

# **State Advisory Council Meeting**

**October 22, 2021 - 8:30am to 1:00pm (In-person Meeting)**  
**Delta Colonial Hotel - Capitol Conference Room**

**Present:** Acting Chairwoman Rochelle Beley, Julie Feck, Heather Denny, Christy Hendricks, Brenda Schye, Ken Holmlund, Julie Burk, Randy Schwickert

**CFSD Representatives Present:** Nikki Grossberg, Jennifer Hoerauf, Laura McCullough, Effie Benoit, Eric Barnosky, Deb Cole, Jennifer Blodgett, Theresa Becker, Lynne Johnston

**Absent:** Mick Leary, Sahrita Jones-Jesse, Courtney Callaghan, April Sommers, Detective Schoenfelder, Carrie Krepps, Dana Toole, Greg Daly, Lisa Evers, Loretta Rex, Megan Bailey, Mercedes Oxford Kemp, Judge Randall Spaulding, Traci Perez, Trudi Schmidt, Wayne Phillips, Valerie Winfield, Laura Sebulsky, Gabby Wheeler

## **8:30 – 8:50am          Welcome, Introductions and Approve Minutes**

Acting Chairwoman Rochelle Beley called the meeting to order at 8:30am. Rochelle Beley asked everyone to introduce themselves. Rochelle Beley asked for a motion to approve the July 23, 2021 minutes. All approved. Since a quorum of 51% was not reached at this meeting, an email will be sent out to members to vote on approval of the minutes and the CJA Budget. If anyone would like to be on the Board, please contact Nikki. Nikki reported that we are not able to have this meeting in the Arcade Building due to the size of the conference room. Nikki will see about arranging to have a Hybrid system by the next meeting. Let Nikki know if this is an option anyone would like to consider. Ken Holmlund attended a meeting that had a Hybrid System. There were challenges, but the issues were worked out and the system went smoothly for them.

## **8:50 – 9:50am          CFSD Update – Nikki Grossberg**

The State Advisory Council will provide Child and Family Services with guidance about what is working or not working in their communities or around the state. Historically, we would report out to the State Advisory Council. We would like the member's input on what is happening in their areas. We are at the end of our third round of the Prevention Plan and will start the new round in November. In the next review, we will see how things are working for everyone and how we can improve the system.

Nikki updated everyone on the following items:

- Marti Vining is no longer with CFSD so she can have more time to spend with her family. Nikki is taking over as Acting Administrator of CFSD until a replacement can be hired;
- Jason Larson of Region 3 has retired with Deb Cole taking over his duties;
- Angie Rolando of Region 6 has resigned in order to concentrate on law school, with Jennifer Blodgett replacing her;
- Adam Meier, Director of DPHHS, has done restructuring within our departments. Our branch was changed to the Social Economics Branch with Nikki being under the direction of Erica Johnston who now has 5 divisions – two of which are Child and Family Services and Early Child and Family Services which is a newer division focused on childhood and family support.
- Laura Smith has moved to Intermountain Children's Home as their new director;
- Effie Benoit is the new Fiscal Program Bureau Chief;
- Christy Hendricks, Office of Public Instruction, is taking over as interim contact person replacing Heather Denny;

- Child Welfare 101 training is in progress. The Safety Model, which educates people on how we do what we do and how we assess families, is being reviewed. If we do not get our data out there, people tend to make assumptions on what our data is, so we want it to be accurate. Training is on the state and regional levels and so far has been in Butte and Miles City. Six more trainings are upcoming with four of those including safety signs. The next trainings will be in Bozeman October 26, Kalispell October 27, Great Falls November 2 and Billings November 3. Child Welfare 101 trainings will be in Missoula and Helena but will not have the safety training. Christy Hendricks asked Nikki if there is anything she should do to help . Nikki would appreciate any assistance from her.
- Nikki talked about the CPS reports to Child and Family Services. The number of calls coming into Centralized Intake had dropped during the COVID season, but has increased since the return of normalcy to the system.
  - There were 10,935 calls in 2019, 10,272 in 2020 and 9,328 in 2021;
  - Nikki discussed the types of allegations for FY21 which has increased since SFY18;
  - Kids in care has been trending down. SFY19 was 3,950 and 3505 in SFY20;
  - Removal Rate has gone down from 10.6% to 8% with SFY19 2,399, 2000 in SFY20 and 1,813 in SFY21;
  - Updated prevention plan procedures are to focus and correlate with the Safety Model;
  - State and Regional Removal Rates were shown trending the up and downs;
  - Number of children removed by age were compared for SFY20 to SFY21;
  - Permanency outcomes were compared for SFY19, 2020 and 2021 in relation to reunification, adoption and guardianship;
  - Exits and Entries of kiddos beginning in SYF19 was shown from into and out of system.

