

**Adoption Advisory Council  
MINUTES  
160 N. LaSalle, Room N505, Chicago  
June 2, 2006, 10:00 am-3pm  
Approved as Written at 8-4-06 Meeting**

<b>MEMBERS PRESENT</b>	<b>MEMBERS ABSENT</b>	<b>DCFS STAFF PRESENT</b>
Donsetta Blakely	Eddie Baines	Ursula Angielski
Kathy Casey	Patricia Cooper	Valerie Davis
Sue Cianci	Diane Dominguez	June Dorn
Arthur Davis	Vance Johnson	Rachel Feldheim
Ronald Davis	Joyce Loy	Ray Gates
Mary Debose	Krista McCoy	Bridgette Glickman
Gwenn Eyer	Kate Monte	Kendall Marlowe
Brian Hall	Bernadine Spitz	Terry McGlothlin
Jeanne Howard	Shannabeth Stein	Judy Pence
James Jones	Ron Tyler	
Susanne Loss		
David Matthews		<b>GUESTS</b>
Marilyn Panichi		Linda Coon
Elizabeth Richmond		Freda Hardaway
Gina Samuels		Meg O'Rourke
Gretchen Schulert		
Jackie Sharp Akins		
Terry Solomon		
Kim Wheelock		

Welcome & Opening Remarks

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

**NEW BUSINESS**

Schedule FY07 Meeting Dates

The following meeting dates were set for fiscal year 2007 (7/1/06 - 6/30/07):

- August 4 - Bloomington
- October 6 - Springfield
- November 17 - Chicago
- February 2 - Bloomington
- April 13 - Springfield
- June 1 - Chicago

NACAC Support Groups

Donsetta said they are meeting every three months. She said that the Jockey Foundation is on board for support.

Grant Update

Marilyn gave an update on The Family Connections Project.

\*The printed version of the adoption worker curriculum is at the Children's Bureau for approval. It will need to be converted to web-based training, which will be done by the Cradle in early FY'07.

\*The youth curriculum is being revised.

\*The curriculum for families – the module after Pride training, will need to be rewritten for web format. The Cradle will convert it next fiscal year as well.

\*The curriculum for legal professionals has moved along quickly. There has been a nice collaboration of legal professionals involved in working with youth.

\*The training for judges and attorneys is scheduled for July 12th. A panel of youth will be presenting as part of the training. The youth are meeting tomorrow morning to start preparing, and a videotape of the panel will be done so that it will be available on an ongoing basis. Judge Thomas will lead the Cook County training, and Peggy Slater will assist.

Marilyn said she made a presentation at the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and asked for names of additional youth that were adopted and having ongoing contact with birth parents. She met a family at the meeting that is going to be part of the panel.

Marilyn said she emailed Terry this morning information on Adoption Excellence Award nominations and Terry will send the information to all council members. She also sent information on media attention around foster care, and said that details could be obtained at ABCNEWS.com. The public service announcements featuring teens will be launched on June 8th.

#### Report from Office of Foster Parent Support Services

Ray reported that Jean Maher said the adoption certification training has been completed. He read praise from Jean of Susanne Loss's assistance on the project. The Training of Trainers is June 1-2 in Springfield and June 5-6 in Chicago. Susanne said the curriculum would be very good for adoptive families. It is rewritten in a more appropriate events form, and a lot of new activities are included. It is still a 9-hour training.

Ray said he attended an Integrated Assessment interdivisional meeting on June 1st. A change request was submitted to SACWIS that will allow clinical screeners to enter a code and it will print out the caregivers interview section, the caregiver recommendations section, and the child's recommendations section. It is slated for action at one of the next two meetings. The IA report is finalized at the family meeting on the 45th day. After that, the expectation is that the next time the child's caseworker makes a visit to the foster home, they will bring those three sections of the IA report to give to the foster parent.

Ray said that DCFS is enhancing efforts towards reunification. The Clinical Division is taking the lead on this issue, developing practice models, guides and forms. DCFS will look to foster parents to become partners with birth parents. Ray said he spoke to the SWFCAC about this too and there will be more to report as it develops into the role-out phase. Another piece of this is that DCFS is enhancing the way they are working with birth parents. He has the assignment to manage the Birth Parent Advisory Council, which meets the fourth Thursday of each month from 5-7pm at 35th & State.

Ray said that on June 27th there would be a reunification kick off from 6-8pm. Invitees will include Executive Staff, partners from the private agencies, executive directors, judges from juvenile court, staff from the offices of the public defender, the public guardian and the GAL. The purpose is to help everyone understand our new emphasis on partnering with parents.

