

Washington State Children's Administration and Foster Parent Quarterly Regional Consultation Forum (HB 1624)

December 9, 2008; 1 – 3 PM

Moses Lake, Washington

Agenda

Attendance:

Foster Parents: Dru Powers – Spokane; Ginger Schutt – Spokane; Cindy Gardner – Spokane Valley; Judi Gruver – Moses Lake; Susan Stolsig – Moses Lake; Caren Courtright – Moses Lake
Staff: Jeff Kincaid – DLR Supervisor; Michelle Cutlip – FP Trainer; Laurie Palmquist – Regional/DLR; Russ Haugen – Area Administrator (AA); Connie Lambert-Eckel – Deputy Regional Administrator; Debbie Fenske AA; Brent Borg – AA; Joy McClendon ML Licensor; Sue Cornett ML

Welcome by Jeff Kincaid and Dru Powers. Introductions were made around the room.

Training Update

A list of upcoming trainings is attached to the agenda. Pride training will occur in Moses Lake in January and April. Parenting Plus training is currently offered in Spokane and coming soon to other parts of the region; this is a fun training and will start in Moses Lake after first of the year. An inquiry was made regarding training specifically on relative care. It was explained that the Intro to Child Welfare 6-hour class is dedicated to relative care givers. Also, all relative caregivers are welcome at any classes including the Parenting Plus.

Recruitment

New recruiting materials are available if anyone is interested, please contact Linda Rogers. We have recruiters for most of the offices except Moses Lake and Colfax. Moses Lake is in pretty good shape. They have 10 pending applications, but we are always looking at ways we can support Joy. Colfax still needs a recruiter. Letters to the editor are good ways to recruit, radio shows (Wenatchee), and Omak also (Kelly Brown). Pam in the Colville area has a goal to work with six churches in six-month period. A new program, Sunday's Child, is in conjunction with NW Adoption Exchange. It uses the same idea as Wednesday's Child, but the pamphlet is given out at churches and it appears to be very effective. A movie about foster homes, Home for the Holidays, will air on TV 12/23 (channel 2, CBS). Having a support person who is attached to each office is very helpful and this small grass roots effort that is paying off. Another grass roots effort, foster parents helping other foster parents, is effective. This helps families to feel somewhat engaged and less left out, especially during the licensing process where they might lose contact with the licensor. We are actually beginning to make some headway in getting new homes licensed through all our efforts.

Retention/Support

The Moses Lake support group is led by Steve and Deanna Reed. They seem to usually have good turnout. Cindy Gardner will begin to facilitate the coffee support group in Spokane. Amber Sherman does the night life support group in Spokane. Beth Sutton in Oroville is doing great job with her support group. The new facilitator in Omak is doing well, but has only there a couple of months.

Items identified by support groups

1. How will the budget cutbacks affect foster parents and the children in care?

The budget is tight; we are dealing with the most significant fiscal impacts that we have had in the last 30 years. There is significant impact across the department and agencies because the tax revenue is just not coming in. Children's (CA) does not make money, they spend it. Our agency is viewed as a public safety service and has been somewhat protected by the Governor until now. However, CA needs to pay their share from this point on. Estimates are there is a five million dollar shortfall for CA, with approximately four million dollars is being absorbed by headquarters in Olympia and the balance will be in the field. The Governor's budget will come out right before the holiday and it will be submitted to Legislature for approval. Region 1 had 27 non-perm staff leave service day before Thanksgiving; these days were very difficult for us. We were overspent in the first quarter, but received the directive that by first of December we had to be in compliance from the overspending. Please feel free to call Dru, Connie Lambert-Eckle or other staff people if you have questions regarding budget cuts. We are bracing for even more negative information from the reports coming out in March 2009. CA basically has two budgets, one for staff and one for service dollars. Both are overspent so we are asking everyone to be very careful how they spend, and to review services and requests to determine if it is really needed.

2. The suggestion was made to have social workers refer foster parents to their local support groups when a foster parent is frustrated. Is this happening? If not, is there a system by which this could be implemented?

When foster parents become frustrated, they should be referred to a support group will to help with frustrations. The next Region 1 foster parent newsletter is coming out soon and will advertise contacts for the support group and conditions under which would be appropriate to call. Foster parents need to be proactive in accessing the support groups.

3. How have the previous concerns regarding communication been addressed? Are Social Workers telling foster parents whether they prefer e-mail or phone? How do we support this?

Foster parents want to know which is a better way to communicate with SW – by email or by telephone. It was suggested that foster parents ask their social workers which they prefer. Most Moses Lake staff would prefer email. A suggestion was made that perhaps there might be some training available to help staff to remember to refer the foster parent to the support group or to let foster parents know how they would like to be reached as foster parents might not always know to ask. Staff may not always remember to give this information to foster parents, but managers can certainly ask that they communicate it better.

The region is working on putting together a resource directory. This directory will include a list of sw email addresses. Also, the child info sheet in the traveling folder that goes with child should have the information on how best to contact the SW. There are three parts: the SW packet, the caregiver packet which has pertinent information critical info for the caregiver, and the traveling file folder which includes all pertinent information on the child and goes with the child in their foster care placements. This information will eventually be available on the internet in the future. Managers will also counsel staff to communicate better with foster parents regarding how they wish to be reached. A suggestion was made that if appropriate, could SWs include their email address in their telephone message. That way, the foster parent could email SW and the SW could email back with how they would prefer to be reached. Joy McClendon said she always tries to let foster parents know that she prefers to be reached by email and that she could add the "everything" list to

the orientation materials. The more times we get the information out, the more connected we are going to be.

