

STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

02/01/21

Attendees:

Myke Halpin*, Sarah Lockery*, Dr. Elisabeth Cannata*, Christopher Scott, Deb Kelleher, Dr. Irv Jennings*, Judy Eisenberg*, Jennifer Nadeau*, Lisa Girard, Ken Mysogland, Dr. Regina Moeller*, Stephanie Cotton, Suprena Shuler*, Amani Sehloui

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests:

Sergio Alvarez, Malcolm Blue, Susan Cunningham, JoShonda Guerrier, Karen Fenton-LaShore, Sarah Gibson, Jon Jacaruso, Johanna Schmidt, Olivia Wilks, Joanna Widding

Minutes

- Jennifer Nadeau motioned for the January minutes to be approved and Judy Eisenberg seconded. The SAC voted to approve the minutes.

Membership:

- Sarah Lockery has reached out to folks who are missing a portion of the application. If you have not finished that, please do so.
- Myke will reach out to Rosie.
- Marie has left the SAC and her position, but she hopes to join the Region 4 RAC. This means there is available opening for someone for the Region 6 RAC position. This is not an appointed position, one can just join.
- Damien is not able to make the SAC meetings and would like feedback on how to proceed and whether someone else should take that position.
 - o Sarah asked the group to consider whether they would be interested in moving the meeting time to evenings. Overall, participation has been very robust at the current meeting time.
 - o Ken Mysogland asked that if it is being changed, it be moved to earlier in the day.
 - o Irv Jennings favored changing the time.
 - o Deb Kelleher suggested rotating between a day and an evening time and switching every month.
 - o Since some members fill multiple role, everyone was encouraged to consider this and it will be discussed further next month.

RAC Reports

Region 1

- Suprena shared that on January 15, the RAC did a presentation on the RAC and SAC mission. They discussed anti-racist initiatives, the RAC's elevator pitch, and the mission statement for the RAC/CRP.
- The group had lots to say about the SAC. They also gave a lot of feedback about how difficult the transition to virtual learning has been. They suggested considering

alternative methods for engagement and learning. One recommendation was to utilize substitute teachers to do in-person supplemental learning for those who need it.

- The RAC used a PowerPoint for their orientation that helped streamline the conversation.
- Their next meeting will be February 19.
- They also discussed the legislative updates from Vinny Russo. They would like more information about how the RAC and SAC can get involved.
- Suprena was asked whether anyone in education (Board of Ed, etc.) was at the orientation meeting. Suprena explained that they are trying to involve schools/educators more, as well as police. They would also like to expand beyond Bridgeport. It is key to help them understand the role that trauma plays in these kids' lives.
- Ken checked whether everyone is getting Vinny's legislative update emails. The group said that they were, and they also want to feel like they have input in the process. Ken explained that many of the bills mentioned in those updates will not end up moving forward. There is also a legislative subcommittee of the SAC that can weigh in with DCF's affairs through Vinny or consider testifying.
- Suprena said that Vinny did a great job explaining the CGA website to the group. We need to pinpoint where we want to influence and focus on those bills, as well as consider how we can bring in more community voices.
- Chris Scott shared that he and Steve Hernandez were working on creating a foster/adopted caucus. That initiative has been tabled due to COVID, but this could be a deliverable that we work on. We can consider how to tackle this collectively.

Region 2

- Judy spoke about the meeting on January 8, which addressed the process, timing, and focus of the RAC.
- Meetings will be on the first Friday of the month at noon (this is a new meeting time). The first meeting went quite well.
- Stephanie added that they have also made progress with recruiting and will have three new family voices. There will also be standing time dedicated in each meeting for family voices.
- The Region 2 RAC will be reviewing their CRP focus at their next two meetings.
- They are interested the idea of an orientation and found the presentation to be helpful.
- In March, the RAC will look at fatherhood work and re-screen a video. They will update recommended changes based on gaps.
- Many folks participated in the implicit bias training.

Region 3

- Regina shared that the Region 3 RAC has done their EMPS training. Lisa added that at their next meeting in March, they will do IB (implicit bias) training.
- They have discussed the RAC, RAC-FAB, and SAC.
- A provider wanted to join the RAC and they had to explain that it is invite-only and mainly intended for parents.

Region 4

- In their January meeting, the RAC discussed the racial justice change initiative, which is increasing kinship for kids of color. They will be doing reviews to see if any children placed with CORE families could be moved to kin.
- They also discussed Family First and felt that there is a lack of formal information to the SAC and RACs. Several members are on the workgroups, but they are not able to give summaries, since they can only speak from their view. It would be helpful to have a more formal process for reviewing Family First decisions and actions.

