

## State Advisory Council Minutes

Monday, July 7, 2014

### Members in attendance

Claudia Carbonari, MD, Kelly Cronin, Jacquelyn Farrell, Patricia Lorenson, Susan Sherrick

### Also in Attendance:

Irma Camacho, Susan Smith, Josh Howroyd, David Oyola, Dave Santis

### Members Absent

Janice Andersen (excused), Elisabeth Cannata, Dino Depina, Donna Grant, Regina Roundtree, Regina Moller

### Welcome & Introductions

Patricia Lorenson

Kelly Cronin introduced, David Oyola, RAC Region 5 co-chair, to the Board.

Mr. David Santis, interim -Executive Director, at the Covenant of Care for Children and part of the Region 5 RAC also joined the meeting for the first time.

It was noted that this meeting did not have a quorum.

### RAC Community and DCF Updates

(Agenda order changed to expedite start of the meeting.)

DCF – no updates to report at this time.

#### Region 1 RAC-Susan Sherrick

Attended the conference and the speaker was Dr. Joseph Crumbley, from Kinship Care. He is a renowned expert in the field of social work. His most recent areas of specialization have been kinship care and transracial adoptions. The conference was well attended by foster parents and meaningful dialog was carried out between Dr. Crumbley, foster parents and DCF –addressing what needs were being met, and which were not. The needs identified were collaboration with the educational and legal system.

RAC learned about a new program called the “Connecticut Partnership for Child Welfare Excellence. The program will receive \$735,000 over a five-year period beginning this federal fiscal year. The program is designed to ensure that new social workers are ready to implement the Department’s new “Strengthening Families” practice model. It is a collaboration between UCONN School of Social Work and the CT Department of Children & Families. The Partnership will result in 35 Master of Social Work (MSW) graduates who are either currently employed at the Department or who will receive priority consideration for employment. The Department will seek students who are currently enrolled or are considering enrollment in the UConn School of Social Work MSW program. Students accepted in the program will have their final year of graduate study paid in full through this grant. During their course of study, the students will be required to intern at the Department. In addition, the graduates will need to commit two-years of work at DCF.

#### Region 1 RAC- Patricia Lorenson

Attended the statewide meeting of the Council of the Collaboratives on June 13.

She noted a couple of money items of interest to SAC and RAC.

In the FAVOR structure, parents qualify for \$20 per meeting (stipend) if it is beyond a normal monthly meeting with a collaborative. In SAC’s recent decision regarding stipends to be given to parents/youth/family by the RACs the amount was set at \$25 per occasion. She questioned the inconsistency.

The other item was that through the CONNECT monies, there may be up to \$17thousand available per region. Five thousand of which would go to support family and parent efforts. The disbursements

would be made through the RACs to the collaboratives. Although everything is still in the planning stages, it is something the RACs should be aware of when considering how to support the CONNECT initiative.

#### Region 2 RAC- Jacquelyn Farrell

Racial justice- the RAC members have been doing some of the exercises that the DCF is undergoing with efforts geared to address disproportionality and bring culturally aware. Training is done by DCF staff. Susan Smith -Racial Justice is one of the cross-cutting themes that the Commissioner has adopted as well as it is one of the performance expectations for 2014. A racial justice group is being convened. Bill Rivera, Director of Multicultural Affairs and Vanessa Dorantes, the area director in Torrington are leading that effort. This work will better ensure that we are caring for families and kids in equal and equitable way.

#### NOTICE of Statewide Provider Meeting:

On July 22 a statewide Provider meeting will convene at CCSU Student Center @ 1pm – 4pm. It is a follow-up to the meeting we had in January 2014 “snow storm” meeting. Even with the snow fall that day, we convened at CCSU. The commissioner and her team presented on various areas in the department related to our procurement and social service development.

This will be a follow-up regarding where the department is going in terms of our community based service needs and a good component of that meeting will also be talking about culturally competent service provision. In addition, Pathway data will also be presented.

