



**LOUISIANA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**  
**OFFICE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**  
**★ MAINTENANCE OF ACCREDITATION ★**  
**HURRICANE RECOVERY PLAN**



June 29, 2006

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**OVERVIEW OF HURRICANES KATRINA AND RITA IMPACT**

Hurricane Katrina came ashore on the southeastern Louisiana coast on August 29, 2005 devastating the low lying parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemine, Jefferson, Orleans, St. Tammany and Washington. Weeks later, Hurricane Rita hit southwest Louisiana devastating many additional parishes. Such wide spread destruction has resulted in monumental changes in Louisiana's population due to the destruction of the city of New Orleans and many other areas of the state.

The devastation of the southwestern area of Louisiana by Hurricane Rita is fully acknowledged, and the losses and life altering changes have impacted the entire state. However, Hurricane Katrina created and exacerbated conditions closely associated with child abuse and neglect in the state's most populous region, requiring more concerted and proactive efforts by the Office of Community Services (OCS) in the Greater New Orleans Region.

Extended family support is positively correlated with child safety and well being. The loss of extended family connections may be more pronounced due to the culture in Louisiana, not only in New Orleans, but also in rural parishes throughout the impacted area. Demographic studies indicate that, prior to Katrina, 70% of older homeowners and 55% of renters in the New Orleans area had occupied the same residence for 20 years or longer. Now, families and neighborhoods have been splintered, with many finding themselves dislocated to other states with no prospect of reuniting soon.

Adequate and affordable housing in the region was a problem in the region prior to the hurricanes, and the massive destruction of entire neighborhoods and rural communities will exacerbate the housing problem. Prior to the hurricane, 25% of homeowners and 46% of renters in the New Orleans area paid more than 30% of their income for housing (affordability problem), had more than 1.01 person per room (overcrowding problem), or lacked kitchen facilities or complete plumbing (adequacy problem). Post-Katrina rebuilding may result in improved levels of adequate housing, but increased housing costs could negatively impact affordability, thus resulting in more overcrowding. Additionally, thousands of Louisiana citizens are living in FEMA trailers. Some of the trailers are on private land as homes are being rebuilt, but many are located in FEMA trailer parks. Affordable, adequate housing is essential to the recruitment and retention of foster families, and lack of such housing may increase the risk of abuse to children living with their biological families who are experiencing the stress of living in overcrowded, unfamiliar conditions.

Poverty is strongly associated with child abuse and neglect. The levels of poverty in the four parishes of the Greater New Orleans Region compared unfavorably with the national poverty level prior to Katrina, as indicated on the following chart:

<b>NAT'L POVERTY</b>	<b>ORLEANS POVERTY</b>	<b>JEFFERSON POVERTY</b>	<b>PLAQUEMINES POVERTY</b>	<b>ST. BERNARD POVERTY</b>
12.4%	25.5%	15.7%	15.3%	14.2%

The level of poverty in the area has been exacerbated by loss of income and livelihood due to the storms. Although construction jobs are plentiful in the impacted area, there are impediments to gainful employment, particularly if one's skills, expertise, and experience are not in construction. Many families in the low-lying coastal parishes lost their only means of making money...their fishing boat. Citrus farmers in Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes have lost their crops and may never regain their livelihood due to salt water damages. The tourism and service industries were major employers. New Orleans is slowly regaining its ability to support tourism, but many residents are still without their pre-Katrina jobs.

Substance abuse and mental health issues are also strongly associated with child abuse and neglect. The Louisiana Public Mental Health Review Commission reported that approximately 30% of Louisianans who experienced the storm can be expected to have symptoms of mental disorders as a result of the experience, and that 25-30% of people exposed to severe trauma are at risk for substance abuse.

It is within the context described above that the Louisiana Office of Community Services submits this document. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to describe the impact of the disaster and to address key factors in assuring that practice standards will be maintained and advanced during this time of ongoing recovery, rebuilding, and reform.

This document addresses specific areas where the child welfare system was made especially vulnerable due to the disasters: Change in Mission, Human Resources Management, Infrastructure, Out of State Placement, Safety and Availability of Foster and Other Substitute Caregivers, and Safety and Service Delivery Needs of Children under State Supervision Who Evacuated with Biological Parents to Another State.

**CHANGE IN MISSION**

Act 110 of the 2005 Louisiana Regular Legislative Session provides for a change in the mission of OCS to include child abuse and neglect prevention. This change was fortuitous when considered in the context of the increased risks to the safety and well being of the children of the state in the aftermath of the hurricanes.

The OCS mission, as stated in the Strategic Plan (exhibit 1), is to “strengthen the safety, permanency and well being of our state’s children and families by providing child abuse prevention services, child welfare services, community based services, and administrative and executive supports”. The aim of prevention efforts is to reduce the incidents of abuse and neglect throughout the state through community based efforts using innovative evidence-based strategies.

## **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, approximately one-half of the Louisiana child welfare system was completely inoperable. Over 600 staff was directly affected by the storm and four regions (Orleans, Jefferson, Thibodaux, and Covington) were unable to open. Within a month of Katrina, Covington and Thibodaux regions were reopened, but many offices had reduced staff due to damaged or destroyed staff homes and staff working in shelters or assisting with distribution of emergency food stamps. By early October 2005, one office was opened in the Orleans/Jefferson regions to house staff from Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines Parishes. In February 2006, the Orleans office reopened. As of June 2006, all of the staff for East and West Jefferson, St. Bernard, and Plaquemines Parishes continues to operate out of the East Jefferson office.

A month later, Hurricane Rita came on shore in southwest Louisiana, and the entire Lake Charles region, with approximately 180 staff, was inoperable. Three of the parish offices in Lake Charles region were able to reopen within a few days, but the largest parish in the region, Calcasieu, and the regional office were unable to reopen until the end of October 2005 because of power outages and building damage.

Following Katrina, almost all staff from the affected areas called into OCS state office to seek information. Information on their whereabouts, safety, and plans was captured and recorded in a data base developed for this purpose. Because of the volume of calls, some staff from the Katrina affected area who had relocated to Baton Rouge volunteered to come into state office to assist with call management. Other Katrina area staff was relocated throughout the state, and they were offered the opportunity to work wherever they were. Many staff accepted that opportunity, and some continue to work in other areas of the state. The lessons that were learned in Katrina were useful in preparing for Rita, and all staff was accounted for in the Rita-affected area within five days. Staff in Lake Charles Region whose homes were intact returned and child welfare coverage was pieced together through staff working from their homes or from available offices in the region.

OCS had 1860 employees at the time of the hurricanes. In addition to the 600 employees displaced from the areas of the state hardest hit by the two hurricanes, approximately 900 staff was affected statewide because of assignments to general and special needs shelters and emergency food stamp distribution. These alternative assignments left the entire child welfare system operating with significantly reduced staff (approximately 300) and resources to accommodate the elevated needs of foster parents, children, and families.

### ***Staffing Patterns***

OCS lost 41 positions during the State Fiscal Year ending June 30, 2006, but staff has been available to meet the growing caseloads as the population returns. Two particular issues have been challenging in staff allocations. First, the shifting populations brought about by relocation within the state and FEMA trailer camps increased population density in areas that were formerly sparsely populated; and, second, staff in the affected areas has experienced increased need for medical and personal. Therefore, the Field Services Director and other Field Services Division staff at OCS state office have been conducting

monthly staff utilization studies since Katrina occurred, and will continue on going monitoring and evaluation of staffing needs. This process involves reviewing caseloads, comparing them to our standards and the number of active employees on duty, and studying the rise and fall of intake cases in each geographical area to determine case trends and staffing needs.

