

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
Pere Marquette Hotel, 510 Main Street, Peoria, IL
September 19, 2008, 3pm – 11pm
Approved Minutes**

PRESENT		ABSENT	DCFS STAFF
Mercedes Ball	Kim Perez	Ronald Davis	Gail Belless
Angela Barber	Rolinda Robinson	Tonya Duke	Robert Blackwell
Gladys Boyd	Heather Schumacher	Leanne Montgomery	Mary Bullock
Debbie Freke	Pamela Seals	Rosie Starks	Frances Elbert
Royann Garcia	Uli Senz		Gwenn Eyer
Cecil Garner	Steve Steinhardt	GUESTS	Ray Gates
Robyn Harvey	Patricia Welander	Jerry Welenc	Sharrell Hibbler
Birdia Jenkins		Shantaye Wonzer	Terry McGlothlin
Sheila Jones			Cynthia Richter
Debra McGee			Elizabeth Richmond
William Miller			Gail Simpson
Ramon Nieves			Thu Vo

Hospitality

Patti Welander welcomed council members and guests to the meeting and stated that the meeting would be taped to ensure accurate minutes. She asked that cell phones be put on mute and that if someone needs to take a call that he or she should step into the hall. She also advised that if anyone needed to have a side conversation, they should also step out into the hall so that the meeting could continue smoothly.

Welcome & Introductions

Chair Robyn Harvey opened the meeting, welcoming everyone and asking them to introduce themselves.

PRESENTATIONS

Central Region Consumer Satisfaction Survey - Gail Belless

Gail stated that the survey forms are distributed to 100% of the currently licensed foster parents in good standing, i.e., no licensing holds. The total number of foster parents has decreased year by year until last year when the total increased by 15. The surveys garnered an 18-22% return rate. Summary reports are distributed to local teams and offices, the Quality Council, advisory councils, etc. for feedback and follow-up. Gail reviewed the Foster Parent Report (survey results) with the Council.

Comments included the following:

- Robyn stated that the Council has requested survey results from each region.
- Results are addressed within individual teams, local QI, staff meetings, regional Quality Councils, etc. Teams often decide on a corrective plan that will be implemented based on survey results. I.e. supervisors send out specific directives including expectations based on survey results.
- A suggestion was made that when surveys are distributed, the cover letter should have a statement indicating the way prior completed surveys have impacted service delivery.

OLD BUSINESS

Approval of Minutes from 07/18/08 Meeting

Patti Welander made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Gladys Boyd seconded. Motion carried.

Final Reports to the Director

There were no final reports to the Director.

Robyn met with the Director September 5th and discussed:

- Recruitment efforts he hopes to establish
- Ways to better include the SWFCAC in the front end of changes that affect foster care

Robyn and Ray have been asked to present at the weekly Deputy Director's meeting on November 18, to talk about the work of the Council and the Foster Parent Law, etc., with emphasis on asking the deputies to make sure they and their staff include the council on the very front end of changes to policy, practice and resources that affect foster care.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Policy Committee

The Policy Committee meeting reports are included in the packet. Heather recapped the content. Ray mentioned that he asked the Policy Committee to meet via conference call rather than in person, in light of the current budget pressures. He indicated that other committees will be encouraged to utilize conference calls rather than in-person meetings as those meetings are scheduled.

Adolescent Issues/YAB

Robyn said folks are working to make real positive changes in the youth council and the SWYAC is looking forward to having them join in for the joint meeting today.

Archives – Patti Welander – Patti is currently going through the materials and sorting them and anticipates working with Jerry Welenc to archive them.

Legislation – Sheila Jones

Sheila distributed and discussed her committee report. Sheila recapped the content.

Staffing Issues

In response to a question from the floor, Regional Administrator Bob Blackwell stated that 179 is the number of lay offs currently anticipated, based on administrative discussions, and he indicated that the bulk of these positions are Child Protection, Intact and Placement positions. One of the compensations the Director is making is to adjust case loads – the ratio of cases to staff are being increased by sometimes as many as three additional cases per worker. (Fewer people will carry the cases, so workers will be responsible for more cases.) With this case load increase, Illinois will still be below Council on Accreditation standards and other standards. Mr. Blackwell also stated that open positions will likely not be filled during this fiscal year. Within this layoff formula, there will be some (very few) positions filled. A procedure will be in place where staff can “bump” into other positions according to the contract with AFSCME.

FPSS – Ronald Davis - No report in Ronald's absence.

Training – Debbie Freke – Debbie indicated that training is going on as usual. She noted that class sizes have not been adjusted nor is the co-trainer model being used as requested by SWFCAC, and she does not anticipate that they will be. Debbie participated in a CWAC Training Committee meeting, but did not have anything specific to caregiver training to report.