4. Social workers not returning phone calls is still an issue. We must keep this on the agenda.

SW not returning telephone calls appears to continue to be an issue and foster parents want it to continue to be on the agenda for every meeting. Managers discuss this with staff a lot. However, foster parents must elevate their concerns surrounding this issue. Foster parents need to contact the supervisor if the SW does not get back to them. If the supervisor does not return the telephone call or email in a timely manner, then a call should be placed to the Area Administrator or Connie Lambert-Eckle. It is important for us to be focused with individual families. Debbie Fenske advised that it is important for the SW to keep their telephone messages updated so people will know how soon they will return or if the caller needs to contact someone else for assistance. Our agency has the expectation that messages will be kept up to date so callers will be better informed. However, if you place a complaint you should be ready to answer the questions of what time did you call, what dates, and when is the last time you called.

5. If a sibling visit is overnight does it count as respite to the foster parent? Does the foster parent get paid and how? In Oct. meeting this was going to be confirmed. What is the answer?

Overnight sibling visits payments count as respite for the foster parent either as an exchange or respite. A new baby is qualified as sibling under our policy even though they may not have an established relationship yet with their siblings.

6. What is the status of the professional foster parent pilot?

The professional foster parent pilot is for intensive resource homes. It is now occurring in Region 2 and Region 6. We don't have a start on this pilot yet. For our region there is a handout on this pilot that provided guidance on what the foster parent needs to have in place to be an intensive resource home. This information is now in the contract. We are hopeful this pilot will begin in 2009 after legislature meets. We will let you know how that is progressing.

7. The suggestion was made to consider providing a retainer for respite only homes, similar to the retainer provided for receiving homes. Is this an option?

The idea of providing retainers for respite homes appears to be a good idea. It would make sense in order to create some protection for respite homes. This will become a statewide issue because of the ramifications it will have.

8. Foster Parents with allegations seem to be unaware of the FIRST program, and are not being given enough information about it, nor are they being encouraged to contact FIRST.

The FIRST Program is a statewide contract to support foster parents during investigations being made in the home. Investigator has the responsibility to notify the foster parent they have the right to have a FIRST representative there to support them. Most of the investigations have been moved out of the local office to the investigations unit, except in the rural areas. We urge foster parents to have their FIRST representative with them no matter how well they get along with their licensor or investigator. The investigative interview will stop until you get your FIRST representative there if you request one. Updated brochures are going out to staff.

9. Discuss what "unfounded" now means. CA is 51% sure that it did not happen but does not mean it did not happen. How will this affect foster parents?

CA has now gone to a two-tiered finding rule; either unfounded or founded. Unfounded is used when it is 51% more likely the action did not happen or it could mean that what happened is true, but it does not meet the WAC definition of abuse or neglect. It is all about risk assessment. Founded findings will now be based on the fact that more likely than not the action happened. A referral stays connected to the case file for six years. If you receive a founded during that time, it will stay always. These investigations might cause the licensor to take a more serious look at foster parent records. Sometimes we might have a valid licensing complaint and still have an unfounded CPS complaint.

10. In a previous meeting the suggestion was made to communicate to foster parents via a letter when there is a new social worker assigned to a case. Has this been implemented? This is especially pertinent with having lost so many social workers in Region 1.

CA understands the importance of communicating with the foster parents when there is a change of SW assignment and we attempt to do this when we can. Some units do letters, some post cards, some telephone calls. We are trying to shore up these issues, and reinforcing what ever method works well for each unit.

11. What is the status of the Foster Care to 21 program? Have there been additional programs lost due to the budget cuts?

The Foster care – 21 program was enacted in 2006 for two year period which ends December 31, 2008. Youth who are currently enrolled in this program will continue in the program until they are 21. This program is difficult to support in times of financial duress. We will hold onto the structure of this program with the hope that we can continue it. We don't want to talk about other programs that might get cut, rather wait until the governor's budget before we look at programs. At this time, there is no talk of foster parent rates being changed due to the budget cuts but there has been some talk about contract provider rates changing.

12. The length of time that it is taking some background checks to move through the system continues to be a concern. There are reports of it taking as long as three months in certain circumstances.

CA has a new contractor that has very low rejection rate. We scan the prints to the background check unit, who sends them on to WSP but WSP does not always get back to us in a timely manner, especially if there are rejections but we are working on this problem-- it takes time. We do know that if WSP rolls your prints in Olympia HQ, they will not reject your prints. As a whole, the new system works faster than the old way, if you have good prints. Staff can make your appointment for you if you are having problems.

13. In a previous meeting the concern regarding receptionists requesting a foster parent's address in front of bio-parents was brought up. How are foster parents being encouraged to advocate for their privacy in this circumstance?

There was a previous concern about a receptionist in a doctor's office asking the foster parent for their address in front of bio parent. The foster parent needs to tell the person asking that they are not comfortable doing this in front of bio parent. It is appropriate for the foster parent to be assertive and let the askee know it is not appropriate to answer that information in front of bio-parents. Confidentiality a big issue with CA and information goes out to staff on a regular basis. Foster parents can use this issue as a training issue with support groups. You can get training credit for it.

Statewide Meetings: Ginger Schutt is the regional representative to statewide meetings, Megan Ware is second representative in Ginger's absence, and Charlene Thiesfeld is the third alternate to meetings if the other two cannot attend. We are allowed to present two questions from each region. After considerable

discussion it was decided to present the following topics at the next statewide meeting, which is January 13 in Tacoma.

1. Mileage reimbursement for respite providers, especially those in the rural areas.
2. The proposal of retainers for respite providers.

One agenda item for the next regional meeting will be the issue of not enough information from fiscal as to why mileage is being rejected.

Next Regional Meeting – Tuesday, March 10 from 1 - 3 (location to be determined)

Next Statewide Meeting – January 13, 2009 in Tacoma