

Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

8/3/20

Attendees:

Sarah Lockery*, Suprena Shuler*, Chris Scott, Jennifer Nadeau*, Dr. Regina Moeller*, Myke Halpin*, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata, Marie Mormile-Mehler*, Samaris Rose, Dr. Irv Jennings, Dr. Damion Grasso, Ken Mysogland, Deb Kelleher*, Stephanie Cotton, Mariyem Sehloui
(* indicates a voting member)

Guests

Elizabeth Duryea, Susan Cunningham, Jonathan Jacaruso, Sergio Alvarez, Sarah Gibson, Stanley Kasanowski, Johanna Schmidt, Malcolm Blue

Minutes

The minutes from the last month's meeting will be sent to the members.

Membership

Introduction of any new people in the room:

- No new individuals in the room

Progress of membership outreach assignments:

Sarah Lockery updated the group that there is a form in progress which must be submitted

SAC Member Advisement

Follow-up on Assignments:

- No discussion

RAC Reports:

- Region 1
 - o Region 1 met to discuss the recent racial tensions - they decided to go through the data of racial disparities in child welfare in Connecticut. Racism is in the focus, and we have the data to examine it. They are working at the RAC to determine how best to support the community during COVID-19.
- Region 2
 - o Region 2 explained that their RAC will meet on Friday (8/7) and have several presentations from CBHP regarding community assessments - culturally appropriate consultants will guide the group.
- Region 3
 - o Region 3 has recently re-launched their RAC, which they completely rebuilt from the ground up. They met with the Commissioner last month and now have a new setup. They have met twice already.

- Region 3's new RAC is led by tri-chairs: a parent, a provider, and a youth. This will help the tri-chairs step into leadership, and they hope to expand their members. Their next meeting is in September.
- Region 4
 - Jen added that they have been meeting monthly and reviewed the CRP report and their list of recommendations.
- Region 5
 - Region 5 has been talking about presentations for the IFCS program.
 - Sergio said they thanked providers and families for their efforts throughout the pandemic. They have increased their communication using the RAC and community pathways. Their ODs have started attending the RAC to make sure there are more local pathways for resolving issues rather than statewide.
 - Region 5 updated their membership about the "Talk it Out" Campaign. They also talked about Enhanced Service Coordination, which Megan introduced to them.
 - There have been lots of updates and concerns regarding systemic issues, including COVID-19.
 - They acknowledged their need to increase the number of youth members - the Youth Boards have been assisting them with this.
 - The Region 5 RAC has decided to break up its work into subcommittees, which are:
 - 1) Membership and Diversity
 - 2) Marketing
 - 3) CRP
 - 4) Data
 - These subcommittees will do the majority of the work, then the entire RAC will be updated on each group's progress at their meetings.
 - The group is working to make sure that they are staying in line with their purpose using a racial justice lens.
 - Deb added that they bought hand sanitizer and will put the "Talk it Out" line number on the bottles. The RAC will work to bring CRP to light. It is currently at a standstill but will be running soon, and they are very excited about it.
 - Sergio mentioned that they also want to spend time discussing isolation and trauma.
- Region 6
 - Marie is currently on vacation, so Stanley updated the group on Region 6. They are meeting monthly and have their next meeting on Thursday (8/6).
 - Region 6 is currently working on recruitment and collaborating with the YAB to get a tri-chair.
 - They have been creating summer/back-to-school kits for families that contains PPE and activities.
 - They have also been examining data (pre- and post-COVID) and did a presentation on it, but they hope to explore this further.

SAC Member Reports:

- Sarah discussed a survey that SAC member Damion Grasso is involved with run by UCONN that asks about the pandemic's impact on families. Damion is interested in knowing if the SAC would like to use the survey to gain information from families. Sarah asked whether the SAC was able to support the survey efforts.
- One member agreed that the survey was nonintrusive, but it is rather long. Grandmothers and other older caregivers and family members may take longer with it.
- A few other members shared their perspectives, but the group felt that they were not currently in a position to review/deny it as the majority had not gone through it yet.
- A participant agreed that it is not an invasive survey and they have shared it with some people.
- Another person agreed that it was lengthy and asked what the SAC's intention would be in sharing the survey. How would they get it back?
- The next speaker agreed that the survey was long. They asked whether the IRB needed to be involved and whether DCF needed to approve it. Ken replied that he was not sure of IRB approval because it is voluntary and anonymous. It is not a DCF survey (it is a UCONN survey), so the Department has some distance from it.
- Sarah agreed to provide feedback to Damion that it is a bit too long but that the group did agree that it is non-invasive. She will ask Damion to clarify how the SAC will get data afterwards and to update the group next month.

