

**Joint Meeting of the  
 Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council  
 & Illinois Adoption Advisory Council  
 Approved MINUTES  
 3518 West Division Street, Chicago, IL  
 November 17, 2006  
 9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**

<p><b>SWFCAC Members</b>  <b>PRESENT:</b>          Mercedes Ball          Donsetta Blakely          Gladys Boyd          Sylvia Flory          Debbie Freke          Cecil Garner          Robyn Harvey          Nancy Hughes          Birdia Jenkins          Leanne Montgomery          Ramon Nieves          Andre Robinson          Heather Schumacher          Uli Senz          Antionette Walker          Patricia Welander          Adrienne Welenc          Mary White</p> <p><b>ABSENT:</b>          Ruth Dominguez          Tonya Duke          Ruth Jajko          Vicky Kline          Geraldine Wilson</p>	<p><b>AAC Members</b>  <b>PRESENT:</b>          Art Davis          Mary Debose          Diane Dominguez          Gwenn Eyer          Brian Hall          Betty Johnson          James Jones          Susanne Loss          Alan Marcus          David Matthews          Krista McCoy          Dorothy McGhee          Kate Monte          Marilyn Panichi          Elizabeth Richmond          Gina Samuels          Gretchen Schultert          Michele Seidl          Mark Werner</p> <p><b>ABSENT:</b>          Kathy Casey          Sue Cianci          Patricia Cooper          Ronald Davis          Jeanne Howard          Joyce Loy          Jackie Sharp Akins          Terry Solomon          Bernadine Spitz          Shannabeth Stein          Ron Tyler          Kim Wheelock</p>	<p><b>DCFS STAFF:</b>          Ursula Angielski          Michael Byrd          Mildred Cardona          Iris M. Cuevas          June Dorn          Ray Gates          Laura Garza          Bridgette Glickman          Treva Hamilton          Idell Harris          Vanessa James          Erwin McEwen          Terry McGlothlin          Donna Moore          Cynthia Moreno          Rod Mulford          Christina Schneider          Velma Williams          Sue Zarlenga</p>	<p><b>GUESTS:</b>          Christina Bruhn          Jean Samuels          Leonie Smalling          Jerry Welenc</p>
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### **Welcome & Introductions**

Elizabeth Richmond welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked all in attendance to introduce himself/herself. Mary White informed everyone that the meeting was being recorded to assure accurate minutes.

### **Approval of Minutes from 10/20/06 SWFCAC Meeting - Uli Senz**

Uli Senz asked for any corrections to the SWFCAC minutes. Adrienne Welenc requested a change to page three, third bullet. She clarified that the FPSS in Cook are asked to provide support for DCFS homes that have POS children in them. *Motion: Adrienne made a motion to accept the minutes with the correction. Mary White seconded. All were in favor.*

### **Approval of Minutes from 10/6/06 AAC Meeting - Jim Jones**

Jim Jones asked for any corrections to the AAC minutes. *Rev. Davis made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Alan Marcus seconded. All were in favor.*

### **Final Reports to Director - Uli Senz**

Uli asked for any final reports to the Director from SWFCAC committees. There were none.

### **Update on CWAC Education Committee Work - Cynthia Moreno**

Elizabeth introduced Cynthia Moreno, Deputy Director of the Division of Service Intervention. Cynthia thanked the councils for inviting her. She said the Division of Service Intervention has focused mainly on education for the last year. She said the CWAC Education Subcommittee is primarily made up of staff from private agencies and DCFS, from Cook County and downstate. They are reviewing the entire span of education, beginning with early childhood on up to post-secondary, including alternative settings, such as on-site residential, vocational, etc.

Cynthia said she has been appointed to the Governor's Task Force on re-enrolling youth that are out of school. They have been holding public hearings around the state to look at the issue of young people who are not in school for many reasons. The Task Force will make a recommendation to the Governor's Office in January. Four legislators are working with them on this task force.

