

Steps for Improving Washington's Child Welfare System

Daryl Daugs

- **Break Children's Administration out from the DSHS Bureaucracy.** DSHS is a huge bureaucracy with multiple levels of red tape and middle management. Our states most vulnerable children are lost in a sea of red tape. The head of Children's Administration should answer directly to the Governor. Accountability to our top elected office should not be separated by multiple levels of bureaucracy.
- It is well known that administrative practices in children's services lags twenty years behind the best practices of the business industry. **My plan requires that all top-level managers in Children's Administration undergo a "360 performance evaluation"** Saying you want to have "good business practices" needs more than lip services. The business world knows that quality improvements begin by top-level managers "being accountable". "360 performance evaluations" such as is done at Boeing and other organizations are key to my plan. If CA truly wants to develop good administrative practices modeled after the business world they cannot "cherry pick" only the stuff that is comfortable.
- **Fewer middle managers ... more front line social workers and support them.** It is no secret that our children are poorly served when caseworkers are buried by unmanageable caseloads. Class action lawsuits on behalf of the children have called for manageable caseloads. Our social workers have begged for lower case loads. Industry standards call for lower case loads. Our legislators and our Governors have provided funding time and again to lower case loads. No more middle managers. Truly become a "lean Team" and focus existing resources on caseload lids based on industry best practice.
- Children's Administration should be required by legislation to redefine its mission to ensure that core value is enforced. **The hiring of any new social workers should be contingent on the agency producing a plan to provide better daily support for its workers and caregivers.** The time for business as usual must end.
- **Create a "FosterCorps" of specially trained foster parents.** Most foster parents are already parents and the vast majority do not need specialized training. However, some of our children have extreme medical, physical and emotional needs. The foster parents that care for them should be held to higher standards and given specialized training.
- **Finally the department must seriously redefine its recruitment strategies for helping communities to "own" their children who come into state care.** The agency is working on a new razzle-dazzle targeted recruitment system, complete with a marketing campaign, logo and slogan. But they are overlooking what is by far the most important foster parent recruitment strategy - keeping the current foster parents satisfied and supported. It does no good to have 1,300 new foster parent every year when 1,300 leave, many for reasons of dissatisfaction."

Daryl Daugs spent the first years of his adult life in the business world. He holds a degree in Organizational Management with a focus on Organizational Dynamics. He is the lead union organizer for foster parents, a former foster parent, and has consulted with public and private foster care agencies across the US. Daryl is the former director of Families for Kids, a large private agency to recruit and support foster and adoptive parents.

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