



Citizen Review Panel

District of Columbia

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY CITIZEN REVIEW PANEL

Tuesday, July 9, 2024

6:30 to 8:30 PM

MINUTES

Present Members: Pierrea Wallace, Chair; Shana Bartley, Vice-Chair; Wanda Thompson, Mattie Cheek, Elizabeth Mohler, Emily Bloomfield, Meghan Schott

Absent Members: Patrick Foley, Treasurer, Theresa Gibson

Potential new members: Carolyn Woods, Whitney Miller, Andy Miller, Tyra Moore

Community workgroup member: Rick Bardach

Public Observer: Daniel Jones

Facilitation team: Margie Chalofsky and Toni Carr

Welcome/Introductions

Panel members, facilitation team, potential new members and public observers introduced themselves. The quorum was met, as was satisfaction of public notice. Minutes from March 2024 were approved with no edits. There were two modifications to the agenda by Margie C.- (1) Introduction of context of discussion moved to beginning of agenda to allow Emily M. to hear before her early departure and (2) Toni C. will present the fiscal report in Patrick F's absence.

Info sharing - Updates

CFSA director left, waiting to hear about who will fill the role.

Roni S. shared that CFSA is in the middle of their 5 -year plan to feds and as part of it they had a great stakeholder convening. She shared that staffing is low and many vacancies especially in CPS. This situation is impacting many DC agencies, not just CFSA. Although CFSA's hiring freeze does not apply to critical positions like social workers, it is harder to get workers, a problem shared by agencies across the country and acknowledged by ACF.

Roni also shared that in- home numbers are good and foster care numbers low

Pierrea W. asked about developments in workgroups. There were some short updates about YAO abstract and survey. Margie C. also shared that since with the loss of CFSA staff, all our work and data collection is going through Roni S. right now, she had held off pushing forward the Prevention work for a while. Pierrea W. and Wanda T. shared that their workgroup had productive meetings with CFSA and developed their data charts and may have approximately one hundred cases that fall in their data collection category. They shared that they had thought they would have direct access to gathering the data, but that had changed, and CFSA will be

pulling the data from the case files to give to them. As Roni S's supervisor is now gone from the agency, she is the only one working on the data and will need to get others at CFSA to help her pull it from the files. Pierrea W. shared her excitement that Dr. Tyra Moore had joined their workgroup. She also explained to Daniel J., our observer, about the workgroup projects.

Margie C. reiterated that we are staggering what we drop on Roni S and that we are excited to have Carolyn Woods and Andy Miller now on the YAO group and Whitney Miller on the Prevention group. She also shared that she had found some funds to use to purchase evaluator hours per Mattie C's recommendation. Pierrea W. expressed appreciation for Roni S.

Context for discussion

Margie C. shared that the discussion about structure came out of her conversations with Mattie C., Shana B., and Pierrea W. As different jurisdictions have varied different structures and projects, what is working well or could work better in our CRP? For example, if we are mostly doing research, should we recruit next members for that, or should we do future projects based upon practice? Where do we want to be as a body and do we want to advocate for structural change, (i.e. the appointment process?)

Mattie C reiterated that she was thinking about the compatibility between projects with members' expertise. If the CRP will be conducting surveys, then perhaps we should be looking for members who have that experience, or if we don't have that expertise then maybe we look at other projects. She stated that different states don't always require research in their projects, and we could look at hosting a conference, running workshops, etc.

CRP National Conference- Elizabeth Mohler

Elizabeth M. presented about her participation at the CRP 2024 national conference in San Diego.

She shared that she has many power points from the presentation and asked if we could upload them onto our website. She shared that the conference was hosted by the Child and Family Policy Institute of California and that there were approximately 100 people. She learned that there are about 350 CRP's in fifty states, the District and Puerto Rico, and that they are implemented in a variety of ways. She shared that CAPATA mandates at least three in each jurisdiction with some exceptions. Elizabeth M. asked individuals about their legislative process, appointment etc. It appeared clear that the people she was speaking with had very different/simpler experiences than ours here in DC and that their process for appointments was more straightforward without delays or complications.

Elizabeth M. shared that one state had a youth panel, which she found interesting, and one CRP in California actually changed the mandated reporting legislation which she thought would be relevant to our prevention workgroup. She also shared about an organization called Just In Time for Foster Youth, a support network for youth who aged out of foster care and a model in Boston called HOPE that looks at positive indicators to well-being, an approach in reverse to ACE's.

