



## Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council

### APPROVED MEETING MINUTES

September 17th, 2021

WebEx videoconference

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT	GUESTS	STAFF
Gladys Boyd	Kathryn Adrian	Diana Blackburn	Gwenn Eyer
Kimberly Coniglio	Jessica Bullard	Date Danielson	
Arrelda Hall	Kelly Elleman	Debbie Freke	
Tiffany Johnson	Maya Maclin	Maria Levengood	
Harriet Kersh	Kellye Norris	Solange Morrissette	
Susan McConnell	Mary Savage	Tammy Step	
Kate Monte	Phyllis Summers	Arlene Woods	
Audrey Reynolds	Stephanie Tesreau		
Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond			
Samella Taylor-Lewis			
Rebecca Thomas			

### Welcome/Introduction

### Council

### Approval of July 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting Minutes

Arrelda Hall, Chairperson, called the September 17, 2021 SWFCAC meeting to order at 9:05a.m. Susan McConnell called roll.

*MOTION: Arrelda Hall made the motion to approve the August 13, 2021 meeting minutes. Gladys Boyd seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.*

### Office of Caregiver and Parent Support

### Gwenn Eyer for Michelle Grove

Gwenn reported that they continue to hire staff in caregiver support so council members should begin to see some new faces. Arrelda reported that Jason Cummins will be moving to a different position and Terry McGlothlin will return on an abbreviated contract. Gwenn stated that CORE Teen training has launched and Foster Parent Law training is being offered weekly. The office continues to support the process of addressing daycare issues through the stakeholder group. If this process needs explained

again, Michelle can send Q&A or hold a WebEx to describe what it means. Basically, it is the route to get recommendations to the director and track progress along the way.

### **Educational Mentoring Program**

### **Kate Danielson**

Kate introduced herself and demonstrated the Foster Progress website at [www.foster-progress.org](http://www.foster-progress.org). Mentors and youth meet weekly to ensure the young people finish high school strong and have post-high school opportunities for continuing education. A lot of it is relationship building. Anyone may refer a young person, but the student must apply. The program typically begins in their junior year in high school, but there is some flexibility. Kate also discussed the Traverse Program for youth that might not be ready for college. This program includes monthly meetings and therapeutic experiences in the Northern Region. They may travel, do cultural immersion experiences, go on college road trips, volunteer in the community, etc. They offer workshops for foster parents, workers, and educators around issues like trauma effects on education, how to support foster youth in higher education, etc. They are willing to present to councils and support groups, as needed.

### **First Star Academy**

### **Arrelda Hall**

Arrelda segued into a discussion of First Star Academy, a college preparation program for foster youth in high school. The program was established as a national model to improve the lives of foster youth by collaborating with child welfare agencies, universities, and school districts to ensure foster youth have the academic, life skills, and supports needed to successfully transition to higher education and adulthood. First Star at Illinois State University include monthly Saturday enrichment classes, academic supports, life skills, year-round mentoring, caregiver engagement workshops, and a residential summer immersion program for up to 16 students in Central Illinois. More information can be found at [www.firststar.org](http://www.firststar.org).

### **Daycare Update/Discussion**

### **Rebecca Thomas**

Rebecca reported that the daycare sub-group continues to work toward solutions to the day care issues identified. She noted that they've met with some key individuals earlier this month, and following this SWFCAC meeting, they will meet with Keisha Davis from DHS. Rebecca reported that the group has been building out the change form, trying to cover all their bases. They are currently seeking out all the information they can find to access all current resources. Two change forms have been completed. One addresses the time that it takes to get the forms to complete and processed for day care programs to be paid. It looks like there are some internal ways to deal with this issue. The second form addresses the lack of options for foster parents to hire an individual caregiver to come into the home when child care is needed to preserve the placement. She noted that the rate of pay for this service is too low to encourage qualified professionals to meet this need. She gave examples from her experience in the Northern Region, noting that the subcommittee is looking for ways to provide a rate more in line with industry standards. She reported that earlier recommendations did not result in any positive change, and encouraged the council to get involved in working together to resolve these issues.

