

Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

2/7/22

Attendees:

Myke Halpin*, Sarah Lockery*, Ken Mysogland, Suprena Schuler*, Michelle Sarafin*, Whitney Rodriguez, Stephanie Telford-Cotton, Deb Kelleher*, Elisabeth Cannata*, Jennifer Nadeau*, Judy Eisenberg*, Chris Scott*, Dr. Irv Jennings, Rachael Levine

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests

Johanna Schmidt, Elizabeth Duryea, Malcolm Blue, Stan Kasanowski, Jon Jacaruso, Sarah Gibson, Sergio Alvarez, Sharon Davis, Susan Cunningham

RAC Reports and System Development:

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

Region 1 RAC - Suprena

- The Region 1 YAB continues to work on getting youth access to bank accounts through a credit union. Covid has made it difficult to keep these conversations going. The YAB is also ordering merch (including t-shirts).
- On April 30, there will be a virtual *Cool, Calm, Comply* training where youth will learn more about interacting with police.
- The survey on the RAC assessment was sent out. Suprena described their process for getting feedback.
 - o Folks included comments on the survey.
 - o The RAC held breakout rooms where small groups were able to discuss things in depth and offer potential improvements. These smaller groups helped make folks more comfortable sharing, and the RAC got more feedback as a result.
 - o This format improved participation and resulted in more suggestions. They will use a similar process for the next section and will take their time in the next domain.
- Jeanette Blackwell also came in to discuss community training available through the DCF Academy for Workforce Development and the safety practice model.

Region 2 RAC - Judy

- The Region 2 RAC met on Friday. Representatives from DCF Central Office and DDS attended to give the RAC more information about their programming and eligibility. They also answered the group's questions.
- Their March agenda will be based off the group's requests. They will discuss DCF practice and the racial justice change initiatives. Ann Adams from the DCF Office of Community Relations (OCR) will also give a presentation about the OCR's work and how families/providers with concerns can reach out for guidance.
- They are also working on developing updated outreach and orientation materials.

Region 3 RAC - Jon

- Due to RAC member feedback, the Region 3 RAC decided to change their meeting schedule to be monthly for 60 minutes rather than 90. They noticed a drop-off after 60 minutes, so they hope this new structure will "leave them wanting more" and encourage them to come back next month to continue the discussion.
- They also found success with giving members the discussion questions in advance and having fewer DCF guests. This has helped family and youth members feel more prepared and ready to speak.
- They discussed youth attendance at ACRs and learned that the invites often go to youths' addresses, which may be out of date in the system. Some social workers do additional outreach to the youth, but this varies greatly by workers. A SAC member recommended using phone contact or emails rather than just the physical address.
- The group also discussed money available for life events. Chris Gardner, an adolescent PS was very helpful in this discussion.

Region 4 RAC - Jennifer

- Region 4's YAB accomplished a lot in the past few months, including a Trunk or Treat and a Thanksgiving event. They will be holding a training soon in positive development. This update was provided by the new youth tri-chair for the RAC.
- The RAC also received an update on ChildStat, where they learned about performance indicators and DCF data. They also had the opportunity to ask questions.
- They considered ways to reach a broader community, such as a community conversation.

Region 5 RAC - Irv

- The Region 5 RAC discussed the low vaccination rate of children in care. They also discussed the recent approval of telehealth on the federal level, which many providers feel is good news for them.
- The RAC also talked about the DCF pathways data and recent population changes from the 2020 census. There are some improvements, but some disparities remain.
- The SFIT discussion has continued, as providers are finding it is hard to get staff when folks know the program will be ending.
- The retirement wave at DCF has already started, and many folks are interested in discussing this more broadly. How will it affect programs and providers? How will communication remain consistent? How will folks be kept updated about new contacts and build new relationships?
- Deb added that there will be an LGBTQIA+ 101 training on February 28, 10 am-12 noon. Community members and providers are welcome to join. Deb and Sergio both emphasized the robustness of the conversation on the pathways data. Sergio highlighted the overall population decrease in CT, though the Hispanic population has increased. Siobhan Trotman, Torrington Office Director, will come to the March RAC meeting to cover this in more depth.

Region 6 RAC - Michelle

- The RAC did not meet in January but did have their February meeting last week.
- They had already gone through the RAC assessment and found that folks had a deep conversation, including both old and new members. They identified system issues, strengths, and opportunities. Many parents were willing to be vulnerable.
- Stan added that the meeting was one example of how sometimes the best meetings are ones that do not stick firmly to the agenda. There were many great voices at the table, all of which were unique and genuine. They have taken a step towards an area of focus. The stories were powerful, and they are considering whether it might be possible to put them on video and record them.
- FAVOR has identified two youth and parents who might be participate.
- They liked Region 3's idea of introducing a question before the meeting.
- The RAC has also discussed the safety practice model, DCF's antiracism work, and other DCF developments.

RAC Self-Assessment Tool - Structure

- After some discussion, it was determined that over the next few months, the SAC will shift to discussing the **consumer-driven area** of the RAC Assessment. RAC members should begin completing the assessment and discussing it with their RAC. We will discuss it in a future SAC meeting.
- Following that, we will move to the **partner** area of focus and then to the **leadership** area.

