

State of Delaware Child Protection Accountability Commission
Permanency for Adolescents Committee
January 26, 2012 Meeting Minutes

In Attendance:

Dr. Victoria Kelly, DFS (Co-chair)
Jen Donahue, Esquire, OCA
Katharine Snyder, CFF
Kristen Brough, PPGH
Theresa Sedevis, Esquire, DOJ
Dr. Deborea Jones, DPBHS
Ellen Levin, CPAC
Karen Angelici, Annie E. Casey Foundation
Virginia Pryor, Casey Fam Programs
Daneya Wheeler, DGI

The Hon. Peter B. Jones (Co-chair)
Tania Culley, Esquire, OCA
Aimee DeBenedictis, PPGH
Julia Pearce, CPRB
Donna Thompson, Esquire, DOJ
Felicia Kellum, DFS
Trish Hearn, Family Court
Lisa Paine Wells, Annie E. Casey Foundation
Susan Smith, Casey Fam Programs
Joni Silverstein, DGI

I. Opening Remarks and Introductions

Tania Culley, on behalf of CPAC, welcomed everyone and attendees introduced themselves.

II. CPAC Charge to Committee

To improve outcomes for adolescents in foster care by developing best practices, policies, procedures and statutes that create lasting connections for adolescents, that exit them in a timely fashion from foster care with appropriate caregivers, that reduces the number of children with a goal of APPLA, that pursues legal strategies for keeping connections, and that has appropriate placements for youth that create stability and success while in foster care. This Committee shall not duplicate the work of the DFS APPLA workgroup, the Delaware Girls Initiative or any other groups or initiatives assisting adolescents in foster care, but should instead complement or fill gaps which still exist in Delaware's child protection system.

III. Annie E. Casey Foundation Findings on Permanency for Adolescents

Karen Angelici, from Annie E. Casey Foundation's Child Welfare Strategy Group (CWSG), began the presentation by giving an overview of the assessment her team has done of Delaware's child welfare system. Karen stated that CWSG partners with states and works in phases to help states achieve improved outcomes for children and families. The three phases are: (1) assessment; (2) strategy development; and (3) implementation. She specifically limited her comments to the assessments and finding on adolescents. Final findings and recommendations will be presented to DFS and the larger community

in the latter part of February. Ms. Paine Wells then began with the initial data presentation.

Ms. Paine Wells stated that in Delaware in 2010, 426 children entered DFS custody. Of those children, 38% (164) were teens. And of those 164 teens, 79% were entering DFS custody for the first time. Nationally, teens enter care primarily for behavioral reasons. However, in Delaware, most teen cases are coded as abuse or neglect. More analysis will be required to determine if this is in fact true. There is also a popular misconception that many children are aging into foster care. Delaware statistics do not show this. Given the number of teens entering foster care for the first time, Delaware should consider modifying its practices to divert these cases at the front door to a service array that allows for family preservation rather than foster care.

Ms. Paine Wells then discussed multiple placements for teens. In the first year of placement, 31% of teens have more than two placements. After one year, 67% of teens have three or more placements. Delaware needs to have a much more intense focus on placement stability for teens. Approximately 50% of Delaware adolescents in foster care will also experience placement in congregate care. While congregate care can be beneficial when it is short term and has specific goals, it instead becomes a stopping point for social workers. Studies show that congregate care is not positive for youth – it increases negative behaviors and involvement in juvenile justice. Ms. Paine Wells stated that unstable placements tend to drive negative behaviors which drives poor permanency outcomes for teens.

National data also shows that teens entering care are at the greatest risk of exiting care at emancipation. Delaware is the 5th worst in the nation for this with 53% of Delaware children who enter care as teens not exiting care until emancipation. Delaware may want to consider looking at a subset of these children as an initial target for reduction and a target population for preventative strategies.

Judge Jones requested clarification as to the definition of “emancipation” as it is used by CWSG. Ms. Paine Wells stated that emancipation is when a child ages out of foster care at 18 without a permanency plan in place.

Ms. Paine Wells indicated that as part of their assessment, they interviewed more than 100 Delaware youth who have experienced Delaware’s foster care system. Teens felt that overall their workers cared about them; however, the assessment has shown that workers don’t identify their role as helping youth find permanence. Teens want a family, and in particular their family. Nationally, and in Delaware, not much effort is made to explore the paternal side of the family. Youth who age out of foster care have poor adult outcomes – see Casey National Alumni Study conducted by Chapin Hall.

