

## STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

11/02/20

### Attendees:

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

(\* indicates a voting member)

### Guests:

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

### Minutes:

- The revised August, September, and October minutes were sent out - were there any changes needed? The group had no changes in mind.
- Deb Kelleher motioned to accept all three months' worth of minutes, and Jennifer Nadeau seconded the motion. The SAC voted in favor of approving all three.

### Membership:

- Sam Rivera unfortunately needs to resign, as he has accepted a position in Pennsylvania as a civil rights attorney. He has been asked to recommend a replacement.
- In terms of SAC member assignments, the SAC was previously asked to make sure at least one person from their respective RACs serves on every Family First workgroup.

### RAC Reports

#### *Region 1*

- Sarah introduced the Family First workgroups to the RAC to see if anyone was interested in serving, and they are still working on it. They were shown the website, and they will be asked again on the 13<sup>th</sup>.
- In terms of a racial justice initiative, the RAC was unsure about developing their own initiative. They felt it would be better to work on DCF's for now and then consider implementing their own later.
- Several Region 1 DCF leaders gave summaries of the RJ initiatives, focusing on their language and framework. This was an introduction to the work, and they will hold a more detailed presentation this month.
- Cheryl Lynn Wilson came to discuss racial justice and she was committed and consistent. While conversations on race can be easy for those who discuss it frequently, it can be challenging for those who do not, and this was a good conversation.
- The two subcommittees are still moving strong. The first is meeting about marketing and trying to get others to join the RAC, especially police and teachers. The second is working to strategically inform the SAC and discuss language to talk to legislators.
- The SAC is really engaging with anti-racism.

### *Region 2*

- Judy explained that Region 2 has not met since October 2<sup>nd</sup>. They decided to join the SCNC retreat, where they will discuss the Region 2 racial justice initiative.
- The RAC will also meet in December.
- There is at least one person on every Family First workgroup.
- The Region 2 RAC recently recruited a dad for the RAC.
- The group is excited about Intensive Family Care and Support (IFCS).
- The RAC has also been considering how they can introduce Family Care and Support - they may get some ideas.
- It has continued to be challenging to find a fiduciary for the RAC. They have not applied for more funding recently because of this issue.

### *Region 3*

- Lisa Girard said that the Region 3 RAC will meet again in December. They are currently focused on restructuring. At their December meeting, they will learn more about Mobile Crisis, especially where they get their referrals from.
- The RAC is still discussing the Family First request.
- There will be a RAC FAB (Regional Advisory Council Family Advisory Board) and QPR training over Zoom soon.
- The RAC has also been looking at their marketing/engagement.

### *Region 4*

- Region 4 discussed their budget and ways to distribute reimbursement to families.
- The RAC will send additional people to the National CPR Conference because it is less expensive this year. They are pleased about this shift.
- They have received recommendations from their youth tri-chair, who had to resign recently because they are attending an out of state college. They discussed the recommendations, especially around DCF support for foster youth.
- Family First will be discussed next time. They do have one person on a subcommittee, but they hope to be more intentional about their participation moving forward.
- There was a conference recently that the RAC sent two family members to. The family members found it empowering, and they got to learn more about what other states are doing. They felt that CT is ahead in some ways. Sarah Lockery asked for more information about the conference, and Jennifer said she could send that information to her.

### *Region 5*

- Region 5 has at least one RAC member on every Family First workgroup, which happened organically.
- Deb said that they have focused on DCF's Racial Justice initiatives and antiracism for November.
- They will also have a SHAPE presentation on November 14<sup>th</sup>. SHAPE is a school climate project.
- The next meeting is at the end of November.

- Sergio said that Carla Perrella presented a summary of the Region 5 change initiative.
- They also had a school representative attend to discuss COVID as an engineering challenge. School support is a big focus right now.
- The RAC has been offering trainings to Waterbury schools and SDE.
- There will be a Community Provider event in January to raise awareness about non-DCF services that families can access. The RAC wants to identify other ways to support families outside of DCF and help the system develop its resources.
- The RAC has been very involved with RED.
- On November 10<sup>th</sup>, they will discuss the anti-racism framework.