Cynthia said the CWAC Education Committee workgroups have been meeting since summer, working on identifying some of the barriers and some of the good things happening in the five different groups. Sharon Freagon from NIU, Director of the Education Access Project, is one of the co-chairs, as well as the Director of Allendale. The committee is focusing on what key activities they can do with each of the age groups to impact school enrollment in 2007. There are also a couple of side projects they are working on with NIU. There was a proposal from Casey Foundation to look at innovative ways to work on educational issues. They participated in a phone call with hopes of getting funds to do this new project, but Casey did not offer any funding. The project, in partnership with NIU, will look at the Rockford school district and identify children in the school district with a return home goal. They have already met with the Superintendent and Asst. Superintendent in charge of support services in Rockford. They will partner with the school to work with foster parents, teachers, caseworkers, and biological parents to make sure the academic progression continues after the child returns home. There are less

than 200 children that would meet the description of a return home in the Rockford school district.

This past summer a symposium was held at NIU on how trauma affects academic performance and how we can keep youth on track academically.

Cynthia reminded everyone that in January the applications for scholarships would be coming out, and the application period is January - March. She will make sure council members get applications for their next meeting. It is a full four-year scholarship to any of the nine state institutions. They receive up to a \$450 stipend, a medical card for the full four years, tuition, and assistance with their books.

Cynthia said she also co-chairs the CWAC Older Adolescent Workgroup. Last year they held one youth summit in Cook County, and fifteen more throughout the state. There is a lot of baseline information that workers needed to have in terms of the programs offered for older adolescents. This year they will do the youth summits again. There is a committee with four workgroups, one for each region, with 8-10 youth on the planning committee. Each youth will receive \$25 per meeting they participate in, with a maximum of \$250. She said she is asking that youth work with us to tell us what they would like to see. They are planning to hold the Youth Summits from 10-4 on Saturdays. They are hoping to have these at city and community colleges so kids can get some hands-on workshops on self-advocacy, and engage them to better preparation them for emancipation.

#### **Post Adoption Report from UIUC - Chris Bruhn**

Jim Jones introduced Chris Bruhn from the University of IL at Urbana-Champaign. Chris presented a slide show on the report that was submitted by the UIUC. The report was titled "Supporting Adoptions and Guardianships in Illinois - June 2006". She distributed a copy of the presentation. She said the full report had been distributed at a previous meeting, and was also available at the web address, which was listed on the last page of the handout. She also distributed copies of the report's highlights.

Mary White suggested that a survey be done with adoptive families that have dissolved their adoptions to find out what happened. Diane Dominguez suggested a control group of adoptive/foster families be followed over a length of time because there are many ups and downs to fostering and adopting.

Chris said her contact information is in the material she distributed and she could be called with additional questions.

#### **Placement Rotation – Acting Director/POS Monitoring Deputy Director Erwin McEwen**

Jim Jones introduced Velma Williams, Deputy Director of the Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development. Velma said there are a lot of changes in terms of reunification, which Ray would address later in the meeting. Ramon asked Velma if she sees a correlation between clinical services and failed adoptions. Velma said there are families out there that have needs that are unmet, and that issue needs to be addressed. She said this issue has also been discussed at management meetings.

Elizabeth introduced Erwin McEwen, newly appointed Acting Director of DCFS, and former SWFCAC member. Erwin introduced Richard Foltz to do a presentation on the new placement rotation system. Richard used a slide show to demonstrate the tool is used to find the closest homes for a child, in order to place them in or near their current school district. Copies of the slides were distributed. Following were some of the points made:

- \*30-40% of DCFS' children have education disabilities.
- \*There are approximately 40,000 kids in adoption or guardianship in IL, mostly foster home conversions.
- \*There are 2,700 foster homes in the database, out of 27,000 licensed homes in Illinois. There are a large number of foster parents who are not taking placements because they have adopted or taken guardianship, but they still maintain their foster care license.
- \*The new system shows a map of homes that are available for placements across the state.
- \*Before the new system was put in place, when staff needed to make a placement, they described the sibling group to be placed, including language and number of siblings, and then agencies determined which homes were available.
- \*In the new system, the age range and name of the school is entered, which brings up a list of homes in the school catchment area, and within a mile radius. It looks at distance rather than counties.
- \*The Case Assignment Unit calls several agencies at once rather than waiting to hear back from each agency.
- \*Spanish-speaking cases go through the same process but are referred based on language as well. There are 54 homes prepared to serve Spanish-speaking children.
- \*A survey is sent out to agencies weekly, and then licensing staff respond to what homes are available, their language, age ranges, and capacity.
- \*Relative placements take precedence. They do not go through this system.
- \* Decision-making has to be made for a smaller percentage of youth when keeping them in the same vicinity would create a safety issue. Safety is the total goal and mission of the system. Those decisions are made at the front end of the new reunification model.
- \*The new placement rotation system was created in response to a finding in the Child and Family Services review. There has already been an improvement in placing children closer to their schools.
- \*The new system has been used for 90 days in 35-40% of the intake cases. It only operates during the day from 9-5 and is not used if there are relatives available to place the child with.