Ms. Paine Wells discussed different **strategies to help keep families intact**, including **crisis support, stabilization support** and **Functional Family Therapy (FFT)**. California clearinghouse approved FFT as an evidence based strategy to be used as a baseline intervention for all families in the child welfare system. Dr. Kelly added that

Children and Families First has implemented FFT in DE for truancy and juvenile delinquency cases. Motivation is the outcome of first phase of treatment and presumes parents are frustrated and have given up. Dr. Tom Sexton is one of the developers of FFT and is interested in developing an application for child welfare. Dr Kelly believes this is fundamental in helping families and should be part of differential response initiative. Ms. Paine Wells discussed further strategies to help keep families intact, including a **family search and engagement for both maternal and paternal relatives and a pre-removal team decision making meeting**. This meeting provides an opportunity for families and children to be part of the decision-making process with the guidance of a neutral, trained decision-maker and social services worker *before* the child is removed. Dr. Charles Usher, North Carolina, opined that 50% of the time team decisions are made without placing the child in foster care.

Ms. Paine Wells further discussed **strategies to promote permanency**, including an **APPLA policy review**. She stated that “reason codes” need to be changed and the age for consent for adoption should be raised to 16. There are lower adoption rates due to the current lower age of consent. She stated that it is important to get behind the “no” to figure out why a child does not want to be adopted. The second strategy is establishing **teen permanency units and permanency teaming**, which is ideal for training and supervision. There should be identified teen permanency workers to spend time with the child and family. Another strategy is the **targeted recruitment of teen foster homes** and to provide them specialized training, intensive case management and financial rewards. There are specific foster care procedures in Fort Collins, CO, where there is early identification of high risk kids who are matched with particular family after having pre-placement visits on weekends. The child and the family enter into a contract and the family is provided 20 hours of case management/support each week (treatment planning and therapy and active work with birth family). The foster parent is involved in every aspect of child’s case. An additional strategy to promote permanency is to establish a **Permanency Review Committee** to include a neutral person outside of child welfare system to look at children who have not achieved permanency within 2 years, or “flatlined” after 2 years in foster care. Another trigger for committee review is when a kid is moved more than 2 times within 6 months. The focus is on planning for aftercare when a child is placed with a family in order to avoid re-entry into the system. The final strategy is **performance management** to establish goals for the system and make available to staff.

IV. Current Delaware Initiatives

Casey Family Programs (CFP)– Permanency Roundtables

Dr. Vicky Kelly is excited about the Casey work and data. Over the years the ability of Delaware’s agencies to provide social workers with supervision has gone down. Permanency Roundtables (PRT - Atlanta) have provided a context for good supervision.

Virginia Pryor explained that PRT’s have a very structured format and difficult cases, like APPLA, are looked at first. The focus is on legal permanency (adoption,

guardianship, reunification with birth parents, reinstating parental rights). Focus should also be on fathers. Ms. Pryor discussed the **6 phases of Permanency Roundtables**, which are permanency driven:

- (1) Welcome/Overview: persons present at roundtable are neutral facilitator, case manager, social worker, supervisor, master practitioner (national consultant from CFP), scribe.
- (2) History of Case: case manager presents the history of the case to the present.
- (3) Question and answer session
- (4) Brainstorming session: all ideas of the participants are considered and discussed. Case workers are encouraged to try a previous intervention tactic (ie. re-visit bio parents).
- (5) Action Planning (who, what, when): create a concrete, detailed, specific plan of action before leaving the meeting. Includes specific services, such as family search and engagement, FFT, etc. and who is responsible to get the job done.
- (6) Follow-Up until the child achieves permanency.

Ms. Pryor stated that Roundtables are successful in many states, including Mississippi. Of the 46 cases brought to roundtable, half achieved permanency within 3 months. Permanency connections (ie. friends/acquaintances/ family members of child) are necessary as a safety net. Dr. Kelly stated that the social workers feel incredibly supported through the roundtable process.

Ms. Pryor next discussed **Permanency Values Training** for members of child welfare team prior to the roundtable. The training defines the importance of permanency to inspire social workers. Legal permanency is preferred, but workers need to understand that it is not a failure if a child ages out with a web of permanency connections. Permanency outcome is the entire child welfare system's responsibility, not just DFS. Ms. Pryor suggested a Permanency Summit for training about 350 people, everyone who touches the life of a child, so that everyone gets the same message at the same time. Summit should include workshops and break-out sessions. Thereafter, hold a values training and skills training for DFS.

