

MINUTES

Division of Family Services Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting April 18, 2007

Attendees: Julia Pearce, Mike Kersteter, Sue Dougherty, Nikeya Rush, PJ Facciolo, Leslie Newman, Ellen Levin, Suzanne Seubert, Carol Post, Rita Paige, Janice Mink, Susan Leininger, Allison McDowell, Dory Zatuchni, Laura Miles, Joseph Smack, Carlyse Giddins.

Chairperson Julia Pearce called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.

Approval of Minutes from prior meeting – Janice Mink motioned to approve the minutes (second Mike K.). Council unanimously approved the minutes from the January 24, 2007 meeting.

Adopt US Kids – Council members viewed four public service advertisements designed to educate the public about the thousands of American teens in the foster care system awaiting adoption. Julia gave an update on the Upper Bay Council's Respite Day and Marylou Edgar's role in the event. The key to adoption success is post-adoptive legal services.

Independent Living Benchmarks – Deputy Director Laura Miles handed out Independent Living Benchmarks to the council members. Categories for benchmarks were broken into population ages 14-15 years of age / 16-18 / 19-21. The benchmarks included the activity and whom is responsible for the actions. Laura noted that DFS has too many children in APPLA (Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) and that the proposed extended jurisdiction language could alter the benchmarks for the 19-21 year olds. Laura asked for comments on the benchmarks as presented. Leslie Newman inquired about the applicability of driver licenses for kids in care. Carlyse stated that this issue has been one of our priorities. A recent youth conference brought the issue to light for some members of the General Assembly. In February, Carlyse met with Senator Liane Sorenson, Insurance Commissioner Matt Denn and the Office of the Child Advocate to discuss the issue. On April 16, Carlyse met with Commissioner Denn and a senior vice president from a major insurance company to discuss how they may be able to help. Legislation would be needed to hold DFS or caretakers faultless if we signed for permission to allow youth in care to obtain licenses.

Carol said that she would like to see the benchmarks contain a section on dating violence / healthy relationships. Susan D. brought up financial competence and having some kind of beginning savings accounts to facilitate learning. Laura said that would be added to the benchmarks. Ellen brought up the work of the Delaware Money School and possibly being able to partner with them. Dory volunteered to work on an effort to reach out to banks for assistance. Carlyse mentioned that outside businesses and the community need to be educated about our role and the needs of our youth as they age out of care. Suzanne S. inquired about the frequency of the independent living plans review. Laura will get

back with the council concerning the frequency of the reviews. Leslie said that we would want our youth to 'aspire' to something. Is there a way to encompass that feeling? Dory felt it may be included in employment area. Carlyse mentioned that the benchmarks will also be vetted by the Youth Advisory Council.

Extended Jurisdiction – Julia met with the CPAC subcommittee on extended jurisdiction. Julia stated that they were not receptive to the Advisory and Advocacy Council's proposal to allow any unused monies for the new extended jurisdiction program to be reverted for independent living use. Carlyse reported that extended jurisdiction was discussed at last week's CPAC meeting and the draft legislation was reviewed. The Family Court would like to see the program include emancipated assisted persons with misdemeanor charges. Those with felony charges would be suspended pending the outcome of the charges. This was the only major change to the legislation. There was a recommendation from CPAC also to examine the use of service providers and not add the proposed five new DFS staff members (four caseworkers, one support, resources). The challenge is the issue of legal representation. Could the Department of Justice legally represent service providers in court? Because there is a fiscal note of \$837,000 the revenue forecasts may come into play with this proposal. Carlyse shared that the CPAC subcommittee on Caseload/Workload has highlighted that we need 31 new treatment workers just to keep up with current requirements. Funding any new treatment workers would be this Division's priority.

DFS Update – Carlyse passed around a magnetic door-hanger designed by the foster care recruitment committee. 2,500 of these door-hangers will be distributed statewide in targeted zip codes from where the highest percentage of children who come into care currently reside. This is designed to recruit foster parents and/or respite providers in those communities.

