

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
January 29, 2009

Attendees: PJ Facciolo, Leslie Newman, Allison McDowell, Suzanne Seubert Julia Pearce, Mary Lou Edgar, Mike Kersteter, Laura Miles, Joseph Smack.

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

Approval of Minutes from prior meeting – Approved unanimously.

Opening Comments – Julia provided an update on Delaware’s celebration of National Adoption Day on November 15. It was a great success with several hundred people in attendance.

Ivyanne Davis Memorial Scholarship & ETV Presentation – Julia showed a Power Point presentation on the Ivyanne Davis Memorial Scholarship and the Educational and Training Voucher funds that her office administers. Julia explained that the Ivyanne funds are for children who age-out of the foster care system. The money goes to the independent living providers directly for assistance with tuition, room and board, books, fees, equipment, etc. Davis does not cover rent or transportation. There is no maximum amount per year that a child may receive from Davis. There is a \$5,000 maximum for ETV funds per year for a maximum of four years. ETV can be used for direct school expenses, rent, utilities, transportation, and childcare. Julia highlighted the eligibility, student expectations, and how the scholarship committee decides on awardees and amounts. Julia went over the award cycle of how a child applies, interview process, review of grades, etc. Julia tries to keep the process and awards flexible. All children who qualify for a scholarship or voucher receive some assistance. Julia urged anyone who may have questions to contact her.

DFS Update – Laura presented on behalf of Carlyse who was in a departmental meeting. Carlyse remains DFS director. The Department is participating in the state’s Performance Review Project which was initiated by Governor Markell. This is a long-term strategy to determine government efficiencies. Our new cabinet secretary, Vivian Rapposelli, has assumed her position. DFS leadership met with Sec. Rapposelli earlier in the week to brief her on our work.

The DFS presentation of the Fiscal Year 2010 budget to the Joint Finance Committee is scheduled for February 24 in the Senate Chamber. The Department’s presentation begins at 10am with DFS tentatively scheduled to present at 1:30pm (or immediately following the lunch break). There are no new initiatives in FY10. DFS has submitted proposals to trim our budget by 7% in FY09 and 15% in FY10. Decisions are all pending at this time.

Julia inquired if any thought has been given to how furloughs would be applied to staff. Laura said that she has heard that other state agencies are considering this as an option to meet reduction targets. However, there has not been any discussion of furloughs as of yet

within DSCYF or DFS. DFS has been extremely fortunate to be able to hire frontline staff during a hiring freeze to assure children are kept safe. We have administrative vacancies that will not be filled in the foreseeable future so that we can make sure that frontline staff positions are advanced. Any furloughs would have to be handled as a state policy, taking into consideration union issues and other factors. Mike had read that the Governor's Recommended Budget included 15% reductions across the board for agencies. Laura confirmed that we have prepared a budget with 15% reductions, but no decisions have been made on these proposals.

Leslie inquired if it was a policy now to not refer cases to contractors. She stated that Children and Families First Functional Family Therapy Initiative is not being utilized in Kent or Sussex. This home-based service could help keep kids from coming into care. It is getting to a point that C&FF is suffering from not receiving referrals. Laura said that DFS is in a holding pattern. All program managers have been instructed to hold the line on spending and they cannot overspend their contracted amounts. Laura said that she would look into Leslie's concerns and ensure that the regional supervisors are aware of the Functional Family Therapy Initiative (see attached information sheet).

Laura reported that DFS currently has a \$1.3 million deficit. The number of children in foster care continues to be high, but is leveling off which is contributing to the improvement in our financial position. There are 915 children in the state's custody with 791 children in paid foster care placements and 124 not in paid care. Forty-three percent of the foster care population is 13 years of age or older. On January 1, 2009, there were 104 seventeen year olds in care.

Laura reported that DFS had been receiving report line calls and referrals from the State Service Centers and others concerning utility payment assistance for families. This was cause for concern as there were no reported concerns related to child abuse and neglect. Carlyse contacted the head of the Service Centers to reiterate the DFS mandate. Carlyse also contacted the Helpline also to let them know we have been receiving a lot of calls concerning assistance and that we would be referring these calls to the Helpline.

Laura said that the STEPS program – Stairways to Encourage Personal Success is a positive program which is designed to allow teens preparing to age out of care to assist in their planning for their transition from foster care. This is a youth driven process with the youth identifying the participants that they need in the meeting to outline their transition plan. Facilitators were solicited in-house and many volunteers stepped forward to assist. The STEPS facilitator curriculum was designed by the Division's Professional Development Unit and has been a great success. Julia shared that the youth they have surveyed know about STEPS and have really bought in on the plan. She is excited by the early results.

Laura reported that we are developing a specialized foster care pre-service curriculum for those who will be fostering teens. The 27 hours of training required for foster parents will concentrate on addressing the needs of this population specifically.

Marylou talked about a Youth Pilot Program that would train young people on what being adopted means. This will help reduce fears and misconceptions about adoption and may lead to a reduction in APPLA cases. Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Delaware are participating in the pilot program.

Legislative Update – Joe reported that the Department does not have any major legislation pending for this year. The fiscal climate will not allow any new initiatives to be addressed. The plan is to play defense against any legislation that would unduly burden staff without the addition of resources. One bill (SB 10) has been introduced that would allow a licensed childcare provider to operate after school programs in any school without having each facilities operation approved by the Office of Child Care Licensing. Allison noted that OCA has some draft legislation concerning termination of parental rights that will be moving this spring.

Future Focus – Mike Kersteter will present in April on the mission and work of People’s Place. Leslie will present in July for Children’s and Family First and Marylou will present in October.

Marylou would like to continue to look at Child Mental Health Services and would like to invite someone to discuss the ongoing relationship and the new grant CMH has for very young children.

Meeting adjourned at 11:46 am.

Next Meeting – April 15, 10am-Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services