

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
MINUTES
January 21, 2022 9:00 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.
WebEx videoconference**

SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT	GUESTS	STAFF
Gladys Boyd	Kathryn Adrian	Debbie Freke	Gwenn Eyer
Arrelda Hall	Kelly Elleman	Tina Haynes	Michelle Grove
Tiffany Johnson	Kate Monte	Elizabeth Richmond	Kara Hamilton
Harriet Kersh	Susan McConnell	Arlene Woods	Pedro Mendoza
Audrey Reynolds	Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond		Kimberly Taylor
Mary Savage			
Phyllis Summers			
Samella Taylor-Lewis			
Rebecca Thomas			

Welcome/Introduction

Arrelda Hall, SWFCAC chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She noted that this is the council’s first meeting of the new year and encouraged council members to be very involved in council work this year. Gwenn Eyer from the Office of Caregiver and Parent Support conducted the IAAC voice roll call.

Approval of November 5, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Motion: Audrey Reynolds made the motion to accept the November 5, 2021 meeting minutes. Gladys Boyd seconded. The motion carried via voice vote following discussion. Gladys Boyd corrected the name of the team member she is working with from the Director’s Office. The correct name is Ms. Kelly Beauchamp from the Director’s Office.

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

Michelle noted that the office will have two positions filled in February and March. New employees will provide support to foster and adoptive parents and the statewide councils. The office support staff, Deanna Painter, is on board and brings with her a background in state experience. Michelle noted that staff members will continue to support the council.

Michelle’s reported that she is continuing to read the annual implementation plans and that her purpose is to check that procedures are accurate and look at trends. This year we are taking a different approach to the plans internally as members score them, tracking and analyzing data within our office to see how we are supporting foster parents. Staff will check phone numbers and web links, and look at respite policies, grievances that have been filed, training, support groups, resources, etc. Michelle referenced a specific

training resource she'd read about and Harriet Kersh explained that Center for Youth and Family Solutions is paying for access to the Foster Parent University for their foster parents.

Traverse Program

Kate Danielson

The Traverse Program with Foster Progress is a gap year program for youth in Cook and Northern regions. It offers travel and other opportunities to identify their strengths, encouraging them to pursue higher education, and be successful in life. They have developed a couple of new partnerships which are described more fully on their website. These programs are open to any youth who have experienced foster care. Papa Pals is a work program connecting youth with older people, doing odd jobs for them. This program includes training, flexible hours, and payment for services. AdventureEXP is a destination work program with seasonal job opportunities in the U.S. and abroad. This program should be a great resume builder and housing is included in the program. Kate asked council members to share the opportunities with others.

Discussion:

- Is there a minimum/ maximum age requirement? The minimum age is 18 but maximum age is negotiable.
- Are these programs good for youth with special needs? It would depend on the needs, as youth need to go through a screening process.
- Are these programs available to youth who have been adopted through the foster care system? These two programs are available to all youth.
- Are these two programs regionally based? They are open nationwide.

DCFS Scholarship Required Council Member Training

Kim Peck

Kim is with the DCFS Office of Education and Transition Services. The Department awards a minimum of 53 scholarships. Scholarship recipients receive a tuition and mandatory fee waiver at an Illinois public university or community college, a board payment, medical card, and assistance with books and supplies costs. Applicants must be in care, aged out of care, or moved to adoption or guardianship from care. There is a new CFS438 application for 2022. Applicants are required to submit a personal essay and three letters of recommendation. No ACT or SAT scores are required. Applications must be postmarked/Emailed by March 31, 2022. Each application is scored by three different people with the average becoming the applicant's final score. Those who do not receive a scholarship are still eligible to request the stand-alone tuition and mandatory fee waiver that is valid at an Illinois public university or community college. Students are encouraged to apply for the scholarship in order to retain their Pell grants. For assistance with post-secondary issues, contact Laura Guterrez. She offers weekly virtual office hours for foster parents, youth, caseworkers, etc. to talk about post-secondary programs. She can be emailed at laura.gutierrez@illinois.gov to request the link to the virtual office hours on Wednesdays from 3:00 – 5:00 pm.

SWFCAC Goals/ Meeting Schedule

Arrelda Hall

Arrelda stressed the need for council members to be here, be dedicated and committed to the work of the council. She said if you have made the determination to volunteer as a member of the council, we need you to fulfil your responsibilities. She reminded council members to score implementation plans and return completed scoresheets to the office in a timely manner. She noted that Ethics and other required trainings need to be completed in a timely manner when they are released each year.

