

STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

10/05/20

Attendees:

Sarah Lockery*, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata*, Chris Scott, Deb Kelleher, Judy Eisenberg*, Dr. Irv Jennings*, Jennifer Nadeau*, Lisa Girard, Samaris Rose, Amani Sehloui, Suprena Shuler*, Myke Halpin*, Marie Mormile-Mehler*, Ken Mysogland

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests:

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

Minutes:

- The group discussed the format for meeting minutes that Johanna Schmidt uses and determined what level of detail they were comfortable with. Some felt that using names when quoting people could be a barrier to free-flowing conversation. In particular, it could be a barrier for youth or families who may not want to speak up.
- Others felt that using names was a good thing. It provides clarity in case the group needs to revisit a discussion, and as one person stated, the SAC is a public body and members should take responsibility for the ideas they put forth. Additionally, who is speaking can change the message (e.g. a provider sharing an idea vs a youth).
- After some discussion, the group agreed that when voting or presenting, names would be used, but for questions or conversation, names would not be used. For all RAC or DCF updates, names will be used. Johanna agreed to revise the September minutes to account for this request.
- The group also noted that the *s used to indicate whether someone is a voting member needed to be updated. Irv Jennings and Judy Eisenberg were both listed as non-voting members, and Deb was listed as voting -- these three needed to be switched. There are a few others who will be voting members but are not yet because their appointment is not complete yet. To help with notes, the group briefly went through its voting members:
 - o Suprena Schuler
 - o Judy Eisenberg
 - o Myke Halpin
 - o Jen Nadeau
 - o Dr. Irv Jennings
 - o Marie Mormile-Mehler
 - o Dr. Regina Moeller
 - o Dr. Elisabeth Cannata
 - o Dr. Damion Grasso
 - o Sarah Lockery
- The group then moved on to approving the previous months' minutes. Deb motioned to approve June's minutes. Sarah Lockery seconded, and the SAC voted and approved them. Samaris motioned to approve July's minutes. Sarah seconded, and the SAC approved them.
- Johanna agreed to revise August and September's minutes to take names out and correct the voting member roster.

Membership:

Introduction of any new people in the room:

- The group was introduced to Rachel, who is Stephanie's daughter.

Progress of membership outreach assignments

- Sarah Lockery said that Stephanie, Steven, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata, and herself need to send in their application and narrative. Once that is done, the applications will be scanned to create one document, which will go to the Governor's Office.
- After the Governor's office receives it, they will send back the background check form.
- The Child Psychiatrist position is still vacant.

RAC Reports

- When reporting, Sarah asked RAC members to consider the asks from last time: 1) consider racial justice indicators and 2) consider the 10% budget cut DCF has been asked to make.

Region 1

- Suprena shared that Yolanda and Nicole met with the RAC to give them an update on working with youth in care. If possible, they would like to meet with the medical director, legal director, and counseling staff to learn more about how youth have been emotionally affected by quarantine.
- There is currently no travel allowed outside of CT without prior approval - there have been many denials, but not all. The office has been focused on supporting kids.
- They have not received any guidelines yet but they are hoping to soon so they can give that information to families.
- The RAC has also been focused on the racial justice initiatives. Recently, they watched YouTube videos about systemic racism and the data that Ken provided to review the disparities.
- There are two subcommittees. The marketing committee is looking into how to add community members, including police and teachers, to help them understand trauma and how that impacts AWOL cases. They also want to add someone who can help facilitate conversations about race. They will ask the questions that Sarah mentioned at their next meeting.

Region 2

- Judy updated the group about the two new members who were added on Friday morning. She thanked Samaris for helping to recruit them. They are continuing to look for dads and youth for involvement.
- Region 2 leadership discussed racial justice and how they can partner with the regional network of care in this work. They hope to have a larger presentation to both of them.
- The RAC was asked to provide meaningful feedback on the racial justice initiative, which aims to reduce the disparity of kids who come into care by increasing the number of kids of color who go to kin.
- As far as Family First goes, the RAC has at least one person on each group except the Governance. They feel well-positioned.
- They have no feedback on the budget cuts, except that they hope it will not impact service.