Krista McCoy said that in all of the cases her agency has received through the new system, the child has been placed within one mile of the birth parent. She also said that if the agency does not accept a case they have to "take a hit". She said that in 100% of the cases they are having some trouble, such as birth parents harassing foster parents and/or stalking the children, and schools are not meeting the child's needs. Erwin said DCFS has been working with the Chicago Public Schools and a lot of work has been done to address those needs. He said moving one child out of that school is not the answer. He said that social workers need to utilize engagement and outreach skills, and communicate with birth parents and foster parents.

Erwin explained that when agencies "take a hit" that just means that DCFS met their obligation by giving the agency a referral and the agency then goes back to the bottom of the rotation cycle. He said the struggle is that agencies now have to report their availability. Some agencies have 100 referral opportunities but only 15 slots in the database.

Erwin said that in Cook there is a shelter care system, but not downstate. After-hour rotation does not have these limitations on it. He said in some ways it has created a control group.

Art Davis suggested a group of homes to take kids during the integrated assessment phase. Erwin said we need to minimize the number of placement moves, but he would be willing to consider this idea for teenagers.

Vanessa said foster parents usually need more than an hour to decide whether to accept children.

Nancy Hughes said this puts a lot more pressure on agencies to know their foster parents, recruit new foster parents, and have systems to get in touch with those foster parents when they have a referral. She said the kids would endorse staying in the same school, not as the only criteria but at least as one of the primary criteria, and there is tremendous merit in what is important to the kids.

Krista asked if agencies could share the responsibility. Erwin said that the Foster Care Infrastructure Committee opposed the sharing of foster homes, but sharing the responsibility may come into play with disruptions or other situations.

Erwin said that accomplishing reunification within 12 months would be difficult, but DCFS is working on it through the concurrent planning and reunification models. He said that when adoption takes place within 24 months of placement, it is typically due to a voluntary surrender. Birth parents decide to make specific surrenders to foster parents that they have talked to and trust with their children.

Erwin said we need to recruit more foster homes in the areas where we most need them, and we need to recruit people with the interest of assisting with reunification.

### **Working Lunch - Adoption Reform Law - Christina Schneider**

In response to a question, Christina said that subsidized guardianship parents are permitted to make decisions regarding the child that are in the child's best interest, and if they have a legitimate reason to deny a visit, they are allowed to do so. This is not a decision to be made lightly, but biological parents do not have absolute rights to visitation if the visits are not in the best interest of the child.

Christina said the Adoption Reform Act was signed in August 2005, and it made a lot of changes to adoption practice in IL. It most affected adoption agencies that do non-DCFS adoptions and provided many changes in the law in relation to how DCFS monitors and licenses adoption agencies. DCFS implemented Rule 401 that went into effect February 2006, and has drafted new procedures to go along with the rule. The Birth Parent Bill of Rights and Responsibilities and Adoptive Parent Bill of Rights and Responsibilities are going to be utilized in non-DCFS

agency-assisted adoptions. Illinois adoption agencies will be required to use these documents whenever they place a child for adoption. Members of the Adoption Advisory Council worked with Christina to develop this product. The Rule 401 Workgroup will be meeting on Monday, in Room 6-215 of the JRTC, to discuss these two documents. Christina asked anyone with suggestions to email her at Christina.Schneider@Illinois.gov

Christina said the bill was passed as an unfunded piece of legislation and the cost to implement it was estimated to be over \$1million. Phase one of the website is implemented and can be accessed through the DCFS website under the adoption link. It lists all of the licensed adoption agencies in Illinois. The toll-free number is not in place yet due to lack of funding for staff to answer the phone. Two more phases are planned for the website, but are on hold at this time.

