

**Normalcy Task Force Meeting**  
July 13, 2016  
1:00 PM – 4:00 PM  
Office of the Court Improvement Project  
5001 Central Park Drive, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68503

**I. Call to Order**

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The Normalcy Task Force of the Nebraska Children’s Commission was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Co-Chair Sarah Helvey.

**II. Roll Call and Introductions**

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*Task Force Members present (15):*

Payne Ackerman	Heather Colton	Nikki Novak
Erin Bader	Jude Dean (1:25)	Mickey Sampson
Marti Beard	Patricia Frost (1:10)	Stacey Scholten
Cassy Blakely	Claudette Grinnell-Davis	Lisa Story
Anna Brummer	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers

*Task Force Members absent (4):*

Ashley Brown	Kim Hawekotte
A’Jamal Byndon	Deb Shuck

*Ex Officio and Resource Members present (5):*

Karen Authier	Nicole Paul	Timoree Klingler
Ronda Newman	Jim Bennet	

A quorum was established.

Let it be noted for the record that Nicole Paul was given authority by A’Jamal Byndon to serve as a proxy for voting matters in his absence.

*Guests in Attendance (20):*

Crystal Aldmeyer.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Erin Aliano.....	Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers
Raevin Bigelow.....	Project Everlast
Becca Brune.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Nathan Busch.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Amoreena Brady.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division
Bethany Connor Allen.....	Nebraska Children’s Commission
Sarah Forrest.....	Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Sherri Haber.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Mary Ann Harvey.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Doug Jamison.....	Christian Heritage Foster Care Program
Brian Lisonbee.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Michele Lueders.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division
Amanda McGill Johnson.....	Nebraska Children’s Home Society
Meghan Malik.....	Women’s Fund of Omaha
Mark Mason.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division
Felicia Nelsen.....	Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
Julie (Hong) Pham.....	Office of the Ombudsman
Brian Rader.....	Christian Heritage Foster Care Program
Lisa Schulze.....	Woman’s Fund of Omaha

a. *Notice of Publication*

Recorder for the meeting, Amanda Felton, indicated that the notice of publication for this meeting was posted on the Nebraska Public Meetings Calendar website on June 27, 2016 in accordance with the Nebraska Open Meetings Act. The publication will be kept as a permanent attachment with the meeting minutes.

b. *Announcement of the placement of Open Meetings Act information*

A copy of the Open Meetings Act was available for public inspection and was located on the sign-in table at the front of the room.

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### **III. Approval of Agenda**

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**It was moved by Cassy Blakely and seconded by Claudette Grinnell-Davis to approve the agenda as presented.** There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (14):**

Payne Ackerman	Heather Colton	Mickey Sampson
Erin Bader	Claudette Grinnell-Davis	Stacey Scholten
Marti Beard	Sarah Helvey	Lisa Story
Cassy Blakely	Nikki Novak	Juliet Summers
Anna Brummer	Nicole Paul	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (5):**

Ashley Brown	Patricia Frost	Deb Shuck
Jude Dean	Kim Hawekotte	

**ABSTAINED (0)**

**MOTION CARRIED**

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### **IV. Co-Chair Report**

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Sarah Helvey, Child Welfare Program Director with Nebraska Appleseed, introduced herself and explained her role as Co-Chair of the Normalcy Task Force. She welcomed forward Interim Co-Chair and CEO of Nebraska Children's Home Society, Karen Authier. Ms. Authier described that her position as Co-Chair would be on an interim basis as a Commission Co-Chair representative as per structure guidelines. Once the membership of the Nebraska Children's Commission was finalized and appointed, the Commission would appoint a permanent Co-Chair for the Normalcy Task Force.

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### **V. LR529: Interim Study to examine the Strengthening Families Act**

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Co-Chair Helvey brought attention to Legislative Resolution (LR) 529. The LR was an interim study examining the implementation of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) in Nebraska. She noted that the LR was given a priority designation by the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature. Plans to meet with Senator Howard, who introduced the study, were in progress. Timoree Klingler, Legislative Aide to Senator Howard, explained that hearings were requested to occur prior to November. She gave a few details on how the structure of the hearing could look, and let the members know that they would be kept up to date.

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### **VI. Overview of the Strengthening Families Act**

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The meeting continued with Co-Chair Helvey giving a brief summary of the SFA. Prior to the formation of the Normalcy Task Force, three stakeholder meetings took place from June 2015 – March 2016. Outside of the meetings, efforts such as focus groups and surveys were done to gather additional information for recommendations. With the passing of LB746, which was introduced by Senator Campbell, Nebraska law came into compliance with the federal law by implementing the SFA at a state level.