Region 5

- Irv discussed the immigration presentation/training that was held.
- The CRP will meet this upcoming Saturday.
- The Region 5 RAC has created an anti-racism subcommittee.
- The RAC also has discussed the vaccine, possible resistance, and the impact on teams. There are many people who do not want to get the vaccine, as well as significant concern about the new strains (particularly the South African strain) that have been spreading.
- They are wondering whether it could be a requirement to get the vaccine. Regina replied that it is possible for some organizations to make it a requirement, but they have opted for an incentive program - this helped add 25% more people. Irv agreed that it was a good idea, but it can only take one ill person to cause community spread. Regina added that it is possible to require it as long as there are religious/medical exemptions.
- In terms of resistance to getting vaccinated, Deb highlighted the importance of acknowledging the ways the medical system has historically abused Black and brown communities. A lot of that resistance comes from being used as guinea pigs.
- Also, the RAC will spearhead a workgroup to address the undocumented community. Region 5 has trouble connecting undocumented families with services, both due to lack of services and a lack of desire to connect with services. Deb said that they have not had much luck engaging people in this yet but will start meeting monthly to improve.
- Former foster youth will begin doing monthly conversations with current foster parents - if anyone is interested in joining a community group, they are welcome! Ken said that they will promote that initiative.
- Ken also acknowledged the historical reasons why some communities (particularly Black and brown communities) distrust the vaccines. The State of CT is not mandating it for its employees, but private organizations have different regulations. They would be interested in discussing strategies to increase participation in the vaccine next month. His understanding is that while it prevents one from getting sick, it is still possible to spread the disease. He would love the SAC to discuss this more in depth.

Region 6

- Marie was not present, so Elisabeth Cannata shared updates. The RAC met on Thursday, and they have a new youth tri-chair.
- Region 4 did their CRP presentation, which was fantastic. They feel more purposeful about their CRP now. They also were updated on Family First.

SAC Member Updates

- Chris shared that things are going well for Sun, and they are currently serving sixteen students. They have had great enrollment and retention. They have also recently done an interview with *In Print News* and a podcast as well.
- Chris spoke with Sarah and they feel it would be valuable to have him attend next year's retreat. He is very willing to attend. Jerry is brilliant but always humbles himself, and he is great about lifting youth voices. He will provide lots of insight on democratic policymaking.
- Sarah said they are thinking about summer 2022 as a good time for the retreat, and they would like to use Jerry's involvement as a springboard for sustainable change. They also prefer to have it in-person.
- Jerry has [spoken on Family First](#), and we thank Chris for using that connection.

Budget Update

- There will be a \$5,145 check coming in from FAVOR this week.
- December and January stipends are on their way. Some stipends still need to be cashed.

Family First: Community Conversations

- Joanna Widding, Olivia Wilks, and Karen Fenton-LaShore were on the call from Chapin Hall, a policy research institute with the University of Chicago. JoShonda Guerrier was also present.
- Chapin Hall was complemented for their fantastic contributions. JoShonda and Ken have been working on the Family First planning process for over a year.
- The Department is on track to submit its Prevention Plan in April.
- In addition to today's updates, the co-leads will put together a PowerPoint to present to the RACs, perhaps at next month's SAC meeting. This should help address the questions about the work to date.
- The Department has received input from over 250 community partners, but they would like to specifically get feedback from families. To that end, there will be a series of small focus groups (20 people or fewer) facilitated by Chapin Hall and a community partner (not DCF) to discuss their experiences.
- Today's discussion will address the goal of these conversations and our draft flyer. These conversations will be held on February 23rd and 25th.
- Logistics: There will be a set of February and April conversations, both of which will be virtual.
- Questions:
 - o How did you initially access supports?
 - o How did your family experience the conversations?
 - o Were you referred or directly connected to a service?
 - o What would the best experience for families look like to you?
 - o What else can you tell us about Connecticut's supports for families?
- The SAC was asked to give suggestions for how we can advertise these conversations.

- One suggestion was to see if the Office of Community Relations can reach out to folks they're aware of. Also, DCF staff (particularly intake staff) probably are aware of families.
- This could also go out in the newsletter and be sent to community partners.
- Families may be more likely to step up if they are providing an evaluation of the system.
- "Community conversation" is a common term that may result in eyerolls - it is not meaningful. "Sharing expertise" may be a better term. Also, 60 minutes is not enough for 20 families to have enough time to discuss - 90 minutes would be better.
- Perhaps the Systems Directors should be involved - we should make sure we have a diverse array of families from different regions. These types of conversations can become mundane, so it is important to stay receptive.
- One person felt there was some ambiguity and asked whether we are talking about DCF and the Child Welfare System or the State generally - it is important to be more explicit in what we are looking for. Is there any way to positively frame it?
- Another member cautioned against handpicking families - we want a diverse array of people. They suggested sharing on social media to make sure it is distributed widely.
- It was suggested that although the conversations will focus on the child welfare system, we ought to step outside of the child-centered focus and consider who is addressing the adults in the family (DMHAS, DSS, etc.).
- Ken shared that we need a cross-section of families involved with DCF and also those who have not, since the prevention system should lead to families to not interact with DCF.
- In terms to sharing with individual families, it might be a good option to ask some and see if they can then encourage others to join too, since word of mouth is more effective than flyers.
- The group agreed that it would be important to have strong facilitators.
- Another suggestion was to have school districts share it, which would reach a broad group of people, while also having the message go out from an entity with trust and a relationship.
- It is important to encourage folks to be honest, even if they are angry. Folks will recruit others if it is a good experience. "Community conversation" is vague and impersonal.
- Another person said that they did not agree with hand picking folks, as this may lead to getting only positive opinions.
- JoShonda clarified that these discussions are meant to be fairly structured to get feedback related to Family First, not general complaints about the system. We will strengthen the language to make this clearer.
- It was suggested to create a five-minute video clip that would summarize the work of Family First.
- One person asked whether the families will have access to the questions before the meeting, and the organizers said that while they had not planned on that, it was a good suggestion that they will consider.
- Ken shared a copy of the flyer with the group. Overall, many folks in the group felt it was too vague and ought to be more explicit about the purpose of the meetings.

