

Strengthening Families Act Taskforce Meeting

December 2, 2015

9:00 AM – 2:00 PM

Lincoln Community Foundation

215 Centennial Mall S, 5th Floor Conference Room

Lincoln, NE 68508

I. Call to Order

Jennifer Skala called the meeting of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Taskforce to order at 9:06 a.m.

II. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Skala welcomed everyone and asked that guests introduce themselves and state their organization. She also asked that guests give one or two words that either described a childhood memory of normalcy or their feelings towards the SFA. Individuals present are as follows:

Guests in Attendance (31):

Payne Ackerman.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Renee Ambrose.....	Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska
Kim Anderson.....	Nebraska Children's Home Society
Jodie Austin.....	KVC Nebraska
Raevin Bigelow.....	Project Everlast
Cassy Blakely.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Deanna Brakhage.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Becca Brune.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Nathan Busch.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Bethany Connor Allen.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
Jude Dean.....	Foster Parent Representative
Amanda Felton.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
Kim Hawekotte.....	Foster Care Review Office
Sarah Helvey.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Jodi Hitchler.....	CEDARS
Candi Marcantel.....	Sarpy County CASA
Skyler May.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Laura McCormick.....	Child Advocate
Robert McEwen.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Katie McLeese Stephenson.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Michelle Moline.....	Nebraska Children's Home Society
Ronda Newman.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Mary Jo Pankoke.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Nicole Paul.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Angie Pick.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Amy Reynoldson.....	Magellan Behavioral Health of Nebraska
Christy Rohe.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Jennifer Skala.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Julia Tse.....	Voices for Children in Nebraska
Lana Verbrigghe.....	Child Saving Institute
Ross Wendel.....	Omaha Home for Boys

The group pulled together a list of descriptors including:

- Blessing
- Hopeful
- Exciting
- Friendship
- Finally
- Connection
- Belonging
- Sleepovers
- Crafts
- Innovative
- Parents
- Thankful
- Birthdays
- Happy
- Sky is the limit
- It's about time
- No brainer
- Logical
- Together
- Traditions
- Common sense
- Celebrate
- Voice
- Family
- Community
- Love

III. Updates since Last Meeting

Ms. Skala invited Sarah Helvey to share updates on the SFA that had happened since the previous meeting. Ms. Helvey explained for new guests that three meetings had previously taken place regarding the SFA. At the past meeting, breakout groups created several recommendations for focus areas. Several focus groups also took place over the last several months that included groups of young people, foster parents, and the Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Another item of note were the several surveys that were released to stakeholders to get feedback on the recommendations from the previous meeting.

Ms. Helvey went on to discuss the report, "Letting Kids be Kids," that stemmed from the group's work. On October 22, 2015 there was a legislative hearing for LR248 which encompassed the SFA report. The report addressed several areas that needed further discussion which would be the topics covered later in the day.

On November 17, 2015, Ms. Helvey presented information about the report to the Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission). With the positive work of the informal stakeholder group, the Commission motioned to create a more formal Taskforce under their umbrella. In the motion they charged Sarah Helvey and Katie McLeese Stephenson with the roles of Co-Chairs for the Taskforce.

Bethany Allen, Policy Analyst with the Nebraska Children's Commission, explained what this would mean for the group. She stated that moving forward, all Taskforce recommendations would be submitted to the Commission. The Commission would then review recommendations, and if approved, send them on to the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature. She also mentioned that there was a possibility that the Taskforce could be added into statute, making the group subject to the Open Meetings Act.

Ms. Helvey notified the group that since the current meeting was scheduled before the decision had been made to formalize, that the meeting would serve as a transition. It provided the opportunity to evaluate what the next steps would be as a formal Taskforce as well as targeting members who wish to continue involvement. She also stressed the need to pull in other individuals that would assist in completing the goals of the SFA Taskforce.

IV. Review of Recommendations

The next presenter, Nathan Busch, Protection & Safety Policy Section Administrator with the Division of Children and Family Services, reported on the updates taking place with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Mr. Busch went over the various topics examined in previous meetings. He explained that DHHS was looking to maintain flexibility with their policies relating to SFA compliance in order to adjust as needed. Focus will be on the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS). Mr. Busch expressed excitement that Nebraska seemed to be ahead of the curve. With that said, he emphasized the importance of meeting with providers to find out what RPPS mean to them.

Mr. Busch noted that DHHS was working with providers to give attention to foster parent training curriculum. He updated the group that the draft regulations were still in process. He continued by discussing the importance of youth involvement. The Youth Bill of Rights that DHHS was made with hopes of adaptability. While recommendations were subject to approval, they were welcome input to assist in creating a helpful tool.

V. Recommendations for Priority Conversations – Legislative and Administrative Policy Work

Ms. Helvey directed attendees to the recommendations listed on the second page of the fact sheet handout. She went through each recommendation with the group. She noted that Senator Campbell hoped to bring forth a bill at the next legislative session. There were several areas where additional feedback was needed for the draft legislation. Ms. Helvey indicated that a draft would be released to the stakeholder group in the days following the meeting.