Detail was given regarding the areas of focus within the SFA. Co-Chair Helvey reviewed the main topic areas which were the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS), Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (APPLA),

the Youth Bill of Rights, youth participation in case planning, access to pre-discharge documents, and oversight such as GAL reports.

**VII. New Member Nominations**

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The group reviewed the two applicants for Task Force Membership. Applicants which included:

- **Nathan Collier** – Young Adult Previously in Foster Care
  - Would serve as a youth previously in Foster Care in a voting capacity.
- **Nicole Paul** – Training & Special Projects Manager, Nebraska Families Collaborative
  - Would serve as representative from a child welfare service agency in a voting capacity

It was clarified that Nebraska Families Collaborative has requested that Ms. Paul serve in a voting capacity on the Task Force in lieu of current member, A’Jamal Byndon. Commission policy did not allow for more than one voting member from a stakeholder group on any of its subgroups. If approved, Ms. Paul would replace Mr. Byndon as a voting member. Mr. Byndon would then move to a non-voting, resource position on the Task Force to which he had agreed.

**It was moved by Juliet Summers and seconded by Anna Brummer to approve both applicants to their respective position with voting authority and to move A’Jamal Byndon to a non-voting resource position in order to adhere with Nebraska Children’s Commission structure policy.** Discussion brought attention to the fact that with this change in membership, the Task Force would lose an element of diversity. Claudette Grinnell-Davis voiced that future recruitment efforts should be made to bring representation of people of color on the Task Force into balance. No further discussion occurred. Roll Call vote as follows:

**FOR (13):**

Payne Ackerman	Heather Colton	Stacey Scholten
Erin Bader	Claudette Grinnell-Davis	Lisa Story
Marti Beard	Sarah Helvey	Juliet Summers
Cassy Blakely	Nikki Novak	
Anna Brummer	Mickey Sampson	

**AGAINST (0):**

**ABSENT (5):**

Ashley Brown	Patricia Frost	Deb Shuck
Jude Dean	Kim Hawekotte	

**ABSTAINED (1)**

Nicole Paul

**MOTION CARRIED**

**VIII. Review of Subcommittees**

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Co-Chair Helvey went over the five subcommittees of the Task Force, noting that the groups had been meeting regularly since March to create preliminary recommendations for feedback from the full Task Force. The input given by the Task Force members would be taken back to the subcommittees to help shape final recommendations that would be submitted first to the Task Force for approval and then to the Nebraska Children’s Commission at their September meeting. Once approved by the Commission, the recommendations would be forwarded to the Legislature and Governor in an annual report.

*a. Community and Family Voice Subcommittee*

The floor was given to Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Co-Chairs, Jude Dean and Mickey Sampson. Ms. Sampson, an Independence Coordinator for the Bridge to Independence program and young adult previously in foster care, discussed the main focus of the group which was the youth Bill of Rights (BOR). The work of the subcommittee had led to the creation of an online survey to capture feedback from both

individual youth as well as facilitated focus groups of youth. A facilitation guide was compiled by members and distributed to various youth councils and to Taskforce members and other stakeholders who interact with youth. The survey would remain open through late July to allow time for feedback. At the time of the meeting, only 17 individual youth had completed the survey and no facilitated surveys had been submitted.

Ms. Dean, a foster parent, continued by covering the other efforts of the group. Moving forward the group planned to take steps to encourage community involvement in the Subcommittee. Future meetings would focus on seasonal issues that would be addressed in a “world café” format. She gave the example of looking to center on summer child care and activities at the next meeting.

Discussion circled back to the youth BOR. It was explained that the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) had a current BOR that was available in their [Administrative Memo #30-2015](#) which is required to be distributed to all foster youth. In an effort to expand on the current BOR, the Task Force was asked to provide input.

There were many suggestions for the facilitation guide and survey which included:

- Look into having hard copies of the survey available for youth to complete who many not have access to internet.
- Making the survey available in other languages, or at least distributed to entities who could assist youth with translation and completion of the survey.
  - With an increasing refugee population in Nebraska, it was noted that Lutheran Family Services had a refugee coordinator who could assist in reaching that population.
- Members of the Task Force would assist in distribution of the survey and facilitation guide and host focus groups when possible.
  - Amanda Felton would send out a reminder notice to all members associated with the Children’s Commission and its subgroups and Stacey Scholten indicated that she could ensure that the agencies and support groups were made aware.