Minutes

- Minutes were sent late, but no edits were suggested.
- Judy moved to accept them, with Deb and Rachael seconding. They were approved as-is.

Membership

- Whitney Rodriguez is still interested in joining as a youth voice and her application is nearly ready for approval.
- There are still two openings, so if anyone is aware of any RAC members who might be interested, please email Sarah L and Myke to introduce them.

Non-RAC SAC Updates

- Chris Scott shared some exciting updates from SUN Scholars. They recently received \$100,000 in matching funds which will help them expand their scope and staff. More media has reached out as well. Also, while SUN Scholars does not recruit participants, they will be reaching out to DCF Area Offices to give presentations since they are a somewhat new organization and want staff to know who they are to build their partnership.
- Elisabeth gave an update from the Behavioral Health Advisory Board, which recently submitted their report in October. Their subgroups identified short, medium, and long-term needs and solutions. The number of initiatives right now require collaboration and consolidation. Workforce shortages are increasing the issues. It is also necessary to coordinate with commercial insurance and points of entry that are not publicly funded.

Legislative Report

- The legislative subcommittee did not have anything to report, but Ken shared some general updates about the 2022 Legislative Session.
- Vinny Russo, the DCF Legislative Program Director, is on loan to the Office of the Governor, where he will be working with Chief of Staff Paul Mounds. This is a temporary loss for DCF, only for the legislative session.
- Ken Mysogland, Kate Dwyer, and Johanna Schmidt will be working on DCF's legislative work. In Vinny's absence, Ken will serve as the primary point of contact for all inquiries about DCF and legislation.
- There will be numerous opportunities for public testimony from the RAC and SAC. Folks may testify in a personal or professional capacity. If anyone is interested in testifying for the SAC, they should go through Sammy.
- This year's session will be heavy on mental health and juvenile justice. There are many proposals, all of which have good intent behind them, but some may be fragmented, incomplete, or simply missing important context. Legislators need input from the right people to make good decisions.
- Telehealth proposals, ad campaigns, and money for program expansions may all be possibilities.
- DCF will be submitting its proposal soon and will send updates to the SAC. The only proposal from DCF is a shift in the background check process. Currently, providers requesting a DCF background check must fax in the release form and DCF must maintain a copy. To reduce wait times, DCF is proposing that providers check a box confirming they have the release form rather than requiring them to provide a copy. DCF would verify providers maintain the release forms during their licensing audits. This change would speed up the process and require less work from both providers and DCF.
- Even though DCF has only one proposal, other legislation may include DCF and require input. For example, one suggestion being mentioned is legislation that would mandate a DCF investigation of a family if a youth steals a car. DCF would obviously testify against such legislation.
- DCF is waiting for the Governor's budget address. Remember to contact Ken with any questions this session.

SAC Budget

- Balance: \$14,746.26
- The SAC retreat will use approximately \$10,207.50 of this, paying for Jerry Milner's attendance, hotel/travel/transportation, RAC member stipends, and other expenses.

DCF Report

Safe Sleep

- Ken explained that DCF is going to be putting together a video and promotional materials regarding safe sleep. In 2021, there were 9 child fatalities, and 6 of those involved safe

sleep risk factors. Direct cause of death can be hard to prove, but these risk factors may have contributed to their passing.

- Ken noted that the Child Fatality Review Panel discusses child fatalities and found that unsafe sleep is a frequent risk factor; however, it is not labeled as the cause of death unless the medical examiner says that asphyxia is the cause of death. It is difficult to show it as the definite cause, but risk factors like the child not being on their back, toys in the crib, etc. are common in these situations even when they cannot be proven to be the cause.
- A video on the dangers is not enough, so Ken requested input from SAC members. Who should DCF partner with? What components are important to highlight? Who should be the target audience? How does DCF ensure the target audience is being reached?
- One possible frame is to include messaging from a parent who has lost their child due to safe sleep issues. Why take the risk? Some people may not be aware of risk factors (like blankets). This is something you cannot undo or come back from.
- One member requested more data on the issue--are there trends in the demographics of parents, etc.? Is this a predictable group or is it random? It is important to target the right people. Ken said that the families tend to be in a lower socioeconomic class, but he was unsure about age or other trends.
- Numerous members highlighted important partners, like pediatricians (perhaps through the American Academy of Pediatrics CT Chapter), daycares, hospital staff, the CT Hospital Association, doulas, OBGYNs
- There may be cultural or generational factors, so cultural ambassadors may be helpful. This may be an opportunity for a Parents as Experts session.
- Another member who is a Safe Sleep Ambassador pointed out that pre-parenting classes in high school may be useful. Another member reiterated this suggestion and added that places with poor sex ed and high teen pregnancy should be targeted.
- Many newborns may be in daycare, so reaching out to them would be useful. Others pointed out that many families rely on informal caregivers (grandparents, neighbors, etc.), so they should be outreached to as well.
- Ken wondered whether messaging should be a) do not co-sleep or b) if you are going to co-sleep, here are safety tips. It may be possible to do both.
- Many parents struggle with getting their children to sleep, so perhaps these messages could be combined with suggestions for addressing this problem. Combining messages might help people pay attention. Many folks in the discussion agreed with this point.
- When we discuss cultural factors, this is sometimes just a coded way to talk about people of color and how they are different from white people; however, it is important to point out that a lot of this stems from distrust in government, which is not unique to people of color. Many white families resist government outreach, as exemplified during this pandemic. It is important that we consider who the messenger is and how we can frame it in a way that does not feel controlling. DCF or DPP may not be the best messenger.
- Ken clarified that Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) applies when there is no known cause of death and no risk factors. In contrast, Sudden Unexplained Infant Death Syndrome (SUIDS) applies when there is no known cause but there is a risk factor.