Several months ago, the Human Resources office began biweekly information exchange meetings with the Field Services management team to keep them informed of staffing trends and issues. These meetings have proven to be very effective, having improved communication, in addition to many other benefits. Data was reviewed on employees out on an extended leave of absence and the employee's anticipated date of return, current vacancies, status of filling vacancies, developing action plans to handle employee absences and/or performance problems, etc. At the June 8, 2006 information exchange meeting, the Human Resources Division presented the Field Services management team with a plan of action to improve office closure and staff deployment operations during any future disaster situations, with following recommendations:

- 1) Written authorization delegating selected staff to handle calls from displaced staff,
- 2) Revise forms to better record information on displaced staff and provide HR with a copy of each completed form,
- 3) Make official assignments immediately upon an employee returning to duty in any fashion. The Regional Administrator in the new location needs to designate a supervisor for that employee.
- 4) Have an HR employee physically placed in the Field Services Division to provide timely consultation with assigned staff handling calls from displaced staff.
- 5) Copy the HR Director on any e-mail regarding staff placement, relief of regular duties to staff shelters, etc.

Further, a position control database has been developed which now allows the Human Resources (HR) Office to electronically notify and update critical management staff of the positions in each organizational unit, the staff assigned to each position, vacant positions, and current activities related to the filling of each vacant position. As opposed to the previous procedure that involved sending out paper reports every month, position control information is now provided to top management with more current information as data is electronically dumped every other day from the HR system into the new position control database. The database is a much more efficient and effective process as it eliminated 1) many hours each week of several HR staff's time to manually make changes to the position control report, 2) duplication of effort as these changes had been entered previously into the HR data base, and 3) typographical errors that may occur on position numbers, etc.

Because of the drastic reduction in caseloads when thousands of families had to relocate to other areas, even out of state, a small layoff, limited to 11 employees in the Greater

New Orleans Region who were serving a probational appointment, was conducted because there was no work for those employees to perform.

In June 2006, the Department's shelter duty policy was changed to allow the Regional Administrators to relieve workers from their regular duties and change their work schedule to a flexible 40-hour workweek when shelter duty is assigned. This will allow OCS to reduce the cost of overtime expenses and to temporarily reassign the shelter duty workers' cases to another worker to ensure client services are provided timely.

Beginning with the 2006 hurricane season, OCS plans to use staff less in long-term shelter operations. We are considering hiring temporary staff to work in the shelters either to supplement OCS staff or instead of OCS staff. When staff must be used, we will make more effort to rotate shelter duties among a larger number of OCS staff, so that each employee will work fewer hours. This would reduce staff fatigue and stress and result in better coverage of program services.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) has decided that there will be no shelters of last resort operated by DSS personnel, eliminating a recurrence of staff not being able to leave a shelter for several days. The new plan involves a commitment from Louisiana State Police to get our staff out of harm's way if other transportation is not available.

Two new positions have been created and staffed using Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) Hurricane Relief Funds to assist in recovery operations. One will monitor funds, assist staff throughout the state in servicing families affected by the hurricanes and encourage them to relocate and/or meet their needs where they are. These displaced families have been identified as a special "class", and local staff will meet day to day service needs with access to this resource person for assistance. The other will serve as a liaison between state office and the Greater New Orleans region to assist with special projects, plan for management of caseloads and services in the current hurricane season, and monitor efforts to maintain quality services. Many families are expected to return to the hurricane damaged areas during this summer, and OCS will continue close monitoring of the workload and be proactive in allowing staff to return to the area to work, using every opportunity to create a highly skilled workforce. Exhibit 2 provides a current organizational chart.

### ***Space for Staff***

Employees available for work and whose offices were closed due to the devastating affects of the hurricanes have been reassigned to work in other OCS offices in closest proximity to where they were residing at that time. We were very fortunate that because of the nature of child welfare work and the fact that many of our southeastern and southwestern Louisiana clients relocated to other parts of the state, OCS, in most cases, had work to assign displaced staff in other parts of the state after the hurricanes. We doubled up offices, used conference rooms, and learned to be very creative and accommodating. Staff shared resources needed to perform their work such as computers, clerical staff, etc.

We have experienced a shortfall in Louisiana revenue, in part due to these disasters, and accordingly have had our budget reduced. We have examined our operating expenses and determined that when and where feasible, we will make every effort to lease less costly buildings. Additionally, OCS will continue to look for opportunities to either become co-housed with or move closer to other DSS staff in an effort to make more DSS services available for clients at one location/area. This consolidation strategy will better serve our clients as they often need services provided by other DSS agencies and could result in a decrease in the level of spending on separate building leases. Further, it supports the concept of the Department's No Wrong Door project (a DSS initiative that seeks to consolidate offices, establish a single application process, and integrate data bases for all services). The concept of integrated service delivery is further supported by the new DSS web-based computer technology, A Comprehensive Enterprise Social Services System (ACESS), which will streamline business processes, enable shared case planning and management, and automatically forward basic client information to all DSS programs for which the client may be eligible. ACESS will prevent consumers from providing the same basic information repeatedly and enable staff to perform their jobs more efficiently.

In January 2006, the Space Utilization Committee was formed with various managers and administrators representing all agencies within the DSS to determine the most efficient use of office space that will reduce expenditures for the Department and ensure the quality delivery of services statewide consistent with the philosophy of No Wrong Door. This committee developed guidelines to utilize in making decisions and conducted a review of office locations, spacing situations, current and anticipated levels of staff, the current and anticipated levels of clients, and the effectiveness in meeting needs of the consumer and the agency, etc. The committee has made recommendations for immediate action and short as well as long-term plans for office space focusing on the Greater New Orleans area first, since this was most critical. Steps involve on-going monitoring of where clients need services, the types of services, transportation availability, etc. in order to determine what type of office structure is needed and will work effectively in this area.

Discussions have also included what areas may be conducive to a part-time physical presence. We are monitoring the number of FEMA issued trailers and their location so as to anticipate and prepare in advance to the extent possible for the increase of client services needed in those areas.

For a couple of years now, the agency has been making and will continue efforts to co-house multiple DSS agencies at one office location in order to better serve our clients. Further, at the recommendation of the Space Utilization Committee, the DSS has established and implemented a building lease committee to be headed by the Departmental Building Lease Coordinator to ensure a central point of coordination and oversight of all building leases in DSS in order to not only reduce the cost by consolidation of multiple agency offices, but also to have a link to the No Wrong Door committee.

The Department's Information Technology Division has begun researching and assessing the feasibility of mobile computing (i.e., staff working from mobile units and/or perhaps their home). It is anticipated that in about 18 to 24 months, some level of mobile computing will be implemented in some areas.

