

**MINUTES**  
**Division of Family Services**  
**Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting**  
**August 14, 2012**

**Attendees:** Leslie Newman, Mary Lou Edgar, Rosalie Morales, Suzanne Seubert, Vicky Kelly, Julie Miller, Amanda Brennan, Jesus McClain, Kia Clarke, Felicia Kellum, Lilliana Nguyen, Beth Christman, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 4:00 pm.

**Approval of prior meeting minutes** - approved unanimously without change.

**Opening Comments** – Leslie welcomed everyone to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves.

**Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative** – Julie Miller and Amanda Brennan from the Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative (DYOI) presented on the work they are accomplishing on issues related to youth aging-out of foster care. The Community Partnership Board, chaired by Lt. Governor Matt Denn, has eight established workgroups that are exploring policies relevant to the DYOI mission. Board members include representatives from private and public enterprises. Foster youth, including individuals from the Youth Advisory Council (YAC), sit on the board as well, as it is their first-hand experiences that will help identify what is most needed in terms of resources, policies, and practices.

**Youth Advisory Council (YAC)** – Jesus McClain reported that the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual YAC Conference was held on August 1<sup>st</sup> at Delaware State University. He said that about 100 youth attended the conference. Jesus said it was a very positive conference and feels that youth do have a voice with YAC. Twenty to thirty youth attend each meeting with new members at each one. He said that he would like to see meetings in other locations besides Dover. Amanda said that the Delaware YAC model is being touted by Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative as a national model for youth involvement. Kia Clarke mentioned the recent YAC retreat to Frank’s Island that was designed to help youth with their leadership skills. Suzanne Seubert asked Jesus if he had received assistance with housing as he was leaving foster care. Jesus reported that Lifelines was an immediate help and taught him many valuable skills such as cooking, writing checks and other life skills. A question was raised as to whether former youth are allowed to return for Independent Living services if they leave. Felicia Kellum reported that there were no closed doors until the youth reaches 21 years of age. All youth at age 16 are referred for IL services. Felicia estimates that 90-95% of youth accept some IL help. Leslie encouraged YAC representatives to attend the next Council meeting in October to continue the dialogue.

**DFS Update** – Vicky reported that the Foster Care to 21 workgroup that was established by a House Joint Resolution has been meeting on a regular basis and expects to have a final report in September. The workgroup is comprised of young adults, advocates and legislators. The workgroup is hoping to create a continuation of transitional supports to assist youth. They are looking at state programs that look at a youth's skill level and find the best fit of supports. They will also look to determine how the system gets built. The challenging economy may not allow a Cadillac model and will most likely necessitate incremental adoption of services. The youth have been moving the agenda. Felicia felt that the workgroup is definitely focused on hearing from the youth as they explore developmentally appropriate services. Vicky stated that they are looking to build the capacity to help those who leave and then want to return. Felicia noted that some of the youth wanted stringent timeframes for the ability to return to services. Research from Jim Casey is being used to help develop services needed. Casey is using Delaware as a model for a nationwide launch. The idea is to end services at 21, which Leslie noted is the age set by the federal government in the Fostering Connections requirements. Jesus said that he was in foster care his entire life and felt that the IL help he received was wonderful. He also feels that 21 is a good age for the open door to services to end.

Vicky noted that record numbers of reports to the hotline were received in fiscal year 2012 (16,678 reports). Pressure on the frontend puts pressure on the entire system. Last November, the average caseload for an investigations worker was 14.6 – the mandated standard is 11 per worker. The pressure to not grow state government while facing a 50% volume growth was a struggle. In December 2011, a tiered investigations standard was implemented at the reportline. This has helped to clear the backlog of low-risk investigation cases and started to lower caseloads. Structured Decision Making® was instituted at the reportline on May 22, 2012. SDM is an evidence-based actuarial tool that examines risk. This has helped divert some reports from becoming full investigations while maintaining child safety. The Children's Research Center (CRC) is assisting DFS as we adopt SDM. It is expected that SDM will be operational for investigations in November and building the components for treatment to be ready for the implementation of Facts II in 2014. The reportline is screening in 13% less cases with more consistent, valid decisions being made. Delaware is the only state that has allowed the quality advisors from the CRC to listen to actual calls to the reportline. In the pretest for the fidelity model, the standard to meet was 70% of reports being handled correctly with the SDM model. Delaware had a rating of 85%.

Delaware has been a historic child welfare system – an investigation was conducted and then substantiation if warranted with services to follow. If no substantiation, DFS involvement was usually concluded. There is a realization that many families are being referred when there are no safety concerns. Differential Response is the umbrella concept that allows different pathways for families to access services without having a full investigation accomplished. An RFP for Differential Response services has been offered for community agencies to provide services to families where safety is not at risk, but some other level of service is needed to help prevent them from entering full DFS services. The DR workgroup decided to focus on prevention of teens entering care. DR is

a family assessment model and is the only budget initiative for the Children's Department in FY14.

Vicky reported that treatment caseloads are rising with University Plaza having the highest caseloads in the state. We will look at vacancy relocation as needed to provide relief. Team Decision Making (TDM) is a model that is being explored in DE. TDM uses a structured and facilitated pre-removal meeting with the family, the child (if appropriate), family allies and supports. Specific safety plans and a "live" placement decision is made at a TDM meeting. TDM takes dedicated staff to coordinate and mediate the meetings. Vicky wrote a grant proposal to hire consultants until we can fund positions to handle TDM. This will probably begin for case planning and permanency at UP and be pushed out over the coming year.

All of the initiatives DFS is currently involved in are under the umbrella of Outcomes Matter with the vision of 'Enhancing Practice – Transforming Lives'. DFS will roll out the Outcomes Matter logo and initiatives to the public this fall.

Vicky reported that DFS regulations are under review as part of Governor Markell's Executive Order #36. This order set forth requirements that agencies hold three public hearings to solicit comments on regulations promulgated by the respective departments. DFS is the only division within DSCYF with regulations and we were required to hold hearings in all three counties in the month of August. Provisions were also made for residents of Delaware to comment online or in other written formats. The focus is primarily on child care licensing regulations as they impact the small business owners who run them.

**Agency Updates** – Mary Lou handed out the MY LIFE brochure – this is an acronym for My Young Life In Foster Care Explained – and is designed to help explain the 3-5-7 model of preparing children, youth, and families for permanency. 3-5-7 is based on the theories of child development, separation and loss, grief process, family dynamics, impact of abuse, and resilience. This helps the child piece together the story of their own life on their terms.

Meeting adjourned at 6:03 pm.

**Next Meeting – Wednesday, October 24, 2012, 4pm – 6pm at the Elizabeth Murphey School auditorium, Dover. A reminder and further information will follow prior to the meeting date.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack  
Division of Family Services