### *Region 6*

- Region 6 has been looking at "Kin for Kids," the racial justice initiative to change foster care in the region. There are 50 kids currently not with kin; their records will be reviewed to see if any kin were overlooked, and meetings will be held to explore options to place those youth with kin. The goal is to have 70% of the region's youth in foster care placed with culturally matched kin caregivers. The RAC is excited to hear more about this initiative.
- There were guests at the meeting to discuss class trainings.
- In November, the group will discuss the IFCS program and ratifying three family members as voting members.
- For Family First, a lot of work is being done in the PSAWG group, but the RAC needs to identify folks to participate in the other workgroups.

### *SAC Member Updates*

- Sarah Lockery shared on Rosie's behalf that if families order meds through HUSKY, they can order them three days ahead. Pharmacists may not be aware of this change yet, in which case, families can have them contact HUSKY to explain this. One SAC member said they were not aware of this change and thinks it should be announced so more people know. They suggested having DPH send something out.
- One person asked about the idea of COVID fatigue. How do people feel about things? Connecticut is taking COVID seriously, but people are still tired. We cannot let that stop us.
- One person suggested that the members send their recommendations regarding COVID fatigue to the Department via email, since cases are climbing now.
- Singly called in Stephen.
- Some SAC members have expressed difficulty getting families to participate in the RACs. Ken Mysogland suggested that Chris help connect folks, since he works with a lot of university students.

### SAC Budget Report

- Current Balance: \$12,650.26
- \$250 was spent on five stipends.
- You can receive \$5,145 by applying to FAVOR if you are a CRP or fiduciary.

## DCF Report

### *Safe and Sound Culture*

- Ken said that he was happy to see and talk to everyone.
- Ken began by discussing DCF's Safe and Sound culture. This is an umbrella concept that broadly means that all voices are heard and accepted. The Department wants folks to feel like they can say what they want to - conversations may be uncomfortable, but they should always be safe. We will not accept retribution towards someone who has spoken their beliefs because all should have a voice. DCF embraces uncomfortable conversations and works through that discomfort to create greater change. This concept should be reiterated in the RAC and SAC.
- One person asked what mechanisms have been used to facilitate these conversations. Ken replied that one strategy has been to use mailboxes (e.g. DCF COVID mailbox, Family First mailbox, and the Racial Justice mailbox staffed by Monica Rams). These mailboxes allow staff to submit feedback in a safe environment. The Department is also working to make this a structural part of the Department and embed it in its culture. Additionally, the weekly (now biweekly) Commissioner videos have allowed the Commissioner to be open and to connect directly with staff. This transparency has helped staff feel like we are all in this together.
- A SAC member explained that conversations will be uncomfortable, but they have found it helpful to start small (with clips or videos) and use virtual breakout rooms. A scribe can summarize the conversation. It is hard. They have found that people of color seem to be able to discuss racial justice issues, but it is still hard and we are trying to undo years of harm. Some white people may be afraid to discuss these issues. They are also trying to have conversations on social justice beyond race, including sexuality and other identities.
- Ken pointed out that sometimes families are reluctant to participate in Department initiatives or discussions because their voices are often undervalued. This discourages them from participating.
- A SAC member explained that white people need to do the work and not put it on people of color. POC should not be treated as information sources - do the work yourself.

### *National Adoption Month & CT Adoption Day*

- Ken moved on to discussing National Adoption Month, and Connecticut Adoption Day, which will be on November 20<sup>th</sup>. Six courts will be using Zoom for Connecticut adoptions. Adoption is the end of permanency when children cannot remain in their home, but it should not be seen as our end goal. The Department wants to reiterate that 91% of families it interacts with remains intact. Although we have had 663 adoptions, we also want to highlight the 718 families who were reunified. Adoption is just once piece of the work. The Department recently received a \$1.1 million adoption inclusion grant from the federal government to enhance efforts to find homes. To get an idea of the baseline, in 2019, the Department received \$112,000 and in 2018 they received just \$12,000. This shows the increase in adoption for youth, particularly for

older youth and those with special needs. The money is not just used for recruiting but for infrastructure (such as consultants, Lexus Nexus, etc.).