What does a successful child welfare system look like? What are we trying to achieve?

- Increased knowledge and reduced bias/stigma around substance use disorders;
- Increased use of community prevention services;
- Data-driven decision making;
- System Approach to improvement;
- The right children in foster care for the right amount of time;
- Safety reduced number of children in foster care;
- Reduce number of child fatalities caused by abuse or neglect;
- Resilient child welfare workforce.

Nikki answered questions from members on her discussion. She did not have any information at hand for the federal data point but will get the information and send it out to everyone.

Surveys recently administered:

- Wellness Survey;
- Workforce Survey in November;
- Survey in August with another group on developing a wellness program based on feedback from our staff;
- Employment Assistance program is available to staff;
- Nikki will have more information at the next meeting in January;

- Next step is to start focus groups.

#### Training

- On the workforce trend with legislation, we have a requirement for child welfare workers being certified. We have administrative rules to support that legislation;
- Montana Child Abuse Neglect Training;
- The Regional Training is a three-week program where we have added a variety of additional trainings with our partnership with UofM. We go out to our regions and begin training in an in-depth manner;
- The MCAN Training focuses on our Safety Model;
- Enhanced Visitation Training;
- In our Child Advocacy Center, we make sure the staff understands how it operates;
- Training is also available online;
- Workforce Training in the first year;
- Annual Supervisor Training has four modules with some learning teams in between. Two of the modules focus on leadership about child welfare, two on the safety model and the practice model when children come into care.

A Bill was passed that if rules are changed in the interim there is nothing we can do about the interim but we can review all those changes when legislation comes back into session.

Families First is a five-year plan that started in 2018. States have the option to use the Title IV-E Prevention Plan that was originally submitted last November 2020. First feedback was received in June 2021, resubmitted and the second round of feedback in September/October. This plan allows us to draw a Title IV-E reimbursement at 50% for specific models that are through the Clearing House for specific families who agree to work with us on a prevention plan. Our final plan will be submitted in January with a year of data collection. We had Title IV-B and now Title IV-E in order to serve families.

Two focuses:

- Preventing kids from coming into foster care, and
- Increasing the requirement for kids going into therapeutic group home level of care.

#### **9:50-10:10am Budget Update – Effie Benoit**

Effie Benoit gave a brief background on her experience before beginning her presentation on the budget update:

- There have been 3,236 children in foster care since June 30, 2021 with 27 children exiting;
- IV-E saturation rate has increased by half of a percent over last quarter;
- Foster care benefit payments were at \$22.4 million last year with \$14.2 million from state general fund and \$6.2 million from Federal IV-E;
- The current year has \$30.8 million and will spend \$27.3 million for foster care payments;
- There was \$19.9 million for adoption payments last year with appropriations of \$27.9 million for FY 22. We are expected to spend \$22.3 million with 3,149 children in adoption placement;
- There are 1,157 children in guardianship with \$5.5 million in funds and will spend \$6 million;
- Money will be transferred from one fund to another if needed;

- There are 38 vacant positions – 23 CPS workers, 1 supervisor position and 3 Centralized Intake workers as September 30;
- CFSD Financial for FY 21 spent \$105.4 million with 54% on benefits and 32% in personal services;
- SFY22 has \$115.5 million and projected to spend \$108 million;
- Will be spending less under our appropriations in each of our budget sources.

COVID Relief Funding – There is a lot of interest in how we are spending this money.

CARES Act – March 2020

- Domestic Violence (spent \$102,144 of \$111,582 - by end of year, it will all be spent) – This money is a FVPSA grant and is very specific about what it can be spent on;
- Title IV-B had \$108,741 that has all been spent;
- Guardianship and Foster Care funding had \$2,754,850 funds obligated by 12/31/2020 that also went to therapeutic group homes and shelter care. Additional funding was provided through Medicaid or different divisions.

Funding from CAA (Consolidated Appropriations Act) passed December 2020

- Chafee Education and Training Vouchers Program (\$432,971 and spent \$201,292)
- Chafee transition to adulthood (\$2.9 million and spent \$1.8 million)

CRRSAA Act – December 2020. We did not receive any of this funding.

ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) – Domestic Violence received \$376,207 and spent \$10,790 so far;

CAPTA (\$310,00 which none has been spent, we have until 2025 to use)

Nikki reviewed the Children Bureau expenditures. Will get this information out by email to everyone.

Children Adjustments Act of 2022 is \$94,000. \$3,000 admin, \$4,000 CJA task force, \$15,000 CANN conference, \$20,000 for trainings, \$4,000 Expert Witness training, \$25,000 to Children’s Advocacy Funding plus \$50,000 in mini grants.

Deb Cole discussed her opinion of the three-year survey. She felt very ill-prepared because the questions were so specific and did not relate to her position.

Motion to approve expenditures. Brenda Schye motioned and seconded by Rochelle Beley. All approved.

**10:10-10:30am        BREAK**

**10:30-11:30am        Reports by Regional Administrators**

**Region 1: Eric Barnosky**

- The Family Support Team Coordinator needs to become very knowledgeable in all of our communities about who the service providers are so they can work together as a team;
- Region 1 has had 64 meetings so far this fiscal year in all services. COVID has allowed them to have meetings virtually which is great for this region in order to bring people together. This method works great for them, and they will continue with it;
- They have an MOA that is being amended to continue their relationship with tribes and CFSD. This agreement has been in force for 10 years. Before 2011, whoever got the report was the one who handled the case. Now, there is a specific person assigned;

- When a request is made, they reach out to Churches who respond back to CFSD if services can be donated;
- They had Child Welfare training in Miles City two weeks ago. Good turn-out from counselors, schools, foster parents, judges, attorneys, and service providers;
- Dawson County is in the Court Improvement project and will be using current facilitators. She is interested in moving forward with the pre-hearing conferences with Judge Meeker. Will be hiring additional facilitators;
- CASA is expanding their territory as far northeast as possible;
- HB 39 has expedited their emergency protective services hearing dates and expanding language.

### **Region 2: Sahrita Jones-Jessee**

- No update is available since Sahrita is on vacation.

### **Region 3: Deb Cole**

- Deb Cole is taking over for Jason Larson, who has retired;
- Care Portal was on wayside with COVID but was reinstated two weeks ago in Billings;
- Family Support Team (FST) was started January 2021. If there is an immediate danger, action is taken to FST within three days which parents need to agree to. Usually have two to three each week;
- An increase in the number of protection plans are in motion;
- Child 101 training was on November 3;
- EPS Hearings have been in process since 2019. Previously, the pre-hearings were on Tuesday and Thursday and in court by following Tuesday. The major change is that they are done every day now. Another change is that the judge who starts a case hearing will see it through to the end which has a positive impact on families;
- The ICWA court is in the EPS hearing system now under Judge Souza handling removals in Northern Cheyenne, Crow and Fort Peck tribes. An ICWA expert is always available. Judge Davies handles removals from all other tribes;
- There has been an increase in parenting time;
- Family Recovery Court has incorporated ICWA Recovery Court which is done weekly. Parent has to be requested and screened to be in the weekly ICWA Recovery Court since it is more intensive and will be committed for 12 months. Focus is to get kids back into the home quicker;
- A new change is the Direct Intern Program so we are able to get interns from Montana State in Billings for their education on child welfare;
- The regular judges are Fehr, Harada, Davies, Harris, Mauldin, and Souza does the ICWA court.

### **Region 4: Laura McCullough and Jennifer Hoerauf**

- Laura McCullough recently took over the supervision of Centralized Intake hotline. They are having joint meetings with the different providers to see what can be done to build the gap between what was happening at the hotline and in the field. Centralized Intake workers have been going out in the field for cross training in order to see the other side of the hotline calls;

- Laura brought in Molly Malloy who is providing the Masterwork Social Program at Carroll College to speak about that secondary piece on how we can support each other;
- Internally, their office has created a resiliency working with the workforce available;
- Had a meeting about the new program RE Family Services that focuses on RV vacation efforts;
- Region 6 had 65 kids in adoptions and 46 in guardianship which is significantly high;
- Butte has the Meadowlark Program that has pregnant women coming in with substance abuse, violence, or mental health concerns who need intervention on developing plans in place due to their ongoing substance abuse or other conditions;
- Judge Berger is becoming involved in implementation of the pre-hearing conferences;
- Livingston is trying to rebuild their CDC Center.

### **Region 5: Courtney Callaghan**

Courtney is on vacation so there is no update available.

