

## 7/8/16 Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup Meeting

Notes courtesy of Ryan Williams

Meeting convened at 1:13pm

**Present:** Gail Reyes-Walton; Elizabeth Duryea; Vanessa Dorantes; Michael Steers; Breresford Wilson; Michael Graham; John Milavsky; Ryan E. Williams; Joyce Voltaire; Dr. Anthony DeJesus; Tracy Davis; Chrichton Stewart; Melane Rossacci; Andrew Ludwig; Steven Smith; Evangeline Brianes; Melanie Mercado; Susan R. Smith; Sommaly Ounthongdy; Maria Winberger; Jeff (?); Monica Rams; Dr. Elizabeth Cannata; Michael Williams; Jodi Hill-Lilly; Sarah Diaz; Lori Blinderman; William Rivera

Bill R. opened the meeting. He acknowledged the recent tragic events of black men shot by police officers, as well as the assassinations of police officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge. Bill stressed the importance of being present at the meeting and encouraged those present to take care of themselves as they coped with the personal impacts of these events. We were also encouraged to exercise caution before making judgments and emphasized the importance of our work.

Participants introduced themselves and their respective offices and organizations.

Vannessa D. shared that she accepted the **RYASAP Above and Beyond Award** on behalf of the SRJWG. The award was for the partnership work on *The Color of Justice* film and dialogue series. These were facilitated conversations across the state on the topic of racial inequities in the Juvenile Justice System.

CT DCF was asked to kick off the national Racial Justice Alliance the webinar series this year. CT was asked to highlight the work it has done on the journey towards becoming a racially just child welfare agency. There were 120 people participated on the webinar from different states. Many organizations requested the transcript to help them in their racial justice work. Sustainability beyond the current administration was emphasized. The webinar and supporting documents can be accessed in their entirety at <http://www.ct.gov/dcf/cwp/view.asp?a=2546&Q=551748>.

Michael Williams informed us the decision was made to restructure the administrative leadership representation to the Racial Justice work. He shared that he was designated as the de-facto lead of the SRJWG. He stressed that racial justice is not just cultural competence and continual learning, it is the analysis of what the data is telling us about the outcomes within the agency through a racial justice lens. Susan Smith, Chief of Quality and Planning was selected from the Commissioner's team to lead the group because of her expertise regarding data analysis.

Susan S. stated that we're always talking about data during our work. The QA aspects of our work are embedded in all areas. Figuring out how to put in place what we do within the group and putting in to practice in our everyday work is key. Bill R. emphasized the importance of embedding the work beyond any individual, and that the racial justice work continue regardless of the leadership. Mike Williams stated that the work isn't building the racial justice lens, the work is doing something about what we know. It's going to be a challenge.

Jodi H-L stated that consultant Joyce James met with Region 3, Solnit North and Linda Dixon's Team. Joyce J. is currently meeting with Region 6. Jodi H-L stated that it's time to walk the walk, because based on the performance expectations, the needle isn't moving. According to Jodi H-L, Joyce J. stated that her meetings with DCF are some of the most fulfilling for her to date because of the

willingness and readiness of those involved. The meetings will be very structured toward strategies that will lead to outcomes.

Vannessa D. stated that Joyce J.'s work in Texas impacted many outcomes. Some of these did not last beyond Joyce's administration. For that reason she emphasized the need for sustainability. Vannessa D. stated that there has been a purposeful look at the technical assistance given to the Dept. regarding the racial justice work. Jen A. and Jodi H-L's work is also a part of the technical assistance, as they do a lot of work across the country helping organizations regarding racial justice. Dr. DeJesus also assists with case consults and looking at the work through the racial justice lens. There is also QA technical assistance regarding the data, and conversations with regions regarding areas in which we could make a difference in the work.

Bill R. reflected about the journey of the Workgroup has been on, and identified that the progress made has been significant. He reminded us that we've made more progress in the last 3 years of the 15 he has served in his role. Monica M-R asked about how the technical assistance (TA) would be implemented. It was reported that Joyce J. would look at what goes on at the executive level, i.e. performance expectations, as to how the needle moves for children and families, while Jen A. and Jodi H-L will look at how to change the culture in the various regions and provide assistance in that area. Susan S. is providing tech assistance on the data development and Dr. DeJesus is providing consultation on cases.

