

**Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup Meeting 1/22/16**  
**Submitted by Ryan Williams**

**Attendance:** Vannessa Dorantes (DCF), Jen Agosti (Consultant), Andrew Ludwig (DCF), Isabel Alvarez (CSSD), Yadira Ijeh (DCF), Michael Graham (DCF), Meghan Korn (CSSD), Gail Reyes-Walton (DCF) Jaquita Monroe (Judicial), Mallory Lapreme (CTJJA), Vincent Tinnerello (DCF), Joyce Voltaire (DCF), Koren Kermashek (DCF), Jo Hawke (FAVOR), Elisabeth Cannata (Wheeler), Steve Smith (DCF), Tina Jefferson (DCF), Irma Reyes (DCF), Debi Freund (DCF), Nedra Muley (DCF), Ryan Williams (DCF), Lori Blinderman (DCF), Sara Diaz (DCF), Elba Caraballo (University St. Joseph), Anthony De Jesus (University St. Joseph), Carrie, Glennon (DCF), Latosha Johnson (DCF), Debra Borzellino (CMHA), Chrichton Stewart (DCF), Monica Rams (DCF), Tracy Davis (DCF), Brian Gresko (DCF), Carmen Rivera (DCF), Jenny Garcia (DCF), Maria Weinberger (DCF); Michael Williams (DCF), Anne McIntyre-Lahner

Vannessa welcomed Jen Agosti back to the team and congratulated Dr. DeJesus on the birth of his new daughter. Bill R and Jodi H-L were unable to attend the meeting.

**Subcommittee Reports**

**Policy and Practice:**

Yadira I. reported that Intake and Vol. Services policy is being revised and will be sent to committee for review.

**Purchasing and Procurement:**

Melanie R. reported that the racial justice RFP language has been dispersed and providers have responded well. There is a paragraph pertaining to racial justice in all of the RFPs. Paul Shanley has been an active member of this workgroup. He will be retiring from state service. Melanie expressed appreciation for his work.

**Community:**

Gail R. reported that the committee is working closely with Bill R. and Steve Smith in an attempt to integrate a racial justice lens in the work being done to address all aspects of juvenile justice that youth in DCF care are impacted by. The Community Subcommittee's Charter is being revised.

**Workforce:** Tracy Davis reported that they are looking at the current exit survey and reformatting it to incorporate issues of race and discrimination being experienced by departing employees, as well as expanding it to be used for persons who transfer to other offices within the department. There will be a presentation regarding this work upcoming.

**Regional Reports**

**Region 1's** Regional Racial Justice Workgroup had their first video conference meeting. Region 1 has also facilitated racial justice data presentations to regional offices with more scheduled on 2/2/16 and 2/17/16. Region 1 continues to work on expanding its racial justice workgroup's membership and is creating a mission statement pertinent to the work.

**Region 2** will host its first regional racial justice initiative meeting.

**Region 3's** Middletown office had a brown bag lunch activity during which those in attendance looked at disparity and disproportionality data in the Middletown Office's catchment area. All offices in Region 3 will conduct a racial justice experiential activity in which workgroups will competitively debate the question, "Should white children be placed in homes of color?" Region 3 received intellectual property clearance from Beth Hall to conduct the TIPPS MAP racial justice training "The Journey towards Racial Enlightenment", for foster and adoptive parents. Middletown, Norwich and Willimantic offices continue to meet monthly as a regional racial justice workgroup.

**Region 4** had a World Cafe discussion on the topic of racial bias. It was also reported that they conducted a quarterly poll of intake cases looking at racial justice issues at all levels. Region 4 workgroup members created buttons stating "Standing Tall for Racial Justice" and disseminated to staff.

**Region 5** reported that they are taking a look at everything to ensure there is a racial justice lens internally embedded throughout the work. Joyce Voltaire discussed additional work being done by Region 5.

