

ADOPTION ADVISORY COUNCIL
Friday, April 7, 2006, 10:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Northfield Inn & Suites, 3280 Northfield Drive, Springfield, IL
APPROVED MINUTES

Members Present	Members Absent	DCFS Staff
Ronald Davis	Eddie Baines	Ursula Angielski
Mary Debose	Donsetta Blakely	Legertha Barner
Diane Dominguez	Kathy Casey	Deirdra Davis
Gwenn Eyer	Sue Cianci	June Dorn
Brian Hall	Patricia Cooper	Carol Teague Douglas
James Jones	Art Davis	Ray Gates
Susanne Loss	Jeanne Howard	Deborah S. Hawkins
Krista McCoy	Vance Johnson	Vanessa James
Marilyn Panichi	Joyce Loy	Terry McGlothlin
Elizabeth Richmond	Dave Matthews	Judy Pence
Penelope Ford for Jackie Sharp	Gina Samuels	
Ron Tyler	Gretchen Schulert	Guests:
Kim Wheelock	Terry Solomon	Cindy Backstein
	Bernadine Spitz	Josie Rocco
	Shannabeth Stein	Cindy Walk

Welcome and Opening Remarks - Elizabeth Richmond/Jim Jones

Elizabeth & Jim welcomed council members and guests to the meeting. Everyone in attendance introduced himself/herself.

New Business

Grant Update - Marilyn Panichi

Marilyn gave an update on the Family Connections Project, a federal grant that was awarded to Adoptions Unlimited to facilitate permanency for adolescents. They are writing curriculum for workers, legal professionals, youth, and families about openness in permanency arrangements. Several members of the Adoption Advisory Council are part of the workgroup that is advising them on the development of the grant. The project is now totally staffed. Rose Love will be the Assistant Project Director. Rose has 30 years of adoption experience. Marilyn distributed a written update on the project. She said they do still need to identify some adopted youth who are having ongoing contact with birth family members to participate in a focus group and on a panel as part of the training for legal professionals.

Report from Office of Foster Parent Support Services - Ray Gates

*Ray said that the annual NACAC Conference is coming up in August. Information on the conference was included in member's packets. DCFS does not have funding this year to send adoptive parents or staff.

*Ray reported that six of the nine Caregiver Training Institutes have been completed and that the evaluations have been very positive. He said that Susanne Loss represented the Council on the planning committee for the institutes. The trainings are all on Saturdays from 9:00 - 3:00. The institutes were region specific, with regional resources available, and staff presenters from the regions. The remaining institutes are scheduled for Peoria on April 8th, Aurora on April 29th,

and Chicago on May 6th. Elizabeth said that Ron Tyler is providing respite to caregivers for the Peoria training.

*Sibling Rights - Ray said that Michael Byrd had nothing new to report on this initiative.

*Foster Parent Appreciation Month - Ray passed around a calendar of events for the regions for Foster Parent Appreciation Month (May). He said that Volume 3 of Illinois Families Now & Forever would feature the Governor's Proclamation on the front page of the newsletter, as well as a letter from the Director and a letter from Velma Williams, Deputy Director of the Clinical Division. Ray said his office developed some materials - bookmarks, posters, and note cards - that have been sent out to DCFS offices. These materials are available through DCFS' Central Office Stores. Ray said Director Samuels has been invited to attend the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council on May 19th in Chicago to present the awards to the agencies/regions with the top 5 scores on their Foster Parent Law implementation plans. He said that private agencies also plan a variety of events for their foster parents.

*Ray distributed a list of vacancies for the council. He asked for anyone that knew of potential members to contact Terry. He asked for council members to be sure to tell potential members that their travel costs and childcare are covered.