DISCUSSION:

- Reach out to neighboring states to see how they handle this issue. The subcommittee has been reaching out to gather information, but they are challenged with identifying exactly the right person to contact.
- How do neighboring states handle the situation when a child with sniffles is sent home from day care, but is too young to be tested?
- How do we address these issues on a grand scale? Gwenn noted that individual council members can address with their local legislators as private citizens; the council can look at pending bills to identify legislators that are interested in day care issues and bring them in to hear the council's concerns, the Legislative Committee should work with the DCFS legislative liaison to help identify solutions, reporting back to the SWFCAC for action, and the council should utilize the change form to move things forward.
- Financial resources being expended for welcome centers /shelter placements would easily offset day care expenses to keep children in foster homes.
- Susan McConnell reported that female foster parents are being asked to quit their jobs to provide day care, or to pay the difference in rates from board checks already allotted to different line items.
- DCFS should separate from DHS on the day care rate issue. DCFS foster parents are volunteers and DHS uses paid employees.
- Gladys Boyd reported that she has been getting reports that people are being asked to quit their jobs.
- Susan McConnell reported that educational disruption is an additional cost to our youth. Educational progress is slowed and often reversed when a child is moved.
- Rebecca Thomas asked that if anyone on the council has knowledge about this issue from their own connections, or has a contact in another state who can provide support for resolving these issues, please share those resources with Rebecca and the subcommittee.
- Audrey Reynolds will reach out to foster parent friends in Oregon.
- Susan McConnell stated that part of the formula is very difficult to quantify, is foster parent retention. There are some families that refuse to be licensed, some that refuse to take school age children, and others that will not be relicensed because of these challenges.
- Arrelida Hall reported that in Cook County there has been discussion of placing holds on foster parents who are unable to take children due to these issues.

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

Arrelida reported that she and Susan have been contacting council members to encourage participation. They are continuously working on innovative ways to garner participation. She noted that we are feeling the crunch of the pandemic limiting the in-person interaction. She noted that if council members need to miss a meeting they should complete absence forms and submit all reports in advance.

#### **Council Reports:**

##### **\*CWAC**

Harriet Kersh reported that CWAC met September 1, 2021. Chris Cox will be the new co-chair and they will put together some new sub groups, including supporting autistic

foster children and foster parents. Director Smith addressed the group, especially around COVID issues. The state will roll out a survey re: vaccines, etc. They talked about DCFS and the private agencies having standardized policies and practices. They discussed the work force crisis, changing the standards a bit. They talked about a process for the work force, tracking to ensure that if DCFS is going to recruit or hire a worker from a private agency they offer a delayed start, stipend, etc. They discussed ways to include supervisory staff based on more than just a master's level degree. POWR addressed their issues from a parent perspective. This group of individual foster parents discussed job loss, lack of support, etc. when they became involved with DCFS, advocating for birth parents.

**\*IFAPA**

**Gladys Boyd/Arrelda Hall**

Gladys reported that it seems to her that foster parents are going through a lot due to the pandemic, and they are at risk in many ways, i.e. health risk, employment, etc. She then recommended inviting the Director to address the Council. Arrelda added that foster parents are reporting that they are very stressed that DCFS is making promises to provide ongoing support, i.e., wraparound services, for kids in their homes, but they are not consistently delivering the services. She also noted that caseworkers and supervisors are not responding to emergency communication after hours. Arrelda stated that IFAPA has the capacity to represent grassroots foster parents in meetings with the director.

**DISCUSSION:**

How do we get the Director involved in SWFCAC meetings? It was discussed that we focus on a specific topic, i.e., foster parent retention and bring in a team to address issues from the council's perspective. The council is seeking ways to get the Director to hear them. Monthly Foster Parent Law reports to the Director will resume in early October. The council discussed sending an additional "breaking news" or "hot topics" council report to the Director following each council meeting. This will cover presentations, illustrations and outcomes from council meetings. Audrey will compile a draft to send around to council members for review and comment. Gwenn noted all that communication needs to consistently go through the SWFCAC mailbox rather than from individual council members.

