

Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF) Oversight Board

Board Meeting Record

Thursday, April 15, 2021 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m., virtual meeting

Member Attendance: Ben de Haan, Charles Loeffler, Diane Liebe, Jeannie Darneille, Lois Martin, Ruth Kagi, Shrounda Selivanoff, Tana Senn, Tom Dent

Staff in Attendance: Crista Johnson (*Executive Director*), Nickolaus Colgan (*Administrative Coordinator*)

Public in Attendance: Patrick Dowd, *Office of the Family and Children's Ombuds*; Eileen Graham, *Policy & Strategy Director at Treehouse*; Bill Jones, *Parents for Parents*; Representative Jenny Graham, *House of Representatives*; Laurie Lippold, *Partners for Our Children*; Bree Oduwole, *community member*; Renee Hart, *community member*; Gary Grant, *community member*; Megan Carter, *community member*

Only public attendees who chose to identify themselves in the chat box during the meeting, or who made public comment, are recorded in the official meeting minutes.

Welcome, Roll Call & Opening Remarks

The meeting was called into order at 5:00 p.m. Crista Johnson introduced ground rules for engaging on the Zoom. Roll call of DCYF Oversight Board members was taken. Diane Liebe made a motion to approve the January 21, 2021 meeting minutes. Shrounda Selivanoff seconded the motion. Minutes were approved.

Youth and Young Adults Outcomes & Transitions Subcommittee Report Out

The subcommittee summarized the work they have reviewed over the months of February and March. This included finalizing the scope of work & expectations and reviewing the DCYF performance measures related to DCYF's strategic priority "Create Successful Transitions to Adulthood".

Subcommittee Takeaways:

- Concerns that the Adolescent Programs Unit is not including JR and still operating in silos between child welfare and juvenile rehabilitation. This is reflected in both the agency's draft strategic plan and the developing Adolescent Programs Unit organizational chart. HB 1661 (2017) intended for greater integration across program areas for adolescence served by DCYF.
 - Want a theory of change on integration of services. Difficult to tell near term versus long term goals for integrating Adolescent Programs with JR.
- Encourage prioritizing developing baseline data for Adolescent Programs Unit. Acknowledge it is a new unit, but the unit needs to be able to assess performance and outcomes.

Targeted stakeholder engagement on DCYF performance in identified focus areas | Sara Mack, Managing Director of Foster Youth, Volunteers of America Spokane

Sara provided stakeholder feedback on DCYF's work and what can be improved on in the adolescence space. Main themes were focused on foster parent recruitment and expanding the scope for who is eligible to provide a home to children and youth. Sara stated a more equitable and diverse range for recruiting is needed. Additionally, Sara added that for improved outcomes for youth in foster care and transitioning into adulthood, they need access to more basic life skills in their foster home environment. DCYF could improve efforts to hold licensed homes accountable to this expectation to ensure youth are building necessary skills for a successful life after exiting care.

Public Comment

Gary Grant, community member: Gary expressed concerns over the process for child placement used by the department and the lack of communication regarding his efforts to become a licensed caregiver of a relative.

Representative Jenny Graham, House of Representative: Representative Graham introduced herself and shared she was in attendance to get a feel for the work the Oversight Board does and looks forward to learning more about future work.

Bree Oduwole, community member and parent: Bree thanked all involved in the development and passage of HB 1227. Bree expressed her unhappiness with the structure of DCYF and how it has treated families, including her own. Bree stated that while her child was in out-of-home placement the child was injured, which Bree was not notified of or provided any information about how it happened. Bree shared challenges with the assigned caseworker she experienced during supervised scheduled visits with her child. Bree encouraged a higher level of accountability for caseworkers and visit supervisors that prioritizes respect for parents and families with a goal of reunification. Although now reunified, Bree emphasized the continuing trauma her child experiences as a result of being placed in out-of-home care.

Child Safety & Family Well-Being Subcommittee Report Out

The subcommittee summarized the work they have reviewed over the months of February and March. This included finalizing the scope of work & expectations, reviewing performance measures, and reviewing the DCYF strategic priority “Safely Reduce the Number/Rate of Children in Out-of-Home Care”.

