

Normalcy Task Force Meeting

September 1, 2016

9:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Southeast Community College

8800 O Street, Lincoln, NE 68520

I. Call to Order

The Normalcy Task Force (Task Force) of the Nebraska Children's Commission was called to order at 9:07 a.m. by Co-Chair Sarah Helvey.

II. Roll Call and Introductions

Task Force Members present (18):

Payne Ackerman

Erin Bader

Marti Beard

Cassy Blakely

Ashley Brown

Anna Brummer (9:10)

Nathan Collier

Jude Dean

Patricia Frost (9:10)

Claudette Grinnell-Davis (9:15)

Kim Hawekotte

Sarah Helvey

Nikki Novak

Nicole Paul

Mickey Sampson

Stacey Scholten

Deb Shuck

Lisa Story

Task Force Members absent (2):

Heather Colton

Juliet Summers

Ex Officio and Resource Members present (4):

Karen Authier

A'Jamal Byndon

Jim Bennett

Timoree Klingler

Ex Officio and Resource Members present (1):

Ronda Newman

A quorum was established.

Guests in Attendance (22):

Erin Aliano.....Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers

Theresa Barron-McKeagney.....UNO, College of Public Affairs and Community Service

Raevin Bigelow.....Project Everlast

Amoreena Brady.....Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division

Becca Brune.....Nebraska Appleseed

Bethany Connor Allen.....Nebraska Children's Commission

Kim Earl.....Foster Care Review Office

Trinity Eden.....Former Foster Youth

Amanda Felton.....Nebraska Children's Commission

Andrea Fiala.....UNMC Student

Mary Furnas.....Foster Care Review Office

Grace Johnson.....Indian Center Inc., Society of Care

Rachel Love.....UNMC, College of Nursing

Mark Mason.....Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division

Tom McBride.....Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association

Laura McCormick.....Nebraska Sunshine Project

Jerall Moreland.....Office of the Ombudsman

Felicia Nelsen.....Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association

Elise O'Connor.....UNMC, College of Nursing

Brian Rader.....Christian Heritage Foster Care Program

Lana Verbrigghe.....Child Saving Institute

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 July 25, 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 at the front of the meeting room.

III. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Cassy Blakely and seconded by Kim Hawekotte to approve the agenda as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (17):

Payne Ackerman
Erin Bader
Marti Beard
Cassy Blakely
Ashley Brown
Anna Brummer

Nathan Collier
Jude Dean
Patricia Frost
Kim Hawekotte
Sarah Helvey
Nikki Novak

Nicole Paul
Mickey Sampson
Stacey Scholten
Deb Shuck
Lisa Story

AGAINST (0):

ABSENT (3):

Heather Colton

Claudette Grinnell-Davis

Juliet Summers

ABSTAINED (0)

MOTION CARRIED

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes

It was moved by Ashley Brown and seconded by Mickey Sampson to approve the minutes of the July 13, 2016 meeting as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (16):

Payne Ackerman
Erin Bader
Marti Beard
Cassy Blakely
Ashley Brown
Anna Brummer

Nathan Collier
Jude Dean
Patricia Frost
Sarah Helvey
Nikki Novak
Nicole Paul

Mickey Sampson
Stacey Scholten
Deb Shuck
Lisa Story

AGAINST (0):

ABSENT (3):

Heather Colton

Claudette Grinnell-Davis

Juliet Summers

ABSTAINED (1)

Kim Hawekotte

MOTION CARRIED

V. Co-Chair Report

Sarah Helvey, Child Welfare Program Director with Nebraska Appleseed, introduced herself and explained her role as Co-Chair of the Task Force. Interim Co-Chair and CEO of Nebraska Children’s Home Society, Karen Authier reminded members that her position as the Task Force’s Co-Chair would be on a temporary basis, until the Nebraska Children’s Commission could appoint a permanent Co-Chair.

Co-Chair Helvey went on to inform the members that she and a handful of Task Force members would be attending the Children’s Summit in Kearney the following week and would be presenting information on the Strengthening Families Act (SFA) and the Normalcy Task Force.

VI. LR529: Interim Study to examine the Strengthening Families Act

Co-Chair Helvey brought attention to Legislative Resolution (LR) 529. The LR hearing had been scheduled for October 13th at 1:30 p.m. The Co-Chairs indicated that they were in the process of scheduling a planning meeting with Senator Howard to discuss the details of the hearing and that it would most likely be invited testimony only. The hearing would be discussed at the Children’s Commission meeting on September 20th to get approval to provide testimony at the hearing in order to share the work that each of the subgroups had done to date.

