

Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Meeting
Approved MINUTES
April 20, 2007
Ramada Inn – Galena, Illinois
9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

Members Present	Members Absent	DCFS Staff	Guests
Mercedes Ball Donsetta Blakely Gladys Boyd Debbie Freke Robyn Harvey Ruth Jajko Vicky Kline Nancy Lauffenberger Leanne Montgomery Ramon Nieves Heather Schumacher Uli Senz Adrienne Welenc Mary White	Tonya Duke Sylvia Flory Cecil Garner Birdia Jenkins Andre Robinson Antionette Walker Patricia Welander Geraldine Wilson	Gwenn Eyer Ray Gates David Humphrey Vanessa James Joyce Loy Terry McGlothlin Michael Ruppe, ARA Peggy Ulfert	Angela Barber

Hospitality

Mary White 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 9:00 a.m. He welcomed everyone, asking council members and guests to introduce themselves, and the meeting continued. Uli stated that guests are welcome to contribute to discussions, but must abstain from voting. The agenda was approved with one addition:

- Discuss the closing of the foster care program at Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Chicago.

OLD BUSINESS

Minutes from March 16, 2007 SWFCAC Meeting

Uli asked if there were any additions or corrections to the minutes from the March 16th meeting. The Cook South report was revised to state, “Their membership has expanded and officer positions **are being** filled.”

MOTION: Adrienne Welenc made the motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Mary White seconded. The minutes were approved as corrected.

Final Reports to the Director:

The Chair’s monthly report to the Director was submitted, is included in the packet, and Council members were copied.

REGIONAL REPORTS

Cook North, Donsetta Blakely

Donsetta stated that there will be a May 8th training on grief and compassion, for Foster Parent Appreciation Day, with a light lunch to be served afterward. The North East Foster Parent Association will meet May 17th with Dr. George Smith speaking about stress management.

Cook Central, Adrienne Welenc

In a recent meeting, a Fire Department representative covered smoke detectors, CO₂ detectors, and fire safety in general. They also had a representative from the Park District summer programs to share upcoming activities. Ms. Peterson will address the council this month and will talk about a book she has written regarding her experience as a foster parent. They will hold a training regarding gangs on May 10th and a “Meet and Greet” on the 16th to allow foster parents to meet staff after hours. This event will also provide activities for the children. Their regular Advisory Council meeting will be held May 22nd with training and a hot lunch to follow. There will be a free gift raffle for foster parents in attendance.

Cook South, Mercedes Ball

On May 2nd and 3rd they will hold a “Meet and Greet” in two locations. (May 2nd will be held at 6201 S. Emerald and the 3rd at the Harvey office.) They plan to hold a bazaar later in the month. They’re working to collect applications for summer programs. In addition, they will hold a Health Fair April 27th and also plan to go to the ETA for a play.

Northern Region, Robyn Harvey

Their last meeting was held March 21st in Rockford, with five foster parents and several staff in attendance. Marilyn Green was the presenter and they continued to talk about “Demystifying Reunification.” They were unable to hold their scheduled meeting in Aurora, but plan to do so in the future. (Their meetings have been scheduled to cycle between four offices: DeKalb, Joliet, Rockford and Aurora.) Their wrap up meeting with the administrators will be held April 27th. Mike Ruppe, ARA, also stated that they have talked about starting a local parent group with the possibility of some future communication between the two groups.

Southern Region, Vicky Kline

The Southern Region has kicked off their annual round of Foster Parent Law training. Approximately 7 staff and 7-8 foster parents attended in Olney. Activities are being finalized in several offices for their May Foster Parent Appreciation activities.

Central Region, Mary White

The Bloomington/Normal Area Foster Parent Appreciation Celebration will be held May 19th with a pizza lunch at the Children’s Museum in Bloomington/Normal. Joyce Loy reported that Peoria has announced that they’ve started a parent council. Baby Fold announced that they’ve had a doctor come in to do physicals. They are hosting an all-day training May 19th in Rock Island. Monthly trainings continue in Rock Island and Peoria with attendance from foster parents, parents and other caregivers.

DISCUSSION: Reunification Initiative

Uli stated that this topic has been added as a standing agenda item. Discussion surrounded ways to support the Reunification Initiative. Issues discussed included financial supports (stipends) for foster parents who support visits, etc. and foster parent participation in staff training.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Policy Committee – Heather Schumacher

This committee met March 19th. Notes are in the packet.

Issues addressed included the following:

- Bed Hold
 - Although the effective date of the new Policy Guide is July 1, 2006, the (former) Director did not officially sign off on the policy until November 15, 2006.
 - Bed hold payments continued to be made until December 1, 2006.
 - Uli reported that they addressed this issue with the Acting Director who stated that he was surprised by the policy guide which was signed prior to his tenure. Ray further reported that after Uli explained the impact this has on foster parents the Director indicated that he would have his staff review the issue to find better ways to manage it. Ray stated that he anticipates that a management conference call will be held to address this issue.
- Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan Scoring Process
 - Ray stated that three agencies/regions with point disputes have been addressed. Upon review, scores were adjusted on two of the plans. In the third case, no changes were made, pending submission of additional information.

