

Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup Meeting

February 9, 2018

Hosted by: Middletown Area Office

Recorded by: Ryan E. Williams

I. Welcome and introductions

Vannessa Dorantes welcomed the group and invited those in attendance join us for a webinar practice tutorial for the upcoming “*Dismantling Racial Inequity: Slow and Steady Wins the Race - Dismantling Racial Inequity at the Connecticut Department of Children and Families.*”

II. Workgroup Priorities for 2018

Bill Rivera stressed that 2018 will be a critical year to concretize the racial justice work and practice into the culture of DCF. We will have to attempt to assess and measure ways to determine if and how, children and families have benefitted from the work of the SRJWG since 2013. This includes but is not limited to policy and practice changes as they relate to RJ operations, outcomes and strategies. Moving forward, Subcommittee Chairs will provide summaries of their plans to align with operational goals and outcomes. Bill R. reminded us of Department strategies that were reported in a 2015 Dismantling Racial Inequities report, and challenged us to think about what we have completed since then. Do we need to modify or adjust existing work?

Moving forward, all products or activities of the four subcommittees should be framed to answer the question, “Who is better off?” In some cases we made discover that the work will reveal that we don’t know something that is valuable. Perhaps we discover that what we don’t know becomes a spring board for learning and discovery related to our practice. The workgroups focus must be more concrete and measurable moving forward.

III. USJ Case Consultation Model Work

MSW Intern Josh Fisher and Dr. De Jesus, presented the findings of their small focus groups for those who participated in the Case Consultation Model (CCM) trainings. Vannessa D. recognized Dr. De Jesus’s groundbreaking work with racial justice as it relates to cases in New York’s child welfare system in New York City. (Article: *Putting Racism on the Table: The Implementation and Evaluation of a Novel Racial Equity and Cultural Competency Training/Consultation Model*).

Data collected by Josh Fisher reveals strengths and weaknesses of the Case Consultation Model as implemented in designated regions to date. Individuals from Regions 1, 2, and 5 comprised the focus group. Facilitating factors, constraining factors and sustainability factors were examined. The most common feedback was the need for the CCM to be flexible. A challenge of implementing and embedding this model is the fact that each DCF office acts independently of the others. An emerging question is “Could the CCM be embedded, or integrated into existing systems and models being used (supervision, teaming, etc.)?”

Concerns were raised about mistrust of the agency and colleagues as it related staff being judged negatively about their work. Data from New Haven DCF office revealed that white children experienced permanency more often than black children. It was proposed that his was due to high turnover of Social Workers with Black youth on their caseloads, as well as multiple placements. Josh speculated that the high turnover of Black Male workers might have been a factor. This would be good to examine more closely. The workgroup encouraged Josh Fisher to flush this out further.

Dr. De Jesus questioned who would be appropriate to deliver the model. Bill R. requested that Dr. De Jesus provide the group information regarding the Case Consultation Model. Dr. Jesus indicated that he would forward the copy of the New York City ACF study to Bill for dissemination. Vannessa Dorantes reminded the group that

we have systems that could benefit from the model being added. However the model must stay true and not be watered down. Jodi Hill-Lilly asked the group to consider group supervision, which hasn't taken off, and suggested that we look more closely to understand reasons behind this finding, while at the same time considering implementation of the CCM. Tracy Davis stated the people delivering the CCM is important, as those individuals must be empowered to do so.

Bill Rivera referenced that a facilitator template was created in the early stages of the implementation. However, this tool, absent of intense training, coaching, and modeling for facilitators, would be limited and perhaps create unintentional outcomes. We have to develop capacity for potential facilitators before letting them run meetings. Tina Jefferson stated that we were too prescriptive with previous models. We have to pay attention to our past mistakes and look at how to tailor what we're already doing to incorporate new strategies. Jen Agosti suggested looking at language, i.e. model vs. practice, when discussing new strategies. Joyce Voltaire stated that we have to consider written documentation via this process as well.

Tina J. talked about developing a racial justice consultant position similar to that of an RRG specialty. Cindy Butterfield stated there are financial options to pitching a racial justice position, and that perhaps existing data could justify it. Jodi H-L reiterated implementing new strategies in systems that already exist. Chris Lau mentioned that Joyce James' discussion about the position of Equity Specialists in Texas could be an option. Jen Agosti stated California had Cultural Brokers, who were invested in what was going on regarding racial justice in the communities. There is a division within the Illinois DCF that studies racial justice data. Vanessa Dorantes encouraged further discussion regarding these matters. The decision regarding the CCM continues to be pending. The findings of Josh's research will be disseminated after complete.

Racial justice intern, Jameson Folke, suggested the work of a racial justice consultant position would eventually be done by everyone. Dr. De Jesus questioned whether it would be useful to include a job description in the CCM manual. Tina Jefferson liked the idea. Vanessa Dorantes stated that the job description would be vetted by the team.