***Resources for Staff***

After gaining experience from the Katrina/Rita disasters last summer, several changes have been implemented and/or recommended for the DSS Secretary's consideration. Some of them are as follows:

1. The agency was very generous with the granting of special leave of absence with pay to staff directly affected by these disasters. In some cases where justification was presented, staff were approved the use of compensatory/annual leave beyond the special leave.
2. Staff who were still unable to report to duty because of being displaced with no housing available in Louisiana after using the authorized special leave and compensatory/annual leave were placed on furlough (leave without pay) to hold their jobs for them from November 28, 2005 through June 30, 2006 should they be able to return to work.
3. Furloughed employees have been given multiple opportunities through the furlough period to return to duty by recall based on seniority by job title for the available work. In most cases, employees were given choices of positions and geographical locations in which to return.
4. All DSS employees have been issued new Emergency Shelter Policy that, in part, informs staff on how to contact the Department during an emergency. Employees have a hot-line number to call and obtain information about office closures and re-openings, assignments, etc. Further, all employees are advised to regularly check the DSS website for instructions.
5. Each Regional Administrator has been directed to maintain a current listing of all staff and multiple personal contact numbers and each supervisor has been directed to physically keep this information with them at all times.
6. As clients return to the Greater New Orleans area, agency management will consider transferring staff back to that area.
7. A DSS Coordinator was assigned as a contact person to assist staff with the FEMA application process and other assistance as needed.
8. Grief counseling is available to DSS staff.

### ***Training***

In-house and contract training activities were briefly disrupted after the hurricanes due to staff redeployment, but training for all levels of staff in all areas of the state has resumed. The only continuing issue with trainings is that they sometimes have had to be relocated when hotels cancel arrangements. These inconveniences have been overcome by making other space arrangements, sometimes in a city near where the training had been scheduled.

Core Curriculum Courses continue to be provided on an on-going basis. These core training sessions have been updated to contain current practice information, new policies and procedures, and cultural diversity information to enhance work with children and families. Several courses have been developed and implemented specifically in response to the hurricanes. “Emergency Planning for Staff and Foster Parents” (exhibit 3) is a three-hour course providing information on personal preparedness for hurricanes and other disasters. To date, 61 staff and foster parents have participated in this training. “Case Management after the Storm” (exhibit 4) is a six-hour course providing staff an opportunity to express the personal impact of the hurricanes and other traumatic life events. This training has been presented to 155 staff members. Specially trained consultants have begun delivering stress management workshops to all levels of staff, and the on-line policy management system was enhanced with a special “Katrina” chapter that included materials on stress management and financial recovery issues (exhibit 5).

“Family Assessment/Abbreviated Home Study” (exhibit 6) is a six-hour course designed after the hurricanes for response to special situations demanding the quick placement of children. The model procedure allows for a speedier process without compromising the integrity of a strong family assessment that assures a safe family and environment for children. The course will be provided to all home development staff, and has been provided to 21 staff to date.

In addition to the core curriculum training, OCS will provide ongoing training on the use of ACCESS, and develop new and innovative trainings and workshops as needs are identified. Ongoing formal and informal needs assessments are conducted throughout OCS programs, and the Training Section is responsive to providing training to meet identified needs.

In addition to training, OCS continues to support professional child welfare education by providing Title IV-E stipends to BSW and GSW at accredited state universities (Southern University at New Orleans [SUNO], Grambling State University [GSU], Southern University at Baton Rouge [SUBR], University of Louisiana at Monroe [ULM], Northwestern State University [NSU], Southeastern Louisiana University [SLU], and Louisiana State University [LSU]), with the stipulation that these students accept employment with OCS upon graduation. The stipend program is seen as an effective strategy for continuing efforts to increase and sustain the educational credentials of staff. Stipends for the 2006-2007 school years are allocated as indicated in the following chart:

Degree	SUNO	GSU	SUBR	ULM	NSU	SLU	LSU
BSW	2	4	6	4	6	7	0
MSW	9	5	0	0	0	0	5

Further, OCS supports the continuing education of employees by providing full time educational leave with stipends at 75% of the employee's pay for MSW studies, and part-time educational leave with tuition reimbursement for both BSW and MSW studies. In the 2005-2006 school year, 15 employees were granted full time educational leave with stipends. Priority is given to students with advanced placement standing and to those who have completed their first year part time. Twelve of the 15 students graduated in Spring 2006; one was displaced by Katrina and does not plan to return to Louisiana, one withdrew from school for personal reasons unrelated to Katrina but still works for the agency, and one is returning for second year studies this fall. Even in light of the recovery efforts the state and Agency are undergoing, another 15 employees will be awarded stipends to attend graduate school in the fall of 2006. Educational leave and tuition reimbursement, based on regional budget allocations, continue to be awarded after the hurricanes. These allocations will continue in the upcoming State Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2006, but the exact amounts of allocations has not yet been determined.

***Supervision***

All staff is routinely advised upon hiring and movement to different positions of their current chain of command for at least 3 supervisory levels up. Performance standards for supervisors continued to be applied even during the disaster period. We actually had/have more supervisors back at work than our ratio calls for. We have been given a temporary incumbency allocation for 20 or so positions by the Louisiana Department of Civil Service for up to six months since they are not performing the supervision as required by their job title. After six months, their assigned duties must be evaluated to determine the appropriate job title for the level of work performed.

Specific, intensive training is being provided for supervisors. The "Coaching Supervisors Project" directed by consultant Marsha Salus is ongoing. This project is currently providing skill development to 24 supervisors through monthly meetings, ongoing consultation, training, periodic observations of supervisors' interaction with staff, and feedback to supervisors. Additional supervisors continue to be included in the training workshops provided by Ms. Salus as a part of the project, and on-the-job coaching and training is being provided to staff that were displaced by Hurricane Katrina and reassigned to different positions within the agency.

**INFRASTRUCTURE**

The basic OCS infrastructure was damaged, but not destroyed by the hurricanes. Case records were destroyed in only one parish. Contract management was minimally affected by the storms, and our Continuous Quality Improvement efforts are being rebuilt and improved. Although some offices remain closed and some work is conducted in crowded conditions, for the most part OCS offices are operational.

### ***Records Storage and Recovery***

OCS continues to rely on a largely paper-based system of case record documentation, amplifying the issues resulting from staff not being able to get into offices to access case records immediately after the hurricanes. Although many OCS offices were damaged, only the St. Bernard Parish Office was destroyed, and only in that parish were case records lost. Case records in all other parish and regional offices survived the hurricanes, but some offices and the records stored in them were inaccessible for months after the storm, such as Orleans District and Parish. In St. Bernard Parish, all case records were stored in secure metal file cabinets, but recovery of the physical records was not possible. In November 2005, four OCS staff and a hazardous materials (HazMat) team went into the office to attempt to retrieve the records. They were completely covered in mold, and the HazMat team declared them too contaminated to remove. Only limited handling of the records with safety equipment was allowed. The records have been reconstructed to the extent possible in the following manner: (1) Juvenile Court records were housed on the second floor of the court house, which was flooded only through the first floor level, and all information in Juvenile Court files was copied. (2) Department of Social Services Information and Technology staff was able to transfer all computer files from all staff in St. Bernard parish to one of the returning supervisors, who was able to retrieve all files from the server. (3) Certain documentation required for IV-E eligibility determination was stored at the Jefferson Regional Office where no files were damaged. (4) State office files were searched for information packets previously submitted for expanded service authorization or placement assistance.

Records continue to be stored in secure areas in all offices, and steps are being taken to further enhance record security. OCS has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with DSS to use a portion of the SSBG Supplemental Hurricane Relief Funds received by DSS to put safeguards in place to protect critical agency documents. Funds will be used to secure and implement a digital imaging system to record critical paper documents in agency files. The digital imaging will begin with the physical records in the hurricane prone area of Louisiana south of Interstate 10. The necessary technology supports will be secured in August 2006 with full implementation by the end of 2006 (exhibit 7).