Casey Family Programs (CFP)– Cold Case: **Dr. Vicky Kelly** talked about cold case reviews, such as those in Georgia, which include a legal forensic review of a case to identify if any resources were missed. **Ms. Pryor** added that the crux of cold case is “mining” of the case, or legal partners drilling down the case and preparing a 2 page executive summary. A hybrid model is being discussed whereby the case worker would have a copy of the executive summary at the roundtable review. The toughest cases are submitted to a cold case review.

APPLA Workgroup: **Felicia Kellum** stated that the goal is to create better outcomes for permanency and enhanced specialized services for the APPLA population. When this workgroup was created, there were 350 youth with a goal of APPLA in Delaware. As of January 2012, there are 176 APPLA youth. The number should be at approximately 70,

so there is still much work to do in this area. Felicia indicated that the workgroup is comprised of DFS and community partners, a collaborate effort. The workgroup has reviewed DFS policies and developed “extenuating circumstances” guidelines for APPLA goal. The group is improving search methods in looking for families more diligently. The current efforts of the group are reviewing goals, determining what is left to be accomplished through subcommittees, review of the APPLA population in order to break it down and tackle each case individually.

Julia Pearce mentioned that the original APPLA group goals were to lower the use of the APPLA goal and to improve APPLA kids’ outcomes. It is a “worker bees” or grass roots group.

Youth Advisory Council: Felicia Kellum stated that YAC consists of youth 14 years or older who have foster care experience and are a voice for the youth in foster care. YAC seeks to improve experiences for youth in foster care. Meetings are held once per month and there are approximately 30 youth participating. The current efforts are aimed at improving advocacy skills, life skills training, community service, provide trainings, and to share their own experiences of being in foster care. Some YAC members made a presentation to legislators to advocate for foster care until the age of 21, concentrated efforts regarding transition planning and drivers license/car insurance issues. Felicia stated that Casey was impressed with YAC members. She stated that YAC has much support from DFS and Judges Jones and Crowell. Judge Jones has teamed up with a local artist so that youth may create a mural to be displayed at courthouse. In addiction, YAC was invited to Washington, DC by Senator Coons. **Ms. Pryor** asked whether Delaware has a Foster Club or Foster Club Allstar program. Felicia Kellum indicated that one member is an Allstar. **Dr. Kelly** stated that at the Governor State of State presentation, 3 youth were recognized by the Governor, along with 2 military personnel. The youth took a tour of the Governor’s office and they were happy that the Governor was “bragging” about them to his friends and colleagues.

Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative: Joni Silverstein explained that it is a program of Delaware Center for Justice and co-investment site with Jim Casey. Jim Casey is a sibling of Casey Family and Annie E. Casey Programs. Ms. Silverstein talked about Eckert money and Casey Tech Assistant, Julie Miller. YOI is very structured and aimed at bringing systematic change to improve outcomes. Casey prefers non-service providers to lead, which was why DCJ was chosen with funding from the Eckert Foundation. Ms. Silverstein explained the environmental scan by UD and the development of the Community Partnership Board of approximately 30 people to be chaired by Lt. Governor Matt Denn. YOI is working closely with YAC to include the youth’s voice as only 30% of DE youth in foster care graduate from high school and only 3% are employed. There is a need to focus beyond success stories. Ms. Silverstein stated that CIP funds are mining the data from the environmental scan. Finally, YOI can help improve advocacy skills of youth.

Delaware Girls Initiative (DGI): Joni Silverstein indicated that DGI was started by Chief Judge Kuhn. DGI is an advocate for girls in or at high risk of juvenile justice. A

gap analysis was conducted for girls in Delaware and during the last few years, the focus has been on all girls in Delaware. However, during the last few months, the Board has decided to focus again on the high risk population. The goals of DGI are to reduce the number of girls entering the juvenile justice system; to reduce recidivism (extending stages to 90 days); to increase and improve education outcomes; and to increase asset building experience.

V. Appointment of Chairs

Tania advised the group that Dr. Victoria Kelly and Judge Jones have offered to co-chair the committee. All agreed and a motion was made to accept them as Co-Chairs.

VI. Future Meeting Schedule

Next meeting: Friday, March 30, 2012, 10 – Noon, Sussex Family Court

VII. Public Comment

There being no public comment, the meeting was adjourned at Noon.