

**Meeting of the
Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
NIU Holmes Student Center, 1425 W. Lincoln Highway, DeKalb, Illinois
November 16, 2018
9:00 a.m. - 3:10 p.m.
APPROVED MINUTES**

SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT	STAFF PRESENT
Gladys Boyd	Erica Baird	Carlene Erno
Donna Gregory	Katy Cotts	Gwenn Eyer
Arrelda Hall-Johnson	Rachel Hoyt	Michelle Grove
Gordon Hannon	Maya Maclin	Tammie Keefer
Ken Keefe	Kate Monte	Carole Ruzicka
Harriet Kersh	Kellye Norris	GUESTS
Susan McConnell	Mary Savage	Dustin Castillo
Rachel Pruess	Lesley Stuart	Sharon DeBerry
Carol Sheley		Glenn Eyer
Denise Spires		Solange Morrissette
Samella Taylor-Lewis		Bethany Paternoga
Stephanie Tesreau		Natalie Pierce
		Crystal Rekart
		Rebecca Thomas

Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan Scoring Workshop **Gwenn Eyer**
Gwenn Eyer distributed implementation plans, and council members scored plans from 9 a.m. until the meeting officially opened.

Welcome and Introductions **Carol Sheley**
SWFCAC Chairperson Carol Sheley welcomed everyone to the meeting at 10:07 a.m. and council members and guests introduced themselves.

Approve SWFCAC Minutes from 10/14/18
Stephanie Tesreau made the motion to approve the minutes from the October SWFCAC meeting. Denise Spires seconded and the motion carried.

Final Report to the Director **Carol Sheley**
The council submitted a recommendation to the Director which will be addressed during the Training Committee report. The monthly Director’s Report was submitted as required by law.

Northern Region Welcome

Carole Ruzicka, Regional Administrator

Carole has been the RA since last spring. She has experience as a supervisor and a lot of experience on the child protection side. She thanked the council and Foster Parent Support Specialists for educating her on their work during a recent training meeting in Northern Region.

Child & Family Service Review Exit Conference

Ken Keefe

Ken was asked by someone in his region to attend the Child & Family Service Review Exit Conference. Meeting participants included frontline workers, CASA, the Public Guardian, DCFS administration, foster parents, court administrators, etc. The meeting was part of a traditional review where reviewers come in to examine cases and interview foster parents. The purpose was to look at the results that were gathered, then meet in small groups to make recommendations for improvement. They'll submit a final report to the feds by February 9, 2019. They reviewed 40 foster care cases and 25 intact cases and conducted a total of 500 interviews.

General Reports/Outcomes from the 65 cases reviews included the following:

- They are getting back into court much more quickly in Madison County when the judge observes even minimal progress.
- There is a caseworker that doesn't want the foster parent to connect with the birth parent.
- CIPP meetings including youth, foster parents, birth parents and none of them know about the Child & Family Team meeting process.
- It was noted that this council has been looking at Child & Family meetings and pressing toward the inclusion of foster parents with the birth parents.
- Foster parents should be updated on progress toward the permanency goal. Foster parents may go to court and get the information from the court record.
- A foster youth participant in the council meeting stated that sometimes there comes a point in care where the foster parent is more of a parent than the birth parent because they know more about the child than the parent does.
- Getting foster youth involved would be more beneficial.
- Foster parents must be treated as members of the professional team.
- The youth are the foundation. We must focus on the needs of the youth.
- There needs to be policy change on a statewide level to standardize court procedures.
- Carole noted that the review group is working with a statewide court oversight committee to address it.
- Ken will watch for the review report and Carole will ask to include representatives from the council in the review process and both will report back.
- Youth who age out of care feel torn between their foster family and their birth family.
- Carole noted that her breakout group talked about being more aggressive in working with the parents from the beginning, working actively to reunify, focusing on fathers, and actively supporting reunification from the beginning, and looking more at the benchmark timeline. She noted that traditionally, everyone wants to take a "wait and see" approach when movement forward is very slow but there is still movement.
- Youth often report that they have no say in their own parenting, indicating that they are just offered a couple of placement options and that is why youth are being placed in a home that may not be their best fit.

