

CHILD WELFARE OVERSIGHT AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the 1st Meeting of the 2021 Interim

October 13, 2021

Call to Order and Roll Call

The Child Welfare Oversight and Advisory Committee meeting was held on Wednesday, October 13, 2021, at 1:00 PM, in Room 131 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Julie Raque Adams, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

Present were:

Members: Senator Julie Raque Adams, Co-Chair; Representative David Meade, Co-Chair; Senators Karen Berg, Denise Harper Angel, and Brandon J. Storm; Representatives Kim Banta, Lynn Bechler, Josie Raymond, and Nancy Tate.

Guest Legislators: Senator Higdon; Representatives Ken Fleming and Kimberly Poore Moser.

Guests: Austin Griffiths, Ph.D., Director, LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education, Department of Social Work, Western Kentucky University; Joe Dan Beavers, President, Chief Executive Officer, LifeSkills, Inc.; Abby Drane, President, Chief Executive Officer, David Weathersby, Chief Operating Officer, and Shelby Greer, Client, Seven Counties Services, Bellewood and Brooklawn; Marta Miranda-Straub, Commissioner and Lesa Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health and Family Services; Dr. Jay Miller, Director, Self-Care Lab, Dean, Dorothy A. Miller Research Professor in Social Work Education, College of Social Work, University of Kentucky, Chair, Kentucky Board of Social Work; and Jill Parker, Executive Director and Dr. Diane Lally, Research Assistant, Training Resource Center, Eastern Kentucky University.

LRC Staff: Ben Payne, Lead Staff, Samir Nasir, Becky Lancaster, and Amanda DuFour.

Approval of Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes of the August 11, 2021, meeting was made by Representative Meade, seconded by Senator Raque Adams, and approved by voice vote.

Legislator Presentation

Senator Higdon shared concerns for social workers in Kentucky. He discussed a prior meeting with constituents and social workers asking for assistance to provide better

service for children in need. He discussed issues with social worker retention, pay, and stress levels.

Seven Counties Services Child Welfare Workforce Programs

Shelby Greer, Client, Seven Counties Services, discussed how Seven Counties Services assisted her in retaining her first apartment. Seven Counties Services helped her, a single mother, to move forward with her life goals. Abby Drane, President, Chief Executive Officer, Seven Counties Services, Bellewood and Brooklawn, discussed the number of clients served in the region and staff providing support to clients. She reviewed Bellewood and Brooklawn services, treatments, and programs offered to children, young adults, and families. She discussed Seven Counties Services' vision to build a system of care that will connect to the Family First Act model to provide the most appropriate services for clients and families. She discussed the age range of clients served by Seven Counties Services, Bellewood and Brooklawn.

David Weathersby, Chief Operating Officer, Seven Counties Services, Bellewood and Brooklawn, discussed funding and support needed for family recovery court programs to reunite children and families. He reviewed the Pathway to Success program for youth aging out of foster care. He discussed the need for an adolescent substance use disorder program and the different issues addressed in this care model.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Tate, Ms. Drane stated that Seven Counties Services and Bellewood and Brooklawn has no plans to make a statement regarding reproductive care.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Moser, Ms. Drane stated that Seven Counties Services and Bellewood and Brooklawn works as a trauma-informed care entity for clients and staff. Seven Counties Services and Bellewood and Brooklawn attends job fair, uses social media, and pay increases to gain and retain staff. Mr. Weathersby stated that Seven Counties Services, Bellewood and Brooklawn is engaging people whenever possible to hire new staff.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Berg, Mr. Weathersby stated that the Department for Medicaid Services needs to work with managed care organizations (MCOs) to have insurance cover good quality inpatient addiction care services for children in Kentucky. Ms. Drane stated that Seven Counties Services, Bellewood and Brooklawn, has a facility ready to provide inpatient addiction care services for children if affordable rates are covered by insurance companies.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Fleming, Ms. Drane stated that long-standing issues with retaining staff are due to the competition with the for-profit industry. She discussed how their reimbursement and payment structure varies from the for-profit competitors' structures. She stated that Seven Counties Services, Bellewood

and Brooklawn, are committed to working on and meeting the payment expectations. Mr. Weathersby stated that the community mental health centers provide services to clients that have Medicare, Medicaid, commercial insurance, or no funding source. He discussed that the number of child aged cases per clinician are at a manageable amount however the high number of adult cases are problematic.

Department for Community Based Services Workforce Challenges and Initiatives

Lesia Dennis, Deputy Commissioner, Department for Community Based Services (DCBS), Cabinet for Health and Family Services (CHFS), reviewed the mission of DCBS to prevent family units from being disrupted and to reduce child and adult maltreatment. She discussed the number of child protective services (CPS) intakes and the number of substantiated findings or services needed reports completed by DCBS social workers. She reviewed the number of children in the custody of or committed to CHFS. She reviewed the focuses of DCBS staff to provide quality services to children and families. She reviewed the rising average number of CPS caseloads for frontline social workers from April 2021 to September 2021. She discussed 2020 statewide and regional DCBS social worker turnover data and the top reasons for separation from DCBS.

