

**MINUTES**  
**Division of Family Services**  
**Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting**  
**October 24, 2012**

**Attendees:** Leslie Newman, Del Failing, Carol Post, Vicky Kelly, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 4:00 pm.

**Approval of prior meeting minutes** – waived due to lack of quorum.

**Opening Comments** – Leslie welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**DFS Update** – Vicky provided an update on DFS initiatives that are under the umbrella of Outcomes Matter with the vision of ‘Enhancing Practice – Transforming Lives’. Vicky asked that the Outcomes Matter blueprint be attached with a copy of these minutes.

Ten proposals were received for the Differential Response program, FAIR (Family Assessment & Intervention Review). Children & Families First was the awardee. With the implementation of FAIR, Delaware will be a Differential Response System as there will now be an alternative to traditional child protective investigations. CFF, as the contract provider for FAIR, will receive referrals of low-risk cases involving teens to engage the family to decrease need to place a youth in foster care.

Ready by 21 stemmed from a report (attached) issued by a House Joint Resolution 18 that established a committee to recommend improvements to services for youth who aged-out of foster care until they reach age 21. The committee recommended a stipend program as part of incrementally implemented services. The stipend would provide eligible youth with an average of \$500 per month to help them manage basic living costs such as electricity and transportation. These stipends then build on the foundation provided by the SRAP Vouchers. An application would be required and the youth would need to be working or enrolled in an education or training program. The initial request to begin this program will be \$500,000, with the expectation that this amount will be requested for the next three years. The goal is to have a menu of services to meet the needs of individual youth.

The Fiscal Year 2014 budget initiatives are finalized. There is an Office of Management and Budget recommendation of \$3.6 million for deficit correction in DFS. Vicky gave an example using 15 young children exiting care and being replaced by 15 teens, this swings the cost by close to \$1 million. DFS usually has five children in specialized placements. There are currently 15 – some with very expensive needs. An increase in foster care payments for Level I & II providers is expected to be funded with surplus funds from the Department.

Pressure on the front-end of DFS is still up. Reports are up 10.5% in the first quarter of FY13 which is following a record year in FY12. The good news is that for the first time in seven years, investigation caseloads are under the statutory standard of 11 cases per worker. Structured Decision Making® is being implemented for investigations. Training for the Safety Organized Practice model is underway. Safety Organized Practice (SOP) is also being implemented. This practice model provides skills for workers to more effectively engage families and to balance safety and permanency considerations. This approach is a challenge for some investigation workers who have only known the more forensic investigation process. Other staff have enthusiastically embraced this approach as being congruent with good social work practice. SOP borrows from the Australian Program 'Signs of Safety' and uses strength-based, child-centered principles and tools that ensure that the youth's voice is heard. The model has rigorous safety assessment and planning. DFS currently has a policy driven model which needs to change to better meet the needs of our families. SOP allows a family to better tell their story and help assess their own strengths and opportunities.

SDM® has already been implemented at the Report Line and fewer cases have been screened in. This coupled with the implementation of a Tiered Investigation approach in December has enabled DFS to safely assess low-risk cases, when full child protective services investigations are not indicated. Before the Tiered Investigation approach, a lot of cases were in backlog which led to higher caseload totals. The backlog has been significantly reduced. Leslie inquired how the staff at the Report Line did with the implementation of SDM®. Vicky said that there was a smooth transition. The Children's Research Center did fidelity measures for rater reliability and were looking for 70% or better. DFS scored 85% - the highest the CRC had ever measured. The Report Line is confident in their use of SDM. The CRC runs data every six months to look at our decisions, so a lot of oversight exists. Vicky noted that there are 17 different initiatives in Outcomes Matter and staff is heavily involved in the development.

Permanency Summit – Vicky talked about the Achieving Permanency for Children in Foster Care summit scheduled for November 16<sup>th</sup> at the Chase Center at the Riverfront. Judge Patricia Martin of Chicago is one of the primary speakers and will challenge attendees to examine their values when it comes to taking risks for a family. There will be a foster care alumni panel with panelists of varied permanency outcomes and a dynamic guest speaker, Chauncey Strong, as the lunchtime speaker. Workshop sessions are below:

**Workshop Descriptions:**

(A) **Permanency Values Training (Part I):** This session provides an overview of the values and perspectives that system partners bring to their respective roles as we focus on improving permanency outcomes in DE. Innovations in practice can challenge these values and perspectives. However, systems that create common understanding, coupled with shared values and perspectives, can achieve the best outcomes. To support states in safely reducing the number of children in foster care, Casey Family Programs encourages states to expedite permanency for children in foster care by increasing the number of safe and successful reunifications with their families. Yet, committing to reunification with birth families can

challenge other values and perspectives. Discussion of research and experiences from other jurisdictions will be used to help forge a common understanding and shared vision for expedited permanency for foster children in DE. *Presenters: Karey A. James and Paul DiLorenzo from Casey Family Programs (Moderator: Carla Benson-Green)*

