

**Joint Meeting of the
Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council &
Illinois Adoption Advisory Council**

Minutes

Friday, March 8, 2019

The Chateau Hotel, 1621 Jumer Drive, Bloomington, Illinois

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

SWFCAC Members Present	SWFCAC Members Absent	AAC Members Present	AAC Members Absent	DCFS Staff
Gladys Boyd	Katy Cotts	Kathleen Bush	Anne O'Malley	Janet Wukas Ahern
Gordon Hannon	Donna Gregory	Alice Couch	Michelle Price	Barbara Crandall
Ken Keefe	Arrelida Hall-Johnson	Keely Giles	Keisha Robinson	Debra Dyer-Webster
Harriet Kersh	Rachel Hoyt	Natalie Miller	Danielle Sanders	Dee Estep
Maya Maclin	Mary Savage	Maripat Oliver	Brittney Sprouse	Carlene Erno
Susan McConnell	Stephanie Tesreau	Crystal Rekart	Amy Trotter	Sylvia Fonseca
Kate Monte		Elizabeth Richmond	Mark Werner	Jen Florent
Kellye Norris	Guests	Karen Taylor	Julie Yelverton	Michelle Grove
Rachel Pruess	Yolandis Gambrell	Danny Tolliver, Jr.		Matt Jedlowski
Carol Sheley	Audrey Reischauer	Karen Wardlaw	Guests	Darryl Johnson
Denise Spires		Jeremy Wheeler	Laurel Meade	Melissa Kasel
Lesley Stuart			Katie Friend	Kelly King
Samella Taylor-Lewis			Ron Tyler	Jennifer Marett
				Kim Peck
				Maggie Poteau

Welcome and Introductions – Carol Sheley & Elizabeth Richmond

Elizabeth Richmond welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked members and guests to introduce themselves.

Report from the State Guardian

Janet Ahern

Janet reported on a number of activities including the following:

- She has recently been downstate visiting children at the Children's Hospital in St. Louis.
- She reported that Ron Kruger is a new supervisor in the Guardian's Office. He may be reached at the main office number. She has a new immigration attorney from the Cook County Juvenile Court. They'll be able to process cases more efficiently.
- Janet said that there will be no regional graduation parties this year because they were not very well attended. This activity might be folded into the annual Youth Summit.
- She said that they are doing a Permanency Improvement Plan to work to move cases more quickly.
- The Dually Informed are working with them on an expungement project to expunge juvenile records. However, the RFP has gone out twice with no bidders. They also have a new attorney to work on Adult Guardianship.

- CWEL needs three licensing professionals on their board. The application is on the Dnet. The board is a voluntary board that keeps tabs on the profession.
- Janet noted that obtaining a Passport in a Day for emergency purposes is available in one Cook office under special circumstances.
- Janet addressed questions about prudent parenting with regard to foster parents taking children, including foster children, to visit grandparents in an adjacent state and whether background checks are required for short-term visits. Sylvia noted the rationale for notifying caseworkers in advance is in case there is an emergency. Caseworkers must follow procedure. Janet stated that she will send out a prudent parenting statement regarding overnight visits.
- It was noted that there seems to be a conflict with Prudent Parenting and 402. The Policy Committee will follow up on this. Council members were encouraged to call Janet if going up the chain does not resolve the situation.

Licensing Update

Darryl Johnson

Darryl has served as a foster parent and has been around child welfare for 30 years. He said that we are continuously looking for foster parents. He stated that the 2018 Bipartisan Budget Act impacts federal funding and the Department is pushing for more of our children to go into appropriate foster homes, i.e., therapeutic, specialized, etc., as the Department continues to work to utilize the federal funds. The Family First Prevention Services Act transforms federal financing for child welfare programming by allowing Title IV-E funds to be used for evidence-based prevention services for children and families who are candidates for foster care, i.e., at imminent risk of involvement with the child welfare system. It also regulates financial support for youth in residential (congregate care) facilities and establishes criteria for Qualified Residential Treatment Programs.

The Department is in the process of revising rule based on the Family First Act and they need the council to review and go over some of the language that will be included. A lot of the language is being taken from the national model and through the review process they've noted that our licensing standards are really solid.