#### Region 5 RAC Kelly Cronin

Introduced David Oyola – RAC co-chair

The topic of the allocation of CRP funds will be presented at the next RAC meeting. The focus will be on youth recruitment, offering transportation and stipends to youth to get them to the table. There are five possible candidates.

The education sub-committee will present a request to the DCF Commissioner for an educational consultant for Region 5. Youth are ill-prepared after they graduate high school to make decisions about their future and end up failing college. Homelessness of youth in the community is rising. Once they age out at 18 they want out and don't have a plan on what that means. The focus needs to be on the kids at an earlier age to change that thinking.

David Oyola – reported about his work with the RAC and the four sub-committees. The sub-committees meet every other month, opposite the RAC board, and each has a parent, a provider and youth member. The sub-groups current attention is to homelessness, education, employment, adolescent foster home, mental health.

He described his experience to pursue an education once he entered the CHAPS program as very difficult. After a failed attempt at Naugatuck Valley and two years at Porter and Chester, he recently received his two-year extension to return to Naugatuck Valley and complete his degree.

David is working for Waterbury Youth Services through the DCF youth employment program for the next six week. His job includes attending the SAC and RAC meetings and working with the sub-committees. His final task will put together a report detailing the service gaps in their community. Extensive discussion followed regarding his personal experience with foster homes, group homes, school guidance counselors, youth employment and case worker re-assignments.

#### **DCF Legislative Update**

Josh Howroyd

The DCF Preliminary Legislative Summary presentation (dated 6/25/2014) was distributed. This summary becomes the blue print for DCF's implementation plans. Once a law is passed, we are responsible for the various provisions. There is a group that works to identify the provisions and who in the department will be responsible for implantation.

The final summary will be posted on line in the next two weeks.

This year and as is all even number years the legislature holds a “short session” (3 months, February to May) and they pack a lot of things into that short period of time because all legislators are up for election this year (2014) and it is also a gubernatorial election year. Politics clouds everything. It was a fairly quiet year on the DCF front. In comparison to the last three years when we had a very aggressive agenda but obtained pretty much all we asked for. Will highlight about six or seven more significant things that passed. We had a positive impact on a number of different pieces of legislation.

On Page 3 – Public Act 14-196 which deals with a sexual abuse and assault awareness program. This is part of a national movement called Aaron’s Law based on a case of a young person in Illinois who was sexually abused at a young age on two separate occasions (once by a relative and another a person close to the family). She basically stated that as part of the education curriculum, a whole host of things are covered but not the identification of sexual abuse nor how it can be brought to the attention of appropriate authorities. CT is the sixth or seventh state to enact some version of what they call Aaron’s Law. It directs us to work with the State Department of Education and the CT Sexual Assault Crisis Center to develop an educational curriculum on sexual abuse awareness. We have a group working going forward. It has some time tables that by July 1, 2015 it must be up and running.

#### Page 5- Special Act 14-22

We are working with the new Office of Early Childhood to develop policies and procedures designed to maximize the enrollment of DCF kids in quality pre-school programs (high quality is defined as being like those that are accredited or Head Start Programs). They liked this bill so much that the legislature actually passed it twice. One is as a special act and they inadvertently put it into a budget implementation bill.

We do it now but we have concerns in some geographic areas in the State where our kids do not have access to quality programs.

The good news for implementation- CT has more accredited child care programs than almost any other state in the country. We have close to 30K slots that are accredited. The only state that has more child care slots is California, and they have 35K in their entire state. On a proportional basis we are light years ahead, however, they are not always where our kids are and there are issues such as access to transportation for kids who are in foster care. We already have priority access to Head Start programs but this will intensify that effort by increasing awareness and actually requiring us to identify specific kids and where the service gaps are.

We are working with the State Department of Education and the Office of Early Childhood (originally established under the state Department of Education). We are going to overlay where the slots are, where the kids are, do a data match to determine where the service gaps are and then comply with the reporting requirement back to the legislature.

Many kids who come into DCF care are already at an academic disadvantage and access to quality pre-school perhaps can level the playing field as they turn to regular school age. There is a long waiting list and the number of slots will need to increase. The legislature wants to give us some priority access like we have for Head Start. This may be one of the results that comes out of the reporting requirements once we can identify specifically where the service gaps are. That is step one. Step two is the implementation.