Subcommittee Takeaways:

- Acknowledge that the reworking the Family Practice Model is (1) a first step towards system reform, (2) adopting the co-design approach is an indicator of culture change and innovation within the agency, and (3) this approach has not been utilized in the child welfare space before.
- Encourage agency transparency around decision-making and theory of change for reducing number/rate of children in out-of-home care by half. Support agency consideration for expanding ambitious goal setting across all strategic plan priority goal areas, particularly with more specific expectations and commitments for being an anti-racist organization.

Targeted stakeholder engagement on DCYF performance in identified focus areas | Terreca DeFehr and Bill Jones, Co-Facilitators of Washington State Parent Ally Committee (WSPAC)

Mike and Terreca shared their stories about their journey through having their children removed from their care. Their focus points were around the initial approach social workers take with parents who are facing child removal. Both shared the experience of trauma, addiction, and abuse parents are often experiencing and that social workers do not always approach parents and families in a trauma-informed manner. Both expressed the value of complying with service and program requirement, and how this opportunity can build self-worth resulting in a better life. They suggested that community services need to be provided earlier to parents so that the process does not seem so challenging to complete.

Public Comment

Renee Hart, community member and parent: Renee thanked everyone involved in the development and passage of HB 1227. Renee stated that DCYF can no longer be allowed to operate under good faith and qualified immunity. Renee shared her story about her daughter’s removal from her care. Renee stated the case against her was built on personal bias and no one from DCYF spoke to Renee during this process, all this

leading to a judge ordering the removal of her child from her care. Renee shared her perspective that to protect children, innocent parents need to be protected.

Megan Carter, community member and parent: Megan shared her story about her child being removed from her care as a result of an allegation of medical child abuse. She continued that the judge during, fact-finding hearing, tossed out the case after finding DCYF had not do their job and that the physician making the allegation had not been truthful. Megan expressed what was most concerning that, there was not option for speaking the truth during the case, she had to wait until fact-finding. DCYF acted only in relation to the physician's statements. Megan stated once she could share her case and evidence showing the accusations were false DCYF's case against her fell apart.

Laurie Lippold, Partners for Our Children: Laurie expressed thanks to the parents who have shared their stories tonight. She continued, that one of the things the Oversight Board could use their oversight powers to do would be to oversee implementation of new legislation passed in the 2021 legislative session. Laurie stated that conversations like the ones shared by parents in this meeting often lead to legislative changes. She continued that it would be appropriate to identify the bills that fall within the three-subcommittee topics and have them follow it and ensuring they are being implemented as intended.

Bree Oduwole, community member and parent: Bree spoke again and stated that the people with power who have a say in what happened to families and children should have more compassion in their treatment. She explained that during child removal each parent is made to pay child support. Bree ended by stating that all these barriers do not support a path to reunification, instead they lead to alienation.

Early Childhood Development Outcomes Subcommittee Report Out

The subcommittee summarized the work they have reviewed over the months of February and March. This included finalizing the scope of work & expectations, Internal Review Panel applicant review and selection, reviewing performance measures, and reviewing the DCYF strategic priority "Create High Quality B-8 System".

Subcommittee Takeaways:

- Kindergarten Readiness for all 6 domains is seeing an upward trend for all children since DCYF's establishment, and has the highest percentage ready in the 2019-2020 school year at 51.5%. Though racial and ethnic disparities persist, as does foster youth assess lower than non-foster youth, particularly in the socio-emotional domain.
- The WaKIDS assessment has limitations. Additional methods for assessing school readiness are needed to supplement WaKIDS. Particularly indicators that are culturally responsive to diverse communities.
- Cohesive framework for pre-school education needed. As individual school districts pursue implementation of transitional K, further work is urgently needed to develop a cohesive framework of pre-school education, in collaboration with existing providers that integrates existing ECEAP and child care programs into a coherent high quality system accessible to parents and children across the state.

Closing Remarks and Adjourn

The next meeting is scheduled for July 15, 2021 from 10:00 am to 1:30 pm on Zoom.

Adjourned at 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, April 15, 2021