

**SWFCAC Meeting
APPROVED MINUTES
March 20, 2015 ~ 9am - 3pm
Atrium Hotel & Conference Center, 3800 Homer Adams Parkway, Alton**

SWFCAC Members Present	SWFCAC Members Absent	DCFS Staff
Gladys Boyd	Pauline Barlow	Marilyn Arnold
Charlene Burris	Lee Coffman	Joyce Bryan
Edith Cruz	Judi Enix	Thelma Carter
Allison Cugier	Kurt Kalas	Claudia Dancy-Davis
Irma Dixon	Cathy McCoy	Gwenn Eyer
Kelly Fargher		Michelle Grove
Laura Hart		Valda Haywood
Doreen Henry		Derek Hobson
Darrin Holt	Guests	Libby Kling
Stephanie Jones	Robyn Harvey	Susanne Loss
Mark McDaniel	Ron Lanterman	Cindy McCleary
Kellye Norris	Karen Miller	Kim Peck
Sarah Olson	Steve Steinhardt	Emily Richard
Carol Sheley		George Sheldon
Michael Simpson		Kathy Templeton
Pamela Webb		

Welcome & Introductions – Sarah Olson, SWFCAC Chair

Final SWFCAC Reports to Director – Sarah Olson

There were no final reports to the Director. The monthly report to the Director from the SWFCAC Chair was emailed to SWFCAC members.

Approval of Minutes from February 20, 2015 Meeting

Gladys Boyd made the motion to approve the minutes of the February 20, 2015 SWFCAC meeting. Mark McDaniel seconded. The minutes were approved as written.

NEW BUSINESS

Update from the Director – George Sheldon, Acting Director

Director Sheldon described his background in public service. He stated that having this foster care advisory council is important noting that members really are on the front lines. He recalled a meeting with foster parents in Florida where foster parents were critical of a person in a position to make decisions to allow children to participate in activities. He stated that we need to empower foster parents to be prudent parents as opposed to micromanaging them. He referenced families taking 14-year-old birth children hunting, and very normal family activities in some places, but leaving foster children out due to rules. He said that lawyers are risk assessors, but we become so concerned with risk that we put our foster youth in a cocoon, and then allow them to age out without preparing them for normal life. We need to make foster care as normal as possible. Most of our children come into care having experienced trauma, often severe trauma. Many have experienced multiple placements with compounded trauma. Director Sheldon explained that youth have said, “Stop calling us foster kids. We’re just kids.” He asked whether we should have to run a

home study/background check on our child's peers' parents for the child to be allowed to go to a sleepover. The Florida legislature passed the bill to try to institute a more "normal" childhood approach.

He noted that there's a lot of concern about the budget. Florida was in recession when he became Secretary, so he was forced to make big cuts. To a large extent, this Governor had no other choices. This is a process, with many proposals before the budget is actually enacted. Director Sheldon firmly believes in services for kids. The federal funding scheme is set up to incentivize kids, only reimbursing for kids in an educational setting. We are only drawing a 35% match for youth 18-21. Other states are significantly higher. He wants to work with the General Assembly to work to maximize federal dollars. He doesn't believe in necessarily mandating licensure for relatives, but noted that we need to figure a way to work with those homes to maximize funding that comes through licensing, demonstrating that the parents themselves will have more resources with licensure. Foster Connections, a new mandate, allows states to have a different standard for licensing relatives, so it's not as onerous as it is for the general foster care population as a whole. He recognizes that Illinois is unique and he is open to dialogue. He said that this Department has been under siege and he thinks it is very important for us collectively to raise the public confidence in the Department. He thinks it's important to have kids at the table, noting that they probably know more about this system than anyone. He said that he once sat down with youth in Florida and in two hours learned more than he did in other work. He strongly indicated that he's here to work with the council.

