

SWRJWG Meeting
June 29, 2018
Host: Deb Borzellino, The Connection
Notes by: Ryan Williams

Participants: William Rivera (CO); Deb Borzellino (The Connection); Sarah Diaz (Region 5); David Williams (Region 1); Tina Jefferson (Region 6); Jodi Hill-Lilly (CO Academy); Paula D'Aquilla (CO-Academy); Meghan Korn (CSSD); Shaun Punzalan (Region 3); Marie Spivey (Heath & Equity); Christina Best (USJ); Ryan Williams (CO); Chritchton Stewart (Region 2); Rosiris Espejo (Region 3); David Silva (Region 3); Martha Stone (CCA); Joette Katz (CO); Susan Smith (CO); Kristina Stevens (CO); Elizabeth Duryea (CO); Josh Fisher (Region 2); Elizabeth Flores (YAB); Tony De Jesus (USJ); Michele Stewart-Copes (Health & Equity); Monica Rams (Region 2); Siobhan Trotman (Region 5); Lisa Sedlock (Region 3); Dan Moreland (CO); Nedra Muley (Region 6); Kim Thorne-Kannelis (Wilderness School); Lorraine Thomas (Region 3); Elisabeth Cannata (Wheeler Clinic); Jen Agosti (JRA Consulting);

I. Welcome/Introduction of new members

Bill R. welcomed the group to the meeting and introduced Deb Borzellino of the Connection, who expressed gratitude for hosting the group. He indicated that two additional members from the statewide Youth Advisory Board (YAB) have officially joined the Workgroup since our last meeting. They are: Abby Blaszczek and Collise Oates. They could not attend the meeting today. However, Elizabeth Flores is representing the YAB.

II. The Racial Justice Vision – Executive Leadership

Susan S. offered that the executive leadership has been exploring strategies for prioritizing the work of the SWRJWG for the future. The Racial Justice accountability legislation passed this session. She stressed that the group needed to discuss how the new legislation would affect our work moving forward, in lieu of the upcoming elections. The regions submitted summaries of their racial justice work which was impressive. Susan expressed the need of DCF to be on the same page with respect to moving forward in a strong and positive in our racial justice efforts.

Bill R. informed the group that all memos and recent communication referenced by Susan are posted on the Office of Multicultural Affairs and Immigration Practice website and can be accessed by community member participants.

Jody Hill-Lilly emphasized that we should be proud of our progress. We've made great strides over the past few years. DCF's culture, policy and practice integrating racial justice is different now than it was five years ago. We have yet to arrive, but we have accomplished much. She stressed that we were able to demonstrate how we have applied the principles of implementation science in our training. All levels have experienced this positive change, i.e. accountability in contracts, training technical assistance, etc. She shared that the culture is shifting as staff are speaking up about racial justice matters. She used the analogy that we are now at the "adolescent" level with respect to our progress. She pointed out that Jen Agosti and Dr. De Jesus have been instrumental in moving the work within and outside of the Workgroup. In order to service culture change, we must own the work. Jodi challenged the group to think about what this would look like for us to own this work. She recognized Tina Jefferson for her leadership in Region 6 for her outstanding leadership. She also commended the work of SWRJWG at large.

Kristina Steven referenced the RBA framework as it relates to the broader question of "who is better off" as a result of the work completed to date. She pointed out that there remains room for growth in our work with our provider workforce development. A looming concern that remains is - "Do the providers reflect the population of the communities they serve?"

The work being done on CLAS (Cultural and Linguistically Appropriate Services) standards with providers remains ongoing and challenging. The federal Connect grant on CLAS standards has expanded its work integrate the theme of racial justice. The Region 6 network of care and DCF combined to address proper services to the community. In order to move the work forward, there must be buy-in from every level of the organizations involved. Development

of a strategic plan was easy. The implementation is the challenge for which the providers requested training. The number of providers in the SWRJWG has decreased, thus we must consider how to reverse this.

