

STATEWIDE ADVISORY COUNCIL (SAC) Minutes: June 7, 2021

1. Introductions and Attendance

Members: Sarah Lockery*, Myke Halpin*, Ken Mysogland, Jennifer Nadeau, Judy Eisenberg*, Irv Jennings*, Deb Kelleher*, Suprena Shuler*, Stephanie Cotton, Michelle Sarofin*, Lisa Girard, Elisabeth Cannata*, Chris Scott*, Samaris Rose

* = voting member

Guests: Sergio Alvarez, Laine Taylor, Susan Cunningham, Malcolm Blue, Sarah Gibson, Jon Jacaruso, Elizabeth Duryea, Stan Kasanowski, Monica Rams, Johanna Schmidt,

2. Minutes

- One edit was made to the May minutes. Jennifer Nadeau motioned to accept the amended minutes, with Deb Kelleher seconding. The SAC approved the minutes.

3. Membership

- Ken Mysogland explained that the Governor's Office has been locked down and focused on legislation, so DCF has not been able to get clarity around the appointment process and background checks for SAC members. DCF will look into this and provide more information when it is available.
- Sarah Lockery shared that the SAC has 19 voting positions, 13 of which are appointed positions that are outlined in statutes. We have received some of the necessary documents for the appointment but are still determining how to complete the background check process.
- We have three openings: one for a psychiatrist and two for adult caregivers of DCF-involved youth.

4. SAC Member Advisement

RAC Reports

Region 1:

- There was no RAC meeting, but the RAC did hold an event on anti-racism. They wished for a bigger turnout, but they had a great presenter.
- On June 16, the RAC will review the Child Safety Practice Model.
- Suprena provided updates on getting an FCA rep and youth homelessness.
- The RAC has also provided gift cards for graduates and youth going through transitions (e.g. 8th grade to high school)

Region 2:

- The RAC met on Friday and were introduced to the Child Safety Practice Model. Members did not get to provide as much feedback as they wanted and are wondering if they can join other regions' presentations.
 - o Other RACs did offer to let Region 2 RAC members join their meeting to provide this feedback.
- The RAC reviewed its CRP activities, such as fatherhood supports, anti-racist goals, and recruiting additional members (especially dads). They are proud that they have recruited a representative for law enforcement and for Yale New Haven Hospital. They also hope to include folks from schools.
- The RAC is wondering the best way to recruit a youth representative. Sarah L. pitched a specialized CRP for health equity for families;

Region 3:

- Region 3's RAC will have a presentation on 6/9 on the Child Safety Practice Model and are looking to get more youth and families involved.

Region 4:

- Jennifer provided a membership update and information on stipends, opening, and recruiting.
- They have been planning for their annual meeting.
- The YAB has been collecting items for group homes. They are hoping to write a blurb on this project for the Spotlight on What's Right (DCF newsletter).
- They have also reviewed the Safety Practice Model

Region 5:

- On 5/24, the RAC held a meeting with normal participation. They reviewed the Child Safety Practice Model, community engagement plan, pandemic concerns, and increased mental health needs (especially for children).
- There are lots of waiting lists throughout the state (very recent development)--are there any plans to address this?
- Deb asked to have a QPI presentation, so a presentation from Region 1 will be shared.
- The CRP met yesterday and applications have been submitted.
- Irv suggested discussing the ARPA funds and how they may be used to enhance the behavioral health system; it was decided that the budget would be discussed at the next meeting once it has been finalized.
- Ken confirmed that the Children's Behavioral Health Summit is posted and has been sent to the SAC members along with the PowerPoint.

Region 6

- Region 6 is excited for updates on the Child Safety Practice Model.
- Region 4 presented on the Fatherhood Breakout Series, and Region 6 plans to continue discussions on fatherhood work.

SAC Member Reports

- Lisa shared that FAVOR is hosting a men's mental health conversation on June 14. Although it will focus on men, women may also attend.
- Chris was happy to let the SAC know that the students in Sun's Scholars are doing very well--100% of them are enrolled next fall, and their average GPA is 3.0. Chris also participated in a presentation on legislation advocated for by foster youth. Ken shared that he did a great job and was so impressed by Chris.