Respite – Gladys Boyd

Gladys said that due to funding cuts she was asked to hold off on this committee.

Member Binders

Robyn reported that binders have been provided for members to collect materials at each meeting. Binders should be carried to each meeting to collect additional materials. It will eventually have regional sections. Members will be asked to review draft minutes when they receive them via Email, jotting down any questions or errors. Hard copies will be distributed at meetings and they will be corrected and accepted in the same manner they are now.

REPORTS FROM OTHER COUNCILS/COMMITTEES

Future Policy & Practice - Robyn said they are still on summer break, so there was no report.

Foster Kids Are Our Kids

Shantaye Wonzer, Council guest, stated that she has been involved in the Foster Kids Are Our Kids campaign and that it has faced serious budget cuts and a loss of staff. However, WGN has agreed to continue to run the ads, and the third phase is currently rolling out featuring youth who have done well in foster care.

IFAPA – Gladys Boyd

Gladys said they are busy planning the conference and everything is going well. The conference is full and names have been taken for a waiting list.

SWFCAC Chair Robyn Harvey stated that this Council will staff an exhibit. Leanne Montgomery is assisting with the exhibit set up. The following members volunteered to staff the exhibit: Jerry Welenc, Ramon Nieves, Uli Senz, Gladys Boyd, Debbie Freke and Mercedes Ball.

Report from the Office of Foster Parent Support Services – Ray Gates

Ray stated that traditionally the Office of Foster Parent Support Services takes the lead on planning foster parent conferences and institutes. He stated that again this year we are looking at hosting two overnight conferences and four one-day institutes. Ray said that Assistant Director Velma Williams wants the focus of the institutes to be on psychiatric services/mental health and we will also run a mental health track during the conferences. The Program Committee met and has developed a strong list of possible workshops. Council members serving on the planning committee include Ronald Davis and Uli Senz.

Ray stated that the office currently plans to move to the second floor of the Reisch Building in mid-October. There could be some delay in response time then, so members were encouraged to call Ray's cell phone if necessary.

National Governor's Association (NGA) Youth Policy Task Force – Patti Welander

Patti said that a conference call was held in August, but key people were unavailable and the call was rather short. The next teleconference was not scheduled, due to the administration transition in OETS. (She anticipates receiving an Email indicating who will be taking the lead on this.) Frances Elbert, Associate Deputy Director, indicated that she would follow up to get an accurate update on the NGA Youth Policy Task Force and will report back to the Council.

Life Skills for Youth - Thu Vo

We have had Life Skills contracts throughout the state for some of the youth in care. In the past few years, youth have not participated as we'd planned. As a result, past contracts have been cancelled and Director McEwen has assigned staff to work with the SYAB to restructure these programs. The Director's goal is to have youth involved in every step of this process. Staff members are working with the SYAB, former SYAB members, Chicago Area Project and others to accomplish this goal. They have established focus groups to address which skills the youth want to achieve, the kind of program they would create, and ways to modify programs they may have experienced. They send feedback back to the youth and then eventually will identify the history and need for this work and identify vendors who will work to meet the identified needs. In response to a Council member's comment, Gail Simpson stated that learning life skills is essential to enabling our youth to master those skills that will allow them to successfully exist on their own. In that respect they are really no different from youth in the larger community who also need to learn life skills. Some of those youth, like ours, don't always get these skills from their parents and when that happens they obtain life skills outside the home - most likely from school, community based organizations, or other individuals, and that is why a life skills program is important.

NEW BUSINESS

Discussion from the floor – Uli Senz stated his opposition to including standing committee reports from people outside the SWFCAC on the meeting agendas. The chair took his concern under advisement.

REGIONAL REPORTS

Cook North – Cecil Garner, Royann Garcia

Royann stated that they had someone come in to discuss early childhood education (3-5). The Training Planning Committee report is in the packet. The next meeting will be the second Tuesday of the month. Participants receive training credit for meetings. The RA is very supportive of this council. They are currently focusing on implementation plan development and training. They plan to translate their plan into Spanish.

Cook South – Angela Barber

They held a meeting last Wednesday. Their primary focus was the implementation plan. They invited Ray Gates to come in and conduct Foster Parent Law training, but his schedule and budget-related travel restrictions did not allow it.

They don't know for sure who will write the next plan, but they have some DCFS foster parents reviewing different sections. They do not typically offer training credit for their meetings. Angela asked about POS parent involvement in the development of a DCFS implementation plan. Ray stated that in the past he and the Cook South RA had identified and discussed this issue, recognizing that POS foster parents may be caring for DCFS – supervised children and the plan would be applicable to them at that time.

