

Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

3/7/22

Attendees:

Myke Halpin*, Sarah Lockery*, Ken Mysogland, Regina Moller*, Dr. Irv Jennings*, Jennifer Nadeau*, Michelle Sarafin*, Judy Eisenberg*, Stephanie Telford-Cotton*, Deb Kelleher*, Lisa Girard, Damien Grasso*, Rachael Levine*

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests

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

RAC Reports and System Development:

The beginning of the meeting is dedicated to RAC report-outs and development.

Region 6 RAC - Michelle

- At the last meeting, there were presentations on care coordination and referrals. Daniella from FAVOR gave a presentation and they discussed barriers for mental health services.
- At the next meeting, representatives from Autism Speaks and DSS will join.
- They will also be celebrating Lisa Lumbruno and Stan Kasanowski for their work with the Department as they retire.
- The RAC has also been discussing their strengths and weaknesses and were proud that a youth recently attended.

Region 5 RAC - Irv, Deb, and Sergio

- This month, the RAC held a training on the LGBTQIA+ community that went very well. Many attendees requested a follow-up.
- They also held an Equity Conference with the Waterbury public schools and discussed antiracism work at DCF. More than 80 educators attended, and the event emphasized the partnership between the organizations.

Region 4 RAC - Jennifer

- The RAC discussed DCF's ChildStat data, particularly as it relates to permanency.
- They began the next portion of the self-assessment and also heard updates on the racial justice initiatives, which was helpful for providers and families.

Region 3 RAC - Lisa

- The Region 3 RAC has been focusing on youth engagement. They have found that sending the prompt and questions ahead of time has been thought-provoking and helped with participation. This month's question addressed concerns and support, with many responses emphasizing consistency and messaging.
- The RAC also discussed the OPP contract and DCF ACR data.

Region 2 RAC - Judy

- The RAC had a 2-meeting series with presentations. They heard from DDS in February and DCF at their recent meeting. Ann Adams from the Office of Community Relations was one of the presenters and her presentation was helpful and well-received.

- A workgroup is revamping the RAC's outreach materials.
- They will work on the "consumer-driven" section of the self-assessment soon.
- Malcolm added that they are working to inform RAC members about how the regions do not work in silos--there is a lot of overlap with the Central Office. They hope RAC members will get a better understanding of the whole system.

Region 1 RAC - Susan

- The RAC recently received an update on the Bridgeport Transformation Zone, which is a collaboration between DCF and the court system to achieve permanency.
- There are many permanency barriers, such as court changes. Kinship care comes with unique permanency challenges.
- The RAC considered what type of data would be useful to understand this problem: the number of investigations, services, transfers, permanency barriers, services offered if removed, father engagement services (FES). They then turned to solutions and quarterly data. The Fatherhood Engagement Leadership Team (FELT) will also do a presentation.
- They are also working on the survey and will continue with their strategy of using ratings and small-group discussions.

RAC Self-Assessment Tool: Consumer-Driven Portion

- The RAC Self-Assessment Tool was developed to share strengths and identify improvement areas for the RACs. The RACs are currently working on the "Consumer-Driven" section of the tool. This section speaks to the extent of youth and family input, attendance, the use of CRP funds, and how concerns are raised/addressed.
- One recommendation is to enhance partnerships with FAVOR.
- Also, when there is an opportunity for decision-making, it is useful to bring that to the RAC.
- Jen discussed Region 4's approach to the tool.
 - o They sent a survey to RAC members that allows them to make comments and then discuss the results at the RAC meeting. The survey results are anonymous and presented in the aggregate, so folks do not need to worry about backlash.
 - o The RAC works hard to include the youth voice and utilizes other youth groups for this input. This can look like going to them rather than expecting them to come to meetings.
 - o Meeting time can impact participation, as many youths have school during the meetings. One possibility would be to work with schools to count it as a service hour so students can excuse that time.
- Lisa discussed Region 3's approach.
 - o They ask what youth need and have relied on OPP for helpful recommendations.
 - o Communication is one of the most important factors. Youth and families should know the agenda, the questions they will be asked, etc. Youth may also prefer to use the chat rather than speak on video, or even via text message.
 - o Relationships and partnerships are important.
- Maguena added recommendations.
 - o We need to be innovative in how we ask youths for their time. For example, extra credit or school credit could be useful compensation for participation.

- Also, for youth who are "acting up," we could channel that energy into creating direct social impact.
- Participation may come with its own geographic challenges (urban vs suburban vs rural). Think outside the box.
- We must be willing to step back and adapt to youths' needs. We should also give them space when they need it.
- Susan spoke about Region 1.
 - Similar to Region 4, they are flexible with the time of day of their meetings and try to go with options that are convenient. The tri-chair position used to be offered as an internship. They hope to reestablish this.
 - It's important to highlight what is in it for them. What is their impact? Provide examples of changes that were made due to their input.
 - Acronyms are intimidating and inhibit participation.
- Other suggestions made by the group include:
 - Youth can help get other youth to participate.
 - Developing trust takes time.
 - Let youth know they have a voice and listen to them.
 - Use what works best for the individual and meet them where they are at.
- Sarah Lockery gave a shoutout to Whitney, who participated in the Youth at the Capital Day event.

Minutes

- Deb motioned to accept the minutes, with Judy and Regina seconding.
- The minutes were approved.

Membership

- Whitney Rodriguez is waiting for appointment from the Governor.
- Damion and Regina will be confirmed soon.
- There are three openings for a healthcare professional and two adult caregivers.