Carlyse gave an update on the Child and Family Services Review. The onsite review portion took place in early March. The feds have increased expectations for the states. Delaware had some areas of strengths and some in need of improvement. The issue of workload has played out in the review areas for safety and there are some opportunities for the Court to expedite their processes. On Monday, April 23, members of the Children's Department, Department of Justice, Family Court, and other community partners will meet for a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) training session. DFS has received a draft of the initial findings from the feds, but have not released the results to everyone. Janice asked if any of the recommendations from the feds are already being examined by any of the CPAC subcommittees. Laura said that the findings were more in the area of processes, so there is not a direct link. Laura discussed how this CFSR was different from the last. Mike K. shared that the use of technology made the process easier than last time. Carlyse noted that the feds said we have strong policies in place. Carlyse will share the draft report with the All-Management team on Thursday, April 19 and will have the final report placed on our website.

Carlyse went over some of the plans for foster care month (May). The Governor's Taskforce on Foster Care was designed with 700 children in mind – we now have over 900 in care. A magnetic door-hanger has been designed and will be delivered to approximately 2,500 homes within the zip codes the majority of children who come into

care reside. We have large graduating classes for foster parents, but many are adopting the children in their care, which is a good thing. As a result, we sometimes have to place more high-end children together. Leslie inquired if there is a greater need for upper level ages or all ranges? Laura shared that a recent snapshot showed a growth rate of 37% for children ages 0-6 years old and 42% for ages 13 and up. In terms of levels, we need more homes across the spectrum. We are over utilizing foster care providers and the system is taxed. Many teens coming into care have never had any prior involvement with the Children's Department. Some of this is due to Department Policy 209 which directs DFS as the caretaker for children completing YRS or CMH treatment services and cannot return home. The use of legal representation for children has increased with Court Appointed Special Advocates and Guardian Ad Litem advocating for their children. PJ asked if we are seeing an increase in one particular county. Carlyse said it across the board. Susan Leininger shared that she has seen an increase in her elementary school (Pleasantville). Leslie asked what the group could do to advocate or assist. Carlyse said that supporting the ongoing advocacy efforts of the CPAC initiatives, and recruitment help with the community to assist our children.

Carlyse shared a recent policy decision pertaining to a treatment service offered by the Division of Child Mental Health Services called an Individualized Residential Treatment (IRT). An IRT is not designed to be a foster care placement. Because of a lack of foster care placement capacity and national standards for stability in placement, DFS had been over utilizing this service when it was not necessary to do so. The expectation now is that the new foster care contracts will alleviate the dearth of special placements. DFS will not use IRTs as a first placement unless the service clinicians deem it to be in the child's best interest and medically necessary. We are also stepping children down from IRT services, again when the clinicians indicate the higher level of mental health intervention is no longer required. Ellen shared that two of the children on her CASA caseload are former IRT placements and has been discouraged by the changes she has observed with these children.

Carlyse said that CPAC has a new Mental and Behavioral Health subcommittee co-chaired by Janice Mink and Randy Williams. Laura said that we are examining and reassessing how the children who have stepped down are doing. We are working with CMH during this process. The review is an examination of themes. Carlyse said that we need a service delivery approach to address the needs of children in foster care and apologized for any inconvenience the IRT policy change may have caused.

Mike said that we need to move the bar from what is medically necessary for these children to what is needed for functionality. The Managed Care Organization model is flawed.

Leslie said that while we cannot forget the economic piece for foster families and IRT homes, is there anyway to communicate to them that the IRT is a transitional placement? Carol relayed a story of how her trainers were challenged by staff from CMH during a domestic violence session and were taken aback by the culture of that division's representatives.

PJ mentioned Delaware Guidance and a service that they offer which follows children who change schools. We need more services in that model.

Carlyse spoke of the way to work together and acknowledged Council member Rita Paige with the State Housing Authority and spoke of our work with the DSHA in the area of housing vouchers and moving kids onto the waiting list for public housing before they age out of foster care.

Meeting adjourned at 12:03 pm.

Next Meeting – July 19, 2007, 10am-Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Executive Assistant
Division of Family Services