Additionally, OCS has a long-term goal of implementing ACESS. The first increment of ACESS (Child Protection Investigations [CPI] only) is being implemented at this time. Full development and implementation of ACESS will eliminate many problems faced in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita resulting from reliance on paper records. Implementation of subsequent increments of ACESS has been delayed due to budgetary constraints, and no time table has been established to date.

### ***Contract Management***

The contract management policies and procedures were not changed by the hurricanes. Several contracts were reduced or cancelled by OCS due to budgetary restraints and/or population or provider dispersion. Several providers cancelled contracts because they were no longer available to provide services. Otherwise, OCS continues to monitor contracts at the state and regional level to assure that contracted services are provided as delineated in the contracts.

For example, the Family Resource Centers, which are funded by OCS and provide many services to families and children involved in the child welfare system, have had funding cuts as a result of budgetary constraints. Funding for the Orleans District Family Resource Center was eliminated, and funding for the Jefferson District Family Resource Center was reduced by 50%. OCS plans to use SSBG Supplemental Hurricane Relief Funds to restore some Family Resource Center funding. A meeting has been held with the Volunteers of America, contractors for the resource centers in Orleans and Jefferson, and they have indicated that they have the capacity to augment services, including providing services in the Orleans District. OCS is also exploring ways to enhance service provision in St. Bernard Parish. At this point, OCS is awaiting a formal report from the Volunteers of America regarding their ability to expand service provision in the Greater New Orleans Region.

### ***Continuous Quality Improvement***

OCS engages in quality improvement efforts through a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) process that includes stakeholder involvement and feedback, consumer satisfaction monitoring, multi-tiered case record reviews including the cross-regional Peer Case Review (PCR) process and the traditional Quality Assurance (QA) process, and corrective action. In some areas of the state and at the state office level, quality improvement processes were suspended on August 29, 2005 due to the reduction in available staff and the urgent needs of displaced families. State level CQI meetings resumed in March 2006, and in April 2006 regional offices were directed to resume their CQI meetings and processes (exhibit 8). CQI teams will meet at least quarterly, and narrow their focus to broad areas needing improvement and/or areas that support the agency's goals. They will use data gathered from Quality Assurance case reviews and Peer Case Reviews (upon resumption of the reviews), and ad hoc reviews to inform decision-making. They will continue to accept referrals from staff and stakeholders and involve community partners in CQI processes statewide.

Stakeholder involvement has continued and even increased during the months following the storms. Community partners continued to attend stakeholder meetings despite the impact of the hurricanes on their own organizations, and rallied to assist with transportation and shelter, and traveled to other states on the agency's behalf to assure the safety and well-being of the children and families served by OCS. Stakeholder involvement will be ongoing, and their feedback will continue to influence agency programs and processes. In addition to stakeholder involvement directly through CQI committees and subcommittees, Louisiana also has five Citizen Review Panels comprised of stakeholders, which provide input on the quality of services provided. Two of the panels (Beauregard and Rapides) function at the parish level. The other three panels (Covington, Monroe, and Shreveport) function at the regional level and include representatives from several parishes. Stakeholder involvement will be achieved through meetings, focus groups and customer satisfaction surveys.

Consumer satisfaction surveys continued to be distributed in offices that remained open after the storms, and the data was collected but not rolled up into the database

immediately or reviewed in CQI meetings. Consumer satisfaction surveys continue to be administered in all offices statewide. The data is once again rolled-up into the database (exhibit 9) and will be reviewed in CQI meetings. Corrective action plans will be completed as necessary as staff and stakeholder referrals are addressed and as needs are identified by traditional QA reviews, ad hoc reviews and future PCR reviews.

The PCR process allows for a qualitative approach to assuring quality service provision. PCR activities for the 2005-2006 SFY (July 1 through June 30) were completed in two regions prior to the storms, but reviews for the remainder of the fiscal year were cancelled based upon workload and travel expense considerations. In conjunction with recovery efforts, OCS is substituting four significant ad hoc case record reviews to gather information needed for the rebuilding process, as follows:

1. Young Adult Program (YAP): All open YAP cases (approximately 300 statewide) will be reviewed between May and the end of July 2006, using an instrument developed by foster care program staff with feedback/input from a workgroup representing a cross-section of the agency. The purpose of this review is to determine adherence to policy, appropriateness of the program to meet the needs of youth, effectiveness of the use of state funding, and exploration of programmatic changes to improve promotion of independence for youth leaving the foster care system (exhibit 10).
2. Chafee Independent Living Services: A sample of cases of children ages 15 to 17 from all regions will be reviewed between July and the end of September 2006, using an instrument developed by Foster Care Program staff. The purpose of this review is to gain a more complete perspective on how the agency prepares youth for independence and to identify areas needing enhancement (exhibit 11).
3. Special Board Rate: A review of a random sample of cases that (a) currently have a special board rate in place for the children, (b) cases that have had special board rates in place in the past, and (c) cases with no past or present special board rate is being conducted between June and August 2006, using an instrument developed by Foster Care and Home Development Program staff based on feedback from a workgroup representing a cross-section of the agency. The purpose of the review is to develop a statewide perspective on regional conceptualization and utilization of agency policy and corresponding allocation of agency funds for special board rates in order to develop a more consistent interpretation of agency policies and provision of supportive services to foster parents (exhibit 12).
4. In-home Family Service Cases: A random sample of 300 Family Services Cases from all regions was completed in June 2006, using an instrument developed by Family Services/Prevention Program staff. The purpose of the review was to identify causative factors in abuse and neglect and provide a sound basis for development of prevention services (exhibit 13).

Traditional QA case record reviews, which allow for a quantitative approach to assuring quality services, continued in all areas of the state without interruption except in the Greater New Orleans Region, where they have been suspended since Katrina. Regional QA units conduct on-going reviews of Child Protection Investigation (CPI), Family Services (FS), and Foster Care (FC)/Adoption (AD) cases. QA reviews will resume in the Greater New Orleans region beginning in July 2006, with complete reinstatement of the process there by September 30, 2006 (exhibit 14). The chart below outlines the number of cases reviewed in each program area over the course of a state fiscal year:

<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Approximate Number of Cases to be Reviewed in a SFY</b>
Child Protection Investigation QA 1	2137
Family Services QA 1	1498
Case Compliance Review (FC/AD cases)	7141
Foster Care/Adoption QA 1	1475

Louisiana's original Federal-State Program Improvement Plan (PIP) was approved on September 28, 2004 addressing deficiencies noted in the September 2003 Federal onsite Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). For almost a year, the state worked diligently to accomplish goals, tasks and benchmarks set forth in the two year plan with noted success in meeting many of the PIP goals relating to the national data standards. PIP achievements were accomplished through involvement of the CQI process. The PCR instrument was modeled on the CFSR process, and the review tracked items that were identified as needing improvement. As a result of this approach and regional compliance with corrective action plans, Louisiana's data goals were met on three CFSR goals (reunification, adoption in 24 months, and placement stability) and 82% of the PIP benchmarks were fully achieved.

As the state approached the last month of the PIP's first year, all work came to a halt as Hurricane Katrina swept through the eastern half of the state. Activities designed to improve practice were set aside while rescue and recovery became the state's focus. Katrina reduced the state's largest metropolitan area, New Orleans, to its smallest, resulting in the displacement of foster children, foster/adoptive families, biological families, and agency staff across the state and country. A month later Hurricane Rita swept across the western half of the state. Along with the catastrophic damage of the two hurricanes, came the economic impact to an already poverty stricken state, having its largest city and related economic base no longer providing revenues for state services.

