

CPYP Task Force Practice and Policy Committee Meetings

January 16, 2008

10:00 am to 2:00 pm

Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco

Next Meeting: April 17, 2008, 10:00 a.m. at the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco

Practice Committee

Attendees

Robert Friend, CPYP, acting chair
Kira Bellah, California Youth Connection
Kristie Esquivel, Kern County
Jeff Griffin, Orange County
Annette Jones, Fresno County
Angela Look, Kern County
Crystal Luffberry, California Connected by 25 Initiative
Nancy McDonald, Family Builders by Adoption
Katharine Odle, San Mateo County
Monica Rios, Families First, Inc.
Veronica Salmeron, Fresno County
David Turk, San Francisco County

Absent

Cyndee Borges-O'Dell, Stanislaus County
Kat Lauterback, San Luis Obispo County
Jean Little, Stanislaus County

Policy Committee

Attendees

Gail Johnson Vaughan, Mission Focused Solutions, chair
Craig Harris, California Department of Mental Health
Sophia Isom, San Francisco County
Jill Jacobs, Family Builders by Adoption
Fredi Juni, Alameda County
Robin Lockett, Alameda County
Jonathan Pearson, California Youth Connection
Ginger Pierce, Monterey County
Jennifer Rodriguez, Youth Law Center
Diane Wagner, Los Angeles County
Gail Johnson Vaughan, Mission Focused Solutions

Absent

Robin Allen, California CASA Association

Carol Biddle, Kinship Center

Nenita Dean, Stanislaus County

Amy Freeman, Stuart Foundation

Karen Grace-Kaho, CDSS, Office of Foster Care Ombudsman

Susanna Kniffen, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids California

Jude Koski, California Youth Connection

Erin Saberi, Casey Family Programs

Carroll Schroeder, California Alliance of Child & Family Services

Julia Waters, California Youth Connection

CPYP Staff

Eileen Johnson

Agenda

9:30 am Continental Breakfast

10:00 am Introductions, agenda review, review of previous minutes, feedback on permanency newsletter

10:30 am Jonathan Pearson to provide Sacramento legislative update with discussion
Review and discuss policy priority matrix and recent policy changes in CPYP counties
Set policy priorities
Set next meeting date

12:00 pm Lunch in Redwood Room

12:45 pm Separate into committees:

- Practice committee to review previous priorities and focus on one practice area. Develop action steps between now and next meeting so that practice area can receive full attention.
- Policy committee to concur on a minimum of three policy priorities and create action plans to move forward.

2:00 pm Adjourn

Minutes

Welcome and Introductions

Bob Friend welcomed the group. He asked people to introduce themselves and say how long they had been participating in the Task Force.

The agenda was reviewed; minutes from the previous meeting were reviewed and approved.

Permanency Newsletter

In general, feedback from the group was positive concerning the newsletter. Two attendees commented that they like the format of have a brief summary with links to longer text. During the discussion, Eileen Johnson realized that her reminder email about submissions has not gone through.

Action Item:

Johnson will resend the email asking for submissions for the February newsletter.

Recent Policy Changes in CPYP Counties

Bob Friend shared a summary of recent policy and procedure changes (as of 10/2007) in CPYP counties (see attached, Summary of Policy and Procedure Changes.doc)

Discussion

- A culture shift is happening. Permanency is now being seen as practice, not just as a “project.”
- Private agencies such as foster family and adoption agencies are also making policy changes
- It is not cost-effective to cut permanency services.
- How have counties communicated their shift in permanency practice to their suppliers?
- No-cost item – sustaining families through permanency-competent provides OYA

Action Item:

- Eileen will put the policy/procedures changes into a grid and distribute to Task Force members.
- CPYP will sent out the document to CPYP counties, and ask the following:
 - What other policy changes have been done?
 - Please provide more detail on who is doing the work.
 - Is there a cost analysis available?
 - How many children are in care, how many are in long-term foster care, and how many youth are in the permanency project?

Policy Gap Matrix

Based on work from the previous Task Force meeting, Gail Johnson Vaughan developed a list of policy issues which she then sent to Task Force members. She asked people to prioritize the list. The results are summarized in the attached document, CPYP Policy Gap Matrix.doc.

