

Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
April 17, 2020
Conference Call
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.
MINUTES

SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT	GUESTS	STAFF
Gladys Boyd	Katy Cotts	Kathryn Adrian	Thelma Carter
Kimberly Coniglio	Kate Monte	Diana Blackburn	Barb Crandall
Arrelda Hall	Susan McConnell	Jessica Bullard	Jason Cummins
Rachel Hoyt	Stephanie Tesreau	Julie Cebulski	Gwenn Eyer
Ken Keefe		Claudia Dancy Davis	Jen Florent
Harriet Kersh		Debbie Freke	Michelle Grove
Maya Maclin		Maria Levengood	Teresa Guinzy
Kellye Norris		Brenda Marshall	Beth Unkraut
Mary Savage		Sue Muzak	Carlene Van Dyke
Carol Sheley		Bethany Paternoga	Andrea Zuber
Samella Taylor-Lewis		Patricia Pride	
		Elizabeth Richmond	
		Tammy Steps	
		Rebecca Thomas	

Welcome and Introductions

Carol Sheley

Carol welcomed everyone to the meeting and invited Gwenn Eyer to take roll call.

Approval of the March 6, 2020 Minutes

Rachel Hoyt motioned to approve the March 6, 2020 minutes. Maya Maclin seconded, and the motion carried.

Final Report to the Director

Carol Sheley

There were no final reports to the Director. The monthly Director's Report was submitted as required by law.

Regional Reports

Northern Region - Kimberly Coniglio reported that foster parents are overwhelmed with home education and phone visits, with some supervising three to five visits a week. Foster parents have noted that the length of visits is too long for some of the children. Kimberly asked the council for follow up on Help at Home concerns that were expressed several meetings earlier. Jason stated that he had Emailed for follow up and provided the list of contract managers. Michelle suggested that the council draft a proposed Standard Operating Procedure timeframe for administrative response that will be presented to management. The council will draft a guideline for presenters, including a timeline for response. Kimberly noted that foster parents are looking for a promised Google form that caregivers can submit directly to Contracts when there are concerns, for both follow up and data tracking.

Follow up: Michelle reported that the form has been developed and refined. It will be distributed to council members and will be sent out on a weekly basis. The plan is that eventually the form will go live, but for now, concerns may be reported through the SWFCAC mailbox.

Central Region - Ken Keefe reported that Central Region is also having issues with foster parents trying to maintain their employment, while educating their children and conducting visits. Some are being asked to do two visits per child per week, and while they are willing to do one, they feel unable to do two visits a week. Carol Sheley from Central Region expressed disappointment that foster parents were not involved in developing plans for managing restrictions that have come out of the coronavirus issue. It was noted that the 14th Judicial Court has banned foster parent attendance in court. Carol noted additional supports that have been added to allow foster parents to network and receive training, i.e. additional Foster Parent Café's, etc.

Council Discussion:

- The council need to identify the issues that have resulted from the pandemic.
- It was noted that things are going to come up that were not expected.
- We have to support our foster parents while having good intentions with working with the agencies to make it work.
- The Department might decide to conduct visits by Zoom and WebEx. It has to be a secure line.
- The Council should collect issue forms to provide accurate information in order to propose solutions.

Cook - Kellye Norris reported that Cook South did not meet individually. Arrelida Hall reported that Cook Region has been offering unified support to foster parents. They have had many problems resulting from the Coronavirus, and some placements have disrupted. They are offering Zoom training regarding stress management on April 20, 22 and 23.

Southern Region - Mary Savage reported that the Southern Region meets quarterly, and no meetings have recently been held. She stated that some agencies have had disruptions, although, within her specific agency, moves have been behavior-related rather than COVID related. Caregivers who are off work are facing high stress. Some have lost jobs and are struggling to put food on the table.

CWAC

No meetings have been held.

IFAPA

No meeting has been held.

Grievance Procedure

Gwenn Eyer led a discussion of the results from the grievance procedure reviews.

Discussion:

- Various positions are represented on the council, i.e. agency staff, foster parents, trainers, etc. offering diverse perspectives when reviewing the various grievance procedures.
- We will see a higher number of grievances if submitted to a neutral place.
- There should be a template to submit grievances.
- Rod Remolina in the Advocacy office might advise the Council re: grievance procedures coming through the Advocacy Office.

- Licensing staff have been encouraging people to file grievances in some cases.
- Some agencies have a rigid system in place for evaluating grievances.
- What do you do when the grievance can't be resolved?
- Grievances will have to be really simplified.
- What do you do when the agency does not follow through with recommendations?
- How do you follow up?
- Advocacy Office will likely respond very quickly.
- Council being notified of the grievances also allows them to track trends.
- The involvement of the Advocacy Office might help address the fear of retaliation issues.

