

SYMPOSIA SERIES ON SUPPORTING HEALTHY EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY OF FOURTH MEETING

DECEMBER 15, 2014

At the Steering Committee's final meeting, the committee received testimony from representatives of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) and began reviewing the committee's draft report to the co-chairs of the Joint Legislative Council.

Representative Ballweg noted at the outset that she asked both DCF and CTF to submit written materials in response to proposals in Memo No. 1 regarding home visiting and child welfare that the committee did not discuss at its October 23rd meeting. She asked that representatives from each agency present their materials and respond to questions from committee members.

Fredi-Ellen Bove, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence, DCF, stated that DCF supports many of the topics included in Memo No. 1. She noted that the DCF memorandum prepared for this meeting highlights the items about which DCF has questions or potential concerns.

Home-Visiting

Regarding the suggestion to expand home-visiting grant coverage to the counties that have the most adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) according to the ACE study, Ms. Bove stated that the Family Foundations Comprehensive Home Visiting program is primarily federally funded, and must therefore follow federal criteria. She noted that ACEs are not included as one of those federal criteria, so if the state were to require ACEs to be a criteria, it may jeopardize the ability of the state to receive federal funding.

Leslie McAllister, Home-Visiting Coordinator, DCF, explained that the home visiting program serves high risk populations in counties identified through a needs assessment. She said that the federal requirements for the program include many factors that are considered ACEs in general, such as poor health outcomes and unemployment, and that when trying to identify families to serve, the program also looks at individual risk factors that include ACEs, such as substance abuse. Ms. McAllister explained that in the last year, DCF has implemented a new screening tool called the Childhood Experiences Survey, based on ACE questions, which enables DCF to collect information about the ACEs of the population being served in the program. In response to questions, Ms. McAllister stated that the childhood experience survey should help DCF better understand the population that is receiving home visiting services. She noted that representatives of CTF sit on the home visiting implementation team and evaluation committee, and that the upcoming home visiting conference will focus on ACEs and trauma. She noted that program is funded by two federal grants of \$1.5 million and \$6.8 million per year, and DCF has applied for additional federal grant funding.

In response to the suggestion that home visiting programs be evaluated, Ms. Bove stated that a state evaluation is not necessary because the federal government already requires DCF to conduct a rigorous program evaluation.

In response to the suggestion that trauma informed care training be required for county child welfare workers and caregivers, Ms. Bove explained that DCF currently provides trauma informed care training to child welfare workers and foster parents, and that other human services professionals also receive this training.

Child Welfare

In response to the suggestion about exploring the two generation framework, Ms. Bove stated that DCF is supportive of this framework and that two generation strategies are consistent with DCF's goal of looking at the family as a whole unit.

Regarding the suggestion to expand kinship care, Ms. Bove explained that DCF currently has a policy to use relatives for out of home placement and noted that 34% of children in out-of-home care are placed with relatives. In response to questions, Ms. Bove said that when determining where to place a child, a relative is considered first, but the placement must still meet safety standards. She noted that DCF trains counties on how to find a child's family member in both parents' families.

In response to a suggestion to implement on-the spot-licensure and background checks for relatives, Ms. Bove said that DCF cannot do on-the-spot background checks under the current agreement between the state Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In response to a question, she noted that DCF considers placement with a relative first, but then considers placement with people who have a strong connection to a child.

In response to the suggestion to evaluate the use of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) tool, Ms. Bove stated that CANS is used throughout the nation and has been rigorously evaluated. In response to a question, she noted that CANS encompasses physical, mental and behavioral health issues.

Regarding the suggestion to create a new ground for CHIPS orders for drug-positive newborns, Ms. Bove stated that DCF believes that the goal of child welfare is not to take a baby out of the home if the baby could be safely cared for in the home by another relative. Representative Ballweg stated that she is working with the Wisconsin County Human Service Association on a proposal regarding this topic.

In response to the suggestion regarding support for 2013 Assembly Bill 150, relating to adoptions and post-termination contact agreements, Ms. Bove stated that DCF has been working on this proposal with the Joint Legislative Council Study Committee on Adoption Disruption and Dissolution.

Michelle Jensen Goodwin, Executive Director, and Jennifer Jones, Associate Director, CTF, presented information on CTF's child abuse and neglect prevention efforts and recommendations.

Ms. Jensen Goodwin stated that although there are numerous evidence-based programs that currently exist to address child maltreatment prevention, there is a need to develop a more comprehensive infrastructure of prevention programs. Therefore, CTF recommends that the committee request that the Legislative Audit Bureau conduct an audit of prevention services that will:

- Compile an inventory and conduct an assessment of child abuse and neglect prevention programs at the count and state level, including public and private agencies and the funding sources utilized, and
- Recommend strategies for improved coordination among agencies and programs to leverage resources and build a comprehensive prevention infrastructure.

Ms. Jones noted that CTF supports all of the recommendations regarding ACEs in Memo No. 1, as well as the recommendations CTF provided in their October 23, 2014 memorandum to the committee.

In response to questions from committee members, Ms. Jones explained that the Community Response project was developed by CTF in 2005 to provide funding to nonprofit organizations and counties in order to provide voluntary services for children and families who have been reported to child protective services but are either “screened out” or whose cases are closed after an initial investigation. The project currently funds eight sites in the state. According to Ms. Jones, CTF has been developing a framework in order to expand the project statewide, but there is currently no funding available to enable such an expansion. She stated that there is currently no systemic approach to assisting these families. In response to questions regarding the number of cases “screened out” of the child welfare system and the amount of money needed to expand the Community Response project statewide, Ms. Jones said that in 2012, over 60%, or 42,000, cases were “screened out,” and that even a phased-in expansion would reach more families.

Also in response to questions from committee members, Ms. Jones explained that the Awareness to Action initiative provides evidence-based Darkness to Light training to adults who work for youth and child-serving organizations with a focus on adult and community responsibility to keep children safe from sexual harm.

Finally, the committee began discussion of the draft report. Committee members discussed whether to include specific recommendations or identify priorities, or to include all recommendations received by the committee during their meetings. The committee did not reach a consensus on the content of the final report.

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