

**Child Welfare Advisory Committee
November 16, 2023, 1:00 PM
Members Present**

Glenda Lashley (DCFS Staff Liaison)	Audrey Pennington
Beverly Jones – CoChair	Emily Rawsky
Christopher Cox – CoChair	LaTasha Roberson
Malia Arnett	Jackie Sharp
Monica Badiano	Evelyn Smith
Kim Cobb	Annetta Wilson
Ashley Deckert	Prestina Singleton
Nancy Dorfman - Schwartz	Rick Velasquez
Viviane Ngwa	Mary Savage
Jere Murry	Phyllis Summers

I. Welcome and Call to Order

The meeting was called to order and roll call taken by Glenda Lashley, DCFS Staff Liaison at 1:10 PM. It was determined an in-person and virtual quorum was present.

II. Review and Approval of Minutes

Approval of Minutes – May and August minutes were placed on hold due to lack of an in-person quorum per current Open Meetings Act.

III. Co-chair Report

Chris opens the floor a dedicated time where each attendee was given the opportunity to express their well wishes to Director Smith.

- Personalized messages and tokens of appreciation presented by team members to honor Director Smith's contributions.
- A collective expression of gratitude and support, underscoring the impact of Director Smith's leadership and wishing him success in his future endeavors.

IV. Director's Report



Director Smith paused to offer words of encouragement and vision regarding the progress and challenges within the child welfare system at DCFS. Director Smith recounted the journey's highs and lows, emphasizing the collective resilience, determination, and shared goals that have united DCFS and its private partners. "Your passion, dedication, and resilience inspire me daily," Director Smith expressed, the team's role as the driving force behind the agency's progress. Confident in the team's leadership, Director Smith assured a bright future ahead, asserting, "The best is undoubtedly yet to come." Encouraging continued perseverance, Director Smith reminded everyone, "Our greatest achievements are not in avoiding falls, but in rising stronger with each challenge we overcome."

- The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the private sector together form a cohesive child welfare system in Illinois, demonstrating a shared responsibility for the care of abused and neglected children.
- Illinois boasts one of the highest levels of Relative Care Support, indicating a strong emphasis on keeping children with family members when possible.
- Despite the high level of relative care support, residential services and support for DCFS children rank lower compared to our national counterparts.
- The leadership and collaborative efforts of the CWAC have been instrumental in fostering growth within the child welfare system.
- The implementation of a new IT system "Illinois Connect" is set to significantly improve investigation processes, with the care and decision-making for our children.

V. Background Check Update by Shontee Blankenship, DCFS Deputy Director of Licensing

Shontee Blankenship provided an update on streamlining the employee background check process, emphasizing the need for efficiency and responsiveness.

- Electronic Authorizations: Considering the adoption of electronic authorizations for background checks.
- Mobile Fingerprint Scanning: Introducing mobile fingerprint scanning technology to improve the process.

Nancy Dorfman Schwartz questioned the compliance with federal mandates and called for flexibility. Director Smith acknowledged the complexity and committed to seeking adaptability with federal authorities.

- Federal Mandates: Discussion on adhering to and interpreting federal mandates on background checks.
- Commitment to Flexibility: Director Smith's commitment to 1 on 1 adaptability in federal mandate discussions.
- Nancy commended the team's leadership and sought updates on the background check portal and mobile fingerprint scanning implementation.

Shontee provided details on the portal's enhancements and the search for effective mobile fingerprint scanning solutions, highlighting:

- Portal Upgrades: Improved capability for fingerprint searches and background check status monitoring.
- Secure Access: A registration requirement for secure access, with 718 updates renewal transfers. currently using the portal.
- Ongoing Research: Efforts to find the best mobile fingerprint scanning solutions for DCFS's needs.

VI. FY'24 Budget by Kiersten Neswick, DCFS Chief Financial Officer

Kiersten a discussion will occur on November 29, 2024, meeting, led by Director Smith and supported by the governor's administration, is pivotal for addressing safety and security funding within contracts.

- Proactive Approach: Demonstrates a commitment to prioritizing safety, highlighting the importance of these discussions for organizational and governmental operations.
- Nancy's Concerns: Emphasizes the need for clear communication and direct discussions to prevent delays and address safety director roles.
- Director M. Smith's Assurance: Confirms no plans to cut funding for safety-related issues, underlining leadership's dedication to a safe and secure environment.