Dr. Spivey (Health & Equity) stated they've tried to ensure the voice of the community is at the table and heard. She suggested that we consider hearing and providing support to what the community says they need, instead of looking at the data and saying, "This is what you need." They've been using the CLAS standards, i.e. standards used to produce better health outcomes. We must think about this holistically as we respond to the community that tells us what they need. This will ensure that community members will join the work.

Commissioner Katz pointed to Region 6 as an example of where the Agency has evolved. She shared that she's been going to all of the offices to have open and honest dialogues with the workforce about the work. One of the questions proposed to the Commissioner was her commitment to create individual staff positions hired to do guide the racial justice work. Commissioner Katz stated that she did not. Her rationale was that human nature is to devolve and look to those individuals to be solely responsible for the racial justice work. Commissioner Katz proposed that everyone should be responsible for the racial justice work. She went on to state it was her belief the outsourcing of the racial justice work, as it was in the outsourcing IPV, would be a mistake. It is her view that, in lieu of the great contributions of the providers, DCF has to be responsible for its own racial justice work. She stressed that we have to get comfortable being uncomfortable. She noted the youth are discussing sexuality, religion and other heady, intersectional topics, and that they have since joined the conversation on matters of racial equity of children in care. The need to have difficult discussions with our youth, foster parents and providers is essential. She emphasized that we are all in this together, and that the racial justice work will survive when everybody owns it.

Elizabeth Duryea shared that the executive team have been asked many questions about racial justice during office visits. She shared that racial justice is near and dear to her and emphasized the importance of the passing of the racial justice legislation as a DCF mandate.

Elizabeth Flores asked if the Connect Grant work has been integrated with within the Agency or if it's separate. Kristina Stevens responded that we are looking into getting more groups involved and that she would provide Elizabeth Flores' with contacts for her to explore the answers to her question. Kristina S. responded that oversight for implementation of CLAS standards was overseen by CO and Regions, that meetings between DCF and providers are ongoing.

Both DCF and the community service providers are looking at internal and external data to identify any deficits in service implementation. We must ensure that we are providing proper and culturally responsive services to the community.

Dr. Spivey offered that we have to continue asking people being served about what they need. She stressed the importance of taking ownership of the work if it is to succeed. She shared that in the work that her team is facilitating with the community CLAS cohorts, a bias self-assessment tool integral to the process.

Elizabeth Flores observed that having meetings like the SWRJWG helps to create the safety culture to discuss issues with the goal of making the system better. Jodi H-L shared that Deputy Commissioner Butterfield left the agency for several years. She shared that in a conversation she had with Cindy, Cindy shared how impressed she was by the progress the agency had made to address disparity and disproportionality of the families involved with our system.

III. Spotlight on Region 6

Tina Jefferson (RA Region 6) introduced the video created to share staff perspectives on the racial justice journey they have undertaken. The video "Racial Justice Everything" is embedded in a 3 hour learning forum series. She provided a brief overview of how the region has organized its racial justice and Diversity Action teams. She shared

that was intentional because of the racial justice focus is on outcomes. As the RA for Region 6, she questioned why some individuals were not on board with the racial justice work. Her goal was to move individuals to think about racial justice in case practice from the commencement to closure of cases. The video was previewed in its entirety and was received favorably. Extensive feedback and dialogue ensued.

Jodi Hill-Lilly stressed the importance of each Region assessing its needs and acting accordingly. Jen Agosti reminded the group that Tina J. “tilled the soil” so that seeds were planted to allow her region to get to the point where they could make the video. Dr. Best expressed how adeptly the video touched on the issues involving race, guilt, implicit bias, etc. It was also mentioned the video was shown to New England CPS agencies and Tennessee Department of Children’s Services, who “...loved the video and would like to incorporate something similar into TN DCS’s training.” Jen offered that the self-reflection called for in the video will shift the belief and change the culture.

