

## STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL MINUTES

04/05/21

### Attendees:

Myke Halpin\*, Sarah Lockery\*, Irv Jennings\*, Elisabeth Cannata\*, Deb Kelleher, Judy Eisenberg\*, Jennifer Nadeau\*, Michelle Sarofin, Ken Mysogland, Regina Moeller\*, Amani Sehloui, Suprena Shuler\*, Stephanie Cotton, Christopher Scott, Samaris Rose, Lisa Girard, Ann Smith\*

(\* indicates a voting member)

### Guests:

Nan Arnstein, Sergio Alvarez, Malcolm Blue, Susan Cunningham, Emily T, Sarah Gibson, Jon Jacaruso, Stan Kasanowski, Rachel, Johanna Schmidt, Keisha M-V, Vincent Russo, Natalia Liriano

### Minutes

- The March minutes were sent to the members in advance and some edits were made. There were no comments on the minutes.
- Jennifer Nadeau motioned to approve the minutes, with Deb Kelleher seconding. The SAC voted to approve the minutes.

### Membership:

- Sarah Lockery has submitted the SAC membership to the Governor's Office and is waiting for approval. After approval, members will be sent a background check survey.
- The SAC currently has a few vacancies: a child psychiatrist (if legislation is passed, this would open up to any healthcare provider who works with children) and two adult caregivers of youth involved with services.
- Members want to discuss SAC diversity with Lisa from FAVOR.

### RAC Reports

#### *Region 1*

- There has been a lot of YAB involvement recently; they have helped to build the SAC's PowerPoint. It has been great to hear their vision and what they want to change. They have several suggestions for language changes:
  - o They would prefer "foster child" to change to "youth empowerment"
  - o They would like "foster parent" to change to "heart parent"
- The YAB members feel there is a stigma associated with foster care, and these language changes may help eliminate that embarrassment. Ken noted that Natalia Liriano, DCF's Director of Foster Care, will be joining the call later. He suggested this feedback be brought to her. He also noted that the Department has shifted its language from "foster child" to "youth in care."
- Region 1 has finished its PowerPoint and adopted it. They have recently been sending it to providers, and they may ask the SAC to also take a look at it. They are proud and excited.

- They brought some initiatives to FCA and to the Community for feedback. They shared that DCF needs to pay more attention to culture, not just race. They are pleased that DCF has been working on this.
- They also had a question - why does an unsubstantiated case stay on one's record for so long? For example, a foster parent who was involved in an investigation but not substantiated against could have the case stay on their record. Ken explained that this would likely require a more in-depth conversation, but to address this briefly, a substantiation stays on one's record indefinitely. An unsubstantiation stays for five years from the last investigation; however, these records are confidential and would not be shared without the person's consent. Suprena said she would let them know, but she noted that this is a stressful process and many families do not understand why it would stay on record if nothing was done wrong.
- Region 1 has shared that the SAC is looking for a child psychiatrist.

### *Region 2*

- Judy shared that the RAC has not met yet since March 5. At that meeting, they listened to fatherhood service presentations and discussed region changes.
- They have learned about two organizations that were very plugged in to fatherhood work but are no longer active. The RAC is not sure if the fatherhood work is now in another agency, but they are interested in rejuvenating these organizations.
- The RAC will meet again on Friday, where they will listen to the racial justice initiatives and case presentations.
- Region 2 has been bolstering their recruitment efforts and will "borrow" Region 1's PowerPoint idea.
- By May, the CRP will try to bring the fatherhood and racial justice work together.
- Malcolm added that both offices are trying to spearhead the FELT.
- Stephanie noted that they have been working with incarcerated fathers and would like to speak with them. Judy said they are also meeting with a roundtable of women who have been released from incarceration.

### *Region 3*

- Regina explained that they have been meeting quarterly. At the last meeting, they watched a presentation on educational neglect and had a dynamic discussion on the topic.
- In between meetings, the RAC has hosted topics/trainings, such as their implicit bias training and psychosis training.
- Lisa shared that the RAC has successfully engaged youth and families, and they have been looking at recruitment and engagement.
- Jon added that the implicit bias training will be on April 28, but they may need to host a second training too.

