

FOSTER PARENT CONSULTATION TEAM (HB 1624)

Meeting Minutes

April 8, 2009, 1-4 p.m.

Tacoma Children's Administration, Room 195

In Attendance:

Beth Canfield, Mike Canfield, Debra Ellsworth, Shala Crow, Debra Converse, Victoria Erwin, Marci Miess, Amy Gardner, Cindy Gardner, Ginger Schutt, Talya Miller, Tess Thomas, Jeannie McShane, Meri Waterhouse Nancy Sutton, Darcey Hancock, Randy Hart, Cora Phillips, Carrie Kendig, Dinah Martin, Bernice Morehead, Lin Payton, Bob Partlow

Staff issues

The meeting began with introductions and a discussion of the current budget situation as it affects Children's Administration work.

Because of the budget, Program Manger Michael Luque will be leaving his position as the program lead for the Foster Parent Consultation Team. Michael was not able to attend because of illness. People expressed appreciation for his great work with them in getting the program to the place where it is today. Program Manager Dinah Martin will take over the job.

Lin Payton, who has been the facilitator for the statewide meetings from almost the beginning, also will be stepping out of that role. Appreciation was expressed for her work, as well.

She said, "Children's Administration places importance in this group. You will be well supported from here on out.

Interim Assistant Secretary Randy Hart indicated more cuts are coming, saying the best-case scenario would be 70 more cuts from Children's Administration, many from headquarters. About 25 such cuts have already been made, he said. "This is a very painful process," he said. He also said that those who work at headquarters bring great value to the work of the agency, in providing direction, support and guidance to the field. "There are a lot of hard-working, caring people at headquarters," he said.

Rate Assessment

The issue of setting foster parent reimbursement rates was then discussed. The major focus was on the move from each social worker setting a rate (as has been the case in Region 1) to having one or two people in each region set the rates. The issue of the rate assessment for infants and special needs children has been moved to a separate work group.

Children's Administration Program Manager Carrie Kendig described that the CA management team reviewed the Region 1 model and believes that having the job centralized in each region leads to better, most consistent assessments. Carrie did not have a specific list with her, but will get the list to Beth Canfield, co-president of the Foster Parents Association of Washington State (FPAWS) and to Michael. Despite the budget cuts, all regions but 4 have now hired its assessors. Carrie also said. Lin suggested the issue be retired, but Foster Parent Representative Tess Thomas said we should not retire it until all regions have assessors. Region 4 has been focused on high needs

children, but should have an assessor soon. An update will be given at the next meeting of the group.

DLR/CPS Investigations

Five issues have been raised by the Foster Parents Association of Washington State and other foster parents:

- A new brochure of Frequently Asked Questions about the process
- The issue of licensing investigations as well as allegations of child abuse and neglect
- The issue of the difference between founded/unfounded allegations
- Whether a pattern of unfounded allegations is being used against foster parents
- Foster parents want copies of investigative findings for review so they can get their thoughts into the document, making it “more complete,” Beth said.

Jeannie McShane from DLR said the brochure is nearly complete.

She said a similar brochure for investigations of licensing complaints may need to be produced and should be the product of the same work group that produced the other brochure.

About foster parent access to the investigative assessments and the opportunity to comment, Darcey Hancock, state DLR Administrator, said they can see the assessments by request once they are complete. The assessments must be redacted. Beth said foster parents want a copy of it before it is finalized so they can get their input and perspective in it. Darcey said they are not supportive of that. Mike Canfield, co-president of FPAWS, said that anyone reviewing the report only gets one side – that the report doesn’t reflect what the foster parents may have said and that it can contain misinformation.

Randy said changes to the investigative process could affect “internal controls” over the investigation, which he said “have to be very discreet and thorough.”

Beth, Mike and others said investigations can take too long. Beth said “we find out a year and a half later”- that the foster parents did nothing wrong, but by then the child has been out of the home and the bonding that occurred has been disrupted. She wants foster parents to be able to keep in touch with their foster kids during an investigation.

“This is one of the main places we are losing foster parents,” Beth said. “Our ultimate goal is the retention of foster parents. This process has a huge impact on the retention of foster parents.”

Marci said, “We want you to recognize that there are flaws in these investigations.”

Debra Converse said, “This is a respect and communication issue. We’re trying to get to the respect issue.”

Randy noted he is a former foster parent and said, “I can understand the frustration with the length of time.” He also said most investigations are unfounded. Jeannie said the law and practice requires investigations be done within 90 days and that is the case in most investigations.