*Ray said that one of the areas where DCFS was found to be deficient in the Federal Review is in the way they relate to birth parents. As part of the Program Improvement Plan (PIP), DCFS was required to come up with very specific work to improve the way they work with and serve birth parents. Ray said he was asked to develop a mechanism where we can have ongoing conversations around the way that we work with them. He is working with the RA's to develop a Birth Parent Advisory Council. They have been having monthly meetings with a small group of birth parents on Monday evenings from 5-7 at the IIT Bldg, 35th & State, in Chicago. The Cook County RA's and their staff recruited some birth parents to help with this effort. Ray said he has found it to be very enlightening. The birth parents have a very positive attitude and they are excited about DCFS sitting down at the table with them. He said they are also beginning to form a group downstate, which will likely meet in Bloomington. This group is in the early formative stages. At the request of Jim Jones, Ray will share the meeting notes from the last few birth parent meetings at the next AAC meeting. Jim also asked if foster parents would be involved. Ray said that DCFS is looking at how we need to work with birth parents and foster parents from the moment that protective custody is taken. Elizabeth said that one of the PRIDE revisions includes a video on the second night about foster parents and birth parents working together. Ray said Judy Zaleski is putting together something much more specific to reunification. Ray said we have not figured out how changes that emanate from the birth parent group will be rolled into practice but they will be fed back through the central PIP committee that is steering all the work we do, and that is where decisions will be made on how to involve the actual workers. The next Birth Parent Advisory Council is scheduled for April 24th.

*Ray said that this council has previously been involved in the development of the annual Adoption Celebration that occurs the third Friday of November. Bridgette Glickman will not be involved in the planning this year. June will find out who is working on this with the adoption attorneys. Ray will check with the Office of Communications. Gwenn, Brian, Kim & Kate volunteered to participate on the planning committee as AAC representatives.

*Ray said the State Fair starts the second Friday in August and ends the third Sunday in August. In Volume 3 of the newsletter, Illinois Families Now & Forever, there will be a registration form for caregivers to submit for tickets for entry, food, discount ride tickets and parking.

*Ray said that a meeting is held monthly where regional staff, RA's and Clinical staff meet about Integrated Assessment. The RA's report on success stories and problems with IA in the regions. Ray gave an update from their meeting yesterday in Chicago. He said they are fully staffed with clinical screeners and the system is working correctly now. The IA process has improved in all regions in a couple of key areas. One key area is timeliness. The IA is supposed to be completed within 45 days. The one problem remaining is that there is some misunderstanding as to whether the 45 day clock starts to run on the date of protective custody, when the investigator actually takes custody of the child, or if it starts to run on the date of temporary custody, when the court grants custody to DCFS. This has been inconsistent. A couple staff were assigned to study the issue, work with our policy office, and at the next monthly meeting the date to be used will be clarified. Another problem that has been encountered is how quickly the information flows to the Clinical Division so that a clinical screener can be assigned. Feedback from families that have been through the IA process has been positive and they appreciate the detail of the reports. In many cases the clinical screeners may recommend a service that doesn't exist, doesn't exist in that area, or there is no funding stream. They plan to address these issues through a research component. On every completed IA report there are two staff assigned to data enter the recommendations and check at 3, 6 and 12 month intervals to see if the service is being provided, and if not, why. The Director plans to use this data to make an argument to the Bureau of the Budget and the General Assembly to secure more funding. Susanne Loss said the 2-hour IA training for foster parents is being received very well in Southern Region.

Reports on SWFCAC/YAB/CWAC/CIAC/CFS - Written Report

Bridgette Glickman could not attend, but provided a written report on activities of other councils and committees. The report was included in member's packets.

Update on Adoption/Post Adoption Reorg. - June Dorn

June gave an update on Rule 302. The feds have altered their eligibility criteria requiring DCFS to do some additional changes to the rule. Susan Netznik, in the DCFS Policy Unit, has already been doing some cleanup.

June asked her new post-adoption staff to introduce themselves. They were:

Deirdra Davis - Northern Region

Carol Teague Douglas - Southern Region

Debra Hawkins - Peoria Region

Ursula Angielski - Statewide Adoption Coordinator

Legertha Barner - Cook County

June said she has requested support staff for each of them. In the meantime, she is working with Larry Chasey to assign temporary clerical support.

Minority Adoption Leadership Development Institute (MALDI) - Legertha Barner

June said that ten states in the nation were chosen to be a part of the MALDI program. This is a mentoring program where an adoption person would be mentoring someone within the system to work on a project for two years. As part of the program, they get resources and technical assistance through the National Resource Center, and there is one annual meeting in Washington

D.C. for each of those two years. Illinois was chosen to be one of the states because there are a number of minority children in our system. There were three applications submitted from Illinois, and Legertha's application was chosen. Legertha has a project to complete in the next two years and came to the meeting today to conduct a focus group with council members.

