

Accepted 8/01/03
Adoption Advisory Council
June 6, 2003
10:00 – 3:00
Quality Inn, Bloomington

Members Present:

Art Davis
Claudia Davis
Ronald Davis
Zee Davis
Mary DeBose
Diane Dominguez
Gwenn Eyer
Brian Hall
Diana Hinshaw
Jeanne Howard
James Jones
Susanne Loss
Dave Matthews
Marilyn Panichi
Elizabeth Richmond
Gretchen Schulert

Members Absent:

James Ami
Sharon Ami
Dr. Felicia Blasingame
Diana Chaytor
Patricia Cooper
JoAnn Flaherty
Tammy Hay
Tharecea Jackson
Vance Johnson
Barbara Jones-Green
Gigi Lambert
Norm Lambert
Billy Ruffin
Cecilia Ruffin
Joyce Scott
Terry Solomon
Cleo Terry
Carol Winn

Staff Present:

June Dorn
Ray Gates
Vanessa James
Terry McGlothlin
Judy Pence
Bryan Samuels
Peggy Slater
JoeAnna Sullivan

Welcome and Opening Remarks

Elizabeth opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m. Members introduced themselves.

Minutes of April 4, 2003 Meeting

Elizabeth asked for corrections or additions to the minutes. *Diane Dominguez made a motion to accept the minutes as written. Gretchen Schulert gave the second. The motion carried.*

Committee Reports

Public Relations Committee

Gwenn Eyer reported that the PR committee has been working with Legacy staff on a concept similar to Friend-to-Friend. One could use a video and information on a specific child to do targeted recruitment for that child. This person would work with the caseworker to get a better sense of the child's needs and individual characteristics, or to find out whether another family is interested. The person would take responsibility for showing the video to appropriate audiences, such as support groups, church groups, or at training. Gwenn suggested that the Council consider doing this on a voluntary basis. Diana Hinshaw, as IFAPA Adoption Chair, offered to take it before the IFAPA.

Peggy said they currently have videos on 19 children, mostly from Cook County, but they are expanding into downstate. The videos are currently used at foster parent and adopt only trainings in Cook County and by caseworkers to show within their agency.

Gwenn moved that the Council begin a joint collaboration with the Legacy Project to do individualized recruitment on a voluntary basis. Diana Hinshaw seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Peggy & Gwenn said they would prepare a small training handbook or guide and present it at the next AAC meeting.

Effects of Felony Convictions on People Desiring to Adopt

Jeanne Howard distributed a research report regarding bars to licensure. Jeanne suggested that the Council encourage the DCFS Licensing Division to develop a protocol to prevent people from being barred for life for something they did years ago. She said the facts would then need to be publicized so that people are aware of the change. Jim Jones said we should invite someone to the next meeting to explain the process. He asked Ray to invite the appropriate person from Licensing to come to the next meeting to discuss current policy and practice, how DCFS makes sure that private agencies are following the same practice as DCFS, the denial process, timeliness of the process, consistency, and what would need to be done to create a waiver process. Diana said the council should have some input on which felonies should not bar a person from adopting for life.

Report on the Task Force on DCFS

Jim Jones distributed pages 31-36 of the Report of the Task Force on DCFS to be reviewed and discussed during the Director's visit today. There was discussion regarding the recommendations in the document and which points should be reviewed with the Director.

NEW BUSINESS

Set Meetings for FY'04

After discussion, the meeting schedule was set for the coming fiscal year as follows:

August 1 - Springfield

October 3 - Chicago

December 5 – Bloomington

Feb 6 - Springfield

April 2 - Chicago

June 4 - Bloomington

All meetings were set to begin at 10:00 am and end at 3:00 pm.

Presentations From Agencies With Additional Post Adopt Funds

Family Service Center

Vicky Moore, Judy Manning, Denise Frank, and Cindy Walk summarized the services they offer with the family-centered services money. They distributed a brochure describing their Support for Adoptive Families Through Education and Empowerment (SAFTEE) Program. The program offers training for adoptive parents on parenting skills and on aggression replacement training, as well as ongoing monthly support groups, mentoring, summer camps, and emergency or planned respite care in the home or in licensed foster homes. The program is for pre-adoptive and adoptive families in Sangamon, Christian, Logan, Mason and Menard Counties. It is a twelve-week program, and it includes childcare and meals during trainings. They reported that the program served 136 people in FY 02, and 75% of the participants showed a reduction of stress. The money they receive is used for program supplies, advertisement, respite and summer camps.

