



Illinois Adoption Advisory Council
Serving Adoption and Guardianship Families in Illinois
Joint Meeting with Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
MINUTES
November 5, 2021 9:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.
WebEx videoconference

IAAC MEMBERS PRESENT	IAAC MEMBERS ABSENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT
Mary Kay Collins	Keely Giles	Gladys Boyd	Kathryn Adrian
Katie Friend	Maripat Oliver	Kelly Elleman	Kimberly Coniglio
Alex Montgomery	Cara Siebert	Arrelda Hall	Kate Monte
Shirly Padera	Danny Tolliver	Tiffany Johnson	Kellye Norris
Crystal Rekart	Karen Wardlaw	Harriet Kersh	Maya Maclin
Elizabeth Richmond	Jeremy Wheeler	Susan McConnell	Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond
Danielle Sanders		Audrey Reynolds	Samella Taylor-Lewis
Brittany Sprouse		Mary Savage	
Karen Taylor	GUESTS	Phyllis Summers	STAFF
Amy Trotter	Debbie Freke	Rebecca Thomas	Ray Gates
Mark Werner	Tina Haynes		Michelle Grove
	Maria Levensgood		Terry McGlothlin
	Crystal Rekart		Gayla Webster
	Carol Sheley		
	Arlene Woods		
	Julie Yelverton		

Welcome/Introduction

Katie Friend, IAAC chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. and conducted an IAAC voice roll call. Susan McConnell, SWFCAC, vice chairperson, conducted the SWFCAC voice roll call.

Adoption Month Celebration

Mary Kay Collins

Mary Kay reported on National Adoption Month celebration activities in Illinois. Due to COVID restrictions no in-person activities are being scheduled again this year. Children’s coloring sheets will be posted on the DCFS websites and Facebook site as well as with resource agencies for children to color and submit back to the Council. These can then be posted on those sites (without identifying information) and used to promote adoption/guardianships, the Council and other informational resources and support services available to children and families. A donation is being given to the IAAC for National Adoption Month activities by the Elks lodge #2497. The local press will be encouraged to highlight this event to promote the importance of adoption and guardianship as a way to build families and to acknowledge the Elks valued sponsorship with the Council. These monies will be used to purchase family picture frame magnets that will be given to all adoptive and guardianship

families as they complete their permanencies beginning in 2022. In addition, the Council would like to develop a “swag bag” to also be given to families that would contain pertinent resource and contact information along with useful tip and/or fact sheets. Plans for next year will begin early in hopes that a bigger in-person event will be possible for November of 2022.

Permanency Workgroup Report

Alex Montgomery, IAAC

Alex reported that this workgroup is a collaboration between SWFCAC and the IAAC and interested parties are encouraged to contact Alex to join. Stakeholders are encouraged to give recommendations to the workgroup. The purpose of the workgroup is to highlight the children in need of permanent families and to reduce the barriers and delays in completing adoptions and guardianships. The workgroup has been successful in having the guides for creating and reviewing subsidies reposted for workers who do this work, as a means for streamlining the process by reducing errors and providing greater consistency in the process.

Update from Office of Caregiver and Parent Support **Michelle Grove, Associate Deputy Director**

Michelle reviewed where the division falls within the Department and the programs included under her supervision. The Office of Caregiver Support falls under Permanency within the division of Operations and includes the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council, the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and the Birth Parent Council (which is still evolving). In addition, Michelle oversees the Partnering with Parents program, the Foster Parent Support Specialist program, the newly created Adoption/Guardianship Support Specialist program, Incarcerated Parents and Interstate Compact, each of which has an important working relationship with the Councils and the children and families we represent. She is seeking to fill the Incarcerated Parent Program Administrator position which has been vacant for the last year. Once in place, she will have that person present to the Councils as their work is very important in supporting youth and maintaining family connections when a youth’s birth parent is incarcerated. Research clearly shows the benefits of maintaining those connections. Parents are also very helpful in identifying kinship members as potential caregiver resources. Interstate Compact becomes involved when our youth are placed in out of state foster care or residential care and includes those adopted or in guardianship placements with subsidies when they do not reside in Illinois.

National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) update:

Michelle reported that we are in the 5th year of the grant which piloted the newly developed curriculum in Cook and Northern Regions and used Central Region as the control group. At this point the grant is focusing on building on sustainability. Michelle encouraged any council members who were interested in being developed into NTDC trainers to contact her office. Two NTDC facilitators provided feedback regarding their experience with the curriculum. They both thought the training was very good with emphasis on being trauma-informed, encouraging caregiver self-care and helping them identify expectations and areas of growth. They recommend amending the training to have more Illinois-specific and caregiver-focused content. One of the strengths identified was the availability of the “Portal” which allows access to the materials and training resources after the training is completed so that participants can review content whenever it is most useful to them.

