

**Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Meeting**  
**October 20, 2006**  
**Quality Suites, 7401 Walton Street, Rockford, IL 61108**  
**9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.**  
**(Approved as Amended at 11/17/06 Meeting)**

| <b>Members Present</b>  | <b>Members Absent</b>  | <b>DCFS Staff</b>  | <b>Guests</b>                  |
|---|--|--|--------------------------------|
| Mercedes Ball<br>Donsetta Blakely<br>Gladys Boyd<br>Debbie Freke<br>Cecil Garner<br>Robyn Harvey<br>Ruth Jajko<br>Birdia Jenkins<br>Vicky Kline<br>Leanne Montgomery<br>Ramon Nieves<br>Uli Senz<br>Antionette Walker<br>Adrienne Welenc<br>Patricia Welander<br>Mary White<br>Geraldine Wilson | Ruth Dominguez<br>Tonya Duke<br>Sylvia Flory<br>Nancy Hughes<br>Andre Robinson<br>Heather Schumacher | Kay Clark<br>Gwenn Eyer<br>Ray Gates<br>Sidella Hughes<br>Vanessa James<br>Bernadette McCarthy<br>Terry McGlothlin<br>Sue Zarlenga | Sharon Dempsey<br>Jerry Welenc |

**Hospitality**

Mary White welcomed members and guests, announcing that the meeting would be recorded to assure accurate minutes.

**Welcome and Introductions**

Uli Senz, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and asked members to offer brief introductions.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Minutes from September 8, 2006 Meeting**

Uli asked for any additions or corrections to the minutes from the September 8th meeting. Revisions are shown below in bold type.

Vicky Kline provided clarification for her Southern Region Advisory Council report, including the following:

- 1) Vicky reported that they held one of their three **satellite** meetings, discussing reports from the most recent **field office** meetings.
- 2) (Each office is responsible for hosting the meeting once per year and must report back to the large group.) **Moved statement forward from later in the paragraph.**

***MOTION: Adrienne Welenc made the motion to accept the minutes as corrected. Ruth Jajko seconded and the motion carried.***

**Ethics Training - Adrienne Welenc**

Adrienne stated that due to state requirements, members must complete the ethics training. She distributed packets, with instructions, and said she would collect signed statements at the close of the meeting and after members had completed the training.

## **FINAL REPORTS TO THE DIRECTOR**

There were no final committee reports to the Director. Uli explained that as Chair of the Council he is responsible for submitting a monthly report to the Director and that a copy of the August and September reports are provided in the packet. He stated that in the future the agenda item for final reports should also include any final committee reports, as these reports will need to be approved by the Council before moving forward to the Director when it is appropriate to forward them.

### **Regional Reports**

*Cook Central - Jerry Welenc*

Cook Central held training on confidentiality and court.

*Cook South - Geraldine Wilson, President*

Geraldine stated that at their October 18th meeting Ray Gates presented a training including the history of the Foster Parent Law. She expressed appreciation to Ray for such a fine presentation. She stated that their council is expanding. They are requesting that each POS agency in Cook South provide two committed council members. Vanessa mentioned that the upcoming issue of *Illinois Families Now & Forever* would include an appeal for participation.

*Northern Region - Robyn Harvey*

Robyn stated that one council meeting was cancelled the day of the meeting, and that their council met another time after that. They are working to build participation. She said the Northern Region Council meets in the evening at the DeKalb field office.

*Southern Region - Vicky Kline*

Vicky reported that they held six Foster Parent Law implementation plan meetings so far, with four more scheduled. Their draft plan has been written. Foster parents have been sent a letter from the Regional Advisory Council Chair instructing them as to how they can make comments and suggestions. They have a meeting November 1<sup>st</sup> for sign off. Some areas have been hosting fall foster parent appreciation meetings.

*Central Region - Mary White*

Mary White reported that the Central Region Council met September 20<sup>th</sup> with RA Bob Blackwell. She said that supervisors have had their reunification training, and council members recommended that caseworkers and foster parents be co-trained on this topic.