Arrelda said that council members are asked to keep cameras on during meetings because this is a professional meeting and meetings are recorded. She noted that members may need to pop off quickly for some reason, but need to keep them on throughout the meeting. Attendance is critical. Be present and be on time. If you must miss a meeting, please complete the absence form and return to the council mailbox. She stated that we recognize that there are extenuating circumstances, but if members are unable to participate, they should consider going off for now and rejoining the council in the future when timing works better. We are actively recruiting council members and we need some great volunteers to serve on the council. Arrelda noted that the council meeting schedule has been updated and shared it with the council. She stated that the council is still trying to meet in person, but with the recent pandemic spike we are holding off on in-person meetings.

Michelle recognized Pedro Mendoza and Kim Taylor. Arrelda asked Pedro to introduce himself. Pedro is the Permanency RA for the Northern Region. He states that he works closely with the region's Foster Parent Support Specialists, and has in the past hosted meetings with FPSS, intact and workers. He will reach out to his staff to identify Northern Region membership applicants. He mentioned that certain groups/agencies want to partner with the Department, noting that prior to the pandemic the YMCA was interested in hosting recruitment events. Kim Taylor introduced herself, next. She is the temporarily assigned Regional Administrator for Central region. She comes from Permanency as a caseworker, supervisor and AA, and she is happy to be here and is happy to help with anything she can. The Central Region AA holds weekly calls with lead FPSS to help manage foster parent issues within the region.

Michelle noted that we will send the RA's the membership list so they can make recommendations. Please send committee reports to the council mailbox.

Scoring Implementation Plans

Gwenn Eyer

Gwenn discussed the various scoring components and requested that members take their responsibility seriously and submit scoresheets in a timely manner.

Discussion:

- Agency reviews were not always successful because staff were unfamiliar with the agency's plan, sometimes knowledgeable staff were relocated to cover for other staff during the interviews, and sometimes foster parents had no understanding of the Foster Parent Law/ implementation plans.
- Foster parents need to be involved in implementing the law.
- Foster parents need to have input in writing the plans.

- The DCFS external website includes current regional plans and many agencies post their plans on the website.
- There must be accountability with the plans.
- Agency Performance needs to be involved to manage implementation.
- Foster Parent Law training has been regularly offered and the new on-demand training was posted in late 2021.
- Need to run a teaser on the VTC to explain the Foster Parent Law and publish on social media and in the newsletter.
- Some agencies provide the implementation plan in the welcome packet and at least one agency does annual training along with a video training on their website.
- Staff note that parents often do not acknowledge the Foster Parent Law until they have a complaint.
- Foster parents are always very cautious about filing grievances or complaints because they fear retaliation, sometimes rightfully so.
- Often agencies/ regions rely on technology to share plan updates and sometimes foster parents don't have internet access.
- The Office of Caregiver and Parent Support will continue to gather data to help the SWFCAC determine how to better ensure successful implementation of the Foster Parent Law.
- Reach out to licensing to do a presentation or otherwise educate and move the program forward.
- Use a regularly issued newsletter to share information.
- There is a colorful flyer available to agencies and regions. It should be distributed through the RA's, through the Foster Parent Law liaisons, and through social media and the newsletter. Is there a way to send it out to all foster parents?
- Regions are including the Foster Parent Law in meetings with staff.

Managing Safety Concerns

Arrelda Hall and Michelle Grove

Michelle recognized the loss of Diedre Silas who was killed while conducting a DCFS investigation. She acknowledged the feelings several may be experiencing, foster parents and staff. Pedro Mendoza recognized the loss of a worker in Northern Region four years ago, recognizing that the feelings of loss are still there. He reported reaching out to that worker's colleague who reported that she did not want to return to work immediately after, with the request to take off work the next day. There have been many staff in that particular office, but such a loss has impacted many.

Discussion:

- So many people in the field are weary, in general, but have a sense of feeling unsafe.
- Council members expressed gratitude to workers and those who are in harm's way on a regular basis and requested safety standards be implemented statewide.
- Is the Safety Reboot training being offered? There is a 3-hour on-demand training on the VTC.