Foster Parent Law:

The OCPS is working with the training division to develop a self-directed training on the law that would be available to all caregivers and agency staff. One of the issues has been the fact that the current platform for the training is not 508 compliant and switching to another platform is difficult and complicated to achieve. Currently approximately 50% of our staff have less than 2 years child welfare experience and have little to no knowledge regarding this law so the need is great. Ideas to get the workforce trained are being considered.

OCPS Staffing:

The OCPS is currently down 7 positions and Michelle is working diligently to interview and fill them as quickly as possible. Jason Cummins has taken a new position and will no longer work with the Councils. In the interim, she is excited to announce that she has been approved for two 75-day contracts to get some temporary relief until after the new calendar year. She introduced Terry McGlothlin who has over 20 years of experience in working with the Councils, and Ray Gates, former administrator over the Councils.

Breakout to Individual Councils

Approval of October 8, 2021 Minutes

Council

MOTION: Brittany Sprouse made the motion to approve September 17, 2021 minutes. Danielle Sanders seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously through roll call vote.

Vote for approval: Katie Friend, Mark Werner, Mary Kay Collins, Alex Montgomery, Amy Trotter, Karen Taylor. Opposed: none

Statewide Adoption Update

Sylvia Fonseca/Kelly King

No report.

Training Requirements for Council Members

A reminder was shared for all Council members to complete both the Ethics training and the Harassment/Discrimination training. They are due today and they must be completed in order to remain on the Council. They are available to take on-line and if you need the links to be resent to you contact someone through the IAAC mailbox.

Meeting Schedule

It was discussed that there is some confusion with the actual planned schedule for the remainder of the fiscal year. A previously developed schedule provided to the Council does not match dates discussed in previous meetings or that which is posted on the web-site. Katie will ask to get a final schedule sent out to the members. She indicated that the hope is to have a least two in-person meeting in the coming year if it is safe to do so. Arrangements can still be made for remote options for those who feel it is too risky. Until the schedule is confirmed she asked that the committee and workgroups continue to meet regularly and remain on track with accomplishing their goals and objectives.

Committee / Workgroup Reports

Adoption/Guardianship Parent Support Specialists

Elizabeth Richmond

Elizabeth and Karen Taylor wrote a position announcement to encourage applicants. Sylvia Fonseca, Statewide Adoption Administration reviewed it and made some minor changes and it is ready to be posted. Elizabeth read the announcement to the Council and plans to do the announcement blast today with hope that interviews can begin next week. She asks the Council to refer all potential candidates that meet the criteria denoted in the announcement. Positions include two in Cook County at 1911 Indiana and 1-2 positions (along with Gayla Webster) to be housed in Central Region. The official start date is planned for Jan. 2022, but she anticipates the contracting process will take about two months. Elizabeth is excited to get the program started and Karen reminded the Council that the positions are much needed, but, as a pilot we must prove that the outcomes are successfully accomplished in order to continue to get administrative support for the program.

Bylaws Committee

Mark Werner

Mark noted that any name change the council wants to pursue will require a full bylaw change with a motion, two readings and membership vote. Keeping the council name the same and adding a "tag line" to the name does not require a bylaw change-only a majority vote by the members.

Legislative / Public Policy Committee

Karen Taylor

Karen Taylor reported that the committee is inviting our legislative liaison (Megan Jorgenson) to attend one of next meetings in order to start to build a relationship with the liaison and to enhance the Council's awareness of upcoming proposed legislative changes that would affect adoption/guardianship practice. Additionally, the committee hopes to get support to have the AAC legislated in the Illinois Adoption Act. Karen also reported some possible federal changes that would affect the discontinuation of subsidies, making it more limited as to the circumstances that would stop a subsidy. Jeremy Wheeler, the committee chair, is working to find out more information. He also reported on a new federal grant aimed at assisting families seeking guardianship privately. As he gains more information he will share it with the committee and Council.

Membership Committee

Mark Werner

Mark reported that current council vacancies include one Cook County Adoptive Parent, one adoptee (Karen Wardlaw recently resigned, pending e-mail to co-chairs), two Cook Central Adoptive Parents, two at-large adoptive parents, one Southern adoptive parent, and two adoption professional openings. Karen Taylor will take over chairing the committee as Mark would like to withdraw.

Communications Workgroup

Elizabeth Richmond

Katie Friend reported that the workgroup has included Jen Florent from the Office of Communications and Kelly King from the DCFS Adoption/Guardianship unit. The main focus of the workgroup currently is to find a way to update the Path Beyond Adoption (Path) website to ensure that as needed content can be added/deleted and easily found. There are limits to what can be done due to the platform it was built on and the changes needed will require OITS to rebuild it on another platform for DCFS use. Due to the backlog of requests at OITS it is not anticipated that this will be done in the near future and alternative, less functional options were identified. The workgroup is planning on developing posters to be posted in all field offices that would promote the use of a local ASAP provider and help families understand the wealth of services they offer. Julie Yelverton is working on the development of the poster which will be done by the DCFS print shop. Their next meeting is on 11/19/21 at 10:30 am for anyone interest in joining.