### **Foster Parents in Reunification Training**

\*Debbie Freke stated that she has contacted Jean Maher regarding this issue.

\*Adrienne stated that she also had discussed it with Bernadette McCarthy.

\*Ray Gates stated that he has had conversations with Judy Zaleski who has stated that foster parent reunification training will be available, however, he did not ask her about co-training the topic. He also stated that Kay Clark and Bernadette McCarthy will be luncheon speakers today and recommended that members ask them their questions.

### **Foster Parents in Reunification Training, Cont.**

\*Ruth Jajko stated that there is a committee planning the foster parent component and their first steering meeting is October 25<sup>th</sup>, lead by Peggy Slater.

\*Vicky clarified that co-training has two connotations; 1) training two groups together at the same site at the same time (e.g. foster parents and staff) and 2) one group co-presenting with a representative of the other group (e.g. a foster parent co-training with staff).

Mary continued reporting other issues discussed at the meeting. She said Mr. Blackwell brought up the CAPU issue, and Gail Bellis provided the survey results including foster parent comments. Mary pointed out one comment that requested the return of the Foster Parent Support Specialist. She also referenced the lack of systemic support in initial placement. Marsha Jones reported on the 800 Helpline, stating that they were able to take care of 48 of 49 calls received.

Uli Senz suggested that when hot topics arise in local council meetings, regional representatives should provide SWFCAC a written report with their local council's recommendation. Vicki indicated that the form formerly provided for reporting should be recirculated and utilized. Terry will attempt to locate the form and send it to members.

#### *Cook North - Cecil Garner*

Cecil stated that a meeting was held where they discussed and worked on revising their implementation plan. They also plan to utilize a survey that was sent out prior to the meeting.

**DISCUSSION:** Uli opened a discussion around regional issues. Discussion included the following points:

- In Northern region, foster parents are pretty dissatisfied with workers' response times.
- Foster parents are asked to do the almost impossible, but are given nothing in return.
- There is an issue concerning the lack of FPSS for POS homes.
  1. Adrienne stated that in Cook County FPSS's are requested to provide support for POS homes that have DCFS in them.
- There is a high level of caseworker turnover and limited support.
  1. Ruth stated that it's a crisis in the social work field. When POS workers compare their roles, responsibilities, etc., they often totally leave the child welfare field rather than just circulate from agency to agency.
  2. Concern was expressed about the lack of training, preparation and support for new workers, expecting them to carry case loads after 5-10 days.
  3. Where do we find data regarding the turnover rate?
  4. We need to make note of the past implementation plans we have scored – 2006 is the first year DCFS regions have made it into the top five scores.
  5. Workers feel the push/pull of trying to adhere to policy while still meeting client needs.
- Does privatization make sense?
  1. Does it “do good” or does it provide harm? Should the council pursue the question?
  2. Overall it looks like we're looking at 80% privatization – not 100%.

Ray stated that Erwin McEwen will attend the November meeting and will be available to address key issues. Ray also referenced a tool that supports the reunification model: the “Icebreakers” program that brings birth parents, foster parents, and workers to the table immediately after placement.

Vicky reminded the Council that the Foster Care Advisory Council Law pushes us to address policy that impacts foster care.

**TASK:** Ray will ask Deputy McEwen to add a discussion about the performance data collected by the APT and how that data is used to impact agency performance to his presentation.

**TASK:** Ray will ask Deputy McEwen where to gather similar data re: DCFS performance.

**TASK:** Ray will ask Elizabeth Richmond to provide information to the council regarding the Central Region Icebreaker program.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **Policy Committee – Ray Gates for Heather Schumacher**

Ray said a conference call was held to design the council training for on-site FP Law Implementation Reviews. Heather and Ray will train members in January.

Ray said the proposed changes to the Foster Parent Law, that were previously recommended by the Policy Committee, have been reviewed by Dana Yowell and Shelley Knuppel. They will take it to the Director for his approval, and then the requested changes can go forward to the Governor’s Office.

