

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
May 4, 2011

Attendees: Mary Lou Edgar, Del Failing, Ellen Levin, Sue Dougherty, Julia Pearce, Leslie Newman, 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 January meeting. There were no corrections.

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) Discussion – Laura explained what APPLA is, essentially long-term foster care, and handed out a facts sheet for data as of May 1, 2011. The largest cohort for youth in APPLA are those ages 16 years and up. The federal government highlighted Delaware for having too many children in care with a goal of APPLA. Laura stated that some of the ways we have addressed the issue is to bring Pat O’Brien from the social work and adoption agency ‘You Gotta Believe’ to inspire workers to continue to strive for permanency for these teens. The issue is the follow-up and the early intervention to help achieve permanency. Some DFS staff members are getting access to Facebook to help identify family members and friends who may play positive roles in the lives of these teens.

Leslie inquired if the number of youth with APPLA been consistent. Laura said that 217 youth currently have that goal. Julia reported that the number is down slightly over the years. It was asked if this reduction has been due to youth aging-out of care, adoption, or other reasons. Julia said that some of the reduction is due to a shift in goals after reviews were accomplished. Goal reviews are done at least once per year.

Leslie noted that subsidized guardianship would only cost \$500,000 in Delaware and would not affect permanency goals. Subsidized guardianship is nationally successful. Laura stated that Delaware had this in the past, but the federal requirement for cost benefit analyses to be accomplished was laborious.

Julia inquired about the current rate for foster care remuneration. Laura said that it averages in the mid-\$500s with an average yearly remuneration of \$6,000. Laura inquired if the Council members were aware that DHSS has a Kinship Care program that provides money to help family members with basics, such as bedding and clothing so they can accept a child into their home. DHSS receives \$50,000 annually for this program.

Discussion ensued on the possibility of having a concurrent planning goal that would help reduce APPLA goals. Julia proposed naming the concurrent goal as ‘SSP – Still Seeking Permanency’ to be used with APPLA as a reported goal (APPLA is used by the

federal government). Laura said that the CPAC APPLA workgroup will be meeting later in May and will have more information to share at the next Council meeting.

DFS Update – Laura thanked the Council members and guests for their support and ongoing work to improve the lives of children. Report Line totals are rising – through the end of March, 10,069 reports of abuse, neglect, or dependency had been received. Last year's total of 11,222 reports will soon be eclipsed. Laura reported that frontline staff at the Report Line has been increased by 43%.

Investigation caseloads continue to be a focus for management. The March 31st average for a fulltime worker was 13.6 cases. The goal in statute is 11 cases. DFS experienced the usual February-March spike in the number of reports. A recent analysis showed that if DFS had not put additional assets in the investigations units, the average would have been 17.5 cases.

Kent investigation cases remain high at 18.1 cases per fulltime worker. Additional resources have been added with transfers from treatment and casual seasonal assistance. A position in Kent was reclassified to create a third treatment unit. Leslie noted that Children & Families First receives the least referrals for their family services, including their Functional Family Therapy program. Laura stated that this would be addressed so that Kent was aware of the service availability.

DFS examined Interstate Compact cases that were investigated by DFS. This was done to determine if these cases could have been better handled by the Interstate Compact Unit to conduct home studies.

Three hundred Dragon Speaking Naturally licensees have been purchased and training for this voice recognition software is underway. This will help speed the input process for notes and other information into the FACTS database. DFS is also examining other technology that could assist staff.

There have continued to be numerous long-term leave for medical, maternity, and other reasons. This has impacted caseloads and coverage. DFS has been able to hire dual-incumbents to help cover caseloads.

Family Assessment and Resource Solution will be presented at CPAC in July. Sue Murray and Linda Shannon will present the program model that is designed to help divert low-risk and home study cases to community based groups for assessment and service provision. DFS will be receiving some assistance from the Annie E. Casey foundation. The child protection laws allow this track along with an investigatory approach opportunity to serve low-risk families. DFS feels that child safety will not be compromised on this arrangement. The priority for DFS is to get the caseload averages below standards. The Power Point presentation that will be presented at CPAC will be shared with the Council in July.

The number of children in foster care is inching up. A few large families had come into care in the past few months. The top two reasons for the spike are children ages 0-6 coming into care for neglect and teens ages 13-17 for dependency.

As part of the Bradley bills that passed the legislature last year, DFS is required to report to the Division of Professional Regulation (DPR) any suspected child abuse or neglect by a licensed professional in Delaware. The initial data run of 65,000 professionals revealed 65 persons involved in an active case. Weekly reports are being submitted to DPR. DPR is utilizing the criminal history form from DFS when a person applies for a professional license.

Independent Living/Youth Aging Out – the State Housing Authority is scheduled to have their Bond Bill Hearing later that afternoon. They are urging passage of a proposal that would add 50 additional housing vouchers for youth aging out of care.

A memorandum of understanding was signed between the Kids Dept. and Delaware State University on February 14 to continue the agreement that allows two youth per year to matriculate at DSU with certain provisions. Goldey Beacom is proposing a similar model that would allow one student per year to attend. This is expected to be in place for the fall.

Foster care training – with a reduction in the number of foster home coordinators in the state, it was decided that the training duties of these positions would better be handled by contracted persons. This will free-up foster care staff to work more directly with children and families.

Agency Updates – Sue Dougherty noted that FAFSA (Fostering Adoption to Further Student Achievement Act) information is not widely understood by families that adopt teens from foster care. Many assume that their family income would count towards any financial aid that a student might apply for. The FAFSA guidelines hold that students adopted from foster care would be classified as ‘Independent’ students and their adoptive families income would not be considered. Sue feels this information should be shared with foster families and permanency workers.

Children & Families First’s Nurse Family Partnership program is in all three counties. They need more referrals in Kent and Sussex.

New Business – Leslie reported that Children & Families First is part of children’s advocacy groups and would be happy to bring Delaware’s interests to these groups.

Future Focus – the July meeting will feature a presentation by Carol Post of the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence

The October meeting will focus on Extended Jurisdiction.

Meeting adjourned at 12:07 pm.

Next Meeting – July 20, 2011, 10am - Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services