The TA will be facilitated on multiple levels. Joyce V. stated that it would be great if we could look at the data dashboards and drill down the disparity and disproportionality data. Susan S. stated that is something that could be worked on. Vannessa D. stressed the need to be specific when requesting data. Susan S. went on to state that there are disparity and disproportionality reports in ROM. Mike S. expressed the importance of having the ability to drill down that data. Joyce V. stated that it would be great to compare disparity and disproportionality between different populations and resultant outcomes. There was a competitive process as to who would get whose services, i.e. Joyce, Jen/Jodi, Sue S., Dr. D, technical assistance and when. Jodi wanted everyone to have access. Vannessa stated that people voluntarily submitted the applications.

Bill R. shared that Dr. De Jesus received Commissioner and IRB approval to chronicle the journey of DCF's SRJWG. Focus groups and interviews have been approved to occur during work time. Dr. D. stated that Dr. Caraballo would be working with him on the project. Dr. De Jesus will begin to reach out to people within the next couple of weeks to begin the project. Michael W. reminded us that Michael G. encouraged the commissioner talk publically about the racial justice work, which is reflected in an OP Ed on the DCF website and her lead on the webinar. Elizabeth D. emphasized taking advantage of the community resources posted at [dcf.ocos@ct.gov](mailto:dcf.ocos@ct.gov). DCF is on Facebook and Twitter. The department has had over 2300 followers. There will be pro bono help getting DCF's social media going. Elizabeth D. stated that the two areas we want to spotlight are the legislative committees that would have RJ presentations, as well as RJ presentations to the courts. Giving our court partners the opportunity to look at the data so that they know that racial justice is a priority for us. Vannessa D. encouraged the group to be more deliberate on our JJ focus and to continue documenting our efforts to bring about positive outcomes for children and families via our racial justice work.

## **Presentation**

### **Disproportionality and Disparity Data: Committed Delinquents**

Bill R. talked about the language we currently use to describe “Juvenile Justice (JJ) kids in DCF care.” Stressing the significance of language in constructing reality and self-identity, he went on to emphasize the fact that the JJ kids aren’t different – they are children in DCF care that happen to be involved in the Juvenile Justice system.

MPA Intern Andrew L. and Steve S. presented their findings on the data available on youth involved with the JJ system. Steve stated that “the ask” was “Who is the population we serve, who are the youth that are involved in JJ and how?” There was a series of meetings to define the data. Andrew has been working on the project since March. The Director of FAVOR asked Steve and Andrew to define “Who are these kids?” Steve answered that there isn’t a level of sensitivity given to the JJ kids as it relates to how they are served all of the different aspects they appear in our work, as well as how they’re nuanced. Looking at the common denominators between JJ and non JJ committed kids was also emphasized. Andrew presented SFY 2015 disproportionality and disparity data related to the youth involved with JJ. They presented Pathway’s data, raw data, Disproportionality Index, Disparity Index, and Subsections of Pathway Data. To view the data presentation contact Bill R. They are looking at what would help us make decisions at the regional levels regarding the youth involved with JJ. This will require additional data mining.

Mike G. asked if it would be beneficial to look at court data regarding CPS and JJ. Elizabeth D. stated that there is data from the courts, but it’s not drilled down or in line with the DCF regions. Elizabeth D. and Susan S. have discussed how to refine the judicial data. Joyce V. asked if the data captured bench OTCs from the delinquency side. Elizabeth D. stated that they suspect bench OTC’s are a method judges use to avoid CJTS and detention. Elizabeth D. agreed to include members on the distribution chain of the judicial data. Elizabeth D. stated that Judges’ assignments change every September. For that reason it’s not easy for judges to slide into different positions. Breresford W. asked what schools and communities made up most the referrals. Bill R. stated that the presentation would be disseminated to all members of the RJWG.

