

Statewide Advisory Council Minutes

7/11/22

Attendees:

Sarah Lockery*, Myke Halpin*, Ken Mysogland, Deb Kelleher*, Judy Eisenberg*, Rachael Levine*, Lisa Girard*, Suprena Schuler*, Samaris Rose*, Elisabeth Cannata*,

(* indicates a voting member)

Guests

Johanna Schmidt, Sergio Alvarez, Susan Cunningham, Sharon Davis, Paul Guerrero, Jon Jacaruso,

SAC Retreat Feedback

The SAC Retreat was held on Wednesday, June 29th. It featured Jerry Milner as the guest speaker, as well as Commissioner Dorantes and the Executive Team. The retreat primarily addressed Connecticut's vision for Family First, implementation strategies, and the remaining gaps in Connecticut's prevention work. The SAC dedicated most of its meeting to discussing feedback from the retreat.

- Ken shared that the Commissioner was glad to see everyone in person.
- There was excellent team-building at the tables.
- Many people were pleased by the amount of youth involvement, especially from Region 3. Their comments were thoughtful and comprehensive.
- One person shared that a parent attended the event. This parent had recently had a case open with DCF and while the case did not go particularly well or particularly badly, the parent was left with a lot of fear spending the day with DCF workers. However, the retreat ended up being a positive experience for them, and they left feeling that DCF was not as scary or threatening as they had expected. When their case had first opened, they feared that their children would be removed. Ken appreciated this comment and hoped to use this feedback to improve the way staff interact with families.
- Some felt that there were some guests that did not have enough background knowledge around Family First, so a little explanation/context would have been helpful.
- Many of the groups were giddy about finally seeing each other in person.
- There was a logistics issue with the food; there were not enough vegetarian lunch options, and the food ran out at one point.
- One member discussed a foster/adoptive parent who attended who loved being there and loves Family First's values; however, they also emphasized that there will always be a need for non-kin foster and adoptive parents. They felt that the way they were discussed in the event made them feel like a "dirty secret" and that their work was not valued.
- Family First focuses on the "front door" of care, preventing youth from needing to be placed in foster care. There will still be a need for other services, and it is recommended that the Department work on the messaging around that.
- Ken responded to some of the comments and explained that non-kin foster parents will be just as important as ever as Family First rolls out--perhaps even more so. Foster care is a last resort, but that is what makes foster parents so important. With Family First, we can invest in front-end support, but there will still be youth in care who need non-kin foster parents. Ken also described his work as Foster Care Director in 2010, when the Department began a huge push towards kin caregivers. Foster parents had a similar reaction then, but he explained that the kids who then do need care have often faced tremendous losses--we need strong foster parents who can care for kids who have faced this.
- Ken also believes the SAC can help demystify DCF and help it learn to be less threatening.

- It would have been nice to have more mixing during the retreat, especially so that families from different regions could meet and share their experiences.
- The discussion about poverty made one member think that perhaps we should pull more people into the RACs and SAC who are anti-poverty but who are not sure on how to get involved.
- The SAC retreat was motivating and provided a good framework for setting yearly goals.

The group discussed some concrete next steps:

- Communication and messaging, especially to those who do not receive DCF's regular newsletters, will be very important.
- There is a monthly Family First newsletter that has gone out to internal staff and external partners. It has provided an overview of Family First and the candidacy pool.
- It feels like a lot of people know a little about Family First, so working within these networks to disseminate knowledge will be helpful.
- It is helpful to present this information in bite-sized chunks. It would also be helpful to have Sharon Davis speak on specific topics, especially if she can connect directly with folks rather than going through Sarah Lockery.
- Family First is not going to immediately shift everything, as it is only one part of a broader prevention strategy. We still need to tie in other legislation and work.
- One member explained that a similar response happened on the provider end when differential response was introduced. FAR was a new way of thinking, so communication needs to explain how Family First fits in to the broader picture.
- Questions will differ by audience (DCF staff vs providers), so we need to educate folks and message based on our audience and how it will impact them.
- We need more family-friendly presentations and educational resources. It should be understandable at all reading levels. We also need materials in other languages (especially Spanish).
- It would be useful to have community messengers who are paid to discuss Family First with their community.

Announcements

- Ken announced that Johanna Schmidt will be leaving DCF in a few weeks. She will be pursuing a Master of Public Affairs at the University of Wisconsin. She appreciates everyone in the SAC and will miss working with you all.

Next Steps

- Next month, the SAC hopes to clarify some of the legislative changes that occurred this session.
- The SAC will meet on **Monday, August 1st, from 9:30 am – 12 pm**. At that meeting, we will evaluate the retreat and discuss next steps, as well as continue conversations from today.