DISCUSSION surrounded implementation plan disputes about scores and scoring process in general.

Issues to be addressed:

- Go to a more generic scoring process similar to the rating schedule for agency reviews, “Acceptable, Somewhat Acceptable, Not Acceptable”
- Add to Director Letters: “You must submit a copy of all Foster Parent Law grievances filed during the calendar year.”
- Revise the foster parent survey form to ask if caregivers have submitted a Foster Parent Law grievance during the calendar year.

ACTION ITEM: Terry and Gwenn will run a chart correlating the results of agency review scores and implementation plan scores.

Adolescent Issues/ Statewide Youth Advisory Board Liaison – Robyn Harvey

Robyn reported that nothing pressing is coming up, but she regularly receives Email from Antwan Turpeau at Chicago Area Project keeping her updated. They are planning Youth Summits, but will not be planning Youth Roundups this year. Typically, for Youth Summits they bring in a wide variety of topics and speakers to assist youth in leaving care with preparation for independence. Robyn participates in the National Governor’s Association Youth Policy Institute and she stated that they’re really concentrating on techniques to successfully transition youth from care to independence.

NOTE: Ray has requested that Clark Peters provide summary reports of his focus group work at the recent Caregiver Institutes. This may give insight into why children tend to leave care at age 18 downstate, versus 21 in Cook County.

Resource Family Subcommittee – Ruth Jajko

Ruth Jajko met with Peggy Slater in March. Paying a special service fee is being considered.

Archives – Jerry Welenc

No work to date.

DISCUSSION surrounded disbanding this committee. As that is being considered, the following steps will be taken.

- The Office of Foster Parent Support Services will store the materials.
- Adrienne Welenc will ask Jerry to catalogue the contents of the archives before sending the materials to the office. When gaps are identified, they will try to fill those gaps.
- Vanessa James will work with the Council to develop end-of-the-year reports (including pictures) for a recap of each year’s efforts. She will also compile a collection of photos for the archives.

Motion: Ruth Jajko moved that we maintain the Archives Committee until the next meeting, offering the chair the opportunity to work on organizational change in leadership. Ramon Nieves seconded and the motion carried.

Training – Debbie Freke

Debbie referenced the earlier discussion of inclusion of foster parents in the Reunification Staff Training. She stated that Judy Zaleski declined to have foster parents participate, referencing foster parent specific training that will be available. (Update from Ray Gates: Foster parents may attend the three-day workers training.) Ruth suggested that the foster parents might ask to attend with intake workers the first day when they cover the “meat” of the content, skipping the more form-oriented training days. The Reunification Training for foster parents has been placed on hold. (They are working to refine the content prior to training trainers.) Debbie understands that they’re reviewing financial supports for foster parents.

CWAC Training Subcommittee – Debbie attended a “walk-through” of the DCFS Virtual Training Center where foster parents will have access to their own personal accounts and which will also include access to the Lending Library. The PRIDE training is set to be revised this summer to include reunification initiative information and other minor revisions with a Training of Trainers (TOT) to follow. There will be a TOT for the Trauma Training in May with sessions beginning in June.

Two new registration clerks have been hired for the Springfield office. SWFCAC concerns were again expressed regarding the perceived inability for foster parents to register by leaving voice mail and having calls returned in a timely manner.

Heather Schumacher expressed concern with the reduction from 25 staff members involved in the community college training units and the much lower number currently involved.

SWFCAC issues to be addressed include the following:

- Failure to provide updated training transcripts, risking placements (D. Blakely/H. Schumacher)
- Limited training calendar (H. Schumacher)

- Should provide only updates, not reprints of the entire training schedule (A. Welenc)
- Inability to access PRIDE Connections to complete casework (H. Schumacher)
- Inability to access updated training attendance to complete casework (H. Schumacher)
- Lack of timely and appropriate training (H. Schumacher)
- Lack of timely notification when training is cancelled (H. Schumacher)
- This process handicaps foster parents who are not computer literate or who do not have ongoing computer access (H. Schumacher)
- Trainers are not getting materials in a timely manner (D. Freke)
- Trainers are expected to do more with less (D. Freke)

ACTION ITEM:

- Ray stepped away from the meeting to call Judy Zaleski with a partial list of specific concerns. Ray stated that Judy immediately responded via Email to Steven Minter and Ray to identify steps taken to deal with the issues. Licensing workers are being directed to call the DCFS Training Office to address issues. The Virtual Training Center will be up and running within a few weeks and workers will be trained to access the system.
- The Training Committee (Debbie, Donsetta, Heather and Robyn) will schedule a meeting with Judy Zaleski and will report back in the May meeting.