- The RAC heard that the legal department plans to audit the central registry, and there was a lot of enthusiasm around that.
- The RAC will not be meeting in November.
- In December, the RAC will listen to presentations of FAVOR, voluntary care management, IFCS, and local interests.
- Ken said that he will give them more information about legal's racial justice initiative, and that the Department would like even more feedback, especially specific feedback and guidance (this is not just for Region 2). They appreciate hearing that the RAC approves of something, but they do not want the RAC to "rubberstamp" the ideas; rather, they would like detailed feedback on how these initiatives should work.

Region 3

- Regina shared that the RAC met on the 24th and spent the whole meeting discussing racial justice work within DCF.

Region 4

- Jen shared that the RAC was updated about support for COVID+ families and the change initiative for their region. They also received a budget update and discussed membership.

Region 5

- Region 5 RAC planned to meet that evening, and they will discuss voluntary services tonight. The meeting is open to the community.
- On December 14, the RAC will host a community presentation on the SHAPE system with Western Network of care. There are concerns about the recent OCA report regarding Waterbury schools.
- In November, there will be a presentation on racial justice with the Region 5 ODs. This meeting is scheduled between their normal meetings so they can allow enough time for a full discussion.
- The RAC would like to work with the Youth Bureau to discuss how to recruit and support greater youth involvement.

Region 6

- Marie shared that the RAC is focusing on racial justice. They met last on October 1st, where they discussed their region's change initiative, which is looking to increase kin placement from 40% to 50%. They will look at 50 cases and review them for any oversight. They are trying to review child/family team meetings and schedule meetings with them. The RAC feels this initiative is doable and admirable - it was very well-received.
- Thanks to the RAC-pack committee's efforts, there will be a video of Manny S. reading his book.
- The RAC would like to hear more about legal's initiative.
- The RAC will also learn more about intensive services from Beacon.

SAC Member Updates

- Dr. Elisabeth Cannata shared that the Children's Behavioral Health Advisory Board submitted their report and now needs to determine what they will focus on in the next 12

months. Their recommendations were to plan for family needs, reduce silos, maximize fiscal reimbursement and access. They will have a DCF Visioning Summit soon.

- Chris Scott updated the group on Sun's Scholars, who will be contracting with DCF to bring statewide. They are taking small steps for expansion, hopefully to work with 'R Kids. They have a diverse, multilingual staff and are very excited. They are currently mostly present in the Central region, but they are hoping to move towards the south soon and are looking for formal contracts.
- Myke wanted to acknowledge and congratulate the Department for its hosting the Dads Matter Too virtual conference. The speakers were great, and he acknowledged the planning committee, Commissioner, and the Department. In particular, Anthony Gay, Marcas S, Abdul R, Jennifer R, Jeff Gold, Steve S, Joe G, Heavenly T, and Lauren P - thank you! The event was not to be missed.
- Ken followed up and gave kudos to the planning committee, who brought in both local and national experts. He said that he hoped the Department would promote fatherhood better moving forward, including via its media. It was powerful and he hopes everyone will take part next year. It was a very solid event, and he was happy to be the opener on Friday. He also thanked Myke for being present both days.
- Susan shared that the Dads Matter Too conference was the first DCF conference she had gone to and she thought it did a good job of spreading the word through data and experiences. She found the "man-analogues" particularly powerful - it is important to hear those stories.

SAC Budget Report

- September Balance: \$13,151.26
- 5 \$50 stipends were paid for the September meeting
- Current Balance: \$12,901.26
- If you are a fiduciary, please send invoice to FAVOR for one year of work and cc Beresford Wilson and Dorothy.