Kim Thorne-Kannelis observed that perhaps the wilderness school should make a similar video for staff to explore their thoughts, feelings, biases specific to transgender and LGBTQ issues. She recognized the intersection of these issues with racial justice. Crichton Stewart asked if the “Racial Justice Everything Forum” is being offered to other regions and what curriculum was used? Bill Rivera offered that if a group is ready for the learning forum it might be appropriate. However, we have to be cautious, to resist the temptation to release the training series without context. Bill R. suggested that, given that the video is on the Racial Justice web link, perhaps posting a disclaimer that the video is a part of a larger training forum framework and should not be utilized in isolation.

Elizabeth Flores shared that the YAB is working on a video of youth in foster care to address issues DCF involved youth deal with in care. She emphasized that youth are a part of the team and their voices need to be heard. Monica Rams shared that the video subtly captured the essence of “Racial Justice Everything” in its rawness and honesty by real staff discussing their experiences. Jen Agosti again emphasized the work that occurred prior to the filming of the video. One provider saw the video in the context of the CQI team in Hartford. It was suggested that the conversation in the video has to be tied to the data. Tina shared that this was already being done. Dr. Best reminded the workgroup to stay focused on race, with intersectionality considered. Jodi H-L stated there is room for conversations on intersection of a conversation on race and other issues.

Jen A. reminded the group structural and systemic racism feeds off of power. Power must be considered as it relates to the relationship between DCF and providers. Elizabeth Flores shared that she was amazed by the power of what was happening within the SWRJWG. Dr. Spivey asked how DCF will share this video and information with other state agencies. Lorraine Thomas stressed the importance of sharing this information with other agencies outside of DCF. She shared about a recent situation where she and a worker experienced implicit bias while in court. They chose to address the individual who expressed bias during a hearing.

Bill Rivera cited a national report elaborating on the intersection between racial justice and immigration racial diversity as the emerging CPS racial justice issue. He share the Department had integrated all of the legal, policy, and practice recommendations in the report. This is important due to the growing racial diversity of recent immigrant arrivals to the state.

Dr. Spivey reiterated that all state agencies and community agencies should be involved in this work. This can be done by sharing data, training, and other emerging ideas. Commissioner Katz cited how during her work on an opioid crisis committee, she asked about how the committee was examining their work through a racial justice lens? She was disappointed that the issue of race was not a factor in the planning.

Dr. Cannatta shared that SAC retreat has traditionally brought providers and families together to address emerging issues impacting communities. She asked about how DCF, providers and communities could come together to share this information. With respect to licensing undocumented individuals as foster parents, Jen Agosti reminded the

group that we have institutionalized families based on mainstream cultural norms. She cautioned us about contributing to and perpetuating institutional racism regarding the undocumented population.

IV. Racial Justice Forum Updates

Elizabeth D. provided a brief update on the upcoming fall Racial Justice Forum. Planning for the forum is moving forward. Dr. De Jesus shared that USJ was making arrangement for various campus activities planned for the week of the forum. One is a performance to be offered on the night of the summit. Recent events at the border inspired St. Joseph's University to connect with Alex Alfaro of Los Angeles, who performs a one-man show about many of the themes that will be addressed at the summit. Dr. De Jesus offered Alex to serve as a panelist at the racial justice summit.

Monica Rams shared that the summit is set for 10/26/18 at SJU from 9am to 4pm. The summit planning committee is looking for external and internal guest speakers. A draft of what the day looks like has been set. The summit team is exploring visual concepts to add to the event. Send ideas to Yadira Ijeh, Monica, or Jodi H-L. The proposed agenda will be a keynote speaker, an issues panel, and youth panel. The summit team wants the community involved in a meaningful way. An overarching theme is how do we create capacity for DCF and providers to do what Region 6 has done, i.e. the video? Elizabeth Flores asked how we would deal with the criticism for our stand on racial justice. Jodi H-L mused that DCF is used to being criticized. Jen Agosti stressed that the forum is five years in the making and should be a reflection of the journey DCF has been on, not a response to current events.

