

## Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

11/01/21

### Attendees:

Myke Halpin\*, Sarah Lockery\*, Ken Mysogland, Jennifer Nadeau\*, Deb Kelleher\*, Judy Eisenberg\*, Michelle Sarofin\*, Suprena Schuler\*, Lisa Girard\*, Regina Moller, Dr. Irv Jennings, Elisabeth Cannata\*

(\* indicates a voting member)

### Guests

Susan Cunningham, Sarah Gibson, Elizabeth Duryea, Stephen Jacobson, Johanna Schmidt, Sergio Alvarez, Sharon Davis, Whitney Rodriguez, Taylor Ford, Stan Kasanowski, Malcolm Blue, Rachel Levine

### RAC Reports and System Development:

The beginning of the meeting is dedicated to RAC report-outs and discussions about developing the RACs.

#### *Region 1: Suprena*

- Region 1 has focused on YAB recruiting.
- They are working to get youth 16+ bank accounts with Skyline Credit Union.
- They have also focused on event planning. In particular, they are recruiting for a police engagement program that will lead to engagement between youth and police. This will help both parties get comfortable with each other in a safe way.
- St. Joseph's Parenting Center needs trainers.
- Beacon Health has a Care Leadership Team in Region one and a FB resource
- They have also received money from FAVOR

#### *Region 2: Judy and Malcolm*

- Folks are stretched quite thin right now, so it is hard to continuously engage them.
- CT Public Utilities Regulatory Agency (PURA) and Beacon's Voluntary Care Management did presentations at their Friday meeting.
- There was a Health Equity Meeting.
- The Dads Matter Too! Conference is coming up in November.
- They have not heard much from the YAB, but they will be at the RAC.

#### *Region 3: Lisa*

- Region 3 met two weeks ago using their new agenda format.
- On November 10, youth will present on the transition into college.
- There are six open spots for family/youth as voting members of the RAC.
- The region has shifted from quarterly to monthly meetings.

#### *Region 4 - Jennifer*

- Region 4's October meeting utilized voting through SurveyMonkey. Those who cannot vote electronically can vote via paper.
- They have identified family and youth members.

- Several topics were discussed, including CCMC, youth, and EMPS, as well as Careline data, and how it has changed during COVID. They also discussed cannabis, education, children's needs, and home schooling.
- The YAB gave an update on their community service project. They are collecting donations for a shelter and took photos. They will work to identify a new challenge and project.
- They will also host a "Trunk or Treat"
- The RAC recently received additional funding.
- They have been getting updates on racial justice initiatives.

*Region 5: Irv, Deb*

- Region 5 has not met since the last SAC meeting, and they are facing the same issues. In particular, staffing remains a problem.
- The children's mental health emergency, increasing waitlists, and impending Silver Tsunami has given folks a dire outlook.
- Deb added that they held a Business Meeting/Training for mandated reporters due to several comments about the Waterbury pilot. There were a lot of myths they hoped to bust regarding mandated reporters. Around 35 people participated. Many community members attended, including FCA, Waterbury CMHA Youth Services. They may hold it again with a live presenter.
- The YAB has struggled with recruitment--it is hard to compete for attention.

*Region 6: Michelle, Stan*

- Brendan Burke presented on Careline referral data. The disparate data is a focus area for the CRP.
- There was a rich conversation about the New Britain school system.
- They hope to connect with the community, build relationships, and collaborate on mandated reporter and implicit bias training.
- They added that there is a smaller meeting coming up.
- They have struggled with youth representation and are working to develop orientation materials. They have also brainstormed potential barriers and plan to outreach to the DCF YAB person. Further, they are discussing whether it might be possible to be informed by youth without needing them to be present in all meetings. In other words, considering them as consultants.
- The RAC has also worked to stabilize its leadership.

*RAC Development*

RAC Assessment Tool

- SAC members were given the assessment tool and asked for feedback. It has also been sent to Systems. Sarah asked to go through roll call for feedback by region.
- Region 1
  - o They suggested the tool be streamlined so it is easier to go through. Streamlining will help avoid redundancies.
- Region 2
  - o Region 2 has not had a chance to fully discuss the assessment tool and may need multiple meetings to get through.