- One person pointed out that families involved with the Department may not have initiated services, so asking questions about "accessing" services seems disingenuous. It should be clarified what they are seeking. Olivia explained that we are hoping to develop an option for self-referring to services, and this is an attempt to capture what we hope to build.
- The child welfare system is designed to help families stay together, but they do not always get it right - how can we help this?
- In differential response, many families have expressed a desire for services before a call was placed. It might help to ask families who have had different levels of involvement (FAR, voluntary services, etc.) and those who are representative of the candidacy groups.
- The flyer uses the phrase "supportive services," and while this has a specific meaning to providers, families may think of other services.
- The organizers agreed to incorporate the feedback about being more transparent and explicit. The intent had been to not center DCF, but they understood the points about being clear.
- In terms of explicitly calling out this event's relation to DCF, one person suggested that DCF be named but not emphasized, as some people may feel resentment towards them. Another point was made that DCF has been making strides and working to develop trust - continued transparency is an important part of this.
- The people that we may most want to hear from may have access issues and not be able to participate in a virtual call - is there a way to leave a comment or contribute without being part of the meeting? JoShonda replied that time is a constraint. If there is a ton of interest, other forms of engagement may be considered, or folks may be folded into the second round in April.
- In March, the SAC will be updated on the progress around Family First. If we consider adding additional folks, we may want to hold it from 11-12, and then consider having a follow up if there are additional questions. Folks can also email and respond, which could inform subsequent presentations.
- The group was reminded who is on the Governance Committee: the Commissioner, the exec team, the co-leads for all workgroups, youth/family voices, community partners, and sister state agencies. Decisions made in the workgroups go to the Governance Committee, who makes final recommendations to the Commissioner, who will then submit her final approval. Governance essentially serves as an advising body to the Commissioner. The minutes from Governance and other workgroups are available on the DCF website.

Legislative Committee

- Vincent Russo came to the last SAC meeting and described the legislative process. Please reach out to him if you are interested in getting involved; we value your contributions.
- Sammy and Amani have started a Legislative Committee of the SAC. They are the co-chairs of this committee, and they aim to get educated about the bills coming out and

the process. They will report to the SAC and let us know about opportunities to advocate for or oppose bills. This is a new committee, and it will evolve as we go.

- Email us if you are interested in participating in this.

Racial Justice Change Initiatives

- We were asked to provide input on the Racial Justice Change Initiatives. There are 26 initiatives - this list was provided to the SAC but the region/office is not listed, as all have application beyond that specific area office. Please also give this information to the RACs for feedback.
- One person asked how data will be measured. Ken said Monica could review these initiatives to make sure they include metrics, but some are hard to measure. The data depends on the initiative. For example, the OCR's initiative has no data as a starting point but will develop with time.
- It was suggested that abbreviations be spelled out before these materials go out.
- The group requested more information about the goals behind the initiatives, and Ken agreed to provide more detail. Others suggested including the regional information - folks should be familiar with their own region's initiative by now anyway.
- Some of the initiatives ought to explicitly state how their goal is connected to racial justice.
- As with the earlier discussion around the community conversations, the SAC emphasized the importance of being detailed and explicit. Vagueness is often a cushion to avoid being held accountable - the SAC challenged DCF to be less vague.

Parent Right to Know Brochure

- The SAC provided feedback on this months ago - DCF wants to start updating it and incorporate it in with the OCR.

January Spotlight on What's Right

- Ken recommended that everyone read the first two articles, one of which is called "Embracing 2021" and provides an update of DCF's collaboration and recent efforts.
- Another is called "She breathed life back into her family."
- The Department will continue to highlight these stories, as well as provide important information. For example, this month includes information on human trafficking.

Next SAC Meeting

- The next SAC meeting will be Monday, March 1st, 2021. The SAC will hear more about Family First and the status so far.
- The Annual Report is complete and the SAC will receive a copy of the final version.