Legislation – Ruth Jajko

Gladys Boyd and Ruth both attended the Child Care Association Conference in Springfield. Gladys stated that she spoke with a number of senators and scheduled a meeting with Senator Mattie Hunter to discuss the COA indexing bill. She will meet with the Senator on the 23rd.

Ruth reported that all of the people attending the conference spent their time trying to speak to their legislators as well as hearing presentations from the Governor’s Office, the Department of Juvenile Justice, DCFS, and other providers.

Issues for members’ consideration:

- Support the bill indexing human service agencies (including foster parent providers) cost of living increases.
- Governor’s Budget includes the Gross Receipts Tax (GRT) to fund some of these programs. This has mixed acceptance because it’s just one means of funding the cost of living increase.
- HB 396 – Jerry Welenc will work to meet with Representative Flowers, a bill sponsor, to gather more information. Present concerns have to do with providing incentives for youth to leave the system too early and whether it will prohibit utilization of other resources. It appears that DCFS supports this bill, with amendments.
- Council members should take action as individuals to support efforts to keep the cost of doing business increase front and center.
 - It was suggested that the council avoid taking a stand on funding sources, but rather to write letters to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, etc. focusing on support of the increase overall, not as a one-time thing, but on a regular basis.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION: Support HB 790, Juvenile Sex Offender Registration which supports utilizing judicial discretion in determining whether juveniles are listed as sex offenders. In addition, there is currently a Senate bill, which also supports this issue. **The council endorsed this recommendation.**

Fact Sheets were available for members to pick up. Ruth stated that the position statements listed on the bottom of each are the Child Care Association positions, not SWFCAC positions.

Adoption Day Celebration – Ramon Nieves

Ramon's report is in the packet on page 17. Teleconferences have been conducted and the next meeting will be Monday, April 30th. Ray contacted Arthur Bishop to clarify that the committee will work with ARA Valerie Davis and Ursula Angeleski, Statewide Adoption Coordinator.

WORKING LUNCH

Status of Agency Monitoring Review Discussion

*The AP process went much more smoothly this year

*Advance training improved the success rate overall. (Training had not occurred with AP teams in Central region prior to a review there, so there were a couple of problems.)

COMMITTEE REPORTS (continued)

Foster Parent Support Specialists – Vicky Kline

The Committee has been working via phone and Email. The committee letter, which the Council endorsed, has been forwarded to key management.

Uli reported on his meeting with the Director and stated that Director McEwen stated that officially the efficiency of the Foster Parent Support Specialist (FPSS) program is not documented, although anecdotally it appears to be successful. The Director personally wasn't questioning the value of the work FPSS's do, but stated that he needs to look at data to make future decisions.

- The Director seems to view part of the role of Foster Parent Support Specialists being to recruit and mentor new foster parents.
- Vicky will work with the committee to compile data from federal reviews and RQC and COA reports to support their concerns. They will look at stability rates, foster parent retention rates, etc. They will also compile documentation of the objectives found in the FPSS program plans. They may also refer to past implementation plans to review the work FPSS's have done over time.
- Some purchase of services agencies are hiring people to fulfill similar roles, but calling them "advocates."
- Vicky will work with the committee to develop guidelines for data collection. She expressed concern that current committee members may go off at the end of the fiscal year and no one will remain to serve as chair.

Nominating Committee – Vicky Kline

Vicki has provided the chair with the list of members eligible to run for office and provided nomination forms for each member. The job description is listed along with eligibility requirements. Completed nomination forms must be received by Vicky Kline by midnight April 30th. Nominees will be notified by letter and/or email, and an electronic or hard copy signature reply is required.

Issue to be Addressed: There appears to be a contradiction between the SWFCAC bylaws Article III - Officers and the SWFCAC Law regarding the terms of service.

NEW BUSINESS

Report from Chair's Meeting with the Acting Director – Uli Senz

- They discussed the FPSS issue
- They discussed the Bed Hold Policy issue
- The Chair felt that the Director was open to discussion and willing to follow up in the future.
- The Director indicated that foster care board payments are part of the DCFS budget and asking for any increase should start to be addressed through that venue.
- The foster parent conferences were discussed
- They talked about the reunification initiative
- They informed the Director of Council work including implementation plan scoring and agency reviews
- Council members expressed concern that the council received policies after the fact when they do not have opportunity to impact
- He expressed the emphasis on reunification, the issues faced by older youth, a new emphasis on birth parents, and increased training, especially web-based training.

DISCUSSION: At the Chair's request, council members discussed the closing of Catholic Charities Archdiocese of Chicago and Lake County.

MAY MEETING AGENDA ITEMS:

- Set the schedule for FY 2008 meetings
- Honor the top five implementation plan agencies
- Director's Report on the State of DCFS

MOTION: Adrienne Welenc made the motion for adjournment and Gladys Boyd seconded. The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

The next meeting will be held May 18th at 160 North LaSalle, Rooms N505 and N502, in Chicago.