VIII. Review of Subcommittee Reports

Co-Chair Helvey invited each of the five subcommittees to provide an update to the group for feedback. It was noted that the updates would be shared at the September 20th Nebraska Children’s Commission meeting by the Co-Chairs of each of the subcommittees.

a. Training Subcommittee

The update for the Training Subcommittee was given by Ashley Brown, Co-Chair of the Subcommittee and Vice President of KVC Nebraska. Ms. Brown explained that the Subcommittee had met after the last Task Force meeting to review and implement the few changes that had been recommended. She noted that the only other significant change to the document was to update the section regarding Trafficking training to support the recommendations of the Trafficking Subcommittee. No recommendations were given for further updates on the Training Subcommittee recommendations.

b. Trafficking Subcommittee

Present to give the trafficking update were Co-Chairs Erin Aliano, Special Projects Coordinator with the Nebraska Alliance of Child Advocacy Centers, and Nikki Novak, Foster Family Services Supervisor with Boys Town. Ms. Aliano let the Task Force know that updates were made to accommodate the requests from the previous meeting such as making language accessible for everyone, providing explanations of acronyms, and including feedback from the youth population.

Additional services along with placement options for youth returning from missing status was an area for future work that Ms. Aliano identified. She noted examples from other states where youth could stay with their previous placement or in a designated facility with the youth’s identified advocate present to assist in the return transition. Another example included specialized foster homes with training in addressing the trauma that can come from being missing from care and involved in trafficking.

The group discussed at length the necessary balance of respecting the privacy of the youth and ensuring the safety of the youth. The issue of having a current photo of missing youth was acknowledged as a key piece in finding youth. It was noted that while having a photo could speed up the process in locating a youth, it could also lead to the youth being exported out of the state to avoid identification. This highlighted the importance of communication efforts nationwide as well as between entities within the state.

Suggestions for the Trafficking Subcommittee were as follows:

- Recommendation #4 under Agency Process should remove the word “should” from the first sentence.
- Looking into addressing the core procedures or necessary statutory changes relating to the court process for youth who have gone missing from care.
- Promote the sharing of reports from Probation and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) on youth who were suspected of trafficking involvement with the Foster Care Review Office.

c. *Normalcy Subcommittee*

The Normalcy update was given by Co-Chairs, Tom McBride, Executive Director of the Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association, and Theresa Barron-McKeagney, Professor and Associate Dean of the College of Public Affairs and Community Service at UNO. Mr. McBride began by remarking on the difficulty of the task that had been assigned to the Subcommittee. He remarked that no youth or family would have the exact same definition of Normal, and that the group worked to acknowledge that by viewing Normalcy on a spectrum in relation to the individual youth and their level of placement.

A topic of in-depth discussion was the variance in the cultures of the youth and placement families. Included within this topic was the issue of religion. While the Normalcy Subcommittee had originally felt that the rights surrounding religion and spirituality should be included in the Youth Bill of Rights (YBOR), the Task Force members argued that it should be present in both areas. The work of the Normalcy Subcommittee would lend more to policy formation and training for professionals, versus the YBOR being used to inform youth of their rights. Pushing for policy early on would eliminate the need to create reactionary procedures after complications had proved them necessary.

Members went on to explore the complications that arise when the opinion or views of the youth differs from that of the caregiver. Providing a youth with the space and ability to navigate their identity was mentioned as an important element of transitioning to adulthood. Much of the dialogue stressed the need to encourage education on culture and religion along with the appropriate matching of youth with a placement setting. Future work of the Normalcy Subcommittee would need to look into how these issues could be addressed. Legal restrictions would need to be taken into consideration to ensure that any recommendations were feasible.

Suggestions for the Consensus Document included:

- Within recommendation #1 under the Normalcy and Family section, include emphasis on the importance of the cultural planning element of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA).
- Expand recommendation #2 under the Youth Access to Information and Healthcare to include sexual healthcare.
 - Cassy Blakely, Assistant Vice President of Youth Policy with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, indicated that she had information on this topic that could be shared with the group.
- Include immigrant and refugee populations in the listing of special populations throughout the document.
- Look into broadening the language of self-identifying as LGBT to include youth who may be questioning their sexual identity.

d. *Grievance Subcommittee*

Kim Hawekotte, Co-Chair of the Grievance Subcommittee and Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office, provided an update on the work of the group. She began by reminding members that they could access a thorough [list](#) of the various grievance processes available in the state on the Subcommittee's Google Drive. Ms. Hawekotte went on to inform the Task Force of a survey that had been completed by young adults enrolled in the Bridge to Independence program.

The survey captured responses from forty young adults who were asked to think about the questions in reference to their time in out-of-home care. Results showed that while over half of the youth had their rights explained to them, 69% of the respondents did not know what their rights were. Another finding showed that a majority of the young adults talked to someone in an effort to resolve their complaint, most often a caseworker or caseworker supervisor.

The main themes and issues that were discussed by the Subcommittee included the implementation of regular review of the Bill of Rights with the youth, that the grievance process should be directed towards youth grievances coming either directly from the youth or individuals filling on behalf of the youth, that grievances should address violations of the Youth Bill of Rights, and that entities with grievance processes should be collecting and sharing the data from the fillings.