Additional comments/discussion:

- Funding was an area that was rated as very important. However, the problem is not so much needing additional funding, but reprioritizing what is already available. There is also the possibility of using federal funding.
- Some members questioned whether item 12 is really a practice issue, rather than policy: Currently when guardianship is achieved and dependency dismissed, family loses foster care benefits. Need policy to maintain dependency or other way to continue benefits. Some pointed out that guardianship doesn't necessarily mean a loss of dependency. Others asked whether this issue was even valid, because ILP and WRAP services may not be available.

Legislative Update - Jonathan Pearson, California Youth Connection

Jonathan Pearson presented key points about the proposed 10% across the board state budget cut. (see attached, Budget Proposal Lowlights). Although the governor proposed that this method is the most judicious way to cut the budget, Task Force members were quick to point out that the state does not have an equal obligation across the board. The example was given of a family facing reduced income: do they decrease their entertainment spending the same amount as their grocery spending?

Pearson listed five major areas related to foster youth that will be affected by the proposed cuts. He gave some additional information about some of these items:

- Reduced Child Welfare services monies to counties – it is important to know what impact these reductions will have. County Child Welfare directors have leeway in their fund allocation; it is important to keep advocacy for permanency.
- Reducing the frequency of random visits to licensed care facilities - under the current proposal, each facility would receive a visit once every seven years.
- Stopping the disclosure of sibling contact information under AB 2488 – this statute is under threat of being repealed. Advocates are working to prevent this by stressing the importance of its being a prior commitment.

Pearson added that most advocacy efforts this year are going to be focused on keeping the status quo rather than pushing for new initiatives. State legislators have been told not to introduce measures that include moderate to substantive fiscal expenses.

Discussion

Full group discussion by both committees followed the presentation. Attendees shared several ideas about possible approaches for advocacy:

- Individuals at the county level have the ability to advocate as well.
- Stress that permanency saves dollars.
- People need to attend the budget hearings – be the “squeaky wheel” throughout the budget hearing process. The budget hearings schedule is on Senate Sub 1, and Assembly Sub 3.
- Concerning Adoption Assistance Grants, try to raise public awareness and give help to the media in interpreting the cuts

- Are any figures available comparing dollars approved last year versus the amount of decrease this year? Is it a net decrease?
- Explore the possibility of partnering with the California Alliance of Child and Family Services. The Alliance has good grass roots level support. Have individual people tell their stories about the costs involved with caring for foster kids.
- Start documenting how these cuts will impact permanence. Disseminate the information and include specific items, such as:
 - “Here are ten ways we know that these cuts will impact counties.”
 - “If you reduce services by x amount, this is what it means.”
 - Have the information available on the CPYP website.
 - Hold a press conference with caregivers and other people being immediately impacted. The “Hitting the Mark” study done in Maryland could be a possible backdrop.
 - Coordinate with other advocacy groups. What can “I” do? What is my piece?
 - We need to identify key areas that we will work for. We know that in theory we have a position of “no cuts are acceptable,” but in reality we need to prioritize.

Messaging Priorities

1. Permanency work reduces reliance on group care, thus saving money. A reduction in care rate promotes expensive options. Getting kids out of care saves the system money.
2. Reduced prevention/early intervention decreases established family permanency and increases cost and system needs.
3. SB 84 saves dollars by creating a regional center flat rate for adoptions.
4. When your budget is impacted, you don’t cut all expenses across the board. Create more revenue.
5. How do we avoid not energizing “being in it for the dollars”? (the idea that foster parents are in it for the money)
6. Kin family as a focus – lack of resources
7. Loss of federal match
8. Translation of budget cuts into the child and family’s life – What does it mean for Johnny if the family has x fewer dollars each month?
9. What are the messages already provided?
10. Success and savings in reducing care

Other comments:

- The state is the parent.
- Even though the proposed cut is across the board, there is not equal obligation across the board for the state.
- Permanency saves money. Destabilizing permanency ends up costing the state money.
- It is important to have data to back up statements – i.e. cost savings analysis from existing CPYP counties.
- High case load is a deterrent to involving /engaging foster parents
- If there are lost positions and high caseload, workers can’t focus on permanency
- Concerning the foster care rate, make a separation between what goes to the organization versus what goes to families.

