

Strengthening Families Act Committee Meeting

August 11, 2017

9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Southeast Community College, Rooms V-103 & 104
8800 O Street, Lincoln, NE 68520

I. Call to Order

The Strengthening Families Act (SFA) Committee 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

Committee Members present (14):

| | | |
|----------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Erin Bader | Jude Dean | Stacy Scholten (arrived at 10:00) |
| Cassy Blakely | Patricia Frost (arrived at 9:20) | Deb Shuck |
| Anna Brummer | Kim Hawekotte (left at 10:25) | Lisa Story |
| Heather Colton | Sarah Helvey | Julia Tse* |
| Vernon Davis | Nikki Novak | |

Committee Members absent (4):

| | |
|----------------|----------------|
| Payne Ackerman | Nathan Collier |
| Ashley Brown | Mickey Sampson |

Ex Officio and Resource Members present (1):

Jim Bennett

Ex Officio and Resource Members absent (3):

| | | |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|
| A’Jamal Byndon | Timoree Klingler | Ronda Newman |
|----------------|------------------|--------------|

A quorum was established.

*Let it be noted for the record that Julia Tse was temporary proxy designated by Juliet Summers

Guests in Attendance (6):

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Amoreena Bradey..... | AOP, Juvenile Services Division |
| Deanna Brakhage..... | DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services |
| Becca Brune..... | Nebraska Appleseed |
| Bethany Connor Allen..... | Nebraska Children’s Commission |
| Amanda Docter..... | DHHS, Division of Children and Family Services |
| Amanda Felton..... | Nebraska Children’s Commission |
| Emily Greenberg..... | Youth Emergency Services |
| Mary Ann Harvey..... | Nebraska Court Improvement Project |
| Felicia Nelsen..... | Nebraska Foster and Adoptive Parent Association |
| Timothy Thompson..... | Former System Involved Youth |

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 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 to the side of the meeting room.

III. Approval of Agenda

It was moved by Anna Brummer to approve the [agenda](#) with the following alterations: The Department of Health and Human Services would be moved after Subcommittee Discussion to accommodate presenter schedules. Lisa Story seconded the motion. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (12):

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Erin Bader | Vernon Davis | Nikki Novak |
| Cassy Blakely | Jude Dean | Deb Shuck |
| Anna Brummer | Kim Hawekotte | Lisa Story |
| Heather Colton | Sarah Helvey | Julia Tse |

AGAINST (0):

ABSENT (6)

| | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Payne Ackerman | Nathan Collier | Mickey Sampson |
| Ashley Brown | Patricia Frost | Stacy Scholten |

ABSTAINED (0)

MOTION CARRIED

For purposes of the minutes, items will be reflected in order of the original agenda.

IV. Approval of Meeting Minutes

It was moved by Erin Bader and seconded by Lisa Story to approve the minutes of the [May 3, 2017 meeting](#) as presented. There was no further discussion. Roll Call vote as follows:

FOR (12):

| | | |
|----------------|---------------|-------------|
| Erin Bader | Vernon Davis | Nikki Novak |
| Cassy Blakely | Jude Dean | Deb Shuck |
| Anna Brummer | Kim Hawekotte | Lisa Story |
| Heather Colton | Sarah Helvey | Julia Tse |

AGAINST (0):

ABSENT (6)

| | | |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Payne Ackerman | Nathan Collier | Mickey Sampson |
| Ashley Brown | Patricia Frost | Stacy Scholten |

ABSTAINED (0)

MOTION CARRIED

V. Co-Chair Report

Co-Chair Vernon Davis, a young adult previously in Foster Care, noted the change in name from the Normalcy Task Force to the Strengthening Families Act Committee which went into effect on July 1st per [LB225](#). Co-Chair Sarah Helvey, Child Welfare Program Director with Nebraska Appleseed, alerted members that there were a few open positions on the Committee and that members could find additional information on the Children's Commission [website](#).

VI. Department of Health and Human Services Update

a. LB225 Implementation

An update from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was provided by Stacy Scholten, Service Delivery Administrator. Ms. Scholten informed the members that a template of the grievance process had been provided to providers with the requirement for a process to be distributed to a youth upon entering care and routinely 6 months thereafter. Other updates included the policy work for the release of missing youth

photos, the addition of normalcy plan language for group home and shelter contracts, and efforts on transitional living plans.

b. Youth Bill of Rights Update

Ms. Scholten continued by reviewing the progress on the Youth Bill of Rights. Mary Ann Harvey, Project Specialist with the Nebraska Court Improvement Project (CIP), was invited forward to discuss the work happening on the Know Your Rights Guide. She noted that work was in progress to update the Guide as the [most recent version](#) was released in 2014, prior to the implementation of the SFA. The CIP had been in partnership with the Youth Citizen Review Panel to get input from former foster youth on what information should be included in the guide. The hope was to have multiple access points for the information not just for youth, but for families and system stakeholders as well.