VII. Pathways Project Update by Suzanne Isenberg-Chhabra, DCFS Deputy Chief of Staff & Nancy Dorfman - Schwartz

Suzanne Isenberg-Chhabra reported live from a foster care event in New York, highlighting recognition from legislators for proactive work in improving foster care payments. Nancy Dorfman - Schwartz and Suzanne Isenberg-Chhabra, co-chairs for the past year, opened the meeting. They expressed their commitment to fostering collaboration between the department and community partners to address issues within the foster care system.

- Highlights of the Year
 - The co-chairs emphasized efforts to listen to concerns from both CFS and community partners, aiming to improve the foster care system and influence positive changes.
 - A focus was placed on providing global information, exemplified by discussions on the BH degree and its interaction with departmental and community operations.
 - Tim Snowden's CEO meetings were highlighted for their contributions to material implementation at various levels.
- Subcommittee Updates
 - Recruitment of Older Youth: Efforts to address the need for HR licensing, including a revision of forms and training recommendations.
 - Specialized Foster Care: Several subcommittees are looking into enhancing clinical services and finding suitable providers.
 - Reunification: Emphasis on focusing more on reunification efforts rather than just guardianship and adoption. A subcommittee led by Jerry is working on adoption committee improvements, streamlining processes effectively.
 - Family Finding Committee: Achieved a significant milestone by securing funding for family finding specialists for each team in the foster care contract. Ongoing work includes enhancing family finding across all agencies and DCFS, identifying barriers, and making recommendations.
- Future Meetings and Collaboration
 - The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 8. The co-chairs encouraged great participation and reiterated the bi-monthly meeting schedule.

IV. Family First: Kin Caregiver Initiative" Update Dr. Dana Weiner

Dr. Weiner shared updates on the Kin Caregiver Initiative. This initiative is aimed to promote equity through equal funding levels for all foster parents. Provide an introduction of the Care Startup Funds initiative to provide immediate support for initial child placements with an emphasis on improving intake processes and support services, highlighting the transformative potential of the Children's Behavioral Health

Transformation and the Care Portal. These updates underscore our commitment to improving collaboration, service delivery, and addressing community needs.

- Impact and Front-End Group: Productive discussions on efficiency, facing coordination challenges. Searching for a new co-chair due to Desiree Silva departure.
- Meeting Attendance: Consistently good attendance at bi-monthly meetings, focusing on communication strategies and enhancing partnerships, especially with DCP and SO.
- Enhanced Collaboration: Initiated monthly inter-office meetings, significantly improving relationships and communication, positively impacting service delivery.
- Training Sessions: Quarterly training with over 200 participants on topics like integrated assessment and evidence-based interventions, enhancing team and partner skills.
- Statewide Coverage: 11 providers covering all 150 counties, with a growing demand indicated by over 1,616,000 referrals in 2023. Need for backup providers noted.
- Data Dashboard: Significant progress in developing a data dashboard, now in testing, to improve data analysis, referral tracking, and decision-making.
- Future Plans: Next meeting on December 7th to discuss CSMS 2040 intact referral form revisions and phone accessibility issues. Increase in referrals highlights the need for our services.

VIII. Illinois Connect Update by James Daugherty, DCFS Chief of Dolt

James focused on significant updates and discussions regarding the Illinois Connect automatic system. James highlighted the importance of stakeholders engaging with tutorials for a deeper understanding of the system, the ongoing enhancements made possible through collaboration with partners and vendors, and the critical role of soliciting and implementing feedback from stakeholders to refine and improve the system.

- Introduced new features like the learning development center, the Ally app, and intake module improvements.
- Focus on Efficiency: Efforts to streamline processes and enhance user experience, including a click study to reduce system navigation complexity.
- Collaboration and Feedback: Emphasized working with partners and vendors to refine the system and urged stakeholder involvement for alignment with business needs.
- Project Timeline and Transparency: Addressed concerns about delays, highlighting the focus on quality development and maintaining transparency for stakeholder feedback.
- Optimism and Commitment: The team remains optimistic and committed to delivering a system that effectively meets user needs, encouraging ongoing stakeholder engagement.

X. Public Comment:

The importance of public comments and engagement in shaping department initiatives and budget allocations was reiterated.

XI. Next Meeting Date

Tentatively February 29, 2023, 1:00 PM – 3:30 PM

XII. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned by Co-Chair Chris Cox at 3:17 PM. The co-chairs thanked everyone for their commitment to Illinois children and families and urging everyone to give thanks for the support and care received from those around us.