

The mission of MCWAP is to assure that the state system is meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families through assessment, research, case reviews, advocacy, and greater citizen involvement. Our goal is to promote child safety and quality services for children, youth, and families.

Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel Minutes

April 3, 2020 / 9am-11am

Zoom Meeting

Co-Chair: Bobbi Johnson (Absent)

Co-Chair: Deb Dunlap

Panel Coordinator: Heidi Landry- Interim

Present: Deb Dunlap, Betsy Boardman, Deb McSweeney, Lanelle Freeman, Christine Hufnagel, Jim Jacobs, Travis Bryant, Erin Witham, Alana Jones, Kelly Del Aquilla, Esther Anne, Chris Bicknell, Sarah Minzy, Cindy Seekins, Annette Macaluso

Meeting minutes: Unanimous vote to accept March meeting minutes.

Member updates: Betsy provided updates on PC and TPR cases related to pandemic management order changes. <https://www.courts.maine.gov/covid19/pmo-tc-1-3-30-20.pdf>. YLAT groups are active and information can be found on website and Facebook page. <https://www.ylat.org/>. HCI is working on virtual visitation and building capacity for accommodating technology in Districts 1-5. Maine Families Home Visiting has transitioned to virtual visits and is accepting referrals. CAN Councils are providing programming for parent on Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/MaineChildrensTrust>

Breakout Groups: Panel members continued discussing priority areas, Family Quality Engagement and Developmental/Behavioral Health, in breakout sessions.

Developmental/Behavioral Health Breakout:

Focused on educational resources/training for resource parents/caregivers regarding children in resource care with developmental disabilities.

Topics discussed, still information gathering and question development:

- Looking at what is currently being done at OCFS and in the Muskie project – connecting with Gina Googins and others who are addressing this currently to gain insight so we are not duplicating an already developed process
- We should look at policies as they currently stand and also find out what policies are being updated through Muskie.
- Possible meeting with licensing and training staff at OCFS to see what needs they are identifying
- Accessing support groups for resource and kinship parents to gather information? AFFM – Travis; Putting together a focus group to gather more information
- What were the results of the town halls completed relative to concerns regarding training and information access?
- Is there any accountability for training and licensing expectations? How do we develop and allow optimal access for parents based on child's needs?

- What curriculums currently exist to address these concerns: Pride, Tips, etc. Is there a national model?
- How do we achieve individualized assessments for each child to direct optimal resources?
- Possible meeting with licensing and training staff at OCFS to see what needs they are identifying
- Accessing support groups for resource and kinship parents to gather information? AFFM – Travis; Putting together a focus group to gather more information
- Is there any accountability for training and licensing expectations? How do we develop and allow optimal access (in person, webinars, etc) for parents based on child's needs?

Next Steps: Deb McSweeney will reach out to OCFS for some information and bring back to group to discuss.

Family Quality Engagement Breakout: See attachment for notes.

Annual Report updates: Annual report is in the process of final edits and waiting for OCFS responses to recommendations. When final draft is ready, Annual Report workgroup will send to the panel for a vote.

Annual Retreat: MCWAP annual retreat is scheduled for Friday, September 11, 2020 at Maple Hill. Blake Jones, national leader and expert on Citizen Review Panels, is scheduled to join us. We will make a final decision on the retreat in August.

Website Updates: Betsy is leading coordination and will send email to group working on content development so everyone is on the same page. Still need to identify a CDSIRP point person for page content. Goal is for launch at the end of June, but deadlines can be flexible under the current circumstances.

OCFS Updates: Group requested Bobbi send updates before next meeting via email.

Next Steps:

Action	Lead
Finalize draft of Annual Report and share with Panel for approval	Annual Report Subcommittee, Bobbi
Identify CDSIRP point person for website content. Convene meeting among three workgroups (CJTF, CDSIRP, MCWAP) to coordinate content for new website	Bobbi, Betsy
Share OCFS updates via email before next meeting	Bobbi
Invite Christine Theriault to future Panel meeting to review FFPSA and progress	Executive Committee

Next meeting: May 1st, 2020

Family Engagement Discussion Notes

April 3, 2020

1. **Documentation provided at assessment** - Reviewed questions about OCFS policies and procedures regarding documents provided to family members that would like to discuss with Bobbi:

- We need to be sure we have all the most current versions electronically.
- What is the protocol for distribution? When are they given, how frequently are they provided, and what is the process (is it just left or reviewed with parent/s)?
Response from Bobbi 4/10/2020 via email: Staff document in the record that these are provided to the family. Practice expectations are that they would explain what each brochure is to the family. I don't believe they would revisit this unless the family had questions at a later date.
- Which caregivers receive these? Are fathers provided with these documents if first contact with them is later?

