

Joint Task Force on Children's Justice/Child Sexual Abuse

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Verna Wyatt, You Have The Power
Shalonda Cawthon, DCS
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The meeting began with introduction of new members.

Discussion of Community Partners Sub-committee - This sub-committee has struggled with a clear sense of mission. While all members believe in the importance of community partners working together, it was unclear how this group could perform

projects to help facilitate this. The group did one work product, a 2-page information sheet for teachers, but has not assembled or worked on any projects since last summer. The sub-committee does not have any leadership at this point.

Some ideas stated from the group:

- Cindy Perry - DCS cannot protect children alone and that attention to developing community partnerships is critical.
- Bonnie Beneke - Implementation of MRS has meant that the DCS is developing the community partnerships through their Community Advisory Boards and the Task Force time might be better spent in support of the DCS efforts in this regard.
- DCS faces challenges in putting together the CAB's for the MRS implementation. Perhaps this committee could work on some aspect of that.
- Stacy Miller asked if there are tasks for this sub-committee stated in the 2007 State Plan.
- Shalonda Cawthon sees a value in keeping the committee.
- Dana Cobb - There is a community resource person working with the Department in each region and this resource person has worked out well in the NW region.

June Turner asked that for a volunteer to provide leadership for this sub-committee during today's meeting of sub-committees. The group can assemble at least one more time to develop a strategy for the future

Report from Shalonda Cawthon

Shalonda gave information on the challenges and successes in 6 program areas: Multiple Response (MRS), Central Intake, CPS, Relative Caregiver Support, Family Assessment, and Special Investigations Unit.

MRS

The legislation passed in 2005 and DCS must go statewide by 2010. They started with 3 pilot regions – NW, SE, and Upper Cumberland. The plan was for those 3 to help other regions rollout slowly. However, most regions have gone forth to pilot this project in a quicker timeframe. Resource linkage has been the last leg of implementation and should have been first. DCS is now slowing down and stabilizing the implementation of MRS in order to make sure that they are doing it right. They are taking stock of early mistakes and correcting them. This includes revisiting the role and function of the Citizens Advisory Boards.

There were questions about the Information and Referral (I&R) track. "Resource linkage" and I&R are used interchangeably.

TANF Impact on MRS

There was discussion about the upcoming changes in the TANF programs that will likely result in many families losing Families First benefits. There was general concern expressed that this would have an impact on DCS and MRS specifically. Also, there is concern that many key stakeholders in the community may be under-estimating this impact.

Dana Cobb stated that NW agencies have had much discussion on this. The 5-year limit on welfare benefits will be enforced effective July 1. DHS involvement in the Community Advisory Boards will be critical for planning to respond to this. The impact of this change will likely be great.

Shalonda mentioned that community compassion grants available to address some of these needs. DHHS is the source of these funds.

Evaluation of MRS

There was general discussion about the need to conduct a formal evaluation of MRS initiative. DCS is currently trying to find a source to do evaluation. It is unknown whether or not funds for this evaluation have been specifically earmarked.

Child Protective Services

The CPS staff will focus on investigations with the implementation of MRS. There is a plan for a treat in August.

Many staff have asked to go to out of state conferences. DCS is trying to bring out-of-state people in to TN to do training, so many people can receive the training.

Policy – DCS is updating the CPS policies, producing guidelines that are flexible to meet practice needs, but do not want to reduce standards.

Central Intake

This is an area of success for DCS. There have been many improvements in wait time and calls dropped. Central Intake is not making track assignments for MRS at this time, but will hopefully do so within 90 days.

Relative Caregiver

This program is statewide. DCS has expanded the kinship program to East TN. Region. This program adds on \$140 to \$160 to the “child only” TANF grant that relatives receive. The program is now available in Davidson Region, Upper Cumberland Region, Shelby County, and now East, TN.

Family Assessments

This program involves more than just functional assessments. They are working on integration of a variety of assessment tools. Also, they are developing an assessment tool for special investigations. Dr. Lyons, the developer of the CANS assessment is working with DCS on tools for the assessment track and for the Special Investigations Unit.

Morale

There was a question about DCS staff morale: Do you think that morale among the staff is starting to improve and you are starting to see less turnover? DCS believes that morale will improve as the work environment stabilizes. Current turnover rates were not available at the time of this meeting. Glenn Carter stated that the colleges and universities in the consortium had graduated 19 certified child welfare workers that are still working for the department.

Special Investigations Unit

There was a question about the SIU and their knowledge of services for victims and families. The group agreed that SIU should know how to access services for children they encounter in the course of doing their work.