- It was recently announced at a press conference that the state will spend \$3.5 million dollars on suicide prevention efforts. On average, Connecticut loses 8 youths per year to suicide. So far in 2020, Connecticut has lost 7, 4 of which were in October alone. The Department recently sent out a document that includes information about the signs of suicidal ideation, information on youth suicide, and other details. The goal is to alert people to this growing problem.
- Casey Family Programs highlighted the Department's legislative work. The Department is very happy that it has been so effective.
- Last week, the Department sent out the October edition of *Spotlight on What's Right*, the monthly newsletter that features positive stories from the Department. Over 13,000 people have viewed the newsletter, which has been coming out monthly for one year. Ken asked the SAC what their impression is of the newsletter and what feedback they have about it.
  - o One person said that they like to read it to see what the Department's focus is that month. They especially like the success stories and shares them with their staff. We hear so many negative stories that it is nice to focus on the positives. Ken agreed with this and encouraged the group to send positive stories with him to be featured.
  - o Ken explained that the Department tries to avoid telling too many foster care stories. Of course, there are many good foster parents, but the Department wants to emphasize families staying intact.
  - o One member, who shared a story with the Department, said that their experience with the newsletter was great.
  - o A person said that they appreciated that the newsletters are sent out with "[not-secure]" in the subject line - this helps make sure the emails get past the filters. Ken agreed that the Department tries to emphasize that when sending out.
  - o Another member said that they do a lot of work with people who are licensed foster parents and want to adopt, and their staff must emphasize the importance of reunification. They thanked Ken and the Department for emphasizing the non-adoption work.
- One person asked for more information about what it means when the Department is "seeking commitment." Ken explained that the court grants custody and guardianship. DCF has the ability to administratively invoke a 96-hour hold, which is then followed up with a court hearing. The Department may seek custody but not guardianship, but seeking commitment means the Department is seeking both. This happens in the worst scenarios, when the Department is asking for both custody and guardianship. After that, a legal proceeding would occur to possibly terminate parental rights. The SAC member explained that they asked because a family she is working with is not understanding why the Department is seeking commitment. Ken offered to discuss the situation with her further, as it depends on many factors. He also suggested that the family consider calling the Office of Community Relations at 860-550-6301, who can help explain the reasoning to the family.

- Ken discussed the pathways data, which is pulled every year. The Department looks at the whole child population of Connecticut, the examines the makeup of youth with FAR cases open, investigations, substantiations, congregate care, etc. The Department looks at the disparities between the general population and youth at every point in the Department. There are racial disparities at every point, from the initial Careline call to congregate care involvement. The Department has pulled this data for the last fiscal year, and we will go over it next month after the Department has done more detailed analysis (data by office, etc.). The Regional staff will confirm the data, as some information may have changed. The Regional staff need to make sure there is alignment, and we will have a conversation next month about the data.

#### *DCF and COVID-19*

- In terms of the pandemic, here are the latest statistics:
  - o 111 caregivers have tested positive, 3 of which have passed away.
  - o 66 staff have tested positive. Most staff are not regularly in the offices, and these positives are mainly due to community spread.
  - o 65 youth have tested positive, and their ages range from 6 months old to early 20s. Recently, many of the youth testing positive have been older, and there has been a noticeable increase for youth who are attending university.
- The Department continues to stay open. Careline calls have been at about 77% of what they were this time last year, meaning there has been over a 20% decline. The Department continues to see serious cases, and there have been more cases of aggression and overdoses. More kids have been exiting care than entering. There are currently 697 youth in care, most of whom are under 18 years old. Courts are opening up, but they still determine what cases to hear. Each court is doing it differently; some are remote while some are in person with PPE. The Department has been working within these guidelines.
- One SAC member thanked Ken for providing the COVID statistics and other figures. These are important because the statewide data often shows trends more clearly than a small agency can. This helps their staff better understand the risks, which is very valuable, and trends can help inform the agency.
- Ken added that the numbers are always mentioned in the Commissioner's weekly (now biweekly) videos, which are available on the DCF website and on the DCF YouTube channel. It is always mentioned at the end of the video with a warning in case some staff find listening to the statistics anxiety-provoking. Initially, staff were warned about any positive case, but staff felt this was too much for them. If staff have been in contact with someone who has tested positive, they are notified, but if not, then they will find out through the weekly videos. This lets people decide whether or not they want to hear the statistics.

