

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

Attendees: Julia Pearce, Leslie Newman, Mary Lou Edgar, Allison McDowell, Karen DeRasmo, Mike Kersteter, PJ Facciolo, Suzanne Suebert, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 10:05 am.

Opening Comments – Julia welcomed the Council members and asked for them to review and approve the minutes from the April meeting.

Approval of Minutes from prior meeting – Approved without revision.

Children & Families First Presentation – Leslie gave a presentation on the history and work of Children & Families First and handed out two pamphlets highlighting their services. Leslie said that C&FF is a merger of five organizations and began as Associated Charities in 1884. Core services were retained from each of the five service organizations. Leslie said that their main strength is also their main challenge: being statewide and comprehensive. Their goal is to build on the continuum of services and not to encroach on the services others in the state provide. Leslie highlighted the Strengthening Families program and its context with the Children's Department. Leslie also discussed Functional Family Therapy which is a home-based model of therapy. Therapists are trained to look at the family and see if patterns emerge. There is an emphasis on engaging and motivating the family. There have been very good results noted, especially with children involved with the juvenile justice system. Leslie highlighted the Nurse-Family Partnership which is an evidence based model linking a registered nurse with first-time pregnant mothers. The nurse is not there for medical purposes but rather to decrease incidents of abuse and neglect. There is evidence also that children in this program are less likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system and have less reliance on welfare. The program is currently funded for slightly over three positions, but C&FF have plans to hire four additional nurses to serve Kent and Sussex counties.

C&FF provides foster care throughout the state with their Level IV-V homes in Kent and Sussex. Leslie said that their Emergency In-home Shelter Care is underutilized. C&FF excels in providing training for foster parents to handle the toughest kids.

The Kinship Navigator program helps people who are raising other people's children to navigate the various services and benefits they can utilize. C&FF are working to increase the quality and availability of quality daycare in Delaware. Their best known program involvement is Delaware Stars. They have partnered with the University of Delaware to help initiate this national ranking and training system for child care providers. C&FF supports older adults with their Elder Buddy program and hopes to expand the program in the near future. The organization will be changing their mission statement to a more strength-based and opportunity driven one. Leslie encouraged anyone who wished to visit one of their locations to contact her.

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. Joe will share legislative updates with the Council on a regular basis via email.

DFS Update – Joe shared data that was reported to the Child Protection Accountability Commission the prior week. Joe reported that caseworker turnover continues to be low, but has gone up slightly over last year’s total. Caseloads are holding steady, and the number of children coming into care is going down slightly. Joe reported on the seven retirements that had occurred in DFS and that two more were pending. Joe reported that DFS has recently collaborated with the YMCA to increase the opportunity for children in foster care to attend summer overnight camp at Camp Tockwough. The Y was able to secure funding to increase our slots from 30 last year to 52 this year. Another collaborative effort coordinated by the Office of the Child Advocate and DFS was to obtain tutoring for 16 children in care. A Sanford School teacher has been donating her time and talent this summer to assist the children with their academics. The teacher hopes to obtain funding to expand the program next summer. The Division’s budget for Fiscal Year 2010 was also shared with the Council.

Future Focus – Julia informed the Council that she would like them to consider a new chairperson. She has served in this capacity for the past four years and feels that it is time to allow someone the opportunity.

Mary Lou Edgar will present on the services of the Upper Bay Counseling Services on October 21.

Meeting adjourned at 12:00 pm.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services