- The Director will look at state statute re: ways we can normalize the lives of youth in care. He wants to work with this council and with Department staff to review some of these policies and procedures.
- We've got about 2400 young people 18-21 who receive some kind of financial assistance, scholarship, independent living, etc. Only 35% of them are earning *federal* reimbursement. We need to work to increase this draw.
- The extent to which we can incentivize unlicensed relatives to get licensed would provide additional revenue.
- We are currently not maximizing Chaffee dollars, not as significant in number as some programs, but still would be additional funding we could use.
- He's looking for strong leadership to help him establish a strong system. His former deputy at HHS and his former chief of staff from Washington are coming in periodically to help him maximize federal dollars. They're studying three areas:
 - Management structure
 - Claiming
 - Maximizing federal opportunities

Questions/Answers:

- *Will DCFS management change?* With regard to his management team/hiring: He has 19 deputies, which really means 19 silos. He says that we have to promote relationships between these various areas and improve information sharing and cooperative work.
- *What's happening with regard to residential?* Florida had an over-reliance on residential. Director sees residential as a short-term opportunity to use to stabilize a youth's behavior before stepping them down.
- *How do we improve foster care?* He stated that foster home rates aren't what they ought to be. He noted that we have 300 licensed foster homes that currently don't have a child. We

just got an invoice from the detention center in Cook County for 14 kids that can come out if we have placements for them.

- *How do we improve services?* We have to invest in technology and in training. Another colleague from Florida is going to look at the Hotline. Casey Family Program is working with us.
- *Pregnant and parenting teens – are the decision makers aware of the success stories?* Director said that he thinks they are aware and he is trying to make them aware. He believes that it's a dollar issue rather than an awareness issue. The Governor has some very tough decisions to make. Other states are not allowed to carry debt year after year. There are a lot of good programs that are going to take a hit. Director's goal is to try to offer some alternatives, by maximizing federal dollars.
- *What's going to happen to older youth?* If a child ages out at 18 without a high school education/ job skill or if he ages out at 21 without a high school education/ job skill, we haven't done anything to move him forward. A child who ages out is a pipeline to homelessness and a pipeline to criminal justice. We have already failed if a child ages out.
- *What about permanency?* Illinois has the longest length of stay in care of any state, 33 months, at a minimum. (Florida has gotten it down to seven months, using the IV-E waiver.) If "Mom" has a substance abuse problem it doesn't mean that she doesn't love her child. To the extent that you can work with the mom, dealing with the abuse issues, we're investing in the issues that brought them into care, reunifying more quickly. Florida had the highest number of adoptions in the country, moving to guardianship or adoption within a year. IV-E gives a flat rate with an annual increase that we can spend to deal with issues at home rather than bringing kids into care.
- *Does this mean more intact services?* The Director is a big believer in home visits, especially for young moms. He referenced a home visit he made with a counselor that identified that it was a knowledge-based issue that could be addressed, keeping the child at home.
- *What's the IV-E Waiver?* The waiver provides opportunities to utilize federal funds to test innovative approaches to service delivery and funding. Illinois has a IV-E waiver, but it's only in Cook for children under three. The Director wants to keep that emphasis, but he would like to renegotiate the waiver and expand it.
- *Are children going to suffer from the new budget?* It's hard to get 20% out of the agency without hitting the kids' level. In Florida he made the commitment not to cut frontline services or frontline staff. They managed it through attrition. There will be some reductions in funding for children under 18, but he thinks we can absorb them through attrition on personnel. It will mean an increase in caseload in protective services, raising from 10/1 to 12/1. We're at 15/1 in casework, and that will remain.
- *A council member noted that younger children are easier to manage, love and embrace than older youth who are traditionally harder to love, and harder to establish.* Director stated that if we don't get to kids before the age of five, we're really playing catch-up. There is a lower standard for bringing a child into care for younger children. We've got to start independent living skills at 12 or 13.
- *It was noted that judges sometimes will not terminate parental rights.* If this budget will take effect, there will have to be statutory changes. He is going to meet with judges. If we're not in alliance moving forward, we will be in trouble. Illinois has the ability for the delinquency court to adjudicate a child delinquent, sending him or her to our child welfare system. We're mixing delinquency with disability and dependency. They're all being grouped together. He's not saying give up on the child who's been arrested for breaking and entering, but the

methodology with those kids should be different. He visited Aunt Martha's shelter in Chicago where he saw a mix of youth in the shelter. He said that if we're not able to change the statute, we're going to have to change our policies for service delivery. Shelters should be a temporary placement. Residential should definitely be therapeutic so they're stabilizing the child and moving to a foster home.

