

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
April 15, 2009

Attendees: Leslie Newman, Sue Dougherty, Carol Post, Ellen Levin, Dory Zatuchni, Allison McDowell, Mike Kersteter, Rodney Brittingham, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 10:05 am.

Approval of Minutes from prior meeting – Approved with revision. Leslie stated that the minutes should reflect that she had inquired about two separate issues; the concern that DFS was not making foster care placement referrals to outside agencies and the concern that parties were not aware of the Functioning Family program offered by Children and Families First.

Opening Comments – For the benefit of new DFS Deputy Director, Rodney Brittingham, the Council members introduced themselves and identified what organization they are with and how long they have been on the Council.

People's Place II Presentation – Mike Kersteter gave a presentation on the history and work of People's Place II. From humble beginnings as a youth drop-in center in the early 1970's, People's Place has evolved into a multi-service organization with programs in all three counties. Last year, People's Place counseled over 4,000 individuals in five full-service counseling locations. Over half the clientele served are under the age of 18. Domestic Violence treatment and shelter services were added in 1978. The program has now evolved into sanctuary services for DV victims. Carol Post added that People's Place is using innovative models that hold tremendous promise and may be duplicated on a national level. Mike reported they have room for 18 family members in Kent and 11 in Sussex. The program has a treatment component, clinical treatment, support groups, childcare, and a specialized clinic for children specializing in post-traumatic stress disorders.

People's Place has a certified offenders program that serves 1500-1700 people a year and run visitation centers in Dover, Georgetown, and Milford. They run the Kent and Sussex sites for parental and non-custodial parental visits (Child Inc. is in charge of New Castle County).

In the area of children services, PPII operates three long-term foster care group homes for high-end placement and complicated behaviors in children ages 12-18. Two homes are for boys and are located in Townsend and Milford. A home for girls is operated in Milford. Each home can accommodate eight teens and are fully staffed. PPII administers a non-secured detention program that is a structured education and residential program for youth who have been arrested and being held until a court appearance. PPII also administers the Center for Community Justice which mediates misdemeanors – half of which are juveniles charged with property crimes and other offenses. Both the victim and perpetrator have to agree to mediation and meet the conditions set by the Dept. of Justice. There is an 87% restitution rate from this program with 270 cases closed in a year. PPII offers case management for low-income Delawareans that includes housing assistance,

employment, etc. money for the program is through the community block grant and has seen a large increase with the federal stimulus package. They offer a program for incarcerated veterans to help them in transitioning back to society. There is a serious offender mediation program where victims of violent crimes or their survivors can confront the perpetrator. Both parties must agree on participation and are counseled and prepared for the meetings. Future plans for PPII are to add ten additional transitional housing units. Mike stated that any persons wishing a tour of People's Place facilities or programs could contact him at 302-422-8033.

DFS Update – Deputy Director Rodney Brittingham shared data that was reported to the Child Protection Accountability Commission the prior week. Rodney reported that DFS caseworker turnover continues to be low, caseloads are holding steady, and the number of children coming into care is going down slightly. Leslie inquired if DFS is seeing an increase in reports of child abuse / neglect. Rodney reported that there has not been an increase, but we traditionally see an upswing in the spring months due to reports from school personnel. Mike asked if DFS could provide data on the number of substantiated cases of abuse that were related to domestic violence cases. Leslie asked if DFS could provide data showing a historic trend of the number of DFS foster homes compared to the number of provider foster homes. Rodney and Joe said that they would pose those inquiries to the data team for analysis and share as soon as it is accomplished.

Legislative Update – Joe presented on pending legislative bills that have an impact on the child welfare community. One bill highlighted would allow tax payers to designate a contribution to the 21st Century Fund for Delaware's Children. This would replace the designation that had existed for the Children's Trust Fund. Leslie urged the Council members to utilize the 21st Century Fund for their clients and that they could make application for the funds on the department website, www.kids.delaware.gov

Future Focus –Leslie will present in July for Children's and Family First and Marylou will present in October.

Meeting adjourned at 11:46 am.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services