After discussion, the group consensus was that the areas of focus should be bullet points 1, 2, and 5 from Pearson's handout:

- \$83.7 million dollars in 2008-2009 in reduced Child Welfare Services moneys to counties.
- \$6.8 million in 2007-2008 and \$81.5 million in 2008-2009 for foster care and adoptions programs. This proposal also includes decreases in the rates county licensed foster homes, group homes, foster family agencies, adoption assistance, and Kin-GAP recipients.
- \$1.2 million in 2008-2009 by increasing the privatization of independent adoptions.

Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 17, 2008, location to be determined
Post-meeting update: meeting will be at the Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, San Francisco

Following the budget discussion, the group broke for lunch. When the meeting resumed, the group separated into the Practice and Policy Committees.

Practice Committee Minutes

Robert Friend, CPYP, acting chair
Kristie Esquivel, Kern County
Jeff Griffin, Orange County
Annette Jones, Fresno County
Angela Look, Kern County
Crystal Luffberry, California Connected by 25 Initiative
Nancy McDonald, Family Builders by Adoption
Katharine Odle, San Mateo County
Monica Rios, Families First, Inc.
Veronica Salmeron, Fresno County
David Turk, San Francisco County

The Practice Committee, led by Bob Friend, reviewed three practice areas and voted by hands on which issue would be the focus of discussion in today's meeting.

Issue for discussion: Supporting and Engaging Permanent Connections

- 1) How to prepare families and youth for the process of permanency and how to support and sustain the permanency.
- 2) We are all aware of the problems and pitfalls regarding this topic. Discussion needs to be "how can we do this better?" We want to develop "best practice" so that there can be a standard set.
- 3) Support and engagement – first point of contact with youth and family.
- 4) What tone does that conversation take so that it does not set up false expectations?
- 5) Philosophy about the first contact is that it cannot be threatening. It is not so much the words we use as the tone of these early conversations.
- 6) We need to really listen to the family story told by the family. This will give us a clearer understanding of the family and they will feel heard.
- 7) With non-relatives, we request that they join us in finding permanency if they cannot "be the one." Request that they be on "our team who will help find permanency for this youth."
- 8) Always keep youth informed while protecting them. Youth have a right to know about their family and have a right to know how the family finding process is unfolding.
- 9) Allow the youth to have a voice in all of this. Builds trust and confidence. How much of a voice depends on factors such as age, developmental delays (if any), etc. The "readiness" of the youth is a key factor.
- 10) Team work is key in determining who talks to the youth about what.
Examples: therapist, CWW, permanency worker, Group Home staff, etc.

- 11) There are system barriers in working with youth such as:
- Turnover of social workers.
 - History of the youth can sometimes get lost along the way.
 - Prejudice about family members from historical information.
 - Getting everyone on the “team” on board with permanency.
- Ideas about doing this very important and key step: Meet prior to meeting youth with all of the people who make decisions regarding the youth (i.e. therapists, foster parents, group home staff, social workers, attorneys, etc.) If there is a person on this team that is not on board, there may be a problem that needs to be addressed.
- 12) We need a common definition of permanency: Is it only legal and physical, or will we include the achievement of relational permanency as a success?

Closing

Action Step for next meeting:

Read CPYP’s Six Steps to Finding a Family

Use it as a model, which will be a “jumping off point” for practice.

In closing, two more points were discussed:

- Getting feedback from each other regarding our individual work would be helpful.
- What about youth in long term foster care who are happy where they are and do not wish to move? What do we do and how do we work with those youth?

Policy Committee

Gail Johnson Vaughan, Mission Focused Solutions, chair

Craig Harris, California Department of Mental Health

Jill Jacobs, Family Builders by Adoption

Fredi Juni, Alameda County

Robin Lockett, Alameda County

Ginger Pierce, Monterey County

Diane Wagner, Los Angeles County

Eileen M. Johnson, CPYP

Action Items:

- Track cost savings in all counties as a result of youth permanence:
How many youth have received permanency services? How many have achieved permanence and been discharged (adoption or guardianship?) How many have achieved a lifelong connection and are still in care? How many have stepped down to lower level of care?
- Query CPYP counties about who is doing the permanency work and are those positions at risk?

Documenting policy changes that have been made to date

- Bob Friend provided a list of policy changes that he pulled from the current CPYP county reports.
- This documentation will demonstrate how policy changes contribute to culture change needed to integrate permanence into the way work is done.
- Publication of this information will help other public and private agencies begin or become more effective with youth permanence efforts, and provide data to assist with future funding and successful advocacy against budget cuts.

