

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
January 19, 2011

Attendees: Mary Lou Edgar, Del Failing, Rosalie Morales, Alana Kreshtool (OCA intern), Suzanne Seubert, PJ Facciolo, Ellen Levine, Jessica Begley (Family Court CASA Program), Sue Dougherty, Angie Morales (NET), Carol Post, Julia Pearce, Rodney Brittingham, Laura Miles, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 10:00 am.

Opening Comments – Mary Lou welcomed the Council members and had everyone introduce themselves. Mary Lou then asked for the Council to review and approve the minutes from the October meeting. There were no corrections.

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Presentation – Mary Lou introduced Barbara Riley, Program Specialist for Transition with DVR. Ms. Riley shared two success stories for youth in the foster care system who had transitioned to adulthood with DVR assistance. DVR is a statewide service program serving 30 public high schools, alternative and private schools. There are eight full-time transition counselors and five other DVR counselors providing services. The number of students served each year has been growing with 1,778 served in Fiscal Year 2009. Students with disabilities are eligible for DVR services. DVR is under an order of selection from the feds and have to first accept eligible individuals based on severity of disabilities. Transition Services are coordinated activities designed to help the student with: postsecondary education, vocational training, employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, and independent living/community participation.

Carol inquired how adults could access DVR services. Barbara said that adults can self-refer or a professional referral can be accomplished. DVR services usually start in the student's junior year. School records are used as part of the assessment. Sue queried that if a student drops out of school during their participation, do they have to start over with a new counselor if they decide to continue participation? Barbara said that the counseling could continue without a change in specialists. Laura asked to what extent do DVR plans get integrated into other plans for children in care, such as Plans for Children in Care, DDDS, or Individual Education Plans. Barbara that DVR does try to coordinate with these other plans, but that it may not always be practical. Barbara also said that they have an agreement with Delaware Tech's Supportive Education Program that pays for first year college students to take classes and workshops to strengthen English and math skills. Ms. Riley can be reached at barabra.riley@state.de.us or by mobile phone at 302) 561-5610.

DFS Update – Laura thanked the Council members and guests for their support and ongoing work to improve the lives of children. Laura reported that the number of reports of child abuse and neglect continues to be at a record pace. For the quarter ending

December 31, 2010, there were 3,245 new reports of child abuse and neglect with 1,755 being accepted for investigation. The Department is participating in a statewide media campaign to highlight the mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. Secretary Rapposelli has recorded PSAs for the radio and there is a dedicated website iseethesigns.org for information about recognizing and reporting child abuse and neglect.

DFS has added additional supports to the Report Line – one of whom is assisting the supervisor in case determinations.

Investigation caseload averages are still above the standard of 11 cases per worker at 12.7 cases. Beech Street average is 9.3, University Plaza 11.9, Kent 18, and Sussex 13.2. Kent's average is attributed to volume, medical leave, maternity, and other staffing issues. To help address the high caseload totals in investigations, DFS reclassified four existing positions to investigations (early November 2010). DFS also received four redeployed positions from another state agency. That approval was granted on December 29, 2010 and we are actively hiring for those positions.

Laura recently met with staff in the regional offices to discuss workload issues. She is eager to get assistance to the field. Some of the suggestions include the following:

- Shortening the investigation process protocol once safety is assured.
- Contracting with an agency to complete family assessment and offer support services for cases not rising to the level of abuse or neglect, such as Court requested home evaluations during divorce and/or custody cases. If any point child abuse or neglect is suspected or safety is compromised, DFS will step in.
- Hiring additional support staff for regional offices
- Addressing Court demands.
- Using unspent contractual money to support frontline staff by contracting certain services.
- Streamlining FACTS processes.
- Expediting the process for non-cooperative clients.
- Exploring the use of voice recognition software for caseworkers

Laura reported that the Family Unification Vouchers provided by the State Housing Authority are being utilized by 37 youth. There are five more available. Not all the youth have been successful in their housing ventures.

Governor Markell's Cabinet continue to receive updates on 31 youth in a pilot program designed to help clear hurdles they may face as they prepare to leave care.

The Memorandum of Understanding with Delaware State University will be signed on February 14, 2011. The MOU formalizes the agreement to allow two students per year who leave the foster care system to matriculate at DSU. The students are assisted with board, housing, and supports at the University. The program will allow two students per year to enter until a maximum of eight students is reached. The students have to be academically eligible and have the desire to pursue a bachelor's degree.

In January, Delaware became a co-investment site for the Jim Casey Opportunities Initiative. An environmental scan being conducted by DSU and UD will identify strengths and unmet areas related to best serving the needs of youth exiting the foster care system. Delaware will incorporate the Jim Casey strategies of Youth Engagement, Community Partnership Boards, Youth Advisory Boards, Increased Opportunities for Economic Success, Public Will & Policy, and Research, Evaluation & Communication to enhance service delivery and supports to transition age youth. The Delaware Center for Justice thru a grant from the Eckerd Family Foundation will serve as the lead agency in this effort.

The Food Bank of Delaware has offered two scholarship opportunities for youth interested in culinary arts. One has accepted and additional participants will be sought for future classes.

Starting in January 2011, Goodwill Industries will support twelve youth with scholarships for GED preparation and testing. To date, one youth has been assisted with the GED costs at Delaware Tech.

On the federal front, DFS received on January 18 the official release from the Performance Improvement Plan as required by the Child and Family Services Review. Delaware was the second state to be released from the PIP for this round (NM was first). The state has worked on many fronts for the past two years to make significant improvements in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. Laura thanked all those who were involved in seeing this successful outcome. Julia praised the efforts of Keith Zirkle in keeping the PIP process all together. Laura said that Keith would receive special recognition the next day at the All-Management Meeting.

The Department's Joint Finance Committee Hearing is scheduled for February 22, 2011 beginning at 10am in the Senate Chambers. DFS usually is scheduled to present after lunch (1pm). The theme for this year's presentation is 'Working Better Together' and will highlight collaboration between the divisions and community partners.

The Office of Child Care Licensing is being reviewed by the Joint Sunset Commission (JSC) with a public hearing scheduled for February 24. The JSC can recommend some agency tweaks, elimination of the agency, merger, or not make any recommendations at all. OCCL is also working on revising the Delaware Rules for Child Placing Agencies.

Agency Updates – Rosalie thanked PJ for organizing the Brandywine School District employees for the child abuse and neglect trainings.

Carol Post has been named to the National Advisory Council for Domestic Violence. A focus will be on children witnessing DV by sight and sound. Carol would like to tie in healthy relationship trainings to youth aging-out of care.

New Business – Suzanne asked if it could be possible to have the same caseworker stay with a child when transferring from treatment to permanency. She feels that oftentimes there is resentment towards the treatment worker from the child for not allowing them to return home.

Future Focus – The May 4th meeting will feature a presentation on APPLA. The July 20th meeting will feature a presentation from the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.

Meeting adjourned at 11:50 am.

Next Meeting – May 4, 2011, 10am - Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services