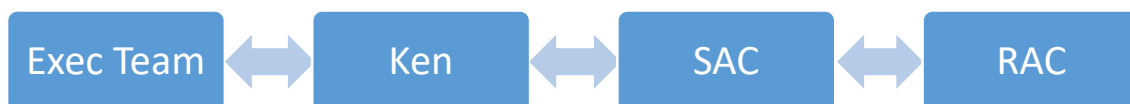
SAC Budget Reports

- Stipends have been updated, thanks to all SAC members for their efforts here.
- The current balance is \$13,401.26
- The last deposit was in January.

DCF Report

Discussion of any items as required by statute and ask of SAC:

- A lot has been happening with DCF. The Department has recently taken steps to become an anti-racist agency, and Ken wanted to go through the structured PowerPoint presentation outlining the Department's work.
- The Commissioner and the Executive Team have been working on ways to become an anti-racist Agency leading to becoming a racially just organization and the Department would like the SAC's help with this. Senior administrators are charged with coming up with a measurable change initiative for their Division which they will send to the SAC for feedback. All policies should include metrics that will show the impact of the change. The SAC will be asked to review the initiatives and associated policies and metrics.
- The Department requests that the SAC take these initiatives back to their local RAC to review. That feedback will go back to Ken, who will update the Executive Team. The goal is to create a reflexive process for feedback.



- This will play out throughout the Department and will include the Racial Justice Advisory Groups and External Affairs. Ken would like the SAC members to also join the External Affairs Racial Justice Advisory Group.
- Since the murder of George Floyd, the Department has examined its data again and acknowledges that there is much work to be done to move the needle. The Department has pathway data that shows disparities by region at every stage of the child welfare system, from the initial report to entering congregate care. It is important to note that the demographic data for the state as a whole is based on the 2010 census, so this may be slightly out of date.
- The pathways data shows disparate outcomes at every point in the system. Considered Removal data has also been examined to see how it has been affected by the pandemic.
- The group took a moment to look at data. We have data on reports by race of the reporter that shows that over 60% of reporters are White; however, we should also note that this data should be examined critically. We know that teachers and school personnel are our most frequent reporters, and that sector is predominantly White. We also need to consider who is in charge of these centers/schools as the Director may be making reports on behalf of the employees which impacts the data.
- The Department has been working on its strategic plan - green indicates that the item has been accomplished, yellow means we are working on it/close to completion.
- The Department has also created a resuming full operations draft and submitted it to DAS. It still needs approval and may be revised.
- Ken was asked to clarify the strategic plan for new members who may be unfamiliar with this requirement. Ken explained that in 1991, the Juan F lawsuit entered the Department into a Consent Decree, meaning that the federal government oversees the Department. There are certain outcome measures that, once met, will allow the Department to exit the Consent Decree. The Department aims to address these measures and work on its infrastructure. We hope that this plan will improve our practice - and this is about more than just Juan F. Through improved technology and other changes, we hope to become a better Department.
- Ken explained that it took a while to pull all the data that was requested, and some of the requests were actually for new data. The pathways data is pulled in September every year. The group also requested reunification data, which we hope to have in time for the September meeting.
- Ken was asked how to identify what is reported as abuse vs neglect. Ken explained that looking at the pathways data, each bar represents a point in the child welfare system (initial report, FAR, INV, substantiations, etc.). That being said, there is not a specific bar that differentiates between types of substantiations. Ken asked the members to email any questions they had about that data and he would try to follow up by the next meeting.
- Ken went through the Racial Justice PowerPoint

Racial Justice PowerPoint: Boldly Leading Anti-Racist Work within DCF

- DCF is in the process of transitioning from being a racial justice-oriented organization to an anti-racist organization. We have been doing racial justice work for years - but it has not moved the needle. Our disparate outcomes are still present.
- In 2020, the Department has begun to ask itself, "What are we going to do about it?" Instead of just having conversations, the Department has issued a call to action for concrete strategies to improve outcomes while supporting staff and partners. There is a will and commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization.
- The anti-racist framework ties into the Department's development of a "Safe & Sound" culture. Everyone must feel comfortable sharing their opinions with everyone. Staff must feel empowered and equal in these discussions. It is important that all feel valued and respected so that they feel comfortable bringing up issues when they arise.
- That being said, it is important to level set regarding racial justice to get on the same page and support the efforts that are already underway. Messaging also needs to be consistent.
- There are several points that must be emphasized, the most important of which is that safety does not necessarily mean comfort. Furthermore, discomfort is central to change. We must be willing to get uncomfortable in order to change for the better. Cultural humility is central to this.
- The group did not have comments at this point in the presentation.
- Ken shared a visual showing the different spheres of systemic racialization ranging from internalized (at the individual level) to interpersonal, institutional, and finally structural. The Department is aiming for change at the internalized, interpersonal, and institutional levels, as this is what the Department can most strongly influence. Everyone must first start on the internalized level. How do we help people acknowledge their biases?
 - o Ken provided an example from his own life, where he locked his car door when reaching a certain part of town. He stepped back to evaluate what went into that decision - it is possible it is due to crime reports and shootings he has heard about in the neighborhood but internalized racial bias may also have played a role.
- One person asked if the Department could pull data on the rates and types of referrals that are given to Black families vs White families. Are White families given more referrals than Black families? Are they referred to different programs? The Department agreed to pull these statistics.
- Ken explained that a central focus moving forward will be practices and policies. These are the things that impact disparate outcomes. This could mean examining legislation, including Connecticut's mandated reporter laws. We need to question where a policy/practice came from - how was it created? How is it affected by racial biases? These are what create institutional racism.
- A member shared that their organization made it a point to create a Board of Directors that was diverse - it is mostly women and people of color because representation does matter. Those Board members' perspectives are vital to decision-making. They also explained that we need to acknowledge our own role in these systems. We tend to think, "It's everyone but me," but this is a fallacy. We are part of the issue.