Randy said, “some parts of this intrigue me,” and added, “we would be willing to take a look at this.” He asked to have the foster parents send a one-page outline of each issue raised and send it to Darcey.

Beth said she would work on a draft report and discuss it at the May 19 conference call with the foster parent representatives.

Medication Logs

There was discussion about what the requirement for foster parents to keep logs of medication they dispense to their kids and any kind of form to track that. There was considerable confusion among foster parents about whether a log is required for when the medications are given as opposed to what medications are supposed to be given. Darcey said there is a re-write of the Washington Administrative Code now, but that such a log is required to be kept. It was agreed that the department needs to inform foster parents of the requirement.

Tess said a tracking log is “another form of protection” in case allegations are ever made about what drugs were given.

Randy and Darcey said a template will be provided to help address the issue.

Teaming And Respect

The issue of publicly distributing the office contact list of regional Children’s Administration staff from social workers to regional administrators was discussed. The practice of distributing such information varies from region to region, with regions 3 and 5 having a broader process. Placement coordinators distribute the information. In most regions, the liaisons and representatives of this group have access to it. But Bernice Morehead, manager of stakeholder relations, said putting it out the Internet could cause problems. She said Children’s Administration will look at the issue again.

Beth said FPAWS still plans to collect information about complaints made by foster parents through a variety of channels. Program Manager Bob Partlow explained the idea is gather complaints by number in one centralized place to better inform agency leaders and others what kinds of concerns are being expressed and in what quantity.

Randy said, “I look at these issues as being local” and said foster parents working locally on issues is “when it is going to get better.” He said data is good but said non-local data is less valuable. “I’m not going to fix the foster care system from Olympia.”

Foster parents said the idea was to collect data by region or office to help inform local staff of issues that have been reported.

Transitions and Relative Placements

The issue as expressed by foster parents is that social workers love foster parents when they want them to take a placement and dismiss them when they want to move a child quickly to a relative placement. Children’s Administration staff said the social workers may not know the policies around removal of children. Foster Parent Representative Ginger Schutt also said foster parents need to get all the information they can on a child coming into care. A Child Information Referral Form was provided as a handout.

Randy said, “we just need to do a better job of ... practice improvement.” He suggested the current budget situation will have the effect of keeping more social workers at their jobs, reducing turnover which will provide them with greater time to acquire knowledge about policies and procedures.

Marci said, “within policy and procedure, without all the players at the table ... we don’t have a chance to be the best system we can be.”

Payment For Respite Transportation

The issue of paying for transportation for respite care was raised, with foster parents seeking clarification on the issue. Program Supervisor Meri Waterhouse explained that a cutback in such payments was part of a Children's Administration plan for budget cuts. She stressed, however, that such payment could be made if the social worker made it part of a child's ISSP that respite is needed and transportation would be paid.

Marci said that could well mean that "if you have a savvy worker, you mileage will be covered and if you don't, it won't be."

She also said that transportation to respite can be a big financial hit – if you have to drive 20 miles one way four times in a weekend, for example.

She suggested she would be willing to eat the cost if it was five miles or less – beyond that "the social worker has to transport."

It was also suggested that there are inconsistent and "unfair" payments from region to region.

A statewide workgroup on the issue discussed the issue, but foster parents said they were not included.

Randy said "maybe this will be reconsidered." He suggested that foster parents can meet with program managers to re-develop the plan. He said the current plan is not in effect until July 1.

It was also raised that foster parents have had to, in some cases, wait for the Area Administrator to approve it. They also wanted to know if the policy is not going to be in effect if they can go back and retroactively collect payments. Randy said they can only go back 90 days from the time they submit the invoice.

Momentum

Some foster parents have reported a drop off in the number of foster parents participating in regional meetings of the Foster Parent Consultation Team.

People agreed this is not necessarily a negative, since many issues are getting resolved at the local level, partly through the Family To Family Recruitment Development and Support work and partly because of the work of the representatives and the liaisons hired through state contracts. Randy said the work will continue.

"It is ongoing because if nothing else, it is the law," Randy said. "If it is not this, there will have to be something like it. Because there is a partnership."

Other commented that this is worthwhile because it is a place to process. While some issues can be solved locally, it is important to have a statewide forum. With at least one Regional Administrator (Nancy Sutton) in attendance, "it feels like an investment" by the department.

