
Illinois Children and Family Services Advisory Council

September 8, 2022, from 3:00 to 5:00 PM

Via WebEx / Conference line only

MINUTES

Attendance

Members: Jennifer Hansen (Chair), Marge Berglind (*Ex Officio*), Gabriel Foley (Secretary), Brittani Kindle (Vice Chair), Kim King, Nate Pietrini and Anita Weinberg

DCFS : Kara Hamilton (Liaison) and Lorena Hernandez

Public: Nicholas Martin (pending member) and Joshua Travis (pending member); Guest: Levi Campbell/Family Advocacy Center, and Mike Shaver/President of Children Home & Aid

I. Welcome and Introductions

Jennifer called meeting to order at 3:04 p.m.

II. Approval of Minutes from July 14th and August 8th meeting. MOTION: Brittani Kindle moved to approve both minutes; second by Nate Pietrini; Minutes unanimously approved.

III. Membership Discussion

- a. **Nominating Committee Meeting.** The members are Jen, Marge, Anita, and Brittani. Have received resumes for possible members and will schedule a nominating committee around mid/late October.
- b. **Proposed Amendment to Bylaw.** Historically, membership terms were not particularly enforced, or looked at, until the current administration came in and started looking at it more. Will circulate proposed amendments to Council Bylaws for November's meeting to review changes and possibly approve.
- c. **Required Trainings.** As a reminder everyone is supposed to complete their annual trainings to be compliant

IV. Direction of the Council and Feedback from DCFS Director Smith

The Council had a special meeting on August 8th and discussed topics for the Council to focus on for the next year. Council invited Director Smith to attend meeting to provide feedback on topics and provide any further direction to the Council.

1. **Unauthorized Placement.** Discussion re unauthorized placements – who the children are and what can be done to keep them safe; Council will need access to DCFS documents. Director Smith thinks it'd be a helpful topic for the Council to review. The Council agreed to focus on the last 3 years (2019-2021).

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2. **Unlicensed Relatives.** Discussion re unlicensed relatives – who the children are and what can be done to get an unlicensed relative licensed if a child is placed there in order to avoid foster care drift. Director Smith said a number of years ago, DCFS was at a higher

60 E. Van Buren Street, Suite 1339 • Chicago, Illinois 60605

312-814-6800

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level re licensing foster homes, which has dropped. Director Smith indicated that DCFS has been working with private partners to increase the number of License Relative Parents and the number has dropped down. Director Smith indicated this topic may not be a worthwhile one for the Council.

- 3. Resources available for foster families and youth.** Discussion re resources available to foster families and youth. Director Smith indicated that topic is broad and there are many avenues to learn. DCFS is working with communities to figure out how children in care and foster families can receive more services. Director Smith suggested focusing on one area and then do a deep dive in that particular type of resource (*e.g.*, medical, dental, mental health, residential). Council will be able to speak with the right people and obtain information once this topic is narrowed.

Family First. Discussion re Family First. Director Smith confirmed trying to be very aggressive about the size and scope of it and that Illinois has a more comprehensive plan than other areas around the country. DCFS is transparent and is open to those conversations to be evaluated on how they are doing. However, it's very early in the process but optimistic of outcome. Family First, thinks there's a real opportunity to view how the implementation is looking from an outside view. Maybe the growth of how to connect Family First to the community. Julie Barbosa/DCFS and Chapin Hall would be their contact persons.

Q: The council believes Mental Health services can be a prevention and there is a lack of services. Also, Dana Weiner coordinated effort with state agencies that services behavioral health. The question is how to identify if they're helping? DCFS can share the Chapin Hall report that has Mental Health Services by county for Illinois and then tie that back directly to what is believed.

Q: At what point does an unauthorized placement become wrong? The age is a huge issue here in terms of understanding what's going on. For a 17-year-old kid, a caseworker can't convince him to be in a different placement, therefore becomes unauthorized placement. More trauma is done by trying to make them go to a different setting. The above monthly report at a high level discusses more in detail.

Q: Is a Safety Assessment is done when the agency finds them? Yes, but that's not always the case because there's a percentage that is out of state. Q: Does the agency keep track of Safety Assessment? It would be a result of overlapping the 2 reports to find that gap.

V. DCFS Audit Overview- Chief of Staff, Jassen Strokosch

There were some legislative changes passed in 2019 that went into effect for DCFS to put in place. Office of the Auditor General to conduct an audit after one year from January of 2020. This is the 1st performance audit of DCFS' compliance. Within 2 years, a follow-up performance audit will be done. Key Recommendations are:

1. Related to hiring practices within the State of Illinois versus hiring in general for unfunded positions.
2. The Chief Internal Auditor by statute should be reporting directly to the Director. The organizational chart was updated.
3. Include language in the Home Safety Checklists certifying no environmental barriers and hazards to prevent returning child home.
4. Should complete Home Safety Checklist and DCFS Administrative Procedure number 25. Dealing specifically with Permanency Teams using it specifically when the child returns home.
5. Ensure after care plan for at least 6 months after a child returns home. Conducted specific meetings and training with staff to remind the need to document more effectively.
6. Ensure well-child visits/check-ups. The audit was right during the transition to youth care. However, DCFS rely heavily on school settings and was during COVID 2020.
7. For immunization data there is a centralized system of all organizations that are attracted to state level again. It is an independent system that's done outside of purview. Their IT has corrected and clean SACWIS data.
8. Tracking Child Welfare Services Referrals are now being handled exclusively by the private sector across the state. This is related to being able to produce the data needed to view whether DCFS is compliant.

Q: Is there a window for performing the checklist? It is within the first 24 hours of the return home, follow within 45 days and then 6 months. The Home Safety Checklist existed in different stages of DCFS before this legislation.

Q: Is there a connection between the need for improving the Home Safety Checklist for return home and after care services? No, checklist was a new add on for DCFS Permanency staff per new statutes. Normal methods for reinforcing new changes were not possible due to DCFS and private sector are still working hybrid. The number is very small (single digit) each one of those cases are review by Child Death Review and OIG coming back with recommendations.

Q: What kind of oversight do supervisors have with the case workers? It used to be a 6 to 1 ratio now 5 to 1 for all front-line staff effective 2 years ago. Around 80% of this work is done by the private sector. Part of their agency performance is a response mechanism with the APT and ACR team meeting every 6 months. Also, depending on their age, the youth give feedback too. Doing home visits different from in-person to virtual due to Covid.

VI. Nate Pietrini Email

Nate proposed Council developing various committees with members with various expertise to share updates so that the Council could dive into a specific topic. The Chairperson replied that this is a great idea and something to keep in mind for the future when the Council has more robust membership; at this time, the Council is too small for various subcommittees.

VII. Identify November's Meeting Agenda

The Tentative Agenda is as follows: Minutes, Bylaws, Chapin Hall Report, Unauthorized Placement Data, Foster Family Licensing Standards, SAFE Model, and CCWIS. For January's meeting Family First can be part of the agenda.

VIII. Public Comments

None at the moment.

IX. New Business

Meeting Adjourn at 5:09 PM – MOTION: BY: Nate Pietrini; second by Marge Berglind

Next Meeting: Thursday, November 10, 2022, 3:00 PM – 5:00 PM via WebEx