Ken stated that there were many strengths, including safety outcomes and keeping siblings

together. Permanency is a major issue, which seems to result from a reluctance from the courts and caseworkers to change permanency goals, leaving children and youth in limbo. It appears that neither wants to make that recommendation. They talked about it regarding the child's sense of time. We are supposed to use concurrent planning, focusing on the child's return home while identifying supportive resources in advance in case it does not happen. Carole noted that the big push with this administration is reunification, noting that we are not an adoption agency. We need to focus more on working with parents for children to return home.

Stakeholder Reports – None

Training Committee WIG

Harriet Kersh

The committee met earlier this year and set their Wildly Important Goal (WIG). They decided that they really wanted to have input on what foster parents get in training to ensure that it meets their needs and that the training is appropriate for foster parents. The committee met with staff and determined the need to write a proposal to the Director. They drafted and sent a proposal to the Director and the Director approved the link with the Office of Learning and Professional Development. A draft Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) was developed and shared on a call with representatives from the OLPD. Their office has refined the SOP. It was noted that the council should stay in contact with SYAB to share ideas.

Discussion:

- How do we gather information from the foster parent public? Council members should use their council position to listen and observe at regional meetings, etc.
- Coordinate with POS agencies who host public training to share their training calendars with the Training Committee.
- Use Illinois Families Now & Forever, the foster parent newsletter, to share information.
- Tap into Clinical for specialty area trainings, i.e., autism, developmental delays, etc.
- The committee might want to use the Council's website to post foster parent training opportunities.
- They could ask Training to add self-guided topics to the VTC.
- Michelle has two curricula that involve foster care, i.e., Emergency Foster Care and the Foster Parent Support Specialist training.
- A key issue to be addressed is to train foster parents and staff to support families and youth who are adjusting to a change of placement and return home, recognizing that there are changes and transitions.
- Training must recognize the grieving process foster parents go through when children leave their home. Offering training support would improve retention.
- Collaborate with the Foster Parent Support Specialist Committee to address training.
- Share the recommendation format used with the Policy Committee to send a recommendation forward for council inclusion in policy development.
- Develop a Training Committee workgroup which can include people from outside the council.

Traverse Program

Rachel Pruess and NIU Students Dustin & Kaydra

Council member Rachel Pruess, LCSW and foster/adoptive parent, has a varied background in child welfare and a passion for travel. Kaydra, 21, with a double major at NIU, came into care at

age 16 and ages out in September. Dustin, 22, is pursuing a career in the Hip Hop industry. He spent time in care from age 12 to 21.

The Traverse Program is an Adventure Therapy program. Traverse, by definition, means to travel across or through; to move forward. Rachel noted that nationally an estimated 20,000 youth emancipate or age out of the foster care system annually, whether they are prepared, or not. The Traverse Program serves the entire system, providing travel as therapy to young adults in care and travel as self-care for foster parents and caseworkers. Traverse helps young adults from foster care recreate themselves, utilizing travel, activities and service projects to change their perspective of themselves and the world. Traverse provides diverse opportunities to immerse in different cultures and learn from others' life experiences, encouraging youth to discover they are not stuck in their previous circumstances and that they have talents and strengths to offer the world.

Key program participants include youth in care, adopted youth and youth who have aged out. It was piloted last year with youth at NIU. It sets a higher standard and uses positivity to promote teamwork and collaboration. Adventure Therapy (AT) can be defined as, "a therapeutic intervention which uses planned and structured activities of an experiential, risk-taking and challenging nature." AT has been found to foster adolescents' personal development, including enhanced self-concept, self-competence, a sense of accomplishment and internalized control. It has also been shown to improve their interpersonal development and the development of appropriate and adaptive social skills. Rachel reported that current brain research suggests that skill acquisition and an increase in self-concept helps to restore and reintegrate neural networks damaged by the experience of trauma as participants engage in problem solving and team building activities.

Kaydra stated that she initially could not trust the person to support her as she repelled off a cliff, stating that until then, she'd been able to rely only on herself. She said, "Traverse is a life-changing experience. You meet another family that you can cherish forever, and you find out more about yourself that you never realized. It is a roller coaster of emotions and it's amazing!"

Dustin said, "Traverse is a way to find yourself and help others do the same and create a new family. It helps you learn how to take your past and grow stronger and learn."

The council asked questions and encouraged Rachel to expand the program to reach out to high school aged youth to share upcoming opportunities.

