

Strengthening Families Act Taskforce Meeting

March 4, 2016

1:00 PM – 4:00 PM

Office of the Court Improvement Project

5001 Central Park Drive, Suite 200

Lincoln, NE 68503

I. Welcome and Introductions

Co-Chair McLeese Stephenson welcomed everyone and asked that guests discuss amongst themselves what Normalcy meant to them. After a few minutes, Co-Chair Helvey asked that guest introduce themselves. Individuals present are as follows:

Guests in Attendance (52):

Payne Ackerman.....	Project Everlast
Ron Ahrens.....	Omaha Home for Boys
Crystal Aldmeyer.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Jodi Allen.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Monika Anderson.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Kim Anderson.....	Nebraska Children's Home Society
Jodie Austin.....	KVC Nebraska
Jim Bennett.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division
Raevin Bigelow.....	Project Everlast
Cassy Blakely.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation
Michelle Borg.....	Nebraska Department of Education
Deanna Brakhage.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Ashley Brown.....	KVC Nebraska
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
Jason Feldhaus.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Project Everlast
Amanda Felton.....	Nebraska Children's Commission
Sarah Forrest.....	Office of Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare
Mary Furnas.....	Foster Care Review Office
Sherri Haber.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Mary Ann Harvey.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Kim Hawekotte.....	Foster Care Review Office
Sarah Helvey.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Doug Jamison.....	Christian Heritage Foster Care Program
Chris Klingenberg.....	YMCA
Michele Lueders.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division
Meghan Malik.....	Women's Fund of Omaha
Mark Mason.....	Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division
Tom McBride.....	Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association
Laura McCormick.....	Nebraska Sunshine Project
Katie McLeese Stephenson.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Michelle Moline.....	Nebraska Children's Home Society
Amanda Nawrocki.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Felicia Nelsen.....	Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association
Ronda Newman.....	Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Project Everlast
Abby Osborn.....	Shifferrmiller Law Office

Amy Peters.....	Nebraska Appleseed
Angie Pick.....	Nebraska Families Collaborative
Adam Proctor.....	Magellan Behavioral Health
Brian Rader.....	Christian Heritage Foster Care Program
Jessica Ross.....	Nebraska Children’s Home Society
Mickey Sampson.....	DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services
Claire Shannon.....	DHHS, Division of Public Health
Gail Steen.....	Steen Law Office
Lisa Story.....	Foster Parent Representative
Juliet Summers.....	Voices for Children in Nebraska
Sandy Thompson.....	Family Inspiring Families/ Nebraska Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
Julia Tse.....	Voices for Children in Nebraska
Deb VanDyke-Ries.....	Nebraska Court Improvement Project
Michaela Young.....	CEDARS

II. Overview

Co-Chair Helvey reviewed the legal aspects of the Strengthening Families Act (SFA). Issues covered included the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard (RPPS), Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (APPLA), youth participation in case planning, notice of rights, and pre-discharged documents.

Becca Brune, Program Associate of Child Welfare with Nebraska Appleseed, gave an overview of what has happened to date with the SFA in Nebraska. Ms. Brune described the three stakeholder meetings took place from June – December of 2015. Outside of the meetings, efforts such as focus groups and surveys were done to gather additional information for recommendations.

Discussion returned to Co-Chair Helvey as she went into detail of LB746 which was introduced by Senator Campbell. The bill allowed for Nebraska law to come into compliance with the federal law and included areas based on stakeholder recommendations. She pointed out the recent amendments that would extend the Nebraska Children’s Commission and would update the language surrounding Guardian Ad Litem (GALs).

III. Timeline and Resources

A review of the timeline and resources was given by Amanda Felton and Bethany Conner Allen with the Nebraska Children’s Commission. Available resources included assistance with meeting organization, report preparation, data analysis, legislative support, and many others. The timeline noted the effective date of July 1, 2016 for the Normalcy Task Force should LB746 pass. Other dates of interest included a full Task Force meetings in July and September and the deadline for the Task Force annual report at the November Children’s Commission meeting.