Follow-up regarding the Council’s inclusion in reviewing and commenting on policy drafts:

- The Director’s initial remarks to SWFCAC 3 years ago indicate that there would be no change in the way the Department relates to the Council.
- Following the last meeting, Ray contacted Susan Netznik, Policy Division, to clarify procedures re: dissemination of draft policy. Susan stated that all policy is distributed to Council members via Email. Terry McGlothlin has forwarded updated mailing lists to Susan and has been added to the distribution as a means to ensure that policies are going out and so she can remind members to review the most important ones.

### **Adolescent Issues/ Statewide Youth Advisory Board Liaison – Robyn Harvey**

Robyn stated that she has not yet met with other committee members; however, she has been in close contact with the chair of the SYAB and plans to attend their upcoming meeting. Robyn indicated that she would continue to offer SWFCAC support for addressing the driver’s license issue.

### **Archives – Jerry Welenc**

No meeting to date.

### **Legislation – Ruth Jajko**

Ruth stated that the Legislative Committee had a conference call and discussed House Bill 4242. She said the bill has passed and that the main practice difference involves the required documentation for placing with a relative. They discussed the issue regarding foster parents having the right to be considered as a placement option for foster children formerly in their care.

The question was forwarded to the DCFS Policy Division. The response was that the formal appeal process would not really help a foster parent in this situation, but instead, a FP Law grievance should be filed. Adrienne stated that the documents workers use when a child comes into care do not include a search for past placements.

Ruth said the Child Care Association has extended an invitation to the committee to participate on their weekly policy calls.

Jerry stated that the committee also discussed limits to what this committee can do with consideration of potential conflict of interest or appearance thereof.

**TASK:** Ruth Jajko will follow up on including the prior placement information in the documents workers use when a child comes into care.

### **Adam Walsh Bill - Ray Gates**

Ray referenced the information on page 19, indicating that he exchanged e-mails with Larry Chasey, Downstate Operations, regarding how it will be implemented.

- We are currently waiting to see how it rolls out from the feds.
- This report will make the council aware of the legislation, with the understanding that we won't do anything else until we receive further direction from the feds.
- One major concern is the cost – higher levels of background checks will cost approximately \$57 each.
- Another concern is potential delays in making placements, while waiting for national background checks.

### **Foster Parent Support Specialists - Vicky Kline**

Vicky said that they are trying to gather information regarding FPSS demographics, including the number of Support Specialists, their locations, geographic areas covered, etc. She stated that contracts have come out, but there are problems with the way they were presented. There are areas of the state that do not have a FPSS, even though funds are available. Vicky stated that another issue is that all new hires are independent contractors and receive a different program plan.

### **Training - Debbie Freke**

This new committee spent time brainstorming regarding key issues to be addressed. One hot topic is the training requirement for the new Reunification Initiative. The committee believes that this is a challenging issue for foster parents, which needs to be addressed through intensive training. Another key issue is the new placement protocol where foster parents will potentially be parenting their neighbors. The committee believes that FP training needs to be developed to specifically address issues including boundaries, confidentiality, etc. They also discussed the value of online training. Although convenient, it totally blocks out the personal interaction that leads to learning. In addition, there is great concern for foster parents who do not have Internet access or navigational skills. Concern has been expressed regarding the issues of losing the local college coordination when training is centralized.

Committee Goal: We want to be sure that foster parents receive adequate training to prepare them to care for children.

Ray addressed some of the issues, stating the following:

- Judy Zaleski has assured this council when she met with us last July in Alton that the foster parent training reorganization should be seamless for foster parents and that there should be no net effect on the quality of training.
- Judy will attend SWFCAC in January to discuss the full rollout of the reorganization of foster parent training as well as the training plan for foster parent reunification training.
- Ray will ask Judy if Debbie Freke can sit on the Reunification Training Committee. The next meeting is November 30<sup>th</sup>.