With many tasks already completed in the first year of the PIP and with the drastically altered outlook for the state, it was determined that a new direction must be taken in the PIP to address short-term recovery efforts. The renegotiated or revised PIP (see exhibit 15) sets forth the direction the agency is taking to provide for the Safety, Permanency, and Well Being of the state's most vulnerable citizens in light of the current crisis.

Though the original PIP was scheduled for completion on September 30, 2006, the state's federal partners have granted Louisiana an extended PIP completion date of September

30, 2007. In light of recent events that now shape Louisiana's current reality and impact the state's vision for the future, this revised PIP sets forth direction for the state's child welfare system both in terms of short-term recovery and long-term reform.

Louisiana is now and will for a lengthy period of time be in the recovery stage from the nation's worst natural disaster. Conservative estimates are that recovery will last more than five years as infrastructure is repaired or rebuilt and communities repopulated.

This creates challenges for the state's child welfare system as it seeks to make sure, under dire circumstances, that children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect (both in and out of the home), that they are provided stable living arrangements that continue to meet their needs, that efforts are made toward permanency, and that the state agency charged with serving them does so with the highest possible practice standards.

Louisiana must also take advantage of opportunities brought about by the storms in reevaluating and rebuilding certain aspects of its service delivery program. Though long-term reform efforts are not a part of the revised PIP, they will begin during the PIP timeframe.

Actual detail planning for long-term reform is part of the agency's five-year Federal Child and Family Service Plan (exhibit 16, pages 60-66). It focuses on two major initiatives, the first of which is to redesign front-end services with special emphasis on prevention, CPI intake and decision-making and the development of a continuum of services to prevent, and when warranted respond to, child maltreatment. The state will utilize available technical assistance through the system of federally contracted National Child Welfare Resource Centers (exhibit 16, pages 28-30). For example, the National Resource Center (NRC) for Child Protective Services in identifying effective models for redesign of CPI Intake and decision-making. The NRC for Organizational Improvement and the NRC for Children's Mental Health will work with the state on the development of a continuum of services that will support a prevention re-design. As a part of this initiative, the state will create a more accurate picture of its clients, the issues they face, and the services necessary for the safety, permanency and well being of their children.

The second major initiative for long-term reform is directed at decreasing the number of children in residential and emergency care facilities. This will require a review of all children in residential settings and emergency care facilities to triage for more appropriate placement. Through this effort, the state hopes to promote a culture of change from a placement system to a continuum of care service system.

The following action steps have been completed as a part of the continuing recovery plan:

1. The state has worked in consultation with the NRC to analyze current CPI data, practice, and external factors as they relate to the current rise in foster care placements.
2. The state has worked in consultation with the NRC for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning to develop and implement a protocol for case

- management and decision-making for displaced foster children and their biological parents.
3. The state has developed action plans for finding missing biological parents, including maximizing use of Parent Locator Services to identify and locate families.
  4. Broad guidelines have been developed for visitation and maintaining contact between foster children and their biological parents who remain separated due to the storms.
  5. A case decision-making model has been developed in conjunction with the courts to assist workers in making placement choices for foster children evacuated living out of state due to the storms.

The following PIP action steps are planned for completion:

1. By September 30, 2006 the Quality Assurance Program Administrator will develop a series of data views that will provide further insight into the possible factors relating to the increase in children entering foster care.
2. By February 28, 2007 the CPI Program Administrator will conduct a formal analysis of data to determine the relationships of demographics, law and policy changes, and external factors to the increase in placements.
3. By June 30, 2006 the Program Division Director will work with the NRC to develop a hierarchy of procedures for assisting caseworkers in finding missing biological parents; by August 31, 2006 the State Office Liaison to Orleans/Jefferson District will implement specific procedures to assist caseworkers in finding biological parents; and by the same date, the Program Division Director will develop action plans for locating any biological parents who remain missing.
4. By August 31, 2006, the State Office Liaison to Orleans/Jefferson Districts will, with the assistance of a task force, create a basic placement decision-making model relating to case decisions for out of state children, and publish the decision-making model in a memorandum to staff and shared with the courts as a guide for case decisions by September 30, 2006.
5. By August 31, 2006 the Louisiana Court Improvement Project Coordinator will work in consultation with the NRC for Organizational Improvement and the NRC for Legal and Judicial Issues to develop a plan for recruiting and training qualified legal representation for storm impacted families and children. By June 30, 2007, the Court Improvement Project Coordinator will implement the plan and monitor its effectiveness.
6. By October 31, 2006 the Training Section Administrator will work with the NRC for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning and the Louisiana Court Improvement Program to develop training on how to advocate for children and families in the context of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita; by June 30, 2007 the Training Section Administrator and the Louisiana Court Improvement Program Coordinator will deliver the training to specific OCS staff, qualified attorneys, and service providers.

In conjunction with recovery and reform efforts, the processes of both PCR and traditional QA will be revised to measure the agency's effectiveness in achieving new goals and objectives based on long-term reform efforts. The goal is to create a seamless CQI process that gathers useable data to inform decision-making and practice. The focus will be on identifying key issues of importance and, once identified, to link them to processes. In short, the scope of the CQI processes will be reviewed to narrow the focus, to target specific areas of service delivery and to support measurement of the agency's reform efforts.

***Physical Site Challenges***

As indicated above, all offices in the Covington and Thibodaux Regions (contiguous regions to the north and southwest of the Greater New Orleans Region) were reopened within a month of Katrina. Most offices in the Lake Charles region were reopened within a few days of Rita, and Calcasieu Parish and Lake Charles Regional offices were reopened within a month of Rita.

In the Greater New Orleans Region, one office reopened on the East Bank of Jefferson Parish in October 2005. That single office housed staff from Orleans, East Jefferson, West Jefferson, St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parishes as well as Orleans and Jefferson District Offices until February 2006. Consolidation of all staff into one office presented numerous challenges, including insufficient computer access, inadequate telephone lines, multiple workers sharing space in offices and conference rooms, inaccessibility of case records, etc. Reopening of the Orleans office (which houses parish and district staff) provided relief of the negative working conditions in both the Jefferson office and for staff who returned to Orleans, and provided access to Orleans case records.

The Jefferson Parish Westbank office is tentatively scheduled for reopening in July 2006. The Plaquemines Parish office will not reopen as a site-specific child welfare office in the foreseeable future due to budget constraints. However, the parish is taking a very pro-active approach to assure social service provision to its residents. Private and public agencies there have collaborated to develop a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation, The Plaquemines Parish Community C.A.R.E. (Counseling, Assessment/Advocacy, Resources, Education) Centers. These Centers will provide professional, compassionate, comprehensive, and coordinated human services to children and families. While physically co-housed with Jefferson Parish, it is anticipated that workers will serve Plaquemines residents through these Centers beginning in August 2006 (See Exhibit 17). Likewise, the St. Bernard Parish office will not reopen in the foreseeable future because of the state budget crisis. As indicated in the chart below, the low level of repopulation in St. Bernard parish does not justify the expense of operating a separate parish office. In other areas of the state, workers from adjacent parishes meet the service needs of the residents of small adjacent parishes.

<b>PARISH</b>	<b>PRE-KATRINA POPULATION</b>	<b>MAY 2006 POPULATION ESTIMATES</b>
Orleans	454,863	192,500
Jefferson	452,824	390,000
Plaquemines	28,995	23,000
St. Bernard	65,364	16,000

## **OUT-OF-STATE PLACEMENT**

Most children in out-of-state placement as a result of the hurricanes have returned to Louisiana. Sixty-three children remain out-of-state, and their individual situations are being considered in determining the most appropriate course of action regarding their future placement. Every effort has been made to assure the safety and well being of these children.