Cook Central – Birdia Jenkins, Rolinda Robinson

Birdia reported that the guest speaker at the last meeting was Delores Cunningham from Chicago Public Schools. She talked about behavior issues and steps foster parents can take to make sure that foster children have protections and strategies to deal with behavioral issues in school. Ray Fleming from Alternative Schools will be at the next meeting to discuss school issues. They're asking parents to participate in the development of the implementation plan. They try to keep building interest in what they're doing in the region and offer guest speakers that will draw participation. Foster parents typically choose the topics to be addressed at the meetings. Training credit is awarded.

Northern – Debbie Freke, Robyn Harvey

Debbie said the summer hiatus on council meetings has extended into the fall. They have traditionally had good attendance and plan to get going again soon. The Northern Region Council is not involved in the development of the implementation plan.

Southern – Tonya Duke, William Miller

Willie stated that he was unable to attend the meeting. However, meeting notes are included in the packet. They are working on getting participation in the implementation plan training and revision.

Central – Pat Welander, Leanne Montgomery, Pamela Seals

Patty indicated that the RA utilized a traveling council approach in order for more people to have the opportunity to participate, but SWFCAC members from the region had not been invited. RA Robert Blackwell reported they tried to go to four sites and had those sites correspond with the re-accreditation process. They are scheduled to go to the Bloomington Field office in October. During those traveling meetings they talked with caregivers primarily about reunification and secondarily about the accreditation process. Mr. Blackwell reported that they did a very good job on the accreditation.

Re the regional council, Mr. Blackwell said he, a POS representative, a foster parent support specialist and a foster parent co-chair the meetings. They took the summer off and will go to the Pontiac/Bloomington area in late October or early November, then will convene a conference call in late November/early December to address changes and transitions related to the budget. They will resume meetings in the spring and will specifically address the new Transformation Team. Attendance averages between 8 and 20, with a core of five or so who attend in each area. Concern was expressed regarding the information flow between the regional council and Statewide, as the Central region reps. have little to report because they are not in the (regional) loop. Elizabeth Richmond, co-chair of the Central Region Advisory Council, indicated that reports from Statewide could be sent to Marsha Jones at DCFS for distribution to Central Region foster parents on the Regional Council email list. Mr. Blackwell said the region will do a better job of reaching out to its SWFCAC regional reps. and that process has begun today.

Mr. Blackwell stated that they are studying the disparate treatment of children in the child welfare system. Since March of 2007 the regions have been involved in symposiums where they have engaged communities around issues of permanency. One of the areas that seem to be most problematic for both this state and the nation is that children of color (African American, Hispanic, and Asian) are finding themselves in care in greater proportions than the

general population and their care is not equivalent to care provided for non-minority children. The disparity and disproportionality exists, and the thinking is we need to explore what if any effect “institutionalized racism” plays in these numbers and dynamics.

They have contracted with Crossroads Ministries and they have a very structured process where they work with organizations to create teams to look at the issue of institutionalized racism and then apply that knowledge to an existing system, in our case the child welfare system. POS, attorneys, judges, faith-based folks, and caregivers are part of the team with DCFS staff from all divisions. They will be examining point-of-entry issues, decisions made while kids are in the system, decisions made when kids exit the system and all points in between. They will look at areas to work on as they work to address this disproportionality. It is not an exercise in race relations. The premise is that everyone in this room has been programmed to exhibit racism. Mr. Blackwell will come back to address the council upon conclusion of this work. In this area, 25% of the population is African American while 65-70% of the kids in care are African American. Illinois is on the leading edge of this work and will host a national conference on disproportionality in May or June, 2009. While in Illinois this project has come forward from the field, some states have been mandated to examine this issue and some are contacting our state to find out how we’re doing things. They are working with the Casey Family Alliance, nationally recognized researchers and other experts.

Agenda for Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for October 17th at the Holiday Inn, 3800 Homer Adams Parkway, Alton. Ray and Terry will drive in the morning of the meeting, in order to save on travel costs.

The meeting begins at 9:00 a.m. and ends at 3 p.m. Lodging will be provided Thursday night. Members must attend the entire meeting in order to have their lodging provided and transportation expenses paid. Any exceptions requested must be approved by Ray – in advance.

Hospitality Request

Leanne said she would like council members to let her know of anyone on the council who is ill, had surgery or loses a family member and she will send a card or flowers. She accepted donations from anyone willing to give to be used for flowers and cards.

Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m. for a short break before reconvening for a joint meeting with the Statewide Youth Advisory Board.