- They need to decide how to operationalize the assessment tool.
- Elizabeth Duryea added that more time is needed and Ken Mysogland agreed. If folks have more time to discuss it thoroughly, it can be at the forefront next month.
- In response, Sarah Lockery suggested it may be more helpful to discuss it by section rather than all at once.
- Region 3
  - Region 3 thought the tool itself looked great but the process of assessing should be discussed in more depth to make sure each RAC implements it in the same way.
  - In the "Partnerships" section, the last three seem unrelated.
  - The tool should include a question asking who is missing--who else should be at the table (schools, police, etc.)?
  - Sarah L. did not necessarily agree about needing to implement the tool in the same way; this is not for research, it is meant to generate conversation.
- Region 4
  - Region 4 used SurveyMonkey to get valuable individual feedback and see the collective picture. This then led to a broader discussion.
  - For the "leadership" section, they felt it would be helpful to provide definitions. When it says "receive assistance," who is this referring to? DCF? Members?
  - Sarah L. was concerned about it becoming too prescriptive. Adding definitions may be perceived as telling them what to do.
  - A suggestion was to change the wording to "The creation of the RAC agenda is collaborative."
- Region 5
  - Region 5 was unsure how much the members know/care about how the agenda is created, so long as it is informed by the region's needs.
  - The usefulness/clarify will be most visible when people actually get a chance to go through it.
  - Region 5 recommended "meet bimonthly/quarterly" to "meet on a regular basis" since each RAC has a different meeting schedule.
  - One member was unsure how to actualize this data and what to do with it. The region has plenty of problems already, and he felt this may not be useful.
  - Elizabeth Duryea responded that the RACs and SAC are sources of insight for the Department and can help inform policy, legislation, and advocacy. The tool is providing a pulse on where support is most needed. The Department wants consistency and support for the RAC themselves, to make sure they are a good use of time.
  - The member felt that RACs do not have actual input. They cited the SFIT decision as an example, where the RAC was not consulted on that issue. DCF staff responded that communication can always be improved.
  - Ken added that the assessment tool will give a baseline of where we are at and points to support the RACs on. There are two demands: 1) RAC/SAC functioning and 2) RAC/SAC topics and input. We need to do both, and they are not mutually

exclusive. The SFIT is an example of how decisions are made and information is shared, and this process can be improved.

- Region 6
  - o The tool is important, but we should consider that the needs of leadership are different from the needs of members. Some questions in the tool seem more relevant to certain members. Perhaps the initial questions could be given to the tri/co-chairs, and the later questions should be for general members.
  - o Elizabeth Duryea added that leadership and meeting continuity is important. Membership strength varies by region, and we need a sense of the struggles and baselines to create an appropriate feedback loop and ensure we are adding value.
  - o Region 6 will discuss the tool in more depth at their next meeting.
  - o Also, at the last meeting, some folks found the word "leadership" too vague, but some preferred it as-is because it then focuses on the perception of leadership involvement, rather than trying to have specific DCF staff there.
- General Discussion
  - o No tool is perfect, but this is a good beginning to help us learn.
  - o Diversity and anti-racism need to be in the top section.
    - Diversity in many senses - ethnic, racial, and geographic
    - Also, fatherhood/types of family members (bio and foster, generation, gender).
  - o Youth involvement also needs to be captured. Possible questions could be:
    - Is there funding from the YAB?
    - Does the RAC utilize YAB funding to support youth involvement?
    - Is CRP funding used to support youth involvement?
  - o Sarah L. will revise the tool using folks' comments. It is important that you all use it your way. This topic is for you.
  - o The group will discuss the tool again in January and focus on the structure section.

### Minutes

- Sarah Lockery motioned to approve and Suprena and Deb seconded. The SAC voted to approve the October minutes.

### Membership

- Some members have received their notification of appointment. Deb actually received multiple folks' notices.
- Whitney is considering membership and will talk to Sarah offline.
- The SAC has a few openings: one for a healthcare provider with a focus on children, two adult caregivers, and one youth.
- Taylor gave some suggestions to the SAC based on her role with FAVOR.
  - o Consider how you are defining engagement - just coming to a meeting?
  - o Consider possible barriers - transportation, timing (e.g., scheduled during the school day).

- Be genuinely open to feedback - you should be willing to be criticized and hear pushback. This shows you actually want to hear from them.
- Be clear about the ask - what information do you want? What do you want to get out of the feedback? What is the point for the participants?
- Encourage active participation and real partnerships.
- FAVOR is still offering training.
- Whitney spoke from her perspective. She grew up in care and asked the group to consider what attracts people to go to meetings.
  - Timing is important.
  - She has felt like ideas were thrown out and DCF did not really care about them.
  - Folks felt frustrated when they felt unheard or like the meeting was unproductive.
  - Youth are very passionate and need a platform. They also benefit from ways to offer feedback without having to attend the meeting. It may be more attractive to youth if they can do it behind the scenes and/or without public speaking.
- Another recommendation was to ask youth directly how they prefer to be involved, giving them specific questions/topics ahead of time, and not putting them on the spot.

#### SAC Member Advisements

- Ken suggested that Linda Dixon and Steve Smith discuss the YAB with the group, including how they create their formal agendas and the day-to-day ways to provide input outside of meetings.
- Also, note that DCF is creating a youth ombudsman as part of the Office of Community Relations.

#### SAC Budget Reports

- The SAC budget will decrease once the retreat venue is paid for. There are 6 spots per RAC for youth or family who want to attend. They will receive a \$50 stipend for participating. This is being covered by the SAC, so there is no need to use RAC CRP funds for stipends.
- The retreat will be held on **June 29, 2022**.