Next Steps

- Office of Caregiver and Parent Support will provide a summary of the council reviews.
- Council members will comment re: high priority, "good ideas," best practices and a proposed timeline.
- The SWFCAC will provide DCFS agencies and DCFS regions a template for their 2021 plan submissions.

Election Process

Jason Cummins

Determination of eligibility and willingness to serve forms were sent out a few weeks ago. Once the Nominating Committee tallies those, nomination ballots will be distributed by Email. Please complete and submit to the SWFCAC mailbox. Those nomination forms will be tallied and election ballots will be sent out. If there is no in-person meeting in June, ballots will be tallied and accepted via Email.

Foster Parent Law Awards

Gwenn Eyer

Ballots will be distributed and responses will be collected via Email. Award certificates will be presented in June.

Foster Parent Appreciation Month /Communications

Jen Florent

We have completed an Illinois Families Now & Forever newsletter. It will go be available in print, online, and in social media. Jen asked council members to share with the public. Another issue will go out in May. They are waiting to see if the State Fair will be a go to include ticket forms in the newsletter. Foster Parent Appreciation Month will be recognized in "virtual" manner on social media. Jen is reaching out to permanency leaders and operations staff to see what will happen in each region to recognize foster parents. Information will be shared on the DCFS external web site. Jen noted that the DCFS Scholarship application deadline has been pushed back to April 30. No new information has come out regarding the Day Care Town Hall meetings, forums for sharing day care information.

Office of Caregiver and Parent Support

Michelle Grove

Michelle reported that staff are working to fill vacant council positions by July 1, 2020. An Email blast went out to administration, on D-Net, to regions, to APT, etc. COVID resources have been posted and shared on the web site. Michelle recognized that Foster Parent Support Specialists have been doing amazing work throughout the crisis. They are also accepting applications for FPSS at this time.

Public Comment

- Julie Cebulski noted that foster parents are being pressed to host video calls.
- Diana Blackburn stated that foster parents are reporting threats to pull kids when foster parents push back against special accommodation requests during the COVID crisis.

- Jessica Bullard said caseworkers, FPSS, etc. are making weekly calls and foster parents are feeling overwhelmed.
- Barb Crandall asked about training provided regarding how to conduct video/phone visits, i.e., do they know that backgrounds should not be able to be identified? No training has been given other than how to download and operate the app. Most parents are using their personal phones and computers to conduct the visits.
- Carlene Van Dyke stated that there should be training preparation. She also stated that one agency reported that while a First Responder foster parent was being tested for COVID the foster child had to be moved, then returned 72 hours after the negative test.
- Carlene reported that a foster parent received stimulus funds for a former foster child. He wondered how to send that money to the current foster parent. Elizabeth Richmond noted that she was advising people to hang onto the money and wait for guidance regarding reimbursing the government for overpayment.
- Debbie Freke reported the need for foster parents to be trained to supervise visits, i.e. which topics should not be addressed by birth parents with their children, which observations need to be reported, when a visit needs to be ended for cause, etc.
- Barb Crandall noted that training and guidelines should be posted on the VTC.
- Sue Muzak noted that when caseworkers have not been assigned after a transitional visit, it's a real problem. Once the caseworker is assigned, the worker should send specific guidelines to foster parents and birth parents about how to conduct visits, i.e. an amended COVID visitation plan.
- Jessica Bullard expressed concern about health risks to the foster home on lockdown when we allow unsupervised visits. She noted one situation where a child move was encouraged as the only way to mitigate risk.
- Thelma Carter noted that the training unit is offering online educational advocacy and trauma training.

Stakeholder Comment

- Carol Sheley noted that it seems inconsistent to allow children to attend day care while blocking in-person family visits.

Outcomes:

The council will send a letter to the Director including the following information:

- No punitive action should be taken against foster parents working to support the visitation needs of children in care, i.e., do not move children.
- Plans for the length of visits should take into consideration the child's age and developmental level. Two-year-olds do not typically have the attention span/ capacity to sit and talk on the phone for an hour.
- Part of the stay-at-home order states that custody agreements must be honored. Work toward agreement to abide by the order between visits, and if there are people with increased risk in the foster household, visitation restrictions may be offered.
- Caseworkers should send specific written guidelines to foster parents and birth parents about how to conduct visits, i.e., an amended COVID visitation plan.

MOTION: *Kellye Norris made the motion to adjourn. Rachel Hoyt seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 11:10 am.*