The members also had suggestions for the youth BOR itself:

- The youth BOR should be made available in a number of languages to ensure all youth audiences could access it.
- Suggested inclusion of the right to have adequate sexual and reproductive care under Access to Information and Services Rights
- Inclusion of an “affirming home” language under Permanency and Placement Rights
- Consider the addition of transportation rights
  - Lengthy discussion occurred around transportation and the liability issues that come with allowing youth a driver’s license. It was agreed that LR529 should include an examination of the liability issues and how they can affect the everyday lives of the foster youth and families.
- Add mental health status to the list of issues upon which the youth shall not be discriminated for.
- Include the right to be free from religion and the right to choose a religion that aligns the youth’s personal identity.
  - This raised discussion on the need for foster parent and provider education on the cultural and social practices of the Muslim community with their increase in population in Nebraska.
- Expanding on the bullet discussing medication information under Access to Information and Services Rights

The members and guest also discussed the need to find the balance of Normalcy between the foster youth and the family setting in which they enter. The norms of the home also need to be respected along with the rights of the youth.

*b. Normalcy Subcommittee*

Brian Rader, Director of Foster Care with Christian Heritage, provided an update on the work of the Normalcy Subcommittee in the absence of the Co-Chairs, Tom McBride and Theresa Barron-McKeagney. Mr. Rader began by remarking on the difficulty of the task that had been assigned to the Subcommittee. He directed the members and guests to the Consensus Document that the subcommittee members had created. The subject areas for recommendations were comprised of Foundational Principals, Overall Recommendations to Enhance Normalcy for Youth and Children, Normalcy and Families, Technology, Schools, Access to Information and Healthcare, and Access to a Suitable and Durable Routine.

It was noted that the language within the Normalcy Consensus document was targeted to child welfare youth and many not be applicable to juvenile justice youth. Jim Bennet, Director of Placement with the Juvenile Services Division of the Administrative Office of Probation, made note of several differences between foster youth and juvenile justice youth. These included the fact that parental rights were still intact, that placement was court ordered, and the limited number of cases that dealt with permanency issues. Due to the complications of issues such as these, the SFA legislation that passed did not include juvenile justice youth within its scope. It was suggested that efforts towards expansion of the SFA to include this population be added to the work done under LR529.

Suggestions for the Consensus Document included:

- Look into including the addition of the juvenile justice population under the SFA as a foundational principle.
- Identify what safety should look like for both child welfare and juvenile justice youth.
- Examine how the Indian Child Welfare Act fits into the SFA.
- Addition of “appropriate” to the language regarding technology.
- Review the Consensus Document for language that may be unfamiliar to those outside of the professional child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Either update language or provide definitions for clarification.
- Include people of color and children with disabilities as identified special populations.
- Compare the language within the recommendations to the youth BOR language to ensure consistency.

*c. Grievance Subcommittee*

Sarah Forrest, Co-Chair of the Grievance Subcommittee and Assistant Inspector General of the Office of Inspector General of Child Welfare, provided an update on the work of the committee. Current efforts of the group included working to create a spreadsheet of the many grievance processes currently available to youth in out-of-home care and other interested parties. Through this work the subcommittee had found that there were numerous grievance processes across the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The subcommittee had identified barriers preventing the successful filing of complaints. One such barrier was that very little data was being collected on how the different processes were being used. A more problematic issue the group found was that youth were rarely, if ever, taking advantage of any of the grievance processes themselves. While there was speculation as to why this was, the group was working with the Bridge to Independence program and the Foster Care Review Office to add additional grievance related questions to their youth/young adult reviews.

Ms. Forrest explained that the Subcommittee had a goal of identifying ways for data to be collected and tracked by the various entities. Other objectives included finding a way to make the complaint process as positive as possible, increasing youth knowledge of their rights, increasing transparency of the bodies receiving the complaints, and making sure that youth were aware and involved in court proceedings. She went on to note that given the complex nature of the grievance processes, formal recommendations may not be ready for the annual report, as additional research may need to be done to identify the best way to streamline the process for youth.

