

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
October 16, 2008

Attendees: PJ Facciolo, Leslie Newman, Janice Mink, Julia Pearce, Robbie Hoosty, Carol Post, Nnamdi Chukwuocha, Mary Lou Edgar, Mike Kersteter, 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 unanimously.

Opening Comments – Julia announced that Carlyse was being honored with the Child Placement Review Board Cupery Award, named for longtime chair Shirley Cupery and awarded for personifying one of the characteristics reflected in Shirley’s work:

- Leadership that strives for innovative and responsive services for children
- Harmonious and respectful resolution to issues relating to children
- Relentless or inspirational advocacy on behalf of children

Julia reported that Carlyse was being recognized for embodying all of those characteristics. Julia had asked Council members to make comments to include in a card to Carlyse on their thoughts of working with her. Julia presented the card to Carlyse and read some of the comments aloud. Carlyse thanked everyone – this is her passion and it has been a pleasure to work with the Advisory Council and receive their support and that of the community partners and advocates.

Economic Downturn – Carlyse shared the DFS Accomplishments document for 2001-08. The document is a witness to the hard work that has been accomplished through these years. Carlyse expects the economic downturn to have an impact. The State is currently in a hiring review. DFS has eight caseworker vacancies. CPAC will request an exemption from the hiring review for DFS. There is a projected shortfall that will have to be addressed for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2009 and projected reductions for FY 10. A 5% general fund reduction (\$653,900 in FY 09) would be required. Janice inquired where the reductions would come from. Carlyse responded that we are continuing to manage the foster care population, examining APPLA and reexamining a family’s situation. We have been very successful in adopting children from the foster care system, 120 last year, and will continue to work in that area. We may have to make some tough decisions that impact service providers. We have 14 vacancies – 8 are frontline case carriers. FY10 could see possible 10% cuts. We have seen hotline reports increase 18% from FY 07 to 08. Janice inquired if DFS was concerned over the safety of children? Carlyse is concerned over expectations to meet standards. Where do we close the door? Carlyse said that we would have to look at teens because children are more vulnerable. Other states are beginning to venture into this area. Mike asked when we might know of the impact to service providers. Carlyse said probably after the December DEFAC projections meeting. Laura said that DFS staff may have to do more instead of utilizing contracted services. Leslie talked about Child Inc’s Family Function Therapy that has shown good outcomes with children 10 and over. The family engagement is a 20-30 week involvement. The

program started in August and they have some openings, especially in Kent and Sussex. It is a voluntary service and Child Inc. will go into the client's home or community location. The services are for families in conflict and are free of charge. They are funded thru '09. Leslie reports that some states reimburse the provider with Medicaid funds. They are working with DHSS to see if this could be possible in Delaware.

Training Update – Laura handed out a list of refresher trainings that have been accomplished from 2001-08. Intake and Initial Response training will be accomplished by all frontline workers and will cover clarifying statutes, policy and procedures, physical punishment, justified force, new reports vs progress notes, document requirements, Adam Walsh requests. Reportline staff will be trained by the end of December and then all others into 2009. We will also be looking at our policy and Performance Improvement Plan for future training needs. Carlyse noted that when we have the training dates, if any member of the Council would like to attend, we will try to accommodate them. A list of the dates will be sent at a later date.

APPLA Workgroup – Shirley stated that the workgroup is continuing to meet every other month. A subset is currently examining the driver's license bill and developing the policy. There are a lot of legal and insurance requirements that come into play with this policy. APPLA recently met with the Dept. of Labor. We learned of several programs available to assist the population of kids leaving foster care, programs we never knew about. Shirley will attend DOL meetings to work with them more closely. Shirley reported that some children have been through money management training. Children get \$200 any use money and \$200 into a WSFS account they cannot touch until age 18. WSFS has been a great partner in giving ATM cards and accounts. Leslie inquired if bio parents or other adults would have access to the kid's account? Laura said she would find out (note: Laura has confirmed that parents will not be able to access accounts). Work continues towards the enhancement of housing options and a film highlighting APPLA kids. Shirley reports that the Court has made major changes to hold parents accountable and engage them early.

Family Case Conferencing – This training brings the family and those close to the family together to examine aids they can provide when a child first comes into care. Shirley reported that we are still facing a lot of children entering care for the first time as teens. We have 110 seventeen year olds and aging out is a big issue. Shirley discussed how case conferencing works. Each region will reach out to staff to see who can lead the process. The hope is to have the program in place by November and is expected to be called something else – the name should better fit what the training is about. We expect to have a bubble of children and then expect 3-4 conferences per month per region.

National Adoption Day – Mary Lou reported that Delaware will celebrate for the first time with a statewide event on the same day (November 15). 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. There will be four workshops:

1. Family Building thru Adoption

2. Sex Talk
3. Life Books
4. Developmental Issues

There will be lots of entertainment including a police dog, Irish dancers, etc. There will also be a ceremony for children who have been adopted during the year. The intention is to make this an annual event.

Driver's License and Fundraising – Joe reported on Senate Bill 262 that was sponsored by Sen. Lianne Sorenson and signed by Governor Minner on July 30 and allows DFS workers to sign for teens in foster care to obtain a driver's license without assuming liability. A partnership was established with the Insurance Commissioner and AIG Direct to develop low-cost, portable automobile insurance policies that could be made available to teens in care and those who have recently aged out. While AIG has strived to keep the policies low, the premiums might still be beyond the means of the teens. In addition to insurance, there are associated costs with licensing fees and possibly in obtaining the 50 additional hours of driving necessary after driver's education is completed. To that end, DFS has endeavored to raise fund to offset these costs. Joe handed out a draft fundraising letter and asked for input on groups, companies, or other organizations that could assist. Suggestions consisted of the Delaware Bar Association, UD Greek organizations, the Key Club. Mike Kersteter inquired when the driver's license policy would be finalized. Peoples Place II has a vehicle and insurance policy ready to go for their kids, but need the approval of DFS workers. Carlyse reported that the policy is on target for January 1.

Future Focus – Julia reported that she and Shirley had traveled to Kentucky to present on public/private partnerships. Three groups were highlighted; CPAC, DFS Advisory and Advocacy Council and the APPLA workgroup. Other states were amazed at our partnerships. Shirley noted that our organizational structure has helped make improvements easier. Stability has allowed us to move things along. Julia would like to build on the networking aspects of our partnerships by asking council members to conduct a 20 minute presentation about their organization and the strengths and opportunities they see in the child welfare system. The council liked the idea. This will begin with the January meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 12:05 pm.

Next Meeting – January 21, 10am-Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services