- We should also consider that some of these situations may not be the result of personal choice but external factors. For example, poorer families working multiple jobs may simply be too tired to follow all best practices or may not be able to afford to live in a safe place. We should not lose sight of systemic factors that contribute to this problem.
- One suggestion was that positive messaging resonates better and feels less controlling than negative messaging. Sharing what to do rather than what not to do may be more effective.
- Also, social media is key here. In particular, Facebook groups serve as key places where new parents learn information--and they are also hotbeds of misinformation and online radicalization. Simply posting about the issue may not reach these insular places because of the algorithm. We should consider how we might be able to reach folks in these places.
- Word of mouth is important, so having folks here this from trusted individuals is also helpful.
- Members reiterated that there are likely generational differences, as older generations might have kept their babies on their stomach with the head to the side. Perhaps messaging from older folks talking about how things have changed might be helpful.
- It is a delicate line to walk because we want to ensure safety without surveillance. There are many folks in helping relationships that might be good to target too. Also, perhaps some ARPA funds could be used for home visiting. These partners may be able to bring up the information in a relational way.
- Again, lack of trust in government is a big issue. Perhaps going through providers or offering competitive grants might be better ways to get the message out. Also, we should tackle the whole village, including caregivers and relatives.
- Teachers and assemblies might be good ways to get messages out to students and young people.
- We need to be creative and think in multiple layers for the different age groups.
- Many young mothers may simply not know all this information.

SFITS and Behavioral Health

- SFITS are closing by the end of March to make way for a new model. Ken suggested holding a comprehensive discussion in the SAC at the March meeting to go over Departmental planning and the future of behavioral health.
- ARPA has provided funding for the short-term. It is being used for mobile crisis, case management, etc.
- We could pull in several DCF staff to discuss this information in depth all at once. This discussion would also serve as a good foundation for everyone to have a better sense of the legislative proposals that will be coming in soon.
- Context is key. Proposals are often well-intentioned, but legislators may simply not have the full story. For example, one proposal asked for a database on EMPS outcomes--we already have this. The data was shared with the legislator and there is no need for the legislation. We need more outreach and education to address these misperceptions.

Spotlight on What's Right: Best of 2021

- In the January edition of the *Spotlight on What's Right*, DCF included a "[Best of 2021](#)" article that highlighted the things the Department is most proud of from the last year. This includes:
 - o DCF's permanency work--Over 1,500 children achieved permanency (200, reunifications, 425 transfer of guardianships, and 500 adoptions)
 - o Over 1,000 children have been reunified since the start of the pandemic
 - o DCF's Family First plan is awaiting final approval, which should be coming very soon
 - o Two Juan F. outcomes have been met, with only one remaining
 - o Kinship placements are up to 44%
 - o The first ever Executive Fellowship program was launched, which will prepare more staff to become leaders in the organization
 - o Family Support Liaisons were piloted in the Waterbury Office
 - o The Olive Branch Toy Shop, a toy storefront in Glastonbury, allowed parents to choose gifts for their children
- As always, please feel free to forward positive stories to Ken for consideration for the *Spotlight* newsletter. They can be anonymous. The purpose is for other families to read about the Department's work. Any family or provider who submits a story has an opportunity to read it before it is published.

The Silver Tsunami

- A lot of folks have been retiring, in both the public and private sector
- So far, Cindy Butterfield (CFO) and Gary Kleeblatt (Communications Director) have both retired.
- Many behavioral health staff and regional staff will also be retiring.
- DCF is determining the best way to communicate about updated contacts, retirements, etc.
- This will be an interesting period and there will be some gaps. DCF will try to get ahead of any changes to make the transition more seamless, but this is not always possible.
- Other upcoming retirements include Stan Kasanowski (April 1), Maureen Duggan (April 1), and Chris Lau (Spring)
- This is an exciting opportunity for succession planning. Someone leaving a position does not mean an automatic refill; there is a process to reconsider the function.
- If you are unsure who to contact, reach out to Ken and he can help direct you.

Family First

- Sharon updated the SAC that the implementation workgroups are up and running. DCF is currently on track for implementation.
- Planning is underway for the community pathways and care management entity. It will be important to bring in family voice for that.

Next Steps and SAC Assignments

- RAC members should continue discussing their assessment results.
- The next SAC meeting is **Monday, March 7, from 9:30 am - 12 pm.**