### **Subcommittee Updates.**

#### **Contracts Procurement**

Melanie O. reported that they are working on their Charter. She stated that the workgroup is exploring adding a technical assistance representative and possibly contracted providers. The question of whether participating providers would gain an unfair advantage was posed. Instead of having eight separate questions on RFP, some questions would be combined to make it easier for providers to answer multi-level questions. Melanie R. wants to review the responses before making a move to make the questions easier. Bill R. offered to assist. CLAS standards were incorporated into the questions. Providers aren’t used to the process, but Melanie doesn’t want to back down. Vanessa D. stated the charter would be reviewed.

## **Community**

Gail R-W working with RACs and Martha Stone re. JJ. All of the regions are represented on the committee and the committee is looking to add Solnit. Mr. Wilson and Ms. McBride, and Dr. Cannata have joined the team. We're looking at Youth, parents, and faith based membership. Regions have been reaching out, but have to move the needle. There has been apprehension about reaching out to the faith based community because of lack of success in the past. Gene Marchand of YAB has reported positive feedback from the YAB's. The subcommittee is considering having a forum to invite the faith based community. Vanessa D. stated that she would disseminate the subcommittee's completed charter.

## **Policy- Tabled**

## **Workforce**

Charter has been submitted for review. Tracy D. passed out a draft of HR's existing exit interview document. If completed, the information is sent to the Office of Diversity and Equity. It was decided that the survey would also be used to capture information on transfers. A few questions were added. Monica M-R also asked whether race has been a factor for leaving or transferring, as well as the issue of fair and equal treatment in discipline. The narrative aspect of the survey is designed to explore the details of staff's decision to transfer or leave. Vanessa D. suggested looking at how to word it more succinctly. Mike S. asked to consider cross referencing with performance appraisals. Mike W. noticed that termination is not a reason, the HR representative present stated that the survey is voluntary.

It was pointed out that people terminated are not being surveyed. Jodi asked about how people are notified that the exit survey are available. It was reported that HR has to have the correct contact information. Mike S. suggested that the issue be brought to the OD COP. Jodi H-L asked about when folks would get notice of the opportunity to do an exit interview. It depends on when HR is made aware of the staffing change. The form is online under the Diversity and Equity section of the DCF website. Employees get notification of the link when they notify DCF of their departure. Mike G. asked if employees would have the ability to follow up. Tracy D. stated that employees would have the opportunity for a direct conversation if they ask for it, which is stated on the form. Mike W. suggested bringing the survey to the SAM once it is submitted as a recommendation so that it's operationalized. Bill R. asked if there was a goal date as to when the survey could be submitted to SAM. Tracy D. stated that the group would meet again in August to make revisions before giving it to SAM. The committees' work will be reviewed at the Sept. 2016 SRJWG meeting.

The Language Utilization Survey data has been submitted to the offices and they've been asked to provide feedback and additional integrations.

## **Regional and Community Partner Updates**

Gail R-W stated that she and Ken went to WPRX, Latino Radio, to talk about DCF's racial justice work. Gail stated that they received good feedback from the community

Joyce V. (Reg. 5) restructured their committee to spur more activity. Dr. Najjar has a presentation regarding Syrian culture which was well received in Danbury and Waterbury. Torrington is next. There was a case consultation in the Torrington office. This was successful and will occur at least monthly. It

was helpful to hear about how family are impacted by DCF involvement. There was an outreach program to the Torrington Latino community, Latino parenting strategies for adolescent. There is a grant proposal facilitated by DCF to help them get funds for a program. Joyce V. reported that clergy person in the area wants tools from DCF to help them better engage the community. Joyce V. has been data mining and will provide results. Joyce V. stressed looking at the data of all races and finding the common denominators. Joyce V. offered to do racial justice presentations for the offices in the region. Joyce set up a space in the regional offices for staff to listen to the webinar.

