

CWAC November 15, 2013

Members present: Em Parent, Deborah Eves, Judy Gundy, Melanie Galloway, Sharon Lindsay, Lytricia Toler, Nannette Bowler, Deb Forkas, Lori Battin, Lelia Hopper, Dorothy Hollahan, Elisabeth Corey, Phyl Parrish, Denise Dickerson, Alex Kamberis, Celest Williams, Melissa O'Neill, Kiva Rogers, Phyllis Savides, Cathy Pemberton, Tiffany Gordon, Carol Wilson.

The meeting was called to order by Alex Kamberis and the group provided introductions. First on the agenda was a presentation by Celest Williams with Harrisonburg Rockingham Social Services (HRDSS). In keeping with the request of the committee for more local input, Ms. Williams was asked to speak about concurrent planning as it is implemented in her locality. Ms. Williams provided demographic information about the area and cited the number of CPS referrals, on-going CPS cases, foster care cases, and adoption subsidy cases. Taking a historical prospective, Ms. Williams presented data on several child welfare and well being measures from 2007. In that year 93 children entered foster care and of those children 29 had an initial placement in a congregate care setting. Thirteen children aged out of foster care from a facility. There were approximately 40 – 50 permanent foster care cases. The average length of stay in foster care was 36 months. Only about 5.8% of children discharged to permanency after being in care 24 months or longer. Thirty two percent of children were in two or fewer placements.

These numbers are not what DSS strives for today and since the Children's Services System's Transformation, many changes have been implemented at HRDSS. One of the biggest changes deals with communications and training. Foster care workers are trained with foster parents. Foster parents were trained as to what foster care workers responsibilities are. Communication about the case with all parties is encouraged. The foster family coordinator was trained to be thinking about permanency when looking for families to place a child with. This allowed for greater understanding of the process as well as the ability to focus more on permanency for the child. Other changes are that HRDSS implemented Family Partnership Meetings (FPM) and family search. If possible a FPM is held within the first five days and foster parents are introduced to birth parents. During the first five days of a case, relatives are searched and pursued. If appropriate, custody is transferred to relatives or relatives can become an approved foster parent in a short time.

HRDSS created the "red notebook" which is given to birth families and contains helpful information about the court process, appointments, dates of court hearings, etc. There is also a video that is shown to the birth parents about the court process. If a FPM was not held within the first five days, one will be held within the first 30 days if the child enters foster care. HRDSS does not wait for the 75 day hearing to start serving planning and encourages regular and frequent visitation with the family. Very early in this process there is full disclosure about what is the permanency goal is for the child. There is a meeting held with all parties invited to discuss progress and barriers to permanency.

In addition to communication, training, implementing family partnership meetings, and family finding, HRDSS began using data to help understand trends and look at goals. In 2012, 124 children entered foster care and nine were placed directly into a congregate care setting. Three children aged out of

foster care from a facility. There is only one new permanent foster care case. The average length of stay was 21 months and 31% were discharged to permanency after 24 months in care. Thirty nine percent were reunified by 17 months and 43% were in two or fewer placements. These numbers show improvement and HRDSS is committed to continuing to improve their work with children and families.

Mr. Kamberis spoke with the group about VDSS's request to have technical assistance from the National Resource Centers. Two current requests are for adoption negotiations and for diversion strategies. The group suggested kinship placements, barrier crimes, youth engagement, and permanency as other possible areas to request assistance.

Judy Gundy informed the group of several trainings that are now available. CWS1500 Navigating OASIS – CPS modules are now online in the Knowledge Center (KC). Pam Sheffield, former OASIS guru and expert, narrated those modules. CWS 5501 – Substance Abuse is up on the KC and can be used for continuing educational credit. Two of the mandated reported courses are going to be revised soon and there is work being done on developing an e-learning course for SDM tools. SafeMeasures 5 will convert a webinar into an e-learning course. Training staff is coordinating with people from Behavioral Health around a coaching model for trauma informed care. Initially, this information will be presented as a Subject Matter Expert workshop. Ms. Gundy is working with Denise Dickerson with ICPC and Dorothy Hollahan with Continuous Quality Improvement to develop more e-learning around ICPC and the Quality Service Reviews. Lori Battin with CIP informed the group of an e-learning module she had created around the new court timelines and offered to share that with VDSS training.

Phyl Parrish spoke to the group about upcoming legislation for the next General Assembly session that will potentially impact the Division of Family Services. Ms. Parrish is aware of proposed legislation that will require VDSS to create a framework for Diversion activities and another stating a child in foster care cannot be removed from a relative placement without judicial consent. There may be proposed legislation around fostering to 21 that will include both foster care and adoption assistance. There may be legislation stating a child would remain in the custody of DSS even if they are committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice. There will be several pieces of proposed legislation from the Crime Commission including the creation of multidisciplinary teams for child abuse cases. Lelia Hopper, with CIP, informed the group of two more pieces of proposed legislation. One would be an attempt to provide funding to relatives and the other suggests an increase in payments to lawyers in child dependency cases.

Ms. Parrish spoke briefly about the Foster Care Appeals regulation. The General Assembly passed legislation last year requiring a foster care appeals regulation. This regulation went to the October board meeting for the Department of Social Services. Currently, Ms. Parrish is working on drafting guidance around the appeals process and she hopes to complete this guidance by the beginning of next year. Ms. Parrish clarified what could be appealed; and that is the denial or delay of services that are specified in a plan for a child. That includes CSA plans, prevention plans, independent living plans, and foster care plans. Ms. Parrish expects to see additional legislation to clarify what can be appealed.

Em Parente talked with the group about the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment tool and work that is currently happening around modifying the CANS for use in child welfare cases in Virginia. There is a federal recommendation around the use of “functional assessments” such as CANS. The tool must be standardized, valid, and reliable. Assessments are made on multiple domains of social-emotional functioning and administered periodically to assess changes over time. The tool should permit evaluation of the effectiveness of particular vendors or services as well. It should generate knowledge about the effect of maltreatment and trauma and evidence of effective treatment and should screen for and treat trauma associated with maltreatment and removal.

There is currently a joint effort between the Office of Comprehensive Services, VDSS, and local departments to review and improve child welfare and trauma assessment. There is a workgroup that is tasked with developing revised procedures, tools, and strategies for increasing the utility of CANS. There are goals of creating reporting that will allow the worker to view multiple periodic assessments in order to see changes and creation of a supervisory tool. The workgroup would like to improve the user instrument interface. The changes made to CANS will be reviewed by various stakeholder groups including the Trauma Informed Care Network which is made up of public and private mental health and child welfare providers.

There was time at the end of the meeting for a brief member roundtable. Lelia Hopper, with CIP, shared that there will be the state Best Practice Courts conference held in December. In addition, the court interface with OASIS began on October 1 and there is now sharing of foster care transmittals between local departments and the courts. There were some “bumps in the road” but those are being worked through.

The meeting adjourned at 1:00.