



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect
PREVENTION COMMITTEE

Patty Mojta, Co-Chair
Sanford Starr, Co-Chair

March 3, 2022
10:00 A.M. – 12:00 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

Minutes

In Attendance:

Suzanne Conrad
Nicole Epps
Diane Dellano
Corissa Kazar
Jeanne McMahan
Patty Mojta
David Seegert
Svetlana Shpiegel
Sandy Starr
Wendi White

Cape May County Ace Prevention Partnership
World Childhood Foundation USA
Advocates for Children of NJ
embrella
SPAN Parent Advocacy Network
Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey
School Based Youth Services Program
Montclair State University
NJ Department of Children and Families
NJ Department of Corrections

Guests:

Nya Earrusso
Tariro Imunyereyi
Kim Pinto
Florence Racine
Dave Ellis
Blake Connor
Kareem Lovelace
Benita Miller

Advocates for Children of NJ
Montclair State University
NJ CAP
NJ Department of Children and Families
NJ Department of Children and Families
NJ Department of Children and Families
NJ Department of Children and Families
Powerful Families, Powerful Communities

Staff:

Daniel Yale

NJ Department of Children and Families

"In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of notice filed with the Secretary of State, the Trenton Times and the Newark Star Ledger and posted at the Department of State, 125 West State St., 1st Floor, Trenton, New Jersey."

**Please note the meeting is being recorded for the transcription of minutes. Please be sure to state your name prior to making comments, motions and seconding votes.*

Welcome and Introductions



Patty Mojta welcomed members and each member provided a brief introduction. Patty informed members that the 2022-2025 NJ Statewide Prevention Plan was approved by the Task Force. Sandy informed the Committee that he invited Dave Ellis (DCF Office of Resilience), Benita Miller (Powerful Families, Powerful Communities), Florence Racine (DCF Office of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging), and Blake Connor (DCF Office of Family Voice) to join the quarterly meetings as their offices have direct responsibility for several of the cross-cutting priorities of the Prevention Plan. As the Committee discusses progress on the plan, we will be able to have consultation from those at DCF with expertise on these areas.

Office of Family Voice

Blake Connor & Kareem Lovelace, DCF Office of Family Voice

The Office of Family Voice was created as a result of a listening tour conducted by Commissioner Beyer in which she heard from many youth, parents, and foster parents that felt as though they did not have a voice in the system. The Office was created and was “infused with the voices of those who have lived experience”. Blake explained that they are listening to individuals with lived experience and keeping them involved and at the table as programs, policies, and initiatives are created.

- **DCF Youth Council**

- Began in January 2020
- Council Members sign up for a 2-year commitment
- Currently 20 council members, age 16-23
- Lived experience with DCF (DCPP, CSOC, Regional Schools, etc.)
- Members meet monthly, meet with Commissioner Beyer bi-monthly
- New cohort began in January 2022 – 3 council members have been elevated to coaching new members
- Worked on several initiatives with DCF including logic models, social media, drafted surveys that were youth-focused, created a storyboard a video for CSOC
- Subcommittees have developed a Siblings Bill of Rights which has been introduced to NJ Senate and Assembly
- Creating an advocate with lived experience
- Selected a model to connect youth that are entering into the system with youth that have lived experience.
- Pride and nurtured heart training review
- NJYRS website – have rewritten content from youth perspective
- Created an app to go along with NJYRS website



- **Fatherhood Engagement Committee**

- Reconstructed in 2019 to include community partners, external stakeholders, multiple DCF divisions and state departments
- Began as a small group of 5 fathers – not includes 12 fathers from 10 cities
- During COVID the committee grew to include 22 fathers from across the state
- Presented a list of recommendations to Commissioner Beyer in August 2021
- Approved to begin workgroups with collaboration between fathers and DCF
- Members receive stipends for attending workgroup meetings
- Developed areas of focus
 - Lack of initial outreach
 - Lack of inclusion in case planning
 - Lack of information
 - Need to be shown that the system cares about their needs as well
 - Weren't receiving proper services or next steps
 - Staff don't understand the trauma that they have been through
 - Child support and housing issues regarding reunification
 - Need a place in the community to receive services and resources
 - Prevention services
 - Financial assistance
 - Employment opportunities
 - Visitation
 - System is very intimidating – need peer navigators
 - Safe visitation areas
 - Flexibility regarding services
 - Building trust with DCPP and community agencies

