

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council  
MEETING Minutes  
March 19, 2021  
WebEx videoconference  
9:00 a.m. – 11:45 a.m.**

<b>SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT</b>	<b>SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT</b>	<b>GUESTS</b>	<b>STAFF</b>
Gladys Boyd	Kathryn Adrian	Audriana Aranda	Janet Ahern
Jessica Bullard	Kimberly Coniglio	Lori Benner	Chevelle Bailey
Kelly Elleman	Tiffany Jones	Diana Blackburn	Dagene Brown
Jimmie Golden	Ken Keefe	Debbie Freke	Gwenn Eyer
Arrela Hall	Kellye Norris	Kara Hamilton	Michelle Grove
Harriet Kersh	Carol Sheley	Tina Haynes	
Maya Maclin	Stephanie Tesreau	Solange Morrissette	
Susan McConnell	Samella Taylor-Lewis	Rosanna Perino	
Kate Monte		Crystal Rekart	
Audrey Reynolds		Elizabeth Richmond	
Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond			
Mary Savage			
Phyllis Summers			
Rebecca Thomas			

**Welcome and Introductions (Getting to Know You)**

**Arrela Hall/Council**

Meeting was called to order by Vice Chair Arrela Hall at 9:05a.m. Voice roll call was taken.

**Office of Education and Transitional Services**

**Chevelle Bailey**

Chevelle introduced herself as the DD of the Office of Education and Transition Services. School Readiness programs K-12, Transition programs, Lifeskills programs and the post-secondary programs, Educational and employment programs that are incentivized. Her division provides NIU Educational Advisors to support youth in K-12 programs throughout the state, through each region. They should be accessible to foster parents and caseworkers. The contacts list will be distributed to council members. She asked council members to share their requests for further supports.

**Discussion:**

- Does the Department have any influence within the state to encourage school districts to decide whether to go hybrid, in-person, etc. Chevelle noted that they

have a voice with the Illinois State Board of Education and individuals in the Governor's Office who are trying to monitor the federal directives re: in-person instruction. She noted that individual school districts must accept guidance from the state. She suggested that stakeholder groups speak up to help others understand the foster family perspective. She recognized that there are mixed messages, with strong opinions from each side of the issue.

- Is there a way to track the knowledge loss due to the loss of in-person learning? Chevelle noted that research is very limited. We recognize the educational impact of trauma, but she is unaware of any good benchmark for measurement. Research talks about learning losses in general, and the quality of the remote learning provided exacerbates the level of learning loss. They will add tutoring and other educational reports to the SPIDER (Service Provider Identification and Exploration Resource) database to provide resources to fill the gaps. Tutoring may be an online model, but still will be one-to-one.
- Who updates SPIDER, and how regularly is it updated? Chevelle stated that there is a full team assigned to do this work, now. They are holding community meetings monthly to identify resources.
- Are there ways to support parents during the at-home learning period and to help move children and youth away from the computer? School districts should be able to provide paper copies of supplemental materials along with a step-by-step guide to support at-home learning away from the computer. There are also online resources to walk youth through the steps to solve problems, i.e. math concepts. OETS will reach out to find resources. Jesse Rodrigues-Hammond stated that he and his husband offer an online school, and offered to collaborate on an afternoon Study Hall type program, as needed. An educational psychologist, he referenced how resilient children are, and that with supportive resources these gaps may not be as daunting as parents assume.
- Educational Specialists will provide office hours type sessions to provide additional support. Sessions will be recorded and FAQ's will be published and distributed. These sessions will be promoted on the Dnet and on social media.
- May youth reach out to Educational Advisors directly, or must they rely on their foster parents? They may reach out to Educational Specialists during office hours, but should not reach out to Educational Advisors who work more with school district and foster parents.
- How are foster parents notified of programs such as office hours? Announcements will be posted internally on Dnet and links will be shared on social media channels.