Bernadette McCarthy, Training Division, reinforced the training plan for Reunification Training for foster parents. She reiterated that staff training is going on now, and that training specific to foster parents is being developed, noting that all foster parents will receive reunification training. In addition, PRIDE pre-service and in-service trainings will be strengthened to support the reunification concepts. She answered questions regarding the need to roll the staff training out right away, rather than holding it to make it co-training with foster parents. She also suggested that it might be possible to include foster parent leadership in the staff trainings, especially for administrators and managers. With Judy's approval, Ray's office will oversee the invitation process.

The Council unanimously endorsed two Training Committee recommendations:

- 1) **Recommendation:** The Council endorsed the recommendation that a member of the SWFCAC Training Committee be appointed to attend CWAC Training Committee meetings.
- 2) **Recommendation:** The Council will pursue the inclusion of members of the SWFCAC, as well as Foster Parent Support Specialists, in the three-day reunification training for staff.

#### **PA92-0295 School Records Act – Mary White**

Dana Yowell and Illinois State Board of Education representatives are currently addressing this issue. No committee action needed until we hear back from Dana. Ray Gates will report next meeting.

#### **New Case Assignment/Placement Procedures – Patricia Welander**

In this contract year there's a big change in the way placement decisions are made for traditional foster care. DCFS has developed a database system called the Foster Home Availability Database to be used in a centralized intake process for the entire state. This practice replaces the old rotation method. (It excludes add-ons, identified spec cases and relative placements.) The underlying goals are to support reunification and to minimize the trauma caused by a high number of disruptions in a child's life domains.

Steps: The Case Assignment Unit runs through the database to find the foster home closest to the child's home school or home school district to allow each child to stay as close to his/her home community as possible. If there is only one available home, that agency receives the call to place. Otherwise, agencies are contacted in a manner similar to viewing concentric circles from the school outward. Agencies have one hour to respond as to whether they can take the child for placement. (Some of the decision as to which agency to call is based on agency performance

factors.) Development of the database is ongoing. Currently, the calls may be so individualized that the agency really has only one family to call for placement.

Patricia said that Nancy Hughes will take the Council's concerns to Erwin McEwen for discussion. Ray added that Deputy Director Erwin McEwen has accepted SWFCAC's invitation to attend the November 17<sup>th</sup> joint meeting to explain the new placement system.

### **Reunification Initiative – Ruth Jajko reporting in absence of Nancy Hughes**

Ruth stated that she believes that the things foster parents will be asked to do may be challenging for them. Some of the concepts are new, including the birth parent/foster parent meetings within the first 48 hours. We'll have to work on ways to include parents in medical appointments, report card pickup, etc. The training for administrators and managers involves going over the material rather quickly. There's a lot of focus on how to look at the visitation as a more effective intervention, using the visits to coach, and offering parents feedback regarding areas to work on.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **WORKING LUNCH**

#### **Foster Parent's Role in Reunification – Bernadette McCarthy and Kay Clark**

#### **Kathleen (Kay) Clark, Associate Deputy Director, DCFS Division of Clinical Services and Professional Development**

Kay stated that she and Bernadette have been traveling around the state to disseminate information about the reunification model and to meet with stakeholders. She stated that they would be happy to meet with regional councils to share information about the model, as well. In September 2003 the federal review studied casework practice. They recognized that Illinois has done very well with adoption work and work with Subsidized Guardianship, but just did not meet the benchmark for reunification. For the past two years, workgroups have been looking at reunification. Stakeholders from DCFS, POS, etc. dealt with topics including court, foster parents, and clinical practice. Drafts of the model were presented in May, and the model has now been approved by the feds and by DCFS management. The model is approached in terms of engagement. It is a paradigm shift from earlier processes, which may have come across as adversarial, and it is still a work in progress. Training began in August, but was curtailed for a couple of weeks for mid-course corrections to deal with issues that arose. Workers will be trained from mid-November through March. It will roll out sequentially beginning in January.