DCFS provision of non-ward adoption subsidies - Christina said this is not a new issue but it is an issue that has received a lot of attention in the last couple of years. Some privately adopted children, if they have special needs and meet certain criteria, can be eligible to receive adoption subsidies through DCFS. DCFS only received 17 of these applications last year, and fewer this year, although they have made enormous efforts to educate all adoption agencies. Christina said she has also trained adoption attorneys in private practice to make sure they are aware that non-ward subsidies are available. The information is also on the DCFS website. Criteria are narrow and not a lot of children are eligible. Approval has to be obtained before the adoption is finalized.

#### **Draw Agencies to Be Reviewed in 2007 - Policy Committee**

This action was tabled until the January SWFCAC meeting.

#### **Report from Office of Foster Parent Support Services - Ray Gates**

##### Reunification Training

Ray said that foster parent leadership was invited to attend the Reunification training for supervisors. Terry is handling the registration process for council members. The next training is scheduled for November 28-30 in Peoria, Maywood and Rock Island. Council members will be advised of additional dates as they are scheduled.

Planning for reunification training for foster parents will begin in January. Caregivers to serve as co-trainers have been selected from the IAAC and SWFCAC. Other foster parents will also be selected. There is no time schedule as to when the training will begin, but probably in early spring.

Adam Walsh Legislation - Ray said the Department is waiting to hear from the federal government. Nancy Haber and Gailyn Thomas are forming an implementation work group so Ray sent them an email Thursday asking how both councils can be involved. He will keep council members informed.

##### Adoption Month

Ray said information on Adoption Month was included in members' packets, including proclamations from both the Governor and the President, posters, bookmarks and a list of activities that are scheduled in various regions of the state. He said if anyone wanted more

bookmarks or posters they should call Terry or Nancy and they would have them shipped to them.

Training Reorganization - Ray said that PRIDE and in-service trainings would be centralized in the DCFS Office of Training. The official date was to be June 30, 2007, however, of the eight community colleges that currently provide the training, seven have opted out of their contracts as of 12/31/06. Judy Zaleski will come to the January SWFCAC meeting to give an update. Debbie said the lending libraries are already closed and no new PRIDE classes are being offered. Foster parents cannot be referred into the classes at this point. Ray said it is critical that all of the information and the specifics be given to Jean Maher. Debbie said adoption conversion training is also on hold and many families are close to adoption but need training. Recruiters are holding the applications because they can't get the training.

Resource Family Committee - Ray said Bernadette McCarthy & Peggy Slater have convened a committee to work on PIP issues around reunification. They meet via conference call, and have had two calls so far. Elizabeth Richmond was on the first call. Donsetta Blakely, Mary White and Kate Monte volunteered to participate. The next call is scheduled for December 4th at 10:00 a.m., and the call-in number is 1-800-864-4804, passcode 7778662. It should last about 1 1/2 hours.

Partnering With Parents Councils - Ray said a council is up and running in Cook County and Rockford, and one is being formed in Peoria. The first downstate Information Fair was held at the Peoria Civic Center on November 3rd and it went well. Elizabeth Richmond, Bob Blackwell and his management team worked at the event. Thirty-five agencies from the community that serve our parents had displays and there were 3-4 presentations in the adjoining room, including a powerful panel presentation by three birth moms. Part of the success was a pretty good turn out of birth parents, who took advantage of everything offered. They had the opportunity for one on one discussion with the management team. Another Information Fair is being planned for Champaign in March. Ray said this is an important piece of the reunification initiative. Rev. Davis volunteered to work on this project.

FPSS Positions - Ray said Adrienne has been copied on all emails regarding where positions are, which ones are vacant, etc. The committee continues to work on issues, such as assuring that vacant positions are filled. Ray said he spoke with Larry Chasey, who said he told the regions to fill the positions, and he needs to know where the vacant positions are; then he will look into it.

CWAC Training Committee - Ray said that Debbie Freke is going to be on this committee and should hear from someone within the next 2 weeks regarding meeting information.

