Office of the Child Advocate

Childhood Trauma Task Force Meeting Minutes

Monday August 7, 2023

1:00pm-3:00pm

Meeting held virtually

**Task Force Members or Designees Present:**

Maria Mossaides (OCA)

Andrea Oliveria (DMH)

Janice LeBel (DMH)

Sana Fadel (CfJJ)

Dawn Christie (PPAL)

Shawna Boles (DYS)

Mia Alvarado (CLM)

Stacy Boothe (DCF)

Rick St. Onge (Probation)

**OCA Staff:**

Melissa Threadgill

Alix Rivière

Ari Fertig

Bekah Thomas

Morgan Byrnes

**Other:**

Amy Whitehead-Pleaux (EEC)

Samantha Matlin (Baker Center)

Kathleen Bitetti (OSA)

Carisa Pajak (MassHealth)

Brooke Arrigo (Suffolk DA)

Heidi Gold (EOE)

Cathie Twiraga (MAFF)

Keesha LaTulippe (DPH)

Madi Wachman (MassHealth)

Courtney Chelo (MSPCC)

Alyssa Chrobuck (FamilyAid)

Shaplaie Brooks (MCLGBTQ+)

Sofia Carozza (Harvard Medical School)

Anat Weisenfreund

Jayne Singer (Boston Children Hospital)

Audrey Hermann (Rep. Livingstone)

Carmel Craig (ABH)

Samantha Awada

**Meeting Commenced:** 1:04 pm

**Welcome and Introductions**

Ms. Threadgill welcomed the attendees to the Childhood Trauma Task Force (CTTF) meeting. CTTF members and guests introduced themselves.

Ms. Rivière then introduced the guest presenters, Aimee Smith-Zeoli and Marianne Bouthilette who will be presenting on trauma supports in early childhood settings.

**Review and Approval of Minutes from June 5, 2023 Meeting**

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the June 5, 2023, meeting minutes. Dawn Christie, voted in the affirmative. Shawna Boles, Mia Alvarado, and Rick St. Onge abstained. No one opposed.

The meeting minutes for June were approved.

**Update on CTTF Work Plan 2023**

Ms. Threadgill then gave an update on the 2023 work plan, which was developed based on conversations at the June meeting. These conversations revealed three areas of interest for members and regular attendees of the Task Force: trauma supports in education, trauma-informed and responsive (TIR) policies and practices to limit the school-to-prison pipeline, and TIR juvenile justice. Ms. Threadgill suggested the group hear from providers and state agencies on these topics at each quarterly meeting.

Ms. Threadgill then introduced two projects to help the CTTF develop more specific recommendations on trauma services. The first proposed project would be for the Task Force to map out what kind of childhood trauma trainings state agencies expect child-serving professionals working for the state to take. This project could include researching state agency regulations, procurements, and employee training opportunities. Members discussed the possibility of collecting data on process outcomes of the trauma trainings that will be reviewed as part of the Task Force’s work.

Ms. Threadgill then welcomed Ms. Rivière to pull up the trauma mapping document that was sent to the group for review. She welcomed any feedback members may have. It was suggested to add the juvenile court as well as probation to the list. Members also discussed if staff in non-direct service positions would also benefit from trauma training.

The second proposed project would be for the Task Force to map out trauma-focused evidence-based treatments (EBTs). Ms. Threadgill explained that the methodology for this project is still to be determined.

**Presentations on Trauma Supports in Early Childhood**

Ms. Threadgill welcomed Ms. Rivière to introduce the guests and their presentation topics.

Ms. Smith-Zeoli, the Special Education Support Specialist at the Department of Early Education and Care (EEC) presented on the following:

* Early Childhood Mental Health Grant
* EEC’s draft policy work to address new laws regarding the use of exclusionary discipline in childcare settings
* Next steps and potential partnerships to increase educational opportunities on trauma-informed care for EEC providers

Part of her presentation focused on EEC’s policy work in regard to exclusionary discipline used in their programs. She highlighted the need for EEC to review existing policies to address the 2022 *Act addressing barriers to care for mental health*’s requirement for the state to reform the use of exclusionary discipline in educational settings. She explained that the goals of the new policy would be to respond to the updated statutory language around mental health, improve program understanding of existing regulations, increase educator knowledge and tools to avoid exclusionary practices, and reduce the use of exclusionary practices in EEC programs.

The group discussed how EEC included a DEI lens in their work. Members also asked if EEC tracks the number of children who are asked to leave programs. It was explained that currently their enrollment data is incomplete. Ms. Smith-Zeoli mentioned that improved data collection is currently a priority for EEC.

Members also asked how staff, who were potentially experiencing secondhand trauma, were being supported. It was explained that different grantees of the Early Childhood Mental Health program tackled this differently and highlighted a few examples.

Members discussed the different tools that could be used to tackle race-based and LGBTQ+ trauma. Members also asked how EEC works with parents through their discipline process.

Ms. Rivière then welcomed Marianne Bouthilette to present on Community Action’s Head Start & Early Learning Programs, which provides early education & care and comprehensive services to expectant parents and children birth to five in Franklin, Hampshire and Western Hampden Counties, MA.

Ms. Bouthilette described the comprehensive services offered by the program, including home visiting services, access to specialty services to support a wide range of health needs for children, basic needs (e.g. meals, diapers, infant formula), as well as parent training and leadership opportunities in addition to a comprehensive education curriculum.

Next, Ms. Bouthilette delved into some of the trauma-informed supports Community Action’s Head Start & Early Learning Programs provides to children, their caregivers, and educators. This includes screening families for trauma of all kinds and using an ECO map strength-based relational process which strengthened program relationship with families. She also highlighted their program’s reliance on reflective supervision and mentoring to support educators who can be affected by the traumatic experiences and reactions of families they work with.

Ms. Threadgill welcomed any questions members may have on the presentation. Hearing none, she welcomed members to share any reflections they may have. Members thanked the presenters for all of the work they are doing in the early education space.

Members discussed the data available around these programs, including data that would allow us to track how many children leave the program and to track enrollment pre- and post-COVID-19.

Ms. Threadgill asked Ms. Smith-Zeoli if there was any pushback from providers regarding limiting the use of exclusionary discipline. It was explained that yes, with the current behavioral health crisis, disruptive behaviors are on the rise and educators feel overwhelmed.

Members discussed how many Head Start children are concurrently involved with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and possible pathways for DCF and Head Start to collaborate on supporting this population.

Members discussed how to define “risk” vs. “dangerous” and how that impacts kids. Members discussed the available data re: exclusion from EEC programs.

**Closing Comments:**

Ms. Threadgill thanked the members and other attendees for their time and continued efforts.

**Adjournment**: 2:52pm