Staff from the region met with leaders from the Hispanic Coalition in Waterbury, the Cultural Center in Danbury, and New Opportunities in Torrington. They have agreed to begin working with us to do outreach in their communities. Specifically, we have agreed to hold a community forum, in all three towns, in March if all goes as planned. We will seek to meet with members of their religious communities for our first forums and we may present some data specific to their respective towns and solicit what they feel is most needed by residents in their communities.

At the Torrington office, Office Director Siobhan Trotman has RJ as a standing agenda item for the management team and Siobhan has conducted a number of Casey Family Programs "Knowing Who You Are" trainings for staff in all three offices. She is now in the process of scheduling follow ups to see what workers are doing differently since having the training. Siobhan is also scheduling time for Courageous Conversations and other talk/materials with the RJ focus during her all staff meetings, which she holds monthly.

In Torrington, "The Color of Placement" project was completed and displayed in the conference room. In Waterbury the project has progressed and a mural is being painted on walls where SWs will display Kid Pix photos. In Danbury, Kid Pix have been printed and are ready to be displayed.

George Hajjar, an RRG in Waterbury, presented research on the Syrian refugee crisis to the subcommittee. He specifically discussed what workers might expect when working with a Syrian family that may migrate to our region. He was able to present on the deep culture of the Syrian people which is extremely useful for staff to know when trying to understand parenting and family function for that culture. We will invite George to present to staff in each of the regional offices over the next few months on this topic.

Walter Belsito, Ph.D, is an ACR reviewer in Waterbury. He has also presented research he has done on the topic of kids in care due to parents being deported and the work we need to do better in finding relatives in other countries.

The RJ subcommittee has developed three data teams to present to staff in each office on an ongoing basis. They will present data illustrating how we are doing with eradicating disproportionality within the system for kids in Region 5.

They will also begin a recruitment effort to solicit representation on the subcommittee from other community stakeholders and juvenile justice Social Workers as youth involved with the juvenile justice system are overrepresented.

**Careline** – Crichton S. reported that data was collected in SIU and Region 1. As of now, we can't get racial data children reported as alleged victims of abuse or neglect. However, data on the parents' race is available. A new template was developed to ensure that the child's race is entered into LINK. Vanessa D. encouraged all to emphasize entering accurate race and ethnicity data in LINK until the system is streamlined. To date, only a small number of mandated reporters have declined to give their racial or ethnic information when asked.

Regarding Performance Expectation (PE) 3 - "Eliminating Racial Disparities", Michael Williams stated that this PE remains a permanent expectation for the agency. All sectors have submitted their strategies to achieve equity throughout DCF. The review team will be providing feedback regarding every region and facilities' plans to address PE 3.

Vanessa D. stated that the Pathways data on Share Point has been updated and separated by race. It reflects the census of 2010. Debi Freund stated that CORE continues to use the 2000 race and ethnicity data as they are unable to convert it to the 2010 data at this time. Vanessa again stressed the importance of entering accurate race and ethnicity data because we can control this.

Jen A. introduced a six minute video regarding the social determinants of health discussion regarding disparity. The goal of this tool is helping potential partners understand why we're doing what we're doing. The creator of the video, Camara Jones, used the allegory of a garden to explain racism and bias. Jen offered the video as a tool for regions and facilities to use in their racial justice work.

A facilitated dialogue took place after viewing the video. Tina J. encouraged folks to be purposeful their roles within the scope of racial justice efforts. Mike W. raised the Flint, MI situation regarding the city's tainted water, and characterized it as an example of blatant institutional racism. Ryan W. discussed cultivating the soil to bring about the desired outcome regarding our racial justice work. Vanessa encouraged the team to be the conduit and voice to explain the importance of why it's important to do this work. Mike Steers stated that we have to look at our providers to ensure equity in service provision. Some of the communities we serve are "rocky soil" so we have to make sure there is equity in waiting lists, and provision of services. Mike W. encouraged taking action too ensue equity regarding access to services, especially as it relates to race and ethnicity. Ann reported that Careline discovered a couple of clear areas of disparity and stated that she viewed the flower box as our work. Ann stated we have to ask ourselves how to make the flower boxes flourish. Monica notice the difference in size of the flower boxes, i.e. the little box didn't give the flowers room to grow. Debi Freund showed a picture of equity boxes.