#### Page 9- section 14-186

Omnibus proposal which means this was one of our legislative proposals where we throw out half dozen concepts together and hope the bill passes. It includes some expanded information sharing between DCF and other provider groups.

We have done some overhaul of the DCF confidentiality statute. This is not a major change, but more of a tweak to that because we have tried to focus on providers or other professionals who have a legitimate need to have access to information for the purpose of providing the services to kids. So this is consistent with that.

Page 11- section 3-5

This act is significant a focus or our Commissioner's on the trafficking of minors. We might be the first state in the country that actually enacted a statute to allow us to provide child welfare services to child victims. Most of the kids who come to our attention as victims of domestic minor sex trafficking have had a link or previous DCF history. This allows us the opportunity to engage them with child welfare services to actually give them placement opportunities and safe-guard them from the circumstances they find themselves in. This act also adds a couple of new mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect: paid youth camp directors, assistant directors, certain paid athletic coaches, and trainers in higher education. The mandated reported statute has evolved over the last 30 plus years. Hardly a year goes by where somebody gets added to that list.

Regarding the Multidisciplinary Team it permits the existing MDTs to fall under the auspices of the Multidisciplinary Teams.

We also tweaked an act that passed a couple of years ago dealing with abuse and neglect in school settings. There were a few technical defects in the law. One of our responsibilities when we develop legislative proposals is to police the statutes. We are responsible for the implementation which sometimes is not identified when it first passes until you hit the barrier on implementation. These are some of the things that are included in our legislative proposals.

Page 13- section 14-187

One of the Governor's initiatives was to eliminate unnecessary government regulation. DCF has about 30 different regulations. Most of them were written in the 1980's and do not necessarily reflect current child welfare practice or dealing with juvenile justice. The Governor's office asked all state agencies to review their existing regulations and identify those that were obsolete or could be tweaked in some way to meet the current need. We repealed about half of our regulations but, in many cases, we substituted the ability to implement certain provisions or took the key provisions of a regulation and put it into a statutory provision.

Page 18- section 14-133

An act that has been around for a long time but actually passed in a compromised version providing adult adoptees access to their original birth certificate. It has been a controversial issue in the past but many other states have done this. The legislature enacted it and it applies to anybody who was adopted after October 1, 1983. The reason they chose that date is that is when the probate courts in the judicial branch began using a form that put a person voluntarily relinquishing parental rights on notice that they were not given carte blanche anonymity.

There will be an effort to go backwards because ironically between the 1940 and mid 1970s there was no prohibition on sharing information dealing with birth certificates. It will take effect 2015.

Page 26- section 14-217

Implements various provisions of the state budget. The last couple of sections at the very end (sections 235 and 236) are a legal provision to allow us to deal with subsidized adoption so we can legitimize our receipt of federal funds. This is a massive bill they passed next to the last day. Our sections go up into the 236 the bill goes into 300 plus. Many of these things do specifically implement provisions of the budget. Other sections deal with bills they could not otherwise pass and at the very last minute are dumped into a bill that will pass.

Kelly Cronnin posed the question if Region 5 RAC was interested to put a proposal together to educate parents and children at the same time, could they submit it to the DCF Commissioner.

Mr. Howroyd responded if the proposal were to have early childhood component it may be best to coordinate the effort between DCF and the Office of Early Childhood. The Governor is deeply committed to expanding early childhood opportunities and are expanding slots (maybe 100 new slots in the budget for this year). The fact that there is now an Office of Early Childhood, there may be a way the RAC can coordinate the effort with DCF and the Office of Early Childhood, who might have a different funding source for the child care portion. If the RAC is looking to get funding that does not currently exist, it would be beneficial to engage a few local legislators.

Background on OEC- Myra Jones Taylor is the Commissioner the Office of Early Childhood. As this effort rolls out –she would be a good person to invite to SAC.

