

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Meeting**  
**Approved Revised MINUTES**  
**March 16, 2007, 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.**  
**Comfort Suites O’Hare, Schiller Park, Illinois**

<b>Members Present</b>	<b>Members Absent</b>	<b>DCFS Staff</b>	<b>Guests</b>
Mercedes Ball	Tonya Duke	Michael Byrd	Angela Barber
Donsetta Blakely	Sylvia Flory	Christina Schneider	Robert Childress
Gladys Boyd	Vicky Kline	Gwenn Eyer	Carole Lukacek
Debbie Freke	Ramon Nieves	Yanira Fontanez	Jerry Welenc
Cecil “CR” Garner	Andre Robinson	Ray Gates	
Robyn Harvey	Antionette Walker	Idell Harris	
Ruth Jajko		Vanessa James	
Birdia Jenkins		Terry McGlothlin	
Nancy Lauffenberger		Rod Mulford	
Leanne Montgomery		Gloria Orange	
Heather Schumacher		Sari Rowitz	
Uli Senz		Yvonne Sales	
Patricia Welander		Ron Wynn	
Adrienne Welenc			
Mary White			
Geraldine Wilson			

**Hospitality**

Donsetta Blakely welcomed members and guests, announcing that the meeting would be recorded to assure accurate minutes.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Uli Senz, SWFCAC Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. He welcomed everyone and recognized our new member, Nancy Lauffenberger, asking her to introduce herself to the Council. Nancy has been a foster parent for eight years and stated that she and her husband were fortunate to adopt their first placement. Nancy works in the Medical/Educational/ Pharmaceutical field. She stated that she joined the Council because she is interested in foster care and knowing “how it all works.” Council members and guests introduced themselves and the meeting continued. Vicky Kline, Tonya Duke, Andre Robinson and Ramon Nieves had excused absences. Uli said that Nancy Hughes has expressed the need to resign from the Council.

The agenda was approved with an addition:

- What constitutes a “conflict of interest” when conducting Council business?

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Minutes from February 23, 2007 SWFCAC Meeting**

**MOTION: Adrienne Welenc made a motion to accept the minutes as written.**  
**Geraldine Wilson seconded. The motion carried.**

**Final Reports to the Director:**

There were none.

## **REGIONAL REPORTS**

### ***Cook North-Cecil Garner***

They held their regular meeting March 13<sup>th</sup>. Jean Maher participated via conference call, speaking in great detail regarding several training issues. There was also discussion regarding the score on their implementation plan. Last week there was a separate meeting held to address issues faced by transgendered youth, with forty people present. Dr. Claudia Mosier was one of the speakers and the training included handouts, a video, and discussion regarding the struggles and issues faced by transgendered youth. Their regional council is working on Foster Parent Appreciation Month plans. Their next meeting will be held April 10<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Cook Central-Birdia Jenkins***

They had a speaker at their last meeting, addressing special tax tips for foster parents. Their next meeting will feature someone from the local Fire Department addressing the updated carbon monoxide laws and someone from the Park District who will discuss summer programs.

### ***Cook South-Mercedes Ball***

Their last meeting was held February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Their membership has expanded and officer positions have now been filled. They are working on building their committees. They had guest speakers and distributed a list of acronyms commonly used by DCFS. They received clarification on the “bed hold” policy. Uli Senz stated that membership has expanded and officer positions are being filled.

### ***Northern Region-Robyn Harvey***

Their next meeting will be held next Wednesday. They are still working on “demystifying reunification.” Robyn recently spoke to the Northern Region Quality Council regarding the regional representative’s role on the SWFCAC.

### ***Southern Region-Vicky Kline***

Vicky submitted a report stating that they have not had a regional meeting since the last SWFCAC meeting. They are still making plans for Foster Parent Month.

### ***Central Region-Leanne Montgomery***

Leanne stated that there was a lot of discussion regarding training availability and CAPU issues. She also noted that they are developing a reunification support group. The report is in the packet.

## **Reunification Initiative Discussion**

Uli stated that the caregiver training draft curriculum was distributed via Email, and this is an official method for council members to comment on the content. Ray noted that members raised concern about this at the last meeting, so sent the curriculum to all members.

- Private agency management has expressed concern about the financial responsibilities for private agencies. In order to make initiatives like this successful, they must have the resources available to do so.
- The expectation is that only a small number of cases will actually be reunification cases.
- There is a need for after hours support. There are staffing issues in private agencies and those workers still have the need to be available for their own children and families.
- One “brainstorming idea” is to use a team approach to support. Members also discussed the possibility of using intact workers to support reunification.