Counties

Action Item:

Eileen Johnson to take Friend's report and make it into a grid listing the changes down the side and the counties across the top. Where appropriate, combine policies that are the same. Put a check in columns for counties who have made those changes. E. Johnson will share with G. Johnson Vaughan who will review and send back. Once complete, this should be sent out to all CPYP counties, including the four pioneer counties, requesting that they add new, not listed policies they have implemented and check boxes for others they have implemented. Request descriptive data to clarify how the policy works in their county.

The request should include the fact that we need this information to effectively advocate against the proposed budget cuts.

Other policy changes to add to the grid:

- All court reports address what has been done to achieve permanence (Alameda, Monterey)
- TDM for all permanency cases

State Policy Changes:

- Kin gap, plus addition of specialized care increment in 10/06.
- State not forcing full implementation of 20-30 without \$\$
- Steinberg AB 408, and cleanup bill (direct result of CPYP convening) - every court report has to address permanency for all dependents. Monterey, Alameda assessment includes permanency assessments.
- New law (need bill #) - relative guardianship has priority over stranger adoption.

Federal Policy Changes

- Federal higher education financial aid independent student status expanded to include children adopted from foster care at age 13 and above

Private agency policy improvements

- California Alliance-accredited FFAs no longer can consider long-term foster care as an acceptable outcome and must demonstrate efforts to achieve permanence
- Many private adoption agencies are expanding their mission from adoption to permanence.

Action Items:

- Johnson Vaughan will request Carroll Schroder to have CACFS member document policy changes that improve permanency outcomes. Consider including the CPYP definition of permanency in the request. Also ask providers how their counties have communicated their changing policies and expectations for achieving permanency.
- When we query counties, we should also ask them: How have you voiced their permanency policy/expectations changes to your providers? (i.e., This is what we want and this is our expectation.) For example: Los Angeles has told all FFAs they must get adoption licenses (they have gone from 14 to 31 licensed adoption agencies).

General discussion:

- CDSS is adding a position for permanency in it's SB 163 (stepdown) implementation.
- We need to be sure that new permanency efforts don't undermine existing permanency efforts; for example, the Older Child Adoption Initiative will not fund permanency work for youth who have a sibling under age nine.

Action Item:

Jill Jacobs and Johnson Vaughan will talk to Karen Gunderson.

- THP+ problem in CDSS policy: Parenting THP+ participants can't live with their child's other parent if that parent is not also THP+ eligible. Committee believes that CDSS policy should allow it when a child is involved. Otherwise the child is at risk for increased instability and youth disconnection from peers undermines the youth's ability to attain healthy adult outcomes.

Other Policy Issues to Pursue

Linkage with Mental Health

- We must improve dialogue and partnership between social services and mental health at the state and local levels
- The new ruling on Targeted Case Management now disallows a child to have more than one case manager. If the child has a TCM case manager, child cannot also bill Medi-Cal under case management. Likewise, if the child has a county case manager, s/he cannot also have an EPSDT case manager. One needs to be billed as collateral.
- Ginger Pierce reported that the state is now asking some counties for a 15-20% match to cover possible unfunded activities.

Adoption/Permanence Competency Training

- Importance of assuring that public and private foster care and adoption staff, therapists, wrap providers, etc. are adoption/permanency competent.
- Many states have developed a post graduate certification in adoption/permanence competency. Should we push for that in CA?
- Adoption Clinical Training curriculum (Kinship Center) is well-established, updated with latest information and researched-based. It is being considered for the post-graduate certification curriculum in Texas.
 - There's no state money to pay for it
 - What's in it for the clinician to invest in the certification? (Better outcomes, more referrals)
 - Who bears the cost?
 - Can we get agencies (public and private) to invest in certification
- Agreed that post-adoption certification is worth exploring
- CalSWEC CORE new worker trainer now has a day on permanence (the importance of gathering family contact information at the front end, etc.)
- Need to get training on permanence integrated into schools of social work and clinical training. Hunter College has such a curriculum.
- Micki Duckburry, therapist in the bay area is working on developing a curriculum for a college to take on. (Jacobs knows more about that.)

Unfunded Judicial Mandates for Youth Permanence Services

- An Alameda County judge ordered a 3 year-old child into Dumisha project. The child is not age appropriate; there is no funding for services. Is this happening in other counties?