

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
MEETING MINUTES
September 11, 2020
WebEx videoconference
9:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.**

SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	STAFF	GUESTS
Kathryn Adrian	Kellye Norris	Dagene Brown	Lori Benner
Gladys Boyd	Audrey Reynolds	Geneva Byrd	Diana Blackburn
Jessica Bullard	Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond	Barb Crandall	Jessica Bullard
Kimberly Coniglio	Mary Savage	Jim Daugherty	Lisa Bramlett
Kelly Elleman	Carol Sheley	Gwenn Eyer	Thelma Carter
Jimmie Golden	Phyllis Summers	Jen Florent	Melissa Castle
Arrelda Hall	Samella Taylor-Lewis	Matthew Grey	Julie Cebulski
Tiffany Jones	Stephanie Tesreau	Kristin Hernandez	Jamie Dornfeld
Ken Keefe	Rebecca Thomas	Shelina Meneese	Debbie Freke
Harriet Kersh		Carlene VanDyke	Wendy Ingersoll
Maya Maclin	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT	Laura VanHorne	Maria Leavengood
Susan McConnell	Kate Monte		Melissa Kasel
			Pat Pride
			Beth Unkraut

Welcome and Introductions/New members

Ken Keefe

Ken called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. taking roll for council members.

Approval of July 16, 2020, July 17, 2020 and July 24, 2020 Meeting Minutes

MOTION: Ken Keefe made the motion to accept the minutes from the July 16, July 17 and July 24, 2020 meetings. Stephanie Tesreau seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Voice Vote Yes: Adrian yes, Boyd yes, Bullard yes, Elleman yes, Golden yes, Hall yes, Jones yes, Keefe yes, Kersh yes, Maclin yes, McConnell yes, Norris yes, Reynolds yes, Rodriguez-Hammond yes, Savage yes, Sheley yes, Summers yes, Taylor-Lewis yes, Tesreau yes, Thomas yes.

SWFCAC FY21 Goal Setting and Goal Planning

Ken Keefe

Ken asked if there were any updates to council goals and there was no discussion.

SWFCAC Committee Work**Ken Keefe**

The council wants to ensure committees are being utilized and that all new members sign up on at least one committee. He noted that committees do a deeper dive into the topics and report back to the council. Staff will send out the updated committee list. Susan McConnell has stepped up to chair the Policy Committee as well as the Permanency Committee, and she is doing a great job.

Office of Caregiver and Parent Support Update**Gwenn Eyer**

The Office of Inspector General completed a review of a 2013 investigation and permanency case involving the death of a six-year-old child. After a thorough review of the case, the OIG recommended in its Annual Report that *“When sibling groups are placed in a foster home, the Department should require an assessment of the pragmatic demands of the placement given the developmental and chronological ages and needs of the children and demands on the foster parent.”* The Department of Children and Family Services responded to the recommendations of the OIG by stating that the *“Department will continue to support the Model of Supervision Practice through regional leadership by reinforcing the elements of the model in the day to day work of direct service supervisors. Additionally, foster parent support will be an item on the agenda of the Foster Care CWAC sub-committee. Foster parents will be reminded of the ability to request respite, day care, and more frequent visits from a foster parent support specialist or licensing representatives.”* If any council member is interested in reviewing the entire redacted OIG report please email the SWFCAC mailbox at DCFS.StatewideFosterCareAdvisoryCouncil@illinois.gov.

Youth Teams**Laura Van Horne**

Laura recognized James Daugherty as the DCFS Chief Information Officer. Laura is the DCFS Mobility Product Owner and has a lead role on the Youth Teams development project. Product development is a collaborative effort including many child welfare disciplines.

Laura reported they are still in development for this project. Phase 1 has been implemented for the pilot group of 130 DCFS/POS intact and permanency workers. Phase 2 testing begins next week. The workers will start to reach out to foster parents. This is still in very early stages. They would like to return to follow up around Phase 3.

The Youth Team App originated as part of the COVID-19 response. DCFS noted hotline call volume went down dramatically, as typical across the United States. The Department knows that abuse and neglect had not dropped by 50%, so they needed to create a better way for workers to have frequent contact virtually to provide support. The Youth Team app increase’s youth’s accessibility to workers. More frequent contact via the app helps the worker build relationships, evaluate youth well-being, assess the safety of a youth, connect the youth with other virtual services, and arrange timely interventions. It is not

intended to replace in-person visits, but offers supplementary contact, allowing workers to build more tangible relationships. They are providing all DCFS and POS staff with Illinois.gov Emails to have access to the Microsoft Teams app, including the Youth Team App. A slide presentation will be distributed to council members.

The Youth Teams app is a simple interface showing workers all the youth they've built teams for. If the youth does not have a phone, or is restricted from its use, this app may be used on Chromebooks provided by the school system. This is designed to ensure compliance with HIPAA, etc.