### ***Safety***

All children in foster care and their foster parents who were displaced by the hurricanes have now been located, and are safe. The initial focus of recovery was locating children in agency custody. Within hours of Hurricane Katrina, open OCS offices had begun receiving phone calls from foster caregivers and other providers, relatives of clients, biological parents, youth, judges, CASA, and staff to notify the agency of their location. The persons who contacted the agency were often able to provide information on other parties involved in their cases. This method of collecting information was expanded by advertising a toll free number on broadcast media to request contact. Assistance in locating children in foster care and their foster parents was requested and received from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, the Missing Persons Project, the national CASA organization, the national Foster Parent Association, public assistance and child welfare agencies in other states (including Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children [ICPC] units).

State office staff manned the special telephone line, and working hours were extended to improve accessibility. Information was gathered on the location of foster children and their caregivers, and a data base was developed and maintained to store current information on the whereabouts of foster families because many of them experienced several moves during the first few months after the hurricanes. In addition to gathering information about the whereabouts and safety of children in foster care, the service needs of foster families were explored, and the following section describes actions taken to meet those service needs.

During the time that access to case records was not available or availability of records was limited, informal arrangements with ICPC units in other states were made for visitation and service provision for children in foster care to assure the safety and well being of those children. The Regional Placement Specialist from Orleans and the Residential Section Administrator in state office visited children in out-of-state residential placement to assure their safety and well being.

At this point, the vast majority of foster parents who evacuated to out-of-state locations with children in state custody in their care have returned to Louisiana. Currently, there are 63 children in OCS custody residing in other states due to the hurricanes. Additional children in OCS custody are residing in planned out-of-state placements (e.g., through an ICPC approved placement with a relative who lives out-of-state, unrelated to hurricane activities). All children in hurricane related out-of-state placements have been referred to

ICPC in the appropriate states for follow-up assurances of safety and service provision. Three of the 63 children who remain out of state were in residential placement prior to the hurricanes, and continue to be in residential placement. Efforts are underway to locate appropriate placements to meet the special needs of these children, and they will be returned to Louisiana immediately upon location of an appropriate placement resource. The other 60 children are placed with foster families who evacuated. The expressed goal of the governor is to have all Louisiana families return to Louisiana. OCS has the same goal for foster families and the children in their care. The Home Development Staff in the Greater New Orleans Region is contacting each of the displaced foster parents to determine their plans to return to Louisiana. Most of these families express a desire to return to Louisiana, and are awaiting FEMA trailers, repair to their own homes, or are experiencing other short-term delays in their return. Families who indicate that they have not made a decision are being encouraged to make their decision by June 30, 2006. The families who have indicated that they will not return to Louisiana are being encouraged to contact the state in which they are living to become licensed foster parents in that state. OCS is making a case-by-case assessment of the best interests of the children who are placed with foster families who do not intend to return to Louisiana. In cases where it is in the best interest of the child to return to Louisiana, efforts to locate an appropriate placement here are being made.

In addition to the children who are now out of state as a result of the hurricanes, 142 children in foster care who were displaced by the hurricanes are now living in other areas of the state. The OCS regions and parishes where they are currently placed have accepted responsibility for assuring their safety and well being.

### ***Service Delivery***

An assessment of service needs was made upon initial contact with foster parents. The most frequently requested services included day care, housing, food, clothing, education, medical and mental health treatment, money, transportation, and identification of service providers. State office staff made informal referrals to ICPC units in other states to assure that at least one visit was made to children and that needed services were provided. A number of willing partners stepped forward to assure that the needs of Louisiana children and families were met, including the National Association of Social Workers; the National Foster Parent Association and Louisiana Foster and Adoptive Parent Association; churches and other faith-based organizations; private shelters (in Louisiana and out of state); other Louisiana state agencies such as the Departments of Health and Hospitals (including Vital Records Bureau) and Education; children's hospitals in Louisiana and other states; local private and non-profit agencies such as Catholic Charities and Volunteers of America; and the public assistance and child welfare agencies in Louisiana and other states. Through these resources, foster families were provided assistance in locating a place to stay, identifying safe local day care agencies, obtaining emergency food supplies, enrolling children in schools, obtaining clothing, identifying specialized medical and mental health providers, and locating other service providers as needed.

State office OCS staff provided a number of case management activities to assure that the service needs of foster families were met. Board payments and reimbursements for clothing purchases were processed and mailed directly from state office to foster caregivers and other providers to provide financial resources to meet the children's needs; transportation was provided to help children separated from families rejoin their caregiver, and to return children to Louisiana; replacement and birth certificates and Medicaid Cards were requested and provided; respite services were arranged for foster families displaced to the Houston area; supervision of visits between children and biological families or siblings displaced out of state was arranged or provided, state office staff represented displaced regional and parish staff at court hearings; visited day care facilities; visited children in out of state residential placements; removed and replaced children when unable to preserve placements.

Throughout the evacuation and displacement, foster children and their caregivers experienced many of the same problems that are experienced routinely in child welfare settings such as elopements, children fighting among one another, children committing acts resulting in involvement with law enforcement and courts in other states. Additionally, some children already involved with the child welfare system in Louisiana became involved with child welfare systems in other states as a result of maltreatment by the caregiver or kidnapping by the biological family. OCS (at the state, regional, and local level, as available and appropriate) and the Louisiana juvenile court systems collaborated with other state child welfare systems, court systems, law enforcement, ICPC for juvenile justice, and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to locate, determine the most appropriate legal actions, return children to Louisiana when appropriate, provide for basic needs, and to identify placements for these children.

As local staff returned to their offices, daily management of cases and provision of services transitioned out of state office and was resumed by local staff. Transferring case records of children in foster care displaced within Louisiana and completing formal ICPC referrals for children displaced to other states was a top priority once regional and parish staff had access to case records, or had reconstructed records to the extent possible (St. Bernard Parish only). All such case record transfers and ICPC referrals have been completed, and services are being provided by the receiving in-state region or parish or by the state to which the foster family evacuated. Special procedures were developed to facilitate visits with biological families when one or more members of the family were out of state (exhibit 18).

Service provision for children in foster care who have remained in or returned to Louisiana presents a challenge. Throughout the state, the number of persons who require services has increased due to population relocation, but the services have not expanded to meet current needs. The Greater New Orleans region is experiencing the greatest challenge in meeting service needs. Even though there are fewer families in the region, those families who remained or have returned to the area have service needs that have been amplified by the devastation. A severe shortage of medical and mental health providers has been identified. The availability of grocery stores and other essential

businesses is very limited. Transportation to access services is also a challenge in that public transportation is reduced and many individuals lost their vehicles in the flood.

OCS is also tapping into any available resources, such as TANF funds, to provide summer activities for children and youth who have returned to New Orleans, and to replace personal belongings such as clothing, bicycles, and other toys that foster children lost in the storm. Replacement clothing was provided as requested immediately after the hurricanes, and OCS plans to provide additional replacement clothing prior to the beginning of school this fall for foster children who continue to have clothing needs.

### ***Case Planning***

In consultation with National Resource Centers, OCS is working to improve the assessment process that guides case planning. The adjustments to the assessment process will better link the assessments to case planning.