**DCFS Guardian Update****Janet Ahern**

DCFS Guardian Janet Ahern stated that her purpose in joining the meeting is to hear what council members say. She reminded that legal educational advocacy is provided through her office, i.e., re: expulsion, etc. They have subcontracts with agencies throughout the state, and foster parents may make the referral. She has been approving home-schooling this year, more than in any other year. These temporary requests were granted for children who really did not have the capacity for remote learning. Her office will re-post vaccination announcements re: routine consents for approved COVID vaccinations. Most of our COVID Cases have been in residential situations and they track the outcomes. Janet moved that most have come through it very well.

**Approval of January 15, 2021 Meeting Minutes****Arrelida Hall**

*Rodriguez Hammond made the motion to approve the January 15, 2021, minutes. Kate Monte seconded. There was no discussion and the motion carried unanimously.*

**Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan Approval****Gwenn Eyer**

Gwenn reported that all plans were scored to be “Acceptable” except two plans that were rated “Somewhat Acceptable.” She stated that several plans were submitted with minimal revision, due to COVID limitations. Other plans were revised to address ways agencies and regions were implementing strategies to overcome barriers and limitations caused by the COVID pandemic. Council members will receive summary ballots for award nominations and awards will be presented at a future meeting.

*Arrelida Hall made the motion to approve the scores. Audrey Reynolds seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.*

**Foster Parent Law Training Update****Gwenn Eyer**

Gwenn Eyer reported that the on-demand Introduction to the Foster Parent Law Training is in the final review. The link will go out today to the SWFCAC Training Committee for their review and comment.

**Office of Caregiver and Parent Support****Michelle Grove**

Michelle Grove discussed the way our office staffs the council. She stated that we will offer an Onboarding Session for new council members during the noon hour Thursday, March 25, 2021. She noted that this session will provide more detailed information to council members who have already received binders. The session will include an overview of the history and mission of the council, professionalism as council members, member’s “job description” and the importance of their contributions to child welfare in Illinois. She stated that the council member’s role is essential and we want to make sure we give you the tools to do your work. Council members should Email the SWFCAC mailbox to request resources, including the council member binders.

## **Committee Updates**

**Arrelda Hall**

Arrelda Hall noted that one of each council member's key responsibilities is to be active on at least one committee. She noted the need to be honest about time and availability and requested that council members only sign up for one or two committees. Michelle Grove noted that the office is taking a slightly different approach to staffing the committees. Michelle is reaching out to various divisions to connect key people from each division with the appropriate SWFCAC committee. Key DCFS staff will partner with the chair of the subcommittee, and this support provided to the committee will enable them to be proactive in setting and meeting goals. Council members will have early notification of upcoming initiatives, legislation, policies and procedures. Our office will conduct the meetings, take the minutes, etc. to support each committee as we move forward. Michelle noted that some committees are ad hoc committees and do not have the full-time commitment other committees have.

## **Foster Parent Handbook**

**Council**

Arrelda Hall reported that no council members volunteered to have input on the handbook. Statewide Foster Parent Support Specialists have taken on this task, and Arrelda noted that the council's FPSS committee may be pulled in on it.

## **Reports from Other Councils/Committees/Workgroups**

### **CWAC**

**Harriet Kersh/Mary Savage**

**Jessica Bullard/Phylliss Summers**

Harriet Kersh reported that CWAC discussed the Family First report. They are creating an orientation for HMR care foster homes. Harriet will reach out to see if the council can have input. They have a revision to verbiage on the language re: HMR being licensed for foster care. Mary Savage reported that a large part of the meeting was dedicated to discussion of the budget.

### **IFAPA**

**Gladys Boyd/Arrelda Hall**

Arrelda Hall noted that IFAPA continues to try to figure out the best and safest way to host a conference. They are trying to see if the WebEx platform could host 100+ people at one time. They have been reaching out to the DCFS technology department to determine the best platform for a virtual conference.

### **Respite**

**Gladys Boyd, Kellye Norris**

Michelle Grove reported that she was informed of a CWAC Respite Workgroup within the Department and that she asked to include the Respite Committee. Gladys Boyd reported that she and Kellye Norris participated in this very important meeting and expressed the belief that things will be moving forward. Kellye submitted a written

report. Michelle reported that the meeting provided follow-up to the group's recommendation to develop Respite Only Homes as a specific kind of licensure. She stated that this is not an option due to the restrictions as detailed within the Child Care Act (CCA), so homes used for respite must be licensed as foster homes.

