

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

December 4th, 2020 / 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.

Virtual: Meeting held over Zoom

Co-Chair: Bobbi Johnson

Co-Chair: Deb Dunlap

Panel Coordinator: Kathryn Brice

Agenda

9:00 a.m.- Welcome and Introductions

Virtual attendance: Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Deb Dunlap, Bobbi Johnson, Annette Macaluso, Andrea Mancuso, Ashley McAllister,

Cindy Seekins, Julia Simmons, Gina Googins, Ashley McAllister, Adrienne Carmack, Ahmen Cabral, Andrea Mancuso, Annette Macaluso, Betsy Boardman, Bobbi Johnson, Brittany Raven, Chris Bicknell, Christine Hufnagel, Cindy Seekins, Deb McSweeney, Erin Whitman, Deb Dunlap, Esther Anne, Jim Jacobs, Jamie Brooks, Jean Youde, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Lanelle Freeman, Lyn Carter, Marie Briggs, Libby McCullum, Tammy Roy

9:10 a.m.- New Business

Caseworker Training Discussion: The Panel heard from Julia Simmons, OCFS Policy and Training Specialist, and Gina Googins, Regional Associate Director, regarding training that is offered to OCFS staff. Julia reviewed the Foundations training, which the Panel had heard about last month. She reminded the Panel that the 5-week training is mandatory for new OCFS and ARP caseworkers, and involves training modules, opportunities to hear from subject matter experts and field observation. This year, 7 rounds of this training have been provided to 136 new staff.

Aside from Foundations training, new caseworkers must also complete several other trainings within their first year of hire: Legal Training, which is provided by AAGs and covers case flow, discovery, factual documentation, etc; Intro to ICWA, which explores ICWA laws, historical trauma, working collaboratively with the tribes, etc.; Social Work Ethics, which provides an in-depth look at the Social Work Code of Ethics and explores values and standards; Psychosocial Assessment, which offers information around how to best gather information and write such assessments; CW Trauma Training, which highlights trauma as it relates to families involved with CPS as well as recognizing vicarious trauma and exploring self-care techniques; and Children's Behavioral Health Services, which explores levels of care and how to access appropriate care. Caseworkers must also complete the Infant Abuse Prevention training, offered online by the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital, as well as several DHHS-wide online trainings covering topics related to confidentiality, health information, privacy, security, ergonomics, etc.

Additionally, 40+ different trainings are offered to staff and management each year. OCFS and the Cutler Institute are also working to incorporate a learning management system which will, amongst other things, help keep track of the trainings that staff have participated in.

The group discussed the work being done around preventing children from entering care, including the Family First legislation and the Plan of Safe Care, a federal initiative that mandates each state to have a plan for infants who are born substance exposed. The Department also highlighted the internal work that is being done around the topic of preventing removal, including recent analyses examining the reasons children are entering care and the barriers to exiting care, as well as exploring the cases where children have entered and exited custody within 30 days.

Members of the Panel discussed the importance of providing appropriate training to resource families, who often have little experience in managing some of the challenges that youth in care face. In addition, the Panel highlighted the importance of training caseworkers to support resource families navigate these systems. OCFS discussed the Resource Family Introductory Training (RFIT) and reported that the Cutler Institute is working in union with OCFS to research different training models that could be offered to resource families. OCFS also discussed a new adoption training model that rolled out recently, which includes topics around preparing for adoption, grief and loss, relationships with birth families, etc.

The Panel asked what is expected of staff in terms of ongoing training. OCFS reported that ongoing training can vary- sometimes mandatory trainings are offered, but staff can also elect to participate in non-mandatory trainings. There are also efforts being made, in conjunction with HR, to improve the professional development component of performance evaluations, which could include recommended trainings for staff to improve their practice.

Lastly, members wondered about the training offered to caseworkers regarding case closures for families where domestic violence is a concern. OCFS reported that the SDM tool helps inform workers on the risks associated with certain factors and provides a guideline for where a case may be headed. Safety Plans were also discussed by the group, as was the desire for OCFS and MCEVD to continue to partner in providing training on supporting survivors to navigate relationships once the Department is no longer involved. OCFS highlighted its desire to support families in being successful after our involvement and discussed the efforts that are currently being made to explore this topic. For example, a recent analysis found that after 12 months, the rate of children who remain reunified with their family was 84% statewide; the Department is working to better understand this data in order to increase this measure. The Department is also hopeful that funding will be allocated from the Family First initiative to support families after children return home.