Bill Rivera inquired about the technical assistance trainings and community forums being facilitated by Joyce James, Jen Agosti, and Susan Smith. He questioned if what knowledge or data was being gathered to determine impact – "How will we know that what we're doing is having an impact on our practice?" Tracy Davis stated that Jen Agosti developed a survey to assess the impact of her training. In its beginning stages and that perhaps this tool could be used to facilitate our data collection. Bill suggested that we focus on gathering qualitative data. Jodi Hill-Lilly stated that she would like to hear from those who've had training assistance to look at how we would go about measuring the impact of the racial justice work. Bill R. indicated that we have multiple sources and viewpoints we could use to measure the impact of this work, but we need to get started as soon as possible.

IV. Workgroup Updates

Yadira Ijeh offered a summary of how the racial justice work has influenced policy. She asked if we should considered a different way to approach our existing practice of policy review. Perhaps we should be considering a way to examine racial justice and equity issues while creating policy. Those who are already involved in the process would provide feedback. Yadira invited people to join the Policy Subcommittee. Vanessa Dorantes stated that the stakeholders of the different policy areas have different levels of competency regarding a racial justice lens. Tina Jefferson reminded us that the Policy Subcommittee is essential in the development of policy and that the existing subcommittees should remain in place due to their intentional work.

Jen Agosti asked whether there are racial justice questions or qualifiers that should be asked during the policy development process. It was pointed out that being able to share what's been learned by the SRJWG would be

valuable. Tina J. reiterated that we're not ready to determine how RJ applies to many systems that we interact with. Yadira expressed appreciation for Tina Jefferson's observation about readiness.

Bill R. stated that there is an existing framework for the policy review, however, it is applied after the policy is developed. Perhaps we should revisit the existing process and create a tool that must serve as the filter for all policy sponsors. Jodi Hill-Lilly asked if policy is vetted by the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Immigration Practice. Yadira Ijeh responded that she and Bill review all policy that comes to our attention to ensure that they incorporate an equity and racial justice lens. Bill stressed that in addition to race, we are examining other factors. For example, the impact of populations demographics, cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of populations on a broader. Irma Reyes from Office of Diversity and Equity shared that their office is purposely involved to ensure that no protected class is excluded. Vanessa Dorantes reminded us that the DATs and regional racial justice workgroups intersect. However, they have different focuses. Members of the SRJWG can help the offices, regions and facilities work out these differences.

V. Racial Justice Legislation Update

Elizabeth Duryea provided an update on the progress of the proposed legislation to require DCF to be held accountable for our commitment to eliminating disparate treatment of children and families involved with the Department. She stated that the current process of submitting this policy is important. She shared that racial justice language has been placed in Policy 17-a-3. The policy language has been submitted to the Children's Committee and can be altered. We're looking forward to presenting the State of the Agency to the Children's Committee soon. During this presentation racial justice progress and work will be addressed. OPM and the Governors' office signed off on this. Bill emphasized that it is important that the proposed language proceeds to get our foot in the door and can be modified in future sessions. Elizabeth shared that the Racial Justice Summit planning is underway. Additional committee members are needed. We must gain sponsors for this event. Jen Agosti reminded the group that this event would be good to engage and re-engage external partners.

VI. Subcommittee Updates

Community Workgroup

The workgroup revised their Charter. Their goal will be to examine bias in our work with community providers.

From time to time, or as the need arises, they will request and review racial data on callers to the Ombudsman, Office of Diversity and Equity, and the Office of the Child Advocate. This workgroup will also seek data from the Dept. of Education and look at how families and community partners are included in development of policy. The community workgroup will review adolescent specialist's data and data from the medical consent unit as it relates to RJ lens. The group would also seek YAB input.

Bill Rivera stressed again that, "Data is only as good as the action it prompts." We have to focus on doable projects that can be measured and turned into positive outcomes for children.

Contracts Procurement

Melanie Rosscci shared that the membership of group has changed in an effort design training for providers to diversify the provider network. How can credentialed provider bid on larger projects? Support of smaller providers is the goal, working with FAVOR to provide training in each of the communities. Contracts and Procurement is developing an email chain to help diversify the workgroup.

Vannessa D. appreciated the intentionality of the makeup of the group in order to achieve its goals. Jen Agosti. stated that changing the look of the group of contracted providers is an actionable goal that could result in a

dramatic change. Irma Reyes stated that the Office of Equity and Diversity is essential to looking at equity in contract dollars.

Workforce

Tracy Davis stated that the Workforce workgroup has been looking at staff being threatened and called racial epithets, as well as how the existing threat assessment policy addresses these matters. HR will look at the threats coming through in this area to develop an action plan. Tracy D. asked the group for permission to advance the project. The group needs an HR representative. Reg. 6's HR representative was highly recommended to be a part of the Workforce subcommittee.

Partners / Providers

Megan Korn stated that DCF's language and work towards racial justice is more advanced than in other agencies. Judicial has been collaborating, but there could be more, as Judicial has done some great work as well.

Community provider Deb Borzellino stated she wants to be a part of the solution and the change, as she brings the work back to her group.

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m. Participants were invited to observe the walkthrough session for the webinar.

Lorraine Thomas commended the SRJWG on its thoughtful process for implementing the racial justice work statewide.