

SWRJWG Meeting Minutes 4/27/18 Hosted by: DCF Middletown Area Office Notes by Ryan Williams

Present: William Rivera (CO); Elizabeth Flores (YAB); Josh Fisher (New Haven); Monica Rams (New Haven); Susan Cunningham (Region 1); Yadira Ijeh (CO); Nedra Muley (New Britain); Gail Reyes-Walton (CO); Julie Flemming (CO-CTKIND); Tracy Davis (Academy); Latosha Johnson (Hartford); Erin Sherian (Middletown); Benjamin Maynard (Solnit South); Ellen Whelan (Solnit South); Shaun Punzalan (Norwich); Chrichton Stewart (Milford); Sarah Diaz (Region 5); Joyce Voltaire (Region 5); Jameson Folke (CO Intern); Michele Stewart-Copes (Health & Equity); Tony De Jesus (USJ); Jodi Hill-Lilly (Academy); Elizabeth Cannata (Wheeler Clinic); Sommaly Ounthondy (Region 4); Paula D’Aquila (Academy); Carmen Karecki (Manchester); Irma Reyes (DCF Diversity & Equity); Janice Currier-Ezepchick (Region 2); Rosiris Espejo (Region 3); Meghan Korn (CSSD); Siobhan Trotman (Torrington); Kristina Stevens (CO); Dan Moreland (CO) ; Natalia Sieira Millan (CO)

I. Welcome and Introductions

Bill Rivera welcomed participants and encouraged them to sign-in. Vanessa Dorantes and Jen Agosti will not be joining us due other commitments. We welcomed Elizabeth Flores as the first member from the DCF Youth Advisory Board. Racial Justice Intern Jameson Folke will be completing his internship on May 2nd and graduating a few weeks later with a Masters of Public Administration degree. He was acknowledged for his contributions to the Work and wished well on his future endeavors.

II. Racial Justice Forum Planning Updates

Elizabeth Duryea provided us a brief summary of the Racial Justice Forum planning committee. They are looking for someone to serve as the emcee for the event. Funding is limited. They are also exploring keynote speakers willing to present. Latosha Johnson is assisting Joyce Voltaire search for the keynote speakers. Elizabeth D. stated the workgroup is proposing a 2.5 hour session in the am and a 2.5 hour session in the afternoon. The USJ will serve as the venue. Siobhan Trotman inquired about the proposal to organize two panels for presentations. She asked if a youth panel be organized. Elizabeth Duryea shared that the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) members will askes to participate as a panel. Citing their participation at the last YAB meeting, Bill Rivera stressed that it great to have a panel of youth at the event. Elizabeth asked the group for a consensus about youth involvement. All were in agreement that we should proceed to invite members of the YAB. Elizabeth D. asked about the idea of combining the annual SACC retreat with the Forum. Susan Smith stated it would be appropriate to join the two. Elizabeth D. also asked that any information on potential sponsors be sent to her and Yadira Ijeh. Bill Rivera asked if there were enough members on the committee. Elizabeth indicated that the committee would welcome new partners from outside of DCF to join the group.

III. Legislative Proposal Update

Elizabeth D. shared that the legislature is in the final days of this session. The DCF Omnibus still has to be acted on. The bill, which includes the proposed racial justice accountability language, is out of committee and looks like it will pass both the house and the senate. Hopefully between now and 5/9/18, **House Bill 5332** will pass.

IV. Revisiting “Privilege”

Bill R. introduced Monica Rams and Chrichton Stewart from Region 2, to request guidance on how to expand their mission statement to further elaborate on the concepts of white privilege and power. Monica reported that one of the regional’s racial justice workgroup initial tasks, was to develop a mission statement that was aligned with DCF’s racial justice mission statement. While the regional workgroup incorporated the definition of racism defined in the Commissioner’s 2013 Racial Justice memo, they concluded that the definitions of power and privilege required further elaboration, as they were not defined in the Commissioner’s original memo.

