

Office of the Child Advocate
Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board
Community Based Interventions Subcommittee
Thursday, October 21st, 2021
1:00PM-2:30PM
Meeting held virtually

Subcommittee Members or Designees Present:

Brian Blakeslee (CPCS)
Rachel Wallack (Juvenile Court)
Kimberly Lawrence (Probation)
Amy Ponte (CAFL/CPCS)
Leon Smith (CfJJ)
Barbara Wilson (CLM)
Nokuthula Sibanda (DYS)
Brian Jenney (DPH)

OCA Staff:

Melissa Threadgill (OCA)
Kristi Polizzano (OCA)
Gabriel Sultan (OCA)

Other Attendees:

Shayna Simmonds (Probation)
Kathleen Bitetti (SAO)
Katherine Hughes
Jennifer Hallisey (Masshealth)
Other Members of the public

Meeting Commenced: 1:04PM

Welcome and Introductions:

Ms. Threadgill welcomed the attendees to the Community Based Interventions (CBI) subcommittee virtual meeting. She then presented the agenda.

Review and Approval of Minutes from 9/16/2021 Meeting:

Ms. Threadgill held a formal vote on the approval of the previous Community Based Interventions meeting minutes. Brian Blakeslee, Kimberly Lawrence, Rachel Wallack, Jennifer Hallisey, Amy Ponte, Thula Sibanda, Barbara Wilson, and Brian Jenney voted to approve the minutes. No one was opposed or abstained. The meeting minutes for 9/16/2021 were approved.

Update on DYS Learning Lab:

Ms. Threadgill turned the floor over to Thula Sibanda who updated the group on the kick-off of the DYS Learning Lab. Dr. Sibanda confirmed that all three providers were in the process of hiring staff and conducting initial trainings. She anticipated that the providers would begin to take cases within a few months. Dr. Sibanda informed the group that the providers will be trained on how to use the Learning Lab's data infrastructure, and how to administer and score the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2) and the Youth Level of Service Case Management Inventory assessment (YLS/CMI). Ms. Threadgill thanked Dr. Sibanda for the update.

The Role of CAFL & an Attorney in CRAs::

Next, Amy Ponte and Brian Blakeslee gave a joint presentation to the group on the CRA process from the perspective of a CAFL social worker and an attorney respectively. Mr. Blakeslee opened by discussing the changes made to the CHINS statute in 2012. He determined that the changes have resulted in the CRA decriminalizing many typical youth behaviors, but acknowledged that the system requires additional work. Mr. Blakeslee highlighted that the adversarial nature of formalized court proceedings puts attorneys and the parties in a difficult position to collaborate and come up with comprehensive plans for services in a timely manner. Mr. Blakeslee also criticized the lack of a uniform procedure for appointing an attorney for children before the preliminary hearing stage of a CRA case. Mr. Blakeslee did point out that in his experience, the CRA process often makes children and parents feel empowered by enabling them to have their needs and points of view advocated for by attorneys, heard by one another, and acknowledged by people in power.

Ms. Ponte discussed the CRA process from the point of view of a licensed social worker. She focused on the capabilities and operations of the Community Based Health Initiative (CHBI) in connection with CRA cases. Ms. Ponte informed the group that CBHI provides wraparound and community-based services for both families and children. These services range from intensive care to in-home therapy and other measures, the most popular of which is therapeutic mentoring. Not all children require intensive or formal services, and social workers will often look for other ways for child to explore their interests in the community. Ms. Ponte argued that many of the issues with the CRA system come from a lack of understanding among parents, social workers,

and educators about what the CRA process entails and the outcomes which court involvement can provide. She also pointed out the risks involved with exposing young children and families in need of services to a formalized judicial process and alerted the group to the long waitlists which are hampering the accessibility of many services to children and families who need them.

The group discussed some of the new approaches to get youth without MassHealth services they need, but more study needs to be done in this area. A guest encouraged looking at youth with IEPs for both the CRA work of this subcommittee as well as the Diversion Learning Labs that launched. The group also discussed concerns around how private bar attorneys can access funds for a social worker to assist them with court-appointed CRA cases. Mr. Blakeslee said the attorney needs to make a motion for funds and the judge needs to approve that motion in order for CPCS to give funding for these cases.

Closing Comments:

Ms. Threadgill thanked the presenters and members for their participation. She informed the group that the next meeting will take place on November 18th, 2021, from 1:00PM to 2:30PM.

Meeting adjourned: 2:02PM