Mattie C asked whether the presentations discussed how other CRP's evaluated their system or best practices. Elizabeth M. said there was a lot about how to collaborate with their agencies, which seems like a universal challenge. She shared she didn't hear a lot about evaluation, but there were individual sessions on specific best practices. Pierrea W. asked if there was any talk about how they impacted change in their jurisdictions. Elizabeth M. responded that the California group that changed mandated reporter laws worked with birth families involved in the system to make this change. She suggested that there was a presenter who spoke about CAPTA and CRP's who would be good to speak with about different ways jurisdictions handle their mandates.

Margie C. shared that DC counts their Children's Justice Act and Child Fatality Committee as filling the mandate for three ways in which citizens are involved, so we only need one CRP specifically. She also acknowledged Roni S. as helping to keep an open relationship with CFSA.

Member sharing- Dr. Wanda Thompson

Margie C. explained to our observer that we have member sharing as a way to get to know each other a little better in this virtual space.

Dr. Wanda T. is a native Washingtonian. She shared with the panel about her educational and professional experience in child protection, mental health crisis response, individual therapy and assessment. In addition to her extensive work in this area, she is an ordained pastor, has been a caregiver, and is involved in multiple boards, her ANC, Interfaith Action for Human Rights, and many other organizations and important work. Significantly, Dr. Thompson was a recipient of the Biden Presidential Lifetime Achievement award in 2023. Panel members expressed great admiration for all the work Dr. Thompson has been and is involved with.

Additionally, Dr. Thompson shared that in her therapeutic work with children in foster care, 99% of them wanted to go home, no matter how good their foster care placement was. This is why she wanted to be on the workgroup looking at reunification. Pierrea W. shared that she feels blessed to be in that workgroup with her and also expressed positively about the member sharing part of our meetings.

Facilitator Report and Updates

- Updates on MOTA and Council

Margie C shared that this Thursday we will have confirmation and reconfirmation hearings on the Council side and that we still have a few openings on the Mayoral side. She suggested that as we think about skills we need and where we want to go, maybe people will come to our minds.

Wanda T. shared that she was surprised hearing that she was up for reappointment and can't be there on Thursday. Margie C. responded that it was a complete surprise to her also as the date on our roster was different. It is another example of why our system is so complicated. Wanda T. and Margie C. will talk later about how to proceed.

Margie C. stated again that we need someone to step up to Treasurer since Patrick F. is moving out of DC. Shana B. has also suggested recruiting another Vice- Chair, who needs to be someone on the Council side- yet another complication of our system. Members were asked to speak with Pierrea W., Shana B., or Margie C. if interested in any of these roles.

- Fall gathering_ Margie C. will put out a doodle poll

Fiscal Report

Toni C. reported that we just completed our final quarter of this grant year and that our new fiscal year started with a delay due to a new CFSA payment system. Roni S. is trying to resolve it. Toni C. also shared that the grant money comes in two drops because our grant falls over two of CFSA's fiscal years. She also shared that we have a lot of gift cards for the workgroups to use for incentives/stipends for target participants.

CRP Structure - Panel Member Discussion

Pierrea W. led the conversation by asking members what they feel is working and what is not in our structure?

Shana B. shared that in her almost 7 years on the panel, she can't think of a time that we were at membership capacity. She shared that the bifurcated process leads to vacancies on one or both sides since neither moves swiftly do confirm and confirmations are done in batches instead of when we have openings. That impacts our work by making projects difficult to complete and take a long time. She shared that as Vice-Chair she served in interim Chair role more often than as Vice because the Chair role was not filled, or the Chair couldn't participate; however, because she was appointed on the Council side she could not actually become Chair. She also shared that, as Elizabeth M. alluded to as well as others who have looked at other jurisdictions across the country, it is extremely rare to have this appointment process, with two sides of government making decisions for appointments. She shared that when the CRP revisited their by-laws, they found that enabling legislation and policy appeared to be written in vacuums and didn't reinforce each other, such as different timelines for reports. The by-laws now are more aligned, but there have been multiple challenges with our structure including the very long time some members wait for their appointments to come through. She shared her opinion that a more simple process would create less barriers to getting the work done.

Elizabeth M. asked if we know what the history is of why we have this bifurcation and whether there is a political reason? Shana B. said that she doesn't have full context, but she thinks that around the time DC CRP was established, CFSA was under a lot of scrutiny and review. Roni S. said she doesn't know either. Margie C. offered to try to find out and stated that in some ways it would make more sense to be accountable solely to the Council since we are supposed to be monitoring the agency which is the Mayoral side.