VII. Probation Update

An update from the Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division was provided by Jim Bennett. Bennett took the opportunity to introduce Amoreena Brady, Juvenile Justice Specialist, who discussed the recent efforts to create a [graduated response grid](#). Ms. Brady explained that while sanctions had been an option previously for technical violations, but that incentives for to encourage positive behavior was a new addition with the passing of LB8 and the creation of the grid. After researching several states performing best practices, the grid was formatted to have sanctions and incentives that fluctuated for individual youth. Integration of normalcy would play an important role in the success of the grid in that parents and youth would need to identify boundaries and the appropriate responses to behaviors.

Mr. Bennett also discussed the recent development of Professional Foster Care. Professional Foster Care would aim to keep youth in a family like setting and out of congregate care. A request for quotation was available on the Probation website until the end of August and any interested foster parents were encouraged to participate. Bennett went on to explain that Professional Foster Care would begin in a pilot phase with much oversight.

Other topics discussed included increasing normalcy in congregate care facilities, the use of “stress passes” for youth who need an opportunity to cool down, research towards how youth use and understand communication, and the release of photos for youth who have gone missing from supervision. Mr. Bennett explained that Probation faced a slightly more difficult scenario when attempting to release photos of missing youth, as they did not have any parental authority of them. Efforts were in progress to ensure policies and procedures were in place that would assist in the collaboration between probation and the parents to ensure information on the missing youth was released as soon as possible.

VIII. Subcommittee Discussion

a. Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) Subcommittee Update

The update for the APPLA Subcommittee was provided by Deanna Brakhage, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Program Specialist. She noted that the group was working to expand its membership to include more groups working with youth who have aged out of the system. A major goal of the group was to achieve a culture change where independent living skills were not just for youth seeking APPLA, but for all youth in order to help them transition into a successful adulthood.

The group had identified a handful of issues to tackle which included seeing if there was a way to track achieved and desired skills of youth, utilization of Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) to inform youth of legal rights, and discussion on a social media application for system involved youth. The app would be utilized by youth to increase the ease of communication with individuals involved in their case management team. Additional information on the capabilities of the application would be shared as development progressed.

b. Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Update

Jude Dean, Adoptive Parent and Co-Chair of the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee, provided a brief update on the group. With the DHHS and the Court Improvement Project (CIP) partnering to update the Know Your Rights Guide, the work of the subcommittee had slowed. Ms. Dean indicated that the group would most likely transition to mostly online interactions with in-person meetings as necessary. In the

meantime the group would go on an archived status until a new task arose at which time membership would be examined and refreshed.

c. Normalcy Subcommittee Update

Neither Co-Chair of the Normalcy Subcommittee was able to attend the meeting. After a brief discussion the Committee agreed that the Normalcy Subcommittee should go on hiatus until a time when tasks could be identified for the group.

d. Trafficking Subcommittee Update

An update on the work of the Trafficking Subcommittee was provided by Nikki Novak, Subcommittee Co-Chair and Foster Family Services Supervisor with Boys Town. Ms. Novak informed the Committee that the subcommittee was working with DHHS and Juvenile Probation to outline procedures to streamline the process for the distribution of photos of missing youth. Other topics discussed included the screening tool in progress under the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force, foster parent training on trafficking, and collaboration with the APPLA subgroup to better outline the role of the SFA Advocate. Novak also noted that the group hoped to meet with Department of Education representatives to examine statistics regarding homeless populations since they had an increased risk of being trafficked.

Co-Chair Helvey took a moment to highlight the issues that had come up throughout the Subcommittee discussions related to court systems. Members noted that youth had spoken out on their desire to have the judge, attorneys, GALs, and other court professionals be more aware of the SFA. Foster parents were also known to have difficulty establishing relationships with their GAL, especially in the rural areas of the state. Given this information the Committee felt it would be beneficial to establish a subcommittee that would look at the knowledge and understanding across the court system. Anyone interested in participating in or leading the group was encouraged to contact either Co-Chair or Commission staff.

IX. New Business

Cassy Blakely let members know that the Citizen Review Panel was recruiting young adults and to forward information of anyone interested to her attention

X. Public Comment

Co-Chair Helvey invited any members of the public to speak. No public comment was given.

XI. Next Steps

The subcommittees would continue to meet and work on recommendations to be reviewed at the November 1st Committee meeting.

XII. Upcoming Meeting Planning

Meetings for 2018 would most likely change schedule due to the 1st Wednesday of the month having conflicts with other standing meetings. After general discussion Friday afternoons were suggested as a potential meeting time.

XIII. Adjournment

Cassy Blakely moved to adjourn the meeting. Erin Bader seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 10:55 a.m.

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