

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

**August 30, 2007**

### **Present**

Pat Wade, TN Commission on Children & Youth  
Paul Phillips, Attorney General 8<sup>th</sup> Judicial District  
Bonnie Beneke, TN Chapter of Children's Advocacy Center  
Linda O'Neal, TN Commission on Children & Youth  
Jeanne Brooks, DCS/Children's Trust Fund  
Linda Lloyd, DHS/Child Care Services  
Jim Thompson, Attorney General Office  
Irma Buchanan, DCS/Office of Child Safety  
Marjahna Hart, DCS/Office of Child Safety  
Robert Matthews, DCS/Office of Child Safety  
Michael Carter, Disability Law & Advocacy Center  
Mary Jo Howland, Department of Education  
Rae Anne Seay, Legal Aid Society  
Jo Ann Gregory, Springfield Police Dept.  
Nicole Cobb, Dept. of Education  
Gail Crawford, DHS  
Chris Zawissa, University of Memphis Law  
Larry Seeman, Volunteer Behavioral Health Care  
Judy Covington, Montgomery Co. Child Advocacy Center  
Anne Fisher, Montgomery Co. Child Advocacy Center  
Cindy Perry, Select Committee on Children & Youth  
Carla Snodgrass, Prevent Child Abuse of TN  
Debra Valentine, DCS Inspector General  
Stacy Miller, DCS/General Counsel  
Bridget Bandy, DCS  
Susan Barber, Department of Health  
Nancy Williams, Memphis Child Advocacy Center  
Sandra Allen, LeBonheur Center for Children & Parents  
Wanda Mott, DCS  
Rory Alley, UT SWORPS  
Toni Lawal, UT SWORPS

### **Others Present**

Arlene Wilson, Youth4Youth Board

The meeting was called to order by Co-Chair, Pat Wade at 10:10 am. Wade proceeded with introductions of members and by acknowledging the absence of Co-Chair, June Turner and DCS Executive Director of Child Safety, Shalonda Cawthon.

*1st agenda: Discussion of by-laws*

-Co-Chair, Pat Wade asked members to review the revised by-laws and acknowledged Rory Alley's assistance in structuring the by-laws. Wade also asserted the importance of having a protocol to replace resigning members and those with excessive absences.

-Stacy Miller recommended using the language "2.08 proxy" rather than "quorum." The recommendation was second.

-Cindy Perry asked about the thought behind modifying the by-laws. It was stated that resigning members thought it was their prerogative to provide replacements upon their resignation; however, although members are allowed to make recommendations, it is the duty of the executive committee to make recommendations to the Commissioner who makes the final decisions on appointees.

-Bonnie Beneke asked about the process for making recommendations. It was suggested that members email their recommendations along with persons' resume or vitae to UT staff. Subsequently, UT staff will submit recommendations to the executive committee. After brief discussion of the issues and suggestions, the members' unanimously accepted the revised by-laws

-Rory Alley announced that Commissioner Miller suggested that the TN Center for Child Welfare (TCCW) executive director serve as an ex-officio member once that position has been filled.

*2<sup>nd</sup> agenda: DCS update*

Marjahna Hart, Robert Matthews, and Irma Buchanan provided the following information concerning DCS activities:

- Susan Ford of Central Intake has resigned and Joe Saladino has been named to fill the position.
- Marjahana Hart and Robert Matthews reported that they have been traveling across the state meeting with front line staff, team leaders, and team coordinators to support staff with MRS and to conduct case reviews. The focus of these meetings is to respond to frontline staff and management questions/concerns, to provide face-to-face support, to ensure cases are being closed in a timely manner, and to ensure response times are being met.
- Marjahna Hart noted that more training is needed on Multiple Response System (MRS) as well as attention to staff caseload.
- Robert Matthews stated there was no funding stream as of yet for snacks under Resource Linkage; however, there is a process available to submit a request for snacks should persons require these resources.
- Robert Matthews stated there are approximately 46 Community Advisory Boards (CABS) throughout the state. Matthews also stated they plan to review the CABS to assess their functionality and they [DCS] were trying to get those mandated players at the table. Some of the mandated players include representatives from the court system, law enforcement, and school system. Ms. Servella Terry is assisting with this effort.
- Marjahna Hart discussed the "readiness tool" which consist of different tasks that need to be done before the roll out of MRS. Hart further stated that meetings are occurring regularly to discuss MRS and added that there is a need to do some

restructuring as it relates to Investigative and Assessment workers, internal communication, and ensuring that all staff have a clear understanding of MRS. Hart also announced that DCS legal team support in this effort has been an asset.