- He noted that although they made improvements in Florida, there are still problems as there are in other child welfare agencies.
- Illinois probably leads the nation in health screenings, immunizations, and the oversight of psychotropic medications.
- *What about the disconnection between judges, states attorneys, etc. Some refuse to terminate parental rights.* Director indicated that part of it is a training issue and part will require personal interaction. Florida outsourced investigations to local sheriffs and co-located some investigators to sheriff's offices. He recognized that we send our investigators into high-risk situations with no backup. One thing he would like Illinois to consider is to offer an annual Dependency Summit using court improvement dollars. They brought 2000 people together for a four-day professional development/training conference in Florida. Stakeholders included foster parents, DCP, judges, lawyers, GAL's, law enforcement, case managers, advocates, children, etc. Training was provided in tracks to meet licensing and other requirements. They did daily breakouts by circuit where they designed a circuit improvement plan for the next year. To some extent, everyone was able to walk in the others' shoes and it really brought continuity. 100 judges attended in Florida. This approach empowers everyone while making systemic improvements.
- We need to really act in "kid time" – one year is one fourth of a four-year-old's life.
- We need plans for special needs children who will age out of care. Best Buddies was founded by Anthony Shriver, based on the concept where you take a disabled child and pair him or her with a non-disabled partner to do activities, etc. (Similar to Big Brother/Big Sister.) This council ought to be very involved in identifying and setting up these programs.
- There's a huge philanthropic community in Chicago that we need to get engaged in.
- *Private agencies don't really have a problem with termination of parental rights, but adoptions are delayed.* We've got to work the courts. That's where it starts. They did an Adoption Day in Florida, with teddy bears, balloons and publicity. We need to publicize the benefits of moving into adoption.
- "Don't violate the rule, but if the rule has a stupid result, bump it up to another level where it can be addressed." He described a past experience where lines were crossed between Medicaid and the child welfare system and the Director personally went to the DHS Director to solve the problem. He wants "can do" people who can make things happen. He's telling management to empower staff to make decisions or move it up to people who can make the decision, but notes that it's a challenge.
- He runs by two principles: common sense and a sense of urgency.
- *What happens to continuity for a child when caseworkers change multiple times during placement?* Director said to send him names and he will follow up. He believes in holding people accountable for doing the work.
- Director said that Illinois is a big state. He's found that people are scared to make a decision. The message he's trying to share: If you follow protocols, make a judgement decision and a case goes bad, we're going to stand behind you rather than firing the lowest person on the totem pole. If we can get the message out that we're empowering people we can change the culture. All knowledge doesn't reside in one state. He's a big proponent of establishing

guidelines and pushing decision making down to the lowest level, i.e., regional or circuit. We have the responsibility to train and the resources to do it.

- *We need cooperation between the foster parents, GAL, agency, court, etc.* Director said that it is really the only way to move forward. Sometimes a system gets so bureaucratic that it kind of feeds on itself. How do we re-inspire people? He stated that there are innovative things that we can do. Example of innovation in technology: Florida had a child that was missing for nine months before location. The child was missing for four months before even being reported missing. The Florida child was found in Wisconsin, abducted by the mother, just out of prison. Florida used technology to find the child. A horrendous outcome for family members that could have been prevented if the child had been reported as missing. After this experience they started equipping workers with technology, taking updated pictures of kids in care every 30 days, entering case notes immediately, etc. You need to treat this foster child like you treat your own child.
- *Are you requesting additional funding not requested in the previous Director's budget?* Director Sheldon stated that the first thing he has to do is restore public confidence, noting that the legislators believe the child welfare system is broken. He said that we have to be totally transparent about everything. If we have a child death we have to own up to it, and release the records. No matter how good we get, something bad is always going to happen. We have to recognize that something else could still have been done. If we're going to ask for more resources – and we need them – we have to restore public confidence. We've got to stabilize the department as part of the long-term plan.

Sarah noted that the councils have been working on two recommendations as part of its work plan, and stated that the Director could look for them shortly.

Office of Professional Development – Joyce Bryan

The Office of Professional Development provides training for staff and foster parents, and oversees the foster parent support and birth parent support programs. Feedback is welcome.

Office Values:

- Integrity – honesty in actions, following through, sticking to commitments
- Respect – for colleagues and other stakeholders
- Assume the best – ask for clarity as needed
- Excellence – in job performance, but don't let excellence become the “enemy of good”
- Full disclosure

Permanency Update - Marilyn Arnold

Update on Rule 315 –We have been working on enhancements to permanency to all youth in care, i.e. reunification, adoption and guardianship. Our work begins at investigations and goes through permanency. They are working to utilize feedback from the Ansell Casey assessment they use for older youth, ensuring that they're getting the services they need as they progress to independence. They're on target with meeting their deadlines. It will go out for review and comment and they will do training.

