

## Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

1/3/22

### Attendees:

Myke Halpin\*, Sarah Lockery\*, Ken Mysogland, Deb Kelleher\*, Dr. Irv Jennings, Chris Scott\*, Jennifer Nadeau\*, Judy Eisenberg\*, Rachael Levine, Samaris Rose

(\* indicates a voting member)

### Guests

Johanna Schmidt, Elizabeth Duryea, Missy Vega, Sarah Gibson, Sergio Alvarez, Jon Jacaruso,

### RAC Reports and System Development:

The beginning of the meeting is dedicated to RAC report-outs and discussions about developing the RACs.

#### *Region 1 RAC - N/A*

#### *Region 2 RAC - Judy*

- The Region 2 RAC met on Friday and completed their assessment.
- They brought up the outgoing message on the phone portal when calling DCF.
- There has been some difficulty understanding DDS services for youth and parenting adults, so the RAC would like to hold a presentation on this topic.
- They are also working on updating their flyer and materials.

#### *Region 3 RAC - Jon*

- On December 8, the RAC chose Erin Hagan as its new chair. Erin works for Norwich Youth Services.
- They are working with Our Piece of the Pie (OPP) to include more youth voices and there is a young woman interested.
- Youth crisis calls have increased, and it is hard to meet demand with covid.
- Norwich Racial Justice co-chairs discussed their change initiative with the RAC.
- They completed the self-assessment and discussed how many folks feel "Zoomed out" due to the many virtual meetings they are a part of. As a result of their discussions, they are going to revamp their agendas and reconsider their timeframes/schedules.

#### *Region 4 RAC*

- Region 4 met on December 21, where they got an update on the new Office Directors (ODs) for the region.
- They completed the RAC self-assessment, shared the results, and held a discussion.
- They also received updates from Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Wellness Teams, and the Diversity Action Team (DAT).
- They will soon have their first meeting with their new youth tri-chair.

#### *Region 5 RAC*

- Region 5 did not hold a meeting in December. They will hold a training in February on LGBTQ+ issues that will cover things like language, respect, etc. They will send out invites for this meeting. Missy (guest) is the new recruiter for the Region 5 RAC and joined the SAC call to see the collaboration throughout the state.

Region 6 RAC - N/A

RAC Self-Assessment Tool - Structure

- The SAC discussed the results of the RAC self-assessment tool (structure portion) and which regions scored themselves high. Regions that did not score themselves high should connect with other regions to learn about how to incorporate new strategies to improve.

Domain	High-Scoring Regions
The RAC has a written agenda for each meeting	2, 4, 5
The RAC agenda is informed by the region's needs	2, 4
The agenda includes an opportunity for members to be asked for their feedback about decisions DCF is contemplating	5
The agenda includes information about DCF updates	5
The RAC meets...	2, 3, 4 - monthly 5 - every other month
RAC meeting dates/times are consistent	Many regions
RAC remains informed about DCF's progress towards becoming an anti-racist agency	2, 3, 4
The diversity of the RAC reflects the diversity of the region served	2
The RAC uses data effectively	4
The RAC sets goals for itself	2
The RAC takes action steps to respond to concerns and needs	2, 4, 5
The RAC provides orientation to new members	N/A
The RAC has written materials that inform people about the RAC	5

- Region 2 will share out their agenda so that others can use it as an example.
- Region 3 did not do much scoring, but they did make sure their new meeting structure is informed by these suggestions. They are realigning so that family voice is at the beginning and DCF is at the end.
- Region 2 would like to establish a member orientation but need support in this. They also held detailed discussions on the meaning of words (e.g. diversity). Deb added that they borrowed Region 1's orientation presentation and just changed it to fit their region.
- Region 5 discussed diversity with their team because much of their region is white and rural. There is also a lot of diversity in the state, and although they have done outreach, they have had less success.
- Region 4 is similar as they have a lot of representatives from cities and fewer from the towns.
  - o Sarah L asked whether this is something the Systems PDs could help with.
- The group discussed the concept of diversity as it relates to RAC members.
  - o Ken reiterated that diversity can apply to many things - racial/ethnic, gender, geographic, family member type, etc.

