

Act 264 Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Friday, November 17, 2023

9:30-12:00

Looking for information about Act 264? Please go here: <https://ifs.vermont.gov/docs/sit>

Act 264 Board Members Present: Matt Wolf, Alice Maynard, Doug Norford, Heather Freeman, Megean Martin

Regrets from Board Members: Kristin Holsman-Francoeur, Cinn Smith

State Staff: Cheryle Wilcox, Beth Sausville

Members of the Public: Laurie Mulhern, Cheryl Huntley, Sandi Yandow

Agenda Item	Discussion Notes
DCF Commissioner Chris Winters and Family Services Deputy Commissioner, Aryka Radke	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. What are your top three focus areas for 2024?<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Restoring the High-End System of Care (HESOC) at all levels, including residential, community-based and foster care.<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. We are trying in many ways to rebuild the system of care. Working to stand up programs and a new permanent facility for the highest end for the system of care. Have had legal blocking in some communities to do this. Have put out requests for proposals and are trying to staff.b. Working to have a temporary facility in Middlesex. This will be available in late January 2024 and the community is accepting of this.c. Put out a Request for Proposal for a permanent facility. Proposals were due Nov. 10th and they are reviewing some good ones to determine which way to go. The permanent facility will be a couple of years out.d. There is a lot of scrutiny and a lot of internal reflections after the article about Woodside came out in <i>Seven Days</i>.e. We want smaller and more tailored programming. Internal focus on health, safety and wellness at programs—for youth and staff.f. A Specialized Response Team is being created at AHS to support Family Services staff who are staffing youth in temporary placements. About 1 ½ years ago, Beth reached out to the Dept. of Corrections because they had a model and approach which they were using in their system that FSD might be able to replicate. The Secretary’s Office supported this effort to figure out how more staff at AHS in other depts. could help FSD staff who got called out to staff youth. They are moving forward with a North team and a South team to staff youth at alternative locations.2. Stabilizing the FSD workforce by implementing innovative retention and recruitment strategies. Have had many staff leave due to the stressful work.

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	<p>3. Securing the remaining funding to fully implement a Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS). We are one of the last in the US to have their 1982 software system in place for data tracking and funding pull downs.</p> <p>a. DCF Commissioner has allocated carry forward funds to support this. They are further ahead with this than ever before, but still have a significant ways to go.</p> <p>4. Families Come First Legislation is a priority. Their 5-year prevention plan has been approved and they are moving forward with evidence-based practices.</p> <p>2. What are the current plans to replace your data system? Been using carry forward funds and federal match funds for a new system. The office of The Child, youth and Family Advocate are also very interested in this work and getting a new system. Also have to use spreadsheets. DCF has been letting stakeholders know about this need in order to get support for the funding to move this forward. This investment will have great return. Deputy Commissioner Radke will send more detail about this so the Board can offer support towards this effort.</p> <p>3. Are there innovations that have emerged from the pandemic that you would like to maintain going forward? If so, what are they? Absolutely. We have learned how to leverage technology to do our work more efficiently. Continuing hybrid work models, as long as the business need is met, is important for effective functioning and will also make DCF a more attractive/competitive workplace.</p> <p>4. What would you rank as the top accomplishment of your agency/department during the last year? This year, FSD hosted the first of its kind Child Welfare Summit. The event brought together judges, family services workers, attorneys, and advocates to take a close look at the decisions which might lead a child to be removed from their home due to concerns of abuse and neglect.</p> <p>Over 240 summit attendees learned about the Structured Decision-Making tools utilized by FSD to assess safety and risk. Accordingly, central to the Summit was a review of the <i>Vermont Court Hearing SDM Guide</i> and the <i>SDM Court Reference Sheet</i>. The guides were developed by a collaborative workgroup consisting of judges, FSD staff, and our partners at Evident Change over a period of eight months and were designed to unify language and understanding across disciplines. They are meant to help clarify and improve understanding of the linkages between statute and practice and to increase objectivity and consistency in decision making around the state.</p>