- The Department apparently made some policy changes. Before, if you were a placement worker with four children on your caseload it counted as four cases. When they reunified they counted as one case. When children reunify now, they are still counted as individuals with regard to caseload.
- The issue around increasing FPSS's or increasing their hours is "still alive" in management discussions. This Council has supported a commitment to Foster Parent Support Specialists in both the public and private sector

#### *Training Issues*

- Foster parents need to be involved in worker training.
- PRIDE trainers will be trained on Reunification issues in the very near future.
- Audience comments supported the need both for more support for FPSS's and for co-training foster parents and staff. (Using training as a means of team building.)
- Design worker training with the meat of the content one-day with the forms and other internal content presented another day so that foster parents can participate. Ray noted that workers are already being trained from now through at least June.

**Action Item:** Uli will more aggressively pursue a meeting with the Director.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Policy Committee – Heather Schumacher**

Committee has not met since the last SWFCAC meeting.

Uli recognized Sari Rowitz because her region's representative (Cecil Garner) stated in his report that they had concerns about the score on their implementation plan. Sari said Cook North has achieved a near-perfect score and she recognizes that in some cases, scoring kind of deters the implementation and practice issues. She identified the agency review practice as a means of following up on implementation of the Foster Parent Law. She also stated that some agencies or regions might not update to reflect changes because they're working to keep their perfect score.

- Jerry Welenc stated that the Policy Committee is struggling with a need to start from scratch, throwing away the previous scores, totally rescoring every plan.
- The point has been brought up that the agencies treasure their previous scores and major issues may arise when scores drop.
- Some council members believe that we should take a hard look at everyone's plan again, without regard to the current score.
- In some cases the score becomes more important than the plan.
- It was recommended that every three years plans get scored from scratch.
- Ray spoke to the competition involved in this process, stating that scores mean a lot. He also said that the Council has put together a process that is explainable and defensible, noting that to change scoring practices could undermine the integrity of the process.
- Another approach would be to go with a "pass/fail" system.
- Don't publicly recognize those with the highest scores.
- If we want to make it be a living document we need to place the emphasis on being transparent and honest about practices within the agency and region.
- Regularly do trainings or meetings with the FP Law Liaisons to get feedback and update them regarding SWFCAC procedures.

**Action Item:** The Policy Committee will pursue this issue at their next meeting.

### **Conflict of Interest – Ray Gates**

We have developed an internal (SWFCAC) policy regarding conflict of interest and how it applies to scoring implementation plans. Ray discussed the aspect of “an appearance thereof” when applied to the conflict of interest – presenting a “reasonable” person with a perception of conflict or the potential for such. He stated that he has a copy of the policy guide if anyone needs to review it. Members were instructed to err on the side of caution. Christina Schneider said Ray's explanation is correct. A general discussion followed.

### **Suggested Guidelines:**

- If you have a current relationship in an official capacity, you must recuse yourself.
- If you enter a situation unknowingly, and feel strongly that there's a conflict, you must recuse yourself.
- If you enter an implementation review unknowingly, and feel strongly that there could be the perception of a conflict regarding an interviewee, please ask if someone is there who can take the interviewee's place.
- If you enter an implementation review unknowingly, and feel strongly that there could be the perception of a conflict, please state that there might be a conflict and ask if they want you to proceed or reschedule for another time.
- If someone questions your ability to proceed without a conflict, please recuse yourself.
- Develop a Conflict of Interest Agreement form for use on site. This form states that all participants believe that the action can be conducted without prejudice.

### **Action Items:**

- Terry will try to find previously developed Conflict of Interest guidelines.
- Council members with conflicts or perceived conflicts must let Terry know right away so that she can reassign reviews.
- Develop a Conflict of Interest form.

### **Adolescent Issues/ Statewide Youth Advisory Board Liaison – Robyn Harvey**

Robyn reported that new officers have been appointed and trained. They're working toward garnering more participation on the regional level by meeting only every other month.

### **Archives – Jerry Welenc**

No work to date. Andre Robinson will contact Jerry to schedule a workday.

### **Training – Debbie Freke**

Debbie referenced the earlier discussion of the Reunification TOT that is coming up. The Office of Training has asked that the foster parent trainings be conducted on weekdays and Saturdays. She expressed her concern that this training will not be well attended if it is not a requirement. PRIDE Training is being reviewed. Debbie pointed out that reunification is not fully addressed within the PRIDE training and needs to be included to avoid doing the new foster parents a disservice. She suggested that holding a joint caseworker and foster parent teambuilding session

or Q&A following training would be a way to address the co-training issue in a small way. The Council has endorsed this and Debbie will make the request at the upcoming CWAC meeting.

### **Legislation – Ruth Jajko**

House Bill 396 has passed from Committee to the full House. This is legislation to establish a \$1500 stipend for people who become too old for the standard foster care system. They will award money for education, driver's education or housing as long as the youth has a diploma or GED. Minutes from their last conference call are included in the packet.