Ray said that on June 28th DCFS is having the first annual information fair for birth parents, titled "Partnering With Parents", from 3-7pm at 6201 South Emerald in Chicago. It is set up as a come anytime, leave anytime event. There will be short presentations on topics of interest to birth parents. A nationally known expert and Professor & Dean of the School of Social Work from Albany, NY will speak. She will talk about success stories from around the country with organizations that work closely with birth parents.

Operations staff will be heavily involved. There will be information tables with experts from Operations and other divisions at each table, as well as organizations represented that serve our birth parents. There will also be a few presentations geared toward birth parents. The Regional Administrators have committed to having management level staff available in case birth parents have issues to deal with, and they will have space available for private conversations if necessary. Hot snacks and promotional items will be provided for birth parents in attendance. Terry Solomon said she has attended a couple of the Birth Parent meetings and complimented Ray Gates and Michael Byrd for working with the group. Donnella Bishop-Ward has been contacting community providers and asking them to share this information with their birth parents. Posters and invitations have been developed. They were mailed to RA's, ACR Administrators, Child Protection, and APT staff to share with birth parents.

#### Reports on Other Councils/Committees

Bridgette distributed the written report. All of the advisory councils met in May, so the report does have updates from each council. CFS had a brief teleconference to plan their next meeting on June 9th. CFS is still down 9 members, which should be taken care of in the next couple of months. The SWFCAC elected Uli Senz as Chair and Donsetta Blakely as Vice Chair.

#### Developing Guide for Hiring Adoption/SG Attorneys

Christina Schneider asked for the council's input on draft documents that she prepared regarding hiring adoption attorneys. Christina introduced Rachel Feldheim. Rachel just started working for DCFS this week and will be taking over this program from Christina. Christina asked the adoptive parents to read the document and see if it covered what they needed to know when seeking an adoption attorney.

Christina said that in 2000, the foster parent community asked DCFS to have a panel of attorneys that met certain criteria, and who were trained on subsidy review, to be on a panel and that those attorneys would be paid by DCFS. Elizabeth said there were many adoptive parents using attorneys that were not familiar with subsidy needs and adoption laws, and not getting the services in their subsidy that they needed. If the supporting documentation is not written into the subsidy, you can typically not get amendments. The panel was put in place to protect the adoptive parents. Any attorney can be on the panel if they go to the training and meet the criteria. It is a way to have adoptive parents make an informed decision when selecting the adoption attorney. There is a statewide list on the website, sorted by region. Staff are to direct

families to the website or the Advocacy Office, to avoid distributing old lists, and to avoid directing families to specific attorneys.

Christina asked at what point the adoptive parent should get this information. Suggestions were: when the family is signing a permanency commitment form, during the home study assessment, during adoption conversion training, add to foster parent handbook, during PRIDE training, or the What You Need to Know in Illinois piece.

Other comments on the documents:

\*Vanessa suggested that information on “why” you need to hire an attorney be added to the opening paragraph.

\*Gretchen suggested the language be revised to make it easy to be understood by adoptive parents that are not familiar with legal jargon.

\*Terry S. thought it needed to be reorganized to flow smoother. Under first bullet point say see website, and add the advocacy 800#.

\*It could be part of the Making the Adoption/SG Decision booklet.

\*June suggested simplifying with questions – Why do I Need an Attorney? How do I choose an attorney?

\*Ray – 2<sup>nd</sup> dot point and 4<sup>th</sup> dot point both mention the \$1,500 maximum.

\*Brian – What is the total cost of adoption? Attorneys on the panel should accept the \$1500 fee. If they will exceed they need to make it clear that the adoptive parent will be liable for the excess.

\*It was suggested that the attorneys on the panel sign an agreement to accept the \$1500, unless a higher fee is approved by the state due to extreme circumstances, and it should be pre-approved. The adoption worker should explain the panel, and explain that if they choose someone on the panel, they are trained and experienced in adoption subsidy review, and that they will be paid directly by DCFS. Susanne Loss said that, as an adoption conversion trainer, they go over a lot of the information on the handout.

Christina said that the difference with the Subsidized Guardianship document is that proposed guardians can review the subsidies but do not need an attorney to represent them in court.

\*Terry S. said some of the same comments would apply to this.

\*Move information about the panel to the front, such as purpose of having an attorney, change the title, organization of information, and use the question format.

\*Jenny could help make them into two brochures, and they could go into the file that Legertha is putting together.

\*There are a couple of judges in the Northern Region that request different GALs than the juvenile court GALs. Christina will state that in the document.

Council members were asked to Email any other suggestions to Terry McGlothlin. She will collate them, and send them to Christina. Christina will rework and send it back to council members.