- The team stated the community has queried them about CABs roles/responsibilities and they do plan to keep the community apprised of changes.
- Irma Buchanan introduced herself and spoke about her 13 years of experience in child welfare from the state of Texas. Buchanan also spoke about the technical assistance being provided to staff (for instance, how to alleviate backlog and how management can support front line workers) during their visits to the regions and discussed the importance of streamlining, providing quality work, and ensuring children's safety.

-Cindy Perry asked about the MRS evaluation component. Marjahna Hart responded that TCCW received the contract and that Pete Heller is on board. She added that information from TN Kids will support MRS evaluation efforts and mention there is internal support (Lance Griffin) and plans for external support (Tony Lomez of St. Louis).

-Cindy Perry then responded by noting TCCW (consortium members) was DCS largest external contractor.

-Pat Wade asked if there were any plans for a quality service review of MRS.

-Cindy Perry asked the DCS team if they had a sense about how many cases needed to be closed. In response to Perry question, it was stated approximately 75% of the cases will be going to the assessment track and a low percentage to Family Service Worker (FSW) and that all of this information will be capture by the MRS evaluation process.

*3<sup>rd</sup> agenda: First rounds of subcommittee meetings reports*

**Court Improvement report:**

Stacy Miller reported their committee received 13 responses to the survey administered at the August (2007) conference of juvenile court judges and all responded they were interested in training to make children's testimony less traumatizing. Miller stated that training might be provided at the mid-conference in February (2008) or at the big conference in August (2008). Miller also proposed using the forensic interviewing model as a guide to conducting training.

This group plans to meet again in October via conference call.

**CPIT report:**

Bridget Bandy reported on forensic interviewing legislation and stated due to hearsay rules, forensic interviewing is not allowed in court. There was also some discussion on Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) nurses and medical personnel. Bandy stated this committee plans to look at other states model to guide their efforts. Bandy also stated district attorneys are working on this matter at their conference and that Bonnie Beneke is working on state application (\$40,000.00 fee) for 2008 and has been soliciting faculty to conduct "training for trainers" (T for T). Also, Beneke is trying to locate sources for funding the application process and is seeking support from law enforcement and CPS persons to assist with the practice interviews.

In addition, Bandy announced that a rule is being considered to include severe physical abuse and suspicious child death under CPIT law. Bandy also reported this subcommittee is working on providing training to judges and utilizing the assistance of statewide faculty to facilitate training. The subcommittee also shared that “Finding Words” first responders are up-to-date and current.

**Community Partners report:**

Cindy Perry reported that this subcommittee followed up on previous business concerning recruiting members and that per the federal mandate, members should include CASA, criminal court judges, parents, and disabilities representation. Perry announced that Marjahna Hart has agreed to provide clarification on these mandates (for instance, does retired judges meet the mandate of criminal courts, how is parent consumer defined, etc.). Paul Phillips suggested contacting local judges e.g. Judge Cheryl Blackburn and Jim Thompson suggested a judge from Jackson and agreed to make the contact.

In addition, Perry asserted the need for this subcommittee to have clear goals and would like technical assistance from DCS concerning how to strengthen partnering efforts. The subcommittee suggested the core agencies (DCS, DHS, DOH, etc.) write down three (3) things their departments need from this taskforce.

Perry also reported that several members shared problems reporting allegations of child abuse/neglect to DCS. One member shared that she reported an allegation involving a 3 or 4 year-old Hurricane Katrina child who was exhibiting behavioral indicators of sexual abuse and that the report was screened out. Another member reported that some school staff has been removed from their positions for reporting abuse; others are afraid to report for fear of retribution, and that in rural communities, there have been cases where reporters have received threats and vandalism to their property.

Next meeting October 8, at 9:30 am to 11 am via conference call.

