

## STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

12/07/20

### Attendees:

Myke Halpin\*, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata\*, Deb Kelleher, Judy Eisenberg\*, Dr. Irv Jennings\*, Jennifer Nadeau\*, Marie Mormile-Mehler\*, Ken Mysogland, Rosie Champlin, Samaris Rose, Sarah Lockery\*, Stephanie Cotton, Christopher Scott

(\* indicates a voting member)

### Guests:

Sergio Alvarez, Beresford Wilson, Malcolm Blue, Carolyn Westerholm, Susan Cunningham, Elizabeth Duryea, Jon Jacaruso, Stanley Kasanowski, Johanna Schmidt

### Minutes:

- The November meeting minutes were sent to members to approve over a week before this meeting. Judy motioned to approve those minutes, and Deb seconded. The members approved the minutes.

### Membership:

- Sarah informed the group that the applications have been submitted, and they can send the background check form in soon. She said she and Stephanie would work it out this week, after the meeting.
- Sarah asked Chris for Amani's narrative, which was sent over Google docs and she cannot access.
- Elisabeth Cannata still needs to send in her application statement.
- There is an opening for a child psychiatrist and an attorney. The SAC would like these positions filled by people of color if possible.
- The SAC was reminded that we should aim for good, robust participation outside of the meetings as well.
- Deb said that the organization that Sam (who previously filled the attorney position) worked for will let the SAC know if they have a suitable replacement for him.
- Sammy asked whether the location of the attorney matters, and Sarah said it was statewide.

### RAC Reports

#### *Region 1*

- Sammy shared that they had a meeting last week to make sure everyone is ready to implement the racial justice piece.
- Seven members joined the subcommittee to create a shared mission/vision for the RAC as well as develop recruiting and orientation materials.
- The RAC has also worked to build up relationships to enhance membership.
- They will meet on December 16<sup>th</sup> for a rough draft and then kick off in January.
- On November 13, the RAC met and the Racial Justice group presented framework. They were notified by the Academy for Workforce Development that someone could be sent

in to conduct implicit bias training. The RAC had 13 volunteers, but they could only send 1. They were pleased by the great energy and momentum around this, and they hope to have additional trainings.

### *Region 2*

- Judy shared that the RAC met again and joined the Network of Care in September. They also met this past Friday, where they heard a presentation on IFCS, a new service that demonstrates the restructuring of the child welfare system in Connecticut.
- IFCS involves care coordination outside of the Department.
- Some people have confused IFCS with other departmental changes.
- The RAC also gained a new fiduciary.
- Some meetings have been conflicting, and the RAC wants to examine its CRP function and consider how to focus more on racial justice and Family First.
- There is new leadership in the region.
- They were also invited to send someone to join the implicit bias training in January.
- Ken asked whether the confusion regarding IFCS and CFS has been resolved? Jud said that it has not been well-resolved. CSF follows FAR, whereas IFCS is for unsubstantiated cases. It was not well-explained. Malcolm said that he felt it was well-explained but not resolved. Leadership can revisit their explanation. Ken suggested they revisit in January and clarify further, and Judy agreed.

### *Region 3*

- Lisa and Regina were not at the meeting, so Jon offered updates on Region 3.
- In terms of recent departmental changes, the underlying theme of IFCS and other new initiatives is to take care of families rather than only being concerned with child welfare – it is a shift from focusing on substantiations and instead asking what the families' needs are.
- They have also established a local leadership team.
- Their next meeting is 12/9; they have reached out and filled provider slots and are on the way to filling family slots (about halfway there).
- The agenda for the next meeting is to hold an EMPS presentation and get an overview of the racial justice work happening in those offices.
- The RAC FAB met and did a QPI training; they are working to engage more families in this.

### *Region 4*

- Jennifer explained that Region 4 has been having conversations about the budget; they are supporting YAB meetings and working on funding.
- They held an IFCS presentation with Beacon.
- The region is having discussions about CRP – they have sent out a survey for feedback and will conduct focus groups for the upcoming year.

### *Region 5*

- Irv shared that the region has discussed race, and they looked at voting records for towns in Connecticut. They noticed that towns that vote red are mainly clustered in small towns, whereas big cities lean blue. There are also geographical divides (urban/rural, South+West/North+East).
- They focused on anti-racist framework and considered ways to share this information.
- In terms of COVID, the situation is bad and getting worse.
- Sergio gave a nice presentation on November 10, where he covered DCF's anti-racism framework and Safe and Sound culture. It was well-received.
- 11/30 was the last RAC meeting, where they discussed how to raise awareness and developed a few ideas. They aim to support the community and message.
- The RAC's next meeting will be at the end of January, where they will review the pathways data and work with community providers.
- Jen Avenia also came as a guest to the 11/30 meeting to discuss undocumented immigrants in Danbury; federally qualified health centers have been having issues, and they need to discuss this further. Jen Avenia will be developing a subgroup specific to this issue.
- In terms of COVID, the RAC is asking for a sense of urgency – we need to keep working together to protect ourselves.
- The RAC has also looked at school support for truancy and school-based arrests, racial justice, suicide prevention, and strengthening partnerships with providers. They will be doing a training with the Waterbury Health Center on 12/9.
- There will be a CHDI-sponsored SHAPE training on 12/14, which has been opened up to others outside the region.