Central Baptist Family Services

Rachel G. presented on behalf of their Adoptive Family Support Program (AFSP) that is funded through a Family Centered Services grant. She distributed information on the program and services they offer. The AFSP is available to any adoptive family with at least one adoptee under the age of 18 years old in Coles, Clark, Cumberland, Douglas, Edgar, Moultrie and Shelby Counties (LAN #14). They are currently serving 18 families. Respite is provided during the day or overnight and can be provided in the home or elsewhere. The agency coordinates overnight respite in licensed foster homes or relative homes chosen by the family. The program provides payment to respite providers. When they get a call for service the agency does an assessment to determine stress levels and to form a plan of action. They also provide group respite so that families can attend a monthly support group meeting. They recruit adoptive families as well, and they have recruited five families to take older children. Their biggest accomplishment for the year is having no disruptions.

Introduce Director Bryan Samuels

Jim Jones introduced Director Bryan Samuels. Members introduced themselves. Jim Jones encouraged members to ask their questions or make comments about the adoption section of the DCFS Task Force report. (The sections to which the questions apply are referenced prior to each question or comment.)

Recommendation #3 –

*Gretchen Schulert said this issue arises from the mandate in the adoption statute that adoptive families be given written information prior to the date the adoption agreement is signed. That is not happening consistently, and complete information is not being given. Pulling this information into a report is a very difficult, time-consuming task, and each case takes 15-20 hours to complete. Families are adopting children without complete information, and they are not well prepared on what to expect. Five years ago DCFS came to the Midwest Adoption Center (MAC) because, when requested, MAC provides information after adoption. MAC staff have developed a written format to help workers

do this before adoptive placements occur. Training curriculum was designed, staff were trained, and then it went to Best Practice but has never emerged. Gretchen said MAC could work with DCFS to refine the program, but there are training and budget issues.

Recommendation #5 – Members made the following comments.

- *Rather than having a worker monitor adoptive families once a year, have another adoptive parent help in the transition.
- *Have a team of adoptive parents throughout the regions to address the adoption problems. Try using a master adoptive parent program model.
- *If monitoring is needed for reasons other than support it should be clearly stated as to why the Department would require regular visits to adoptive homes. This is important because many adoptive families do not want support in the form of mandatory caseworker visits to their homes.
- *Understand that adopted children generally do not like workers coming to their home.
- *If workers were to visit adoptive homes they would need to be a particular type of worker that understands adoption.
- *Southern Region tried a pilot project last year where Adoption Support Specialists were available 20 hours a week through a contract. They staffed an 800 line in case adoptive parents needed help. The specialists worked with adoptive families, provided resources, training, and support groups, and they even did recruitment. They were non-invasive and provided a very friendly atmosphere. Their grant was cut for FY'03.
- *The name and number of adoption support specialists could be mailed with adoption subsidy checks. Adoptive parents would be more apt to call a person rather than the agency because many don't want agency involvement after adoption.

Recommendation #6 –

- *If a potential adoptive parent or their lawyer is a good negotiator they will get all they need in their adoption subsidy agreement, but if they are not able to negotiate they don't get as much.
- *There should not be a negotiating process to get the services that a child needs. If the state has access to a service it should be provided across the board as part of the adoption contract.
- *Some of the research that has been done on children who have been adopted indicates that certain factors in a child's early life predict problems down the road. DCFS needs to prepare families based on that knowledge and recognize that certain families will need more services than others.

Recommendation #7 -

- *Members noted that adoption information is not present in the CORE training curriculum for DCFS staff.

Director Samuels said he would not try to respond to all the issues he heard today. He said he has to look at the big picture, and the options available are not options that come at no cost. Resources are required to do something differently and more effectively. He said he agrees on many issues, and the challenge is to figure out what to cut in order to do

more. The absence of doing something does not reflect insensitivity or disagreement. We have a trade-off system.

