

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Meeting
&
Illinois Adoption Advisory Council
JOINT MEETING
Approved Minutes
November 18, 2005 ~ 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.
160 North LaSalle, Room N505
Chicago, Illinois**

AAC Members Present	AAC Members Absent	SWFCAC Members Present	SWFCAC Members Absent
Donsetta Blakely	Sue Cianci	Donsetta Blakely	Claudia Davis
Kathy Casey	Patricia Cooper	Gladys Boyd	Vicky Kline
Arthur Davis	Ronald Davis	Ray Chasteen	Judy McAtee
Gwenn Eyer	Mary Debose	Ruth Dominguez	
Brian Hall	Diane Dominguez	Sylvia Flory	DCFS Staff
James Jones	Jeanne Howard	Cecil Garner	Michael Byrd
Susanne Loss	Vance Johnson	Ruth Dominguez	June Dorn
David Matthews	Joyce Loy	Ruth Jajko	Ray Gates
Krista McCoy	Gina Samuels	James Jones	Dr. Kristen Kenefick
Marilyn Panichi	Terry Solomon	Andrea Miller	Terry McGlothlin
Elizabeth Richmond	Bernadine Spitz	Andre Robinson	Christina Schneider
Gretchen Schulert	Shannabeth Stein	Uli Senz	Velma Williams
? For Jackie Akins	Ron Tyler	Adrienne Welenc	
Melinda Woods-Lis	Kim Wheelock	Mary White	Guests
		Geraldine Wilson	LaDonna Williams
			Jerome Rhodes

Welcome and Introductions

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

Adrienne, Jim & Elizabeth welcomed council members, and asked everyone to introduce themselves.

Deputy Director's Report - Velma Williams

Velma thanked both councils for the work that they do, and she reported on recent initiatives as follows:

*Integrated Assessment (IA) has been rolled out statewide. An IA is done on all new cases to identify baseline issues. They are working on a process for providing written reports to foster parents, and Velma deferred details on this work to Dr. Kristen Kenefic, who was in attendance to speak with the council.

*Child & Youth Investment Teams are comprised of specific staff, others involved in the case, the caregiver, the birth parent, and the child. They come together to look at a child

that is already in the DCFS system when serious problems emerge. They often deal with placement issues.

*Velma said that the Clinical Division is pulling a group together to discuss the involvement of foster parents to train, mentor and support birth parents when the goal of the child is return home. Initiation may be several months away.

*The Older Adolescent Program is designed for youth 13 years and older to evaluate skills and educational needs and help prepare them for adulthood. This is a Division of Service Intervention initiative. They are developing many new services and initiatives for this population.

*Caregiver Institutes were started last year with four regional based educational institutes held. They were very successful and well attended. This year we will offer these trainings at nine regional based locations with a similar format.

*Child Trauma - Measures and instruments are being used in IA, CAYIT and at residential facilities. Staff will be going through training on recognizing the indicators of child trauma and how to engage families.

Uli asked about a Foster Care Utilization Review. Ray said there has been one done by the Division of Placement and Permanency. Steve Minter's staff has been conducting this review because we know that we have a relatively large number of licensed foster homes not serving children. Staff is looking into why foster parents are maintaining their license if they are no longer caring for children, and what these licensed foster homes can be used for - such as mentoring or respite. Ray said there is a large drain on DCFS Licensing to monitor homes that are not serving children. Steve has also been consulting with Erwin McEwen, who supervises POS agencies, and there may be a plan in the works for POS agencies to conduct a similar review. Adrienne deferred this question to Steve Minter, who is on today's agenda.

Velma acknowledged that November is Adoption Appreciation Month. She thanked all council members for their efforts and leadership.