*4<sup>th</sup> agenda: “Connecting for Children’s Justice Conference” update*

Bonnie Beneke provided an update on this upcoming conference. The conference registration fee is \$125.00 and includes workshops, educational materials, and reception. The conference will be held November 19 –21 at the Sheraton Music City Hotel. Co-sponsors include Court Improvement Administration, FORBE, Dental Management, DCS, Police Chief Assn., Office of Juvenile Justice, Vanderbilt COE, Our Kids, TCCY, LeBonheur Center for Children & Parents, CASA, Satellite Tracking of People LLC, South Regional Advocacy Centers, TN Dept. of Finance & Administration, Prevent Child Abuse, and District Attorney Conference.

Beneke stated her office hope to send out an agenda Tuesday, September 4 and that some of the workshops will include information on trauma symptoms checklist, law enforcement investigations, and three hours of ethics. Beneke also announced that the Police Chief Association is offering 75 law enforcement scholarships and will be provided to law enforcement personnel on a first come first serve basis. The scholarships only cover the registration fee and not hotel accommodations, travel, meals, etc. Continuing education units are available as well.

Cindy Perry suggested offering a workshop on community partnering.

For more information on the conference or if you are interested in providing assistance, please contact Bonnie Beneke or Jeanne Boone at 615.327.9450. Nancy Williams is supporting the decoration efforts for this event.

*5<sup>th</sup> agenda: Final round of subcommittee's reports*

**Training & Education report:**

Rory Alley reported there was discussion about posting a one-page document on the website concerning signs and symptoms of child abuse/neglect. Alley stated there was much discussion about this topic e.g. ways to address a broad audience and how to format the document. Alley agreed to add more information to the document and distribute to task force for review. Alley also reported the executive committee met with DCS Commissioner Miller and she suggested a representative from TN Social Work Consortium to serve on this subcommittee.

Additionally, Alley reported there was discussion about inviting persons from the community to speak to the task force on various issues such as: Bonnie Beneke and Stacy Miller to speak on the Adam Walsh Act; Arlene Wilson, Youth4Youth and MTSU social work major and former foster care child to speak on her experiences; Glenn Carter to speak on TCCW Child Sex abuse curriculum. The latter report led to a question about who is doing legal defensible training. Bridget Bandy reported the contract has been assigned to someone in Shelby County. It was also announced that Bonnie Beneke, Jeannie Brooks, and Verna Wyatt could possibly share information from their training in N.C. at the next task force meeting.

**Treatment report:**

Larry Seeman reported the recommendation by Commissioner Miller to work with Lane Simpson and Nancy Clark at DCS to move forward with the use within the Department of the "Considerations in the Reunification of Adolescent Sex Offenders" developed by this subcommittee. Bridget Bandy agreed to follow-up by contacting these persons and helping to arrange a meeting prior to the next JTF meeting. Seeman also reported the recommendation that the JTF move on formally adopting the "Considerations" document at the next meeting.

Seeman also reported that there is much anxiety about how federal juvenile registration legislation will impact juvenile sex offenders in Tennessee. Linda O'Neal responded to Seeman's comments by expressing her concerns about children as young as five (5) names being placed on a register. This type of legislation has resulted in prosecutors trying to plead down to an assault charge to keep their names off the register. Co-Chair Wade suggested that task force members stay alert to legislation on adolescent sex offenders.

Seeman reported that the subcommittee had previously discussed conducting a survey on victim treatment availability and practices, but will suspend this since Child Advocacy Centers have already conducted a similar survey. The subcommittee will review this work and will also follow the work of a group recently appointed by Commissioner Miller work through the Centers of Excellence in promoting adoption of best practices in victim treatment.

Cindy Perry asked about local discussion on the Adam Walsh Act. Paul Phillips responded that there is not much discussion. It was noted that Nashville has an adolescent CPIT and are discussing implications of this act e.g. federal funding. Mary Jo Howland suggested exploring training on developmentally appropriate norms to address concerns related to cases of inappropriate touching of children by school staff.

*Other Business: Future Joint Task Force meetings*

December 6, 2007

April 10, 2008

July 10, 2008

October 9, 2008

December 11, 2008

The meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Toni Lawal,  
CJA Coordinator