### *Region 4*

- Jennifer shared that during the RAC's March meeting, they showed the video of the Family First update presentation that was given at the last SAC meeting. They received good feedback on this presentation.
- The RAC's Membership Committee will hold their annual meeting in May, where they will discuss vacancies, the Region 4 brochure, translating it into Spanish, the YAB update, and putting together hygiene products for group homes.
- Sarah Gibson spoke to the youth about possibly doing a story about their work and highlighting this partnership.
- Ken thanked Region 4 for their being the impetus to do the Family First presentation and for continuing the feedback loop.

### *Region 5*

- Deb Kelleher shared that the RAC recently watched a presentation by Safe Girls on Fire, an organization to protect Black girls. They watched a video and will speak more about this - they were very moved by the video.
- They were glad to show local, youth-led antiracist work.
- Region 5 wants to create a racial justice workgroup and incorporate implicit bias training.
- They have begun their Health Equity Planning, and Jeanette Blackwell joined to discuss the Child Safety Practice Model.
- Sergio Alvarez discussed the Prevention Services Unit and the Caregiver Practice Model with Region 5.
- Sergio added that the implicit bias training was offered to community group and providers. He also explained that the Prevention Services Unit is a collaboration with Waterbury schools; the Department is piloting a program to outpost social workers in schools. The goal is to offer supports in the community so that children do not have to come into care. The key is that they are offering *support*, not child welfare involvement.

### *Region 6*

- Region 6 met on Thursday, where they scheduled a presentation on fatherhood and racial justice, as well as the safety practice model.
- Region 6 is looking to increase engagement and participation, and the CRP is looking to identify a focus.
- The RAC is interested in hearing feedback from the family focus groups that were held.
- Stan shared the concern that the RAC is provider heavy, especially now that one person recently left. They are considering changing the time of their meeting to help with this.
- The region hopes to bring together fatherhood work and racial justice.
- Ken shared that we do have the feedback from the focus groups and hope to put it together into a 1-pager. DCF also has a visual, which will be given out in some form. He also suggested that the RAC outreach to Johanna Schmidt, who has the information of the folks who participated. She could reach out to them and encourage them to connect with the RAC. The Department does not want their feedback to be a one-time event, so tapping into their expertise would be helpful.

### SAC Member Updates

- Chris did not have many new updates about Sun's Scholars but shared that the organization is doing well.
- Sarah Lockery let the group know about learning collaboratives that address the CLAS Standards (cultural/linguistic standards), which are fifteen federal standards that address provider biases that impact healthcare outcomes. DCF has provided trainings to develop health equity plans. Providers are at different spots, and the learning collaboratives offer peer support. Each region has a contact person, and they will be launched soon. They will be seeking input, and we would like to shape those plans.
- Amani shared that there will be a 5K in May called "Foster the Future." The money will go to programmatic expenses.
- Suprena shared that there is an implicit bias training in May.
- Chris added that at the end of April, they will be hosting an alumni association meeting. He wants to establish a formal network of working professionals who have been in the foster care system.

### Legislation Subcommittee

- There were no updates from the Legislative Subcommittee.

### Budget Update

- The current balance is \$16,596.26.
- Jerry Milner will likely join us for our retreat in Summer 2022, where we will evaluate the Family First launch and other actionable items.
- One member thought we might have paid out the same invoice twice, but Sarah Lockery assured the group that this is not the case, and stipends have been paid through March.
- Another person asked whether it is possible to start paying some expenses in advance. They were not sure whether it is possible to carry the CRP funds over year to year. Sarah said they could consider putting a deposit down on a location for the retreat. Another member followed up to explain that the federal government only needs to know that FAVOR will distribute the funds; they do not need to know what happens after. Also, they found that FAVOR is not taking the fiduciary fee, so that can pull administrative costs out.

### DCF Updates

#### *DCF Foster Care and Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)*

- Natalia Liriano, Director of DCF Foster Care, joined the call to discuss the Department's Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI). She introduced herself to the SAC and shared that she has been with the Department for around thirty years. Most of that time, she has been a champion for foster care, and she is honored to serve as the Director. She is even more excited about the recent alignment with the Bureau of Child Welfare; Foster Care used to be outside the division but now it is all under Tina Jefferson, Bureau Chief of Child Welfare. This is a greater opportunity to embed practice and be aware of interdependence. She hopes to transform the practice of foster care.

