

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
January 18, 2012

Attendees: Leslie Newman, Sue Dougherty, Mary Lou Edgar, Ellen Levin, Rosalie Morales, Rita Boyer, Karen DeRasmo, Julia Pearce, Carol Post, Suzanne Seubert, Del Failing, PJ Facciolo, Rita Paige, Vicky Kelly, Lauren Myers (OCA intern), Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 10:05 am.

Approval of prior meeting minutes - approved unanimously without change.

Opening Comments – Leslie introduced herself and had everyone go around the room and talk about their connection and passion in helping children. Leslie thanked everyone for sharing and working together to become a voice for our kids. The Council is here to offer suggestions, give feedback, have conversations about whether support or constructive criticism is needed. Leslie asked what voices were not at the table that could possibly make the Council stronger.

- Suzanne said a few more legal advocates at the table would help give the court perspective and that she would come up with a few names for consideration.
- Rita Boyer felt the children in care or those who had recently aged out would be valuable.
- Vicky noted that YAC has grown to 50 to 60 members who attend on a regular basis. It was noted that Casey was very impressed with YAC. Their motto “nothing about us without us” is powerful. Vicky discussed the director for a day program that will begin in February that allows a youth to serve as DFS director for a day.
- Rita B. said that she has reached out to foster parents who have children in her daycare about possibly serving on the Council. She hopes to have confirmation in the very near future.
- Mary Lou felt that families who adopt older children could bring a perspective to the Council.
- PJ suggested representatives from both prevention and behavioral health and youth rehabilitative services.

Leslie asked that Council members continue to think about who they would like to see at the table and to let her or Vicky know if they need assistance in reaching out to possible new members.

Leslie turned the conversation to meeting time and place. The current time and location of the meetings is convenient for us but not for the youth and foster parents we seek. Leslie noted that her organization varies times and locations for board meetings to accommodate different schedules. She has access to videoconferencing in Wilmington, Dover and Georgetown and offers the service if the times work. Leslie asked if there would be a consideration to vary meeting location between Wilmington and Dover to encourage participation from across the state. The group agreed. Leslie asked how the Council felt about meeting at another time of day. Suzanne likes the idea. Susan Dougherty noted that many children are in alternative schools so day-time meetings later in the day might be okay. Carol felt that it would be harder for others in the committee to come in the daytime and it could be problematic. A discussion ensued over proposed times. A meeting at 6 PM 9 AM and 3 PM were suggested. The meetings will be split between Dover and a location in New Castle County the possibilities being Buena Vista or the Appoquinimink State Service Center. Julia asked if mileage reimbursement for non-partners could be considered. Vicky said she will examine this proposal.

DFS Update – Vicky noted that she has been director for the past 5 1/2 months. The Annie E. Casey assessment is deep in the process and they are excited by the work in building the foundation for a stronger child welfare system. We are very strong in safety and have good results for permanency especially for young children (not teens). We have opportunities for improvement in well-being and placement stability especially for teens. There's a problematic loss of academic achievement when children have placement stability issues. We have a high percentage of youth aging out without permanence and a low Title IV-E capture rate. Casey will help us address these issues. There is a 3 to 4 year commitment by Annie E. Casey in this assessments and follow-through. Casey will attend the DFS management meeting on February 14 at the Sheraton in Dover. It is hoped this will facilitate discussion and help build for cultural changes. A full rollout of the completed assessment in an open stakeholder forum will take place probably in Dover as well. Casey Family Programs are interested in working with us in investing in programs and projects. Casey Family has a \$2.6 billion endowment and with their assistance, Delaware could be a model in the nation for child welfare.

Rita Boyer asked what is meant by permanency. Vicky responded that the highest bar for permanency would be adoption/permanent guardianship followed by relational permanence where youth are connected to at least one adult, if not more.

A Community Partnership Board is being established and will be led by Lt. Governor Denn. There will be subgroups led by business, health, and community leaders. Each committee will have a representative from YAC.

Vicky provided the Council with copies of the Annie E. Casey presentation shared at the CPAC meeting the prior week. She reported that caseloads for staff are an ongoing

challenge and we are struggling to meet the mandated caseload standards. The current average is 13.4 for investigations, over the standard 11 cases. The highest average tends to be in Kent County. DFS has added eight employees in investigation units and casual/seasonal supports to assist. The volume of reports is 'frightening'. Last fiscal year, 14,010 were received with 7,300 investigated. The initial thought was that DFS would receive 16,000 reports this fiscal year however the totals are trending to exceed 17,000. A mandatory reporting campaign is set to kickoff in April with radio ads and billboards advertising the responsibility of everyone to report suspected child abuse and neglect. This campaign could further increase the number of reports received. The average treatment caseload is 16, two below the standard of 18 cases. This figure is artificially low due to cases being counted as a family unit and not individual children. CPAC has established two new committees, one focusing on permanency outcomes and one on data usage. Vicky will chair the permanency outcome committee. The data usage committee will examine what data would be most useful and important for safety, permanency and wellbeing. It is hopeful that these committees will help DFS.

There have been several staffing changes within DFS. Ione Truesdale has retired as Kent County Regional Administrator. Carla Benson-Green has assumed this position with Sue Radecki leaving Beech Street to accept the University Plaza position vacated by Carla. Stephanie Guiswite from YRS has been hired as the regional administrator for Beech Street. In an effort to keep Council informed on DFS activities between meetings, the DFS weekly report will be sent to members.

The DFS Joint Finance Hearing is scheduled for February 16 beginning at 10am. DFS is expected to testify at 1:30 in the Senate chambers. The Governor's Recommended Budget includes \$750,000 for Differential Response. This is the only new initiative in the Department's budget this fiscal year. Vicky thanked the Governor's Office for their support. The Council agreed that Leslie should testify at the JFC in support of the Differential Response funding request on behalf of the Council.

Susan Dougherty inquired about assistance for teen mothers in care who are placed with their children. Vicky noted that DE applied for a federal grant to help address this need.

Rosalie asked if criteria for Differential Response had been established. Vicky said no and that a national expert will come to work with DFS and stakeholders to build what resources would be needed to provide family assessments for low-risk. Rosalie also noted that every state that utilizes Differential Response does it differently and that no one model exists. Vicky said that community partners would be contracted to provide family assessments for low-risk families. If the family is not cooperative or moderate to high-risk exists, a referral will be made back to DFS. If Differential Response is not enacted, the opportunity to miss a case rises and that could be detrimental to child safety. In addition, many teens coming into care do not necessarily need to be in care.

Agency Updates – Suzanne noted that the DHSS program 'Stand By Me' assists youth to complete the FASFA forms for financial aid and offers budgeting assistance.

Rosalie said that Child First training for child forensic interviewing will be held from April 23-27 in Newark. The training is free of charge and can be accessed from the Office of Child Advocate online training calendar.

Future Focus – Continue to recruit new council members. Potential members can be directed to Leslie, Vicky or Joe.

Meeting adjourned at 12:03 pm.

Next Meeting – May 9, 2012, 4pm – 6pm, Murphey School, Ehinger Hall, 42 Kings Highway, Dover, DE 19901. Directions and further information will follow prior to meeting date. Meeting will feature a presentation by the Youth Advisory Council

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services