

MINUTES
Division of Family Services
Advisory & Advocacy Council Meeting
October 20, 2010

Attendees: Mary Lou Edgar, Del Failing, Rosalie Morales, Denise Fuller (OCA intern), Mike Kersteter, Rita Paige, Suzanne Seubert, PJ Facciolo, Cristina Harrison (Family Court CASA Program), Shane O'Hare, Rodney Brittingham, Laura Miles, Joseph Smack.

Meeting called to order at 10:03 am.

Opening Comments – Mary Lou welcomed the Council members and had everyone introduce themselves. Mary Lou then asked for the Council to review and approve the minutes from the July meeting. There were two corrections to the minutes; Mike Kersteter was not on the list of attendees and the Kent Pilot Project identified 17 children (not 7) for the project. Motion to approve prior minutes made by Suzanne and seconded by Rosalie. Mary Lou apologized that our planned guest speaker from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation had a scheduling conflict and could not make the meeting. The plan for this meeting was to have members discuss any innovative work within their agencies to assist children. The discussion topic was the last item on the agenda.

DFS Update – Laura thanked the Council members and guests for their support and ongoing work to improve the lives of children. The number of reports of child abuse and neglect continue to be at all time highs. DFS is on pace through the first three quarters of 2010 to exceed the 11,222 reports made in 2009. On September 30, 2010, the average statewide caseload for an investigations worker is 12.4 – exceeding the caseload cap of 11 cases per worker. Beech Street had an 11.1 average, University Plaza 13.4, Kent 14.8, Sussex 10.7. Laura is working to gain additional staffing to help bring these numbers down. The plan is to convert casual/seasonal staff members to full-time equivalents by utilizing existing vacancies.

Treatment caseloads are holding below the cap level of 18 cases per worker. The only region exceeding this total is Kent.

Independent Living continues to make strides in serving youth aging out of care. Our partnership with the State Housing Authority has yielded 30 housing vouchers designated for youth exiting care. This is in addition to the 20 family vouchers DSHA has made available for DFS families. Thirty youth have applied for the vouchers with 14 having moved into their approved housing. The balance of applicants are in the searching phase. DFS is looking to create 50 more opportunities for next fiscal year.

Governor Markell's cabinet is monitoring 30 youth who have aged out of care. The Cabinet is examining issues and challenges faced by these youth as they apply for and utilize adult services. The Cabinet signed an MOU at the August 4, 2010 Youth

Conference detailing their agreement to work with these IL youth (MOU attached, also can be found at http://kids.delaware.gov/pdfs/mou_AgingOut.pdf).

DFS has collaborated with Delaware State University to allow two youth who were academically qualified to attend DSU. The youth live in the dorms and have arrangements made for housing during times when the campus is closed. Reports are that the students are doing well. DFS and DSU intend to expand the opportunities for next year and beyond.

On October 1, 2010, the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) went online. Delaware is now reporting outcomes for youth exiting care and will be responsible for surveying youth at various intervals. The surveys will cover areas such as education, employment, and housing. This is a national effort that is designed to help prevent unsuccessful transitions to adulthood.

The seventh quarterly report for the Program Improvement Plan as part of the Child and Family Services Review has been accepted by the feds. The eighth quarterly report will be the last of the regular reports and is due on November 15. All 163 activities from the PIP are completed. We have two areas that we continue to work to improve; Risk of Harm, and Visits with Children in Home. DFS will have to provide progress reports to the feds on these areas for at least a year's time. The feds have already begun initial planning for the third CFSR.

DFS has been working with the Division of Professional Regulation to ensure recent legislative changes are being met. Laura highlighted DFS' requirement to report instances of any person employed in a DPR profession suspected of child abuse and neglect to the DPR. DFS has been establishing the protocol and ensuring privacy issues and the letter of the law are being met.

Laura reported that the CPAC Abuse Intervention Committee has been working on a mandatory reporting campaign that is designed to increase public awareness on the requirements to report abuse and neglect. Rosalie shared that two domain names had been reserved 'iseethesigns.org' and 'seethesigns.info'. The plan includes various ads and a website designed for reporters.

The Department's initial budget hearing is scheduled for November 1. This is the first opportunity to present the FY12 budget for consideration to the State Budget Office.

Mike inquired if the higher investigations numbers are due to vacancies. Laura stated that in Kent, some is due to vacancies caused by extended leave, such as military, maternity, and FMLA. Laura reported that age projection charts from a few years ago called for a wave of adolescents in Kent County. We may be seeing the beginning of this wave. Law enforcement also reported at last week's CPAC meeting that Kent has experienced increased rates in the incidences of child endangerment.

Mike inquired about the number of children in foster care. Laura reported that a total of 761 children were in care. Six hundred sixty-one were in foster care placements and 100 children were in the custody of DFS or a sister agency, but were not in a foster care setting. Laura attributed part of the downturn in the number of children in care to the work of treatment workers in identifying family and other supports for children, the work of the courts and our partners.

PJ commented that Rosalie and Linda Shannon have trained numerous Brandywine School District staff on reporting abuse and neglect. PJ reported that the training is fabulous. Laura stated that there have been a lot of trainings occurring statewide.

Mary Lou noted that 42-46% of kids in care are teens. She inquired if they are in care due to child endangerment. Laura said that it is a mixture. Some children enter DFS for the first time at 17 ½ which causes workers to scurry to assess and plan for the child before they age out. Del said that People's Place is receiving more referrals for older kids leaving no time to bond, develop a routine, and causes a lot of difficulties in enrolling the child in school. Nationally, foster care numbers are trending down. Christina Harrison noted that she has observed many families stepping up to the plate and accepting family members family members thereby keeping children from coming into foster care placements. She said there has been an increase in Guardianship Petitions. Laura said that the increase has been from 9% of filings to 13% currently.

Laura has asked that every child who has five or more and ten or more placements be identified so that DFS can analyze why this is happening, identify any patterns, and stop the pattern.

Suzanne feels that foster parent training plays an important role in the number of placements a child experiences. She has seen many pairings that had failed.

Upcoming Event – National Adoption Day will be celebrated on November 20 from 9am till 3pm at DelTech in Dover. Registration can be accomplished online at www.afisdelaware.org

Mary Lou stated that this is a wonderful event and highlights the many positive aspects of adoption.

Agency Updates – PJ reported that the CPAC Education Committee will be conducting a survey with the Homeless Liaisons from each school district to determine how well the MOU for homeless students is working. The survey will be conducted from November 1-15.

Discussion ensued about APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement)

3-5-7 Project – Mary Lou reported that the consultant from the Kent Pilot Project, Darla Henry, has been working on developing a training program that would help prepare children for adoption. Three Widener University students will assist in helping older children learn where they are from, why they are in care, and what adoption means. The

training is intended to help children grieve the loss of their biological parents and to ritualize the process of moving forward with the use of art, writings, and other means. Shane has a young lady in his caseload that will be part of this process.

Mary Lou reported that the CPAC Mental Health Subcommittee was able to ensure that all children adopted from Delaware's foster care system are eligible for Medicaid. In addition, the Treatment Access Subcommittee is developing a resource booklet that will be made available to every adopted family. The resource manual will contain information for access to therapy, agency services, etc.

Future Focus – The January 19, 2011 meeting will feature a representative from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The April 20 meeting will feature a presentation on APPLA.

Meeting adjourned at 11:45 am.

Next Meeting – January 19, 2011, 10am - Noon, in Room 199 of the DSCYF Administration Building. 1825 Faulkland Road, Wilmington.

Respectfully Submitted,

Joseph D. Smack
Division of Family Services