Elizabeth M. stated that she agrees with Shana B, that time after time people come on then leave, including Chairs. It was noted that the reconfirmations of current members that are occurring on Thursday are actually very late.

Wanda T. brought up the topic of Listening Sessions with the community and would like us to figure out a mechanism to get feedback about agency services related to child welfare across the city. (Note: This has been a recommendation for a while that went on the back burner while we moved forward on our workgroups.) Pierrea W. agreed and suggested that we could pursue that in a small group so as we don't need to restructure to accomplish that. She also stated that we are missing the expertise of birth families directly on our board, in addition to general community outreach and that other jurisdictions doing progressive work prioritize birth parents' lived experience. She would like us to think creatively about how we can add birth parent expertise to our board that will help determine future projects moving forward.

Margie C. agreed and offered that she has tried to reach out to organizations and ask for recommendations for birth families who might be interested but has not been successful. She asked for members' assistance on this. She also shared that we put money in this year's budget for a community forum. Elizabeth M. shared that they had a Town Hall several years ago and that it was successful, and recommendations sent to CFSA but that it was a stand-alone event.

Pierrea W. suggested that birth parents may be hesitant so we have to prove ourselves first and that we could start with a Town Hall as a first step. Tyra M. agreed with Pierrea and suggested that we develop some role definition before an invitation, since the work is hard and involves intense research which can be intimidating and overwhelming.

Pierrea W. agreed with Tyra M and asked if we can make it more accessible by pulling on pro bono orgs and other volunteers to do some of the data and research while basing the work intentionally on the expertise of lived experience, which is just as important as data, law, surveys. She suggested creating an informal workgroup around developing a concept for the Town Hall and working to ensure we prioritize the voices of lived experience.

Margie C reiterated that as Mattie C had said, not everything has to be research based and we can also have projects that are practice oriented. She also expressed that in her review of past CRP work, one structural issue is that most of the reports- and the community forum as well- were led by individual people who had a particular interest and took it on, often someone whose "day job" overlapped with this work. That is a lot of pressure on one person. Pierrea's ideas of an ad hoc committee could resolve this pressure.

Wanda T. spoke about utilizing our networks to get the word out about community outreach and that all of us have more networks than we think we do, and we could reach individuals with lived experience directly from those networks as long as we develop some centralized way to feed the information into.

Mattie C. suggested that we can use scribes to put the input of members with lived experience onto paper. She gave credit to Theresa G for being the lead on the YAO group and using her

lived experience to frame our work in that group. She also suggested that practice-based projects could give other chances for leadership, such as leading a conference session, etc.

Tyra M. agreed and offered the idea of interns and that there are Social work students who might be interested in contributing to our research. She suggested that because it can be a lot of responsibility to take on an intern through a formal university process, that another way is to offer a stipend for a summer intern to do national best practice research, etc. Margie C. responded that we might be able to make that happen.

Carolyn W. suggested that one place to reach birth parents could be in parenting classes. Margie C. thought that was a good idea and stated there are many classes around the city.

Pierrea W. suggested that a small committee get together perhaps between now and our next meeting. and suggested she join with Wanda T, Carolyn W and Tyra M. who have expressed interest. She also asked Mattie C. to feel free to send ideas, since she doesn't have the time to participate.

Margie C. expressed that this was a good start to this conversation and that we moved forward on the community outreach and can continue to talk about our structure in "chunks." Pierrea agreed that our structure is complicated, and we will continue to keep chewing on it. Wanda T. said that she wonders how the Mayor and Council feel about the bifurcation and if we can start discussing it with them since we don't know how it got started and how much investment is still there in this structure. Margie C. shared that she has been planning to get them together and that it is a really good question about whether anyone is still invested in the structure; if not, that would make advocacy much easier. She said that she will set a process up to meet with both branches and invite other panel members who want to join.

Public Comments

Daniel Jones asked questions about Thursday's confirmation process. Margie C. answered his questions and offered to explain more if he wanted to contact her or be put in touch with other panel members. He shared more about his interest in this work.

Closing and Adjournment

Margie C. expressed that she was impressed with the conversation, excited about our new members, and honored to be working with everyone on this panel!

Tyra M. announced that she had seen the new movie "Sound of Hope;" it was one of the best representations of foster care she had seen, and she highly recommends it.

Wanda T. announced that CFSA has a pop-up on Thursday.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27 pm