

Members present: Rick Verilla, Kiva Rogers, Bragail Williams Brown, Sharon Lindsay, Emily Womble, Christie Marra, Colby Ferguson, Rebecca Morgan, Deborah Eves, Tania White, Amy Atkinson, Donna Blythe, Rita Katzman, Traci Jones, Carol Wilson, Garry Cofield, Aleta Lawson, Abigail Schreiner, Cate Newbanks, Nicole Shimp, Phyllis Savides, Lori Battin, Lelia Hopper, Alex Kamberis, Carl Ayers, Jennifer Jones, Wilhelmina Davis, Melissa O’Neill, Shannon Brabham, Allison Lowry, Flora Harris, Jane Joyner, Melanie Galloway, Sherrika Fulgham, Denise Gallop

Carl Ayers, Family Services Division Director, called the meeting to order and the group provided introductions.

CWAC Structure

The Child Welfare Advisory Committee (CWAC) was formed as the stakeholder group for the first round of the Child and Family Services Review in 2003. The charter states the objectives of CWAC include:

1. Advise on child welfare program, policy, training and practice issues.
2. Advise on the development of the five year Child and Family Services Plan and annual progress reports as well as other state plans under the responsibility of Family Services.
3. Guide development and implementation of Virginia’s Program Improvement Plan for any element that Virginia does not meet requirements of the Child and Family Services Review.

It has been recommended that CWAC incorporate the work that was begun through the Three Branch Institute focusing on child well-being issues such as psychotropic medication monitoring and educational data sharing. The proposal is for CWAC to create three sub-committees; Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being; that can meet on an as needed basis to provide guidance and oversight. Action has been taken on the recommendations made from the Three Branch initiative. By incorporating these workgroups, CWAC will be assuming responsibility for holding the system accountable for the work that needs to be done on behalf of the children we work with.

The group was supportive of this idea and provided several suggestions. Those suggestions include:

- Incorporate the work of the health advisory committee (HPAC)
- Invite someone from the Three Branch Committee to provide a wrap up of accomplishments to CWAC
- Ensure data is shared and understood
- Ensure all the appropriate people are at the table, including a parent representative and someone from the Department of Education
- Invite J&DR judges and members of the General Assembly to attend a future CWAC meeting to they remain informed and involved

Because there was no opposition to changing the structure and objectives, the charter will be changed to reflect the decision. The charter will be shared with CWAC before the next meeting when those present can vote on the change.

Legislative update

Mr. Ayers provided a brief overview of legislation from this General Assembly session. The summary will include the bill number, the patron, and for this summary, SB is senate bill and HB is house bill.

SB 1423 Barker: If a child enters foster care and the father is unknown, LDSS is required to search the Putative Father Registry within 30 days of entry. The Putative Father Registry was previously searched before termination of parental only.

HB 1821 Farrell and SB 834 Martin: Information on post adoptive services will be provided when a new birth certificate is issued. DSS is creating a flyer to be used.

SB 947 Favola: Eliminates the requirement for workers to send a separate foster care plan to foster parents that does not include information related to why a child is not being returned home.

SB 967 Favola: Extend foster care to 21 years of age. Money for this was not included in the budget this year. The department is required to report to the General Assembly information on current efforts to help foster care children who age out of the system transition to adulthood and options to improve that transition. The report shall include current trends for this population as compared to the general population related to employment, secondary and post-secondary educational attainment, living arrangements, dependence on public assistance, early parenthood and family situations, health care access, and involvement with the criminal justice system to the extent data are available. Furthermore, the department shall analyze the adequacy of independent living services and other current efforts to assist foster care youth with the transition to independence and provide recommendations to modify the appropriate services and programs in order to improve outcomes for this population in their transition to adulthood.

SB 1095 McEachin: Specific exemption for a specific barrier crime involving a certain length of time and restoration of civil rights; those that qualify for the exemption can be considered for being a foster parent.

SB1117 Norment: Removes the “harmless error” in out of family investigations if the timeframes for CPS investigations are not followed. This could set a precedent in all CPS investigations that are appealed.

SB 1268 Deeds: For parental placement adoptions; if a child has been in the care of that family for five years or more, a judge can waive the home study, social worker visit, and counseling requirement.

Child and Family Services Review Round 3

Virginia will complete the third round of federal child and family services reviews (CFSR) in 2017. This round of reviews is structured differently than the first two rounds. States are allowed, in fact encouraged, to conduct their own state led reviews using the On-Site Review Instrument and on-line

database the feds have created. Virginia must submit a letter of intent to complete a state led review by July 2016. Because of the requirement to use the federal tools, Virginia will no longer utilize the Quality Service Reviews as a method of case review. Additionally, there has been a restructuring of the Quality Assurance and Accountability (QAA) unit within the Division of Family Services. The QAA unit is comprised of Title IV-E reviewers, CFSR reviewers, and a sub-recipient monitor. Staff that had been assigned to conduct Adoption Assistance Reviews have been reassigned to either the IV-E team or the CFSR team. The remaining Adoption Assistance reviews are scheduled to be completed by July 2015.