2. **Documentation provided by Courts** - Reviewed *A Guide for Families in Child Protection Cases* handed out by courts (available at https://www.courts.maine.gov/maine_courts/family/child-protect-main.html)

Feedback

- Would be helpful to add information about ICWA, particularly explanation of the different attorneys involved in an ICWA case which causing confusion (e.g., GAL, Qualified Expert Witness)
- Recommend adding more timeframes to help parents understand the process. For example, number of days for different steps can help families understand the time involved.
- Are there translated versions? How are they made accessible (Betsy is going to check)
- The reading level is about grade 8, although they try to 4th grade. Challenging with the legal jargon.
- Parent Partners and IPV advocates hand out the document to families when it is appropriate, but primarily use it as a reference when talking with families. Often caregivers are not in a place to read/take in materials like this.
- Recommend adding substance misuse and mental health information as well, since those are frequently needed resources.
 - Also might be helpful if there was a place for information about IPV advocates and Parent Partner programs
- Could be more user friendly and have more visuals.

Questions

- The document might also be helpful for older youth—is it distributed to them? Is it available for internal OCFS staff working with older youth? If they use it, how?
- Has there been an effort to get the document and information out to community agencies that also work with families? It might be helpful to hold education sessions for the general community about Child Welfare. ICWA workgroup is doing something similar with the tribes (see attached summary from Esther Anne.)

3. Follow up

- Betsy and Jamie reviewing content of court doc for any needed updates
- Case flow visual sent to Betsy as example
- Erin to type notes, share with group, and send questions to Bobbi

The following follow up items were discussed at the March meeting and remain outstanding except where noted:

- All members will review the DHHS documents that are handed out to parents at the assessment.
- I will email this list the court documents that are handed out. (reviewed at April meeting)
- We are asking DHHS for clarity on when the current documents are handed out to parents. (who and when?)
- Legal requirements doc by Betsy and Libby.

Protect the Children

Wolankeyuwon Wasisok ~ Wali-nenawelamak Atwassisak

All our children deserve a strong, protective circle of caring adults to make sure they are loved, safe and connected to their community, tribe and culture; our continued tribal existence depends on it.

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 is a federal law that recognizes how important tribal connection is. ICWA provides extra protection for native children involved in state child welfare and views the tribe as that child's third parent. ICWA was passed in response to the high rates of native children that were being removed from their tribes and raised in non-native homes.

There are many ways to become part of the protective circle for our children who cannot be with their own families; helping them maintain connection to their tribe. Learning about and sharing information about Indian child welfare is one way to help, here are some other ways:

- *Nikiigook* ~ **Foster Families** provide love and care to children who are not able to be with their own families, they play an important role in helping children and families reunite and in ensuring the child maintains a connection to their tribal community.
- *Nenawelaket* ~ **Respite Care** providers care for children who are either in foster care or with their own families; respite care is usually for a weekend to give parents a break and sometimes is a first step in deciding to become a foster family.
- *Nenawelaket* ~ **CASA Volunteers** serve as Guardians ad litem (GAL) for children who are in the child welfare system. CASA volunteers interview the child, family members, and others and provide a report to the judge about what is in the best interest of the child. The GAL works for the child and is usually an attorney.
- *Namihawet* ~ **Qualified Expert Witnesses** provide testimony in court about the specific facts of each case, focusing on the child's needs and considering the cultural and social standards and child rearing practices of the child's tribe. The QEW also looks at how well the state did in providing active efforts and culturally relevant services to the family.
- *T'ankeyuwal* ~ **Community Hosts** are those who agree to be hosts or guides for children and their foster families, welcoming them into the community, taking them to community events and sharing their community and cultural knowledge.

For more information about how you can become part of the circle and help Protect the Children, please contact Tribal child welfare staff in your community or ICWA Workgroup staff person Esther Anne at 615-3189 or esther.anne@maine.edu