- Region 2 chose to define it as broadly as possible, including geographic diversity, family members, racial/ethnic, fathers, youth, types of providers, etc.
- Sarah L also highlighted that it will vary by region, since each region has different demographics.
- Sarah G offered to provide that data and partner with FAVOR to recruit families.
- Region 4 did use data regarding race and economic status.
- Region 3 felt it had pretty good geographic diversity and provider diversity but needs to improve its racial diversity.
- LINK and pathways data can be used to get a better sense of the demographics.
- Many RACs struggle with engaging/motivating their members to take the lead so that meetings are not DCF-centric. They would like a more active group.
  - Region 5 described many "passive members" with a core group of folks doing most of the work. Creating an active group is one of their goals for 2022.
  - Sarah L reminded the group that we are still in a pandemic and should not be too hard on ourselves. Creating genuine partnerships takes energy and is hard to do virtually. She suggested creating more realistic goals about partnering better with who is already there. Self-care is necessary.
- The group also discussed some of their next steps.
  - Region 2 has not met since doing the assessment and plans on meeting to discuss the results.
  - Region 4 has some places for improvement and will work to strengthen them.
  - Sarah L suggests identifying current strengths and places to strengthen.
  - Ken suggested discussing this body with Ann Adams, the Director of Community Relations at DCF. Perhaps they could draw from their callers and refer them to the RAC. He also suggested holding a discussion with Beresford and others from FAVOR to discuss barriers.
  - Sarah G pointed out how helpful it was to have a full discussion about the ratings rather than just looking at the ratings alone. In their experience, there were a lot of comments about DCF updates, DCF's anti-racist work, and how their input affects DCF's decisions.
- The group also discussed money options and compensation for participants.
  - One person highlighted the large budget that they have right now and suggested offering stipends or using the money in creative ways.
  - Another person wanted to clarify whether the CRP funds were separate from the RAC. Sarah L responded that family and youth are involved in the RAC, so funds may be used to promote family/youth voice.
  - \$50 is considered more than nominal and would require a 1099 tax form; however, if one gives less than \$50 each time, then this would not be necessary. Although this is not an in-person meeting, family members may need to pay for childcare or have other expenses incurred by their attendance, so this reimbursement will help ease that.

- \$35 is a suggested threshold because it would make sure we are under the limit of requiring any tax forms to be filled out. Less than \$50 also works well if they do not meet every month. Whatever the decision, it should be kept consistent.
- Another suggestion for adding family voice is to have case managers discuss the RAC and pass it along to the families they work with.

### Minutes

- Samaris motioned to accept the December minutes, Deb seconded, so they were accepted.

### Membership

- Whitney Rodriguez is still interested in joining as a youth voice.
- Sarah L will connect with Damien to see if he is still interested.
- Sarah also highlighted the importance of focusing on who we have at our meetings, not just who we want.
- Sammy was shouted out for stepping up as a partner.

### Non-RAC SAC Updates

- One member suggested talking more about the ongoing mental health crisis and needed resources. Along with that, another member who is a parent suggested discussing cannabis use. In their personal experience, their son is smoking a lot and the DCF workers have said that there is nothing they can do. They also know another family dealing with a similar problem. They have discussed this with their caseworker and supervisors. Ken offered to reach out to discuss this.
- There is a lot of support for behavioral health. Enforcement is on the juvenile justice (JJ) side, while DCF handles treatment and behavioral health, which is sometimes related to JJ crime.
- Another member wanted to discuss the Omicron variant, which has led to an increase in hospitalization. The group discussed how this was connected to mental health issues, and that many folks are not taking the virus as seriously anymore.
- One member brought up the fact that DCF's policy has been unclear--they have trouble distinguishing current guidance from old guidance. This vagueness leads to frustration. They felt that approaches vary by team and by office and clearer expectations are needed to avoid the anger and frustration parents currently feel. Ken offered to discuss this in more depth. Each case is similar but unique, and we are constantly learning new information. It is important but difficult to balance the expectations of the bio family with those of the foster family, but it comes down to what is best for the child.
- Another member brought up DCF's approach to vaccinations. The current policy requires consent from both parents, which has caused a procedural roadblock and delays in vaccination. Ken explained this would be discussed after the break.

### DCF Report

#### *General*

- Ken spoke with the Exec Team about the suggestion to change the greeting for the Careline.