Ms. Helvey separated the issues into long term and short term goals regarding legislation. Topics needing immediate attention within the legislation included the grievance process, the availability of resources, and Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). Discussion occurred regarding funding and where it would be drawn from for the availability of resources. Individuals brought up the Letting Kids Be Kids funds used by CASAs and the grant-like funding for youth used in Indiana.

The attendees also briefly examined the subject of APPLA. The group felt it was important to find a way to document the efforts that had been made during a youth's time in care. Also raised, was the need to focus on strengthening the relationship between the youth and their birth family.

Ms. Helvey and Ms. Skala switched to examination of the longer term legislative and policy efforts. These issues were Normalcy, Youth Bill of Rights, Support for Pregnant and Parenting, Cultural Considerations, and Training. The group agreed that all of the topics with the exception of Training were issues that would be more appropriate for long term efforts. Training, the attendees felt, was integral to the success of the SFA implementation and needed to be addressed more at length. Lengthy discussion occurred regarding the importance of training and how it affects the system culture.

VI. Process on How to Engage Parents, Foster Parents, and Young People

Cassy Blakely, Vice President of Youth Policy with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, and Becca Brune, Child Welfare Program Associate with Nebraska Appleseed, took the floor. The group was asked to think about what resources were needed for the future success of SFA. Specifically the stakeholders were asked to give examples of who needs to be involved at both the ground level and at the higher policy levels. The group was also tasked to discuss how to get the identified individuals and entities involved with the SFA. The following are tables that include the collective responses:

Who Should Be Involved?

5,000 (Ground Level)	50,000 (Policy/Administrative Level)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Parents and Families • Biological Parents and Families • Kinship Caretakers • Direct Support Staff/ Caseworkers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DHHS and Child Placement Agencies ○ Group Home Staff • Juvenile Justice/Probation • Licensing Unit • Medical Health professionals • Youth/Youth Councils • Educators/Schools • Foster Care Review Office • Legal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) ○ Attorneys • Community populations • Community Based Organizations (CBO) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ YMCA ○ Girl/Boy Scouts ○ 4H • Civic Organizations • Advocacy Organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Right Turn ○ PALS • LGBTQ Population • CASA • Providers • Church/ Religious Organizations/ Faith Leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy Makers • Probation Administration • DHHS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Licensing unit • Nebraska Families Collaborative • Provider Agencies • Urban Development • Department of Education • Department of Economic Development • Office of Juvenile Services • Behavioral Health Regions • Center on Children, Families and the Law • Foster Family-Based Treatment Association (FFTA) • Advocacy Organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Project Everlast • CAFCON • NSAA • PE • Legal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Policy Aids ○ Judges

How to Encourage Involvement?	
5,000 (Ground Level)	50,000 (Policy/Administrative Level)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNO community center • Engage family support network • Families inspiring families • FNAPA • Child care organizations • Communication between parents and foster parents • Define roles and boundaries • Develop continuum • Identify questions • Awareness • Presentations - take it to the target audiences • Culture change • Transportation • Utilize existing community meetings • Continue to engage and include • Point persons from regions to convene local discussions and report back • Technology • Evening meetings to accommodate community and family members • Involve CBO's on scholarships • Reaching out and a call to action • AR vendors • Advisory groups • Focus • Messaging • Training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Eyes of the Child • Effective Leadership • Data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Providing the same information across agencies, consistently • Utilize associations as liaisons • Pull in 5,000 ft folks strategically as meetings need • Involve health care providers

VII. Round Robin Discussions – Part 1

The attendees moved into round robin discussions that lasted 30 minutes each. The groups were given a handout prior to the meeting that included several questions to facilitate discussion. In this section you will find brief summaries of the discussions.

a. APPLA

The dialogue around Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement (APPLA) returned back to several points. These included the need to build relationships with adult supports for when the youth exit the system, ensuring that efforts to prepare youth for Independent Living are documented, and shifting the culture of the system to emphasize the importance of life

skills outside of APPLA. The attendees felt that a subcommittee was needed to examine what the transition skills should be, when they should be occurring, and who needs to ensure they are happening.

b. Availability of Resources

The attendees agreed that it would be difficult to establish a reasonable range of activity costs as variables such as geographical location greatly affected the numbers. There was also talk of partnering with other subgroups of the Commission such as the Foster Care Reimbursement Rate Committee (FCRRC). It was noted that the FCRRC had a Workgroup that handled changes to the Nebraska Caregiver Responsibility tool that assists in determining foster parent rates. The groups entertained the possibility that the tool could be adjusted to encompass the costs of extracurricular activities.

