



New Jersey Task Force on Child Abuse and Neglect

Christine Norbut Beyer, MSW, Co-Chair
Martin A. Finkel, DO, FACOP, FAAP, Co-Chair

Minutes

March 27, 2020
Conference Call

In Attendance

Christian Arnold	Office of the Attorney General
Christine Beyer	NJ Department of Children and Families
Mary Coogan	Advocates for Children of New Jersey
Cindy Cortez	Office of Senator Shirley Turner
Esther East	Jewish Family Services
Martin A. Finkel	CARES Institute
Hon. Margaret Foti	Bergen County Superior Court
Kathy Haggerty	Administrative Office of the Courts
Seetha Holmes	Office of the Public Defender
Christina Lazzaruolo	Attorney
Corinne LeBaron	embrella
Sonia Moticha	Department of Education
Kaitlin Mulcahy	Montclair State University
Assw. Nancy Muñoz	Legislative District 21
Jason Sarnoski	Warren County Freeholder
Richard Stagliano	Center for Family Services
Jennifer Underwood	Department of Community Affairs
Wendi White	Department of Corrections

Guests:

Patty Mojta	PCA NJ
Jason Butkowski	NJ Department of Children and Families
Cheryl Mojta	NJ CAP

Staff

Daniel Yale	NJ Department of Children and Families
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“In compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, notice of this meeting was given by way of notice filed with the Secretary of State, the Trenton Times and the Newark Star Ledger and posted at the Department of State, 125 West State St., 1st Floor, Trenton, New Jersey.”

Introduction and Welcome

A brief welcome was provided by Dr. Finkel and each member briefly introduced themselves.

NJTFCAN Business

Review and approve minutes from the meeting on December 20, 2019.



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The minutes from December 20, 2019 were approved without edit.

Updates from NJTF CAN members on the efforts of their Department/Legislature to address the needs of children and families in light of the coronavirus?

Commissioner Beyer informed that Task Force that one of the difficulties during these unprecedented times is not knowing what will happen in the future but still being able to ensure that we are connecting with children and families, that we are keeping kids safe, and that we are providing services and resources that they need. Commissioner Beyer stated that, in terms of staff, almost all of DCF's 6,700 employees are working remotely and that the majority of that work was accomplished in just three or four days. There were some Information Technology (IT) issues, but the state level IT department and DCF IT department have been incredible in their help to accomplish this.

There have been challenges regarding service provision as well. DCF released guidance this week for in-home and community programs, the use of telehealth, and remote technology for the services that are provided. The lack of personal protective equipment has also been a challenge for our staff to conduct child abuse and neglect investigations. DCF has been working with the Department of Health, the NJ State Police, and the Attorney General's office to put data sharing agreements in place so that we know at the DCF State Central Registry if we are sending an investigator to a home where there may be COVID-19 positive individuals. This will assist in helping staff be prepared and to know what equipment they will need to respond. There are also challenges regarding availability of staff and even availability of local police departments to offer support. DCF is planning for the possibility of a reduction in staff that are willing to continue to conduct abuse and neglect investigations. Commissioner Beyer has been in talks with the State Police regarding whether law enforcement that aren't working or aren't critical to essential functions will be able to assist in conducting child abuse investigations.

Commissioner Beyer stated that the risk of child abuse and neglect is higher during these times. Domestic violence cases are already on the rise. There is an increase in many states in Emergency Rooms regarding the presentation of children under the age of four with severe abuse. There is a possibility that there will be an increase in NJ of severe child abuse and neglect as well as child fatalities. Our primary referral sources; schools, childcare facilities, pediatricians and law enforcement do not the access to children that they have had previously. For Child Abuse Prevention Month, we are putting out videos regarding the helplines, the hotlines, and the domestic violence hotline. This week, DCF released a video about the 6 techniques to destress. DCF is trying to get parents to recognize some of the things they can do to self-regulate. In April, we are talking about asking the community to bridge the gap when the systems are shut down. It is really a moral imperative that we should all look after and pay attention to children in the state. DCF will also be releasing information specifically for teachers and the Department of Education around identifying some things that they can do to help children in abusive situations through remote learning.

DCF has scaled back many of the services that are available and what we are doing in terms of face to face service delivery. For 30 days we will stop doing face to face visits with children and their parents in foster care. Although a very difficult decision, it was necessary to keep children safe. We are ensuring that there is more communication between biological parents and their children during this time by conducting visits using video and telephone. We have a number of foster parents who have stepped up and agreed to take in children that are under suspicion of having COVID-19 or have already tested positive.

One of the challenges that is coming up for DCF is around the children that are in congregate care settings in our Children's System of Care. Many congregate care facilities are having workforce issues. Some staff are being



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mandated to do double shifts or stay longer because other staff are not available. They are starting to identify houses around the state where we can accommodate a small number of children who need to be quarantined or test positive so that they can be isolated from other children. We have been asking providers to submit daily surveys about what is happening in their programs including any issues that they are experiencing. We are trying to capture as much data and information as possible.

DCF has structured ourselves to determine the most critical areas. We have broken into teams: In-home community, congregate care, DCP&P, and operational issues. We also have specific impact teams regarding IT, Fiscal, and Human Resources. Those groups meet on a daily basis for an hour each day. Any issues that can't be resolved are raised to a steering committee that consists of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioners. We are also communicating with other departments where we might have crossover.