She has been with the state around three years but very recently OEC was formally created at a cabinet level position. The legislature meant to enact it in 2013 but in search of the perfect bill they failed to get something passed. So the Governor established the office by executive order then this year formally enacted the statute to officially make it a state agency.

Looking forward to 2015 -

One major focus is to expand subsidized guardianship opportunities for non-relatives. This is a major priority for the Commissioner (DCF).

This would allow another avenue which exists for relative caregivers (subsidized guardianship) and would take it to the next step we are calling “fictive kin” (includes coaches, neighbors, friends of family, godparents) that are not blood related. It is a very viable option for many older kids in our care and sibling groups.

The Department has improved engaging relatives at the time of the initial placing. It has been a priority in the last three years, and a lot of effort is placed to bring everyone together and look at the strengths of the family.

A larger percentage of our placements are now with relatives. 34% of our kids in placement are with relative care. Before we even remove the child there is a meeting with stakeholders (called the considered removal child family team). It brings everybody to the table who is engaged with the child to consider the strengths of the family. We are looking deeper into the family resources of aunts, uncles, grand-parents, fathers, and father’s side of the family. Today things are improved. The Considered Removal team meetings are compulsory and are required to occur within 24 hours if there is thought of a child being removed from the home.

As part of this proposal dealing with subsidized guardianship, we are looking at the different age thresholds that exists for subsidized guardianship, subs adoption and traditional foster care. They should be equalized and same level of financial benefit.

Subsidized adoption cuts off at 18. Subsidized guardianship can continue until 21 if you are enrolled as a full time student (by statute). It is foster care that we can continue up to age 23 if you are enrolled in educational or vocational program. Federal law has changed in as recent as three or four years ago to allow states to recover those post-18 expenses. We are now eligible for Title IV-E reimbursement provided we document everything correctly. There have been some advocates who are actually looking for expanded services beyond just educational to allow full time employment. The data suggest those who pass through DCF care are at an academic disadvantage. The majority of non-DCF kids have at least a high school diploma at age 18, where there are academic delays for the kids who pass through our care.

We have cost data related to this and it is a very expensive proposition. The fiscal times are tough to be able to add one more.

Response to the question of trends in the Child Welfare Arena.

Over the next few years expanding services to the post 18 population to allow kids another track beyond just educational/vocational. It is permitted under federal law if you work up to 80 hours per month (20 hours a week) you can continue to be in the care of DCF up to age 21. The federal act that allowed us to claim this population passed in 2009. Like with many federal acts it takes a couple years for them to implement them and get instructions in place for you to begin to do the IV-E claim.

## **September Retreat Planning**

The following are some of the topics suggested for discussion:

- (1) Where the department is- where is it going –what is the vision.

- (2) What has happened in the past three years since the Commissioner Katz took office
- (3) Standard information - that would be help SAC/RAC (i.e. the Dashboard) be a standard and available
- (4) Survey for ideas or topics that would be relevant to our region, our state, children and families
- (5) Training for staff in the department on how to work with groups such as RAC and SAC. There needs to be some connection made as staff persons are reassigned to have a sense of what is involved.

Pat Lorenson will send an email to the SAC/RAC asking for topics of focus at the September retreat.

RAC representatives: The RACs were asked to submit the names of people who will be attending the September retreat.

### **Membership Updates**

The re-appointments of Ivy Farinella and Patricia Lorenson are before the legal staff at the Governor's office because their third term to serve is expired and the statute allows for three two-year terms. Regina Moller's application for SAC membership has been reviewed and they do not see a problem. It is before the panel of Boards and Commissions.

Discussions followed regarding delay of appointments and processing at the Governor's Board and Commissions office. Mr. Howroyd added that the Governor's office screens thousands of appointments.

Active recruitment to fill the vacancies on SAC was discussed and all the RACs will actively seek candidates from their groups.

Parent/Family members are the most difficult to keep. Funding for these members' transportation was discussed. The statute states that DCF shall provide but does not say how.

### **CRP funds**

CRP monies are to be spent by March 2015.

Meeting closed at 11:28a.m.