Data Workgroup

Julie Yelverton

No report. The group has not met recently.

Permanency Workgroup

Alex Montgomery

The report was provided during the joint meeting.

Post Adoption Services Workgroup

Cara Siebert / Amy Trotter

Amy Trotter reported that to make ASAP agencies more visible and to promote their services, the agencies are meeting to share ideas and to ensure that their quarterly family introductory meetings are publicized on the Path. The workgroup is also involved with identifying and making needed changes to the Path web-site to make it more user-friendly and increase family awareness of it as a resource. They are working on finalizing the new Adoption/Guardianship Readiness training for families and getting it posted on the VTC. Their next meeting is on 11/15/21.

Strategy Workgroup

Keely Giles

Elizabeth Richmond reported that the committee goal is to increase awareness of the Council and the role the Council plays in advocating for families and improving practice, services, legislation and policy. The committee is beginning to identify barriers and strategize how to improve the Council's relationship with the Illinois community. They indicated that they would like to see the Council take on an active listening role rather than just a talking role. The committee is in the process of developing packets that will be distributed to new families. Committee members are being encouraged to attend local ASAP support meetings to learn more and develop working relationships with the agency providers. They will meet again on 11/12/21 at 10 am.

Training & Support Groups Workgroup

Elizabeth Richmond

Elizabeth Richmond stated that the second pilot of the new Adoption/Guardianship Readiness training has been completed and they are working on correcting some technical issues at this point. The content has been well received and the training will rely on the Path to link families to additional training resources, therefore making those upgrades important to this workgroup as well. Cara Siebert shared the ASAP agency provider contact and service content information with the workgroup to further promote their use by families as a training resource and to build relationships with the various DCFS training initiatives managers in an effort to include ASAP agencies in the training plans.

Illinois Adoption Advisory Council Name Change

The discussion revolved around the thought that “Guardianship” should be added to the name since the Council serves those families as well as adoptive families. Per the bylaws committee report, it was reminded that a full name change will require a bylaws amendment and the full process required to do so. Adding a tagline would only require a vote from the present Council members. It was determined that much of our current identity is tied heavily on being known as the Adoption Advisory Council and that it might be confusing for the community to associate a new name with the Council. Following a detailed discussion regarding the pros and cons of the two options it was determined that a tag line would be the best choice. It was recommended that the name would remain the same and along with the “tag line” it would be: Illinois Adoption Advisory Council: Serving Adoption and Guardianship Families in Illinois.

Motion: Amy Trotter made a motion to adopt the name and tag line identified above. Mary Kay Collins seconded the motion. Voice vote taken and those who approve the recommended change were: Alex Montgomery, Brittany Sprouse, Crystal Rekart, Shirley Padera, Katie Friend, Karen Taylor and Danielle Sanders. Opposed: none.

DCFS letter to Adopted Youth:

The Council had a thorough discussion about their concerns regarding a recent letter sent out to encourage youth participation in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion group. Unfortunately, the letter was sent directly to adoptive and guardianship youth, rather than their parents, and was sent using their birth names. Adoption and Guardianship families are upset and angry regarding this breach of confidentiality and failure to go through them for youth still under the age of majority. There are plans underway by families to file a joint complaint against the Department. They expressed anger at the failure to recognize their role as parent to these minor youths and regarding the trauma that has been incurred by their children and families as a result of the letters going to children using their birth names. Many children have never been told that they have been adopted, and while this is not good practice, it placed families in the terrible position of having to provide explanation when they were not prepared. Although most youth do know they are adopted or in guardianship arrangements, many adopted youth were not aware of their birth names. This has led to unnecessary family trauma, confusion and numerous other problems.

DISCUSSION:

The IAAC should take a stand regarding how the problem should be handled now and consider the development of protocols for future communications.

- It will be recommended that an immediate apology letter be sent to all adoptive and guardianship families affected.
- Clarity was given as to who was responsible for the mailing.
- A list of resources to assist families in dealing with the issues and/or trauma experienced by all family members, especially youth.
- Recommendations for further input from stakeholders, including the AAC and the DCFS Adoption/Guardianship administrator, before any mailing of this nature is sent out.
- Absolutely no letter ever be sent directly to minor youth in the future.

- Recommendations will be given on how best to support, use, and provide guidance to the Youth Advisory Board.

Stakeholder Comments

None

Public Comments

None

MOTION: Danielle Sanders made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Karen Taylor seconded and the motion was approved through roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 11:13 a.m. Voice Vote: Approved by: Alex Montgomery, Brittany Sprouse, Crystal Rekart, Katie Friend and Mary Kay Collins. Opposed: none.

Next Meeting: January 14, 2022, 9am – noon, via WebEx, for the safety of council members.