### *Region 6*

- Marie said that the RAC has been regrouping and focusing on end-of-year activities.
- They are working to recruit a youth as tri-chair.
- The RAC is also holding a toy drive for youth in foster care.
- They have been receiving updates on Family First, especially from the PSAWG, which is identifying EBPs across the system. There is at least one RAC member on each subgroup, and they have been sharing updates from their respective workgroups with the RAC.
- The RAC is gearing up for CRP work. They will launch a subcommittee in January.
- Stan reflected on their anti-racist journey: the RAC spoke generally about it during the summer, then in September learned of the racial justice initiative. Now they are looking at data and moving to learn more about implicit bias.
- Sarah suggested that when the leads discuss racial justice in meetings, the RAC work to hold DCF accountable. Things fall through the cracks, and we should ensure that outcomes are being met. Ask for the data to make sure this is happening.

### *SAC Member Updates*

- Rosie highlighted the fact that racial justice work needs to be done in all parts of the state; racism is not always noticed enough in smaller towns, and we need to address it statewide.

- Chris shared that SUN Scholars is officialized – they have hired individuals and are training them intensely. They have also discussed caseloads and worked to be conscious of racial justice. The staff is diverse and multilingual. The Board of Directors is mainly people of colors, and 80% of them have expertise in child welfare. He is very excited for their future.

#### SAC Budget Report

- The SAC is right on track – stipends are all up to date.
- Regina submitted an invoice to FAVOR for \$5,000 more, which will provide a healthy budget for the retreat.

#### FAVOR Presentation: Family Engagement

- Beresford Wilson and Carolyn Westerholm attended the meeting to talk about Family Engagement and FAVOR. Their presentation covered strategies for ID'ing and recruiting families.
- There are various statewide family support organizations and programs to provide direct support to families.
- “Try everything,” said Beresford. FAVOR created a toolbox to help with this, but the important thing is to build and establish trusting relationships.
- Go to places where families are, including bars and cafes. We cannot tell families how to respond to a loss, and families often cannot access the supports they need.
- FAVOR uses traditional advocacy styles, with a myriad of nuances. 90% of their staff have lived experience caring for children with behavioral health needs. The structure follows the protocol of their funders (DCF), and they provide respite and medical equipment. DPH also funds the organization.
- They offered to answer specific questions, and they pointed out that family engagement is broad, not narrow. It is hard to say just one thing it is. It should not be put in a box, and it is important to ask families what brought them to the table.
- Ken asked them to expand on the statement regarding families in need and grief. Carolyn explained that there is a grieving process when a child has special needs; they have volunteer listeners to PATH. Many of these parents grieve, and depending on severity, may even go through a crisis. FAVOR matches families by need, and families find a lot of relief in knowing that there are other families with similar diagnoses.
- Beresford explained that while physical illness is overt, mental illness often is not. There is a similar grieving process for anyone that deals with it. Access to services is important, and FAVOR providing support improves results. Knowing how to navigate the system is key to assisting these families. He added that he has grown in appreciation for all sides of the work, including DCF and its current Commissioner. CT is generally ahead of the curve, and he attributes this to the involvement of families and parents. We will do more with good partners. “I don’t look at this as work; I look at this as life.” He encouraged participants to do and *live* the work by exhibiting kindness, integrity, and trust.
- One member added to the discussion of grief by sharing that when they were age 6, their mother had a baby with Down Syndrome. As a parent, dreams develop for your

child, but many of those dreams had to be let go when the child was born. The child welfare system intervenes at a hard time for these parents, and sometimes it expects too much from families. Families should be seen as the experts; we need to ask for their expertise without expecting them to regularly commit.

- Beresford continued on this thought; parents can establish new hopes and dreams for their child. They learn about loss and appreciation. You realize that it is not just about you, it's about the child. Society is measured by how we treat our most vulnerable, and it behooves us to get this right. We also need to listen to youth more. He appreciates the value of being quiet and listening.
- Another member explained that loss is not just because of mental health; it can be because of a child's removal from the home.
- Racial justice and culture impact the whole system. Beresford explained that misogyny and white supremacy affect how individuals experience the system.
- One person shared that they experienced DCF taking their kids, but it was a mistake. They have also had to call voluntary services. It is challenging to abide by every part of the system. Recently, distance learning has been a challenge, and they are not getting sufficient support through voluntary services; however, the situation would have played out differently if the school had called rather than them calling voluntary services.
- Another member had a similar experience where they were told that they are not able to care for their child. DCF called for removal in this case. It is hard to deal with. The RAC and SAC have been good points of involvement for them, and they encourage parents to get involved before there is a situation. They also credited DCF with changing a lot for the past ten years. Beresford asked them to take credit for themselves as well – their involvement is what created these changes.
- An additional person shared their experience with the Department; they struggled after adopting multiple children, and DCF did not help as they were becoming a therapeutic foster home. DCF was repeatedly involved, their children were misdiagnosed, and they went through different therapists and workers. This is why we advocate – to make things better for their children.
- A provider shared that at their agency, they see families involved with the Department struggling, not only with mental health/special needs. The solidarity of peer support could help. They asked whether they could refer families to FAVOR. Carolyn said that they could work with the family they had in mind.
- Another example of DCF having a negative impact was a situation where the mother could not keep the child safe. At first, the child was placed with a parent who knew the needs of the child, but then the child was moved to another home with very little communication. The parent was treated as a perpetrator, with supervised visits that were hard to coordinate. FAVOR was able to provide support to the mother throughout this challenge, and they will walk with the parent through the whole system, whatever is necessary.
- FAVOR provides a catalogue of training to families. The needs/work does not slow down for anyone, and training/information is important. This helps families take the reins and get the outcomes they need. Families should be able to access services and