- QPI began in California, and it is an approach to relationships, most notably the relationship between caregivers and the Department. The goal is for children to remain 1) with their family; 2) with kin (someone they know); 3) with a family.
- QPI envisions standards of excellence in parenting - CT needs to define what that looks like for us. DCF wants to discover the ways communities can help families without diminishing the parents' roles or life - the goal is to keep their relationship open, parent the whole child, and make sure the connection does not break. The parent-child relationship is a sacred one, and QPI aims to intentionally build that relationship.
- CT is in the process of defining how we see excellent parenting. How are relationships embedded in our policy and practice? How does each division embody it?
- DCF will align its goals with the relationships. They determine how to identify and remove barriers to a relationship, as well as how to sustain the relationships.
- QPI is part of the caregiver practice model and kinship navigator - it relates to the front door to post-guardianship. It has a community-based focus and emphasizes supports outside DCF care. Natalia suggested someone come to the SAC and describe the community side.
- People go into social services to serve and help families, not for paperwork. Foster care needs to be a support, not a separation. Ken highlighted the value of language - foster care should be viewed as a temporary separation of children from their parents, not a long-term removal.
- Along with that language change, Natalia mentioned the use of person-first language. Notably, the Department has shifted from "foster children" to "children in care."
- One person asked who participated in the QPI process. Natalia shared that it was several QPI champions - licensed caregivers and DCF staff from each region. They met and pulled information together using focus groups.
- The new brand statement for the Foster Care Division is "Where we value our children's caregivers as members of our team who build loving and nurturing relationships for children and their families."
  - o The Foster Care Division is trying to break down what that actually looks like, but so far they are emphasizing values like co-parenting and embracing parents.
- A SAC member pointed out that printed material for foster care is concerning because foster care and adoption are often lumped together. This suggests that foster care leads to adoption rather than reunification. Natalia felt this was a good point; DCF needs to look at its material. She is currently working with Cashman and Katz to reform our materials, and there is a lot of work to be done. In that vein, she hopes to popularize referring to the division as the "Foster Care Division" rather than "FASU" because adoption should not be the final goal.
- Another person shared that they are excited about these developments and spoke about their RAC, which worked with the YAB and got some youth feedback on language. They shared the terms "youth empowerment" and "heart parents" as suggested terms. Natalia explained that those voices are important - youth voices were invited to join the QPI planning process, but they did have low participation. Two adults who were children in care participated, and they intentionally want to change the language.

- Natalia closed by asking SAC members to let her know if they have any questions. This is about the whole continuum. She thanked everyone for the invite.

### *Strategic Plan*

- There is a very recent draft plan that Ken would like to share with the SAC. He recommends that the SAC discuss this in May with Treena.
- The SAC hoped that if the Department has specific asks or points of feedback, they would share those questions with the SAC so they can better solicit feedback from the RACs. Ken agreed to highlight points of emphasis, but anything is fair game for feedback, and it is important to be as transparent as possible.

### *DCF Legislative Update*

- Vinny Russo explained that there is not a lot of new developments, since many committees are wrapping up their work. There have been lots of modifications to the legislations (e.g. fatherhood bill).
- One recent bill proposes to dissolve the Youth Suicide Advisory Board and create a new board that addresses the whole lifespan; however, there was a great deal of pushback, so the bill has been shelved for now.
- Three committees are still meeting: Judiciary, Appropriations, and Finance. The Judiciary Committee will finish up this week. The JJPOC Bill is one the Department is following, as it would give DCF oversight of education in juvenile justice facilities. They are currently making technical changes to smooth it out.
- Another recent bill requests that the Department post TPR data - we may need to build up infrastructure to accommodate.
- Budget-wise, Connecticut is doing well. The state has gotten good revenue, as well as federal funding for one-time initiative.
- The Appropriations Committee will report out in April, but we will not see the plan until later in the month. After that, the Governor's Office and Legislature will negotiate.
- Vinny will send out a legislative update next week Monday and will answer any questions folks have.
- Ken asked if Vinny could speak more about the discussion on children's mental and behavioral health. What will we see with our kids after the pandemic? The Department wants to emphasize its role as the lead on these issues while not directing providers. Vinny is part of local listening sessions to discuss local needs.
- A SAC member asked about telehealth - telehealth is essential, but the emergency authorization is expiring. Has there been any legislation to make it permanence? Also, has there been any legislation to make sure insurance will continue to cover telephone-only health services? Vinny said that the legislature passed a bill that will keep the executive order until the end of May. In terms of telehealth, yes, HB-5596 increases access post-pandemic use of telehealth. The Insurance Committee is moving to require coverage is moving to require coverage and there has been lots of discussion, although this is not the law yet.
- The SAC member asked whether there is any way to clarify this to providers, who have received mixed information. Vinny said that providers will likely have Governor's Affairs

