

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
July 17, 2008

Attendees: PJ Facciolo, Leslie Newman, Julia Pearce, Karen DeRasmo, Dory Zatuchni, Rita Page, Suzanne Seubert, Mary Lou Edgar, Mike Kersteter, Del Failing, Sec. Henry Smith, Shirley Roberts, Laura Miles, Carlyse Giddins, Joseph Smack.

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

Approval of Minutes from prior meeting – Approved with one change, the phone number for Upper Bay is 764-1890.

Secretary Smith – Julia welcomed Henry Smith, the new cabinet secretary of the Department of Services for Children, Youth and their Families. Secretary Smith welcomed the council and thanked the members for their commitment and the value the agency provides to the public. Henry handed out the DFS monthly census snapshot that also shows the percentage of out of home placements. Henry discussed the impacts of Department policies 201 and 209 as the primary drivers for the increase in the number of children in the care of DFS. Henry said that the FY09 budget gives him some optimism that we will be ok. Henry went over the FY09 budget and discussed the sources of our funding. The average growth of the DSCYF general fund was 4% - the state average was 1.8%. Henry went over the adjustments and volume inflation increases. The DFS population contingency adjustment was \$2.4 million and we received an additional \$1.5 million for resource assistance. Henry went over the new initiatives. Henry had another handout to show the reductions from the Department's general fund base budget and showed this by division. Carlyse talked about the growth in kids in care and how that has effected the budget. Suzanne asked about the chart and the dip each June in the number of kids entering care. Carlyse explained that is the annual school's out decline due to the teachers and school nurses not seeing children. Henry noted that DFS has seen an 80% increase in general fund monies during the Minner administration and that the increase has been used to offset federal fund reductions.

CPAC Education Subcommittee – Julia stated that CPAC had recently voted to reconstitute their education subcommittee. The subcommittee is designed to assist in examining prevention and early intervention programs, alternatives in returning to school, education surrogate parents, and the provisions of the McKinney-Vento Act which are not being applied as we would like. Julia asked if anyone was interested in participating on the subcommittee. Del asked if graduation rates and keeping kids on track will be a focus of the subcommittee. Carlyse was not sure if that would be a specific focus but that Delaware does have one of the highest dropout rates in the nation. Julia will supply the council with some data at the next meeting regarding dropout rates and other educational areas.

Extended Board Policy – Shirley presented copies of the new policy that was issued on July 1 and outlined how we had arrived at the changes. Tracking children who leave care is difficult. Fewer than 25% exited with diplomas, GEDs, or completion of other alternative programs like Job Corps. Shirley said this information was very surprising and unsettling. DFS had to do something differently. We had many children who were on extended board who were not succeeding in school. Discussion ensued on the difficulty of tracking these children as they leave care – many make informal arrangements with friends or other family. We are also facing communications issues with how the students are really doing in their educational pursuits. Rita inquired about training for foster parents to help with these situations. Carlyse reported that the Governor’s Foster Care Taskforce made recommendations for training foster parents and improvements have been made in this area. We have coupled with Prevent Child Abuse Delaware to assist in training, asking foster parents to continue training, and base compensation on their level of training. Leslie spoke of the DE Girls Initiative and their finding that the traditional education placements are not always the best match. It is critical to pull together plans early for kids to succeed in their educational endeavors. We are getting some positive feedback from the districts. Suzanne noted that the trend she is seeing in court regarding APPLA is that the judges are waiting until a child is 16-17 years old and that there needs to be a balance. Shirley stated that the goals for children need to be visited on a routine basis to see if APPLA is still applicable. Circumstances sometimes change and children will decide they do indeed want to be adopted, their family may have healed sufficiently to have them return, or another route of permanency is identified.

Other Business / Future Focus – Mary Lou reported on National Adoption Day (November 15) and that Delaware will celebrate for the first time with a statewide event on the same day. The event will be at Del Tech’s Terry Campus in Dover. There will be a panel discussion of young adoptees, a Heart Gallery of children looking for ‘forever families’, and lots of information tables. The intention is to make this an annual event. Mary Lou reported that Delaware is going to participate in a pilot program (3-5-7 Program) with Oklahoma and Pennsylvania to help young people better understand what adoption is about. Mary Lou talked about how people can view the children on AdoptUSkids.org and that children can now go on the site to look at what families they think they would best be suited for them and to help them decide what they may want. Carlyse said that we should have more kids that we support with adoption subsidies than we do in foster care.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

Next Meeting – October 16, 2008, 10am-Noon, in Room 198 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services