Sibling Contact

There is a self-administered web training that's mandatory for all staff including POS. Rules are at the Governor's Office for review. Once it's returned they're look at it, and will again send it around for review prior to implementing the procedures.

122 Guardianship and Adoption cases within 120 days

The cases specifically targeted for this effort are where parental rights have already been terminated. Deadline: June 30th. The majority of these cases are in the private sector, but DCFS has cases as well. Her staff has been trained to support private agency staff in understanding what needs to be done to provide technical support and help work through getting these cases to permanency. Most of these children and youth are already in placements that will finalize, and have been for quite some time.

Update from Southern Region – Derek Hobson

Derek welcomed us to Southern Region. He expressed gratitude for the work that the council does, and acknowledged the efforts of foster parents in Southern Region. 2014 started Quality of Service as one of their regional goals, monitoring service provision and assessing target areas to work on, down to individual workers that needed more support. They continue to try to work with the 34 courts within the Southern Region on an individual basis. Their Associate Deputy of Permanency has met with court representatives. They are conducting meetings with ASA's, DCFS staff, etc. to discuss barriers and ways to move forward in achieving permanency. One goal has been to expand client services. Sometimes there's 100 miles between service providers, i.e., counseling services. He spoke highly of the relationship building they're doing with their foster parents. They lost 100 foster homes in 2014 and have been looking at ways to recruit. They need enough staff to license and get prospective foster parents, due to significant delays in the process. They are on target to get an additional licensing team. They are into accountability, building proficiency. The regional Administrator and his top management are reviewing cases to move them toward permanency. Southern Region has one of the strongest youth advisory councils and Derek often stops in to let them know he supports them.

Training Update – Michelle Grove

We are on target for PRIDE Illinois training with roll out in July. Another assessment is being finalized to determine whether prospective foster parents want to take training in person, online or in the hybrid form, based on their best way to learn.

Be Strong Families – Robyn Harvey

Robyn distributed a flyer and left folders for council members to pick up. Be Strong Families is a private agency contracted by DCFS to promote engagement with foster parents, birth parents and youth. This council was really instrumental in formulating Foster Parent Cafés. Everything BSF does is based on the protective factors. BSF offers a Shared Parenting training program promoting a collaborative relationship between foster parents and birth parents. This training involves role play with roles reversed and is their highest rated training.

Training Objectives include the following:

- Finding commonalities between foster parents and birth parents
- Promoting peace and collaboration between foster and birth parents
- Practicing communication skills for challenging conversations
- Assisting participants in developing empathy and letting go of judgment
- Developing strategies to work together to benefit children

Office of Education and Transition Services – Kim Peck

Kim distributed forms and discussed the various programs currently offered.

- Our youth have lots of opportunities for post-secondary engagement.

- She noted that Youth in Transition 21 – offers educational opportunities/support after the age of 21.
- There are Transition Managers in every region to assist youth, their foster parents, case managers, etc. Take advantage of them.
- Contact her at Kim.Peck@illinois.gov Springfield and Chicago phone numbers are listed on the tips sheets. <http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov> offers several of the resources.

Status of Agency Reviews – Gwenn Eyer

Gwenn explained that one of the mandates of the council is to ensure that every DCFS region and every agency doing foster care by contract submit an implementation plan. Plans are due in late November, are scored and results are distributed by the end of February. Agency reviews are scheduled in March to assess each agency’s knowledge of and implementation of the plan. All reviews have been scheduled, and five reviews have been completed.

Implementation Plan Awards – Darrin Holt

Darrin distributed the award forms and asked that members vote for three, returning completed forms before lunch. He and Mark will then tally the totals.

Awards:

- Guardian Angel – Involvement
- Association House – Dignity and Respect
- Chaddock – Dignity and Respect
- One Hope United – Dignity and Respect

OLD BUSINESS

Update the Council re: Residential Policy Memo to the Director – Darrin Holt

Darrin distributed copies of the revised Policy Committee recommendation. There was limited discussion and the council endorsed the recommendation for submission to the Director.

Committee Reports

Legislative/Policy – Darrin Holt

They met March 11th via conference call where they finalized their work plan. He distributed a handout with various bills that have been proposed, instructing members to go to the website at www.ilga.gov to review the bills and notify this committee which bills should be highest priority. Council input will guide the committee’s work.