The youth may chat with anyone on his Support Team and that information is stored in the Golden Archives, with restricted access to the information. The date, time, and participants are all recorded, but actual voice and videos are not recorded. Text chat items may be deleted. The items are still recorded and can be reviewed, but no longer appear in the chat feed within the solution. The worker can set up meetings between the associated contact, the youth, and the Support Team members. Files may be shared across the whole team. The expected outcomes are increased child safety, well-being and permanency. They anticipate that there will be upcoming opportunities to develop teams around foster parents and others. There is seamless integration between Outlook at Teams so that others can follow up if a worker is out of office.

Discussion:

- Jimmie Golden stated that it looks like it will be a good system, but it's hard to respond without seeing it in action. Laura invited him to reach out to his worker to be added to the pilot group, if he is interested.
- Jason Cummins will send out an invitation to the SWFCAC to opt in to the pilot.
- Audrey Reynolds reported that she has young children, two different ages, two different agencies and it would be much easier to connect via mobile devices.
- Carol Sheley noted that she would be interested in participating with her 11-year-old.
- Ken Keefe utilizes phone as incentive for doing chores, schoolwork, etc., so it's harder to buy in. Jim reminded the council that youth may use Chromebooks to address this issue.
- Carol Sheley suggested pulling in the Statewide Youth Advisory Board, especially regarding confidentiality and the recording component.
- Stephanie Tesreau expressed the same concerns re: youth in residential care.
- Laura will follow up with Michelle Grove re: involving the SYAB.
- Laura will encourage workers to be very clear about holding recordings in the Golden Archive.

- Workers will not have easy access to bringing a deleted item back from the archives once a youth has deleted it.
- Jessica Bullard asked what the worker's responsibility is to utilize this app. Laura does not believe it will be a required 24/7 job duty. Michelle Grove will address this question and report back to the council.
- Laura reported that the use of Teams often pays off in a significant reduction in Email.
- PowerPoint slides will be distributed to council members.

Incarcerated Parent Program

Matthew Grey

Matthew is a statewide administrator with DCFS, and is a licensed clinical professional counselor. He has been working with children and families for more than a couple of decades. He reported that the Incarcerated Parent program has been doing a lot of work within Illinois and outside the state. They've been working with IDOC on using WebEx and videoconferencing. He noted that working the goal is not always easy, and commended foster parents for their work.

The outreach to incarcerated parents began around 2016. The SIPAP was created in 2018 to ensure incarcerated parents receive engagement, services, and visitation. This is built on federal and state laws and DCFS procedures. SIPAP build collaborations with IDOC, county jails and the Federal Bureau of Prisons, with added access for DCFS/POS staff within IDOC. Ongoing meetings are held with file reviews, guidance and follow up on engagement issues. They continue to try to engage foster parents in this way.

Even when the incarcerated parent is not a viable return home option, their family members and extended family are options in providing support. Between 20-25% of Illinois youth in care have an incarcerated parent. Engaging this population is something that we need to do based on law and best practice and will have influence on the community at large. We need to coach them to view child welfare as a resource rather than a threat. Reunification is the goal. The overwhelming majority of IP's are not the offending parents and were not alleged to have abused or neglected their children. We want to maintain the mission of promoting safety, permanency and well-being.

Having an incarcerated parent provides emotional, social/developmental and health impacts. Maintaining contact is one of the most effective ways to reduce incidence of problematic behavior – Justice Policy Center. We want to reduce these issues as much as possible for youth in care, promoting better outcomes for children and their families.

IDOC Video Contact discussions began in 2018. Video kiosks have been provided in IDOC, but are not included in this program due to the collection of personal information and other privacy and security concerns. They have identified WebEx as a resource to

promote private and secure interaction across state systems. They are working to enable Illinois foster parents to facilitate the video contacts, noting that partnering with foster parents, when appropriate, strengthens relationships for all involved.

Matthew has books going out to facilities so that incarcerated parents may interact with their children by reading books. All the contact has gone to video contact since in-person visits are restricted due to COVID. However, DCFS and IDOC are implementing WebEx Video Contact for youth in care and their incarcerated parent to maintain contact in-between visitation, even after visitation resumes as normal at IDOC facilities.

Their hope is that this contact will be fruitful and beneficial. DOC monitors all video contact live, to monitor inappropriate behavior, but it has not been determined whether WebEx video contact will be recorded. Someone would monitor the video contact on the child's end, unless determined that monitoring is not necessary. IDOC may end the call if the need arises.

