

Child Advocacy Center – Multidisciplinary Team Advisory Board

Nydia Monagas, Chair
John Esmerado, Vice-Chair

February 5, 2021
1:30 p.m. – 3:30 P.M.
Virtual Meeting

Minutes

In Attendance:

Christie Bevacqua
Christine Beyer
Lilianne Daniel
Jacquelynn Duron
John Esmerado
Martin Finkel
Gladibel Medina
Nydia Monagas
Debbie Riveros
Maria Savattiere
Javier Toro
Elahna Strom Weinflash

Middlesex County Prosecutor's Office
NJ Department of Children and Families
Office of the Attorney General
Rutgers School of Social Work
Attorney
CARES Institute
Dorothy B. Hersh Child Protection Center
New Jersey Children's Alliance
Monmouth County Prosecutor's Office
Deirdre's House
Hudson County Prosecutor's Office
Office of the Law Guardian

Guests:

Joseph Pargola
Pete Boser

NJ Department of Children and Families
New Jersey Children's Alliance

Staff:

Daniel Yale

NJ Department of Children and Families

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting was called to order and the Open Public Meetings notice was read.

II. Approval of Minutes

The Board reviewed the minutes from the October 2, 2020 meeting. The Board voted to approve the minutes without edit.

III. New Business

Review and vote on completed Annual Progress Reviews

Nydia asked the Board to review the new format of the Annual Progress Reviews while discussing each county and to provide feedback.

Gloucester County

Dr. Finkel mentioned that only approximately one third of the cases reviewed were referred for a medical evaluation. Pete Boser explained that Gloucester County has had a transition of their MDT Coordinator this past year and they also transitioned to collecting statistics on the Infoshare module. Due to the many challenges of converting to that system, the statistics may not be accurate. The other issue is that each

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county has a different method of determining what constitutes a case. Pete stated that they may be reporting an inflated number of new children served. Debbie Riveros stated that there are many factors that may cause the numbers on the report. Debbie informed the Board that Monmouth County has also been having a problem with their tracking system. The system is not reflecting the numbers that are entered, causing their data to be inaccurate.

Debbie informed the Board that many times DCPD may make a referral for a medical evaluation for the family, but the family does not attend. Debbie stated even though the Child Advocacy Centers provide education and information to families about the importance of having a medical evaluation, unless they are at a hospital for a serious issue, they end up not following through. Debbie further stated that their SANE/SART nurses are very well trained to speak with the families about medical follow-up. DCPD workers, detectives, advocates, and mental health therapists speak with families about the necessity of having an initial evaluation and/or follow-up medical attention for their child, but if it's not mandated by the court, the family has the right to refuse. Christine Beyer felt that this should be discussed by this board or in other venues to determine if there are ways to approach families to educate them on the importance. Dr. Finkel felt that it may be the way that evaluations are presented to parents, as well as, how DCPD, MDTs and RDTCs work together. Dr. Finkel informed the Board that the CARES Institute developed a booklet regarding frequently asked questions about medical evaluations. The booklet helps families to be prepared for medical evaluations by addressing their fears and anxieties about the evaluation. Dr. Finkel stated that he would share the booklet with the Board. The Board also discussed the possibility of the creation of a short explainer video that could be used to educate DCPD staff, victim advocates, etc. on the importance of medical evaluations and how to communicate the importance to families. Nydia stated that she would reach out to DCF to determine if they can collaborate on education and training initiatives. Debbie Riveros made a motion to approve Gloucester County. The Board voted to approve Gloucester County to receive future funding.

Hudson County

Nydia explained that the Hunterdon County review is missing the number of children referred for medical services but includes the number of children that received medical examinations. The number of children that received medical examinations is quite high, so it is unclear if missing the number of children that were referred will be a barrier and whether the Board would like to table the discussion to await those numbers. Dr. Medina stated that Hudson county had a high number of medical and mental health evaluations. Javier Toro stated that when he is informed that a family has declined a medical evaluation, he asks the detective involved in the case to reach out to the family and explain the importance of medical and mental health evaluations. In a majority of cases, the family will ultimately attend the evaluations. Maria made a motion to approve Hudson County. Christine seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Hudson County for future funding.