#### *SAC Annual Report*

- About one year ago, the SAC decided to standardize agenda items and issue any reports deemed necessary. They discussed the annual report and decided to create a short summary. November would be spent on the outline, and then a draft would be created.

This would be discussed and revised in December, and then sent out in January. What items does the SAC want to include?

- Ken said this is a great idea. He has mentioned the SAC and the RACs in many meetings, and a tangible report would help folks (especially the legislature) better understand their role.
- Sarah was concerned that creating the report remotely would be difficult but drafting a 1-page report should be doable.
- One person recommended including information on the ongoing discussions of racial justice (even before the framework came out) and consider how we partner with families and youth.
- Another person agreed about keeping the report to 1-page. It is more likely to be read if it is concise. We should include language around revitalizing the SAC, highlighting the monthly participation - we consistently have someone from each RAC and all DCF offices. We should mention the importance of coordination of efforts/info on COVID, as well as different initiatives (e.g. Children's Behavioral Health Partnership, Family First, and the SAC) and the intersections between these.
- Sarah said that she and Myke would draft this and send it out before the December meeting.
- Another suggestion was to emphasize the unifying force in this SAC and the importance of partnership.

#### *Strengthening and Partnering with the Community*

- According to one member, about 60% of families in child welfare are involved due to neglect. The Region 2 RAC discussed how we can build a stronger community, so it is better equipped to handle neglect internally rather than reaching out to DCF. They have also developed change initiatives - the RACs or CRPs should also be involved in development to generate work in the community. The community should have input.
- One member added that the community should be involved; in their region, they have had food distribution and a 1-pager was added to boxes with information on involvement.
- Ken has heard of this and felt that DCF would be okay with the RAC doing this. DCF has considered doing something like this, but there is some apprehension in the organization about DCF taking it on, and it seems it would be better for a non-DCF entity to do this work.
- A participant agreed with the importance of community involvement but was unsure about including a letter in food donations since the focus should be on the food. They would like more discussion on this strategy. That being said, they recommended utilizing the media (especially channel 12). The RAC has improved their messaging; this should be explored more.
- Ken mentioned that if anyone is interested in media and would like the statewide perspective, the Communications division of the Department can support you. They can review materials, and the Department appreciates communications coming from non-DCF agencies because they sometimes catch better. For example, if Region 2 takes the

lead, a DCF staff member could make sure the information is correct, and then Communications can review the material and advise it.

- One member mentioned that the New Haven office wants to recruit more foster parents of color; marketing could assist with this initiative.
- Ken agreed that regional folks would know the best ways to get that information out.
- Region 4 has a brochure that they should review and update, and they would benefit from DCF Communications' support. They also would like to incorporate their current initiative in the brochure.
- Another person explained that they have an intern that does their newsletter, and they could increase collaboration with DCF External Affairs. They have considered creating a Facebook page, but the intern is only short-term, and they are not sure how sustainable this is.
- Elizabeth Duryea explained that the SPDs have helped with RAC meetings and partnership, and they have been trying to increase engagement, especially with the change initiatives. They have been looking at how to run the change initiative, leverage the work within the Department, and investigate data on services, with a particular focus on racial disparities. They hope to grow that role.
- In terms of engagement with the community, Sarah expressed a hope to hear more from the Department, but they also hope the RACs will shape things for themselves. Elizabeth agreed with this and said that the SPDs discuss a feedback loop with racial justice as an overarching theme. Sarah said that the community needs to take ownership of the system. Ken agreed and wants the community to feel empowered.
- In terms of the 60% statistic that was mentioned earlier, Ken explained that not all are focused on pathways/entry points. One is regarding kinship (youth in the system), and some represent families referred. Knowing the data is important to create change.