Alternative respite options were discussed, including the following:

1. Utilization of Waivers: while a possibility, the process is arduous and lengthy and not set-up to address the quick turn-around time oftentimes required for respite. Also ruled-out.
2. Emergency Respite: No one on call has a contract, and attendees believed this type of respite was only available through special contracts with DCFS and utilization of Shelter protocol.
3. Engagement of non-active, relative, and under-utilized homes to be used internally as agency emergency respite homes as an option to expand capacity.
4. Matched respite: would specifically match a few licensed providers within the agency to care for the same youth for respite on an ongoing basis to create more relationship permanence/less disruption. POS providers could work to attain ongoing respite with other POS providers. This occurs occasionally, depending on the relationship between agency staff and providers, but there is no formal process.
5. DCFS uses FSS staff in emergencies for respite; POS agencies do not have FSS staff for this option.
6. DCFS also has a Statewide available homes and bed capacity list that they frequently refer to identify potential available placements. A similar list is not available on for POS agencies. A barrier to providing a statewide list is kids being placed without Department knowledge. POS uses a broadcast process to identify homes for respite outside of their own agencies, but the effectiveness unknown.

The committee reviewed current babysitting & respite rules, policies and procedures and have set up action steps to continue to review DCFS Rule, Policy, & Procedure, looping in DCFS Policy.

#### **Nominations Committee**

**Kate Monte**

The Nominations Committee will meet in the next few weeks to determine the ballots.

#### **Training Committee**

**Harriet Kersh**

Harriet Kersh reported that the committee plan to meet the second Thursday of each month at 2:00PM. They met recently and have set some goals. They are currently following up on foster parent trainings appropriate to the pandemic. They identified a COVID training currently available on the VTC and have identified gaps in that training. They plan to reach out to either add topics to the current training, or suggest another

crisis-oriented training to address these key topics. The committee is taking on the review of the draft Introduction to Foster Parent Law training. The committee was asked to consider recommending CPR training to meet requirements.

### **Legislative Committee**

**Susan McConnell, Stephanie Tesreau**

Susan McConnell reported that the committee met via Zoom with Megan Jorgensen, the DCFS Legislative Liaison. Megan noted that she has not received legislative proposals from any state committees.

### **Foster Parent Support Specialist Report Michelle Grove**

Michelle Grove reported that the FPSS are going to take an active role to look at the Lifebooks and at doing something for Foster Parent Appreciation Month, including possibly providing Lifebook kits for foster family use.

Discussion:

1. Give some thought to producing digital Lifebooks.
2. Use Teams to provide support.

### **Regional Reports:**

#### **\*Northern Region Report**

**Kimberly Coniglio/Rebecca Thomas**

Rebecca Thomas reported for the Northern Region.

1. Support groups are going strong in the Northern Region.
2. Daycare issues continue to be the primary issue. Child care provision barriers for youth ages 12-13 with special needs continues to be a big issue.
3. Northern Region requested that we reexamine the day care issues and revise or submit recommendations. Arrelida Hall noted that the council should revisit this.
4. Foster parents are hitting barriers re: transportation that should be provided through Help at Home. Foster parents, who due to other responsibilities, are unable to provide transportation at the hours needed are being threatened with the removal of the child.

#### **\*Central Region Report**

**Ken Keefe/Kelly Elleman/Kathryn Adrian**

No Report.

#### **\*Cook North**

**Kate Monte**

Kate Monte reported that a few foster parent support groups are meeting online. Attendance is sporadic. Several people have expressed concern that they are very wary of COVID, but their caseworkers are insisting that they must do in-person, in-home visits. Kate researched a policy transmittal that expires today, and it states that foster parents should be addressing this with their caseworkers. Northern Region is asking for

clarification of the foster parents' rights, alternate methods for declining visitation in their own home. Arrelda noted that if foster parents have valid concerns about in-home visitation, the Cook Area Administrators and Regional Administrator have been tasked with addressing those concerns. Arrelda noted that staff will distribute the current information transmittal that addresses this, holding the same rules that just expired.