Throughout most of the state, case planning has proceeded without interruption after the hurricanes. In the Greater New Orleans Region, the case planning process has been disrupted, and updated case plans and Administrative Reviews are past due for 216 children in the Orleans district and 188 children in the Jefferson district. These delays are the result of other established priorities for assuring the safety and well being of children by reconstructing destroyed records, transferring records, making ICPC referrals, and locating biological families in the context of reduced staff and an inadequate work environment. These pressing tasks have been accomplished, with the exception of locating all biological parents. At this point, all but 44 biological parents (9 from the Jefferson District and 35 from the Orleans district) have been located. Local staff continue efforts to locate biological parents, mainly through phone contacts with individuals who may have access to information on the parents. A special data base has been established for biological families, containing their addresses and land and cellular telephone numbers. The number of biological parents who have not yet been located is not inconsistent with the number of parents who failed to keep OCS informed of their whereabouts prior to the hurricanes. Workers report that some parents are much more conscientious about maintaining contact with them since the hurricanes.

The current priority in the Greater New Orleans region is bringing all case planning and administrative review activities up to date. Although case plans are updated as needed, primary case planning activities occur at six-month intervals in conjunction with the Family Team Conference/Administrative Review (FTC/AR) process. Local staff has been directed to review all case records to determine whether it has been more than six months since the previous FTC/AR and whether a Court Case Review Hearing has been held that would qualify as an Administrative Review. While Foster Care staff reviews case records, local Quality Assurance staff is reviewing minute entries from courts. It is expected that the review of minute entries will reduce the number of overdue FTC/ARs. Staff is also expected to maintain timely FTC/ARs on cases that are not overdue. Approximately 60 delinquent FTC/ARs are scheduled for July, 2006, and the expectation is that all overdue FTC/ARs will be current by September 30, 2006. Several barriers to accomplishing this goal have been identified, and state office has provided local staff

with strategies to overcome the barriers in the memorandum requiring that the FTC/AR process resume (exhibit 14).

### ***Legal Jurisdiction***

Legal jurisdiction continues to be the Louisiana jurisdiction of origin, regardless of current placement. When necessary, cooperative agreements between court systems both within Louisiana and across state lines were established on an as-needed basis for individual cases.

In the short-term aftermath of Katrina, courts in the Greater New Orleans Region were disrupted because legal system personnel were displaced by the storm, access to buildings and equipment to hold court hearings was limited as was transportation to attend hearings. Courts were reestablished quickly. Initially, the courts held status hearings to determine the whereabouts and safety of the children, but as time progressed, the courts required more comprehensive information, and proceeded with permanency hearings according to Pre-Katrina schedules. Adoptions pending prior to Katrina were quickly put on court dockets to complete the finalization process.

### **SAFETY AND AVAILABILITY OF FOSTER AND OTHER SUBSTITUTE CAREGIVERS:**

Displacement of many Louisiana citizens and the stressful environment of recovery have exacerbated the already limited pool of foster care providers. In addition to the need for foster homes for children whose foster families moved out of state and do not intend to return, foster families are also needed for an increasing number of children entering foster care. Some residential providers and foster families will no longer be available to provide care for foster children in Louisiana, and some foster families who have returned to the Orleans area are not able to provide care for children at this time because they are living in FEMA trailers which do not meet licensing standards or they are living in the upstairs portions of homes while restoring the first floors of their flooded homes. Restoration of homes is a slow process because of difficulty in dealing with insurance adjusters; insurance companies co-paying mortgage companies and owners and requiring that the mortgage be paid in full, leaving little if any money for repairs; and the limited number of contractors available to restore homes.

The focus on personal recovery efforts of potential foster care providers makes recruitment difficult at this time, exacerbating the loss of previous foster care providers in the hurricane-affected areas. OCS recruitment efforts continue through regional recruitment and retention plans that include print and broadcast media, and OCS has received assistance from the Casey Family Foundation on developing recruitment strategies. Casey recommended and the agency is working with True Insights, a public relations firm, to develop a statewide recruitment campaign. Planning meetings with Casey and True Insights are ongoing, with the expectation that a campaign will begin within the next month. OCS is utilizing a portion of the SSBG Supplemental Hurricane Relief Fund allocation (which must be expended by September 2007) to fund this initiative. The initiative is expected to be ongoing throughout the availability of funding.

OCS is also working diligently to overcome some of the issues faced by foster families in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and to improve services in the event of any future disaster.

Disruption in mail service resulting from Katrina had a particularly negative consequence for foster parents, particularly those who had returned to the Orleans area but had no mail service. In an effort to assure that such disruption does not occur in the future, OCS has begun implementation of direct deposit for all providers. Temporary workers have been employed to provide data entry support to the direct deposit initiative. The goal of complete implementation prior to the 2006 hurricane season was not achieved, but direct deposit is expected to be fully implemented by September 2006.

Additionally, an automated telephone contact service is being developed to provide foster caregivers with hurricane preparedness information. In the event of future evacuations, the toll-free call line will also provide foster caregivers with information on the management of the care of foster children during and after evacuations.

Immediately prior to the hurricanes, an emergency rule was passed allowing for three-year certifications of foster parents already certified and in good standing for at least one year. This rule was used to develop a practice memorandum allowing staff to extend certifications of temporarily out-of-state foster parents to maintain children's placements. The agency also developed an expedited certification process for foster caregivers shortly after the storms, and the first training to educate staff on the revised process was held on October 21, 2005. The expedited certification process was devised so that the pool of foster caregivers could be expanded quickly through the large number of people who called during the time of crisis to offer assistance.

The Foster Parents' Bill of Rights (exhibit 19) was passed in the 2006 Regular Legislative Session, and this legislation is expected to provide a more positive environment for recruitment of foster caregivers. One of the rights described in the Bill of Rights is the right to be informed of available support services. One particularly important support service at this time is respite. The level of stress resulting from the disaster combined with the loss of natural supports, such as extended family and other foster parents, exacerbates the need for respite services. OCS recognizes this need and is exploring all avenues of increasing available respite service.

#### **SAFETY AND SERVICE DELIVERY NEEDS OF CHILDREN UNDER STATE SUPERVISION WHO EVACUATED WITH BIOLOGICAL PARENTS TO ANOTHER STATE:**

Within the first month following Hurricane Katrina, state office staff in the Child Protection Investigation (CPI) and Family Services/Prevention (FS) sections obtained reports from the OCS information management system, Tracking and Information System (TIPS), listing all open CPI and FS cases in the Greater New Orleans Region by worker. CPI and FS state office staff then met with local staff in the Jefferson office (where all regional staff was housed at the time). CPI staff met with district managers who in turn met with their staffs while FS staff met with the worker, supervisor, and/or

district manager (depending upon availability) to triage open CPI and FS Program cases. All cases were discussed based on the situation immediately preceding the hurricane, with much information based on the memory of local staff as many case records remained unavailable.

Efforts were made to locate the families of all open CPI cases, and the cases were referred to the areas where the family was currently living if the family was located. If enough information had been obtained prior to the hurricanes to determine that the case was invalid, the case was closed. Cases in which the family could not be located were closed administratively. Open FS cases were categorized as court ordered or not, and the non-court ordered cases were further categorized according to level of risk: high risk, medium risk, or low risk. Workers were instructed to attempt to contact families in order of priority, with all court ordered cases being highest priority regardless of risk. The second, third and fourth priority levels were based on risk with high risk cases being the second level of priority, going down to low risk cases being the lowest level of priority. If families were located within Louisiana, the record (or whatever information was available) was forwarded to the appropriate parish. If the family was located out of state, the child welfare agency in that state was informed of the family's situation.