- Discussion at the recent POS/DCFS providers meeting reported that the staff safety procedures need to be revisited more often than they are now. It was noted that Appendix A provides a list of possible threats and suggestions for how to deal with them.
- There are on-demand trainings available on the VTC.
- How do we share this training/information with foster parents?
- Revisit safety with workers on a regular basis. Field workers get comfortable that “this is our job” and personal safety needs to be more in the forefront.
- Foster parents may have real concern taking violent children into their homes and/or dealing with violent parents.
- Request a foster parent training around safety issues.
- Add a modified version of the safety training to PRIDE.
- Ask the Department to develop strategies to support foster parents.
- With the continued focus on shared parenting, safety training is crucial.
- Look at external training opportunities that support this issue, i.e., DOC’s one-day safety training.
- Reach out to Training to see if the SWFCAC training committee can add the foster parent perspective to training. Arrelida will follow up with Harriet.
- The Southern Region discussed an incident with a four-year-old with special needs and the brand-new foster parent, a nurse practitioner, was pressed to take two younger children. The four-year-old was physically aggressive with the younger children. When she called the SASS and CARES support lines and with no middle of the night support she was directed only to take them all to the hospital. There are other situations with foster parents lacking support when they report violent youth in foster homes.
- There is a need for after-hours support for foster parents when violent incidents occur in the home.

Day Care Workgroup Report

Rebecca Thomas

The workgroup has continued to meet and recently met with Stacy Mixon, Day Care Administrator. Stacy noted that day care will be covered due to a court order or a clinical staffing. Any local issues regarding day care barriers need to go directly to Stacy Mixon. She provided a regional list of day care staff as a resource for the council. Chief Deputy Snowden is committed to removing barriers, as well. The change management form has been refined and was submitted to Julie Barbosa. The workgroup has asked for specific instances where day care issues have prevented placements or created disruptions. Michelle noted that the form goes to senior leaders within the Department. Stakeholder recommendations will be incorporated and the form will go to the SPICE committee. She reminded the council that the focus is the rate. The workgroup will share the recommendation with contracts, budgets, etc.

Regional Reports:

*Northern Region Report

Rebecca Thomas

Rebecca reported that support groups are still actively meeting. Transportation contracts are still challenging, as is the lack of available foster homes. There has been an uptick in lack of support including loss of daycare providers, medical and dental providers, etc.

*Central Region Report

Kelly Elleman/Kathryn Adrian

No report due to absence.

*Cook North

Kate Monte

No report.

*Southern Region

Audrey Reynolds

Audrey reported several safety issues in the Southern Region during the earlier discussion. Audrey related issues related to the workforce crisis continues to cause serious issues across multiple agencies. Day care providers are dropping off due to non-payment, particularly in the Effingham area. When parents move across state lines, sometimes just a few miles, Interstate Compact is being denied. Children are sometimes being reunited with birth parents, and in at least one case it resulted in the death of a child. Audrey will connect with Michelle to address these issues.

*Cook South

*Cook Central

Arrela Hall

Arrela reported that they provide combined monthly foster parent support group meetings every third Tuesday of the month. A speaker from YouthCare spoke about the impact of trauma in their recent meeting. He demonstrated the availability of an assortment of trainings available through the YouthCare website. Arrela reported the loss of Foster Parent Support Specialist, Idaylia Jones. This region shares the same day care and transportation concerns.

Reports from Other Councils/Committees/Workgroups:**Council Reports:**

*CWAC

Harriet Kersh/Mary Savage, Phyllis Summers

Mary reported that she has notes from the last meeting that will be included in the minutes. The next meeting will be February 23, 2022.

*IFAPA

Gladys Boyd/Arrela Hall

Gladys Boyd reported that she and IFAPA representatives will not meet with the Director in February. Director Smith has approved a quarterly web meeting with foster parents. She said that 50-60 active foster/adoptive parents plan to be involved in the meeting. They are asking FPSS to send representatives to the meeting. Two foster parents will speak on behalf of the support specialists. They are currently scheduled for two hours with the Director, and it may go to three hours. The Director will have representatives available to hear the issues.

Committee Reports:

Deferred to the next meeting.

Public Comment

Tina Haynes noted that she remembered receiving the implementation plan as a foster parent and she was required to sign a receipt form.

Stakeholder Comment

None

MOTION: Gladys Boyd made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Audrey Reynolds seconded and the motion carried by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Next Meeting: February 25, 2022, 9:00-noon, via WebEx for the health and safety of our members.