

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
July 19, 2007

Attendees: Mike Kersteter, Sue Dougherty, PJ Facciolo, Leslie Newman, Suzanne Seubert, Carol Post, Robbie Hoosty, Allison McDowell, Dory Zatuchni, Laura Miles, Joseph Smack, Carlyse Giddins.

Carlyse called the meeting to order at 10:05 am.

Approval of Minutes from prior meeting – It was noted by Allison McDowell that she was left off the list of attendees from the prior meeting. Joe vowed to correct the minutes. Mike motioned to approve the minutes (second PJ). Council unanimously approved the minutes from the April 18, 2007 meeting.

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 who is responsible for the actions. Laura noted that healthy dating and domestic violence education has been included in the revised version. PJ Facciolo inquired about the wait until near or after high school graduation to get a drivers license. Laura explained the Department policy and the DMV requirements to have a guarantor for the licensee. Carlyse stated that this issue has been one of our priorities and feels that licenses are a right of passage. 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, Tania Culley and Commissioner Denn met with 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. Mike asked if the benchmarks will appear in contracts. Carlyse said that it could be expected to appear in future contracts. Carlyse discussed the role of foster parents and how they help children ready for independence in areas like, how to do laundry, cook, unclog a sink, etc. how can we facilitate what we would do for our own kids? Laura thanked the Council for their input on the document.

Legislation Update – Joe provided a synopsis of legislation that passed or was introduced that affected child welfare. Discussed was House Bill 90 which added a representative from the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council to the Child Protection Accountability Commission. HB 266 which standardizes definitions of child abuse, dependency and neglect throughout the State Code. Senate Bill 57 that changes the definition of parties to be under the domestic violence laws to include substantive relationships. Carol explained the importance of this bill in extending protection from abuse orders to cohabitating couples and same sex couples. The Family Court judges will figure out the implementation language when the bill becomes active in September.

Suzanne reports that two judges have been assigned to look at the issue of substantive relationships. There was some discussion on the mixing bill that did not make it through the entire process this session. The bill (SB 171) would update the law governing the placement of children in foster care with criminal histories with other children. This can only be done with a Family Court order. SB 113 was discussed. This bill reduces the caseload standard of investigation workers from the current 14 cases to 11. This can be accomplished without additional personnel. The original bill also contained a new caseload standard for treatment workers and would have required money for additional personnel. This section was rescinded to allow at least part of the standards to be enacted. Carlyse thanked the Office of the Child Advocate and Tania Culley for their work in championing the CPAC bills. Carol said that the DV community is looking at a bill that would allow victims of domestic violence to break their leases without penalty. This will be an important protection for DV victims and is expected to be introduced in the fall.

DFS Update – Carlyse expressed her satisfaction with the support from the legislature and the Minner administration for the Division of Family Services. DFS received five new positions in fiscal year 2008. Two positions are for Kent County in treatment. Two are for the new Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children timelines for home studies and one new supervisor. The division also received \$55,800 to support Independent Living contractual services. There was an unfunded federal mandate to collect data on youth aging out of the IL program. We received \$150,000 to update FACTS to meet this mandate.

CFSR – we have received the draft of the final Child and Family Services Review and have sent comments to the feds on factual errors contained in the report. To date, we have not heard back from them and expect that because Delaware was the first state to undergo this round of reviews that our comments are being examined at the highest level of the Children’s Bureau. There were four themes coming from the review; service array, engaging families, permanency, and safety. Our Performance Improvement Plan will be submitted in September.

Carlyse reported that in August 2005, the Department’s Four Year Plan included Independent Living as an area of focus. A national permanency conference was held in September 2006. Delaware has a higher percentage of older youth in foster care than many other states. Department policy 209 mandating DFS to place children who have completed a Youth Rehabilitative placement or Child Mental Health Services treatment has impacted this cohort. Some of the children entering care are older and not returning home or are not choosing adoption as an alternative, thus many are given APPLA (Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) as a goal. Carlyse has commissioned an APPLA workgroup that is looking at this issue and independent living services. Carlyse extended an invitation for any council members to join the APPLA committee chaired by Shirley Roberts. Interested parties may contact Shirley at 633-2601. Carlyse feels that a change has to occur where the child welfare community has to stop thinking about what is only paid for by the state and look more broadly at planning and examining other arenas like Job Corps, donated furniture banks, better supports and collaboration. Suzanne Seubert thought that maybe the problem isn’t with DE having a higher percentage of kids with a goal of independence and perhaps it was with the other states. Carlyse noted that California is looking retroactively at cases where a biological

family placement was not able to be appropriate to see if it may now be, or if a life connection with the biological family can be fostered. The question is; have we done everything that we can to ensure APPLA is not the only goal, such as revisit adoption as an option and reviewing our protocols for permanency. Carlyse used the example of AID in Dover and their program of pairing youth in independent living with faith-based organizations to help the youth. If we can build the system, we could change the lives of these children.

Carlyse provided a list of the events that occurred during National Foster Care Month (May). Foster care did a great job in raising money and awareness by partnering with Shoprite and Fresh Pride to sell blue ribbons in their grocery stores. Over \$4500 was raised through the sale of these ribbons. There were 945 children in paid foster care in the month of July and we are actively recruiting in targeted zip codes where the majority of our children are coming into care reside. We have partnered with school districts with literature being distributed to the Caesar Rodney and Capital school districts. Capacity is being built and plans are underway to work with nine districts in Sussex County. The work on the frontline is tremendous – and the turnover rate this past fiscal year was 6.8%, down from 7.4% the prior year. This is almost unheard of in the child welfare arena. In 1998, the turnover rate was 48%.

Carlyse touted our relationship with the Family Court and their willingness to serve on our committees and build collaborative efforts.

Announcements: Carol Post announced that Prevent Child Abuse Delaware is holding Child Abuse 101 training in Sussex County on September 19, 20. Karen DeRasmo is the contact.

Carol also reported that Domestic Violence 101 will be held Sept. 11-12 at DelTech. October 24 is the Purple Ribbon event and will feature a breakfast at Dover Downs. October 30, the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, Child Inc, and OPEI will host a conference entitled 'In the Best Interest of the Child' and will feature a lecture from Dr. Jeffrey Edleson .

The October 17 meeting of the council will feature a presentation from Adoption Program Manager Frank Perfinski and we will discuss adoption and how to support families that have adopted children from care.

Meeting adjourned at 11:33 am.

Next Meeting – October 17, 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