#### DCF Report

##### *Juan F. Consent Decree*

- DCF has met two additional measures for the consent degree: needs met (child) and in-home visitation standards.
- At the beginning of the administration, there were five outstanding measures, four of which have now been met. There is just one more left around case plans.
- DCF wants to remain humble and pursue a solid case practice for the good of families. DCF's goal is to ensure its practice and policy is excellent. The Department is not trying to teach for the test.
- Ray Mancuso is still involved and providing oversight.

##### *Statistics, Adoption Day, and Spotlight on What's Right*

- There has been a 19.3% reduction of children in care. Currently, <7% of youth are placed in congregate care settings.
- November is Adoption Month and November 19<sup>th</sup> is Adoption Day, which will likely be celebrated virtually.
- Reunification should be our main goal, but we must also celebrate stories of successful adoptions.
- If folks have any exemplary or unique adoption stories, please send to Ken.
- The December theme for the *Spotlight on What's Right* newsletter is "Home for the Holidays."
- In October, the *Spotlight* shared stories about domestic violence and intimate partner violence (IPV), with a focus on the new, better, individualized supports in place to address these concerns.
- Please note that stories can be anonymous.

#### *Resource-Sharing*

- [UniteCT](#) is a DOH assistance program that can provide direct rental and electricity payments.
- There will be several legislative forums about the ongoing behavioral health crisis at the Legislative Office Building.
- EMPS is a mobile service and can go to schools, parks, etc. EMPS is a very effective resource that we want more families to be aware of. More calls should start with 211. Note that "crisis" is defined by the caller - place a call to 211, and they will tailor their response.
- For those looking for youth bank accounts, Linda Dixon is currently working on this. She has met with the Commissioner of Banking, and for those older than 16, the process is easier than we thought. We recommend connecting with her on this (her email is [LINDA.DIXON@ct.gov](mailto:LINDA.DIXON@ct.gov)).

#### *Policy Review*

- DCF is in the process of reviewing its policies and has suggested creating a SAC Policy Subcommittee that includes parents, SAC members, and other "outside eyes."

#### *Questions and Thoughts*

- What happens after the Juan F Consent Decree ends?
  - o Ken replied that this is unclear and DCF is still considering its options. The Department is building up its QA division to continue with its accountability and will plan for it; however, there is no definite date at this point.
- How do we ensure DCF is following Family First initiatives on a case-by-case basis? What if they are not reunifying a family?
  - o Ken replied that in any case where folks are concerned, they should first keep in mind that case planning decisions are never solely made by the social worker. It is decided in consultation with clinicians, legal, supervisors, etc. First, DCF recommends meeting with the social worker and the supervisor to discuss the gap. Then, go up the chain to the PS, etc. Continue to bring it up and advocate for families.
  - o The Office of Community Relations (1-866-637-4737) is also available and can help you work locally to solve any issues. It is rare for attorneys to call, but the OCR will still look

at practice if a concern is raised. However, the OCR does not control the overall direction of the case; they are focused on making sure practice and policy are being followed correctly.

- Also, if a case is in court, OCR is careful because the court is the avenue to resolve issues. They can intervene if there are any issues in behavior or practice.
- The SAC is also a useful place to discuss any patterns or trends that you find problematic.
- Has the CT Family First plan been approved?
  - No, DCF is working to get feedback to the Children's Bureau.

#### *DCF Partnerships*

- DCF is in the process of enhancing its community engagement and partnerships. Ken asked the group for input on what tables DCF should be at. How can we enhance our partnerships? Where should we be? This could be any level, from statewide to local grassroots. In particular, DCF hopes to expand beyond the mandated reporters that they already connect with.
- One recommendation was We Are the Village, which is an amazing organization that works to keep kids off the street. They have a boxing unit and do a variety of other helpful prevention works.
- Another person recommended using Facebook to engage with folks.
- One member shouted out Dakibu Muley of New Haven, who has good knowledge and interest in the community. He has been involved in local, neighborhood organizations like Q House and Lifespan Enrichment.
- One person connected Vinny to the CT PTA, who does lots of advocacy. They also recommended School Governance Councils.
- The Mayor's Office in Bridgeport has many committees in which DCF's participation could be helpful.
- Dr. David Lee Asbery of Fixing Fathers, Inc. was recommended as a resource.
- Municipalities have a lot of control in Connecticut, so more involvement on that level would be good.

#### *Announcement: New England Regional Collaborative Listening Sessions*

- New England Regional Collaborative is holding parent listening sessions via Zoom.
- Please let DCF know if folks are interested.
- They will receive a gift card for participation.
- The first round included six states, written statements, and information about fatherhood, state variation, and future opportunities. Ken can provide more information.

#### Next Steps and SAC Assignments

- Sarah Lockery will draft the SAC's annual 1-page report and send an updated survey.
- The "Structure" section of the survey tool will be the focus of the January meeting.
- The next SAC meeting will be on **December 6, 2021 from 9:30 am - 12 pm** and will have a fatherhood focus.