SWFCAC Brochure - Ray said that at the October 10th SWFCAC meeting, council members asked that a brochure be developed about the council. They would like an official document about the council to distribute at professional meetings and conferences. Vanessa James is going to start developing it, take a look at the statute, and work with council members to get a working draft. She will include basic information from statute, membership, goals, action shots, highlights and incentive for others to join. She and the council members that work with her will

present a draft to the full council in January. SWFCAC volunteers were Jerry Welenc, Uli Senz, and Patty Welander. Vanessa will contact them to set up a conference call.

Child Welfare Licensure Committee - Ray said Antionette would be a SWFCAC representative on the Child Welfare Employee Licensure Committee. There is still a vacancy for another SWFCAC member and a representative from IAAC. Mary Debose is already on the CWEL Committee, but she maybe representing another group. An adoptive parent asked if she could be on the CWEL committee. Ray asked her to give her contact information to Terry and we would check.

#### Home of Relative Licensing Initiative Update

Ray said he spoke to Steve Minter. There were 378 unlicensed relative homes in the state. Steve and his staff reviewed the homes, and have licensed 20 percent of them. There is significant federal funding attached to having the homes licensed. There is no funding for the unlicensed homes. The other 80% could not be licensed for a number of reasons. Private agencies are collecting similar data right now.

#### **General Discussion - Synopsis of Accomplishments - Joint Agendas - All Chairs**

Jim Jones asked for feedback on the joint meeting. It was the consensus that it was a good idea for the two councils to continue meeting annually.

Uli asked SWFCAC members to sign their Ethics Training forms to return to Adrienne, and to also return their Conflict of Interest forms for reviewing implementation plans to Terry today. Uli said there has been discussion at SWFCAC about becoming more proactive and be more aggressive about getting involved with things before they happen. He said that council members have been concerned that they were not being heard. He asked if AAC members would be interested in coordinating efforts.

Alan Marcus suggested that Congresswoman Melissa Bean is a tremendous advocate for adoption and could be invited to a meeting. Uli said Sara Feigenholtz attended last year's joint meeting and said that the legislature needs to hear more from foster and adoptive families. She is notified of meetings, and could also be asked to come to the table and brainstorm on a conference call once in a while. Diane Dominguez suggested a few strong council members could get together to brainstorm issues.

Adoption Month Celebration - Elizabeth said that the joint meeting is typically held in November because of the Adoption Celebration. She said the Chicago Bar would not be supporting that major production any more. She said although there was not enough time to coordinate it for this year, it could be planned for next year. Uli said that the SWFCAC clearly criticized that the event was not done, and has made a clear commitment to work towards an event in 2007.

#### Suggestions:

- \*Involve the press
- \*Celebrate the promotion of foster and adoptive homes
- \*Have informational speakers to speak to the issues rather than politicians
- \*Focus on recognizing families that have adopted

Marilyn said that Voices for Adoption in Washington asked all Congressmen to feature a portrait of an adoptive family in their office in November. They also held a reception honoring one Republican and one Democratic for their work in child welfare. Two families spoke, including one 14 year-old who spoke about what adoption meant to him.

Marilyn Panichi will chair the planning committee for Adoption Month 2007. Ramon Nieves, Art Davis, Alan Marcus, Brian Hall, Gwenn Eyer, Bridgette Glickman and Michelle Seidl volunteered for the committee. They will work to come up with a plan and a proposal to determine funding. Ray asked Bridgette to inform Kendall Marlowe of this effort.

Future Agenda Items:

AAC:

\*Clarification of discussion on Case Rotation. Uli said that Pat Welander chairs an ad hoc committee on this issue for SWFCAC, and asked for concerns to be relayed to them. Krista McCoy will be the link from AAC to the SWFCAC subcommittee.

\*Post Adoption Report - Review what was learned and make some recommendations as to what we would like to see. Invite Chris Bruhn to come to a future meeting.

\*Invite Judy Zaleski to give an update on the training reorganization.

SWFCAC:

\*Invite Judy Zaleski to give an update on the training reorganization.

The meeting adjourned by motion and second at 3:00 p.m.