One issue that is clear is we have to understand the current population of children in care and the extent to which the resources are being spent in the best way for those children. There are fewer children in the system, but they have more problems, and they are in the system for an average of 55 months. Our challenge is to get a better handle on where the children are, what they need, and how to provide what they need.

Thirty-seven percent of the children in care face mental illness or developmental challenges. It is reasonable to assume that recently-adopted children are experiencing the same challenges. We have to decide what compromises can be made somewhere else in order to shift resources to serve these children.

Questions/Answers -

Gretchen Schulert suggested implementing a modest fee based on clients' income as a way to partially pay for the services that Midwest Adoption Center provides, mainly for requests from adult adoptees. Director Samuels said it was a reasonable idea and worth considering.

Peggy Slater suggested that there are some services, such as residential treatment and college, which are seen as barriers to adoption because they are not provided post adoption. GAL's have actually counseled potential adoptive parents to not adopt if the children are older and they want to go to college. The Director said his priority is getting the kids who are in care through high school. He said that, on average among the children in care between the ages of 17-19, only 33% graduate from high school.

Art Davis said there is a need for transitional homes for teens that are leaving foster homes and going into the community without skills. These teens need to know how to live independently. Director Samuels said he agreed that they need developmentally appropriate care to prepare them for adulthood.

Jeanne Howard said it has been five years since adoption training was provided for workers; much has happened since then; and there has been a lot of turnover among permanency workers. Director Samuels said the FY04 budget includes dollars around new initiatives and investment in training on post adopt.

Director Samuels said he plans to have a full leadership team within the next few weeks. He will be reviewing all the pieces and bring them together to figure out the smartest investments. He said he hopes to meet with the Council on a regular basis and maintain open and honest dialogue on the issues.

Status Report on Respite Grant

JoeAnna Sullivan gave an update on the Respite Grant from the federal government which is designed to provide respite care to children with very medically complex needs. The grant will serve about 29 families in the first year at Coach Center, a ranch-style

home in Naperville. This is the only facility of its kind in Illinois. A virtual tour is available on the internet. To date, five children have either been through the program or are scheduled to be served soon. Each of the families deemed qualified for services can get up to 10 days of respite per year. This grant is meeting only a small percentage of need. DPA can pay for this service if DSCC and financial standards are met. The grant is meeting some of the need that DPA cannot cover. She added that here is a national movement to develop lifespan respite care, despite the tough economy.

Budget for FY'04 Post Adopt/Adopt Preservation

June Dorn distributed a folder with budget materials and explained each page of the document. Judy Pence explained how the money was distributed among adoption preservation agencies.

Payment for Medical Services

There was discussion about the lack of medical providers who accept the medical card for payment. JoeAnna said her staff would help families find a physician that will accept the medical card. She said when the Kid Care program began and rates went up there was an improvement, but now some categories are reduced because of the budget. JoeAnna said that Doral Dental (888-286-2447) has a list of dentists that have agreed to participate in the "Take 2" program, where each dentist in each community agrees to take two DCFS - involved children. JoAnna said if a dentist wants to provide care for a Medicaid patient, they should call Brett Bostrack at 888/281-2076. JoeAnna will provide council members with a list of Health Works agencies across the state that take the card and give priority in terms of scheduling.

Research Findings on What Adoptive Families Need

Jeanne Howard distributed a report, The Needs of Adopted Youth: A Study of Adoption Assistance Families, authored by her and Susan Smith. She said the sources of information for this report were two surveys that they had done, one with adoptive parents receiving adoption subsidies in 2001, and the other with families receiving adoption preservation services in 2003. In both studies families generally were glad they had adopted and they said they were satisfied. Over 95% said they would adopt again.

Agenda for Next Meeting/Wrap-Up

The next meeting will be held Friday, August 1st in Springfield from 10:00 - 3:00. The following issues were suggested for agenda items at the next meeting:

- Invite licensing staff to explain criminal bars to licensure
- Discuss the new DCFS organizational structure
- Membership issues
- Work on the operational plan

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.