Christina distributed draft information from a new website that lists all adoption agencies in Illinois, and it should be up by July 1, 2006. It is sorted alphabetically by region. This will provide information to the public about all adoption agencies in Illinois. Agencies are required

to put their license number on every advertisement that they publish in Illinois. The website will list all of the sites for each agency, and what services they provide at those branches. Christina will change Domestic Adoption Only to just Domestic Adoption, and change Foster Care Conversion to Adoption through Foster Care. Before a private agency can contract with DCFS for adoption, they have to be accredited. The Adoption Reform Law does not distinguish between private adoptions or DCFS adoptions.

#### Adoption Day Celebration

Kendall introduced himself as the new Acting Deputy Director of the Office of Communications. He said he has been in this position for a few weeks.

June Dorn reported that Dana Corman would report back to the Council after a June 12th meeting that the Chicago Bar Association has scheduled to discuss the Adoption Celebration event. She said that Dana indicated that Chicago Bar Association involvement would be scaled down. June said that Linda Coon is on the schedule for this afternoon and may be able to say more about it at that time.

Kendall said his Division would be involved in the media committee for the event.

Jim said the AAC would like it to be a joint project, with AAC members at the table in the front end of the planning. Each year AAC has a committee representing the council. Committee members who attend the planning meetings are Gwenn Eyer, Brian Hall, and Kim Wheelock. Jim Jones asked to be added. Bridgette said that last year Channel 7 was the only media that showed up because the Heart Gallery got the media the week before. Gwenn said that three years ago letters to the editor, posters, and other promotional materials were provided well in advance. Bridgette said it was also nationally supported three years ago, and there was PR support. June said that Marilyn could help with materials available from the national level. Bridgette said that on the committee's part, she did feel that they did seek to include this body. Ray said that the IL Adoption Advisory Council is the official voice of adoptive parents in Illinois, and has always struggled to have a prominent presence in this event. At a minimum, one of the co-chairs could do a one-sentence welcome. He said we bring together the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council and AAC and they attend the celebration. Vanessa said there might not be a DCFS co-chair this year. Christina said DCFS has not in the past had a strong presence in this event. Bridgette and the AAC were the only ones involved. She suggested that Kendall represent the department for this event. The Chicago Bar Association supports it financially. Only the last 2 years was there a DCFS co-chair. She suggested perhaps a co-chair could be an AAC member. Jim Jones will go to the meeting on June 12<sup>th</sup> and encouraged other council members to attend too.

Elizabeth suggested that we make it easier statewide to celebrate adoptions. June suggested having a committee to organize input from every region of the state. Elizabeth asked if we could put materials together. Kendall offered the resources to get the press releases out, print materials, and distribute statewide. Kendall cannot attend the 6/12 meeting, but felt that AAC members would represent better what they want for this event.

When Linda Coon spoke to the council later in the day, she said the meeting is scheduled for June 12th at 1:30 pm at the Chicago Bar Association on Plymouth Court between Dearborn & State.

Working Lunch – Adoption Specialist Reorg.

Valerie Davis, Associate Deputy Director of the Division of Field Operations, spoke to council members about the reorganization involving adoption workers. She distributed an organizational chart depicting Adoption Supervisors and Adoption Specialists in each of the regions. Adoption staff now have more consultant duties rather than carrying cases, and they have expertise in working with subsidies, conversions, and other adoption issues. Ms. Davis noted that a change on the org chart is that Bernice Bell was recently married and is now Bernice Stallings. Clerical staff are shared with Post Adoption and Operations.

Ms. Davis distributed a handout on Adoption Specialist Job Expectations and reviewed the document with council members.

Valerie distributed an outline of the adoption worker training. She said they are tying much of what they are doing into the IA and CAYIT programs. At this point only the Adoption Specialists are being trained.

Ursula Angielski said she has been a supervisor for five years and was an adoption worker before that. Most of the adoption workers are veteran workers. They will all go through the three-week training.

Ursula is meeting with supervisors to ensure that we are standardizing adoption practice around the state. They have developed a post adopt checklist so that the same information is going to the post adoption unit. The primary responsibility of adoption specialists is to ensure disclosures are being done, comprehensive services are in place before they do the subsidy, do the adoption conversion assessment and individual child assessment, and take the primary lead in the paperwork that goes to court in terms of investigatory or any other issues that need to be addressed.

Ursula said that as soon as the goal changes, an adoption consultant should be going to the home to discuss permanency, and they are part of the team from that point on. Even if the plan is not adoption, there should be an adoption specialist going to have these discussions, to discuss the financial aspects, and to document what direction we are going with the case.

Ms. Davis said that supervisors are assisting POS agencies with reviewing adoption subsidies, and the request for more professional and clerical staff is at the Deputy level now. The bulk of adoptions are generated by private agencies.