**(B) Family Search & Engagement Initiatives in Delaware:** Research has demonstrated that permanency outcomes improve when birth families and their extended networks are actively engaged in the planning for children in care. This panel will discuss various strategies and approaches that are being implemented in DE, both within DFS and in partnership with community providers. *Presenters: Lori Ryan from Annie E. Casey Foundation; Frank Perfiniski of DFS, Celeste Bishop from A Better Chance for Our Children, and Lynn Moyer from Children & Families First discuss My Life Program (adaptation of the 3-5-7 Model); Theresa Broome of Children & Families First will briefly discuss the Family Finding Program grant opportunity. (Moderator: Stephanie Guiswite)*

**(C) Policy Issues Related to Permanency Outcomes for Adolescents:** This panel will review the combined work of the Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative/Community Partnership Board and the Child Protection Accountability Commission's Committee on Permanency for Adolescents in addressing system barriers to permanency, especially for adolescents. The discussion will focus on several policy and practice initiatives (e.g., Reinstatement of Parental Rights, Post Adoption Privileges Agreements, utilizing DE's expungement statute in child welfare court reviews). The discussion will also include a review of various system initiatives focused on adolescents and identified gaps in service. *Presenters: Tania Culley, Judge Peter Jones, Jennifer Donahue, and Vicky Kelly (Moderator: Shirley Roberts)*

**(D) Safety Organized Practice:** Safety Organized Practice (SOP) is a practice model for child welfare that DFS is implementing. SOP is designed to help all key stakeholders involved with a child keep a clear focus on assessing and enhancing child safety at all points in the case process. It combines the best of Signs of Safety (a solution-focused child welfare practice approach) with the Structured Decision Making® system (a set of research-based decision-support tools) to create a rigorous child welfare practice model. *Presenter: Shannon Flasch from Children's Research Center of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (Moderator: Susan Taylor-Walls)*

**(E) Permanency Values Training and Skills (Part 2 continued from Session A above):** The second part of this session will continue the discussion of values and perspectives of system partners related to permanency options, as we forge a common understanding and shared vision for expedited permanency for foster children in DE. *Presenters: Karey A. James and Paul DiLorenzo of Casey Family Programs (Moderator: Sue Radecki)*

**(F) Panel Discussion of HJR 18/ "Ready by 21" Services:** This panel will review the work of the Delaware Youth Opportunities Initiative/Community Partnership Board in making recommendations to the legislature for expanded services to support youth transitioning from foster care into adulthood. The discussion will include an overview of national trends, the advocacy of the DE Youth Advisory Council, local benchmarks and proposed components of an expanded array of support services. *Presenters: Tania Culley, Julie O'Hanlon, Julie Miller, Christella St. Juste, Felicia Kellum (Moderator: Rodney Brittingham)*

**(G) Team Decision Making (TDM):** TDM is a family engagement practice strategy that has demonstrated success in increasing reunifications and improving permanency outcomes. TDM involves not only foster parents and caseworkers, but also birth family, community partners, and the child/youth, as appropriate, in a structured and facilitated approach to case planning. TDM can support the development of specific and individualized plans at various phases in a case (e.g., at removal, changes in placement, in planning reunification). *Presenters: Lori Ryan and Diane DeLeonardo from Annie E. Casey Foundation/Child Welfare Strategy Group (Moderator: JoAnn Bruch)*

**(H) Round Table Discussion for Judges (session for judges only):** This round table discussion will provide an opportunity for DE judges to discuss strategies for improving permanency outcomes with visiting judges who have been involved in their system transformation initiatives. *Facilitators: Chief Judge Chandlee Johnson Kuhn, Judge Patricia Martin, and former Judge Anne Holton*

A blueprint for Delaware to help children in care achieve permanency will be developed based upon report-outs from the workshops.

Vicky noted that there are a lot of good things going on including the reveal of the



Outcomes Matter logo

There has been a bit of a rough stretch with three tragic cases. Root Cause Analyses will be accomplished as well as internal reviews. A new investigations coordinator position will be hired in the near future in the Office of the Secretary.

**Agency Updates** – Carol reported that they are exploring a grant from Verizon that would enable them to look at the intersection of substance abuse and domestic violence.

Leslie shared that C&FF will be holding a press conference on Oct. 29 to announce a federal grant that will look at using the Strengthening Families Program alone or together with Parents As Teachers when working with substance abusing families who have children from Birth to 3. The focus will be seeing how programming impacts foster care placements and reunification services. Evaluation will be conducted by the University of Maryland, School of Social Work and the Lutra group. New part-time parent educators will be trained.

**Future Focus** – Brainstorming Session: what can Delaware do to enhance the wellbeing of children?

Meeting adjourned at 5:20 pm.

**Next Meeting – Wednesday, January 23, 4pm – 6pm at the DSCYF Administration Bldg. Wilmington. A reminder and further information will follow prior to the meeting date.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack  
Division of Family Services