
Illinois Children and Family Services Advisory Council
Special COVID Meeting October 5, 2021 from 3:00 to 5:00 PM
Via WebEx / Conference line only
DRAFT MINUTES

Attendance

Members: Marge Berglind, Anita Weinberg, Lanetta Haynes Turner, Brittani Kindle, Kim King, Jennifer Hansen

DCFS: Kara Hamilton, Fayette Coleman-Gill, Jacquelyn Dortch

Youth Advisory Board (YAB) Members: Gabriel Foley

Public: Nick Marin (pending member), Joshua Travis (pending member)

Agenda

I. Welcome and Introductions

Marge called meeting to order 3:02pm. She noted the purpose of this special meeting is to focus on number of COVID-19 related issues that have emerged from the last few council meetings. Marge prepared a summary of issues and asked DCFS staff presenting information and council members to use that summary as the discussion guide.

II. Presentation: COVID's impact on DCFS, Fayette Coleman-Gill

- **Discussion of ICFSAC's COVID Questions**

- i. Overall Impact**

1. Tremendous impact, biological families way more in touch, zoom allowed for more connecting partnering with child/family team meetings. Foster/relative caregivers had some initial lag time-technology in home, being equipped. More apt for biological families. Vaccinations-Staff fully vaxed, DCP then permanency then intact staff vaccinated. Good amount of foster parents vaccinated, concern from some of them of children being unvaccinated. Tremendous displacements with age 16-18, partnered with Laurie Children's for testing to ensure quicker placement.
2. Continued use of PPE products in all facilities and all COVID policies still in place; contact tracing, cleaning, etc. All PSAs reporting back to department full time, management tea back, partnership with union has been great
3. American Rescue Plan; Fayette said she couldn't answer exact question but did say Norman & flex funds still available & have been used to return kids home quicker. Return home numbers increasing, would attribute to biological parents weekly accessibility to workers via Zoom.

4. Caregivers (foster parents and relative caregivers) can receive daycare payments if they do an application- they can ask their caseworker, advocacy office, or get on DCFS website. Stacy Nixon-Daycare Unit, has been helpful providing info.

Questions/Comments from Council

- **Q.** What % of youth 12+ vaccinated & what is being done to encourage vaccinations? Per Fayette, we can get exact numbers, most agencies in Cook are at 100% (12+ in congregate care facilities), department has made it very available. Fayette and Kara going to get numbers.
- **Q.** Looking after COVID, are we looking to change way we approach parent dialogues going forward? Per Fayette, yes- Family First starting October 1st, changing mindset and making child-family team meetings primary.
- **Q.** Family First, what's different this time around? Per Fayette, engagement factor is different and being trained to engage with client from onset as well as new workforce coming into child welfare. Back to basics- holding DCP/investigators accountable, finding more relatives/kin, understanding clients better (mental health).
- **Q.** What % of kids have been returned home during this time? Per Fayette, have to get numbers but in Cook County got accredited.
- **C.** There was concern from youth of lack of communication with workers- Fayette said she would relay this information.
- **Q.** What is meant by displacement (16-18 year olds)? Per Fayette, leaving caregivers homes and returning, concern because of unvaccinated. Kids leaving during shelter in place, small %.
- **Q.** Will it become emergency requirement for vaccination of caregivers/foster parents? Per Fayette, not heard but will check with Michelle Grove and will take feedback up the chain.

ii. Basic Information

1. Increased placement disruptions-in particular population, not related to COVID, related to typical youth that would be 'on run' would not say COVID caused disruptions.
2. Health status tracking- can get numbers of youth vaccinated, tracking tools for congregate care in SACWIS.
3. Foster parents/caregivers- can talk to Michelle Grove to see if they track vaccinations. Have not really gotten feedback on reasoning for not vaccinating.
4. Visitation during pandemic- initially video conferencing, positive outcome, able to involve more parents, especially incarcerated. Video conferencing good with foster parents, bio parents. Great use of Family Advocacy Centers.

iii. Education Status of Youth

1. Track youth attendance- CPS had a good % of students report back to school. Could have engaged public school system sooner. Continue to monitor these kids this school year. Asking staff to engage caregivers, we have tutoring programs in place, hired new staff to help navigate with partners (ISU, NIU, etc.)