**Regional Reports:**

**\*Northern Region Report**

**Kimberly Coniglio/Rebecca Thomas**

Rebecca reported on a positive note that they've had a couple of new support groups started, with good attendance. She said that there have been some disturbing things happening, too. She said that foster parents have reported being threatened with removal of children from their home if they won't allow youth to return to the home after dangerous incidents that concerned them. Retaliation concerns are grave in this region. Issues with transportation providers are prevalent in the region, about driver standards, scheduling issues, transportation and supervision. Kimberly shared her concerns with foster parents being bullied to transport children on visits, both prior to and post-placement. Foster parents report high caseworker turnover and lapses in contact numbers for extended periods of time. Gwenn noted that the Foster Parent Law covers some of

these issues, and each agency/region has a plan to grieve alleged violations of the Foster Parent Law.

**\*Central Region Report**

**Kelly Elleman/Kathryn Adrian**

No report due to absence.

**\*Cook North**

**Kate Monte**

Kate had to leave the call prior to the end of the call.

**\*Southern Region**

**Stephanie Tesreau/Audrey Reynolds**

Audrey noted that they have been experiencing similar challenges with transportation. Southern Region has been holding in-person support group meetings.

**\*Cook South**

**Maya Maclin/Kellye Norris**

No report due to absence.

**\*Cook Central**

**Arrelda Hall**

Arrelda reported that Cook Central and the other sub-regions are actively working on their Christmas with list donations. Cook County support groups will resume this month.

**Workgroup Report**

**\*Day Care**

**Jessica Bullard/Arrelda Hall/Mary**

Savage/Rebecca Thomas

This report was addressed earlier in the call. However, Rebecca noted that this afternoon's planned call with DHS has been postponed for a second time.

**Committee Reports:**

**\*Health Care Committee**

**Kimberly Coniglio**

**\*Training Committee**

**Harriet Kersh**

Harriet reported that the committee hasn't met. However, she has been involved in the revamped self-paced PRIDE pre-service training. It has been rolled out using a control group. They are also providing NTDC training. Harriet reported that foster parents will be required to take the LGBTQ training prior to re-licensure.

**\*Foster Parent Support Specialists**

**Arrelda Hall**

Arrelda noted that the Support Specialists committee is collaborating on the day care subgroup and have not met formally. She noted that FPSS are almost fully staffed around the state, with a few new contracts coming on.

**\*Policy & Legislative**

**Susan McConnell/Stephanie Tesreau**

Susan reported that she is collaborating on the day care subgroup and the Policy Committee not met.

**\*Hospitality and Public Relations** **Stephanie Tesreau**

No report due to absence.

**\*Respite**

**Gladys Boyd**

Gladys reported that the Director told her that he is aware of the council's respite concerns and he is going to handle it. However, the number of respite days has decreased for DCFS families, at least in Cook County. She noted that the council's original recommendation was to be applied across the board, DCFS and private agencies.

**\*Membership**

**Susan McConnell**

There are three openings in Central Region; two in Cook North and in Cook Central. DCFS posted an announcement earlier this week.

**\*Adolescent Issues**

**Kimberly Coniglio**

No report due to absence.

**\*Permanency**

**Susan McConnell**

No report. The committee has not met.

**\*Nomination Committee**

**Kate Monte/Stephanie Tesreau**

The council may pull this off the agenda until the spring when the committee becomes active.

**Public Comment**

None

**Stakeholder Comments**

None

**Closing Council Discussion**

Arrelida thanked council members for their participation during this meeting. Rebecca Thomas noted that respite is limited to five days in the Northern Region, but foster parents are being told that respite does not exist.

***MOTION: Arrelida Hall made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Susan McConnell seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned following a unanimous roll call vote.***

**Next Meeting:** October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, 9:00 via WebEx.