

JOIN HANDS FOR CHILDREN
MINUTES FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION ISSUES
JANUARY 5, 2010

Members Present: Mary Meinig; Jeanine Livingston; Mark Courtney; Steve Hassett; Gwendolyn Lawson Townsend; Deborah Osworth; Darcy Hancock; Peg Mazen (alternate for Sharon Osborne); Ken Nichols; Rebecca Peck (alternate for Henry Cagey); Maureen McGrath (via phone); Marian Harris

Staff Present: Benjamin Berres, POC

Others: Alexia Everett, College Success Foundation; Nancy Dufraime, DSHS; Marna Miller and Stephanie Lee, Washington State Institute of Public Policy; Dana Phelps and David Marshall, DSHS Children's Administration; Trudy Soucup and Scott Hanauer, Community Youth Services; Richard Watkins and Paul Cavanaugh, Giddens Foundation; Laurie Lippold and Makeba Greene, Children's Home Society of Washington

Committee chair Ken Nichols conducted welcome and requested introductions from committee members and members of the public.

First Agenda Item: Committee Membership

The committee decided there were no more membership decisions to resolve.

Second Agenda item: Review of changes to the Safety and Permanency Indicators in the Draft Outcome Domains and Potential Measures for Implementing 2SHB 2106 Document

Mark Courtney reviewed the revisions from the previous meeting and explained additional changes he had been contemplating.

One change was to add language that helps to make a more clear distinction between children who enter in-home and out-of-home care.

Another change was to include language throughout the document that emphasizes "safety" when referencing permanency.

Lastly, Courtney included the specific outcomes contained in the National Youth in Transition Database. He recommended that the committee remove the outcome indicator for measuring child fatalities because it is difficult to measure from year to year and it is a no-tolerance issue. David Marshall added that by including a measure for something that is a no-tolerance issue, CA might create the impression that any number of deaths below a baseline is acceptable.

Courtney and Marshall explained that by removing the indicator for child fatalities, it would not preclude CA from performing its standard documentation and reviews for all child fatalities. Some advisory committee members were troubled by the prospect of

removing the fatality indicator because it might reduce contractor's attention to avoiding child fatalities. Steve Hassett suggested the committee could begin to take a look at individual contract provisions, such as a provision to deal with child fatalities, during the joint meeting in February between the Outcomes and Evaluation Issues and Legal and Practice advisory committees.

Third Agenda item: Discussion of Well-Being Indicators

The first issue addressed was if the simple documentation of a child receiving the required health, developmental, and educational assessments is sufficient enough to show that they are healthier than they would be otherwise. Courtney pointed out that parents aren't held accountable for their child's well-being, but they are held accountable to ensuring they get to school and receive medical care in a timely manner. He said that those are items that might best be shifted into a discussion of standards of care.

Both Jeanine Livingston and Hassett suggested that the committee focus more closely on the well-being issues that are statutorily mandated.

Nancy Dufraine asked where cultural competency fits in this document. Hassett was concerned about including an indicator that measured ICWA compliance because—like child fatalities—it is a no-tolerance issue. Other committee members felt it was an issue that needs work because Washington State still needs to improve in order to achieve 100 percent compliance.

Marion Harris said she would bring an indicator of racial disproportionality to the next outcomes meeting. Gwendolyn Lawson Townsend asked that additional language be included that explains the purpose of why each outcome indicator would be broken down by race and ethnicity. Courtney agreed to draft the language and bring it to the next meeting. He said that he would also add language detailing the purpose for why it is important to break up the outcome indicators by age.

There was another discussion to examine if collaboration between children, parents, relatives, foster parents and OPD could be documented and incorporated into an outcome indicator. Courtney was concerned whether this would translate, in practice, into a check box. Another idea the committee suggested was a survey to document this collaboration. Courtney said there are methodological impediments to collecting reliable data on this issue.

Advisory committee members were also concerned by what data are available with the FamLink system. Marshall thinks it would be difficult to answer a question around engagement without a substantial qualitative analysis. Courtney suggested that a periodic survey and evaluation of social workers might be able to answer this type of question, but something of that nature doesn't have to be created through the work of this committee. There were follow-up questions whether a series of interviews would be feasible given current fiscal constraints.

Advisory committee members were curious whether Charlotte McCullough had information about what other states use for outcome indicators.

Townsend refocused the committee back to the issue of racial disproportionality and the importance of “diligent recruitment” of foster families that reflect the population of children in care. She is curious how to incorporate this issue as an outcome.

BREAK

Courtney agreed to draft language to encapsulate a measure of “diligent recruitment” and to begin writing a recommendation that contends with the issue of caring for children who remain in out-of-home care for extended periods of time. A key piece of the recommendation would address current obstacles to accessing and compiling information on foster youth from different systems. The recommendation would express that even though the committee put together a set of outcomes they believe are realistic based on what data Washington State currently holds, they believe that, in principle, it would be impossible to create some of the additional well-being outcomes that have been discussed because data would need to be sewn together from many departments (including mental health, health and education). Essentially, it would be impossible to create those outcomes because there is no data system with the technical capacity to produce robust profiles on foster youth.

Hassett was concerned that there is not enough funding for some of these recommendations and also thinks that the committee should be reluctant to devolve some of the outcomes tracking to the private agencies. Livingston added her belief that any recommendation to the legislature should be accompanied by a discussion around the need for resources for these endeavors.

Fourth Agenda Item: Presentation on Outcome Measurement Options

The presentation included a brief history of what CA has attempted to measure in the past and described CA’s most recent creation, the Priority Performance Measures, which incorporates a total of 21 indicators. The presentation discussed potential future revisions to the PPM system as well as suggestions for revisions for the Draft Outcome Domains and Potential Measures for Implementing 2SHB 2106 document. Marshall also revisited the earlier discussion about fatalities by saying that it’s very difficult to create aggregate statistics on extremely rare events.

There was discussion and some disagreement about whether it would be best to use a measure of relative placement that records whether a child is initially placed with relatives, or placed with relatives within 30 days of removal and who stay with that relative for six months. Marshall feels the second way to measure relative placement is preferable because incentivizing initial relative placement might make agencies more inclined to make hasty and unwise placement decisions. By allowing 30 days for a child to be placed into a relative’s home, there is more flexibility for a placing agency to weigh options. Courtney believes that initial placement is important and should be the primary feature of a relative placement outcome indicator. Some advisory committee members felt strongly that children should always be placed in relative homes and were wary about allowing for greater leniency to place children with non-relatives.

The committee also discussed ways to measure compliance with ICWA standards. Marshall suggested additional well being measures, including using the National Youth in Transition Database.

After the presentation, Nichols opened up the floor to public comment and closing discussion. Courtney recapped the reasons why he is going to add more language to the Draft Outcome Domains and Potential Measures for implementing 2SHB 2106. Dufraigne requested that a glossary of terms be made available so that people external to the committee who might read the Draft Outcomes document will be able to comprehend the full meaning of all the terms.

MEETING ADJOURNED