DCF Report

General Updates

- Ken reiterated that the Department is open and has been open throughout the pandemic.
- The number of reports has been creeping up now that schools are open, but it is still lower than the usual number of reports.
- The visitation triage process now applies to all youth. This process does not only determine whether a visit will occur, it addresses the expectations around PPE, transport, number of people attending the visit, etc.
- Staff are still going to homes when possible.
- There has been an increase in COVID amongst youth, foster families, and staff. Currently, the stats are:
 - o 94 foster parents tested positive (3 deaths)
 - o 46 youth in care tested positive
 - o 46 staff tested positive

- The increase we are seeing aligns with the general surge happening in Connecticut right now. There is a good contact tracing protocol in place, but as a state, we are clearly not immune to an increase.

Legislative Agenda

- The budget is confidential, and the Department is waiting to see how it shakes out. Each agency has submitted and is waiting to hear back.
- The Department received a \$1.1 million adoption incentive from the federal government. The amount depends on the previous year; in 2019, there were 663 youth adopted. The Department made an effort to examine barriers to adoption and promote and support permanency. For context, in 2019, the Department received about \$100,000 and in 2018, about \$12,000. Additions such as events, consultants, and Lexus Nexus have gone to good use, so this is exciting.

Family First

- The Department held a re-launch of its Family First efforts on September 29th. Around 300 people attending the virtual event. Those who missed it can watch [here](#), or look through the [PowerPoint](#).
- The Department is re-launching, picking up where they left off. Originally, the hope was to submit the Prevention Plan by summer 2020. Unfortunately, COVID put those efforts on hold, but the Department still has until October 2021 to get approval. The current plan is to submit a Prevention Plan by April 1st, 2021.
- Each workgroup is in a different stage of their process. Kinship and Foster Care anticipate holding only two more meetings, since they were close to the end. QRTP, the newer workgroup, only met once before the pause, so they are expected to have a series of meetings.
- Candidacy workgroup is moving into a new phase and becoming a separate workgroup.
- Fiscal is not meeting yet, as much of their work depends on what the Programs and Services Array workgroup decides.
- The SAC is reminded to regularly check the [DCF Family First website](#) for the newest updates and information. The Department posts dates to the meetings as well as many links.
- The Community Engagement group is being revised. The co-leads feel it is better if the members join various groups, provide feedback to the RAC, and then the RAC gives that information to Ken through the SAC. By intertwining the community partnerships with the RACs, the RACs are empowered with local influence to provide a feedback loop for Family First. The hope is that this will make communication more effective. It is suggested that each RAC has at least one representative on each workgroup. Ken asked for feedback on this new system.
 - o One person liked the new system but wanted to know how Ken will relay the feedback back down. Ken committed to flip that back down to the RAC.
 - o Another member felt the vision is great, but the timeline may not align with the workgroups. The Family First pace is quick, but some RACs only meet monthly or even every other month - it may be hard to match up the timing. They recommended keeping the website up to date to help with this issue. Ken agreed this could pose a problem and suggested that folks email the Family First inbox

(DCF.CT.FAMILY.FIRST@ct.gov) if more immediate feedback is needed. The cadence may need adjustment.

- The RACs are being empowered to provide input not just with the prevention plan, but with the implementation and evaluation, which will last much longer than the planning process currently going on.
- A participant brought up a foster care crisis they are noticing. The right to file an abuse claim has been extended, and now many companies are not carrying insurance for certain treatments. This person is concerned about no longer being able to provide therapeutic treatment. They also wanted to know how folks connected to the Department have been getting infected.
- Ken explained that in terms of foster care, a kinship navigator is being developed and the Department is looking for reimbursement; however, this is not something Family First would cover. The Department is discussing and looking at the issue around insurance. Ken assured the member that legislators have been approached about the 50-year liability - this has just recently come to DCF attention. He suggested that they bring in some folks from the therapeutic foster care division to address this issue further rather than at this meeting.
- Ken shared that the Department hopes to clarify the fiscal component of Family First, perhaps through a video. The Department is currently looking at its whole system to develop support (particularly community support) for families. Family First is a tool for prevention, but it is narrow. It applies to EBPs utilized for children in the Department's Candidacy definition. EBPs must be on the federal clearinghouse - the Department will be reimbursed for these beyond the 2014 baseline. This is huge because before, this reimbursement was on the back end. Family First does not provide a pot of money. The Department is reimbursed for what it *will* implement on the front end, rather than the back end. Some youth will still need to go to foster care, and the Kinship and Foster Care workgroup is discussing how best to support these families. Likewise, congregate care will be needed, but when this happens, youth should go to QRTPs that meet the legislation's standards, which the Department believes are best for kids. The groups are looking at families' needs for supports as part of a larger circle of prevention intended to keep families from going into the system.
- Ken provided an example: a 10 year old girl was not enrolled in virtual schooling, so the school called police to ensure that the child was safe. The police found the father and daughter living with his sister. The father had a hard time contacting the school because he only spoke Spanish and an interpreter was not readily available. Further, the family did not have internet. A report of educational neglect was filed, and DCF helped the girl get a Chromebook from her school and hook it up, which allows her internet access. She is now attending class. Most of her family lives in Honduras. If true prevention existed, the school would have been able to call another entity instead of DCF. Do families need rescue or support? There is a need for services and a mindset change.
- Mandatory reporting laws and training have allowed for an overabundance of calls for support - not necessarily neglect.