While examining the availability of resources, the groups acknowledged that there may be funding options available that had not been utilized. Discussion led the group to suggest that a subcommittee be formed to assist in pooling information on resources that may already be available in the communities such as activity scholarships, reduced participation fees, and no-cost activities.

c. Grievance Process

The individuals present began their examination of the grievance process by looking at the existing oversight processes of various organizations. The groups realized that there needed to be education to ensure that those associated with the system were aware of the existence and process of filing a grievance. Entities such as the Office of Inspector General of Child Welfare, Nebraska Families Collaborative, and DHHS would need to be pulled in to share their expertise with this process.

The groups all felt that there needed to be more research done on this issue with a subcommittee. The subcommittee could address whether the grievance process would be open just to youth or all parties and look into if the process could be used to enforce the Youth Bill of Rights. The goal of the subcommittee was to assist in creating a culture change where grievances were welcomed as a constructive way to improve the system rather than as a negative accusation.

d. Training

Training was a topic that the attendees all felt was important to ensuring the necessary culture change that would accompany the SFA. Conversation led the groups to agree that all levels of involvement needed to be included in training. While initial target audiences would be foster and birth parents, caseworkers, and legal providers, the attendees stressed the importance of including others such as youth, community organizations, advocate organizations, schools, and kinship and respite home providers. In order for training to be successful, supervisors and administrators needed to be targeted so that they could support the integration of SFA into the culture of their staff.

It was agreed across groups that a subcommittee would need to be established. The subcommittee would need to look at creating a template of training that could be adjusted to fit each participating organization, ensuring that training supports a positive culture change, and engaging the community so that training reaches all of the necessary parties.

VIII. Lunch

The meeting guests took a short break at 12:50 p.m. before continuing discussion over a working lunch.

IX. Round Robin Discussions – Part 2

The round robin format was continued after lunch with shorter sessions of 15 minutes each.

a. Normalcy

The attendees explored the idea of Normalcy for youth and others involved in the foster system. A continuous thread in each group was the fear that the term, “Normalcy,” may not apply to the youth involved. For many of them, normal is a foreign concept, and the attendees struggled to find a more appealing term. They also deliberated on ways that normalcy could be implemented for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

While the groups all agreed that work needed to be done to address the issue of Normalcy, there was a consensus that it was a topic that should be weaved into every element of discussion. Since this topic would be so heavily discussed in relation to every other SFA issue, the groups did not feel that a subcommittee was necessary for this topic.

b. Pregnant and Parenting/ Cultural Consideration Supports

Several issues arose during discussion of the pregnant and parenting and cultural considerations supports. Relating to pregnant and parenting youth, attendees questioned how to handle the needs of these youth in congregate care. They also voiced the need to include consideration for fathers along with mothers. The guests present felt that a subcommittee addressing this population was needed to tackle these issues.

For cultural supports, the groups wanted to ensure that the refugee and immigrant population were involved. Emphasis needed to be placed on educating foster parents of youth and their cultural traditions, morals and values, and differing religious and spiritual beliefs. Since culture varies greatly and plays an important role in a youth’s development, the groups felt that these topics were another subject that needed to be considered across all SFA discussion. With that in mind, they did not feel a subgroup needed to be formed as long as this subject matter was addressed in other areas of focus.

c. Youth Bill of Rights

The Youth Bill of Rights dialogue stressed the importance of youth involvement. Guests felt that there needed to be a wide representation of youth involved in the larger discussion including varied ages, backgrounds, system experiences, and current and previously involved youth. Individuals with knowledge of the legal system and the processes were also vital in developing this section for the SFA.

There were several topics that the groups felt needed to be added to the Youth Bill of Rights such as the right to file grievance, constitutional and basic rights, the right to participate in a normal childhood, and a section addressing the responsibility of the youth in ensuring their rights are respected. The language used needed to be appropriate to the audience in order for the youth to find meaning in the document. The groups agreed that this topic needed to be looked into, but suggested that it be included in the discussion regarding grievance processes.

X. Next Steps and Adjourn

Ms. Skala listed the five subcommittees that the groups suggested be formed off of the larger SFA Taskforce. The subcommittees focused on the topics of:

- APPLA
- Grievance Process
- Availability For Resources
- Training
- Pregnant And Parenting Supports

She encouraged individuals present to let her, Sarah Helvey, or Katie McLeese Stephenson know if they were interested in participating in any of the subcommittees.

Ms. McLeese Stephenson thanked everyone for their participation in the afternoon's meeting. She let guests know that there would most likely be a small meeting of key stakeholders to organize the formal Taskforce in the coming weeks. The next step would be a formal Taskforce meeting where all subcommittees would convene and breakout for discussion over the day. She encouraged guests who were willing to Chair subcommittees to let her know. The meeting would most likely be set for early February 2016, and she welcomed guests to reach out to anyone else who would be a value to the SFA Taskforce and subcommittees moving forward.

The meeting adjourned at 1:57 p.m.

12/14/2015

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