Court-ordered and high-risk families that workers were not able to locate were referred to state office staff. In turn, state office staff referred the cases to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Additionally, if the risk to one or more children in the family was assessed to be high and the family could not be located, a nation-wide Protective Service Alert was issued from state office.

Workers attempted to locate families assessed to be at medium and low risk also. If workers were unable to locate any of these families and had any discomfort closing the case as "unable to locate", the cases were referred to state office and the family was referred to NCMEC in the same manner as the court-ordered and high-risk cases. Other medium and low risk cases in which the family could not be located were closed as "unable to locate".

Prior to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, OCS began experiencing an increase in the numbers of children entering care. The CPI section recognized the increase, and has undertaken a review of variables that may be contributing to this increase, at the state, regional and parish levels. The review includes the number CPI cases opened, the number of CPI cases that resulted in OCS custody, and the total number of children who entered OCS custody in State Fiscal Years 2003, 2004, 2005, and 2006; the reason for CPI involvement; the age, gender, and race of children at the time they entered foster care; the reason for placement; type of initial placement; whether or not relative placements were payable; the proximity of initial placement to child's home; and previous agency involvement.

In addition to demographic factors that may influence the number of children who enter foster care, changes in the law and agency policy that may be contributing to the increase were also examined. Two Acts of the 2005 Regular Legislative Session impacted child

welfare practice. Act No. 148 changed the way in which relative placements are made. Whereas informal relative placements had been made to assure the safety of children during the course of an ongoing CPI investigation, now all relative placements require judicial approval and custody resolution. This Act has had the unintended consequence of children being placed in foster care due to courts' reluctance to place children with relatives and award custody early in an investigation, and relatives' unwillingness to accept custody. Act No. 338 redefined "neglect" to include Child Abuse Prevention Act (CAPTA) required activities related to substance-exposed infants. Both of these laws resulted in changes in OCS policy and practice in child protection, family services, and foster care programs. Further, efforts to reform the Louisiana juvenile justice system have been underway since 2005. One of the many results of this effort has been the reduction in the number of children in secure correctional facilities and the movement toward more group home placements in community settings. Another possible result of the reform efforts may be the increased placement of adolescents in foster care as an alternative to placement in a correctional facility.

Many factors that lead to child abuse and neglect are associated with the conditions created and/or exacerbated by the hurricanes of 2005 (poverty, loss of family and community supports, increased isolation, and cramped or inadequate housing). An increase in demand for vital social services due to feelings of depression, hopelessness, and despair is anticipated.

Thus, the FS/Prevention Section is attempting to get a clearer, more detailed picture of the children and families being served in order to develop resources that are most appropriate to meet their needs. Current practice has been evaluated through a survey submitted to Family Services workers throughout the state to assess their clients' current needs and whether the needs were being met in the regions with the services currently available. Furthermore, administrative staff from the FS/Prevention Section has been going out to each region for an ongoing case review and consultation with field staff to stay current on the issues affecting our families in each region. This aids in administrative staff staying abreast of field issues as well as allowing for the field staff to have more input into administrative program development. This is expected to result in improved services to children and families being served. The focus of these efforts is on restoring services to families in the hurricane ravaged areas of New Orleans and Lake Charles, where services were severely decimated.

With the assistance of the National Resources Centers, a more comprehensive assessment instrument is being developed to assess families more holistically. This will assure that the assessment process adequately identifies the underlying causes that bring children and families into the child welfare system and will more directly guide case planning. This will also result in capability to utilize aggregate data on an on-going basis to be sure that the available service array continues to match the identified needs of families involved in the child welfare system. This project began in July 2005 and is an on-going effort. This assessment instrument is expected to be piloted in two regions during the later half of 2006 and move toward statewide implementation in early 2007.

### ***Anticipated Practice Driven Enhancements***

Evidence-based practices are being researched and the service array modified to provide best practice when working with families. One such effort is the Nurturing Parenting Initiative that was implemented during 2005 across the state. It is a family-based program with a proven track record of preventing the recurrence of child abuse and neglect. It was specifically designed to work with high-risk populations and prevent abuse and neglect. This program is being offered as the primary parenting class for parents with children under the age of 5, the most at risk population, and the effectiveness of the program is currently being evaluated with its creator, Dr. Stephen Bavolek. He is working closely with OCS to make modifications as needed, and is scheduled to come to Louisiana in July 2006 to assist in more training.

Another evidence-based program OCS plans to initiate is Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST), which is an intensive, in-home therapeutic intervention targeted to behavior disordered youth ages 12-18 and their families. This intervention generally lasts from four to six months and includes several hours of treatment each week in an effort to strengthen the family's ability to more effectively manage the adolescent's problem behavior. OCS expects to have this service available in the Jefferson/Orleans region as well as in a limited number of other sites around the state. OCS anticipates development of a contract with a licensed MST service provider in July 2006.

OCS is also developing a Home Visitation Program (modified from Nurse Family Partnership), a long-term program designed to improve child health and developmental outcomes and to improve maternal life course development. In home services will be provided to families with children ages 0-3 by a licensed social worker, two to four times per month with at least one of these visits per month being made in conjunction with a nurse. Development of this service is expected to be a collaborative effort with the Office of Public Health, Office of Mental Health and Office of Addictive Disorders. The agency anticipates using this program to assist in developing a plan of safe care for substance-exposed infants, a CAPTA requirement. The program is expected to be piloted in two areas of the state beginning in the latter half of 2006.

Currently, six regions have contracts to provide crisis oriented, intensive home-based services in an effort to allow children to safely remain in their homes rather than being placed in foster care. The effectiveness of the Intensive Home Based Services program is currently being evaluated and will be modified to better serve the needs of Louisiana families. This is an on-going project.

### ***Outreach for Grant/Foundation Assistance***

OCS applied for and received a two-year, \$10,000 grant from the Brookdale Foundation to implement the Relatives as Parents Program. The purpose of this program is to encourage and promote the creation and expansion of concrete services for grandparents and other relatives who have taken on the responsibility of surrogate parenting. The grant period is July 2006 through June 2008. As an additional support to this effort, we have allocated a portion of funds (which must be expended prior to September 30, 2007)

from the Social Services Block Grant to help to facilitate and secure placements with relatives.

The National Foster Parent Association (NFPA) applied for and obtained a grant from the Child Welfare League of America to assist southeast Louisiana foster and adoptive parent associations to establish a foster family resource center in Jefferson Parish to serve a five-parish area. Additionally, the NFPA, with Freddie Mac funding and in collaboration with United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR), is helping New Orleans area foster parents rebuild by providing funds and volunteer labor for new roofs, electrical wiring, and sheetrock.

Finally, DSS has applied for a federal Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families funding opportunity to demonstrate collaborative efforts between state child welfare and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). If funded, these resources will be used in the Greater New Orleans area to support enhanced service provision to kinship care families to prevent child welfare involvement and across the spectrum of child welfare services.

## **CONCLUSION**

Despite the literal and figurative changes to Louisiana's landscape in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, OCS remains committed to assuring the safety and well being of the families and children of the state. OCS believes that with the short-term recovery efforts achieved and future reform goals yet to be achieved, our outcomes will result in a stronger, more efficient and more effective child welfare system, guided by continued adherence to practice and quality of service as defined in COA standards.