Adolescent Issues – Mike Simpson

They have not met and probably won’t for a while. They’re waiting to see what the legislators do. Mike recommended that council members personally contact their legislators (as citizens) to advocate for adolescents. Mike recently went on a local radio talk show program to share information about adolescent issues. He also suggested working to get organizations to have their parents take foster children, i.e., churches or fraternal organizations.

Foster Parent Support Specialists - Edith Cruz

No report

Respite - Gladys Boyd

Gladys distributed copies of the revised Respite Committee recommendation. There was limited discussion and the council endorsed the recommendation for submission to the Director.

Nominations Committee – Doreen Henry / Kelly Fargher

Committee members gathered and tallied the results of the Acceptance of Nomination forms from all members who are eligible to serve as Chair or Vice Chair for FY'16. The forms were completed to state their willingness to serve in office. The results were that the following council members are willing to serve:

Vice Chair

Laura Hart
Allison Cugier
Sarah Olson

Chair

Sarah Olson

Reports from Other Councils/Committees/Workgroups:

CWAC – Allison Cugier

Allison reported on the meeting in Chicago on March 12th. The Director was present and shared a similar message to the message he shared with the council today. They talked about the Casey project. The Department has had an ongoing relationship with the Casey Foundation, but following the Tribune report re: residential care, they've partnered to address the situation. Darren indicated that outside eyes and ears will be taking oversight of residential facilities.

Casey has three main goals:

- Residential
- Child safety and decision making, i.e. hotline reports to action
- Supporting development of data dashboards – using technology to make real-life data.

Intact cases statewide have decreased, due to a change in criteria. They don't currently have any data to indicate how much intact prevents children from coming into care.

They're trying to understand residential monitoring – the jury is still out on the quality of monitoring; they are still investigating. They have brought in two consultants but they are not replacing monitors right now.

They're looking at the need and greater capacity for treatment foster parents.
Allison will send a report to attach to the minutes.

IFAPA - Gladys Boyd

The Illinois Foster Adoptive Parent Association will meet April 11th from 9 – 2 at the 1st United Methodist Church in Pontiac.

PII Workgroup - Sarah Olson

The last call was very short.

P315

Marilyn covered this information.

Regional Reports

Northern Region – Robyn Harvey

They had a great meeting. There has been a lot of concern and frustration with the way sibling waivers have been handled within the region. A newborn may be in a "holding home" for 7-8

months before the waiver is signed. They called Desiree and Juliana Harms in to answer questions and address concerns. They will bring this issue to the council if it appears to be of statewide concern.

Southern Region – Mark McDaniels

There was supposed to be a call, but the chairman didn't sign on to initiate the call.

Central Region – Carol Sheley

They have a call coming up in a couple of weeks. Carol's group has shared concerns about workers not respecting foster parents as team members. Apparently some foster parents are getting calls to give input, and then when they follow up with the caseworkers they're told decisions have already been made. Another major concern that has been reported within the region is the length of time it takes to complete adoptions.

Cook North - Edith Cruz

Their advisory group lost their chair and co-chair. They have a foster parent conference call number and have many people calling in. They talked about module training and continuing education credit. Another issue that comes up frequently is that people relocate from one part of Cook to another, facing challenges with being able to keep (or not keep) their licensing representative. It was noted that the worker's time/travel funds would be a factor.

Cook South - Kellye Norris

They held a focus group with a presenter from the Children's Center for Assessment and Training. Some presenters asked to utilize the group for voice overs for communications training that is under development. Council members were resistant and hesitant to participate.

Cook Central - Doreen Henry and Charlene Burris

Their meeting had good attendance and featured a speaker from DOT. They're concerned about the way respite is covered. She will report back to the local council re: the letter we're sending to the Director.

While discussing concerns shared in regional councils, and the inability to participate in regional council meetings, members were reminded that everyone has a supervisor and should call the Advocacy Office or their Foster Parent Support Specialist. We may need to have George Vennikandam to come in to speak to the council to discuss ways to address issues with private agencies.

Adjourn

Mike Simpson made the motion to adjourn. Doreen Henry seconded and the motion carried.

Potential Agenda Items:

George Vennikandam

Foster parent involvement in step-down or step-up, Michael C. Jones

Budget update

Next Meeting – April 24, 9:00 via conference call