The group decided that it would be helpful to have Gina return at our next meeting to discuss OCFS policy in greater detail. Resources that the Panel might be interested in were also shared:

Family First: www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/family-first-act.shtml

Adoption Training: www.adoption-support.org/nti

Workgroup Meetings: The Panel discussed the use of breakout rooms. The Executive Committee explained that the groups can call in the coordinator to their breakout rooms at any time, if questions arise. Subcommittees were also encouraged to meet outside of these MCWAP meetings, if additional work needed to be completed.

With that, the Subcommittees broke out into separate Zoom rooms to work on their topics. Once the breakout groups rejoined the main group, they were asked to provide updates to the Panel:

1. Family-centered policy and Practice

Kelly, Betsy, Lyn, Lanelle, Brittany, Esther, Jamie, Annette, Andrea, Christine

The breakout session was mostly centered around a discussion of the intersection of Family Law and PC (Child Protection) cases, specifically as they relate to survivors of domestic violence. The group discussed how we can support these families in a more holistic way and ensure that the family dynamics are being considered both when a case is open as well as when it is closing.

The team is thinking about a sort of training series to explore these topics, including parallel parenting and supporting survivors through the transition from PC to Family Matters. The group also wishes to incorporate other cultural perspectives and will likely be inviting representatives from other populations to join in the conversations.

2. Effective communication/coordination for the care of children entering the system

Alana, Cindy, Jim, Ahmen, Deb McSweeney, Marie

The group is waiting to receive binders from each OCFS office; they're hopeful that these binders will provide a better understanding of what information is being shared and what may be lacking. They will also be reaching out to various groups (resource parent advisory group, AFFM, etc.) to inquire about what information would be helpful. Additionally, they will be researching how other states coordinate effective communication when children are removed.

The team will be inviting Hope Tormey and Becky Richardson of OCFS to join their group next month. The committee is hoping to gather a better understanding of what is happening at the supervisory level in each district and how their efforts can be collaborative.

Lastly, the group highlighted their desire to include older youth in understanding what information they would like to have shared.

3. Child welfare staff training

Erin, Ashley, Travis, Jean, Chris, Libby

The team reported that since hearing from both training units (Cutler Institute and OCFS), they've begun talking about drafting some recommendations. The bulk of what they'll be focusing on is the ongoing training requirements for staff and will be looking at how to extend learning and bolster what is already in place.

There was interest in the group around supervisory training and the support that is available for new supervisors. They are hoping to connect with Julia again to further discuss this with her.

The Subcommittees were reminded that they are more than welcome to invite guests to the breakout rooms in future meetings.

10:50 a.m.- Standing Agenda Items

Approval of November 2020 Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve minutes from November 2020 meeting.

OCFS Updates: OCFS explained that the updates this month focused on what the Department has done in response to the Panel's 2019 recommendations. The impact of COVID was also discussed, including how the Department is continuing to collaborate with partnered agencies (transportation, ARP, CAC, visit supervisors, etc.) to ensure that each agency's activities are being preserved while also keeping children, families and staff safe. The Department continues to work very closely with the CDC to ensure that OCFS is complying with the guidelines set forth by the Center. Work is also being done to educate staff to better understand the definitions being used by the CDC, including "close contact", "isolation", etc.

The Panel asked if caseworkers are considered frontline staff, and if so, whether they will have priority in receiving the vaccine. OCFS explained that the pandemic seems to have fueled an ongoing conversation about whether child protection workers are considered first responders; despite this, it appears that the first round of vaccines will only be going to medical facilities.

The Department is also collaborating with the AG's office in conversations around youth in care receiving the vaccine. OCFS explained that since March, approximately 6 children in care were presumed positive, while 25 tested positive- this amounts to approximately 1% of the total number of children in care. The Office has also tracked symptoms of these children as well: most of them were asymptomatic or experienced minor symptoms, though 1 child, who has since recovered, was admitted to the hospital. That same child also tested positive again in the months following the first diagnosis, but there has been some question around the validity of that result as we now know that re-tests should not occur within a 3-month window of a positive test. In all, the Department is very grateful that children in care seem to be staying safe and healthy and are also thankful that there haven't been any major outbreaks in residential facilities housing children.

11:00 a.m.- Adjourn and Next Steps

The Panel was reminded that the Report Writing Subcommittee is asking for quotes from members about their work on the Panel.

Kathryn will provide a list of trainings to the Panel, once received from Julia Simmons

Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, January 8th, 2020, 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.