IV. Subcommittee Highlights

Co-Chair McLeese Stephenson and Cassy Blakely, Vice President of Youth Policy with the Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, summarized the responsibilities of the various subcommittees and identified the Co-Chairs for each of the groups. There were as follows:

- Community & Family Voice Subcommittee
 - Co-Chairs: Jude Dean and Mickey Sampson
- Grievance Subcommittee
 - Co-Chairs: Sarah Forrest and Kim Hawekotte

- Normalcy Subcommittee
 - Co-Chairs: Tom McBride and Theresa Barron-McKeagney
- Trafficking Subcommittee
 - Co-Chairs: Nathan Busch and Jason Feldhaus
- Training Subcommittee:
 - Co-Chairs: Ashley Brown and Tracey Pearson

V. Subcommittee Breakout

The five Subcommittees separated into breakout sessions to discuss their scope, potential recommendations, required resources, and next steps.

VI. Subcommittee Report-out

The Subcommittees reconvened and each shared the main points of their breakout discussion.

a. Community and Family Voice Subcommittee

The Community and Family Voice Subcommittee volunteered to report out first. Jude Dean gave a brief summary of their discussion. Ms. Dean explained that the goal of the Subcommittee was to ensure that the voice of the birth family, foster family, and youth, when appropriate, are included in the discussion of the SFA. Areas of focus would be wrap around training for birth families, reviewing current training practices, provide input on the Youth Bill of Rights, and to utilize focus groups and surveys to gather feedback.

b. Training Subcommittee

The Training Committee had several key goals within their scope as identified by Ashley Brown. Ms. Brown explained the goals to identify both training needs and audiences to ensure the success of the SFA throughout Nebraska. There was also a need for foundational training information that could be tailored to each audience. Issues to address included identifying system-wide timelines for training completion and researching various mediums for training distribution. Ms. Brown recognized the need to partner with all of the other subcommittees to maximize resources.

c. Normalcy Subcommittee

Jodie Austin provided an overview of the group's dialogue. The hope was to address an application of Normalcy without it becoming too prescriptive or restrictive. Ms. Austin remarked that the group would work to consider how to establish and maintain family connections, promoting consistent education, looking at the varied lenses of Normalcy and how to include them within case plan, including the biological families in decisions, and normalizing the use of no.

d. Grievance Subcommittee

Sarah Forrest, reported for the group. The group had reviewed the current grievance processes available in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. She noted that the number of youth taking advantage of these grievance processes were limited. The next steps would be identifying current best practices, creating ease of access for youth, improving education for youth and families about the grievance process, and working to have system-wide information sharing regarding grievances between entities to address common barriers. Ms. Forrest also touched on the need to collaborate with training efforts and how the Youth Bill of Rights will impact the grievance process. The group would be looking at the practices of other states and reaching out to other potential members in the upcoming weeks.

e. Trafficking Subcommittee

The Trafficking Subcommittee report-out, shared by Co-Chair Jason Feldhaus, began with addressing the culture surrounding the issue of trafficking. The biggest challenge would be fostering a culture change within the system that moves away from the idea of missing youth as “problem youth.” Next steps included identifying the systemic issues that can lead to missing issues, creating a coordinated system-wide response to missing youth, and encouraging system and community ownership for ensuring Normalcy for involved youth. Mr. Feldhaus indicated hopes to partner with the Human Trafficking Task Force, DHHS, and the other SFA Subcommittees in preventing trafficking of youth.

VII. Next Steps

Co-Chair Helvey reminded the members of the upcoming July meeting. She expressed the hope to have initial recommendations from the Subcommittees for review. Co-Chair McLeese Stephenson mentioned the potential for the next meeting to be held in the Grand Island area.

VIII. Future Task Force Meeting Dates

The next meeting date would be July 13, 2016. Details would be made available once a location had been finalized.

X. Next Steps and Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 3:47 p.m.

3/14/2016

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