V. Committee Updates

Workforce

Monica M-R shared that this work needs to involve everyone, thus we can't rely on one person to facilitate the racial justice dialogue. We have to think about the supports that would help staff get comfortable facilitating the racial justice dialogue. Therefore, the Workforce committee will begin to explore how to help supervisors and program managers to facilitate these conversations with staff by developing capacity to do so within structures that already exist. The American Humane Association (AHA) training for supervisors should be considered as an existing system for integrating racial justice guidance.

The goal of the Workforce development committee at this stage is determining the best existing venues for promoting and continuing the work. Monica asked the group for ideas regarding skill sets and capacity supervisors and managers must have to facilitate racial justice discussions. Rosiris Espejo suggested implementing the Case Consultation Model as a prerequisite for SWS and PMs. Monica also suggested taking aspects of the Case Consultation Model to add to a toolbox source for SWS and PMs to help them facilitate the racial justice dialogue. One of the providers recalled how a DCF Waterbury administrator expressed difficulty implementing the Case Consultation Model and suggested participants self assess their comfort level with discussing racial justice. Jen Agosti suggested using individual social workers in the Region 6 video as individual vignettes to encourage racial justice conversations.

Dr. De Jesus offered that the Case Consultation Model Manual is completed and has tools staff can use. The reflection and process of dialogue outlined in the Case Consultation Manual would be useful. Workforce committee will provide an update of their plan at the next meeting.

Policy

The Policy Workgroup indicated that they have not been provided with new policies or practice guides to review lately. There were no other updates. Contact Yadira I directly with any Policy Workgroup questions.

Elizabeth Flores offered that the importance of Social Workers being aware of current events and their implication for practice. She suggested that toolbox or other resources Social Workers can have access to keep them informed.

Bill Rivera shared that he and Susan Smith will be meeting with the Chairs of the workgroups to discuss their scope and purpose moving forward.

VI. Immigration Practice

Bill invited those who haven't spoken to share or ask questions regarding the content of the meeting so far.

Bill provide a brief summary of trends for CPS referrals on immigrant and refugee referrals throughout the state. Regions 1, 2 and 4 have been most impacted. There has also been an increase of immigrants from Spanish-speaking countries migrating to Litchfield County. These migrations will impact overrepresentation of Latino children and families that department may be involved with. To date, over 1410 unaccompanied minor children from the border have been placed in CT since 2014.

The influx of migrants has pushed the workforce to be creative and address the new challenges they are encountering. Many of the refugees and migrants have arrived with severe trauma and mental health issues, speak languages that we have been grappling to find interpreters for, and have little to now context for what DCF does. The Department continues to work to keep migrant children with their parents. Bill has developing an FAQ for what to do when parents are detained and deported.

Siobhan Trotman thanked Bill Rivera for orienting staff at Torrington office about immigration trends, policies, and practice requirements. Siobhan further asked how DCF can better support the undocumented, as they don't trust DCF. Bill recommended all staff complete the online immigration training, as it's designed to provide workers with specific steps to guidelines for engaging immigrant families. Bill stressed that DCF staff must align with the Departments' position about providing services regardless of immigration status. Susan Smith shared that there is a lot of discussion about administration data sets, as there are racial justice implications when people aggregate the data. Not asking people's citizen status could have funding implications on state agencies.

Bill reminded participants that DCF doesn't report undocumented individuals to ICE. However we cannot use state or federal funding to assist undocumented individuals adjust their immigration status. That stated, our policy and practices require that everyone is served equally, regardless of a person's immigration status. Rosiris Espejo emphasized the need for staff to be trained on how to deal homeland security officers when parents or children are detained. Bill reiterated DCF does not provide personal information of clients to DHS/ICE.

Meeting adjourned at 3:54p

VII. Next Meeting: The next meeting is scheduled for August 31, 2018. However, it was noted that this is a long weekend. Bill will review calendar and propose an alternate date.