

**Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services  
(CCDCFS)  
Policy Statement**

**Policy Chapter:** Legal, Juvenile Court & Custody Issues  
**Policy Number:** 7.05.01  
**Policy Name:** Staff/Clients as Research Subjects

**Original Effective Date:** 11/30/1994  
**Revision Date(s):** 05/01/2015, 10/18/2004  
**Current Revision Date:** 05/01/2018  
**Approved By:** Cynthia G. Weiskittel

**PURPOSE:** Research, as used here, includes all forms of internal or external research involving persons served, except internal program evaluation and outcomes research or educational projects performed by students and interns that are part of their professional training.

**SCOPE:** Research refers to involvement of individuals or their records.

**POLICY**

- A. Clients are notified that reports of abuse or neglect involving them are made to the Central Registry maintained by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (ODJFS). ODJFS may release information from the Central Registry in the aggregate. In addition, CCDCFS is required to release identifying information to another child welfare agency investigating a complaint of abuse/neglect involving that client.
- B. CCDCFS may be required by ODJFS to participate in its research efforts. In those instances, CCDCFS follows the ODJFS guidelines.
- C. The CCDCFS Director and PEI Administrator are notified of all research proposals submitted to the agency. Research proposals are reviewed by the Performance Management Steering Committee who shares recommendations for accepting or denying the proposal with the CCDCFS Director and/or A-Team. The decision about participation in a research project takes into account ethical considerations such as the vulnerability of clients, the expected benefit of the research to clients, agency, community, or the field of child welfare, as well as agency resources that may be needed to ensure the success of the project.
- D. CCDCFS does not involve itself or its clients in the practice of experimental research that does not have empirical evidence to support the reliability/validity of said research or which may cause harm to the participants. Deception is not used in the research or reports of its findings.

- E. Approved research is minimally invasive to the family or individuals involved.
- F. Identifying information about persons served is masked prior to sharing information with researchers.

## **PROCEDURES**

- A. All requests for research are submitted in writing to the Performance Management Steering Committee for approval. Such requests describe the purpose of the research; methods to be used; expected benefit to clients, the agency, or the field; the way in which the privacy rights of children and families are guaranteed; and the way in which all client information remains confidential. If approved, the research sets the manner in which the activities are monitored and reports made to the A Team.
- B. Once approved, if there is a need for client participation, the client is notified in writing in language understandable to the client. The notice includes:
  - 1. the reason for the research (goals and objectives)
  - 2. proposed research methodology
  - 3. what may be expected of the client
  - 4. an explanation that participation is voluntary and that withdrawal refusal to participate shall have no consequences for the client
  - 5. explanation of any discomfort or risks involved
  - 6. notice that the client is free to withdraw from the research project at any time
  - 7. that services will continue or terminate based upon the case plan and level of risk (not upon participation in research)
  - 8. that confidentiality will be protected (participants will be protected by guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality on the part of the investigator)
- C. Participation of past or present clients must be voluntary and may not be coerced. Written informed consent to participate must be obtained. Those at or above age seven years must give informed consent, and consent of the parent or legal guardian of all minors is required.

- D. Modest incentives to participate may be given equally to all participants (except employees) if their use is approved during the research approval process.
- E. The CCDCFS Director determines what information is appropriate to make available to the researcher(s). When information from client records, reports, or statistical analyses is provided, it is provided in a manner that masks the identity of persons served so that their identity can neither be discerned nor deduced.
- F. Prior to disseminating information to the researcher(s), the researcher(s) is required to sign an agreement which addresses the following:
  - 1. Information provided by CCDCFS remains the property of CCDCFS;
  - 2. The researcher does not disseminate confidential information containing names or data by which any individual or out-of-home care setting could be identified or deductively disclosed;
  - 3. CCDCFS reviews the research prior to its dissemination or publication to ensure that the research is void of names or data by which any individual or out-of-home care setting could be identified or deductively disclosed;
  - 4. The researcher accepts full responsibility for liability for unauthorized dissemination of information given to them for research purposes, which leads to identification or deductive disclosure of any child or family member.
- G. Designated staff coordinates the in-house research activities (including privacy safeguards to mask identifying information) and works with the researcher to assure smooth implementation and communication to staff of the in-house research activities.
- H. General information about the study outcomes is made available to participants by the researcher, in language understandable to the client.
- I. **Responsibilities:**
  - 1. Anyone requesting to conduct research submits a written request to the CCDCFS Director and PEI Administrator, who considers its merits, determines whether to submit the request to the Performance Management Steering Committee, and designates any further action to be taken.

**SEE ALSO:**

Ohio Administrative Code Section 5101:2-5-13

Related Policies

Policy 7.04.01 Sharing and Dissemination of Confidential Client Information

Policy 7.05.02 Child Involvement in DCFS Publicity Activities