They contacted Bill Rivera. Bill recommended they bring the issue to today’s SWRJWG for a response. Joshua Fisher shared that the Regional 2 workgroup considered changing and or elaborating on the definitions after meeting with providers. Apparently many of the community providers felt that while the Commissioner’s memo did make reference to how ...”dominant culture, power and privilege perpetuate racism in our systems”, the group did not feel that “*power*”, “*privilege*” and “*white privilege*” were clearly defined or elaborated on.

Chrichton stated they used the already established language to define *racism*. He read the first paragraph of Region 2’s racial justice mission statement to the group. Susan Smith referenced the recent Commissioner’s racial justice memos. She stressed that our work and definitions have been an iterative process, and that the executive team is likewise examining their use of existing language. She reported that as they examined the process of evolving in our language, we are moving the work forward and adapting the language as we are progressing on the journey.

Dr. DeJesus share that definitions discussed today would be included in the Case Consultation Model Manual. Dr. DeJesus had developed of list of prescriptive definitions to define the work, power and privilege, and other language associated with the racial justice narrative to align with existing NASW definitions. Jodi Hill-Lilly suggested adapting the NASW definitions.

Bill Rivera stressed the need for action and outcomes in the work. For this reason the SWRJWG and the sub-committees were formed to move us towards realizing the deep meaning of these defined actions and eliminating racism in DCF. Whenever there is inequity in resources there is institutional racism. Michelle Stewart-Copes offered that this will involve examining organizational culture. Bill acknowledged and welcomed new providers to the table offered appreciation for their feedback on the issues.

Dr. De Jesus added that the decision to clarify the definitions would signal an important marker in the SWRJWG. The bar has to be raised regarding individuals’ work and practice. Jodi Hill-Lilly referenced the correlation to safety culture, i.e. “see something say something”, and how important it is for staff to address difficult conversations without the fear of repercussions. She reminded the group the SWRJWG is light years ahead of many jurisdictions and that there is actionable evidence of the progress. The organization is established. Now we must be accountable for what we are doing. Bill Rivera commended the Region 2 team for not dismissing the concerns that emerged as they worked on their mission statement. Yet they processed with the group and brought questions back to the SWRJWG. We have a lot of work to do.

Jodi Hill-Lilly reminded the group that the journey will be painful, but we will get there. Slow and steady wins the race. Monica Rams and Chrichton Stewart indicated that this is a tough issue they had to deal with. Monica shared that it was exhausting. Jodi reminded us that debriefing after difficult incidents is important, and that as facilitators of this work, we will experience pain. Nedra Muley shared that we must be able to process the adversity we experience in our work. Jodi stated that there is a point when one is experiencing pain and is effective, but there are also times when one is experiencing adversity and is not effective. Knowing the difference is important. Janice Currier-Ezepchick recognized how energized Monica was during the situation in lieu of the challenges. Monica acknowledged that seeing the evolution of individual's racial justice journey makes the pain worth it.

Nedra Muley reported that Region 6 is hosting a learning forum for the region. They asked themselves how will they take the racial justice work and apply it to case practice. She shared that they had seven people from their region discuss their AHA moments in the work. Nedra summarized one of the individuals' stories. Kristina stated that there are unintended consequences from doing the work and not getting the support; one being people moving away from the work.

YAB member Elizabeth Flores observed that it appears as if the number of kids of color in foster care are skewed. She did not understand why the majority of the core foster homes were white by race, when the majority of the children in foster care are kids of color. Bill provided a brief overview of state population demographics by race. Given that the majority of the population of eligible for licensing are white, it would make sense that they make up the majority of the resource homes. However, Elizabeth expressed concerns about what the department was doing to recruit more families of color that are reflective of children in care. Yet, regardless of race, we must recruit foster families who understand kids need love. Elizabeth wanted the members to know that many times children are more likely to be reacting to their environment when placed in white foster homes. In many cases they react without total control of themselves due to their development.