Jerry Welenc reported on his opportunity to testify at the Budget Hearing yesterday, chaired by Senator Feigenholtz. He stated that when they spoke before the Blue Ribbon Committee last year they received a warm welcome, but this year the overall demeanor was much less welcoming. The committee appeared to be separated on party lines. Jerry said that Acting Director McEwen spoke first and the Senator commended him for his work. Issues others addressed had to do with federal financial penalties and other fiscal issues. Jerry stated that a foster parent that testified before him had a strong presentation to the committee and highlighted many of the points he had planned to address including the following:

- FP's haven't had a cost of living increase included in the budget for six years
- Foster parents are volunteers
- Adoptive parents need to be included in the COLA
- FP's should not have to go up to beg for money annually

Jerry stated that he reiterated many of the points that she'd made, indicating foster parents are very passionate about what they do and that they expect to pay many expenses out of pocket in light of the new initiatives referenced earlier by the Director. He stated that Marge Berglind also addressed the Committee, reinforcing what had been said. Marge later told Jerry that he put a face to the situation, demonstrating that foster parents are real people with real needs.

Ruth distributed handouts with a website which may be used to gather specific legislative contact information. Ruth will find out who sat in the above-referenced hearing and suggested that members in their districts should contact them directly. The most effective contact is face-to-face whenever possible. Phone contact prior to sending a letter is also more effective than just sending a letter. The Legislative Committee drafted a form letter that may be personalized and sent from foster parents to representatives. Ruth also distributed invitations to Council members to attend the Child Care Association's Annual Legislative Conference. If others wish to attend, please contact Ruth to request more information. Council members who wish to attend may attend at the "Member" rate. The Child Care Association has indicated that they "might be able to work something out" if finances prohibit participation without additional financial assistance.

### **Adoption Day Celebration – Ramon Nieves**

Ramon reported that the committee is working on a major Cook County event with smaller events statewide to celebrate adoption and guardianship. A written report from the committee meeting was included in members' packets. Ray reported that Dana Corman stated that the Chicago Bar Association is not planning a major event, but that Dana would be interested in staying in the loop to see if the Bar Association might support our efforts. There was a question raised about what if any role Bridgette Glickman has in this planning.

### **WORKING LUNCH:**

**Rule 333 Workgroup Update – Christina Schneider**

Christina explained the background for this group, including information regarding our state's history with international adoption. She stated that in the past, doors have been closed to Illinois due to outcomes including child death. The Hague Convention has been ratified, but has not yet been implemented. Although Illinois families may have to meet Hague standards to adopt internationally, Illinois will tailor some of the issues that are not requirements to our distinct use. Christina discussed the development of the workgroup, recognizing that SWFCAC member Ruth Jajko sits on the committee. Christina described the way some of the agencies conduct home studies, reinforcing the need for uniform Illinois requirements regarding the quality of their work, their need to provide a case worker, the need for post-placement and post-adoption monitoring visits, post adoption support, etc. (Some international adoptions are completed while the new parents are in the foreign country and it's more difficult to require them to be monitored after they return home.) Two subcommittees have been formed. One will deal with rewriting the rules and the other will deal with establishing minimum home study standards. The home study subcommittee has gathered home study templates from agencies in Illinois and will use these to develop a standard template and instructions for use within the state. Agencies currently have varying practices, but many require prepayment for the home study. Some are now requiring prepayment for post adoption visits, to encourage adoptive parents to be invested in follow up. The committee has an initial draft of the rule but additional rules will also be impacted. This process will likely take a year by the time they prepare a legislative proposal for the next session. Some agencies, which work only with families that are adopting internationally, will not require workers to be certified since they do not deal with licensed foster homes.

#### **Foster Parent Support Specialists – Adrienne Welenc for Vicky Kline**

The Committee has been working via phone and Email. They've drafted a committee letter that Adrienne read for the Council's endorsement. Ray stated that they might also want to let the Director know that we've been working with Operations on this issue. Ray asked that we copy Arthur Bishop, Velma Williams, and himself.

**MOTION: Mary moved that the Council support the mailing of the revised letter. Patricia Welander seconded. The motion carried.**

#### **Reports on Other Councils**

Terry will check on Bridgette's role with this council and whether we will have reports about other boards and commissions at each SWFCAC meeting.

#### **Status of Agency Monitoring Reviews – Terry McGlothlin**

Terry stated that Mary and Leanne have completed one review. She requested that members notify her if any changes in assignments were needed.

#### **Discussion with Cook South Foster Parents – Michael Byrd, RA and Guests**

Michael introduced himself and his guests, stating that they're working on building their regional council and came to gather information and observe how the "masters" work. They also brought a list of issues important to Cook South.