Darryl focused on some of the key points:

- Foster parent applicants must be 18 years of age.
- They must have adequate resources to provide shelter, food, etc.
- There are some changes regarding mental health and the Department will ask additional questions regarding foster parents' mental health.
- The required conditions of the home will be stated more clearly, i.e. must have a refrigerator, range, etc.

Darryl asked the council to comment on the standards when they are distributed for review. The draft will be out for public comment soon.

They are making changes to the background checks process and this is the time for the council to make a recommendation if they have one. They are currently training child protection case work staff regarding waivers to expand capacity and licensing standard waivers. They need to train staff on some standards but not all. Darryl distributed information about the new fingerprint vendor, Biometric Impressions. The council members may Email Darryl with suggestions

regarding times of availability and locations offered. Foster parents should check with their caseworker/agency for support with fingerprinting.

Discussion:

- Is it possible to have your child's fingerprints removed from the system after adoption? The Department does not store fingerprints. Fingerprints for children in care are kept in SACWIS and possibly at the fingerprinting provider. Janet noted that DCFS Legal has never received a subpoena for a past crime. She said that one database is a criminal database and the other is more to be used for recovery.
- There has been a way to have administration do a "provisional placement approval" but sometimes it violates licensing standards. After such a placement, a clinical screening is conducted to ensure that it is appropriate.

SPIDER

Matt Jedlowski and Noelle Cothorn

Matt introduced himself as the team leader for the Service Provider Identification and Exploration Resource (SPIDER) database team. He distributed program brochures. SPIDER, formerly the Statewide Provider Database, is a comprehensive database used to locate and gather information on social service agencies, programs and services throughout Illinois. It is available for use by individuals and agencies. Provider agencies and programs are geo-coded allowing users to use the interactive map to evaluate services in an area of interest. Noelle is developing an advisory council to help build the program. One issue that came up was misdirection when an agency is housed in one location, but serves multiple locations/counties. It was suggested that they drop pins on the google map to indicate actual service locations.

SSI Applications

Jeremy Wheeler

SSI provides coverage through Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, a massive rebate program where the federal funds reimburse up to 50% of the costs. Jeremy distributed handouts from the Sequoia SSI Referral program. This program is designed to ensure that youth in care get all the benefits they are entitled to. By definition, the youth must have a medically determinable physical or mental impairment and the impairment must result in marked and severe functional limitations and the impairment will last for at least one year or to result in death. Mental conditions to look for include conditions resulting from trauma and stress, neurocognitive disorders, depression, schizophrenia, autism and other disorders. Physical conditions include total blindness, deafness, CP, Down Syndrome, cancer and other conditions. Staff are experienced and offer various areas of expertise. Sequoia supports DCFS foster and adopted youth as they complete applications and move through the approval process. It was noted that initial denials are not unexpected and there is an appeals process. For more information about making a referral, Email DCFS.SSIReferral@illinois.gov or call 217-535-2295.

Scholarships and Tuition Waivers

Kim Peck

Kim sent out a recent policy transmittal. She said that youth could apply for the secondary scholarship only after submitting an application for a DCFS scholarship. She noted that applicants must be under the age of 26. Certain qualifications must be maintained for the life of the scholarship or waiver. Applications go to DCFS and the Department must submit a report to the General Assembly every May. Schools may determine that students are not making adequate academic progress. Updates have been distributed to all students in the Youth in College

placement. Students must submit their new schedules each semester. Trade schools are included when attached to an Illinois Junior College. They will accept applications for the DCFS scholarships until March 31, 2019. Kim will distribute additional scholarship lists.

Approval of SWFCAC 2/15/19 Minutes - SWFCAC

The minutes were revised to state that Gladys reported that she does not have a copy of the current IFAPA membership list. *Denise Spires made a motion to accept the minutes as corrected. Kellye Norris seconded. Motion carried.*

Final Report to the Director

Carol Sheley

There were no final reports to the Director. The monthly report was sent at the first of the month and council members were copied via email.

Approval of IAAC 2/2/18 Minutes – IAAC

Keely Giles made a motion to accept the minutes as recorded. Natalie Miller seconded. Motion carried.

The State of the State

Director Dyer-Webster

Debra stated that she is the Interim Director for 60 days. An acting director could be named to serve for 60 session days. The Governor will recommend and the Senate will confirm the DCFS Director. She reported that the Governor held a retreat with all of the directors of the state agencies. During the retreat they brought in a presenter, did Q&A and report-ins. The Governor was there and participated fully. Thursday night he spoke to the directors and he stated that the expectation is that all “will give customer service.” He interviewed multiple people before choosing the directors. Customer service was the top priority. She said that he’s a very hands-on, caring Governor. She stated that we will be in good hands with his appointed director.

