

**Illinois Adoption Advisory Council
Minutes
Friday, April 5, 2019
Northfield Inn & Conference Center, 3280 Northfield Drive, Springfield, Illinois
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**

AAC Members Present	AAC Members Absent	Guests	DCFS Staff
Keely Giles	Kathleen Bush	Christine Feldman	Gwenn Eyer
Elizabeth Richmond	Alice Couch	Laurel Meade	Jen Florent
Danielle Sanders	Natalie Miller	Angie Nissen	Sylvia Fonseca
Karen Taylor	Maripat Oliver	Katie Friend	Kelly King
Danny Tolliver, Jr.	Michelle Price		David Morris
Amy Trotter	Crystal Rekart		
Mark Werner	Keisha Robinson		
	Cara Siebert		
	Brittney Sprouse		
	Karen Wardlaw		
	Jeremy Wheeler		
	Julie Yelverton		

Welcome and Introductions –Elizabeth Richmond

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

Approval of March 8, 2019 IAAC Meeting Minutes Council

It was determined that a section of the minutes was missing, so approval was tabled until the next meeting.

Adoptions Update

Sylvia Fonseca and Kelly King

The website is up and running. The blog post for this month is going through the approvals for posting. Staff had to be retrained on the phone listing, so the numbers are currently not as high as they probably will be. The new phone line started in April 2018, and they have had 1,275 calls in the past year. Post-adoption staff have now been trained to enter every caller’s information. 243 calls have been logged since March after workers were re-trained. They will start tracking disruptions and calls regarding risk of disruption. Sylvia said that staff were retrained because they needed to really understand the importance of capturing the information, allowing the unit to track trends and what is going on in the regions.

They are stressing the importance of trauma-informed provider training and ensuring that the quality of resources is even throughout the state. Supervisors will follow up as part of the unit’s quality control. Sometimes foster parents just want to be heard and sometimes they will utilize supports that are offered. The adoption unit does not have legal authority, so work is centered on empowering the adoptive parents to use their legal authority to access and utilize resources. The more they can tease out services and needs to identify trends, the more the adoption council can

help respond, i.e., Are there certain ages that parents find difficult? Are there regional situations? Elizabeth requested that they share the monthly trend reports with the council.

Discussion:

- The council expressed appreciation for the work that has been done and will provide support with additional suggestions and requests.
- The board payment breakdown should be listed on the website.
- Add a ready-reference section to the web site, with questions and answers.

They reported 1471 permanencies achieved for children, including 1264 adoptions. They have updated the letters that go out to include the phone number and now there is no inclusion of a prepaid return envelope. It is very important for adoptive parents to update addresses and phone numbers. When families move out of state, they need to go through Interstate Compact to work to maintain medical coverage in the new state. States don't reciprocate for backtracking, so money spent before approval will not be reimbursed. This collaboration will help provide support in identifying services in the new state. Blog posts and social media are two ways to share this need for updated information.

Fostering Connections must be returned annually. When letters are not returned, there is a loss of federal funds. The letter includes the post-adoption phone number and brochure. Sylvia will send a copy of the letter for distribution to the council and will ask for council input on the brochure.

Center for Law and Social Services

Katie Friend

They are still waiting for the final revision of Procedure 309.40 Adoption Listing Services, including updated forms and approvals. They plan to expand to the Central and Southern regions since most current referrals are coming from Central and Southern. They currently have one person covering the area and will add staff. They are fully staffed in the Chicago area. They still receive 15-20 calls for adopt-only, foster-to-adopt, infant and 0-5. People don't recognize the need to come in as foster parents since the kids are in varying stages of permanency. They work with agencies around the state and promote agencies to share their foster homes.

They are training attorneys, and holding attorneys to the new timelines. The Department is committed to making sure things are moving along in a timely manner. If attorneys are not willing to comply they will be removed from the list.

Deb Kennedy is the lead on the Adoption Task Force. We know that all kids, whether in POS homes or DCFS homes, are "our kids." DCFS has been charged with getting the subsidies written correctly. They have provided a lead trainer for staff that are working on this. Erica Carrera is the lead. She assigns a child/sibling group to the worker and the agency finalizes the documents, with support from the Department. How can we help each other to accomplish our goals? Adoption labs are being conducted. Workers are free to go to sites to work on subsidies with supervision and support. Sylvia is holding Adoption Quarterly meetings in the regions where staff receive updates and bring concerns or barriers. They can then work together to address issues. One issue that has been addressed in-house is getting background checks through in a timelier fashion. This addresses issues on the specific regional level and emphasizes the importance of permanency workers letting families know that we are not letting go, indicating

that “We are here to support you.” Their message provides support for families who may have fear of the unknown as to what will happen when the adoption finalizes and their worker is no longer in the picture. It normalizes the process, emphasizing the normalcy of needing support through the years. Keely said that we need to provide a way to share the message more globally, changing the mindset for those who want to run away from connections with agency workers when their adoption is completed.

It was noted that staff know when the case goes to adoption. They have readers at DCFS and they wait until someone sends them the subsidy packet. Sylvia stated that everyone is responsible, regardless who is managing the case. Staff get tickler reminders. ACR looks at it and staff get notices, but agencies have a history of losing staff and supports need to be implemented. Policy 309 has clear steps to move the case along. They are reviewing cases to identify hold-ups and address them.