- One member liked the mindset change - they appreciated that the worker found the family's needs and addressed them. It is important to integrate community and help everyone gain this mindset. This is why they want police involvement in the RAC, so that they better understand culture and trauma.
- Another person asked how long the case stayed open and who is responsible for educating schools. Ken responded that it was closed within 45 days, although he did not know the exact length. He would hope that a supervisor from DCF would speak with school staff and ask them to think more about the situation before calling - do we feel comfortable with how this goes? The workgroup member asked how we can make this happen sooner, as similar stories will be coming up. Ken shared that recently, DCF and SDE released joint documents discussing the need to engage with families and provide support vs educational neglect. They worked with the SDE to create these, but they are unsure how to get this information to the ground. Ken asked if the RACs could consider how they might be able to help locally.
- A participant saw a gap between the school and DCF where they should be working as a team.
- One person brought up the Housing First initiative, as homelessness creates desperation. If housing is tackled first, this could prevent other issues down the line. Root issues like housing, transportation, and internet need to be addressed.
- Ken added that the Family First work is not only about reimbursement dollars, but the Department's values and principles.
- This illustrates the need for further RAC involvement and perhaps a process line to help everyone learn.
- Ken analyzed the story he shared: there are gender components (how is a father perceived as compared to a mother?), racial components (how are Latino families perceived compared to whites?), and language components (how did the family's speaking Spanish rather than English impact the situation?). He suggested that the RACs work with schools to discuss family engagement, and this particular story is in the DCF newsletter.
- Another member discussed progress that was made for FCA. They have been talking about data but should discuss permanency. Whoever they engage with should have these discussions. The member emphasized that the RAC and SAC are not just committees - there have been tremendous changes in DCF recently, and we all need to discuss these.
- Ken agreed and said we also need to consider who is pushing the narrative. He does understand the school's perspective.

Picture of the Week/Reunification

- Ken needed to double check, but he believed that 783 families were reunified in 2019.
- September was kinship month, suicide prevention month, and recovery month. The Spotlight issue this month discusses these (check your spam if you are not seeing it in your inbox).
- Ken shared a photo of a young woman named Caroline, who at age 21 has had a difficult life. Her son Carter was removed as she struggled with suicidal thoughts and substance abuse issues. Through CHR and DCF's combined efforts, she was reunified with Carter

within six months. The FBR program helped Caroline, and her grandmother (who is also sober) provided support. Ken wanted to continue to highlight these stories. The Department spoke with Caroline when asking her permission to share the story, and in that discussion, she said, "Today, I look back on everything I've done and just realize, damn man. I did it! No one else. Greatest feeling in the entire world."