SAC Legislation Committee Report: Sammi and Amani, Co-Chairs

No report

5. **SAC Budget Balance:** Regina is working on the stipends. The budget is healthy, and we need to start planning for the retreat in Summer 2022 to make sure we are taking that into account.

6. DCF Report

Antiracism at DCF: Monica Rams

- Monica Rams gave an update about the agency-wide change initiatives. In September 2020, agency leaders were tasked with creating a change initiative within their scope of influence that could impact outcomes. In March 2021, a meeting was held to receive updates on the 28 initiatives that have been implemented.
- A series of consultation calls were held to provide assistance. The initiatives were grouped into one of the Department's 7 Key Goals, or into "Pathways Data" or "Workforce."
- In these calls, staff heard where the initiatives fell, kept each other accountable, and supported each other.
- Region 1 implemented a Racial Equity Tool, and other regions have since adopted it as their initiative. The Department is working to standardize the tool (currently it is specific to each region).
- At the March Summit, divisions/offices were given 3 minutes to discuss their initiative and progress.
- After the summit, a second series of calls were held to discuss assessing the initiatives and start scaling up successful ones.
- In the fall, there will be a follow-up summit. Data and strategic planning will be embedded throughout this work.
- Some examples of change initiatives are:

- Legal Team - Examine the central registry policy, hold dialogues among the staff, and identify their biases.
- Academy for Workforce Development - Hold implicit bias trainings
- Four Racial Justice Subcommittees are working to tie in data; they are in different phases of their work. Divisions also get ongoing conversations and technical assistance.
- One SAC member asked Monica how the SAC can integrate into the racial justice work happening at the Department? Monica explained that the SAC and RACs have an important role bringing information into the offices and organizations of their region. They are a particularly important connection to the community and organizations--it cannot just be the agency doing this work. The feedback they provide is also key.
- Ken Mysogland added that this has been an important learning experience. The Communications Division has been working to highlight diverse stories, which seems like it should be easy; however, they have phased a tough balance between these stories and what the media wants.
- Elizabeth Duryea added on behalf of the Systems Division that engaging external stakeholders (beyond just inviting them to trainings) is vital. It is also important to understand service trends beyond DCF and consider how we can achieve our aspirational goals. There is a lot of work happening, and we need to align the initiatives.
- The ConneCT Grant helps providers learn the fifteen CLAS standards and then develop health equity plans; Monica offered to connect folks with this grant. There are also Learning Collaboratives that meet four times a year. She recommended contacting Tim Marshall, who can also walk folks through some of this information.
- Monica and Ken will discuss the best ways to send out information, as some folks on the call felt it was difficult to navigate all the opportunities out there.
- Malcolm reinforced the Systems Division's change initiative to engage with community partners. Many have received the implicit bias training from DCF, and he can coordinate these on an office/RAC level.

Family Engagement and Racial Justice

- One member highlighted the need to involve families in this process. How can the materials be more targeted to families? Where do we begin? Monica agreed this is an area we can do better on and the SAC spent some time considering engagement opportunities.
- A SAC member recommended changing our mindset from "bringing them to the table" and instead viewing families as consultants who are experts in their field. When family input is needed, reach out to them as you would a consultant. Caregivers can be members/involved without having to be at every meeting.
- Another person emphasized the need to use accessible language. It is also helpful to have someone who can share the information if a person is not able to go. Creating a safe space and cultivating relationships is important. It is also helpful if families can help prepare the agenda and have the chance to suggest topics ahead of time.
- A family member brought up using "listening ears" and having notetakers/facilitators/anyone relaying information to say things the way participants said them, not in the way they will sound best. If a family member cannot be at the table, whoever is speaking on their behalf should report it the way the member said it ("the way we feel it") and not assume the meaning or change the language. Listening and building relationships is also important.
- Continuing on the topic of building relationships, if a family member has built up a relationship with a particular staff member/facilitator, that should be kept consistent. If the contact person must change, then it must be a smooth transition.
- It is important to bring people to the right meetings at the right time. One member spoke about their own lived experience and how that expertise lends itself best to discussions about post-permanency. Families may not have experience with every part of the system--where does their knowledge fit best? Where can they be an important part of the conversation?

