

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Community Based Interventions Subcommittee
Thursday, June 16, 2022
1:00PM-2:30PM
Meeting held virtually

Subcommittee Members or Designees Present:

Maria Mossaides (OCA)
Amy Ponte (CAFL)
Karin Orr (DMH)
Susan Gil-Hickey (DMH)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Brian Jenney (DPH)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Rachel Gwaltney (CLM)
Brian Blakeslee (CPSC)
Kimberly Lawrence (Probation)
Dawn Christie (PPAL)
Barbra Wilson (CLM)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill
Kristi Polizzano
Alix Rivière
Jess Seabrook
Morgan Byrnes

Other Attendees:

Jenyka Spitz-Gassnola (DYS)
Katie Perry-Lorentz (DYS)
Kathleen Bitetti (SAO)
Craig Maxim (Family Continuity)
Daniele Rose (DYS)
Araya Landry (Family Continuity)
Jamanae White (NFI)
Liz Roccoforte (CfJJ Intern)
Shayna Simmonds (Probation)
Michael Kilkelly
Other Members of the public

Meeting Commenced: 1:02 PM

Welcome and Introductions:

Ms. Polizzano welcomed the attendees to the Community Based Interventions (CBI) Subcommittee virtual meeting. She then presented the agenda, explaining the group would be updated on the Diversion Learning Lab pilot program and hear a presentation on the findings of the study of the CRA system, after reviewing and voting on May's meeting minutes.

Review and Approval of Minutes from the May Meeting:

Ms. Polizzano held a formal vote on the approval of the previous Community Based Interventions meeting minutes. Karin Orr, Susan Gil-Hickey, Kimberly Lawrence, Dawn Christie and Barbara Wilson voted to approve the minutes. Rachel Wallack abstained. No one was opposed.

The meeting minutes for May 19, 2022, were approved.

Learning Lab Updates

Ms. Polizzano introduced Daniele Rose, the Department of Youth Services (DYS) Program Manager of diversion programming. Ms. Rose began updating members on the Diversion Learning Lab, including, case trends, recent stakeholder meetings in each of the counties (Essex, Worcester, Middlesex), case challenges, and successful exits of the program. She welcomed any questions from the group. She continued presenting on data being collected, including, the total number of referrals and intakes to date as well as, demographic information and assessment results.

Questions and comments were welcomed at the end of the presentation. Members discussed the presentation, with a member asking what services are provided to youth who have successfully exited the program. It was explained that the diversion coordinators have been working with youth who request support after completion on an as needed basis.

Members also discussed the relationship between the referrers and the Diversion Program. It was explained that many of the referrers have been very open to communication, and that the ongoing

stakeholder meetings have produced deeper relationships with referring agencies, resulting in more referrals.

Members then discussed the YLS and MASYI assessment data. One member asked for further clarification on the number of somatic symptoms reported, asking if it was unique to this cohort.

It was explained that most of the somatic complaints are tied to questions that ask youth about the physical manifestation of their anxiety and that a high number of complaints was not unusual.

Members then asked if trauma screening was being implemented. It was explained that trauma screening is also implemented as part of the assessment process.

Members then asked the presenters if youth are still completing district attorney (DA) office or police diversion programs in tandem with the diversion learning lab. It was explained that yes, some youth are participating in DA diversion and that the program has a partnership with certain DA's offices to provide the programmatic piece of the diversion.

Members then discussed how cross-over youth were being identified and tracked. It was explained that involvement with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and other systems involvement is tracked.

Ms. Rose asked the committee if any data that they were interested in was not presented, members suggested measuring recidivism. Ms. Threadgill commented that the diversion program has produced great work and commended Ms. Rose and the diversion coordinators for their hard work.

CRA Findings Discussion

Ms. Polizzano introduced the next topic, explaining to members that the findings presented are the culmination of over a year and a half of research into the Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) system and includes interviews with over 100 stakeholders, subcommittee presentations, a CRA

specific case file review done with the Children and Family Law Division (CAFL) of the Committee for Public Counsel Services (CPCS), caregiver focus groups, and public data and policy reviews. Ms. Polizzano then presented on the following preliminary findings:

1. The goals of the 2012 reforms (to limit juvenile court involvement, reduce harm for youth and increase supports for youth) to the CHINS system have only been partially realized, with overall CRA cases only declining 6% between FY13 and FY19, and research from various sources indicating that the reform introduced more court involvement without expanding supports for youth.
2. There is no shared understanding of what the current CRA system is for, leading to misinformation at every level.
3. The system operates with significant differences in different parts of the state with both court counties using the CRA process at higher rates than others, and pre – and post-filing practices varying widely.
4. There are disparities in how the CRA system is used and who is referred to it. Black and Latino youth are overrepresented compared to their white peers. Additionally, youth of color and other youth with specific needs (immigrant youth, LGBTQ+ youth, girls, adopted youth and youth with learning disabilities) are being processed through the system differently.
5. Many youth in the CRA system could have their needs better met outside of the CRA system. When faced with barriers to obtaining appropriate services families are pushed toward the CRA system, however, the CRA system does not provide quick or special access to services.

6. The CRA process can be a helpful “fail safe” for families, particularly for youth with complex needs that require multiple agency involvement. The CRA system has been found to provide an opportunity for stakeholders to come together and collaborate.
7. There is limited data on outcomes from the CRA system that could be used to evaluate the system.

Members discussed the findings. One member pushed back on this language, noting that *any* court representation is client centered, and in the context of the CRA system, the client is the child being petitioned. Members discussed rephrasing the language used to describe this process in the forthcoming report to better represent this nuance

Members then discussed the CHINS reform, with some members noting that although the CHINS reform removed CRA records from a person’s criminal offender record information (CORI), there are still informal ways for a CRA record to follow a youth.

Members then discussed the third finding, noting that variance in how the CRA is used from county to county makes it difficult to define the CRA system, as it is, in practice, actually several small self-contained systems. Members discussed how this would impact what, if any, recommendations the group would make. Members suggested creating sections of the final report that outlined statutory requirements assigned to each stakeholder in the CRA system. Members noted that outlining these requirements would make cross-stakeholder collaboration easier.

Members discussed the connection between the CRA system and out of home placement, with one member asking if it was possible to produce a data set of youth in congregate care with a CRA petition. It was explained that the OCA does not have that data, but that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) does report how many of their cases have a CRA. However, the

CAFL case file review showcased that 50% of those cases required an out of home placement. It was also asked if there were any available data showing racial and ethnic disparities in congregate care placement. It was explained that the data is not currently available due to the way it is tracked by DCF.

Members discussed the fourth finding, noting that the different sources used to inform this finding each comes with limitations. It was explained that those limitations will be noted in the group's report and that the findings are in line with other qualitative data. Members also discussed how this finding should inform their recommendations, with some members discussing the expansion of services to better serve certain populations, including expanding program options to include programs in various languages.

Finally, members discussed how the misinformation that courts have quicker access to services or provide different services to families is spread. It was noted that families with high and complex needs often exhaust their options before entering the CRA system, just to get funneled back into those same services after filing a CRA. Members also discussed how limited data on outcomes is for the CRA system.

Ms. Polizzano thanked members for their participation, explaining that the presentation will be emailed out. She welcomed members to reach out with any questions they have. She mentioned the group will discuss possible recommendations for improvement to the CRA system at their next meeting.

Closing Comments:

Ms. Polizzano thanked the members for their participation and informed the group that the next meeting will take place on July 21, 2022.

Meeting adjourned: 2:31 PM