Adoption Support and Preservation Services

Angie Nissen

Children’s Home & Aid has two teams in Southern region, centralized in Granite City area 10 counties including respite services. Herrin team covers 27 counties with therapists, etc. Services include family and individual counseling services. They have an art therapist on their team and TheraPlay is one program they use. Referrals typically come from DCFS. Their work is trauma-focused. Their staff are trained in NTI, the National Adoption Competency training. They have learned new trends and acquired some additional tools. They utilize the trust-based intervention program and all therapists are expected to view the videos, webinars and utilize online training. Their goal is to increase the tools and resources that are available for the parents. Some sessions are three hours from an office, so home visits are not as frequent as they might be. They have respite workers that go into the home for a few hours a week and sometimes take multiple kids out so that parents have the opportunity for a break. The program holds zoo memberships and they are able to provide other activities for children and youth. They do not provide overnight respite. One of the trends is in significantly traumatic situations where parents wait until the last minute to seek resources. They have a lot of rural areas where their program is the only thing available for many, many counties. They see a lot of families with children in the 8-12 age group, then again around age 17. They have families that need supports when children are coming out of residential. Their goal is to provide prevention services.

The council may make a recommendation to the new Director to include adoptive parents in the services of DCFS Educational Advisors.

Communications

Jen Florent

Jen distributed blue ribbons for Prevent Child Abuse month. She announced that the Department has a new Director, Marc Smith, formerly of Aunt Martha’s. Jen stated that the Path Beyond Adoption website has gone live and may be accessed through the DCFS external web site and through the direct <https://pathbeyondadoption.illinois.gov/> link. Jen will promote this on social media and she distributed business cards for council members to use to share information. Upcoming events include State Fair tickets for foster and adoptive families. The invitation will hopefully go into a May issue of Illinois Families Now & Forever. Shadow Day for youth in care and alumni age 18 and older is coming up in May.

QIC-AG

Christine Feldman

Nearly all families have completed the TARGET program and the evaluation is underway. Christine would like to provide a report at the September IAAC meeting if data is available at that time. She stated that the grant has made an impact on Illinois families. They have conducted meet and greets, the Adoption Support Line is being utilized, the new web site is up and being refined. They want to offer something to all ASAP programs, building on their strengths, offering them for the START program. This program provides an overview of all the domains that impact a child's life and offers a box of books that include activities to use with children and youth. This is an evidence-based approach that involves getting people involved early, prior to the need for crisis intervention. It includes a light assessment format and teaches a family to identify their own concerns and decide what they would like help with. This way they will know who to call later on when they are more willing to seek support. DCFS has been able to help add staff to the ASAP programs. They will offer agencies updates on what is new in the field and will not rely on one method for everyone. This is designed as a useful, flexible and supportive approach.

Discussion: How do we share the message?

- Utilize the Connections You Can Count On video. This video has been revised and improved and it is shorter. They want to use it to train staff and post-adoption service providers.
- They can design a brochure or flyer to promote the support opportunities available to them. Christine will draft the text and Gwenn will send to the council for review.
- Send out information with agency newsletters, as a flat page in Illinois Families Now & Forever, etc.
- This would almost have a recruitment aspect if we catch people on the front end and let them know the supports that are available to them.
- Welcome letters are sent from the region to adoptive parents.
- Offer reminder magnets.
- What is a term that they can use to describe the program to providers? Community partners, stakeholders, etc. Refer to "Adoption Community Connections."
- How is information shared with parents prior to adoption? It seems that there is often a delay in sharing information and paperwork is overwhelming, so it's possible that after waiting so long they just want to sign and move on rather than reviewing.

The last billable day for the grant is September 29, 2019. Christine hopes to be able to show the video at the June meeting. The council would like to have their September meeting in Lisle.

Adoption Training

Karen Taylor

Karen requested an update for the online adoption training. Training was developed, was reviewed by the council with comments, and was supposed to launch. The new training manager did not have up-to-date information. They are working to move forward. Karen said that a monthly two-day regional staff training is offered regarding completing the subsidy forms. Karen and Christina Schneider from legal conduct the training. They also offer a staff training that covers the life of the case and addresses the clinical process. They will start another session in May. They do one week per month for three weeks. They are revising the curriculum and hope to

embed the video in the training. Karen is working on permanency worker training with Donald. It will be put on the VTC for training hours making us compliant with our own policy. Christine has assisted in making recommendations on Policy 309.70 regarding the provision of post-adoption services. The attitude we want to convey is that they really should be coming prior to crisis.

IFAPA Update – Danny Tolliver, Jr.

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.

Adoption Celebration

Karen has ordered the bracelets. Final plans will need to be made in June. The SYAB hopes to collaborate with the IAAC on an event. There will be a planning call before the June meeting.

Illinois Families Now & Forever Newsletter

Articles are due to Gwenn by 4/11/19.

Council

Council Goals and Accomplishments

The Council conducted a workgroup to update the IAAC goals and accomplishments. Results will be posted on the DCFS external web site.

Mark Werner

NEXT MEETING: Friday, June 7 at Northern Illinois University Holmes Student Center, DeKalb, Illinois.