

Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council
DRAFT MINUTES
February 25, 2022 9:00 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.
WebEx videoconference

SWFCAC MEMBERS PRESENT	SWFCAC MEMBERS ABSENT	GUESTS cont'd	STAFF
Gladys Boyd	Kathryn Adrian	Rosanna Perrino	Julie Barbosa
Kelly Elleman	Kate Monte	Susan Lechtenberg	Gwenn Eyer
Arrelda Hall	Mary Savage	Solange Morrisette	Michelle Grove
Tiffany Johnson	Phyllis Summers	Laura Oresky	Charlotte Gallagher
Harriet Kersh	Samella Taylor-Lewis	Shirley Padera	Leonika Garrett
Susan McConnell	GUESTS	Elizabeth Richmond	Derron Strickland
Audrey Reynolds	Diana Blackburn	Matthew Schaad	Kim Willis
Jesse Rodriguez-Hammond	Lori Benner	Carol Sheley	
Rebecca Thomas	Lisa Bramlett	Stacy Steele	
	Debbie Freke	Peggie Terry	
	Tina Haynes	Arlene Woods	

Welcome/Introduction

Arrelda Hall, SWFCAC chairperson, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. She welcomed everyone and noted that this meeting is being recorded. Susan McConnell, vice chair, conducted the IAAC voice roll call.

Approval of January 21, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Motion: Audrey Reynolds made the motion to accept the January 21, 2021 meeting minutes. Harriet Kersh seconded. The motion carried via voice.

**Update from Office of Caregiver and Parent Support Michelle Grove,
Associate Deputy Director**

Michelle introduced new staff in the Office of Caregiver & Parent Support, noting that they will provide support to foster and adoptive parents and the statewide councils. Kim Willis is the Statewide Administrator and will work with the birth parent program, the advisory councils and the FPSS program. She has a expertise in several areas. Charlotte Gallagher worked for the hotline and in Child Protection, and has a background in the mental health field. Michelle reported that Julie Barbosa will join the meeting for her presentation at 11:00 and the IAAC has been invited to join at 10:30 to hear her presentation. Michelle stressed the importance of the council’s voice and the need to ensure that it is being heard. Julie will explain the Annual Progress and Services Report. This year, they plan to have stakeholders involved in a workgroup to ensure that the information in the plan is literally coming from the stakeholders. Every division and unit within DCFS adds information to the plan. Michelle referenced

some of the things listed in the report on behalf of the Illinois Adoption Advisory Council, noting that we will want to add detail to the items highlighted in the report.

Managing Safety Concerns

Leonika Garrett

Michelle introduced Nika and thanked her for doing the research in preparation for the presentation. Nika referred to the Safety Guide that details strategies for worker safety and shared some principles of safety in child welfare. She noted some building blocks around responding to a violent incident. Building on these characteristics can help alleviate the trauma and promote healing. She shared basic self-defense tips and strategies for managing risk that apply both to the workforce and caregiver stakeholders. Council members will receive a copy of the presentation and handouts. Michelle asked the council whether they needed to develop a work group to address safety and risk. Wednesday 10:00 Jen Marett will give an update on SASS and IPS services to the Lead FPSS, if council members would like to sit in. Gladys noted that her daughter uses an app to track movement. The Life 360 app, as an example, even includes a panic button.

Day Care Workgroup Report

Rebecca Thomas

Arrelda introduced Stacy Mixon. Stacy is the Office of Child Development public service administrator and liaison between the statewide regions re: day care issues and solutions. Rebecca reported that Stacy has helped the workgroup fine tune its work. Stacy was on the workgroup call with Doug Washington, the Deputy Director of Contracts. Doug was in the meeting to address exceptional payment and other options that might make the process of finding child care options for children and youth that aren't a good fit for day care centers and day care homes. One of the outcomes is a refined answer to how the day care rate may be changed through the State Assembly. Rebecca noted that the workgroup would like to join with the council's Legislative Committee to move forward with raising the rate. Doug also highlighted policies, including the 1-to-1 sitter contract available in Cook and Northern regions. Rebecca reported a specific situation in her region that she will address with Stacy for exceptional payment. Audrey reported that another thing the work group will look for guidance from Stacy on is whom to reach out to for exceptional payment assistance and breaking through barriers. The council will collaborate with Stacy and the Legislative Committee liaison from DCFS. Michelle reported that a large percentage of our workforce is brand new and day care is a huge issue that results in child movement adding trauma. The information must go back to the regions for dissemination, educating regional staff. She noted that in many cases workers do not know how to advance the issue to the day care contact. Stacy thanked the council for the collaboration, and noted that DCP staff may fill out applications.

Recruiting Council Members

Arrelda Hall

Arrelda noted that council members should know where the open positions are and we really need to make sure that we are moving forward in filling positions so we have equal representation on the council. Please forward recommendations to the council mailbox.