V. Commissioner Racial Justice Memos

Jodi Hill-Lilly provided a context for the recent weekly Commissioner Racial Justice updates that were distributed by the Commissioner. She encouraged everyone to review at the memos. Bill Rivera shared that the idea of the update memos were conceived by Commissioner Katz and she encouraged the regional administrators and office directors to document their progress for posting. Tracy Davis noted that seeing the documentation lets us know of the forward movement occurring because of racial justice work at DCF. Siobhan Trotman shared that she challenges herself and others in her office to embed racial justice into everything they do. Janice Currier-Ezepchick talked about how making the connection to racial justice, one conversation as it relates to our practice. The regional racial justice memos will be distributed to providers as well. Bill Rivera informed that group that all of the memos would be loaded onto the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Immigration Practice website soon. Elizabeth Duryea stressed that we should be proud of our work. She shared that when Commissioner Katz assumed her role, she came from an environment that tried to be blind to race. Commissioner Katz has come a long way in her journey.

Region 5 was recognized for their progression on this work. Jodi Hill-Lilly informed us that at one time

Elizabeth Duryea was not a DCF employee. While working for the Judicial Branch, she continued to push DCF to move forward with the racial justice work. Jodi also recognized those who collect the data, as this is how the racial justice work will keep moving forward.

VI. Case Consultation Model Updates

Bill Rivera invited Dr. De Jesus to provide an update on the Case Consultation Model (CCM). Dr. De Jesus will send the presentation slides to Bill for distribution to all members. Regions 1, 2 and 5 have been trained in the CCM. Dr. De Jesus is developing a manual that would detail the procedures and the historic framework for the CCM. Dr. De Jesus referenced the article summarizing the initial implementation of the CCM in New York City. Bill distributed article to group months ago. Josh Fisher facilitated a focus group with participants who were trained. The results were mixed but identified several implementation gaps. Dr. Canatta asked if Dr. De Jesus's work can be distributed to providers. Josh's (DCF SW and MSW student) study was approved within existing USJ IRB proposal. The results will be published and distributed.

With regard to the question of who would implement the model, it was proposed that a position of a Racial Equity Specialist be created. Dr. De Jesus has been developing a video vignette of the case consultation model that models facilitation skills to be used with the model. The video is being edited and will be ready for viewing in the near future.

Dr. De Jesus provided an overview of the table of contents for the CCM manual. Bill R. asked for an ETA for completion. Dr. De Jesus stated he would have a draft of the manual, with videos embedded on/about 6/1/18. Siobhan Trotman offered that those who facilitate the CCM must have experience with having discussions about race. Jodi Hill-Lilly stated that readiness must be considered prior to facilitators presenting the CCM. Elizabeth Flores suggested an anonymous survey to capture knowledge of the various definitions race and other racial justice language be created. Once there is an understanding of how the group defines the terminology, we can go forward with model implementation.

Dr. De Jesus shared that, originally the requirement was that those who facilitate the CCM, had to participate in the Cultural Humility training. Jameson Folke offered that the survey is a good way to start the conversation because people don't know what the terms mean. People don't know what they don't know. Jameson offered that after the survey, the participants could see the data and have an understanding of why the model is being implemented.

The belief is that participants have to complete self-assessments before they know how they're operating in organizational culture. Tracy Davis stated that she and Dr. De Jesus have been talking about this process regularly. They asked workgroup members having participated in the training for feedback about their experiences with the CCM. Region 1 stated they haven't done the CCM since their first attempt. Region 2 stated organizational and personal readiness is important regarding the CCM and reported they haven't had formal CCM sessions recently.

Nedra Muley stated that when she went through the training, presentation teams were identified and briefed as to what the questions would be. After the session, they were debriefed about the experience.

Nedra reminded the group that every office is at a different place as it relates to discussing racial justice issues. Norwich has not participated in the CCM training. Willimantic tried with no success. Dr. De Jesus stated that there has not been a standardized approach within the agency for how to implement the CCM at this time.

Siobhan Trotman shared that in Region 5, Torrington utilizes the CCM, Waterbury and Danbury do not. Latosha Johnson shared that in Region 4, Hartford has implemented the CCM and invited other participants to implement the CCM. Staff felt as if they needed coaching on the CCM and that the CCM needs to be infused into processes already in place (i.e. supervision model). Hartford area office staff absorbed the CCM in favorably. The Manchester area office picked a case from Investigations and did some work on recognizing their biases and applying a racial justice lens when reviewing cases.