- One person added that the SAC members need to think too about our own organization. As the SAC, what will our body do about this issue? How will we push this work forward? We should take a step back and think about that as we listen. Ken explained that he will take this to other groups and pull in others to examine the SAC.
- A participant loved the concept of discomfort ≠ safety, and they agreed that we must help leaders allow others to do the work, including providers. We also need to help those who are in the homes doing the work. They really love the strategy of letting people be involved in the process. They also agreed with the earlier point about diversity in leadership. For example, FCA has an all-white board. Providers should reflect on their own organizations.
- Ken responded that openness is key and asked the group how to ensure that this includes the Department's community partners so that they all have a voice as well.
- Another person agreed that people must start getting comfortable with being uncomfortable. They also need to be able to facilitate. Ken said that that is something he has discussed with the Executive Team - some voices in the conversation are loud, some are in the middle, and some are quiet. We need to acknowledge that people are at different points in this journey, and we need to meet them where they are at. We need consistent, ongoing conversations.
- Ken added that we also need implementation divers - we must use adaptive solutions to address these challenges, not technical solutions. One part of this may be to institute coaching, as training is only part of this.
- Ken discussed the *Spotlight on What's Right* and the partnerships that were highlighted in the most recent issues. The issue discussed partnerships between Waterbury and FCA, New Haven and 'R Kids, and Norwalk and St. Joseph's. We think we treat families equally, but we need to shift from equality to equity and make sure we are getting families what they need. One example is a dad who got services and resources. When we commit to equity and justice in the way we treat families, we give those families an equal ability to reach these targets. Why is it then when we remove a child from a home, we expect the family to become perfect before the child can come back? Fear of liability? We want to make sure families feel heard and provide them with the extra support that is needed to help them meet goals.
- DCF's work is grounded in its "Safe and Sound" culture, which is made up of "the five Rs": regulate, relate, rise, reason, and respond.
 - o Regulate: We are mindful of our physical and psychological wellbeing and the wellbeing of others as the foundation for our just and safe work environment.
 - o Relate: We build and sustain relationships and community with respect, trust, and candor.
 - o Rise: We are brave and bold with our actions. We understand our purpose and the above challenges and barriers in order to promote equity and bring out the best in our work.
 - o Reason: We make sound decisions based on consultation, teamwork, and knowledge.
 - o Respond: We plan forward and reflect back with competence, confidence, and compassion by utilizing a systemic approach to problem solving.
- A key question we will ask moving forward is how do we regulate ourselves and help others regulate?