#### **Bernadette McCarthy, Northwestern University, Consultant to the DCFS Clinical Division**

Bernadette said they recognize that this is very difficult work and that this is nothing new – it's probably work that many of us do intuitively as foster parents. She also stated that although this may have always been a primary goal, we still have children and youth in care. **This model reminds people that we really don't anticipate that any more than 15% of our children/families will be candidates for this reunification model.** The majority of our cases are more accurately identified as concurrent planning cases. An estimated 5% of our cases are what we refer to as "Expedited Termination". The reunification model is called, "Permanency Planning toward Reunification", and it addresses the need to get the 15% of children to safely return home in a timely manner while supporting the concurrent planning and expedited termination for others.

Key components include the following:

- The Integrated Assessment model supports the goal to work with the family from entry.
- Two facets, return home and timely decision making, drive this program.
- We will look at parenting domains that demonstrate safe parenting.
- Through IA, this program also pushes comprehensive diligent search through the diligent search center. This search will look for relatives who are willing to provide care for the child as well as relatives who will provide support in other ways. There is a renewed focus on paternal family members.
- The first Family Meeting, held within 48 hours, begins to engage birth parents and includes work around identifying reasons their child is in care. It includes foster parents.
  - The worker empathically engages the parent and goes over reasons why their child is in care.
  - The child and family have a reconnection visit.
  - Serves as an “icebreaker” meeting to begin to engage the foster parent and birth family in shared parenting. There are clinical determinations as to the appropriateness of these steps. E.g., foster parents may not always be included in this meeting. One reason could be a perceived threat to safety.
  - Early, fast, constant and continuous is the focus.
- Ongoing meetings follow to provide support in working with birth families in a collaborative relationship.
- Coaching visitation is required twice monthly. (Coaching goes on even in unsupervised visits.)

Implications for Foster Parents Include the Following:

- Building on well-established concepts presented in PRIDE
- Early involvement
- Involvement in shared parenting – a logistical and attitudinal issue
- If it looks like an early reunification case, we really want to focus on increased visitation and will speak with foster parents regarding their support, including perhaps offering their home for visits.
- Training, support, techniques, ways to identify safety issues.
- Utilize “older” foster parents as partners in this program.
- Making this work with the current CAPU placement plan?
- Views matches as a triad – foster family + child + birth family.
- Structurally, there is a committee with oversight for this program and subcommittees that provide support for implementation. Bernadette invited the Council to have representation on this committee. Ray will ask Judy Zaleski if Debbie Freke can join the committee at their next meeting.

Critical Components to Make this Plan Successful:

- This model really depends on a caseworker to be caring enough to make things happen.
- Workers must understand the importance.
- The worker has to engage with the client to make this work – may involve attitudinal change.
- Expectations for caseworkers must be streamlined to support dedicated participation; however, not every family is going to need the same intensive attention at the same time.

## **DISCUSSION**

- Clarifies the plan for the foster parents.
- Concern was expressed regarding services and supports for teen parents.

**PLEASE SEE: Permanency Planning toward Family Reunification Executive Summary** in attachments.

### **Update on Other Councils - Bridgette Glickman**

Bridgette was not in attendance and did not provide a written report.

### **Council Inclusion in the Department's Work on Policy & Practice**

There was discussion about the monthly report that the Chair submits to the Director. A question was raised as to why there was never response from the Director. In addition, Jerry Welenc mentioned that Rep. Feigenholtz came to a past meeting and said that the Legislature never sees foster parents, and she suggested that foster parents have a presence to make an impact. Adrienne said foster parents got the last COLA because she and other council members (as citizens) lobbied agencies and sent out letters for the cause. Uli said we are an advisory council, which does not mean we cannot advocate for certain issues, but IFAPA is an advocacy organization that could take a leadership role rather than SWFCAC acting as a lobbying group. He said we have not recently had an issue on the agenda to take to the legislature. Two issues that were suggested were the COLA for adoptive parents and the FPSS issue. Ramon suggested we invite legislators to attend when we meet in Springfield to give the council visibility. Ruth said the Child Care Association's annual meeting is coming up and they will be discussing their strategy for another COLA, and we could partner with them. Ruth will be at the annual meeting and will bring that information back to the council as a report from the Legislative Committee. Gladys Boyd said she would also take this issue back to IFAPA.