A Manchester investigator highlighted how daycare staff are generally predominantly white, and they account for a disproportionate number of referrals and negative treatment in daycare. Yadira Ijeh informed us that she asked Community of Practice groups what kind of training they needed to support their work. They explored for Racial Equity Experts and consultants in substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health who have an understanding of racial justice concepts. She asked about what it would mean for specific divisions to ask for help to build capacity in this area. Josh Fisher offered to have the conversation in the future based on his MSW study research. For instance, California has cultural competence workers to provide assistance to county staff. Janice Currier-Ezepchick shared that an RRG member was trying to understand how to implement a racial justice lens in her work. She questioned how it would change her assessments. Bill Rivera stressed that obtaining technical expertise is necessary and needs to be localized. Requests for training assistance need to be grounded in reality.

After reviewing the CCM, Bill Rivera stressed that having a review template, a manual, and video vignette is a good resource. However, it just as relevant to have an individual that is competent delivering the message is extremely important. Each region will respond differently. Capacity must be developed so the users can coach and model utilization of the material. Jodi Hill-Lilly shared that we have to follow implementation science in or work. We must be trained on how to implement the material then be coached on the delivery.

Irma Reyes shared that it is always a challenge supporting employees in their emerging concerns related to racial justice matters. She gave an example of a worker who was told she had implicit biases and that she felt attacked. Jodi offered that the Office of Diversity and Equity (ODE) is but one instrumental in moving the racial justice work along. ODE pushes for racial justice with staff internally and endeavors to explain why things are the way they are. Often times the complaints brought to ODE are more likely to be based on perceptions of discrimination, rather than actual cases of discrimination. Their job is to distinguish the differences.

As it relates to implementation science, Dr. Canatta requested that implementation of the CCM would likewise be made available to providers. This would help providers know if the CCM is being implemented in a manner that true to model. Dr. De Jesus shared that it is his desire to move in that direction. As a new member from Human Resources, Dan Moreland offered to support the SWRJWG. Bill Rivera encouraged Dan M. to join the Workforce subcommittee.

Elizabeth Flores shared that it was her observation that white foster parent are often in a better financial position to provided foster care. Bill Rivera stated that this is not necessarily the case and we have to data to support this. Bill added that DCF workers of all races have experienced more racial aggression as of late. Jodi Hill-Lilly shared that this is a very heated issue and that the practice for dealing with these issues varies throughout the state. Siobhan Trotman found that a lot of her work is external. She gave an example of a family that felt targeted by the school system because of their race. She talked about helping other families to implement this work especially to our providers.

Rosiris Espejo expressed that data collection has to improve. For instance, current LINK system doesn't capture accurate race data on persons of Hispanic origin. She has observed that recruitment of Hispanic and Spanish-speaking foster families is sorely lacking. Kristina Stevens shared that CAFAF is working on posting a statewide calendar that would allow families to receive training in other regions in different languages. It won't solve all the problems, thus we must explore all options at our disposal.

Bill Rivera shared that in March 2017, the Online Immigration Policy training was posted on the Academy training site. Susan Smith sent out and all staff memo to introduce the training. So far 188 people have completed it. Workers have to be exposed to the tools and be trained. The training is also posted on the Office Multicultural Affairs and Immigration Practice website for providers.

Ellen Whelan reported they haven't implemented the CCM at Solnit South. She reported being encouraged by hearing the struggles and journeys of others in the implementation process. They want to implement the model correctly. Irma Reyes shared that, with regards to documenting race in LINK, the ethnicity of Hispanics is most detailed in the system. Jameson Folke shared that improper data entry related to race can cause the numbers to be skewed as we try to track disproportionality.

Jodi Hill-Lilly asked if anyone had more to say related to the experience today. Josh stated that YAB is going to San Antonio for a conference. Elizabeth Flores will be in attendance. The group recognized her accomplishment.

Jodi recognized that time was running short. We tabled the last agenda item. The meeting ended at 3:50 p.m.

VII. Scope and Purpose of Sub-Committees for Remainder of 2018 (Tabled)

VIII. Next meeting is scheduled for 06/29/18 at the Connection. 100 Roscommon Drive, Suite 203 Middletown, CT.