Suggestions for the Grievance Subcommittee included:

- Cassy Blakely, Assistant Vice President of Youth Policy with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, indicated that data from the youth focus groups leading up to the Letting Kids Be Kids report may include relevant information for the Subcommittee.
- Since many youth fear repercussion for speaking out, there needed to be a way to ensure anonymity or the guarantee to be free from retaliation.
- Ensure that education was occurring for youth on their options for filing complaints.
  - It was highlighted that it was not an issue of the absence of available processes, but rather so many processes and steps within each process that youth become discouraged and disenchanting with the system.
- Examine how filing a grievance could be simplified for the youth.
  - The process of filing a grievance could be difficult for a youth who was being oppressed, especially for youth who may have developmental disabilities.
- Look at elements of training for caseworkers to strengthen the relationship with the youth so that they will be more likely to voice complaints or concerns.
  - An example was given of enlisting a safe word or phrase between youth and caseworker that would allow for the youth to express concern without signaling an issue to the caretaker.
- Identify language other than “grievance” to something more familiar to youth.

d. *Trafficking Subcommittee*

The trafficking update was given by Subcommittee Co-Chair and Associate Vice President of Childhood Mental Health Systems of Care with Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Nathan Busch. Mr. Busch discussed the importance of using Normalcy as a means of trafficking prevention for system involved youth. In order for this to happen, a culture change would be necessary. Mr. Busch informed the Task Force members of the system effort to shift from the language of youth who “run” to youth who “go missing.”

Recommendation areas focused on Response, Access to Normalcy, Data Collection and Sharing, and Cross System Collaboration. Timeliness of response efforts was stressed as an important factor. Data showed that youth who went missing for longer than a 72 hour period had a higher risk of being propositioned. Another area of focus surrounded training and education on the signs of trafficking for all connected parties.

Suggestions for the Trafficking Subcommittee were as follows:

- Cassy Blakely gave input from her experiences working with youth.
  - Youth wanted the ability to have a confidential health screening upon return.
  - They wanted an opportunity to collect their thoughts and have time to themselves before having to relive the trauma of being missing or trafficked.
  - Youth expressed a desire to have input on their placement upon return.
- Ensure that all acronyms within the recommendations are first spelled out.
- Look into utilizing the Sex Trafficking curriculum through the Capacity Building Center for States for stakeholder training.

e. *Training Subcommittee*

The final update for the Training Subcommittee was given by Tracey Pearson, Co-Chair of the Subcommittee and Executive Director of Youth Care & Beyond, Inc. Ms. Pearson explained that the Subcommittee worked to concentrate on identifying core elements of training, the target populations needed for each component, the frequency of training, and the methods of training as it related to the implementation of the SFA. Core Components consisted of Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS), Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA), the Youth Bill of Rights, Youth Participation in Case Planning, Pre-Discharge Documents, Sex Trafficking Prevention, and the Grievance Process.

Suggestions for the Training Subcommittee were small in number given the limited time. It was noted that schools and mental health providers should be required to be trained on the youth Bill of Rights. This would be especially important for schools with youth who are involved with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

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**IX. Next Steps**

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Task Force Co-Chair Sarah Helvey informed the members and guests that any further suggestions or questions should be forwarded to the Co-Chairs of the respective Subcommittees or to Commission staff. She noted that final recommendations would be reviewed and a vote would be taken by Task Force members to determine what would be forwarded to the Children's Commission for the annual report at the next meeting in September.

She continued discussion of the next meeting, explaining that at that time the Task Force would need to examine the structure of the group. With recommendations completed, it would need to be decided which of the Subcommittees would continue on with their work. Specifically she noted the Steering Committee which had been formed prior to the formation of the Normalcy Task Force. Currently the Committee functioned as an informal subgroup of the Task Force that helped ensure the forward motion of the Task Force by examining items for future meeting agendas, identifying gaps in membership, and other helpful tasks. It would be up to the Task Force to decide if there was still need for this group and what authority, if any, they wanted the members of the Steering Committee to have.

Lastly, Co-Chair Helvey reminded members to assist in spreading information on the youth Bill of Rights. She reminded members that both Cassy Blakely and Becca Brune, Child Welfare Program Associate with Nebraska Appleseed, were available to facilitate focus groups. Amanda Felton would also be sending out a reminder with details on the surveys to all Commission and Subgroup members.

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**X. Public Comment**

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No members of the public present wished to make comment.

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**XI. Future Task Force Meeting Dates**

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The next tentative date for the Normalcy Task Force was scheduled for September 26, 2016 from 1:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m. An invitation would be sent out via email once a location was secured.

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**XII. Adjournment**

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The meeting adjourned at 3:56 p.m.

7/27/2016

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