***MOTION: Ramon made a motion that the council would support in principle and work toward a regular COLA increase for foster parents to enable foster parents to adequately care for children. Adrienne seconded. All were in favor and the motion carried.***

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

Implementation Reviews – Ray said last year the lead reviewer was given the implementation plan. He asked if both members of the team need the plan. Yes they do.

Caregiver Training Institutes – The dates and locations for the 2007 Caregiver Training Institutes are on page 25 of the packet. Ray asked members to recommend older youth who would be able to participate on the youth panels and foster parents who could co-train a workshop on reunification.

November 17<sup>th</sup> Joint Meeting with AAC – The meeting location has been changed. Ray said the meeting was inadvertently removed from the schedule for 160 N. LaSalle. The meeting will now be held at 3518 West Division in Chicago. Council members requesting lodging will stay at the Renaissance. There is free parking at the meeting site. Driving directions and taxi costs from the Renaissance are included in the meeting announcement. Distance is 5 miles.

CWEL Committee – Ray said that CWEL is looking for some members. Uli said the committee meets about 4 times annually in Chicago. Most of their assignment has been to revise the

policies and procedures that govern licensure of child welfare workers. Sometimes they get a recommendation to revoke a license, which is handled via conference call. Uli asked council members to contact Joyce Bryan in the Training office at 217/785-5689 if they are interested in being on the CWEL Committee. Antionette volunteered, and Terry will get that information to Joyce.

Reimbursement for training expenses – Ray reminded council members to submit their recommendations on the draft that was given to them at the last meeting regarding which training sessions in the regions qualify for reimbursing travel. Mary White said that foster parents want to know why caseworkers have to sign off on babysitting or mileage. She suggested that point be deleted from the form. Ray said rules beyond DCFS require this information.

### **Training re Scoring Foster Parent Law Implementation Plans – Gwenn Eyer**

Gwenn trained members on scoring plans. She said that group scoring meetings would be held in Chicago, Bloomington and in the Southern region.

Members will receive the following tools to score a plan:

- Copy of this year's plan
- Last year's letter that went to the Executive Director
- Score sheet from last year
- Agency Information form
- Blank score sheet

Only clearly identified substantive changes are to be scored; not changes to names, terminology, grammar, punctuation, etc.

Gwenn suggested that if there are no substantive changes, the scorer should make a comment suggesting that the plan be revised to reflect policy changes and ongoing changes in practice and resources.

Gwenn reminded members that every item on the final page of the score sheet, the page with many 2-point items, must be scored in its entirety every year.

Gwenn asked council members to shred the plans or attachments after scoring if there is any identifying information in them, or return them to the Office of Foster Parent Support Services with a request for them to be shredded.

Jerry said the style sheet very clearly states the expectations of what is expected of these agencies, including what must be part of the plan and the process that must be employed in developing the plan.

Gwenn offered assistance if council members have questions when scoring plans. She can be reached at 618/462-9728, or at [Geyer50331@aol.com](mailto:Geyer50331@aol.com).

Uli suggested that council members go to a scoring meeting so they can ask questions, and get their plans done rather than putting it off.

***MOTION: Ruth Jajko made the motion that the Office of Foster Parent Support Services support the Council in developing a tri-fold brochure showing our role as an advisory council. Ramon Nieves seconded and the motion carried.*** Ray said he would assign this to Vanessa, but she may need a small committee to assist her.

**Task Chart – Uli Senz**

Uli explained that members should refer to the chart to see tasks that currently need attention. This chart also documents work that has been done over time.

***MOTION: Ramon Nieves made the motion to adjourn. Cecil Garner seconded. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.***

The next meeting will be held November 17<sup>th</sup> in Chicago, at 3518 W. Division Street, as a joint meeting with the IL Adoption Advisory Council..

DRAFT