

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
July 21, 2010

Attendees: Mary Lou Edgar, Del Failing, Rosalie Morales, Michelle Raymond (OCA intern) Dory Zatuchni, Suzanne Seubert, PJ Facciolo, Frank Perfiniski, Laura Miles, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 10:03 am.

Opening Comments – Mary Lou welcomed the Council members and asked for them to review and approve the minutes from the April meeting. Motion to approve prior minutes made by Suzanne and seconded by Rosalie.

DFS Update – Laura stated that she is interested in studying the spike in reports to the report line. The Department’s data team is still analyzing and should have something in the near future. There has been a 15% increase in reports from FY09 to FY10. In FY09, 9,527 reports were received. In FY10, the number of reports received rose to 11,222. There was also a 9% increase in the number of referrals accepted for investigation. The volume of investigation cases is high – the statewide average is 13 cases (standard is 11 cases). Two casual/seasonal workers have been hired to assist the report line and DFS continues to recruit for casual/seasonal help in investigation. Shirley Roberts led an effort by the administration to close some cases. A human resources issue with posting jobs between University Plaza and Beech Street has been rectified and should speed the process. New worker training detail has been improved with less downtime between trainings. Trainers are also being cross-trained so they will be able to accomplish more trainings as needed.

Treatment caseloads remain below the standard of 18 cases in all regions except Kent. This is due to excessive movement and leave conditions including disability and maternity.

DFS is entering into a new collaborative effort with Medicaid, Diamond State Partners, Delaware Physician’s Care, and Unison. The intent of the program is to create a seamless system for kids. Medicaid will sort a list of all children in care and send them to the appropriate Managed Care Organization (MCO). The MCO will then send the assigned DFS worker a member profile for each child. The MCOs will have a point of contact (POC) for DFS workers to contact. The point person will assist staff to obtain Medicaid cards, refer children to specialists, and assist as needed. This will streamline the process and enable children to receive services faster. In the past, the MCO needed to wait for 30 days until they received an invoice from the physician to be alerted to any new medical issue and to develop the plan of care. This will eliminate that delay.

The annual youth conference for teens in care will be held on August 4 at the Delaware State University student center. This year's conference is titled 'Torn, But Not Broken' and will feature information about job interviews, education and employment opportunities, and have guest speakers. The youth will also tour DSU. There will be a formal memorandum of understanding signing among Governor Markell's cabinet secretaries from the Department of Education, Dept. of Health and Social Services, Department of Labor, Department of Correction, Delaware State Housing Authority, and the Children's Department. The MOU is a codification of the role of each agency in providing necessary supports and services to youth who age out of the Delaware foster care system.

There are 30 Family Unification Vouchers for youth from the Delaware State Housing Authority. Twenty-three are being utilized. Laura met two recipients at a recent Youth Advisory Council meeting who are voucher recipients. One young lady is attending the University of Delaware and was able to secure housing near campus.

Laura reported that after ten years of trying, services for post adoption support has been approved. Upper Bay Counseling Services has been awarded a three-year contract. Frank handed out a brochure for the services. Post adoption support will reach families who have entered into guardianship situations, adoption, and international adoption and is seen as a prevention resource. Upper Bay is looking at grant and other resources to help this population.

This is the second year of a summer tutoring program. There are 26 teachers from Sanford School and Friends School who are tutoring 37 children in care. The children range from elementary school to high school age. The children are being tutored in many subjects, including SAT preparation.

Reports of child abuse, neglect, and dependency are trending up while the number of children in foster care is trending down. DFS is trying to understand why this seemingly paradoxical situation exists. One take is that staff are putting more treatment resources in place for families. The requirement to actively seek family members throughout the child's stay in foster care may have helped alleviate the number of children staying in care. The Family Court is doing a good job also in notifying family members when children are coming into care. There is a review every six months when children are in care to see if the family situation has changed or a new member could possibly care for the child.

Suzanne asked how siblings with different fathers are handled when coming into care. Laura stated that every situation is different, but that DFS tries to keep sibling groups together. However, there are times when siblings must be placed in separate placements.

Mary Lou inquired if there has ever been a data collection tracking how many inmates in the correctional system were formerly in foster care. The national average is 70%, but the Delaware average is unknown. Dory inquired if there was a way to look at how many children in custody of YRS were former children in foster care.

Del asked how many children were making the transition from the Div. of Prevention and Behavioral Health to the adult system each year. Laura said that we will check on that and see if an MOU exists that outlines the process.

Mandatory Reporting of Abuse and Neglect – The Lewes matter was raised by PJ who asked how new legislation is impacting DFS. A CPAC subcommittee including Rosalie Morales and Linda Shannon are working to ensure all training materials are accurately reflecting the new reporting requirements. The website and all written materials have been examined and edited as needed. The new regulations require reporting persons suspected of abuse who work in 34 different vocations to the Division of Professional Regulation. We are working on administrative procedures between the agencies that would help expedite the requirements.

Another new requirement stemming from the Lewes matter is the need to have children ages 15 and under to be examined with another adult or parent present. This will require our workers to ensure that this is being adhered to.

Kent Youth Pilot Project – Frank Perfiniski and Mary Lou Edgar presented on the Kent Youth Project, a pilot program that looked at preparing children to be adopted. The project targeted older children and was also conducted in Pennsylvania and Oklahoma. Delaware identified 17 children at the Murphey School ages 9-18 years. The project was funded by AdoptUSkids. They provided training that enabled workers to learn how to have children look at their past and help them prepare for adoption. Mary Lou shared that she interviewed nine children as part of the project. A lot of children didn't what adoption really means and most feel that everyone lies to them. One child who spent almost his entire life in care felt that no one could handle him. He had put all of the abuse he suffered on himself. Both Mary Lou and Frank stated that the project was worthwhile. It takes in-depth work to prepare children for adoption. The next step will be a report issued by the University of Texas. The hope is that more funds will be available to continue the project on a larger scale.

Future Focus – The October 20 meeting will feature a representative from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Meeting adjourned at 11:55 am.

Next Meeting – October 20, 2010, 10 am - Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services