

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
July 20, 2011

Attendees: Mary Lou Edgar, Julia Pearce, Leslie Newman, Carol Post, Jessica Begley, Dory Zatuchni, Stacy Brenner (A Better Chance for Our Children), 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. As this was Laura’s last meeting as DFS Director, Mary Lou presented her with a framed inspirational quote about impacting the lives of children. Laura thanked the Council for their gestures and for the diligent work they do for the children of Delaware. Mary Lou then asked for the Council to review and approve the minutes from the May meeting. There were no corrections.

Domestic Violence Presentation – Carol Post, Executive of the Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence conducted a Power Point presentation about Recognizing Domestic Violence and Accessing Resources. Carol defined domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviors used by one partner to control the other in an intimate relationship. Carol covered why victims stay, the risk to children, and resources available to help. Carol highlighted the Domestic Violence / DFS Liaison Program in all three counties and the work accomplished. Carol also discussed helping children heal from domestic violence. Carol is available to present at any agency event upon request

DFS Update – Laura reported that DFS had received 14,010 reports of child abuse and neglect in fiscal year 2011. That total exceeded last year’s total by 25%. The investigations caseload standard is 11 cases per worker. DFS ended the fiscal year at 11.1. Kent staff made a concerted effort to move cases to treatment with one supervisor staying until midnight on June 30th. With these efforts and the creation of a third Investigations unit, Kent’s rate fell to 9.4 cases as a result.

Dragon Speaking Naturally voice recognition software has been purchased for 300 licenses. The software allows workers to transcribe notes into the FACTS system without typing. It is a huge timesaver and is helping workers in many areas.

Treatment caseloads are still below the standard of 18 cases. The number of children in foster care has increased and is beginning to approach 900 children in care.

Independent Living continues to make strides in services. The 9th Annual Youth Conference is scheduled for August 3rd and is entitled 'It's Not Where You Came From, It's Where You Are Headed'. The State Housing Authority was able to gain an additional 50 housing vouchers for Independent Living youth and family unification. This will help serve additional clients.

The collaboration with Delaware State University continues. Two students from the Independent Living program completed their first year at DSU. Two additional youth will begin in the fall.

An environmental scan of services available to assist youth has been conducted by the University of Delaware and Delaware State University. An advisory board has been established and will be led by Lt. Governor Denn to help assess needs in the community. The report can be found at <http://www.ipa.udel.edu/publications/PhaseIIEnvScan.pdf>

Laura reported that Kind to Kids is interested in teaching life skills curricula for children in care ages 14-16 years old. This would remove the responsibility from DFS workers and enable them to concentrate on other areas of need. The Kind to Kids life skills model follows the Casey model. The skills imparted are the basic daily living skills necessary; finances, shopping, housing, relationships, etc.

Credit reports for youth in care and those aging-out are now available. Supports are also available with other state agencies to help rebuild credit and assist with identity theft issues.

The 2011 fiscal year closed June 30th. The fiscal year 2012 budget provides for slight increases to provider contracts. Emerging issues include ensuring proper resources are available on the frontline.

Laura reported on Structured Decision Making (SDM) and Differential Response which utilizes tools to assess families for low, medium, or high service levels and was recommended by the CPAC Risk Assessment Subcommittee to replace the 1987 Risk Assessment model currently used in Delaware. Differential Response is currently used by 16 states as an alternate to traditional response models. Possible Differential Response cases would be out of state courtesy requests, non-relative assessments, and drug-exposed infant cases. The next steps in implementing SDM and Differential Response will be; gaining technical assistance, measuring community capacity, establishing workgroups, and eventual training for staff. The goal is to have SDM ready in the fall with a worst case scenario ready for the launch of FACTS II.

Agency Updates – Jessica Begley from the Office of the Child Advocate gave the dates for Child First training (October 3-7). The annual Protecting Delaware's Children Conference focusing on strengthening the multi-disciplinary approach is scheduled for October 19-20. Registration will begin on October 1 via the OCA website.

Carol gave the date for the Domestic Violence Prevention Conference on September 16th. Primary focus is to help parents and teachers to learn about healthy relationships, gender impacts, and how we look at violence in our society.

Mary Lou reported that the National Adoption Day celebration will be held on November 19th at DelTech's Terry Campus, Dover. There will be a morning session on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders and Pat O'Brien will conduct an afternoon session with parents on maintain the commitment when the going gets tough.

Dory reported that Jewish Family Services Media Matters program will present Reel Talk, a video production of a day with Governor Markell and PSAs all done by adjudicated youth. Reel Talk will be shown on September 14 at The Queen. Additional information can be found at the JFS website. www.jfsdelaware.org

Future Focus – The October 18 meeting will feature a presentation on Structured Decision Making.

Meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.

Next Meeting – October 18, 2011, 10am - Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services