- Ken thanked Myke and Sarah for their organization of the SAC and their reminders. He also thanked Myke for being a fabulous SAC ambassador and participating in think tank groups and calls with the Commissioner on family engagement.
- DCF is still open and has not shut down. Telework is preferred until January 10, after which folks will be allowed to telework up to 80% depending on preferences. Staff will still come in for their duties when needed.
  - o There may have been short-term changes in the triage process due to covid.
  - o The courts are proceeding as usual.
  - o In 2021, **1,375 kids** achieved permanency, with no increase in repeat maltreatment.
- Staff will be able to permanently telework up to 80%, as long as agency needs are met, and they are still able to fulfill the requirements of their position. DCF is still discussing the specific needs of its agency. Some staff will need to be in more often.

#### *Youth Vaccinations*

- There was a recent article regarding DCF's vaccination policy for youth in care. It is important to understand that DCF **does not have legal authorization** to have a child in care vaccinated without parental approval. This comes from a Supreme Court case that declared that DCF is not able to do so.
- If parents do not want the child to be vaccinated, DCF can file for an administrative hearing, but this may depend on the unique circumstances of the case. DCF maintains that all children should receive their vaccines, including the covid vaccine, but DCF needs to follow the Supreme Court ruling.
- One person also asked that if testing is required for a child to be in school and a parent refused, would that be considered educational neglect? Ken said that it would depend on the situation and would not be able to provide a universal answer to that.
- Another question was about if one parent could not be located to give their consent for the vaccine. Ken replied that they could then proceed if there were reasonable efforts.
- The situation the article was about has actually been resolved.

#### *Spotlight on What's Right*

- If you have families whose story you feel should be told, let Ken know. DCF would love to include their stories in its *Spotlight* newsletter. Stories can be anonymous if families do not feel comfortable sharing their name/photo. The stories are for other families to develop trust and empower them.

#### *Meeting Etiquette*

- The group had a discussion on general virtual meeting etiquette, including cameras, breaks, length, etc.
- Many folks prefer to keep cameras on whenever possible. When cameras are off, it feels like the person has left the room. However, some may turn off theirs if there are many people in the meeting.
  - o Facial expressions provide feedback, so not having that can be disheartening.
- One member brought up their experience with virtual open houses. They like discussing etiquette at the top of the meeting because everyone has varying levels of familiarity with

- Zoom. It is best to make the expectations clear at the start. They also prefer guidelines that are nonjudgmental and allow for flexibility.
- Others agreed that a check-in or level-setting at the beginning is helpful.
  - Technology at the beginning of 2020 was different and more people may be multitasking now.
  - One person brought up that there is a push/pull between replicating things pre-covid and the opportunity to learn new ways of doing things. It may be helpful to adapt and lean in to new methods.
  - Interruptions when mics are on remains a problem.
  - Everyone may have different numbers of meetings and capacity for virtual meetings.
  - It is hard to generalize because there are different types and purposes of meetings. They like the openness, and some expectations may be exclusive.
  - Meetings are often scheduled for a full hour--the pace often then ends up filling the time allotted. Perhaps shorter meetings (45 minutes or less) should be more common).
    - It is important to adhere to timeframes and not abuse people's tolerance. Do not go over time.
    - Some folks like ending 5 minutes early for those that are scheduled back to back.
    - When doing a lot of meetings, folks may need time to catch up or take breaks. Keeping the camera off can help folks manage better. At the beginning of the pandemic, virtual meetings helped drive a surge of engagement, but this is now being lost as folks feel burnt out. It is important to make meetings feel valuable.
  - It is good to remember that the expectations are different. For example, a child or pet may come in, and this flexibility means we are still finding ways to adapt.
  - In a big meeting, different speakers around the room are always engaging, so participants find themselves able to engage more, whereas in a virtual meeting, their eyes have to stay locked on one screen. They may feel fatigue. There is no one size fits all approach.
  - There are also plenty of in-person meetings where folks stop paying attention or start multitasking.
  - One person pointed out that they like the facilitation of the SAC meetings.

#### *Legislation*

- We need to determine how to engage with legislative work and provide feedback.
- The Family First plan has not received federal approval yet, but hopefully they will soon.

#### Next Steps and SAC Assignments

- RAC members should continue discussing their assessment results.
- The next SAC meeting is **Monday, February 7 from 9:30 am - 12 pm.**