

Childstat

by Jan Flory

Monday, June 12, 2006 12:00 AM

The death of seven-year old Nixzmary Brown in January, allegedly at the hands of her stepfather, caused the city to re-examine the way it provides children's services, particularly how it responds to abuse and neglect cases. One of the reforms it is putting in place is Childstat, which allows the Administration for Children's Services to monitor its response to child abuse in much the same way that the police department uses Compstat to track its performance in fighting crime.

On June 7, Gotham Gazette held an online chat with Jan Flory, deputy commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services, who was hired in February and has been working on the new program.

CHILDSTAT

Gotham Gazette: Thank you for being with us, Ms. Flory. Can you explain to us what Childstat is and how it works?

Jan Flory: We are taking many steps to strengthen all aspects of child protection in New York City.

ChildStat is a management and accountability tool modeled on Compstat, the New York City Police Department's acclaimed crime fighting program. ChildStat is intended to help Children's Services to strengthen our ability to protect and serve children who are being monitored by the Agency.

During morning-long sessions each week, ACS senior staff will scrutinize statistics from each of the agency's 14 field offices, which are overseen by borough directors. Each site will be reviewed once every 10 weeks, and the ones that are especially problematic will be evaluated more frequently.

The borough directors and deputy directors will answer questions about caseloads, indicated cases that are closed with services, repeated cases of maltreatment, staff levels, etc. ChildStat will also review a sampling of open and closed cases to examine the quality of case practice.

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Gotham Gazette: Is it up and running?

Jan Flory: We are doing trial runs this month with each borough beginning tomorrow in Staten Island. The actual ChildStat will begin at the end of the month.

Gotham Gazette: So at the end of June it will be fully operational?

Jan Flory: We will officially begin the process at that time. We are beginning with only a few data indicators which we can access through our systems. As we move forward, we will be adding data indicators every few months.

Gotham Gazette: What do you hope the immediate effect will be? Or will it take a while?

Jan Flory: First, we will all become familiar with both system-wide and unit-specific data which will be used to examine our practice and target needed changes -- probably on more than one level.

Gotham Gazette: How long will it take you to come up with the "needed changes"?

Jan Flory: The full implementation will take some time, much as the experience with the New York Police Department and other cities around the country.

Gotham Gazette: So can you give us a concrete example of what you might learn, and then change?

Jan Flory: It will be dependent on the issues identified. Some changes may be immediate,

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others may require more systemic changes-such as improvements to our automated systems, training and skill building in child protection practice. For instance, if we learn that some boroughs or zones within a borough have widely different outcomes with cases, the questions are then why, and putting into place targeted interventions.

Gotham Gazette: The New York Post has written that the big thing that makes Compstat effective is that "precinct commanders feel huge pressure if their numbers don't measure up. They can -- and have -- lost their jobs." Do you plan to be so aggressive about holding people personally accountable?

Jan Flory: I believe that we will be looking at accountability on a number of levels -- first is our system and how it supports or does not support excellence in both investigations and critical decisions.

The second level is that sets of data and/or individual case reviews may point out unacceptable work which will be addressed.

Gotham Gazette: We know that other police departments have used things like Compstat. Do other cities have Childstats?

Jan Flory: I am not certain about other child welfare systems using a childstat system. The city of Baltimore has "statted" all city agencies, but child welfare there is a state administered system. We believe this may be a first in our field.

OTHER REFORMS IN CHILD WELFARE

Joe Lamport: After Nixzmary's death, the mayor announced a plan to hire a lot of new case workers and retired detectives at ACS. What's the status of that effort?

Jan Flory: We have hired close to the 525 new workers by the end of June. We will hire 400 new staff in the new fiscal year. New workers have been going through the new worker core training since late last year. Classes go into the field after 4 weeks of training and then receive on the site training over a period of 3 months, progressively receiving new cases.

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Gotham Gazette: At the same time, the number of calls you're getting about child abuse has gone up. What does this indicate?

Jan Flory: We believe that it shows a heightened awareness by the community and professionals about the need to alert the child welfare system to children who may be at risk of abuse or neglect.

Gotham Gazette: Do you expect it to stay this way, or is it a surge because of the Nixzmary Brown case?

Jan Flory: It is likely , as every year, that reports may level off during the summer, when school is not in session. We believe that the actual number of reports will continue at a higher level than prior to January.

Concerned_New_Yorker: In addition to Childstat, are there other accountability measurements in place to ensure that children in New York are protected?

Jan Flory: Yes. We do have regular quality assurance reviews of cases done quarterly which show by supervisory unit and borough levels our performance on specific indicators. We are monitoring caseload levels and resources to meet those demands on a weekly basis.

Gotham Gazette: You have set a goal of having 12 cases per caseworker. When do you think you will meet this goal?

Jan Flory: We realistically expect to be there, with new workers able to carry full caseloads, by the end of the year. This depends on the levels of new cases coming in and our projections about those numbers.

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