Ms. Hawekotte also explained the crossroad that the Subcommittee had reached in determining their future movement. She indicated two potential objectives for the system which could either be to take an approach of addressing individual grievance resolution by providing a central navigator for filings, or to take an oversight approach to examine and evaluate existing processes for effectiveness and improvement. She also noted that guidance was needed to determine the structure of the process, which could be either the creation of an entirely new system of accepting complaints or to create a central navigator position within an existing system.

The Task Force members held lengthy discussion over the various benefits of the proposed options. There was consensus that a central navigator would be helpful to youth, but that an element of oversight also needed to be incorporated. The group voiced that it may be more efficient to work the central navigator position into an existing system rather than create a new one. Stacey Scholten, Administrator with DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services, referenced the structure of Florida's grievance process that enlists a panel of former wards to review the complaints from youth. She indicated that she would provide an informative video on the process.

Suggestions for the Grievance Subcommittee included:

- Look into involving former system involved youth into the central navigation process.
- Ensure that there is a clear definition of what can be grieved.
- Investigate if there is a way for the annual safety questionnaire that accredited agencies are required to complete can add information requesting grievance data.
- Identify language other than "grievance" to something more familiar to youth.

e. Community and Family Voice Subcommittee

The floor was given to Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Co-Chairs, Jude Dean and Mickey Sampson. Ms. Dean, representing a foster parent position, began by reviewing the main themes that emerged from the Youth Bill of Rights (YBOR) survey. The respondents consistently referenced the need for information about the resources and services available to them. They also wanted to be provided the opportunity to begin transitioning into adulthood at an earlier point. Youth remarked on the need to have competent and engaged caseworkers, probation officers, and other direct care staff. Lastly, youth stressed the desire to be treated with respect.

Survey responses also showed a high interest of youth to speak with their Judge and participate in their court proceedings. Ms. Dean noted that careful work would need to be done to provide youth with the desired rights while also ensuring that those rights could feasibly be enforced. It was pointed out that if the YBOR suggestions were too specific, it could punish foster parents for issues outside of their control, especially if they are located in rural areas where they may not have access to the same resources as in more urban environments. The Co-Chairs indicated that work would be done to prepare a recommended update to the YBOR for the group to approve at the next meeting.

In closing Ms. Dean remarked that future efforts of the group would be looking at funding mechanisms for Normalcy activities. Initial steps had been taken to look into the current voucher system for daycare and the potential for funds to be diverted to other activities for the youth. Work would also be done to identify any policy changes that could be implemented to provide system involved youth more diverse activity involvement.

VIII. Next Steps

Co-Chair Helvey remarked on the next steps beginning with pulling together the key information to present to the Children's Commission at their September 20th meeting. Input from the Commission would be passed along to the subcommittees for any alterations prior to the next Task Force meeting. At the next Task Force meeting the final report would be reviewed and approved for submission to the Children's Commission subsequently the Governor and Nebraska Legislature.

The question was raised on the structure and how to evaluate the efficiency of the Task Force and its meetings. The group deliberated how members who have concerns or were not comfortable speaking on a particular topic during the meeting might express their opinions to be included in the products of the group. Members with any additions to the work of the group that did not have an opportunity to voice them at a meeting were encouraged to email the

Subcommittee Co-Chairs, Task Force Co-Chairs, or the Commission Staff to be added to the final product or agenda for discussion.

Co-Chair Authier also noted that the structure of the group was still finding its footing. Given the history of the group and their work prior to coming under statute, the adjustment to a more formal meeting process was still underway. A balance would need to be struck between the Co-Chairs, members, and staff to work to ensure that all information and input was being captured. Co-Chair Helvey pointed out that many of the meetings to date had been only to gather feedback and that the next meeting may provide more resolution for members as the final annual report would be reviewed and voted on to move forward to the Children's Commission.

IX. Public Comment

Co-Chair Helvey welcomed forward members of the public to provide comment. Trinity Eden of Elkhorn, Nebraska introduced herself. She noted that she wished to share her experience as a former ward to the benefit of the group and was interested in working with the Normalcy Subcommittee. Tom McBride and Theresa Barron-McKeagney indicated that they would connect with Ms. Eden after the meeting to exchange contact information.

Grace Johnson of the Omaha, Nebraska area expressed interest in the discussion of restorative justice in the grievance process. Kim Hawekotte indicated that the Grievance Subcommittee had only lightly touched on the subject and welcomed Ms. Johnson to join the group to provide insight on the issue.

X. Future Task Force Meeting Dates

It was suggested that the Task Force continue with their established pattern of quarterly meetings. Dates would be set in advance on a specific weekday most likely falling in the months of October, January, April and July. Final dates would be set and meeting invitations would be sent out to members.

XI. Adjournment

It was moved by Claudette Grinnell-Davis and seconded by Mickey Sampson to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote. The meeting adjourned at 11:53 p.m.

9/15/2016

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