Legertha said her focus statement is "Only by means of effective communication between departments and private agencies can families and guardians be served and empowered to successfully parent and nurture children through adulthood". Her outcome of this proposal is 1) to improve the relationship between families and the department by empowering them to see the department as a support system, 2) that families rely less on the state agency and more on the community and improving the family connection, and 3) to validate with staff that they are making a difference in families lives that is positive in keeping families together. She posed a series of questions to council members and they provided feedback in each area. Legertha agreed to return to a future meeting to give an update.

Working Lunch

Family Service Center - Josie Rocco

Josie Rocco and Cindy Walk explained the post-adoption respite program at the Family Service Center. They have a drop off center one evening per month and one Saturday per month. At this time Tuesday nights have not been utilized. The reasons families have given for not using Tuesday nights are that children have homework and activities after school. The Saturday's have been well attended. A flyer was distributed that listed the respite dates, times and contact information. A brochure was also distributed that lists all of the services that are offered by the Family Service Center. Josie said they have a program that offers in-home therapy to families with adopted children. The therapist goes to the home and works with the family. They also have a support group that meets monthly from 6-8pm. The adoptive parents and children are in separate groups, and the children are separated by age. The children learn social skills and appropriate play in that program. Judy Pence said that this is the first year and the funding is only available for respite for the adopted children. They do provide overnight and weekend respite for families that qualify based on a stress test score. Josie said they haven't found a lot of families that want to provide respite. Cindy & Josie can be reached at 217/528-8406.

"Foster Kids Are Our Kids" Campaign - Arleen Peterson

Arleen said there had been a kick-off on Wednesday for the "Don't Write Me Off", "Foster Kids are Our Kids" campaign. The initiative came from a discussion at a CWAC meeting that foster care is viewed negatively and they wanted to do something to put a positive message out. Conversations began in 2003 between DCFS and Family Support America, to come up with some way to help the private agencies increase their foster parent capacity and to persuade communities to step up and support foster care. Focus groups were done with foster parents, potential foster parents, caseworkers, and the general public to ask what their thoughts and perceptions were about foster care. Most had negative perceptions, causing people to not want to be involved. The purpose of this campaign is to start to change people's perceptions and let them know that they could actually do something to help, and create positive awareness around foster care. The commercial will air on WGN's 12:00 and 9:00 news. There were over thirty agencies in attendance at the campaign kick off. ABC news, WTTW is doing a special either Friday night or Tuesday night. Arleen shared brochures on the campaign. There is a website (www.fosterkidsareourkids.org) that shows the agencies involved in the campaign and shows the commercial. There is a chain of stories that go along with the campaign as well. There is a toll free number, 1-888-4RKIDS2 that is answered at Adoptions Unlimited. They then partner the caller with a participating agency. WGN has agreed to air the commercials for free for the entire year. Arleen said

that the response has been great and that all of the agencies that are part of the campaign think it is a great tool.

Old Business

Approval of Minutes of February 3, 2006 Meeting

Gwenn Eyer made a motion to accept the minutes. Ron Tyler seconded the motion. The motion carried and the February 3, 2006 minutes were accepted as written.

Agenda for Next Meeting/Wrap-Up

The next meeting will be held June 2nd at 160 N. LaSalle, Chicago. Agenda items:

- *Invite two more post-adoption respite providers to talk about their programs.
- *June will give update on the budget.
- *Adoption Core Curriculum update

Illinois Respite Summit

Gwenn announced that she represented AAC on the IL Respite Coalition. They are having a Respite Summit on Thursday, April 20th, at the Ramada Inn SW Chicago. The day will address how to identify and advocate for services. It is designed for both providers and caregivers that utilize those services. It is free to attend and breakfast and lunch will be provided. Lodging is available at a reduced rate. If anyone wants more information they can email Gwenn at geyer50331@aol.com.

Illinois Families Now & Forever - Vanessa James

The newsletter is mailed to 47,000 foster, adoptive, guardianship and relative caregivers six times per year. Vanessa asked if anyone had information they would like to put in the newsletter, particularly the adoption section, to please contact her.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 1:45 p.m.