Questions/Comments from Councils:

- **Q.** What do partners do, can you provide list of those partners? Per Fayette, for example a student needs IEP, we utilize our education liaison to whatever school district child is in. Can provide list of partners to council, underutilized tool.

- **C.** As a foster parent, the students that suffered the most were those with IEPs and the distance learning exacerbated that.
- **Q.** Is DCFS prepared to deal with the number of kids that are struggling/lost in education? Per Fayette, extensive resources put in place for dealing with the immense stressors, education help, & mental health for students. Exception to policy- caregivers can ask for things like private tutoring or other resources DCFS is willing to pay for. Per Jackie Dortch, think DCFS kids fared a little better than other kids due to access to resources.

iv. Mental Health Status for Youth in Care

1. Business as usual- workers are meeting in person unless a positive COVID test then virtual. Telehealth counseling still available, more participation.

Questions/Comments from Council:

- **Q.** As we use telehealth platforms more, do youth use more mental health service more? Per Fayette, youth are participating more all around.
- **Q.** Did DCFS notice long wait times for mental health resources? Per Fayette, was a shortage at first- folks not working, issues connecting, overwhelmed providers. Now rebranded and information given to youth now on upside.

v. Impact on Caregivers

1. Foster parents were paid during pandemic on time, some even given special rate. Did not hear any feedback from caregivers having huge deficits of those not working/struggling financially.
2. Housing- did not hear of evictions or issues regarding this, able to provide needs.
3. Returning to work-we had influx of need for daycare for foster parents returning to work.
4. No increase in caregivers RE children needing to be moved, just concern of aftercare.

vi. Impact on Caseworkers

1. During pandemic, we hired a lot of staff. POS got hit hardest, coming over to DCFS side. Cook county down only 15 vacancies, vacancies lowering statewide. New hiring process, ongoing basis, if resigned then new hires within 30 days. Marge noted that most kids in care are on the POS side.

vii. Impacts on Older Youth

1. Youth in Care extension- we tried to do a good job publicizing, engaged YAB, very difficult task, but most of youth utilized that and still making payments.
2. Will have to check on ILO information

Questions/Comments from Council:

- **Q.** Has there been any takeaways? This was a very confusing time. Per Fayette, the D-step process, caseworker receives a tickler for any youth age 20, they plan out safety plan & make youth aware of \$1200 stipend, housing advocate, & pamphlet if they wanted to continue to receive payment.
- **Q.** Can we get numbers of who took advantage of extension? And what will happen now that it has ended? Per Fayette, would have to find out #s.

viii. Future Plans

1. What we feel worked well was our telecommunication, connection though technology worked well for us.

2. What we could do better- communication at faster pace, utilize news media for policy change awareness. Making sure partnerships know how to navigate our resources.
3. For visitation, utilizing Family Advocacy Centers, local churches, etc.
4. For communication with older youth, texting and social media utilize more.
5. Critical decisions- made by our supervisors, using team approach, then moves up the chain.

Questions/Comments from Council:

- **Q.** Who from DCFS posts content? Per Fayette and Kara, office of communications
- **Q.** Blanket ban for no in person visits, has there been discussion if lockdown again? Per Fayette, case by case but as a whole we would have to leave that to Director/Governor.

III. Member discussion:

- a. Concern of discrepancies between what DCFS reporting and what hearing from youth. Importance of data, figure out what numbers are important next meeting.
- b. Circle back with COVID document and get data, come back with recommendations.
- c. Youth in Care Extension services, Marge asked Kara for clarification on extensions further or exceptions. Kara will check on this.

Meeting Adjourned: No formal motion to adjourn. Call ended at 5:20

Next meeting: November 18th 3-5pm