- Carol Sheley noted that contact typically requires sharing a lot of background check information, and the use of WebEx will eventually address this.
- Matthew reported that contact should be taking place twice per month, unless IDOC makes an exception.
- Workers will help assess when these video meetings should occur when judges are unwilling to allow in-person visits. Judges who might say “no” to a long-distance drive for an in-person visit might say “yes” to video contact.
- Lisa Bramlett noted that foster parents may note issues that are inappropriate but the incarcerated parent disagrees, it will be a “he said, she said” situation. Matthew mentioned a checklist to identify what constitutes “inappropriate communication,” i.e., making false promises, discussing the case, expressing gang involvement, etc. If something specifically alarms the foster parent, the foster parent should speak with the worker.
- If the council feels that recording video contacts, even though they are monitored by DOC, is still warranted, Matthew will follow up.
- Matt's email is Matthew.Grey@illinois.gov and his cell number is 217-622-0273 and foster parents may contact him with suggestions, concerns, etc.

***CWAC**

Harriet Kersh/Mary Savage

Harriet reported that they discussed the Youth Teams App. DCFS is making changes to their upline. They talked about foster parents and how they are dealing with COVID. They are still working on a response. They are doing in-person visits again, following established recommendations. Some agencies are getting doctors involved in Child & Family Team meetings. Youth Care has been rolled out and the Department is being pressed to ensure open communication. The Core Practice Model has rolled out, with a

control group in Central Region. They do an orientation with foster parents two weeks before starting the pilot.

***IFAPA**

Gladys Boyd/Arrelda Hall

Gladys reported that they still have not held in-person meetings. They are talking with foster parents and they are concerned with shortages in the stores. Some foster parents are concerned about having visits with birth parents when they don't know if they have been tested for COVID or who they have been around that might have been exposed. They continue to hold their Wednesday prayer meetings, praying for the birth parents, the child in care and everyone else. Arrelda reported that caregivers are still concerned about day care because they have gone back to work. Dagene stated that day care guidance should be out very soon.

Regional Reports:

***Northern Region Report**

Rebecca Thomas

Rebecca Thomas reported that Northern region has been busy. They are holding meetings via Be Strong Families. Some families are reluctant to taking new placements due to COVID, i.e. remote learning, day care, etc. Clothing voucher use is a hardship because store managers must call DCFS for validation. (This happens even when they call ahead.) They are looking for an updated procedure and an updated list of stores that will accept the vouchers. Foster parents are concerned that youth in care are being taken for visits during school hours. This is happening a bit more frequently now.

***Central Region Report**

Ken Keefe

Ken did not have a report. Carol Sheley reported that Central Region met by phone on August 25th and various things are going on. Staff were trained in the use of Lifebooks. They continue to utilize Be Strong Families for support. Travel must typically happen to utilize a clothing voucher and sometimes stores are unable to process it. Child care has been a huge issue. Due to COVID providers are restricted in the number for whom they can provide care. The Department has had a surge in youth coming into care and some are declined because they cannot find day care. One day care center has reported that reimbursement is significantly delayed. Carol indicated that she reached out to Steve Bradford, and was told to utilize the caseworker for day care. If a family takes an emergency placement they need day care right away and the Department is asking families to wait up to three weeks for assigned workers. The Emergency Consent Line is not staffed and children and youth are being taken for emergency care with hospitals calling for permission to treat.

***Cook North**

Kate Monte

No report; council member absent

***Southern Region**

Audrey Reynolds/Stephanie Tesreau

Audrey reported that some families are accepting children because they have no other options. Parents are working from home and with no child care they are unable to maintain their employment.

***Cook South**

Maya Maclin/Kellye Norris

Kellye reported similar day care concerns since school has started. Concern has been expressed around supports for children who need IEP's. Children have started to submit Christmas lists. They've been advising families re: the census, SNAP benefits, America Job Centers for older teens to help them achieve employment. There are four virtual college fairs coming up in October.

***Cook Central**

Arrelda Hall

Arrelda noted that she was reporting for all Cook regions. They continue to hold virtual Zoom training with Be Strong Families. They are working toward implementing additional training. They are down donors for the Christmas lists and Arrelda has been reaching out to donors to try to fill wish lists.

Training Committee

Harriet Kersh

Harriet reported that they are working on reviewing revised PRIDE training. She requested that others review and she will re-send to committee members for review.

Public Comment

Barb Crandall noted that it is important for everyone to reinforce the census. Illinois is one of the few states that did not receive full federal reimbursement due to a lack of census compliance.

Stakeholder Comments

Stephanie asked if the council had received an update on day care questions re: the pandemic. Nothing has been received to date.

Closing Council Discussion - None

Meeting Adjournment

Ken Keefe made the motion to adjourn. Seconded by Maya Maclin. Motion passed unanimously by voice vote. Voice Vote Yes: Adrian yes, Boyd yes, Bullard yes, Elleman yes, Golden yes, Hall yes, Jones yes, Keefe yes, Kersh yes, Maclin yes, McConnell yes, Norris yes, Reynolds yes, Rodriguez-Hammond yes, Sheley yes, Summers yes, Taylor-Lewis yes, Tesreau yes, Thomas yes.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Next Meeting: November 6, 2020, 9:00 a.m., via WebEx