**\*Southern Region**

**Stephanie Tesreau/Audrey Reynolds**

Audrey Reynolds reported that there has been a crisis in Madison County due to a low number of caseworkers. Foster parents are stating that they do not know whom their caseworkers are, limiting their access to medical consents, limiting visitation opportunities, limiting a voice in court, etc. Some new workers have been hired and basically all are new to all their cases. This has been snowballing since even before the pandemic. Foster Parent Support Specialists are provided support, but this is still delaying permanency for children and youth in care. Southern Region requested Council support in developing ways to expedite the process. The council will look at this.

**\*Cook South**

**Maya Maclin/Kellye Norris**

Kellye Norris submitted a written report prior to the meeting, due to her anticipated absence. She reported that the COVID pandemic has been very trying for foster parents working from home, working with more than one child in the home, and fostering children with IEP's coupled with e-learning. She stated that Foster Parent Support Specialists (FPSS) have suggested that they want to recognize several foster parents that have been exceptional at their jobs as foster parents during these challenging times, along with all other foster parents, letting them know, "We See You, Hear You, Recognize You and Appreciate You. Collectively, they are thinking of ways to show their appreciation for the Month of May. FPSS have been allowing the foster parents to vent and share their thoughts on their one-on-one calls. Many foster parents are asking for respite and assistance for children that are E-Learning and have IEP's. FPSS have been working diligently with these foster parents, providing encouragement as they try to avoid home disruptions.

In February, there was a zoom call that prepared foster parents for the first official ZOOM Foster Parent Support Group meeting combining Cook South and Cook North. More than 40 people attended. They had a presentation from the Statewide Youth Advisory Board (SYAB). Some of the SYAB members introduced themselves and offered assistance to the foster parents, if needed. They explained what the SYAB does. Suggested topics for future meetings include: Autism, Emergency homes, how to deal with illegal situations presented in the home, and the Foster Parent Law. One FPSS

attended an online Foster Parent Law training and requested to have the presenter come speak. They were very impressed with the presentation. Life Books were discussed, and they may try to have a presentation in May. FPSS are still reaching out to foster parents during the month to check on them and send gentle reminders of social distancing, wearing mask, washing hands, and just encouraging them. FPSS send out COVID info on testing, shots, and pantry information, some FPSS are even dropping off pantry goods to those foster parents that may have challenges getting out of the home. Support group meetings will be held via ZOOM every third Tuesday of the month from 10-12. Letters emails will be sent out to announce upcoming meetings.

#### **\*Cook Central**

#### **Arrelda Hall/Jimmie Golden**

Arrelda Hall reported that Cook Central, along with other Cook sub regions, have been combining meetings. They meet every third Tuesday of the month, 10AM to Noon. They recently invited Statewide Youth Advisory Board members come to encourage participation and to encourage foster parents to support teens in the Cook Region.

#### **Public Comment**

Diana Blackburn reinforced the Northern Region report, especially the issue around youth who transition out of the child care eligible age group, yet are still unable to stay by themselves. She noted that we do not have parents who stay home full-time any more, and the state needs to be forward thinking in meeting needs.

Crystal Rekart thanked the council for invited the SYAB to participate in the meeting and stated the desire to work collaboratively with the SWFCAC.

#### **Stakeholder Comments**

Rebecca Thomas recommended that the council's FPSS Committee take on the child care issue to press toward a new recommendation.

#### **Closing Council Discussion**

Michelle Grove followed up on the stakeholder comment, providing a summary of a method the whole council could utilize to address this issue using various council committees and their key connections within the Department.

#### **Adjournment**

*Arrelda Hall made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mary Savage seconded. There were no objections and the motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:40a.m.*

**Next Meeting:** April 16, 2021, 9:00 a.m., via WebEx

#### **Agenda Items:**

SPIDER updates and resources