

**MINUTES**  
**Division of Family Services**  
**Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting**  
**Children and Families First**  
**October 31, 2007**

**Attendees:** PJ Facciolo, Leslie Newman, Susan Leininger, Suzanne Seubert, Dory Zatuchni, Mary Lou Edgar, Janice Mink, Julia Pearce, Frank Perfiniski, Keith Zirkle, Joseph Smack.

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

**Approval of Minutes from prior meeting** – Motion to approve minutes passed unanimously.

**Adoption Presentation** – Frank Perfiniski and Mary Lou Edgar presented on the state of adoption in Delaware. Frank reported that ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act) created some issues for states to move children from foster care into adoption within 24 months. Frank noted that November is National Adoption Month and that National Adoption Day is observed on the 17<sup>th</sup>. There are several events scheduled in Delaware. Frank spoke of the Heart Gallery exhibitions and the DFS effort to have exposure for the children available for adoption from the foster care system. This past summer, the Wilmington Drama League held a Heart Gallery and will do so again in June. In Fiscal Year 2006, 74 children in Delaware were adopted from the foster care system and in FY 2007 it increased to 120. Frank credited the work of the adoption unit and our partners in the adoption community and courts in moving children forward. More specifics were provided on the adoption numbers. The figures reflect 116 adoptions. Four others were noted late after the data run:

Adoptions by foster parents of child:	DE 73%	National 60%	
Adoptions by Race of Child:	Cauc. 64%	African American 51%	Asian 1%
Ages of Adopted Children (in years):	1-5 70	6-10 39	11-16 7
Sibling Group:	45 were connected with a sibling group		
Medical Issues:	48		
Emotional Issues:	35		
Mental Health:	32		

Adoptions by County:	NCC	Kent	Sussex
	70	22	24

Children from Delaware adoptions are in 31 different states and we field inquires from across the nation.

Mary Lou spoke of some of the issues when adopting children from care from other states, such as excessive delay, lack of customer service, lengthy home studies, etc. some find it easier, though more costly, to adopt from a foreign country. Foreign adoptions usually take six-eight months. Julia noted that in the CPAC Mental Health Subcommittee, they are finding that foster parents are not participating in mental health and that they are not healing as a family. Frank noted that we are starting to see some international adoptive children coming into our system.

Discussion ensued on of APPLA children (Alternative Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) and how to reduce their numbers. Frank said that they are being reviewed to seek relative adoptions. Mary Lou spoke of the importance of involving birth families with the adoption. The challenging populations for finding adoptive homes are older, African American males, and sibling groups.

Mary Lou said that during recruitment, we need to get beyond looking for the ‘cul-de-sac’ family as the perfect adoptive family. That dynamic is not always the best fit or readily available. The average age of an adoptive parent is 41 years old with a household income average of \$73,000. Fifty-eight percent are married couples. Seventy-eight percent of children are adopted by Caucasians and 22% by African Americans. Frank noted that Delaware allows gay adoptions while some states do not. Discussion ensued on the barriers to successful adoptions. Julia stated that we have to shift how we do our work in getting kids from APPLA to adoption instead by including GALs, agencies, etc. in the plans.

Mary Lou discussed the emotional component of adoption. A 2006 University of Massachusetts study in conjunction with American University found that adoption subsidies were half the cost of foster care expenses. One dollar spent on adoption yielded \$3 in benefits. The 25,000 children who age out of foster care every year in America face futures of uncertainty and are statistically more likely to be homeless or incarcerated within a few years of leaving care. We have to look at adoptive families as resources and not in it for the money. She feels that we need to screen families in, rather than out. The mindset of agencies is too often, what is wrong with the family, not what is right.

Perspective adoptive families are afraid of the process and fear being left alone once the adoption is completed. Mary Lou brought up a case of a man in his 30’s who was charged when he was 19 with assaulting a 15 year old. This charge has barred him from becoming an adoptive resource for his nieces and nephews and felt there must be a way to review a case such as this. Keith brought up federal boundaries and shared language from federal law prohibiting a person with certain charges from becoming a foster or adoptive parent. Mary Lou would like to open avenues of discussion in this area. There was discussion on how children could be involved in their own adoptions. Mary Lou said Adopt US Kids is looking into having children review families on the website to let them choose a fit. Mary Lou relayed that everyone can play a role in adoption. Susan Leininger brought up the importance of connections at all levels for children in care. She drew from a child in her

elementary school as an example of maintaining connections as she has transitioned through several foster homes.

The Council viewed the Adopt US Kids ads and Mary Lou asked for feedback on the ads. Members provided comments.

A summary sheet of the CPAC APPLA workgroup recommendations was distributed. High APPLA cases were noted in the Child and Family Services Review. Julia discussed that the recommendations were designed for preventing kids from having a plan designated for APPLA, moving kids from APPLA, and better serving those we have.

**DFS Update** – Joe apologized on Carlyse’s behalf for her absence from the meeting and thanked Leslie for allowing us to utilize the C&FF conference room for the meeting. He reported on the recent presentation by Patrick Turnpaugh of the Milton Hershey School. Joe reported that DFS currently has three students attending MHS and the great possibility of having two more becoming students in the next few months. The life opportunities at MHS are unparalleled. Mr. Turnpaugh is conducting a public seminar on January 18 at Dover Downs for educators and others interested in learning more about MHS.

Keith reported on the budget hearing scheduled for November 9 and some of the initiatives for the upcoming fiscal year. The door-opener this year is money for the foster care population growth (\$4.4 million). New initiatives include Child Mental Health Behavioral Consultants in the regional offices who would be available to assist DFS workers, upgrades to the FACTS database, post-adoptive services to provide additional supports to families in crisis, and a new licensing specialist for Child Care Licensing. Keith also provided an update on the CFSR and our work to complete the Performance Improvement Plan required by the feds.

Other Business – Janice spoke highly of a book she is reading written by Stacy Dalton, a former child in the foster care system entitled ‘That Mean ‘ole Yesterday’. The book details her struggles in the system and is highly recommended by Janice.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

**Next Meeting – January 16, 2008, 10am-Noon, in Room 201 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack  
Executive Assistant  
Division of Family Services