Steve Smith of Adolescent and Juvenile Services presented to the group on the topic of Juvenile Justice (hereafter referred to as JJ) and the committed delinquent population. Juvenile Justice should be a much broader concept. Extra attention must be applied, the message of equity in JJ has to be throughout DCF. The Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup and the regions haven't been connected to JJ as it relates to racial justice. Steve S. presented information that outlined data from approximately 42K individuals, birth years 1996-2001. Data showed that child welfare involvement meant a greater risk of entering the JJ system. Black males are nearly two times more likely to cross over (adjudication and placement).

There are three levels within JJ, i.e. Prevention (early intervention with the goal of implementing community services to avoid JJ), Diversion (kids who's behaviors trigger JJ consideration, but diversion efforts are put in place, i.e. EMPS, JRBs, etc... Children of color are over represented and more likely to be targeted than their white counterparts), and Intervention (pre-adjudication, DCF Court and Community Liaisons, as well as DCF Detention Liaisons are involved). Vanessa encouraged the regions reach out to the court liaisons and DCF JJ staff. In the committed delinquent population, 67% of newly committed kids were going directly to CJTS. There are Liaisons at Manson Youth Institution and York C.I. to facilitate visitation and case planning. Vanessa discussed additional interventions and reported that the DCF Superintendent has initiated the Virtual Academy to focus on credit remediation. One of the factors is criminal activity, which prevents kids from attending school. We have to pay attention to these and other factors that prevent kids from being educated with their peers. There are disproportionate minority contact (DMC) subcommittees in CT's four largest cities, working on addressing school based arrests and community arrests. There are initiatives, touch points and staff engaged in JJ, but we must bring the conversation to the statewide racial justice workgroup and the regional racial justice workgroups.

JJ Social workers are being trained to understand the dynamics of both CPS and JJ components of our system to assist staff. Mike W. stated community services that are evidence-based that would prevent JJ encounters are overwhelmingly used by the white population, i.e. 66% white kids using these services. 90% kids of color comprise the JJ population. Mike W. questioned how come kids of color aren't getting access to the evidence based services. Mike S. cited disparate outcomes regarding the evidenced based services as well. Vanessa encouraged talking to ARG about services that could make a difference with our JJ population.

JJ social workers have been receiving training in CPS areas such as LINK, SDM, case planning, legal, and adolescent issues. Tracy stated that the JJ social workers question what the work would look like. Vanessa D. noticed the gap between CPS and JJ staff regarding integration of JJ with CPS language, as CPS staff is more familiar with JJ language. Latosha J. voiced that the age of the population has increased, and questioned how ready providers are to handle older teens and the young adult population. We don't have all of the answers, which stresses the need for partnership and discovering what motivates people. We have to be more adept at service delivery. Mike W. asked if its teens in general or teens of color that the community struggles serving. Mike S. acknowledged that the teen population of color suffers more. Mike W. stated that the blame always fall on the kids being too tough to deal with, not the system figuring out how to achieve equity in service delivery with regard to race. Melanie suggested shifting the focus and looking at the menus of services so as to realistically and more effectively service the transition aged youth population. There are some MSTs that are used more than others. Lori and Vanessa D. questioned whether there is a system that tracks kids' access to services through their teen years. Latosha J. stated we don't have control of the entry points, but we do have control after that, as the youths are in our care. Ann M. L. L stated that we have to look at what happens to kids once they're committed to us, because there are drastic differences as to what happens to them. Mike S. stated that evidenced-based programs don't work out for kids of color who are committed delinquent. He questioned how effective those services are. Data collected on CCSD and DCF ends are different and the need for DCF and CCSD to compare data to achieve continuity is essential. Vanessa D. questioned the cultural competence of our providers and stressed the need to take this into consideration.