Discussion:

- Arrelda reported that this has been discussed in many meetings where she has shared specific openings.
- Gladys Boyd noted that she was unaware of the openings and the qualifications.
- Staff will send out the application packet and a list of open slots.

- Gwenn will add a point to the application packet to note that members are to serve as a liaison between the region and the SWFCAC. They are expected to attend regional foster parent meetings and report back to the full council

Regional Reports:

Arrelida asked council members how they meet with other foster parents within the region.

- Cook: Arrelida noted that she represents Cook Central, but all of Cook County meets virtually with all sub regions in the same meeting. They typically host training. They have a mailbox that they refer foster parents to if they have questions and concerns. This mailbox is used to share meeting invitations.
- Northern: Rebecca reported that all FPSS are running or attending support groups and discuss issues raised at the meetings at their regular meetings.
- Central: Harriet reported that she has been trying to get the information since she has been on the council. Her understanding is that they hold closed meetings, open only to DCFS.
- Southern: Audrey reported that they hold quarterly meetings and the last one was well-attended. She noted that during the last meeting it was noted that they are holding meetings because of requirements for the implementation plan. She also talks to FPSS to gather information.
- Michelle reported that she has a master list that the Foster Parent Support Specialists are working on updating. She reminded that we have many new staff and there is a lot of staff movement within the Department.
- Michelle stressed the importance of recruiting geographically, too, so that foster parents throughout the region have a voice.
- Michelle stated that we will meet with the Southern Region RA to identify ways to get the SWFCAC representatives on the agenda for regional meetings and for an RA meeting.
- Arrelida noted that holding those collaborative meetings will help build relationships that can benefit recruitment of council members.
- Michelle noted that it would be important that Spanish-speaking foster parents are represented in support groups and on the council. Roxie responded that their support groups are held in collaboration with Be Strong Families.
- Susan McConnell will share information about additional opportunities.
- Michelle reiterated that the council is the voice for foster parents in Illinois.
- Michelle noted that Central Region will hold a meeting on March 8th.

Regional Administrators Update

Derron Strickland

Northern Region Area Administrator

Derron introduced himself and noted that he is committed to developing relationships with foster parents, addressing issues in a timely manner. He noted that he moved to Northern Region from Cook and there is a vast difference in resources. He invited the council to share their needs and requests and he will do his best to see that issues are addressed. Rebecca commended him for his collaborative work for the region. Derron noted that he has been meeting with providers that are screeners and those providing transportation and they are working to get new services and supports underway. Arrelida noted that transportation has been a recurring challenge in the Northern Region and commended him for working to address them.

Scoring Implementation Plans

Gwenn Eyer

Gwenn reminded council members that scoresheets are due by the end of the month. She noted that scoring plans is a major council responsibility and must be completed to stay a member in good standing. She said that she's willing to score plans with council members via WebEx or phone, reading aloud, as needed.

OMA Training

Gwenn Eyer

Gwenn reported that the Open Meetings Act training is now accessible online. All council members must complete this training in a timely manner to stay a member in good standing. Office of Caregiver & Parent Support staff will provide the training link very soon.

Regional Reports

***Northern Region Report**

Rebecca Thomas

Rebecca reported that support groups are still actively meeting. The biggest issue caregivers currently face is the perceived lack of respect as professional team members. Foster parents are aware of the Foster Parent Law.

***Central Region Report**

Kelly Elleman/Kathryn Adrian

Kelly reported that Central Region foster parents are challenged by respite issues. They have had many youth staying in the DCFS office due to a general lack of beds. It is disheartening to the foster parents in the area.

***Southern Region**

Audrey Reynolds

Audrey reported that day care is still a huge issue. There is a lack of day care centers. Foster parents are not able to take placements due to lack of day care. 906 forms are not getting to foster parents in a timely manner. Foster parents cannot easily contact workers and cannot get their work done without the placement paperwork. Foster parent morale is low. Parents know the chain of command, but are unable to get in touch with people they need to contact. Audrey requested a master contact list, by region. Gwenn noted that this flows into a Foster Parent Law issue (right #4) that the council may wish to address.

***Cook Regions**

Arrelda Hall

Arrelda reported that they provide combined monthly foster parent support group meetings every third Tuesday of the month with speakers providing a variety of presentations.

Reports from Other Councils/Committees/Workgroups:

Council Reports:

***CWAC**

Harriet Kersh/Mary Savage/Phyllis Summers

Harriet reported that CWAC met and part of it addressed the budget. The Director spoke to the group, noting that he has been reaching out to residential programs and other agencies to secure proposals for programs that will meet the needs of our youth. They are really working toward solutions to keep youth from staying in offices. They put a committee together to address issues. One challenge is that DCFS has been hiring private agency staff, and they discussed a 30-day notice when changing from the agency to DCFS. The discussed hiring challenges across the child welfare workforce. They will continue to

address the autism program. They are really trying to bridge the connection between private agencies and DCFS.