- If a parent is invited to a meeting, it can be helpful to do a one-to-one meeting to make sure they are comfortable and learn more about them. Do not start with an ask, just be there to learn.
- Another recommendation is to keep lists of family members with information on their specific interests. The time/day of meetings can be a roadblock.
- Sometimes family members may feel the language used in the meeting is "above them" if there is heavy use of acronyms, shortcuts, or niche words.
- Go where they are, do not ask them to come to you.
- Provide agendas in advance. If people are asked to comment on something specific, let them know in advance.
- Build relationships and genuinely value their input--do not just go to them for confirmation. "If the table is already set, why am I being invited?"

Rhode Island Visit

- At the previous SAC meeting, a guest from Rhode Island DCF joined to view how the meeting went. They loved the SAC and the communication, engagement, and openness they witnessed.

Chiefs of Police - Channel 3 Camp

- There are spaces for 80 children who are at home with an active or recently closed case to participate in this camp. If you know a family, please connect with Jacqui Ford.
- There is also a Sibling Camp.
- Parents are not responsible for transporting the children to the camp; there are various drop-off sites. It will take place 7/18-7/23 and is an overnight camp. The age ranges are age 8-13.

Brief Legislative Update

- The budget is still being finalized.
- Jennifer's Law passed, which added coercive control to the definition of domestic violence. Physical acts are only one part of domestic violence, and this is a great addition to better protect victims of IPV.

In-Person Visitation

- In-person visitation resumed as of 5/20, as have contracts with providers.
- Permanency numbers are lower than in years past due to court closures; however, the Department has still achieved permanency in a number of cases. Since March 2020...
 - **700** kids were reunified
 - **406** were adopted
 - **386** are now under guardianship

This is an example of the great work that DCF has continued to do throughout the pandemic.
- Courts are now actively scheduling hearings, so the delays should begin to ease.
- The Governor approved a bill allowing ongoing telehealth for two years. DCF still prefers face-to-face contact but will allow exceptions on a case-by-case basis if it is best for a particular child.
- One person asked whether the permission for telehealth services applies only to youth or also to families. Ken believed there was an email from fiscal that clarifies this, but he will double check. He believes there is some flexibility.
- Another member disagreed with the guidance that face-to-face contact be the standard except in occasional circumstances, as some youth and families may be best served by telemedicine. Is this not contrary to the legislation? Might this create a parallel system in which DCF-involved youth only have access to face-to-face services? Ken reiterated that the Department feels face-to-face is the ideal form of service, but as was stated, exceptions can be made depending on individual circumstances.
- The SAC had mixed feelings about virtual meetings. In-person can be most beneficial, but remote meetings can allow more participation and flexibility. In-person meetings can also add legitimacy and make participants feel more obligated to go and therefore less likely to skip. Telehealth can also ease the burden on employees dealing with childcare issues.

Family First

- The plan was submitted to Governance and then went to OPM, who had many questions about the fiscal impact. DCF is clarifying some of the language of the plan in response and will be meeting with Governance again to discuss the edits. After that, it will go for a 2-week public review period, during which multiple Parents as Experts sessions will be held.
- If the SAC has any specific questions, please ask them. DCF would like to do another review with the SAC after the edits are incorporated.
- We think the plan is excellent; you can see the collaboration and principles in it. It is the state's plan, not just DCF's.
- One member asked whether DCF is on schedule to submit. Ken replied that it needs to be approved by the federal government by October 2021. We did want it submitted sooner, but the review is important.
- As far as implementation goes, we will have a better understanding next month of the next steps and priorities, so we will review this in July.

Strategic Plan

- The Strategic Plan was sent out prior to last month's meeting. It has been a very busy month, and the SAC members had not had time to review it. They will revisit it next month (Ken will re-send).

SAC Retreat

- The SAC's retreat will incorporate Family First and utilize Jerry Milner as an expert to evaluate implementation. That being said, it might be helpful to involve Sharon Davis in the planning.

Right to Know Brochure

- There is some legislation pending that will change the requirements for this brochure, so edits are still being made. We will have more next month.

7. SAC Assignments:

- At the next meeting, the SAC will discuss:
 - Children's Behavioral Health needs
 - Legislative and budget update
 - Strategic plan
 - Governor's Office and membership appointments
 - Children's Behavioral Health Plan summit
- Send any notes/comments ahead of time if you cannot attend the meeting.

Next meeting: July 12, 2021, 9:30 am - 12:00 pm