Historical Perspective of the Task Force

Bonnie Beneke gave a brief historical perspective on the existence of this Task Force, beginning in 1984 with a sexual abuse investigation in a childcare center in Nashville. Representative Bill Covington led a study group to develop bold new legislation to address the coordinated investigation of child sexual abuse. This bill passed in 1985 and was landmark legislation in the country. This same bill mandated a Child Sexual Abuse Task Force that developed and implemented a State Plan to address child sexual abuse. The plan is updated every two years. Then Federal Legislation later required states that receive CAPTA funds to create a Task Force devoted to the issue of Children's Justice and effective prosecution of child maltreatment. Tennessee combined these two mandated groups into the Joint Task Force on Children's Justice/Child Sexual Abuse.

This group has historically identified critical areas for improvement in services to children, supporting the work of the Department of Children's Services, and advocating for effective laws and policies. Several important initiatives that are now in place were originally part of Task Force planning documents: e.g. Central Intake, Multiple Response, and Special Investigations Unit.

After the break and committee meetings

In the Executive Committee the decision was made to allow the chairs to be members of the Executive Committee.

Court Improvement

This group did a first draft of a survey for juvenile court judges to be handed out at the August conference. The survey pertains to children's testimony in court. Stacy Miller will finalize the draft of this survey. The group will start with this survey for Juvenile Court staff, then revise the document for other courts and other groups.

CPIT

Training of all CPIT members is still an issue for this committee. They will engage the District Attorneys General Conference in a plan to provide training to CPIT teams in different locations.

This committee is still interested in looking at legislation to allow forensic interviewers to testify in court proceedings. There is some question about the constitutionality of such a proposed law. The committee would also like to review or update DCS policies.

Treatment

This group will continue to try to find an audience within DCS for their work product on recommendations for reunification of adolescent sex offenders. This document is still in draft form. Committee needs to look at what it will take to get it out of draft form. They will request the executive committee to take up the issue of using the final product with Commissioner Miller.

This committee was developing a survey of treatment practices for child sexual abuse victims, asking what models are being used for sex abuse victims. A draft was developed but the Child Advocacy Centers have already done a similar survey so the committee will look at that.

The committee is concerned about federal legislation that would require registration of adolescent sex offenders (aso's). Bill Murphy and Jacque Page are on the DCS Sex Offender Task Force and the Treatment sub-committee as well. The Treatment sub-committee may also the SO Task Force to take this issue. Stacy Miller commented that the Attorney General's office is looking at this proposed federal legislation. Juvenile Offenders in TN are adjudicated NOT convicted. This would raise serious questions about posting the names of these youth.

Community Partners

This group did establish an agenda. They will look at the membership of the Joint Task Force, identifying gaps in membership and recommending proposed new members. They requested that Rory Alley provide them with a document that shows which person fills which role on the Task Force. Also, they requested that Rory add 2 or 3 sentences about each person on the official listing on the roster, telling about each person's current job and expertise.

The group will assist DCS in defining the roles of MRS Citizen Advisory Committees. They would like to see a job description for resource linkage people and examples of protocols from existing CAB's. They will ask the Shalonda Cawthon for the name of the consultant who is helping DCS develop Community Advisory bodies and will confer with this person. They will possibly establish a list-serve of the resource linkage people in order to connect them to each other and keep them informed. They may do or recommend a media release.

The committee will identify a representative from the 211 system to tell them how that system first with community partners work.

This group was concerned about how to get word out about changes in the TANF program and the onset of changes. Robert Matthews has a meeting set with his Relative Caregiver group on June 14 and he will forward the flyer to Rory who will send it to the full membership.

The Community Partners will consider how to better inform legislators and about the work of the task force.

Training and Education

This group had member Jessica Hooper check with the Administrative Office of the Courts about using their icon on the JTF/CRP website and the Office of the Courts declined.

The committee is working on a brief summary of child abuse signs and symptoms to post on the website. In addition Glenn Carter with the Social Work Consortium stated that they were working on inclusion of child sexual abuse materials in their curriculum and that once the model was completed that they have members available that could train entities outside the school system. Nicole Cobb will research a list of contacts that would be interested in receiving this training.

There will be further discussion, upon completion of the model, of its potential as a computer based training.

Meetings for the rest of the year: Thursday August 30 and December 6.

Toni Lawal gave a copy of summation of TANF changes to the group. Toni will be the new consultant/support person for this group along with Rory Alley.