- Ken provided an example of his stepson Evan being called the N-word and the way Ken had to teach him to drive in a different way than his siblings because he knew his race could impact his interactions with police. Ken explained that he needed to better understand Evan's experiences.
- Someone brought up the ongoing distinction that has been made between the child welfare agency vs the child welfare system. DCF is the child welfare agency, but at last summer's retreat there was a discussion with other Commissioners who made up the rest of the system (education, etc.).
- Ken shared that the Department will continue to roll this structured discussion out with other agencies, but this needs to be calculated. The Department must have its own house in order, and he would like to first discuss this further with our Family First partners and Commissioner. He suggested that the RACs use regional data and take this to other organizations. After the Department feels its internal processes are in order, they can move out. The Department can only control so much and needs the RACs and SAC to help effect change. The messages are heard differently based on the messenger.
- Ken showed a slide in which racism was defined as prejudice + power. One person asked what is meant by this. "When you say power, from where?" Several members offered their interpretations:
 - o Power to means institutional authority and representation.
 - o Privilege at the individual level.
 - o Assumed power in situations. For example, this participant shared that when they visited families, they received a certain level of assumed power based on the fact that they worked for the state.
 - o One person touched on that example and said that DCF needs to make sure parents understand their rights, and if they are not explaining this to families, then this is a problem. Also, the Department should reconsider the language of families "not cooperating," as this phrase paints individuals as a problem rather than understanding why they may not want to engage with the Department. The earlier speaker clarified that they were referring to a point in the 90's when practice was difference. Ken agreed and added that the way the Department describes adolescents also needs to change.
 - o Another person pointed out that not wanting to engage is generational; for example, they were taught not to speak to DCF because they were the oppressors. They recommended including more POC social workers, taking a softer approach towards families, and educating families on their rights.
 - o Power comes from the way all white people benefit from white supremacy - including white people with good intentions. The structure and the historical legacy (through policies like the GI bill, discrimination, and the building of generational wealth) is the same. For example, once college began becoming more accessible, the bar was raised. We need to dismantle white supremacy and restructure our systems.
 - o One attendee shared that when it comes to DCF, "30 years ago, people like me did not work for the agency." Black social workers were simply not being hired. The Juan F ruling opened hiring to more people of color. People who had been on the receiving end

of DCF services were not permitted to work there at the time. They were one such worker who was hired because of that change, but it took a lawsuit to get there. The Department is so much better than it used to be; diversity is improving, but there are still many systemic issues that remain.

- On the original question, power was defined as being institutional (White privilege, etc.).
 - Another person replied that we are getting close but not being explicit - power lies in being White. For a very long time, Black people were seen as being "incapable of taking care of ourselves." Generational power lies in being White.
 - It was added that this is true both in the present and historically. When the Constitution said, "We the People," it was not really including all people. We have an imperfect system, and it is good that we are being proactive, but there is a lot to be done. We need to embrace these issues. Families are influenced by history and agencies are designed by historic issues.
 - Ken thanked the person who asked the question for their honesty and clarity before continuing with the presentation.
- Ken went over the evolution of DCF's language, from "Diversity/Cultural Competence," "Disproportionality and Disparities" to "Equity and Inclusion" and "Racial Justice" to DCF's new approach of "Anti-Racism."
 - Ken reviewed the Department's Journey (so far) from public allegations in 2009 through leadership changes, racial justice workgroups, new standards, statements issued, up to the beginning of the current administration and racial unrest.
 - Next, the group discussed pathways data - the Department has this data at the state level and by office. Again, Ken reiterated that the data for statewide racial makeup is based on the 2010 census, so this may not reflect current numbers. Even with that in mind, there are clear disparities as you move through the DCF process.
 - Ken used the visual of the "(Im)perfect storm," a combination of COVID-19, racial unrest, and an economic crisis. This point is where crisis meets opportunity - we must keep this at the forefront.
 - Ken emphasized DCF Leaders' ownership of racial justice in the context of their work.
 - One member pivoted to school reopening. They explained that they fear for kids going back to school; some have recommended a tight lockdown. They are concerned that we are not addressing children's safety and addressing worst case scenarios. Ken agreed to earmark some time to discuss this issue at their next meeting - how do we maintain safety? The participant reiterated that we need to prepare for the worst and referenced a NY Times article that discusses how to return safely to schools.
 - Ken wrapped up the meeting by discussing the expectations the Department has for senior leaders. He wants SAC members to review policies and provide feedback on the Department's policies and practices. This ended the structured discussion and the group looked at the data.
 - There were several main themes in the data: pathway data shows increasingly disparate results and reporters are mostly white.
 - In terms of CR (Considered Removal) data, of successful CRs, children were diverted from foster care 70% of the time.

- Ken said that for now, they would stick to working with the current data, as it is difficult to pull more for now. This data provides a good understanding of the system.
- One person thanked Ken for a very informative presentation and for such an inclusive process.
- Ken gave a shout out to Treena Mazzotta, the Careline, and Kim Nilson for pulling this data. The data tells part of the story, but there are still lots of gaps.
- Sarah gave a shout out to Miriyam as this was her first meeting with the SAC. Welcome, Miriyam!
- A member wondered if, since the data is only part of the story, the SAC should also hear testimony from families to help put together stories from the regions. Ken replied that perhaps families could be included in RAC meetings to get their opinions.
- Another thanked Ken for the structure and for the formal feedback loop process. Ken expressed his hope that this process would reinforce the response between the Exec Team, SAC, and RAC.
- Sarah Lockery went over discussion topics for the next meeting: 1) Recommend programming, legislation, etc. to the Commissioner; 2) Annual review of the budget - the SAC will challenge itself to conduct this review using a racial justice lens.

The SAC's next meeting will be on **Monday, September 14 from 9:30 am-12:00 pm.**