Debra stated that Family First is in the planning stage. Different committees are looking at various areas. The federal government is providing money for prevention, now. There still will be funds for children in the care of DCFS, but they will give us more money for keeping kids from coming into care and/or finding permanency. All of the Family First services will be targeted toward keeping a child safe in a family setting.

One of the council members noted that during the Family First presentation prior to the Director’s arrival it seemed that there will be a push to having foster parents demonstrate the ability to support foster children financially without having the additional assistance of the board payment. Director will follow up with Licensing regarding Family First requirements.

Discussion:

We all know that the permanency timelines don’t seem to interface with the court system. How do you see advancing the ball on us getting closer to realistically achieving the goals? A: We are trying to work with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) using the court improvement program where they work to educate judges on federal statutes, DCFS, and other aspects of the child welfare system. She suggested that we invite Heather Dorsey to present at a council meeting. The Core Practice Model is starting at Caritas, but will roll out statewide. It will focus on what will happen in the Child & Family Team meeting to help achieve goals. AOIC is

waiting on us to develop our Family First guidelines to train the judges. The Casey Foundation will also support this work.

Are timelines really beneficial? It seems that sometimes blowing past guidelines does not indicate failure, but rather a determination to due diligence and the child's age impacts the experience. A: The guidelines are federal and we need to look at time through the eyes of the child. A child needs to have permanency, especially in early years. We have to do better for the children.

This morning we talked about situations where the Normalcy procedures seems in contradiction with 402 and some workers interpret it one way and some interpret it another. A: The Office of Child & Family Policy should be addressing it with regard to the procedures.

Youth, birth parents, foster and adoptive parents should be included on the Family First committees. One council member noted that she had not been able to be included and the barrier may be the inability to get an Illinois.gov email address. A: Maggie will send Gwenn meeting/call information so that council members will be able to participate.

Q: There is a huge number of kin and fictive kin placements and they are not getting the training that they should have regarding trauma and resources. We need to have a higher emphasis on training this population. There was a new add-on training related to discipline but it doesn't seem to be available. There is something foundationally valuable with being in the same room with people like you. It's like traditional foster care. The support they receive in in-person training is a big piece of that training. A: Having the training is very important.

Q: One of the things programs do is recruit foster and adoptive parents. It has been noted that agencies will not share resources with each other or with DCFS. A: They view foster parents as a commodity so that they will have resources when needed. They are having discussions about open foster homes. Foster parents will be added to the committee.

A council member suggested that the Department change the language in the contract or program plan to add respite fees per child and standardize the way it is managed across the board.

Q: When a parent identifies a child for adoption and an agency or the department is contacted, they are unwilling to complete and share licensing home studies. Their licensing representatives are not allowing Illinois families to list on AdoptUSkids. They don't want the studies to go out of state. A: This is supposed to be addressed by the task force.

Q: The placement clearance desk is limiting the number of unrelated children in the home. When you count the number of unrelated children it is too many for approval.

Q: Why not choose a more limited amount of information to record to get through the Placement Clearance Desk more efficiently? Information automatically pulls up on the screen, and should not need to be repeated all the time. It should just take the last four digits of the social to pull up the placement. A: All positions cannot go into the PRO2, for your protection and confidentiality.

Q: Will the Family First money and the Core Practice model allow us to do the shared parenting that we've been talking about today? A: Yes, it is supposed to work toward the co-parenting model.

Q: Is there any way to standardize training or follow up with caseworkers who do not buy in to things like normalcy or who seem not to be up-to-date on training? A: We have to do better with our communication, sometimes from the bottom up instead of from the top down. As in every profession there are varying degrees of performance. They are working to address it through training and caregivers can share their knowledge along the way.

Q: Why does it seem that sometimes information is withheld or not available until the adoption attorney shares it with potential adoptive parents? A: The law requires full and complete disclosure so that you can make an educated decision, according to the Adoption Act. The rule is that before you enter into a commitment, any and all information that may tie back into a child is supposed to be told to you as part of the subsidy process.