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	<p>The summit represented an important opportunity for stakeholders to sit down with FSD staff to begin a long overdue truly collaborative conversation about how we make the decisions that have a significant impact on the lives of the most vulnerable children and youth in Vermont and their families.</p> <p>The Board suggested adding information on accomplishments to the 2024 <i>System of Care Report</i> by using what other Commissioners/Secretaries have shared this year when they have come to Board meetings and answered this question.</p> <p>5. When might we expect to see a searchable item on the DCF website for Act 264 and Coordinated Services Plans? You can find this here: http://dcf.vermont.gov/contacts/boards/act264-sit</p> <p>6. There is a large amount of money, a tremendous amount of work, and many timelines attached to H.217. Are some of the timelines unrealistic in your opinion? If so, which concern you most? DCF’s Child Development Division began actively working on implementation of Act 76 (H.217) in late June. CDD has a dedicated webpage for the bill with a Summary and Status report: Act 76 (H.217) Department for Children and Families (vermont.gov). So far, CDD has met and anticipates meeting the major deadlines for the expansion of Child Care Financial Assistance Program and Act 76 Readiness Payments. Areas that will require close attention and dedicated support are: 1) supporting childcare programs to start up and/or grow to serve more children and 2) educating families about the expanded CCFAP eligibility and supporting them through the application process. The major changes to Vermont’s publicly funded Pre-kindergarten programming that the legislature tasked a Committee to take up are significant and may be difficult to assess on the timeline provided.</p> <p>7. Is there any organized effort at any level in Vermont’s social services system to improve cultural competence for staff regarding American black, indigenous, and immigrant cultures? If so, What and where? Yes, much work around this issue is happening in a variety of areas, mainly connected to FSD’s Statewide Racial Equity Workgroup (SREW). We believe that we should be engaging in cultural humility, which is where we take a step further than education on culture, but we also reflect on our own biases.</p> <p>FSD’s Statewide Racial Equity Workgroup is a broadly encompassing group made up of staff and external partners dedicated to anti-racism. The purpose of the FSD Racial Equity Workgroup is to focus on addressing issues of racial inequity and creating systemic changes within Vermont’s child welfare and youth justice system and beyond, as that work intersects with our community</p>

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	<p>partners, to achieve racially just outcomes. The SREW now has six subcommittees focused on projects/issues throughout our system.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engaging Families about Race and Culture 2. Centralized Intake and Emergency Services 3. Staff Education and Training 4. BIPOC Employee Retention, Recruitment, Support and Promotion 5. Foster Care and Permanency 6. Tribal Relations <p>The SREW’s Engaging Families about Race and Culture subcommittee is most applicable to your question and is currently focused on three different projects:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of a policy on supporting and affirming BIPOC youth’s culture and race. 2. Supporting the Practice Guidance for Assessing Cultural Context. 3. Exploring the use of Cultural Brokers within the division. <p>b. Results to date?</p> <p>The Safety Culture Survey is an organizational assessment that examines aspects of an agency’s culture and operations. This is currently being conducted through a variety of jurisdictions and includes questions about race and race equity. Between 2020 and 2021, Vermont saw a 10% increase in the question, “I feel equipped to speak with children and families about issues related to race,” from 52% positively endorsing the item to 62% positively endorsing the item. Soon, 2022 results will be available.</p> <p>The <i>Structured Decision Making (SDM) Policy and Procedures Manual</i> now includes “Practice Guidance for Assessing Cultural Context” as an appendix. This was released in the fall of 2022, and the Engaging Families About Race and Culture Subcommittee is beginning to review staff training and support related to the practice guidance. Supporting staff in using this practice guidance is a main goal of the subcommittee.</p> <p>We are just beginning our work in developing a policy to support BIPOC youth and exploring the use of cultural brokers. The SREW is always open to new ideas or projects related to this topic. To be clear, this work is ongoing and will never be “finished.” Staff will always need to be continuously trained in issues of both anti-racism and cultural humility.</p> <p>We are working in an organized effort to increase staff’s ability to engage families about race and culture.</p>