Michael recognized Robert Childress who shared their region's concerns regarding the Bed Hold Rule, 0118. Robert addressed some of the exceptions that were placed, indicating that they believe the new policies restrict their rights as foster parents, under the Foster Parent Law. *Issues and concerns expressed include the following:*

1. Foster parent responsibility in a disrupted placement of a special needs youth can include weekly staffings, visits, maintaining contact to support the stabilization of the youth and remaining on-call for 24 hours a day.
2. Treating children placed in your home with dignity and respect requires a foster parent to build a relationship by showing consistency over a period of time. The foster parent is the only professional team member whose payment is eliminated during the recovery and treatment of a special needs youth who may still be returned to their home.
3. Placing special needs youth in a foster home versus a group or residential environment requires a very special skill of building a supportive relationship with a youth who is used to 24-hour staff support. This requires additional foster parent time and attention until the youth is able to transition into a traditional home setting.
4. Relapse into problematic behaviors may be anticipated. Foster parents are still providing professional support and availability in their continuing effort to assist with transitioning the youth to a foster home environment.
5. Traditional foster parents encounter youth that have not yet been “specialized” and who may require hospitalization for evaluation. Foster parents still hold the youth’s position within the home and may visit the child and are expected to attend staffings as members of the professional team.
6. Some youth may transition from the foster home to an institutional setting while the foster parent keeps the bed open thinking the child will return to their home.
7. The foster parent’s position as a professional team member is “24/7” and usually requires substantial time, sacrifice and unreimbursed financial support.

**DISCUSSION: Bed Hold Issue**

- Hospitals are not a “placement”
- Vicky forwarded to the chair the Southern Region’s response referenced in the last minutes.
- Foster parents are volunteers – they spend out-of-pocket to cover expenses... foster parents are not looking to make money.
- The policy seems to indicate that when funds are withdrawn the foster parents do not maintain responsibility for the child, yet foster parents are required to maintain relationships.
- A 906 in this system formally cuts the tie between the child and the foster family.
- Housing and utilities must still be paid on the space even while “on hold.”
- Treat foster parents as full team members around the child’s care.
- The Policy Committee will review the policy transmittal and the Department’s interpretation at their next meeting.
- There are probably other mechanisms in place to support foster parents in these situations, i.e. special service fees. If so, the field should be instructed to offer them.
- Classifying children and youth as “specialized” takes from 30-60 days
- One of the goals of the Department is to not step high-maintenance youth up, but to provide the services and supports needed in a traditional foster home. One outcome of the bed hold policy might be that these youth will be institutionalized.

**ACTION PLAN:**

- Ray Gates will have copies of the policy and interpretation emailed to Council members.
- Find out the number of children and youth impacted by these policies.

- Formulate questions and invite Arthur Bishop to weigh in on them prior to the Galena meeting.
- The Policy Committee will add this to their agenda for their next meeting.

### **Records for Schools – Mary White**

ISBE has determined that they will not support amending the statute. Dana Yowell discussed this Council's concerns with ISBE and they said that they would deal with those concerns within their organization.

**MOTION: Patricia Welander moved to disband the School Records Committee. Adrienne seconded and the motion passed.**

### **Resource Family Subcommittee – Donsetta Blakely**

No report.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Report from the Office of Foster Parent Support Services - Ray Gates**

- Members of this council sit on the Family Resource Subcommittee, part of the Future Practice and Policy Committee. This committee is charged with ensuring that caregivers' needs, issues and concerns are addressed. Currently they're working on further tweaking the Reunification Practice Model. Members are encouraged to take their questions to Donsetta or Ruth to be shared with the committee. Comments from the Caregiver Institutes stream back to this committee and are utilized in continuing development of this practice model.
- To date five Caregiver Institutes have been held, with four to go. At each institute foster parent issues are collected via three methods - write down questions and concerns on easel charts, collect participant concerns via note cards, and collect comments on evaluations. Comments have been very supportive as foster parents learn about the Reunification Initiative. Many are already doing reunification work.
- The brochure for the statewide council will have some minor revisions and then go to print.
- Ray is working with the regions to develop a calendar of events for Foster Parent Month celebrations and events. The Governor's proclamation will be available in *Illinois Families Now & Forever* and in hard copies.

### **Nominating Committee**

Vicky Kline was appointed chair. Adrienne Welenc will serve on the committee.

### **AGENDA ITEMS:**

- What happens when foster parents foster outside their own region – who do they contact, who has support responsibility, etc.?

**MOTION: Heather Schumacher made the motion to adjourn and Birdia Jenkins seconded. The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.**

The next meeting will be held April 20th at Ramada Galena, 11383 Route 20 West, Galena.