An issue was raised regarding whether families and foster families had the technology to be able to have video visitation. Commissioner Beyer informed the Task Force that DCF installed Skype on all state cellular telephones so now all state employees have the ability to do video conferencing. The Department created a resource list that contained all of the things that might be necessary to continue operations during this time. Included on that list were iPads, tablets, and cell phones to provide to foster parents for this specific purpose. Another issue was raised regarding how DCF is assisting adolescents that are transitioning out of placement. Commissioner Beyer stated that very early on, as colleges began to close and kids were moving out of their dorms, DCF connected with all of the adolescents that we are involved with to make sure that they could either stay in their dorm or that they had an alternate place to live. We only had one youth that was of concern and we were able to work with her and the university which she attends for her to be able to stay in her dorm room. For the those that do not attend college or attend community college, we made sure that they have all of the equipment that they need. We connected with the youth that are living on their own or in transitional housing to see if they had needs and if they had supports in the event that they did need something.

Dr. Finkel stated that the Regional Diagnostic Treatment Centers (RDTCs) have received good guidance from DCPP and the RDTCs have also provided guidance around how they would respond depending on urgency. In his office, they have a doctor on call 24 hours a day that can determine the urgency of the situation. They are also participating in all Multidisciplinary Team conferences. Regarding mental health, they are transitioning all of their mental health services to telemedicine. They are currently developing standards and protocols for telehealth. Regarding the potential for child abuse being on the rise and not having eyes on these children, Commissioner Beyer asked the members of the Task Force for ideas on how they can use their agencies, disciplines, and positions in their community to rally people in NJ around this issue. Commissioner Beyer stated that members can either share any ideas they may have during this meeting or share them through email. Sonia Moticha informed the Task Force that she would be happy to connect people to the DOE staff member in charge of COVID-19 related issues if that will help in any way. Mary Coogan suggested placing links in email signatures to resources to help parents cope with and relieve stress.

Commissioner Beyer informed the Task Force that DCF has been asking providers to send questions, comments, or ideas to askdcf@dcf.nj.gov. These questions are reviewed and will be posted on a Frequently Asked Questions section of DCF's coronavirus webpage. This will allow for everyone to have access to that information in a central location.

Presentation on the WE CAN (Working to End Child Abuse and Neglect) Social Media Campaign

Patty Mojta, Prevent Child Abuse New Jersey, NJTF CAN Prevention Committee



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The Task Force previously received two documents that included information and descriptions of the WE CAN campaign. Patty explained that the WE CAN campaign is a social media campaign that was developed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Technical Assistance and Strategic Dissemination Center (CANTASD). The intent of WE CAN was to be a national campaign regarding awareness of child abuse and neglect prevention. The Communication Workgroup reached out to CANTASD and worked to create a modifiable version that states can adopt to conduct their own statewide campaign. New Jersey will be the first state to do so. The campaign includes images that are already formatted for use with Facebook. All of the images included are very professional, diverse, and positive. Each image has a tagline at the bottom with a prevention message and a link to a resource that connects to the message. States are permitted to include their own logos in the image as well as change the subheading and resource link. The Prevention Committee created the messages and links that will be used in the campaign.

Patty explained that the Prevention Committee is requesting Task Force approval of this social media campaign so that the campaign can begin in April for Child Abuse Prevention Month. Jason Butkowski explained that the way this campaign was envisioned was that DCF would share the content on social media beginning April 1st and throughout the month as part of Child Abuse Prevention Month. What DCF would ask of the Task Force, in addition to approving this campaign, is that members would be able to share the messaging from their specific organizations to amplify the message. Mary Coogan made a motion to approve the campaign but also for Task Force members to agree to engage in the campaign. Judge Foti seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Subcommittee/Committee Updates

Communication Committee

Cheryl Mojta informed the Task Force that the Communication Committee reached out to the corporate office of Saker Shoprites to discuss working together on a point of sale campaign for the Children's Trust Fund (CTF). Cheryl explained that Saker Shoprites did not have the capacity to work on a campaign for the CTF at this time. It was suggested that the Committee reach out to Wakefern Shoprites.

Jason explained that one of the components of the CTF marketing campaign was to have the NJTF CAN Co-Chairs reach out to corporate giving offices within NJ. The Communication Committee planned to complete a letter to send out to a number of corporations with the signature of the NJTF CAN co-chairs. This has not yet been completed but will be forthcoming. Cheryl spoke about the social media campaign that was approved by the Task Force. MarketSmith was chosen as the social media manager and the campaign will use content that was created and approved by the Communication Committee.

Prevention Committee

Patty informed the Task Force that the Prevention Committee met on March 5, 2020. During this meeting, the Committee spent discussed the CDC's technical package to prevent child abuse and neglect. The Committee conducted a crosswalk regarding what the CDC recommends and what is happening in NJ as well as discussed and identified gaps or areas to be strengthened. During the next meeting, the Committee will focus on what they want to prioritize and use that conversation to start the process of developing the next Prevention Plan.



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Protection Committee

Richard Stagliano informed the Task Force that the Protection Committee did not hold a meeting in March as was scheduled. The Digital Realm of Child Abuse workgroup of the Committee continues to work on the survey data that was received from school districts across the state. The hope is that the workgroup will have recommendations this summer. The Juveniles with Sexually Inappropriate Behaviors workgroup has had a setback in their plan to train clinicians to work with this population as the leader of the workgroup has retired.

Staffing and Oversight Review Committee

No update was provided at this time.

Next Meeting – June 26, 2020 in Trenton.