### **Region 6: Jennifer Blodgett**

- Jennifer Blodgett gave an update on her experience and background;
- The Kalispell office has large turnover. There is a struggle in finding available housing;
- There are four judges in Flathead county with weekly EPS hearings. In the outlying areas, they had one hearing which was quite a struggle;
- During COVID many resources were lost, but trying to get this improved;
- Concentrating on the Protection and Prevention Plan with eight families in Kalispell;
- In Kalispell, the Montana Children's House resource is available;
- Have had six babies in the past 4 months due to child abuse;
- They had Child Welfare 101 training November 27;
- Ken Holmlund asked about hospital rules. The State follows the same rules that is expected of the parents. Jennifer is trying to get a system going.

### **11:30 Lunch Break**

#### **11:50am Resource Parent/Licensing Bureau – Theresa Becker**

One of the initiatives that came as a result of the five year Child and Family Services plan was the Parent Advisory Board which has been meeting for about a year. The board sent out applications in the foster parent community to apply. They had a core group of 10 individuals to give us feedback about the work we do in foster care licensing and child welfare. They are currently working on their bylaws. Kyla Rock is the Permanency Program Manager of the ICPC unit. They are looking at the KCS training which is the training following the pre-service training that foster parents complete. The small things they can do is identify a guest down the road or what kind of information we want them to have. Also, what kind of information they can provide back to us on how they are impacting them and their lives and their communities and ways to do the job more effectively. The core group meets virtually on Tuesday night after dinner.

Licensing on fingerprint background checks has always been challenging trying to make the fingerprint background check consistent. Some of the highlights of background checks are:

- Safety and well-being of kiddos;
- 11 scan machines across the state in order to get results back in days;

- Virtual training is available;
- Identifying barriers and how to mitigate them;
- Doing everything we can to be creative;
- Community cultural families;
- Stability to permanency;
- Increased permanency to 11 weeks of adoption;
- We work with tribes and families to be approved for adoption or guardianship;
- Continue to work on permanency.

Brenda Schye asked what percentage of adoption are subsidized? Theresa responded that the majority are subsidized but did not have that figure. Amounts vary according to each specific adoption case.

**11:50am Charlie Health – Laura Sebulsky**

Laura will report at next meeting in January since she was unable to attend today. Rochelle Beley mentioned some of the good aspects of Charlie Health and the good they do for the child welfare system.

**11:50am-12:15pm Community Discussion Report Out – All Board Members**

- Rochelle Beley discussed how other therapists treat the department and how they are against them by doing too much or not enough. Rochelle feels that she should advocate the department and talk about our rules and regulations.
- Julie Fleck of Integrated Health expressed that she is impressed with what is happening with the foster parents. The department as a whole keeps innovating and moving forward with new methods in a difficult climate right now in terms of hiring.
- Brenda Schye said that Nikki and Marti have made it possible when it comes to additional positions and initiatives.
- Jennifer Hoerauf said Valley County feels more isolated because people are disappointed in their community and their denial about COVID. It has been disheartening to know that nobody is talking about Child and Family Services, they are a family. Our state is the highest in the nation in terms of cases and our county is the highest in the state. They still hammer the health department like it is their fault. There should be more compassion.
- Ken Holmlund said the most effective conversations they get in is from the parents on a one-on-one basis. He would like to get the word out to people. They hear the negative more than the positive.
- Jennifer said parents are important in court. Parents who come to testify are disgruntled. They say it is up to the department to get them out of their situation.
- Theresa Becker mentioned that Kyla Rock and Jeff would like to make contact with the birth parents to bring them in and see about their participation. We would like to have more birth parents and youth on the board. If anyone you know would like to be on the board, let Nikki know and an application will be sent out.
- Christy Hendricks said we need better communication with Brandy on what the kids need. There is a huge communication with Brandi going over foster care data on kids who are a concern such as kids not showing up, kids saying they are home-schooled, are out of state and other various excuses. Need to close communication gap and work together with these kids' issues. Christy sent Brandi a concern spreadsheet so she is able to talk to others so they and everyone can be on the same pages. A foster care dashboard is out there for all the schools to look at. They started a foster care newsletter. There

has been an increase of calls from caseworkers. Heather Denny would prefer that caseworkers call the minute the school gets obnoxious and they can take care of it.

**12:15-12:30pm      Public Comment:**

There were no public comments.

**12:30pm              Wrap Up/Next Meeting: Acting Chairwoman Rochelle Beley**

Meeting date for the next meeting has not been set yet, but will be in January. Rochelle asked everyone to turn in travel vouchers to Lynne to get reimbursed for travel expenses. Meeting was adjourned at 12:30pm.