Ocean County

Nydia explained that the Ocean County review is also missing the number of children that were referred for medical evaluations as this data is not required for National Children's Alliance (NCA) accreditation. However, NJCA has been requesting this data to determine if the discrepancy is due to parental refusal or due to lack of referrals. Dr. Finkel asked that NJCA separate the number of referrals made for medical evaluations into the number of referrals made due to sexual abuse and the number of referrals made due to physical abuse. The Board spoke about where medical evaluations from Ocean County occur. Nydia explained that the medical evaluation data presented in the review is from both Dorothy B. Hersh Regional Diagnostic Treatment Center and Jersey Shore Medical Center.

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Nydia raised a concern regarding the lack of engagement in mental health services in Ocean County. Debbie felt that their data regarding mental health was not reflected accurately. Debbie stated that they refer for mental health treatment frequently, use two different agencies, and those that are referred attend treatment. Debbie stated that in addition to the other agencies, Ocean County also uses Catholic Charities. Pete stated that there is a geographical concern regarding resources in Ocean County. Dr. Finkel asked how it is determined if all of the children that should be referred for services are actually being referred. Dr. Medina stated that in Central New Jersey, they are keeping track of all SANE cases that are seen by the prosecutor's offices and tracking how many of those cases are referred to the RDTC afterward. John Esmerado stated that the data they have collected over the last 20 years indicates that there is an automatic referral to MDT by DCPD on sexual abuse cases. John informed the Board that there is only a 1-2% difference in the number of sexual abuse cases that DCPD receives and the number of cases that the MDT receives. Debbie made a motion to approve Ocean County. Dr. Medina seconded the motion. The Board voted to approve Ocean County for future funding.

Discussion regarding previous and future RFP funding

Nydia informed the Board the first RFP that was released has been completed and the CACs received notification of the funding that was awarded. As there was additional funding remaining, a second RFP has been released that will be open for both capital and programming expenses. Nydia informed the Board that since all of the CACs have their initial funding and have what is necessary to build their facilities, the need has transitioned to technology and the hiring of staff. Nydia stated that her hope is that the next RFP would be open to fund anything that is related to NCA standards that would improve the counties' ability to do the work that they are doing. Maria felt that if the RFP could be as broad as possible, counties would be able to make better use of the funds. Christine informed the Board that if funding is awarded to hire staff and those positions are meant to be continuous, there may be an issue as funding amounts may not be the same for each fiscal year.

The Board discussed the possibility of creating a funding formula to determine the amount of funding each county would receive rather than using an RFP process. The discussion included having DCF contract with each county or DCF awarding NJCA with the entire amount and NJCA developing MOUs with each county. Nydia asked what the next step would be to transition from an RFP to a funding formula process. The Board discussed that NJCA would have a conversation with each county to determine what would be funded with the money and then there would have to be additional conversations internally at DCF to determine if and how the process can be changed. Nydia stated that she would do some further research and that the Board would revisit the conversation at the next meeting.

John stated that the legislation was created with the intent of awarding funds to counties to assist with roadblocks to developing a CAC. This was a temporary stopgap measure to assist with best practices available in all 21 counties. John felt that the responsibility of sustainability of the CAC lies with the counties. John stated that while it may help counties to use these funds to hire staff for one or two years, counties should be using property tax funds to sustain these positions. John felt that there has to be buy-in from the county freeholders for it to be sustainable.

Data Workgroup Update

Nydia informed the Board that Katie Stoehr, DCF Deputy Commissioner of Operations, has joined the Data Workgroup. The workgroup is in the process of reviewing a draft of an RFP to hire a consultant to review the data and make recommendations around consistency across definitions and how data is collected.

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IV. Announcements

Nydia informed the Board that Gloucester and Bergen Counties were officially accredited by the NCA. There are now 12 accredited CACs and 5 associate member CACs in NJ. For the remaining 4 counties, 2 counties will be applying for accreditation and the other 2 are working towards becoming associate members.

Dr. Finkel informed the Board that on March 16, 2021, the CARES Institute will be holding their next Experts in Child Abuse and Neglect lecture series. The lecture will include Professor John Myers, a leading authority on rules of evidence in child abuse cases.

V. Adjourn

Next meeting Friday, April 9, 2021.