- October is Domestic Violence Awareness month.
- Ken encouraged the SAC to keep an eye out for other stories - if you are aware of such stories, please send to Ken and Gary Kleeblatt. These programs make things better for families, and we want to highlight them.
- One participant asked how we can prevent stories like this in the future. Ken mentioned that Caroline had a child at 15 years old but gave them up for adoption, which can create trauma. Are there plans to reunite the family? Ken felt unsure of how to answer because it depends on the situation. He would hope that the family would be open with the child that they were adopted. Caroline is able to see the child, and she visited him last Christmas. The child will be part of her life, and she is currently working to raise her son. Many foster and adoptive parents are open to birth parent involvement, including via virtual options.
- A DCF staff member pointed out that there are generational circumstances that influence parents' lives. This girl gave up a child but maintained her connection with them. As a Department, we need to empower youth not to repeat situations. This is why they are so excited about the philosophical shift Family First brings - it will help prevent removal in the future.
- Another person asked about the \$1.1 million the Department will be receiving and suggested the Department form an ad hoc committee of youth and families to advise how it is spent.
- For those who are unfamiliar with the FBR program: FBR stands for Family-Based Recovery. It is an intensive in-home substance use treatment program intended for parents with infants. It involves counseling and testing up to three days a week. It is one of the most intensive treatments and having FBR staff at Considered Removal meetings has helped divert placements. Its biggest weakness is that it is currently only available in English, so there is a need to add bilingual teams to address the racial justice component.
- Family First and Family-Based Recovery both speak to values - they involve intensive work intended to preserve the parent-child bond and keep families together. It is high risk, high reward. The Department needs to shift from being risk averse to being willing to provide services and believe in its families.
- Another Department member highlighted the evolution of the Department, particularly due to the increased understanding of substance use.
- FBR promotes parent-child attachment; the Department used to have a harder time encouraging bonding. MST Building Stronger Families is a similar program for families with children 6+ years old. The aim is also to keep the family together.
- Ken reminded the group that they should all be on the listserv to receive the Spotlight on What's Right, which is the monthly newsletter highlighting Department updates and success stories. He encouraged collaboration. If you are not receiving the newsletter, check your spam folder and add the Departments' email addresses to your safe senders list.

PD Updates

- There were no updates from the PDs on the call.

Transmission Data

- Earlier in the meeting, a participant asked how children, families, and staff involved in the Department who tested positive for COVID-19 were infected. The group then went back to address this question.
- Towards the beginning of the pandemic, the Department's data on transmission was incomplete. Many foster parents work and do not have the option to work from home, especially those in the healthcare industry or who work with the public. Transmission has often been through community contact.
- For foster youth, there has been an uptick in older youth in universities, some AWOL youth, and some that are still unclear (for example, youth positive but foster parents negative). There have also been some transmissions from the foster parent to the youth.
- Level 1 staff have remained in the office throughout the pandemic and others have begun coming in. Starting in September, visits have begun taking place in the offices too. However, most staff infections have come from their personal contact; there has been very little staff to staff transmission. The offices have been pretty strict about social distancing and wearing PPE.
- A follow up question was asked about staff's care when working face to face with equipment. Ken replied that it is probably not 100% of the time, but the Department does provide PPE for families, youth, and employees. He also reiterated that the triage meeting addresses whether a visit can happen safely, where it will take place, the duration, who will be there, what COVID questions should be asked, and whether the visit is near a hotspot. The discussion is grounded in a public health perspective, and the full details of the visit are always discussed. Furthermore, the Department notifies anyone (parent, child, attorney, etc.) if there is a positive test. Ken said that he is always happy to clarify, and anyone who wants more information can also visit the [COVID-19 section](#) of the DCF website, where we have information on the virus, staff guidance, memos, and the Commissioner's weekly videos. It is meant to be very informative and transparent.

Next Meeting:

- The next SAC meeting will be held on **November 2, 2020 from 9:30 am - 12:00 pm.**
- Assignments for next time:
 1. For SAC members who are connected to a RAC - think about how the RAC can position itself as an advisory body for Family First, not only to help with the plan reaction but also implementation. RACs are encouraged to have a member on each Family First committee.
 2. For those not connected to a RAC, review the [DCF Family First website](#) to help you stay informed between SAC meetings.
 3. Consider whether the SAC should create a Racial Justice Change Initiative for itself.