Q: One parent has a teenage foster youth in the home right now and she is frustrated because she does not know what is going on with her case. She asks her caseworker, but forgets or doesn't really understand and no one is really able to provide the support needed. A: Discussing the parent's mental health issues, drug issues, etc., is not an open conversation. It's totally up to the parent to say whether the foster parent may have the information.

IFAPA Update – Gladys Boyd

They are still trying to work on recruitment efforts. They are working with National for direction and hope to have more updates by the next meeting. They will also meet with National to work on what is needed to build the membership. IFAPA updates will be a standing agenda item for both councils going forward.

IAAC and SWFCAC Breakout Meetings

The councils continued their meetings separately following a networking lunch.

QIC-AG Updates

Jen Florent

Jen reported that the development of the PBA website is nearly complete and there are some technical aspects that DCFS OITS is still working on. The next PBA content committee meeting is Monday, March 11 at noon. Council members should let Jen know if they wish to attend. Kellye King has been working with the ASAP agencies to develop content and agencies will supply blog posts. Business cards will be released when the web site is up and running. The QIC-AG has been working on other projects, i.e., short videos, rollout of the Connections to Count On training video, the ASAP phone line, and a series of Framework Workshops to be held with the ASAP agencies, all topics that will be discussed in detail at the April 5 IAAC meeting to get feedback.

Communications

Jen Florent

Jen distributed information about DCFS Family Night at the Chicago white sox ballgame July 27, 2019 and a copy of the save the date for the fourth annual Foster Care Youth and Alumni Legislative Shadow Day May 15, 2019.

The Foster Parent Handbook

Council

Elizabeth will do a conference call with Natalie Miller, Karen Taylor, Karen Wardlaw and Julie Yelverton to work on updates.

Illinois Families Now & Forever Newsletter

Council

No one has been hired to take over the editor position. A May issue is planned through the Office of Caregiver & Parent Support because we want to keep the newsletter going. Council members are encouraged to submit a QUIC update (by Christine Feldman) and SSI application information. Jen will request a column from the Director, State Fair ticket information, a Know Your Council page with membership openings listed, etc.

DCFS Focus Groups

Maggie Poteau

Maggie reported that she is establishing focus groups to gather valuable information to improve the end-to-end customer journey by creating proactive communication and marketing that will support positive experiences at DCFS. She is working to establish focus groups for youth in care, birth parents, foster caregivers, and adoptive parents with statewide participation. She stated that all voices are welcome, including people that had a positive experience, negative experience, or are indifferent that change for the better will ever happen. One key issue is information sharing outside D-net. As Debra stated earlier, the Governor is really interested in customer service and Maggie said that we need to improve communication and the information flow. She requested that all stakeholders who would like to participate submit their contact information by March 29th.

Maggie developed a council portal and stated that the council should be trained to use it.

Sylvia recommended the development of structured focus group questions to enhance the focus group work. This will help us sell the idea to others. We want to engage people more and this will help gain their trust, community buy-in and understanding.

Online Adoption Certification

The adoption training the council worked on has been shelved and the council never saw the final version. The training that is posted online is old training. Karen Taylor will contact Veronica Sanchez to find out the status. It was noted that the council promotes the completion of this training as it will help people make up missed sessions.

Adoption Updates

Sylvia Fonseca and Kelly King

Sylvia discussed the quarterly adoption meetings. She noted that Support Specialists are sharing more information with caseworkers and additional services will be shared, i.e., educational resources, medical resources, ASAP supports, etc. She said that they are encouraging adoptive parents to respond to the annual questionnaire. Sylvia will include the new phone number in that, as well.

Kelly is working on expanding services and is currently working with Family Core in Peoria. The Training Project will provide support across the state, focusing on the short-term with a focus on prevention. The Center for Law & Social Work is starting to have representation statewide.

Adoption Month**Karen Wardlaw**

Karen suggested that we use funds for a bracelet campaign to show a visual connection to adoption. **Kathleen Bush made the motion and Natalie Miller seconded. Motion passed.** Elizabeth asked permission to write a letter of support. **Danny Tolliver, Jr. made the motion and Karen Wardlaw seconded. Motion passed.**

Danny Tolliver Jr. made a motion to adjourn. Keely Giles seconded. The meeting adjourned at 3:10pm.

NEXT MEETING: Friday, April 5 at Northfield Inn & Conference Center, Springfield, Illinois.