Little City Respite Program – Meg O'Rourke

Meg O'Rourke distributed brochures on their program. She said this is the third year for their program. They serve primarily LAN 67, which is on the west side of Chicago; however, they have now expanded to all of Cook. In January 2004 they served their first client in the post adoption program. They currently serve 16 families and 25 children. They provide funding for

foster parents to reimburse their own support network for respite. They also offer skilled respite where their staff go out to the home and serve as mentors. They serve mostly adolescents. The feedback has been that the mentors have become the sounding boards, and they have had a very positive reaction. They focus on sibling relationships when they have siblings in different placements. Initially they did this for 6 months to a year. They have had some families in the program for two years. They can serve up to 16 families for 3-4 hours per week once a week. If they have more families they cut each family's hours.

#### Catholic Charities - Freda Hardaway

Ms. Hardaway said their families could request services through the post adoption unit or go directly to the agency. Ms. Hardaway shared a couple of family scenarios demonstrating how they help families by working with the youth in building self-esteem, working on socialization skills, etc. They are currently serving eight clients on a one-on-one basis where the respite worker goes into the home 3-6 hours weekly. They reinforce what the parents are teaching. She distributed flyers on their respite program and contact information. Respite providers are paid staff and require a Bachelor's Degree.

Judy Pence said that Crittendon has elected not to contract in the next fiscal year. They serve youth age 0-3. Their funding was moved to Counseling and Family Services.

#### Budget Update - June Dorn

June Dorn distributed a preliminary budget report and permanency charts. She said she would bring details to a future meeting. She indicated that post adoption costs will increase for at least one more year. Adoption numbers are decreasing faster than expected. Three of the adoption preservation programs have increases due to increased utilization in FY'06. There were also some increases for respite programs. All of the adoption preservation programs now have respite programs. All of the information she presented was subject to final approvals.

#### Memorandum of Understanding - Linda Coon

Linda Coon introduced herself as an Adoption Attorney, Legislative Chair for the Chicago Bar Association Adoption Law Committee, and the Project Director for the Families' & Children's AIDS Network. She said she has worked with a number of families where parents are terminally or chronically ill for about 10 years now. One of the initiatives that the Bar Association wanted to take up this last session was HB 4526 sponsored by Repr. Curry to establish a program for older and ill caregivers who adopt or take guardianship of children through DCFS. This program would have the goal of helping older and ill caregivers have information about their legal options, in terms of making a plan for the children if something should happen to them, until the children reach the age of majority. She distributed a fact sheet on the bill. As of December 2004, DCFS had about 10,400 children that have caregivers that are over age 60. The post adoption unit has given anecdotal data indicating that between 1-4 caregivers pass away weekly. Linda said that as an adoption attorney she sees a number of these cases. The program is needed to help identify and prepare these families. She spoke to a number of "Grandparents Raising Grandchildren" groups and encountered people that did not know that if they readopted the child they could qualify for the subsidy the child already had. Many times families think if they identify a backup caregiver with their caseworker at the time of the adoption that it is legally done, but it is not. Linda said the bill would establish a protocol for identifying these caregivers, provide them with social work and legal services on a voluntary basis if they want a legal plan, and see

how that works. The bill passed unanimously in the house and went to the Senate. DCFS opposed the bill because of an attached fiscal note. The Governor's Office agreed to do a pilot program in Cook County, which will offer social work and legal services. The first report is due January 1, 2007 and the final is due April 15, 2007. This will be operated by the Center for Law & Social Work. Dana Corman is the Director. She was out of town today, so she asked Linda to present the information. The pilots will start July 1st and the mechanics of the program are still being worked out. The Bar Association is very glad this is happening because these cases are very chaotic. Dana would like to come to the next meeting. They will be talking to some other programs to discuss how to select cases.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

##### Approval of Minutes of April 7, 2006 Meeting

***Rev. Art Davis made a motion to accept the April 7th minutes as written. Ronald Davis seconded. The motion passed unanimously.***

##### Membership

Ray Gates reported that Eddie Baines from Cook South would not be reappointed because of her inability to attend. Members that will be recommended for reappointment to another three-year term are Sue Cianci, Bernie Spitz, Susanne Loss, Elizabeth Richmond, David Matthews, and Jim Jones. We still have several vacancies that are listed in the member packets. If anyone has recommendations they should let one of the co-chairs, Ray or Terry know.

##### Agenda for Next Meeting/Wrap-Up

Respite - Jeanne Howard

Disclosure Form - Gretchen Schulert

Older Caregivers Pilot Program - Dana Corman or Linda Coon

Final Respite Report - Deb Kinsey

College Assistance for Adopted Children - Ray contact Cynthia Moreno on that question.

Kathy Casey distributed a flyer on the Adoptive Families Today Conference in Palatine in November.

The meeting adjourned at 2:40 p.m.