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	<p>Rachel Edens is the Director of Race, Gender, and Equity who works in the DCF Commissioner’s Office. She has been made a member of the Operations Team so she can take a higher-level picture to see what each division of DCF is doing and push out best practices she is seeing. We saw a 10% increase in this year’s annual staff survey question about staff being more comfortable talking to children and youth about race and equity.</p>
<p>1. Approve meeting minutes from October meeting.</p> <p>2. Membership to Act 264 Board</p> <p>3. Agenda items future meetings</p> <p>4. Update on DCF meetings re potential changes to the Child Protection Registry’s legislation, regulations, and policies.</p>	<p>1. Meeting Minutes: Heather made a motion to accept minutes. Alice seconded. No discussion. Minutes passed.</p> <p>2. Membership and Operating Agreements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. We need a written process/protocol that describes the nomination and confirmation of new members. b. It’s a good idea for folks who want to join the Board to come and see if it fits what they are interested in. It is not mandated. We want to be sure folks know how the meeting is run and the time. Not everyone can manage or likes a 2 ½ hour meeting. c. This Board follows public meeting law, and we always have time on the agenda for public comment. d. We can suggest that an applicant connect with someone on the Board and talk to them about what the Board does. It has been helpful in the past. e. The Board should see the applications as well as SIT. The Board would like to meet them and find out their interest and what questions they may have for the Board. f. If someone fills out an application and attends a meeting to talk to the Board, Cheryle will find out if we could pay the stipend. If they attend virtually, there would be no mileage and only a one-time \$25 stipend. g. If your job does not pay you to be here, you are eligible for the stipend. h. With statute, SIT makes the formal recommendation to the Governor’s Office for appointment to the Board. i. Is there an operating requirement for meeting attendance by the Board? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 3 unexcused absences means a presumed resignation from the Board(e.g., the member doesn’t email, respond to queries, etc.) j. Cheryle will draft these notes into Operating Agreements and send to the group for discussion <p>3. Future Agendas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. December <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30-10:00 Board Business • 10:00-10:45 DAIL Commissioner White • 10:45-11:00 Break • 11:00-11:40 Finalize System of Care Recommendations • 11:40-11:55 Dialogue with applicants to Board • 11:55-12:00 Public Comment

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	<p>2. January</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30-10:00 Board Business-Minutes, Suicide Prevention Strategic Plan Advisory Group update (Matt & Laurie) • 10:00-10:45 Beth Sausville: Sharing about system of care updates and Specialized Response Team. <p>3. February</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30-10:00 Board Business <p>4. March</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9:30-10:00 Board Business • Joined by Laurel Omland, Marianna Donnally, and Dr. Haley McGowan <p>4. Update on DCF meetings re potential changes to the Child Protection Registry’s legislation, regulations, and policies. Laurie and Alice attended.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DCF is being required to revisit how they manage their Child Protection Registry by the federal level. 2. Impressed with the group of people they pulled together: parents, staff and advocates. They made time for everyone to contribute. 3. It is a very large and complex topic to have addressed in one large group meeting. However, the DCF did a lot of preparatory work and gathered information from other states to share. 4. DCF is open to real change that is actively reflecting on choosing the best way to go. 5. Mandatory in person was tough, but the people at the meeting were genuine and invested. 6. Nancy Miller and Marc Wenneberg did a great job facilitating. 7. The meeting helped to demonstrate how complex this work is. 8. Both Laurie and Alice felt the time investment was worthwhile and are optimistic that needed good changes are both possible and likely.
<p>System of Care Recommendations Discussion</p>	<p>Topics to focus on that impact each department within the children’s system of care:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Workforce retention and recruitment efforts across schools, mental health, developmental disabilities, healthcare. 2. System of Care for children-having more community-based programs and high-level care in VT available regardless of custody status or what department they are working with at AHS. 3. Improve Data and Information Systems <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Invest in the child welfare data system.

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	<p>b. During 2024, the Act 264 Board will discuss and investigate ways to increase a consistent method of tracking CSP data Could all members in systems DMH, FSD, AOE create a check box for tracking CSPs?</p> <p>c. Aim to streamline applications across AHS departments with access to information in the system so families and staff aren't repeating information and overwhelmed by repetitive paperwork.</p> <p>4. Focus on housing for children, youth and families and STAFF. There are increasing numbers of children and youth living in hotels and unhoused.</p> <p>5. Address substance use.</p> <p>6. Focus on social and emotional learning to address increased anxiety to establish their awareness of these concepts. Have more community spaces for youth to practice and live these concepts by ensuring their access to sports, various group and team activities, afterschool programming, arts, interest-based experiences. How do youth get information about this? Advancing Social and Emotional Learning: https://casel.org/.</p> <p>SIT will discuss system of care recommendations at their November 30th meeting and then at December Board meeting will finalize.</p>
Public Comment	No public comment