Liaisons, who should be aware of this. The SAC member is concerned that the insurance companies may not be aware of/admit to guidelines.

- Ken shared that the Governor has the power to extend certain executive orders (as per the legislation), but it is unclear which will actually be extended - the Governor will need to specify.
- Vinny recommended that folks outreach to committee chairs if they want to offer feedback. They are still working on the language, so it is a good time to reach out to legislators. Ken added that a lot of people push back on legislation but do not offer alternatives or better solutions. He hopes that folks feel empowered to speak up. It's not final until it is final.

#### *Commissioner's New Haven Visit*

- Commissioner Vanessa Dorantes met with Vice President Kamala Harris to discuss the American Rescue Act and funding for childcare. She felt it was a wonderful environment.
- They also discussed the connection between Careline reports and poverty, as well as supports the Department provides that reduce the need for out of home care. DCF is putting together a special edition of its Spotlight to highlight this visit.

#### *Family First*

- DCF and Chapin Hall is completing its draft of the prevention plan. There are seven sections to the plan, and when the draft is done, it will be sent to the SAC, community partners, and everyone who was involved in the Family First planning process (over 400 people). DCF will have a two-week public comment session. Ken suggested that a special SAC meeting may be scheduled to discuss it, as we want as much input as possible. The plan will then be submitted in early May.
- Dr. Sharon Davis will be starting on Friday as the Family First lead.
- Ken shared the cross-cutting themes from the Parents as Experts session. These themes can be found in the March 2<sup>nd</sup> Governance Committee slides. The input of caregivers was powerful and will be embedded into the plan.
- Looking at the themes, one workgroup member wondered whether families can score how they currently experience the system using the themes as a metric. Ken noted that these themes apply to the whole system, not just DCF.
- In terms of the "consistency" theme, a SAC member felt that although in theory, services should be available everywhere, they are unsure how to actualize this. Ken explained that consistency in this context meant wanting the same type of response across offices and across workers. It is not necessarily the exact same services as much as desiring a uniform response. After that, a needs assessment and what is available will play a role in service access.

#### *Racial Justice Change Initiatives*

- Ken would like Monica Rams to come on a SAC call and discuss the initiatives. Also, last week Wednesday there was a Summit in which each Area Office and Division reported on their initiative. Ken shared some updates from his division.

- **Legislation:** Vinny presented the racial justice framework to legislators, who also participated in the Color of COVID seminar. Racial justice has been embedded in DCF's testimony and discussed with the legislature.
- **Office of Communications:** The Office is ensuring that all communications reflect the diversity of our families and our workforce. They have found that diverse images on the Internet are hard to find; white individuals are more likely to be categorized as having mental health needs, whereas families of color are more likely to be categorized as deficient; and white foster family stories are extremely common.
- **Office of Community Relations:** The Office has been documenting the race and ethnicity of every family that is the subject of an inquiry. They have found that white families are disproportionately likely to be the subject, despite the fact that BIPOC families are disproportionately involved with the Department. This raises questions about access, trust, and engagement.
- Monica will be invited to a meeting to discuss this further, and the RACs have been discussing their regions' initiatives.

#### *Parents Right to Know Brochure*

- This brochure is being updated to be made more family-friendly.
- A member asked whether the Department has Region 2's document with recommendations, and Ken said that it does, and it has been impacting the revisions.

#### Next SAC Meeting

- The SAC was reminded that we are not out of the woods yet, COVID-wise. We need to reiterate the importance of sticking through.
- Sarah Lockery will send out information about the learning collaboratives, and Amani will send out information about the 5K.
- The next SAC meeting will be Monday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021.