Adoption Reform Law Update - Christina Schneider

Christina distributed three handouts:

- *Birth Parent Bill of Rights
- *Adoptive Parent Bill of Rights
- *Summary of Adoption Reform Act

Christina gave a background on how this came about. She said the Director convened a workgroup to look at adoption reform in Illinois, and Repr. Feigenholtz was an integral part of this. Initially they looked at several compelling issues, such as specific cases, i.e., a birth mother that only spoke Polish, and had the understanding that she would have ongoing contact with her son; and a case where adoptive parents offered a birth parent a new car, home repairs, and payoff of credit card debt for a child. They are hoping to finalize the Bill of Rights by the end of December. The Bill or Rights will be a

standardized DCFS form that cannot be adapted by individual agencies. They will be used for any agency-assisted adoptions, not adoptions in the child welfare system. They will also be used as a public education tool targeted at others that would inform court employees and hospital social workers about birth and adoptive parents' rights.

Agencies will be required to keep the original signed copy in their file, with a copy to the birth parent. In the Adoption Reform Act there is a requirement that agencies provide disclosures to the adoptive parent before they enter into any type of agreement.

Christina Schneider welcomed suggestions, and can be reached via email at cschneid@idcfs.state.il.us, or by phone at 312/814-7298.

Foster Care/Adoption Issues - Repr. Feigenholtz

Repr. Feigenholtz said that DCFS has an unbelievable commitment to making things right, and she thanked legal staff that has been very committed to the adoption reform legislation. Her hope is that other states will look at the core of this legislation and use it as a model. The Illinois House formed the Adoption Reform Committee. She requested the committee from Speaker Madigan because we have the Child Care Act for wards, foster families and adoptive families who work through the system, but ultimately we need to set the standard no matter how the placement is finalized. She felt that forming an Adoption Reform Committee made a statement about how we treat children and families in Illinois. Whether or not this should be a standing committee is going to be up to the encouragement of many.

Repr. Feigenholtz said there are other issues to be addressed, such as raising foster care subsidies, sibling visitation hearings, and looming foster care issues. She also chairs the Human Services Appropriation Committee, and said that she regrets the day that the DCFS budget was cut \$8million. She said that the Department is not allowed to go to the Office of Management and Budget and request more money. They are starting to hear from foster parents and youth and it is becoming very clear that the money should have been shifted to more case management, helping youth to become reconnected, educational issues, and preparing them for society, rather than becoming a statistic as a pregnant teen or in the Department of Corrections system.

Repr. Feigenholtz suggested that foster & adoptive families, providers and youth put a very succinct agenda together and get organized like other special interest groups do. She suggested they get a professional to represent them. She said it is important that the group be consistent and show up in Springfield every year. She said that the Legislature is supposed to adjourn April 7th, and that she expects a fast track budget, so that between now and January 11th they need to put together a plan and communicate with their legislators.

Repr. Feigenholtz asked to be on the invitation list for both councils consistently.

Post Adoption Research - Melinda Lis

Melinda said that HR502, which passed this summer, requires a study be done by March 6, 2006. The Center for Child Welfare at the University of Illinois Chicago is doing the research for this report. They are doing a random sample of adoptive and subsidized guardianship parents across the state, pulling files and doing phone interviews. They will submit their report to DCFS, and DCFS will send it to the legislators.

Vanessa will put information on this in the newsletter.

Melinda asked anyone that wanted to participate in the phone interviews, or had other suggestions for the report, to contact her by email at lis@uiuc.edu, or by phone at 773/848-6880.

Melinda also announced that she is moving out of state and has to resign from the Adoption Advisory Council. However, she will continue to work on the research.

Adoption Day Celebration

Council members walked across the street to the Daley Center at 10:30 a.m. to participate in the Adoption Day Celebration activities. Before they left Gwenn & Vanessa showed an Adoptive Family Album that Brian Hall and Vanessa put together to present to the Lt. Governor at the celebration.

Working Lunch - IA Interviews with Foster Parents - Dr. Kristen Kenefic

During lunch, Dr. Kenefic explained the IA process. She said that the clinical screener looks at the strengths and needs of the child, the caregiver and the biological parents. They use an instrument called the CANS (Child & Adolescent Needs & Strengths).