Powerful Families, Powerful Communities

Bonita Miller, Executive Director

In 2019, Powerful Families, Powerful Communities was an idea born out of Commissioner Beyer's desire to do transformative work across DCF programs. In particular, the main goals were to "narrow the front door" into the child protection system and to obsolete the need for non-kinship foster care. At that time, the cohort of children that were most likely to be involved with the child welfare system were 0-5 years old with families impacted by substance misuse. At any given point in NJ, there are fewer than 3,000 children in out of home placement, with the majority residing with relatives at the point of removal and being directly into kin settings with their families. After reviewing this data, Commissioner Beyer created a relationship with a national organization that works with human centered



design to assist in moving to a power sharing model across all 21 counties in NJ. The starting point was in counties with the highest rates of removal of children in out of home care. These starting points including Camden, Bridgeton, Millville, and Newark. Across those communities, co-designers were recruited that included families who had direct lived experience within the system or lived in communities with high rates of removals. These co-designers were selected with a range of experience in and outside of child of the system. The range included different:

- Economic backgrounds
- Education backgrounds
- Geographical backgrounds
- Family composition backgrounds

The 30 co-designers involved in the process included mothers, fathers, community members, grandparents caring for children, and youth with lived experience. It is important to note that DCF have not been involved in every design session. This was done intentionally to be able to create opportunities for the co-designers to build trust with each other and to generate ideas that DCF did not influence. The co-design teams are working to develop new interventions that will be prototyped and tested in those communities to see if they we will work in additional communities across the state.

At this time, the focus is on looking at policy issues that create deeper interactions with DCPP and ways to create community driven prevention solutions so that only families that have actual child protective reasons to be involved with DCPP become involved in the child welfare system. The goal is to reduce interactions and reduce the conflation of poverty with neglect because of how we frame allegations of neglect. We are currently at a point of system transformation where we are looking at sharing power, non-traditional partnerships, and public/private partnerships with a strong emphasis on anti-racist and anti-bias frameworks.

The co-designers developed five actions that they have requested DCF focus on when creating the emerging family well-being system:

- Center children and young people's voices
- Empower families to dream and thrive
- Fund Keeping Families Together
- Invest resources in our village
- Sponsor lifelong healing



Throughout the process, therapeutic support was provided for the co-designers. A black female clinician was chosen so that as the co-designers are processing or revisiting traumatic experiences in their interactions with certain systems, they have clinical support available.

The following has been learned regarding co-design or power sharing:

- Requires new definitions and practices for professional collaboration
- Trust building and healing must be prioritized when communities are asked to do the hard work of imagining
- Enthusiasm and compassion are not enough to overcome the very real constraints of poor participation

Some of the initial projects that are beginning work are:

- The Four-Branch work – efforts to look at courts, legislative, DCF or state government, and communities and their interactions with each other with a goal of reducing opportunities for families to come to the attention of DCPP.
 - By the summer, testing will begin on the ideas that are being prototyped. During the fall, the process will move towards recruiting and asking communities to participate in the next wave of co-design.
 - This is a five-year demonstration project
 - Being evaluated by Rutgers and Spark

Dave Ellis discussed that many of the questions about universality is wrapped up in the ACEs work, as it is an umbrella for many of the initiatives that are taking place at DCF. Part of the reason that certain services aren't a part of the child welfare system (i.e. housing) is because that is how we have defined the child welfare system. We need to redefine and understand that housing is about child welfare. Employment is about child welfare. Our systems are not designed to be resilient, so it needs to be redesigned and power shifted.

Sandy felt that this conversation helped to “set the stage” for the Committee as they listen to presentations in the future and as they are determining how well the Prevention Plan is being operationalized, as future presentations will not only come from state government, but from the community. There is so much work that can be done from the ideas that were presented at this meeting. Although the Department may not be able to provide all the required services, it can help to convene other agencies and connect families in a different way.

Regarding the DCF Office of Family and Community Partnerships, Sandy stated that they will continue to push out programs that address the needs of families that are already engaged with DCPP to get those cases closed and not reopen. Just as importantly, looking at the long term, focusing on building out universal primary prevention approaches that are non-stigmatizing.



Review December 2, 2021 Minutes

The minutes from the December 2, 2021 meeting were approved with the following edit: Jeanne McMahon requested that her agency be listed as SPAN Parent Advocacy Network as they rebranded a few years prior and are no longer the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network.

Prevention Committee Charter

Patty reminded members that during the last meeting, the edits that were discussed regarding the Committee charter were updated on screen during the meeting. The version that was emailed to members prior this meeting was the final draft. Patty asked the Committee to vote on approving the charter and bringing it to the Task Force for approval. The Committee voted to approve the charter and present it to the Task Force.

Announcements

Corissa reminded Committee members of the WE CAN campaign that was used during Child Abuse Prevention Month in 2020. During a meeting with DCF staff the previous day, Corissa discussed using the WE CAN campaign again this year. DCF agreed to kickstart the campaign in April for Child Abuse Prevention Month and also continue as an ongoing messaging campaign on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and possibly Instagram. Corissa will be meeting with the Communications/Outreach Workgroup to review the services that are linked to the messaging and update where necessary.

Patty informed members that PCA NJ will be having a pinwheel garden event on April 8, 2022 to kick off Child Abuse Prevention Month.

Meeting Adjourned – Next meeting June 2, 2022