

**MINUTES**  
**Division of Family Services**  
**Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting**  
**October 21, 2009**

**Attendees:** Julia Pearce, Mary Lou Edgar, Mike Kersteter, PJ Facciolo, Dory Zatuchni, Ellen Levin, Laura Miles, 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 July meeting.

**Approval of Minutes from prior meeting** – Approved without revision.

**Recreation and Respite Program Presentation** – Mary Lou handed out a pamphlet about the Recreation and Respite Program administered by Upper Bay Counseling and Adoption Services. The program began four years ago with the belief that families do need a break so they can recharge and deal with issues in positive ways. The program began with ten families and chose children who had been dismissed from other programs. Rec & Respite asks parents to commit to having their child attend sessions every other Saturday from 9am – 4pm. The program is free of charge. Parents are charged \$5 per minute if they exceed the 10 minute grace period for pickup. Children in the program range in age from 5 – 16 years old and include both sexes. They have a myriad of diagnoses and levels of development. There is a 1:2 staff to child ratio. The children never leave the site. They participate in games, arts and crafts, cooking, education projects, seasonal projects, group discussions, social skill activities, movies, and community projects. Mary Lou recited several positives from the program: Parents are provided with much needed respite, children have a good time and bond with each other, parents meet other parents, and the children look forward to the program. Rec & Respite is a strengths-based program that stresses positive outcomes and behaviors.

**DFS Update** – Laura thanked the Council for their support during the year. As part of the state budget reductions, DFS put forth five vacant positions for reduction from the employee complement in Fiscal Year 09. The Office of Management and Budget has asked for an additional ten positions in the current fiscal year. These proposed reductions, mainly administrative and support positions, have not yet taken effect. Sussex County has been clobbered by retirements. They have lost their office manager and administrative specialist. Other areas have been providing assistance and we are working to put forth the manager's position for hiring. Laura thanked Secretary Rapposelli and OMB for working to fill our statutorily required positions and have received approval for seven hires. We are in the process of interviewing for the Child Care Licensing Supervisor position that had been vacant for over 10 months. There has been an uptick in the number of reports received. DFS never experienced the slow-down that normally occurs during the summer

months. The investigation numbers are slightly over the standard. CPAC will want to address when the Department asks for additional resources to help investigations. Laura noted that a lot of reports are coming in for neglect and that teens comprise 42% of the foster care population. Laura reported that there are no budget initiatives this year. OMB is asking for budget reductions to be identified in the 5% and 10% range. Laura reported that we continue to make good progress on the Program Improvement Plan for the Children and Family Services Review. Laura discussed the teen foster care training track that was developed to help prepare foster parents to accept teens in their homes. Ten sessions have been held on a variety of topics. The training is also useful for persons interested in adopting a teen from the system. The summer tutoring program that began this summer is expected to grow next year. The Sanford School teacher who started the program has received assistance from Barclay's Bank to expand the program. She is actively recruiting other teachers and has been a real asset to the children she tutored this summer. Chief Judge Kuhn accepted donations from a yoga class fundraiser she held to assist children aging-out of care. A special fiscal line has been established in DFS to accept money for this purpose. Laura discussed the upcoming VISTA (volunteers in service to America) project that would enlist volunteers to mentor children aging-out of foster care. The proposed program would be administered by the Division of State Service Centers and would begin in February 2010. This is an excellent opportunity to provide teens with much needed mentoring and guidance as they prepare for adulthood.

**New Business** – Mike shared that the Whatcoat shelter has merged with Abierto Puertas (Open Doors) and spoke of a possible opportunity to offer housing to children leaving care. They have a capacity of 43 beds and 10 apartment units. Case management by People's Place II is included with the shelter services.

PJ took the opportunity to praise the training DFS has provided to the Brandywine School District concerning the memorandum of understanding between the Department of Education and the Children's Department. PJ said that the MOU has worked well to educate staff about the McKinney-Vento Act.

Mike inquired about the number of out-of-state placements DFS currently has. Laura said that less than 10 children are currently in placements outside of Delaware. They are in programs that are not currently widely offered in-state, such as fire setting, developmental delays, and sexual behaviors.

**Future Focus** –

The Joint Finance Committee hearing for the Department and the VISTA Project will be discussed at the January 20, 2010 meeting.

The April 21 meeting will feature a presentation on Jewish Family Services by Dory Zatuchni.

The July 21 meeting will feature a report on the Kent Youth Pilot Project by Mary Lou Edgar.

Meeting adjourned at 11:50 am.

**Next Meeting – January 20, 2010, 10 am - Noon, in Room 201 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack  
Division of Family Services