While the third round of the CFSR has some differences in the way it will be conducted, there are some requirements that are still in place. All states are still required to submit 65 cases; 40 foster care cases and 25 CPS in-home cases. States are no longer limited to just 65 cases and Virginia plans on submitting as many cases as feasible. There is still a requirement to interview the social worker, the birth parents, the child/children (age appropriate), and foster parents if applicable. There has been a decision made that states do not have to conduct focus groups if they can provide enough data to show substantial conformity with an indicator. The largest metropolitan area still must be included in the sample (sorry Fairfax). Virginia's period under review will begin October 1, 2016 and run through March 31, 2017. Cases active during that time period can be considered for this review.

There is a lot of planning that still needs to take place. Staff have been participating in regional conference calls to discuss implementation of the review. States like Delaware that are participating in the review this year have been gracious enough to share information.

Learning Collaboratives

Mr. Ayers led the discussion around Learning Collaboratives and provided some history around practice change in Virginia. Several questions were being asked. "Are people better off because of the interventions put in place?" "What does assessment, planning, and service delivery look like across the state?" While looking for a way to operationalize the Practice Model, Virginia looked to Ohio and Oregon and the practice profiles they created. These practice profiles define practice by showing examples of Good Practice, Developing Practice, and Unacceptable Practice in domains defined by the state. Virginia has a draft practice profile with 12 domains, including documentation and empowerment which are not currently in other state profiles.

Workers from twenty-one local departments have agreed to help develop the practice profiles and define practice across the state. Participating localities were asked to complete a community readiness assessment. Members of the eastern and central learning collaborative teams were present and shared some of their thoughts and experiences. One person indicated that local workers feel as if they have been engaged in the process and related the experience to how families should be engaged in planning. Rebecca Morgan, Director of Middlesex DSS, reported that she has incorporated this process throughout the department. All staff, not just child welfare, are attending trainings on Trauma Informed care and Family Partnership meetings. This process is "pushing practice" for that department already. Rick Verilla, Assistant Director with York Poquoson DSS indicated he believed this is a paradigm shift for CPS workers. For so long, the focus has been only on safety. Now, the focus has to be on engaging families

while maintaining safety. Christie Marra, with the Poverty Law center, offered to share their resources with localities to help with legal issues families may encounter.

The discussion broadened to more general education of social workers and schools of social worker in Virginia. Mr. Ayers announced that Virginia has just gotten permission to restart the Child Welfare Stipend program. This program provides stipends to full time social work students who are willing to work in local departments doing child welfare work for a set period of time. This program does not cover current staff who are returning to get a social work degree. The program will start at Norfolk State and after a year will expand to the other accredited schools of social work in Virginia.

Adoption Negotiators

Traci Jones, Adoption Program Manager, informed the group that the adoption program has successfully hired four out of the five Adoption Negotiator positions and is ready to move forward with developing and piloting the negotiation process. The role of the negotiators involves technical assistance for the purpose of negotiating adoption assistance. There will be three phases toward statewide implementation, which is scheduled to take place July 1, 2015. The first phase (60 days) is piloting the program. The second phase (30 days) will include development and evaluation. The third phase will be full implementation (July 1, 2015). The team will solicit feedback from each region and make adjustments as needed.

The pilot is scheduled to begin April 1, 2015 and will take place in two local departments in each region. The negotiators will evaluate the needs, develop protocols and begin to draft guidance for adoption negotiations. The following agencies have been identified as pilot agencies: Central region, Henrico and Prince Edward County; Eastern region, Gloucester and Norfolk; Northern region, Harrisonburg-Rockingham and Arlington; Piedmont region, Roanoke County and Shenandoah Valley; and Western region, Radford and Wise County. The negotiators will schedule to visit the departments and meet with supervisors and services staff. The current staff will assist with the Northern region until staff is hired.

Extending Foster Care to 21

Mr. Ayers led the group in a discussion about what the next steps will be in planning to extend foster care to youth past the age of 18. There are currently 150 youth that we are serving without a cost code and the question is how to transition those youth from receiving foster care services to receiving independent living services. We cannot pay for congregate care or group home placements for youth over the age of 18. Mr. Ayers has spoken with the League and at supervisor's meetings to encourage appropriate step down of children who are currently in congregate care and encourage alternative placements to congregate care for youth in this situation.

One idea that has been discussed is to support youth with an independent living stipend and supervision in their former foster homes. This would have to be approved by the local FAPT team. Another idea is to have a meeting with representatives from therapeutic foster families to begin the discussion around creating an independent living setting that could be utilized by these youth.

The meeting ended at 1:00. The next meeting will be held May 15, 2015.