Jodi H-L asked if the racial justice case consultations mirror group supervision. Joyce V. stated that after review of a case they realized that because of cultural barriers, a child was unduly placed. Dr. DeJesus stated that the consultations are like group supervision with the emphasis on the racial justice lens. Monica M-R stated that the case they reviewed allowed for discussion about what could happen as they move forward with reintegrating children from a non-urban area to their family who resided in the city. Mike S. stated that there was a large turnout for the case consultation with many disciplines present. Semani stated that there was a positive feedback but suggested integrating the consultation into an already existing meeting, i.e. CRM, family team meeting, permanency meetings, so as to not add an extra meeting. Jodi H-L suggested that the principles of the consultation model be integrated into other departmental meetings. Dr. De Jesus stated that he could continue to work with regions to pilot this format. What's different is that the people presenting begin by discussing their own cultural background. Jodi H-L stated that we need the coaching to change the existing structure to include the new information.

Nedra M. (Reg. 2) stated that their regional RJ team decided that they are going to use the questions and tell them that they are going to have to talk about themselves. Asking each workgroup to present a case in this format. Nedra M. stated that the presentation emphasized culture, faith and realizations of what could be done better. Region 2's RJ team is reaching out to the community to present this work and consultation format. Region 2's team challenged the community to look at what they are doing to do this work.

Mike G. (Reg. 1) reported that they did a survey throughout the region. 140 out of 300 responded. The asked the question, "Do you believe disproportionality and disparity exist in foster care?" 18% of staff said no. Norwalk and Bridgeport Offices are very different. There are weekly discussions between both offices. There are monthly staff meetings, with RJ as an agenda item, to keep the information flowing. They are looking at external and internal bias. The survey was done to look at bias. Case consultation is on the agenda. There is a lot of in house work that needs to be done before they present to the community. Mike G. looking at what the data is telling them about how they are doing the work.

Sommaly (Reg. 4) reported that they would offer, bi-monthly, World Café conversations within the region. They are doing a video on how to incorporate the cultural questions in the work and engaging the clients to self-identify racially. CO is supporting the regions efforts.

Lori B. (Reg. 3) reported that the Norwich Players act out scenarios of how to talk about race and Lori B. suggested partnering with Reg. 4 in their video project. There were many people from Reg. 3 present on the webinar. Willimantic is collecting info from CR meetings as to who is removed by race. They are also looking at what are the barriers to getting families involved and the barriers to kinship placement. Regarding bringing people to the table, the region is looking at where the Careline referrals are coming

from. They are also looking at certain schools' suspensions and expulsion rates and looking at how out-posted SWs affect these numbers.

Region3 is reaching out to faith based partners to explore their role in families' lives to better serve them in the work. Vanessa D. stated that a lot of this work requires DCF going to the community in order to change the perceptions. Reaching out to North End Action team. Looking at who is getting and completing services by race, e.g. FBR (Family Based Recovery), which doesn't have Spanish speaking staff. All of the legal folks in Middletown Court are white and looking at how to make the court more diverse.

Region 3 is struggling with how to integrating racial justice into supervision and how to deliver the racial justice slides in mandated reporter training. Joyce James met with Region 3 at Wesleyan Univ. It was energizing, but unfocused at times. There were many providers present who found the meeting valuable. How we do things and in what order to effectuate better outcomes is important. Jodi H-L reiterated that schools that have out posted SWs have less CPS referrals. Windham and Montville schools have disproportionality regarding suspensions and they are looking at if numbers change. Bill R. suggested that Reg. 3 access the Catholic Church to work with large number of people from Central America relocating to the area.

Solnit North

Solnit North implemented a youth survey to support culture and diversity. They are looking at whether the data regarding physical restraints, mirrors what is going on nationally, as kids of color are restrained more. Their DAT team meets regularly, weekly, looking at biases and how it affects their work. They are doing workshops and seminars regarding diversity and watched the film Crash to elicit conversations, which has been successful. The next workshop topic will examine crisis intervention through a cultural lens to achieve equity. Solnit is also looking at data to ensure that their cottages are diverse. Each cottage has its own culture. They have to look at celebrating diversity in their cottages.

Vanessa D. introduced a video for the group: "What Dark Skinned People Never Tell You"

We processed the film and discussed how we could use what we viewed in our work.

Susan S. stated that we have to be able to connect data to areas of racial justice.

**Our next meeting is scheduled for September 9, 2016 at Beacon Health.**

The meeting adjourned at 4pm.