#### *Family First*

- Family First workgroup meetings have continued. Kinship met recently and has one more meeting before their recommendations are presented to the Governance Committee.
- The Community Partnerships workgroup has been embedded into other groups so they can provide continuous feedback.
- The QRTP workgroup has been meeting every couple of weeks. They look at congregate care providers and have discussed the requirements to become a QRTP. When a child is placed and there is a judicial hearing, the Department may gain reimbursement. There are six criteria, which do make good practice sense and will make residential facilities more well-rounded and effective. The majority of providers meet most of the requirements, but developing sufficient aftercare (at least six months), accreditation, and family engagement remain goals of the workgroup.
- The Fiscal workgroup has not started meeting yet. They are the last group to start because their work relies on the previous work.
- PSAWG (Programs and Service Array workgroup) has over 100 members. Elizabeth Cannata (one of the co-leads) explained that they have been moving forward at a good pace. About 3-4 meetings are needed before they can pass some of their work on to the



fiscal workgroup. They will then have some back and forth with fiscal regarding the recommendations. Elizabeth Duryea (the other co-lead) added that they have been looking at the continuum of services, and many do not meet FFPSA standards, but the workgroup wants to ground themselves in a broad, comprehensive list.

- Ken shared that the Department plans to submit its Family First Prevention Plan on or before April 1<sup>st</sup>. This Prevention Plan will include components of the broader plan; Family First is a sliver of this broad circle that will provide reimbursement for EBPs for candidates in the definition; however, these EBPs have a somewhat limited focus. Aside from those, the Department is looking across the system to realign services/finances to align with its values regardless of the reimbursement. The Department is evaluating how to collaborate and partner with others to prevent abuse or neglect. There is no new money to implement, just a realignment of our finances so that what we want to fund is better reimbursed. The changes that we hope to accomplish may not be realized for years, but we hope to establish an infrastructure of prevention.
- One person asked about the money that has been granted for adoption - is any of that going to families or to Family First? Ken explained that foster parents incur extra expenses when kids stay home rather than going to school (e.g. electricity, food, sitters, etc.). The Governor approved a \$100 increase for three months that will offset additional costs. The Department believes those will apply to August, September, and October, but this is not finalized. It will go to kinship, core, and TFC caregivers.
- Given that some workgroups are finishing up their recommendations, one member asked which workgroups they ought to recruit for. Ken replied that Fiscal, QRTP, and IPP (Infrastructure Practice and Policy) are still towards the beginning of their processes. IPP is looking at establishing non-DCF pathways to service. All three of these workgroups could use additional members and new recruits would have an opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the recommendations. PSAWG is extremely large and close to their maximum. Elisabeth said that they could accept additional members, but those members would need to catch up on months of work and may find it to be a frustrating experience. Elisabeth agreed and said that at the point of the re-launch, they had to orient new members to 25-30 hours of work and condense that information. They had an orientation for their new members, but moving forward, they recommended other opportunities for engagement.
- Sarah Lockery pointed out that while April is the end of the planning process, there will still be opportunities to influence implementation and evaluation. Ken agreed this and said that there will be a long, grinding implementation process, and we are only in Phase I. Ken also offered to send other states' prevention plans in case the SAC wanted to have an idea of the final deliverable.
- Someone asked how much the election would influence the plan, and Ken replied that because the federal law already passed, the Department does not anticipate seeing any effects from the election. The Department will be moving full speed ahead regardless of the election results.
- A member asked if there is a specific date that agencies need to get their plan to DCF to become a QRTP. Ken said he did not know but could ask Linda Dixon, as he thinks she is doing an assessment.

- As a reminder, the Family First email is [DCF.CT.FAMILY.FIRST@ct.gov](mailto:DCF.CT.FAMILY.FIRST@ct.gov). If you have any feedback, feel free to reach out to that inbox.

#### Next Meeting

- The SAC members asked to have the agenda and minutes sooner, preferably at least a week before. Johanna Schmidt agreed to send the minutes out after a first draft is created.
- The next SAC meeting will be on **December 7, 2020 from 9:30 am - 12:00 pm.**
- Assignments for next time:
  - o Prepare for the FAVOR presentation. Gather questions to send to Lisa to help shape the presentation.
  - o In January, there will be a tutorial on how to engage in the legislative process - think of what questions you may have (train the trainer).