The identity of the foster parent is confidential. There is work being done to get a portion of the IA report to foster parents. The foster parent would get their portion of the assessment, the portion on the child's strengths and needs, and recommendations to foster parents, such as respite, or other recommendations for the child. The foster parent will not receive the section on the birth parent.

Dave Matthews suggested that therapists and the agencies treating the child also get copies of the assessment. Kristen said they have not discussed this issue yet, but therapists can request this information from the caseworker.

A 2-hour training on integrated assessment is being developed. It has not been determined yet whether it will be mandatory or elective. There will be a Training of Trainers in January. It will be mentioned in Volume 1, 2006 of Illinois Families Now & Forever.

Rev. Davis made a motion to make the IA training mandatory for all persons handling DCFS children. Donsetta Blakely seconded. There was discussion on the issue, and the motion was rejected.

Update on Rule 402 - Steve Minter

Mr. Minter was unable to attend due to a family emergency.

Sibling Rights Discussion - Michael Byrd

Richard Echevarria, Investigator and Task Force Member, was also in attendance. Michael Byrd spoke to council members about the Sibling Rights issue, and concerns he had about the perceptions and purpose of the task force. Michael said that the task force was put together "to examine establishing policy and programs regarding open adoption contacts that serve the best interest of the children and respect the rights of adoptive parents; and determine the appropriate forum for hearing disputes in individual cases, and study and make recommendations to the General Assembly regarding continuing sibling contact post adoption, including but not limited to contact via telephone, contact via phone, contact via mail, including email." He clarified that the Sibling Rights legislation was never about mandating law.

Originally the hearings were to be held in the Spring and a report done by the end of May. It never made it to the floor and was carried over to Veto session. It was called up and passed in Veto Session at the end of October, giving only the month of November to get the hearings held and the report done. There were four hearings held during the month of November.

Michael put together a draft outline for the report that is due to the legislature by the end of November. The report will be submitted to the Governor's Office, and then to the legislature, where they will pull together pieces of the reports, along with recordings from the hearings, and send to the General Assembly by December 31st.

Michael will email the outline to Terry, and she will email the outline to council members on Monday, November 21st. AAC members were instructed to send their remarks to Krista McCoy. She will draft a response from the AAC with Elizabeth's assistance. SWFCAC members are to send their comments to Terry by noon on Tuesday, and Terry will send them to Michael.

Strategies for Board Rate/Other FP/AP Issues

Jim Jones and Adrienne Welenc will take the lead on organizing a conference call with interested foster and adoptive parents to discuss strategies for approaching the legislature with foster care and adoption issues such as board rate increases. This will be a private initiative - not a project of either council. They will plan a conference call after Thanksgiving.

Approval of Minutes - SWFCAC & AAC

Andrea Miller made a motion to accept the October 21, 2005 SWFCAC minutes as written. Mary White seconded. The motion carried.

Rev. Art Davis made a motion to accept the October 7, 2005 AAC minutes as written. Gretchen Schulert seconded. The motion carried.

AAC members were dismissed at this point in the meeting, but were welcome to stay.

Feedback on Foster Parent Appreciation Month Surveys - Ruth Jajko

Ruth said she and Jean Maher had mailed out a survey to foster parents asking what kind of event they preferred to celebrate Foster Parent Appreciation Month. They received 300 surveys back. The surveys indicated that 68% preferred an adult only activity on a weekday; 76% preferred an adult only activity on a weekend, and 97% preferred a family activity. Foster parents could select more than one of these preferences. Terry will request the written summary from Jean Maher, send it to council members and put it on the next SWFCAC agenda for discussion.

Final Reports to the Director - Adrienne Welenc

There were no final reports to the Director.

Scoring Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans - Gwenn Eyer

Gwenn trained members about the scoring process for this year's implementation plans. She stressed the value of providing recommendations on each comment sheet. She also reviewed the common trouble spots and the importance of the two-point scoring components. She reviewed the expectations regarding the updated Annual Report format and stated that she will provide in-depth scoring training for new members on an individual basis.

Adjourn

Donsetta Blakely made a motion to adjourn. Jim Jones seconded. The meeting adjourned at 2:00 p.m.