Public Comment

Natalie Pierce from the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB) was in attendance. She explained that the goals of the board are to educate, inspire and empower youth in care; advise the DCFS Director, and to address youth issue and concerns with DCFS representatives present to address the issues. The SYAB holds regional meetings and have five executive board members. Committees include Teen Parenting, LGBTQ, and Communications with other boards. The SYAB meets four times a year.

The council thanked Natalie and the other youth present for their participation in the meeting and discussed renewing the commitment to joint meetings with the youth. Donna Gregory made the motion to reinstate the SWFCAC Adolescent Committee. Gordon seconded, and the motion passed. Rachel Pruess will be the SWFCAC liaison with the SYAB.

Committee Reports

Policy/Legislation – Ken reported the Policy Committee recommends that the council approve changes to Rules 377 changing the age from 21 to 26 to align with the definitions of children and young adults as listed in the federal Affordable Care Act. Ken Keefe made the motion and Gordon Hannon seconded and the motion carried. Ken addressed issues in the fictive kin law. The committee recommendation was tabled until we can bring in a presenter to address current policy and procedure. Stephanie Tesreau was appointed to chair the Legislative arm of this committee.

*Training Committee - Harriet Kersh reported that the Director supported our recommendation to establish a solid plan for the SWFCAC to have input on training for caregivers. We will continue to work with representatives from Training to build a solid process.

*FPSS – The committee met 11/15 and will work to gather resources from around the state.

*Health Care Committee – Due to her new job within the managed care system, Rachel had to step down and we need a new chairperson.

*Hospitality/Marketing – Donna reported that their priority is working on a new SWFCAC brochure to promote the work of the council. They are currently editing text and Jen Florent from Communications will attend a meeting to take photos.

Reports from Other Councils/ Committees/ Workgroups

*CWAC

Rachel, Mary, Gordon

A meeting was held in November.

*IFAPA

Gladys Boyd, Arrelida Hall- Johnson

Arrelida reported that they want to use a national brochure to market the benefits of IFAPA membership and they are waiting for support from NFPA to move forward.

Regional Reports

Northern – Donna Gregory reported that she met with Solange Morrissette and Carole Ruzicka to set up a meeting to set goals and revitalize their advisory council.

Central – Carol Sheley reported that the Central Region held a call November 13 and they addressed training that was provided to groups throughout the region. A lot of their meetings are focused on IPS services, how to support kids through the stress of holiday season, SASS, understanding permanency, the normalcy policy and Lifebooks. A couple of issues have come out of the area meetings. One foster parent expressed concerns about how foster parents taking online college classes are not receiving day care since there's not a set timeline for class work although policy states that day care may cover if certain conditions are met. Carol asked if the

council wanted to address this issue. After discussion, the council decided to send it to the Policy Committee for review. The other issue involved a foster parent who was struggling with DCFS to adopt children that were to be moved to Alaska to live with a relative. They reported their concern that DCFS released full case files to the relative's attorney without redaction. The council discussed the issue and council members identified a Foster Parent Law issue with right #1 Dignity and Respect and suggested it might have been a violation of HIPAA if their medical information was shared. The Council determined that we should ask Licensing to address the issue re: rule and procedure.

Cook North – Cook North meets the second Tuesday of every month. Their November meeting was a turkey dinner that was used to build relationships throughout the region.

Cook South – No report due to council member absence.

Southern Region – One Southern Region Advisory Council call was held. They hold a monthly dinner. A Town Hall meeting is scheduled for December 14 and Licensing will be notified to invite foster parents.

Cook Central – Denise Spires reported that their last meeting was a Lifebook party for 74 children and families. Their next meeting was scheduled for November 27 but there is a conflict and the meeting must be cancelled.

Next Meeting Date:

January 18, 2019 The Chateau Hotel and Conference Center, Bloomington, Illinois

Future Agenda Items:

Janet Ahern - Listing waiting youth in the Heart Gallery

Federal Review report, results and deadlines - administration

Be Strong Families – program and Foster Parent Café

Jen Florent – posting a support group calendar

Licensing – Address the Department Rule for identifying the child's permanent connection and clarify whether concurrent planning is in rule and procedure and where it may be found.

Ken Keefe made the motion to adjourn. Gordon Hannon seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.