Marta Miranda-Straub, Commissioner, Department for Community Based Services, Cabinet for Health and Family Services, discussed the plan to infuse primary and secondary prevention initiatives, the three phases of the plan, and the challenges to build a 21st century DCBS. She reviewed the positive and negative impact of COVID-19 on the DCBS workforce. She discussed the vision to review, revise, and modernize all the features and physical conditions in which DCBS work is performed. She reviewed the statewide supports and programs to stabilize and retain DCBS staff. She discussed nine best practice elements that DCBS has adopted.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Raque Adams, Commissioner Miranda-Straub stated that DCBS is working to put items into the budget to work on capacity, create an alternative response expertise team, establish a pay increase, and research pay equity. She stated that DCBS will send budget requests to the CHFS Secretary and the Governor to be included in the 2022 Governor's budget. She stated that DCBS will be requesting to add a Division of Primary and Secondary Prevention to the department.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Meade, Commissioner Miranda-Straub stated that a low-risk situation is when a child is not in danger, there are no potential neglect or abuse issues, or the family is not in immediate crisis. She stated that DCBS staff is increasing in-person staffed offices and staff are able to see people in-person and make home visits. DCBS is able to continue online foster care trainings, evaluations of services and resources, and follow up meetings. DCBS may observe a family that was reported to provide secondary prevention to prevent maltreatment or abuse.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Berg, Commissioner Miranda-Straub stated that DCBS is committed to increasing resources to kinship care, foster care parents, and fictive kin to better care for children. Ms. Dennis stated that DCBS is still learning about impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic to families, children, and DCBS staff. She stated that the expansion of the relative service array will benefit relative and fictive kin caregivers.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Fleming, Ms. Dennis stated that the \$5 million allocated to DCBS for retention went towards increasing salaries of the frontline social workers and supervisors. She stated that DCBS partnered with agencies to supplement the workforce in Jefferson County to help with completion of past due referrals. She stated that from 2019 to 2021, DCBS has significantly decreased the average caseload in Jefferson County from approximately 60 to 80 cases to approximately 30-45 cases per social worker. She stated that the number of cases has started to increase because of the increase in staff turnover.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Moser, Commissioner Miranda-Straub stated that DCBS must take care of the worker shortage, low pay, and worker trauma while also taking care of families and children. She stated that engaging in prevention to help families will reduce caseloads and trauma for staff.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Bechler, Commissioner Miranda-Straub stated that DCBS reviewed what the non-profit competitors are paying workers including bonuses, where workers are going that are receiving a higher pay, internal pay disparities, and the average cost of a living wage in different areas. She stated that depending on the county, the living wage in Kentucky is between \$15 per hour and \$19 per hour.

Western Kentucky University LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education and Research

Austin Griffiths, Ph.D., Director, LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education, Department of Social Work, Western Kentucky University, discussed the start of the Center for Child Welfare Education and Research at Western Kentucky University. He reviewed the mission to support the development of child welfare professionals to serve Kentucky's families and children. He discussed the partnership with LifeSkills, Incorporated to increase capacity and resources to enhance the work with community agencies. He discussed the LifeSkills and Pennyroyal Center merger allowing for expansion, the five pillar approach for the center, and the individuals involved in the center. He discussed various ways the center is supporting the DCBS workforce directly to reduce unreasonable expectations. He reviewed the Kentucky Child Welfare Workforce Wellness Initiative and its partnerships that are working together to create a healthier workforce and community.

Joe Dan Beavers, President, Chief Executive Officer, LifeSkills, Incorporated, discussed how well Dr. Griffiths is achieving goals with the center. He discussed some of the challenges and supports needed to maintain the child welfare workforce.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Raque Adams, Dr. Griffiths stated that the center is supported by grants and partnership with LifeSkills and it is open to accept funding from the General Assembly.

Department for Community Based Services Workforce and Secondary Trauma

Dr. Jay Miller, Director, Self-Care Lab, Dean & Dorothy A. Miller Research Professor in Social Work Education, College of Social Work, University of Kentucky, Chair, Kentucky Board of Social Work, discussed his history as a foster child and then working for DCBS. He discussed the concept of the self-care lab to address burnout among professionals, difference between caseloads and case weight, and how child welfare professionals may be disproportionately impacted by resource restrictions. He discussed how child welfare workplace conditions and associated consequences impact retention, recruitment, morale, and service provisions. He reviewed partnership work completed with DCBS and the College of Social Work at the University of Kentucky to assist social workers. He discussed how worker wellness was measured in Kentucky and the difference shown in each area and then the impact of COVID-19. He discussed the conceptual intervention that was delivered to child welfare to address the burnout problems and the information that was gathered. He discussed what the College of Social Work continues to work on for worker wellness and retention.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Raque Adams, Dr. Miller stated that the College of Social Work has delivered the first wave intervention in every region in Kentucky and is working to make programs more accessible to all social workers.

In response to questions and comments from Representative Bechler, Dr. Miller stated that he attributes his success to reframing foster care as a service for children and families verses the alternative of not having the foster care system. He stated that the differences in the Lake region and the Eastern Mountain region during the COVID-19 pandemic can be attributed to the availability of community resources such as accessibility to family court proceedings.

Social Worker Employment Engagement Survey

Jill Parker, Executive Director, Training Resource Center (TRC), Eastern Kentucky University (EKU), discussed the ECU contract with DCBS to provide training and to house the training records system for workers and foster parents. She stated that the training needs for new social workers were reviewed during the Stabilization Phase with DCBS. She discussed how the TRC is involved in the administrative, evaluation, and technological support for DCBS initiatives.

Dr. Diane Lally, Research Assistant, Training Resource Center, Eastern Kentucky University, discussed the DCBS Employee Engagement Survey and how the TRC will assist in the development and reporting of the data. She gave statistics regarding the 2018 DCBS employee engagement survey data. She stated that the 2021 DCBS employee engagement survey data to be available in December with more of a focus on employee engagement. She reviewed the number and the most frequently reported separation reasons for DCBS staff separations from 2019 to 2021.

In response to questions and comments from Senator Raque Adams, Ms. Parker stated that the contract with ECU and DCBS should be available to legislatures.

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:41 PM.