SAC Budget

- Balance: \$13,936.26
- The June 29th SAC retreat is coming quickly. We have budgeted for 150 people to attend.
- Each RAC has 20 slots available, 6 of which can be reimbursed with a gift card. There are 30 additional openings.
- If you need more slots, let Sarah know. We may be able to add additional participants.
- Jerry Milner is the speaker and facilitator. He will give a presentation on Connecticut's Family First Plan, describe his ideal vision of the system, and then we will have a discussion on how to bridge that gap between vision and reality. There will also be an activity and celebration.
- It is being held in Cascade Banquet Hall in Hamden.

DCF Report

Legislation

- Three legislative update emails have gone out so far this session.
- On Friday there will be a hearing regarding HB-5001, a health bill that would propose changes to the mental and behavioral health systems. It would:
 - o Create a larger pool of therapists by offering reciprocity with licenses from other states, which would get therapists licensed in Connecticut faster if they are qualified;
 - o Offer a waiver for potential therapists until they take their exam rather than making them wait until after, which can cause delays if the exams are not frequently offered;
 - o Make telehealth permanent and ensure it is reimbursable;
 - o Expand EMPS Mobile Crisis so it can serve the whole state.
- The state is expanding its understanding and knowledge of trauma-informed care and working to increase social workers in schools.
- The state also plans to create a new hotline that would divert behavioral health 911 calls and fund a non-emergency line.
- DCF hopes to be part of the solution to these issues. There is a lot of help available, but people need to know where to ask. We also need to address stigma.
- One proposal that DCF supports is creating a behavioral health governance system headed by the DCF Commissioner with parents, youth, agencies, and community partner participation. This would serve as a central place to oversee the system. There are a lot of groups working on this issue but not much coordination.
- These are all proposals and nothing is currently finalized. If you are interested in testifying, you can do so on the CGA website.
- There will be a higher education committee hearing in which a bill will be heard that would increase the ages which DCF can support. Currently, DCF works with youth up to age 21, or up to age 23 with a waiver, and this bill would increase the age to 30. DCF is not supporting the bill because its services expand beyond monetary support for college and include a full array of mental health and emotional support. From their perspective, the bill would reduce DCF's role to that of a fiduciary and would not be feasible. DCF supports the concept but does not believe this bill is in young adults' best interests. It would not make sense to provide full case management/support to these individuals, and providing only financial support does not align with the agency's mission.
 - o One SAC member shared their own experience and pointed out that certain disabled youth may take longer to complete high school and college. The current age cap effectively denies support to those youth. They wondered whether it could be at least increased to age 25 or if DCF would propose an alternative.
- Another bill would extend the age of legal representation for youth up to age 23. DCF supports the spirit of this legislation; however, this bill should really be aimed at the Office of the Public Defender and that statute, as they are the ones who provide legal representation.
- There is a bill that would mandate DCF to research the relationship between worker turnover and permanency; DCF is not supporting this bill as it is too simplistic (many factors

impact permanency) and Connecticut has one of the lowest attrition/turnover rates of child welfare agencies in the country. Looking for a direct correlation between these two variables would take resources away from more valuable endeavors related to permanency, such as improving worker retention and creating partnerships with court systems (such as the transformation zones).

- Finally, SB-2 is a major piece of legislation. Ken will provide more information on it in the DCF Legislative Update.

Family First

- Approval is imminent, DCF is just waiting on the official word.
 - o NOTE: Since this SAC meeting, the CT Family First Plan has been approved by the federal government.
- DCF encourages SAC members to testify, whether they are part of DCF or not, or even if they are not aligned with DCF's position on a bill.
- Remember that Connecticut legislators work part time and cannot be expected to be experts on everything. Many of their ideas are well-intended but may not make sense.
- Sammy is able to be a mentor when considering submitting public testimony, and she can also speak for you if you are unable to attend. Lisa also offered to assist with this.
- Ken also said that parents with lived experiences provide valuable feedback and legislators often ask follow-up questions after their testimony.

Staffing Changes

Ken reviewed the following retirements/changes to DCF staff:

- Cindy Butterfield has retired, Melanie Sparks is now the CFO
- Maureen Duggan is retiring as of 4/1/22 and Zoe Stout will be the new agency Legal Director
- Dr. Worthy recently began with DCF and fills the new position overseeing administration for juvenile justice education
- Chris Lau will retire April 1 and Shawn Wright will fill the position of Assistant Chief of Regions 2 and 3. The Milford Office Director position will be vacant after his promotion.
- Siobhan Trotman will retire April 1 and Carla Perrella will fill the position of Torrington Office Director. The Waterbury Administrative PD position will be vacant after her promotion.
- Lisa Lumbruno will retire April 1 and Donna Maitland-Ward will fill the position of New Britain Office Director. The Hartford Administrative PD position will be vacant after her promotion.
- Stan Kasanowski is retiring and his position will be open.
- Lisa Sedlock will retire April 1 and her position of Middletown Office Director will be open.
- Gary Kleeblatt has retired and his position is open.
- Vinny Russo is currently with the Governor's Office with Ken filling in, but he will return after session ends.
- DCF hopes to start sending updates as they happen for PD and above positions. If you are ever unsure, feel free to contact Ken for an update.

Ukraine

- One SAC member brought up the Russian invasion and subsequent war in Ukraine. The visual impact of families and children suffering has also impacted American children, who

- feel traumatized and fearful after seeing the images. Several SAC members agree that this has been harmful for children to see. It is impossible to fully shield children from this.
- There was a suggestion that the SAC write an official declaration of support for Ukraine and/or a statement on the matter.

Next Steps and SAC Assignments

- RAC members should complete and discuss the "Consumer-Driven" portion of the self-assessment, if they have not already.
- The next SAC meeting is **Monday, April 4, from 9:30 am - 12 pm.**
- DCF will provide an update on the Racial Justice work.