The question of a JJ committee was raised, it was agreed that there must be some thought about this, so as not to separate JJ even more, but there is a need to blend JJ science with our CPS science. Gail R. stated that the community subcommittee is looking at this and integrated JJ into its charter. Ann reported that the majority JJ kids have had DCF in their lives. Yadira I. stated that we look at the JJ kids and realize they are at a disadvantage, as evidence based programs are family based and dually committed kids aren't as connected with their families. Melanie R. recalled the UCONN study, stating once JJ kids went to DCF they were involved for 7 years. We should look at what happens to kids during that 7 years. Vanessa D. motioned to have JJ as a standing agenda item in the SRJW meeting. The Adolescent COP has added JJ as an agenda item at its meeting. Latosha J. encouraged teaming JJ cases so as to have more of a familiarity with their language. Steve S. stated that the JJ COP is trying to get on the Statewide Steering Committee for Permanency. There are two studies coming out, a DMC study (regarding parole youth) and a study to look at the intervention history of JJ kids. Yadira stressed the need for DCF JJ staff to be at the SRJW table. Latosha J. stated that management has to be actively involved in getting JJ Staff to the table. Latosha J. went on to stress the need for us to pay attention to how we describe the kids, i.e. changing the language from Delinquent to Youth, or some other neutral nomenclature. The group discussed outplaced workers taking part in juvenile review boards providing advocacy when appropriate and educating SROs and Juvenile Officers regarding equity in decision making.

Jen A. informed the group about an opportunity for of CEUs by watching Racial Equity Trauma in the JJ Population. Jen A. Questioned the slice of data of black males in JJ and the need for equity (see report). Mike W. stated that if it's the consensus that what we are dealing with in the JJ system is institutional racism, is doing what we're doing going to change things? **How do we eliminate racism? What do we need to do?** There is an absence of the community approach in favor of having the institution do what it does better. This must change. Jen A. stated that the evidence based program data is based on white families, not necessarily families of color.

### **Next Steps**

1. Figure out how and who would engage JJ staff to join our racial justice efforts on local, regional and statewide levels, as it is the hope that the discussion between JJ and CPS continues to expand.
2. Figure out how the SRJW could assist the COPs with their racial justice work. Yadira I. stated that racial justice has to be a standing agenda item in all COPs so that why the racial justice work is important could be discussed with the staff. Vanessa D. stated that we have to call out racism in the work. Gail R. stated that the Community Subcommittee has to look at where to capture the most accurate data and have more pointed conversations about what the SRJW is doing. Mike S. stated that there is a pending report that would look at commitment, arrests, and movements throughout the JJ system. This would be an automated report, disseminated within the next couple of months. Jen A. encouraged exploring data, but not falling victim to analysis paralysis. We must be aggressive in approaching JJ work. We also have to provide consistent data and look at what DMC data the four cities have for us, while considering why white families and families of color engage systems differently. How can we capture the energy from the CPS piece in other areas?

CT SRJW activities will be chronicled. Dr. DeJesus stated that the story of this work is an important story to be told. Dr. DeJesus responded to questions from the IRB and he is looking at how MSW students

could contribute to the study. Dr. DeJesus favors a participatory approach in this project. MSW students are considering different formats for recording CT's racial justice work. Dr. DeJesus suggested looking at the history of the racial justice work. Dr. DeJesus was struck by the different racial justice projects generated from the regions.

One of the providers stated that they are looking at disparity and disproportionality. CCSD was also present and stated they would like to contribute to the conversation. Tina J. suggested provider updates as an agenda item at the SRJW meeting. Jen A. encouraged the providers to bring asks and to be liaisons and partners in the racial justice work. Judicial Branch was present, stating that we have to align what the different agencies (i.e. CCSD, Judicial, DCF) are measuring. Another provider stated that she received a lot of useful information from the meeting and looked forward to attending in the future.

The group declared that Steve S. is now officially a part of the team and the meeting adjourned.