impact their local communities by having conversations with those in power, letting them know what they need.

- One member shared an example of engagement: there was a meet and greet with the New Haven mayor in a barber shop. Conversations at those nontraditional places are where we get the best mileage, if folks have the courage to go there. Families are often excited to hear from you.

### DCF Report

- The Department continues to conduct triages to determine whether in-person visitations can be held safely. DCF has been open throughout the pandemic. Call volume fluctuates, especially as schools have been changing to remote.
- 11/20 was Connecticut Adoption Day, and the Department received some good coverage. Over 25 children were adopted throughout the state via virtual proceedings. It was a wonderful day, but we must remember that adoption is only one form of permanency. Over 90% of the families DCF interacts with remain at home, and 60% of those who are removed are able to be reunified. In 2019, there were 663 adoptions, but there were 782 children reunified. There have been 541 reunifications in 2020. Messaging is important, and the Department wants local advocates that can help prevent a Careline call from needing to be made.

### *Family First*

- The Department is on schedule to submit its plan by April 2021. DCF has seen terrific collaboration with its over 250 community partners (sister state agencies, families, providers, etc).
- The Infrastructure Practice and Policy workgroup is a new post-candidacy workgroup developing the community pathways that will provide families with a more efficient route to services so that the Department is the last call, not the first call.
- Kinship and Foster Care has finished its work, and its recommendations have been reviewed by the Governance Committee. Now the focus is shifting to prioritizing recommendations.
- The QRTP workgroup met on Friday (12/4) to discuss standards for congregate care and funding. There will be longer discussions on this next month.
- The Programs and Service Array workgroup (PSAWG) is working to align services and decide what to stand up to the Clearinghouse.
- Fiscal will soon be taking over PSAWG's work to realign DCF's fiscal picture and determine how the provided EBPs can be reimbursed. This work is not about the reimbursement – it is to revamp the child welfare system, create fewer cases, and provide greater support to the community.
- One SAC member needed clarification on whether the QRTP is the entity responsible for providing aftercare due to the goal of continuity of care. Ken replied that there is still not a lot of clarity on this issue, but he said he would lift this up to Linda Dixon for clarification.

### *Community Engagement*

- Commissioner and Ken have been doing weekly videos, sent out along with memos and handouts. All these can be accessed via the DCF website (<https://portal.ct.gov/DCF/COVID-19/HOME>) and any thoughts can be sent to the COVID-19 mailbox ([DCF.COVID-19@ct.gov](mailto:DCF.COVID-19@ct.gov)).

### *Discussion*

- Providing care in a group home during a pandemic continues to be a challenge; group homes remain places of huge COVID spread. There are concerns across the board regarding the psychological ramifications of being in that environment. Ken agreed that this is a good point. At the time of this meeting, DCF stats are:
  - Staff: 131
  - Foster Parents: 185 (3 have passed away)
  - Youth: 121While DCF has done a good job mitigating the spread, it will likely get worse. It has been traumatizing for staff, especially those who are younger and newer to this work.
- Another provider appreciated the discussion on trauma from COVID. Family First was written before COVID, and Connecticut has great experience with continuity of care with interventions. In their experience, bringing kids home sooner is usually better, with care being continued in the community.

### *SAC Annual Report*

- Sarah explained that the SAC decided to provide an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner. We have not previously issued an annual report, but the SAC liked the idea of creating one last year when it was discussed.
- A draft of the report was sent out for feedback; we will review it in January and submit it then. Sarah asked if there was any feedback regarding the mechanics.
- One person felt the tone of the report was too rosy; there are several problems that need to be addressed, most notably the racial justice piece. They also felt that the Family First work was not going as smoothly as the report implied.
- Another member suggested more discussion about the greater collaboration/synergy and the feedback loop between the RAC and SAC. The coordination has increased, and there have been great updates going between the bodies regarding the Department and its initiatives.
- It was proposed that the report also raise certain issues for the legislature. This is an opportunity to strategize around our prioritize – we should take that chance as it comes up.
- Sarah asked the SAC to review the report again, and if there are any revisions regarding language, send it to her before 12/14.

### Next Meeting

- The SAC did a quick check-in with each other to ensure everyone is doing all right. The next SAC meeting will be **Monday, January 4 from 9:30 am – 12:00 pm**. We will discuss the annual report and listen to a presentation on legislative advocacy.