*IFAPA

Gladys Boyd/Arrelda Hall

Gladys Boyd reported that they are still getting the foster parents together for a meeting with the Director. She has gathered foster parents from across the state for a two-hour meeting with Director Smith. She has submitted the request and the Director's office will assign the date.

Annual Progress & Services Report Overview

Julie Barbosa

Chief Deputy Director of Strategy and Performance Execution

Michelle introduced Julie, noting that council members will be invited to participate in the APSR process as stakeholders. Julie provided a summary of major requirements from the federal government for all child welfare systems across the country. There is an overall five-year plan, the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), that is updated annually through the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). She said that every child welfare agency in the nation must submit a five-year Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). Jurisdictions include all the state systems, tribe systems and territory systems. Plans are updated annually, due on June 30th. Accountability to the plan comes through the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and flows through the CFST Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP is designed to address any areas in need of improvement that were identified in the CFSR.

Julie noted that no jurisdictions have passed all the outcomes, and DCFS only passed two. This plan has several parts that must be completed. One component is "Family and Community Partner Engagement." This is a part the councils may specifically speak to. Julie shared the graphic showing the remaining items DCFS is currently drafting implementation activities for. The Department has met two of the goals: #1 timely initiation of investigations and #14 caseworker contact with children. The Department has done a "baseline review" more representative of the whole state. If the Department gets to the end of the PIP measurement without meeting the goals, there will be financial penalties, limiting our Federal claiming that offsets the cost of the services we provide. The Department wants to avoid sanctions from the Federal government, but we also want to provide quality services to children and families. Julie noted that all families we serve deserve services consistent with our goals. During the pandemic, Illinois was one of the only jurisdictions that had a rise in the number of children coming into care.

The qualities the Department focuses on are safety, permanence and well-being. Each division within the Department directly impacts these either directly or indirectly. Julie went through the core practices. Caseworkers are agents of change, building relationships with the child and family, providing behavior support and linkage to services and supports. This includes advocacy on the child's behalf, trauma-focused education, quality assessments, teamwork and coordinated care, and cultural competence. Core practices are broken down into priorities. The questions they discuss during the Continued Quality Improvement process should be informed by the Department's vision and its mission. The CQI plan should include measurable strategic goals and objectives and measurable program outcomes aligned with strategic objectives. Practice priorities are used to support implementation.

There is a cycle of improvement that supports this process.

- 1) Use data to make observations about performance to identify root causes.
- 2) Implement and monitor the solution.

- 3) Review ongoing data, talking to stakeholders and decision-makers about progress and impact.
 - 4) Determine the extent to which the problems still exist.
- The outcomes will be to adopt, adapt or abandon it.

Discussion:

Q: Will thought be given to the effects of postponing Termination of Parental Rights (TPR). It is a conundrum. Prospective adoptive parents cannot move to adoption without TPR and the state cannot move forward with TPR without a prospective adoptive family.

A: The paperwork is cumbersome. One way to address this is to gather judges to determine exactly what must be included in legal screening, removing extraneous materials from the requirements. We need workers to be prepared. We need courts to be prepared, limiting continuances. The Department recognizes that it is a partnership and they have points in the PIP that address some of these issues.

Julie addressed the council's role in the CQI process. She asked, "How can we engage foster and adoptive parents in the steps in this cycle?"

- Arrelida Hall, SWFCAC Chairperson, suggested assigning parts of this to the Foster Parent Support Specialists, breaking it into smaller chunks, rotating by region.
- Michelle suggested that council members take some time to absorb what they're heard today, then Email the council mailboxes to join in on a workgroup. She noted that birth, foster and adoptive parents are all covered by our office and we need to review the plan to see if others need to join in the review.
- The plan is posted on the DCFS External website.
- The council should provide feedback based on their direct experience with the system. Julie suggested listing the support needs, how to best access those supports, etc.

Committee Reports:

Training

Harriet reported that she is excited to have reviewed the new PRIDE training. It now includes information about the Foster Parent Law / implementation plans and is heavily focused on trauma. She commended Training for regularly updating the committee.

FPSS

Arrelida reported that Michelle and her staff has been helping facilitate a Teen CORE training for foster and adoptive parents. She is making sure that FPSS receive trauma training and they are working with training to ensure that they have an avenue to share information about the Foster Parent Law with foster parents via the VTC.

Respite

Gladys reported that they will be talking with the Director about respite in the upcoming meeting. She asked the council to provide input that she will share with the Director.

Adolescent Issues

Tiffany Johnson reported that the committee will meet on Wednesday.

Public Comment

- Crystal Rekart noted that she represents the SYAB. She introduced Matt, the young person that will likely continue to join SWFCAC meetings to share information with the SYAB. She noted that they will look for ways to collaborate with the Council.
- Julie Barbosa stated, in reference to the previous council discussion, that the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) posted on the DCFS external website includes an extensive contact list.

Stakeholder Comment

None

MOTION: Gladys Boyd made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Audrey Reynolds seconded and the motion carried by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.

Next Meeting: March 18, 2022, 9:00-noon, via WebEx for the health and safety of our members.