



Citizen Review Panel

District of Columbia

Tuesday, May 10, 2022
Meeting Minutes

Time: 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM
Day: Tuesday
Via: ZOOM video conferencing

Virtual attendance

CRP members present: Shana Bartley (Interim Chair), Patrick Foley, Dr. Mattie Cheek, Dr. Wanda Thompson, Dr. Megan Schott, Emily Bloomfield, Pierrea Wallace and Theresa Gibson.

Absent: Elizabeth Corson Mohler

MOTA: Steve Walker and Alexandria Guzman

Visitors: Rick Bardach and Danelle Robinette

CRP Facilitator: Joyce N. Thomas, and Meron Meshesha

CFSA Grant Monitor: Roni Seabrook

Welcome/Introduction

Shana Bartley, Interim Chairperson began the meeting at 6:30 PM and it was announced that the meeting will begin with swearing of new panel members.

Oath of Office

Steve Walker, Director of the Mayor's Office on Talent and Appointments (MOTA) asked the two candidates present (Emily Bloomfield and Pierrea Wallace) to raise their right hands and take the Oath of Office. Following the swearing-in, Shana acknowledged that we have a quorum for tonight's meeting and notice of the meeting was published on the DC Register, CRP website and CFSA website. Each panel member present as well as the two guests and Facilitator team confirmed the confidentiality statement to protect the privacy of potential client information. The minutes from March 8, 2022 were approved.

Interim Chairperson

Shana opened the meeting by asking if there were any modifications to the agenda. The Facilitator suggested adding the discussion about "selection of a new CRP Chairperson". Shana recommended we adjust the agenda to include the topic of CRP leadership, and eliminate items listed as new business to allow more time for discussion of topics for working groups that came from Google Doc. In addition, it was suggested that we focus on having a more robust discussion about proposed topics rather than try to select chairs for working groups. There was consensus from the panel about the change in the agenda.

Follow-up from Google Doc Topics

Shana thanked the panel for submitting topics for consideration for the working groups on Google Doc. Initially, the panel discussed the definition, structure, and activities of working groups which set the tone for open dialogue. The following are topics presented by various panel members.

Dr. Megan Schott raised two topics for possible working groups projects. The first proposed project was about abandonment of children who are in the hospital when they are clinically ready for discharge. These are children known to the mental health emergency department at Children's Hospital. Questions raised during the discussions were:

- What is the length of time a child is left in the hospital before they are abandoned?
- What is the appropriate protocol to deal with abandonment of a child in a health care facility?
- What are the reasons for the problem of abandonment? Is it related to parental behavior of non-compliance, or is it related to an inability to find an appropriate third-party placement?
- What is a proper placement for children with special needs?
- What training is provided to foster parents to care for children with special needs?

A second proposed topic by Dr. Schott focused on medical needs of children in the foster care system. Questions raised and comments made during the discussion were:

- Are children entering foster care able to be followed by their known physician/ health provider or are they assigned to a new provider when they go into placement?
- How often are foster parents using the hospital ER for prescription refills only?
- How much information on medical history is provided to foster parents?

Dr. Wanda Thompson opened with a statement about how most children desire to be with their biological parent and not in foster care. With that in mind, she proposed a project that will focus on the relationship between children in foster care and their biological parents.

Questions raised and comments made during the discussion were:

- What kind of contact do foster children have with their biological parents?
- How do kids have quality contact with parents?
- If children have contact with their parent, is there a better (i.e., less behavior problems or improved academic performance) outcome?
- How does having contact with a parent affect the child's overall attitude and how is this measured?

The panel members discussed the findings of various federal research projects that demonstrate increased time with biological families results in improved outcomes of foster children. Reunification of children and families is better for youth. There is a need for CFSA to document this.

Theresa Gibson informed the panel that she was a foster child in CFSA years ago and she expressed concerns about children ageing out of the foster care system.

Her questions and comments focused on the needs of older youth.

- What resources do youth have when they age out of the system?
- What specific support is available to youth?

- How can we assist to enhance the reading level of older youth?
- What policy papers can be developed to generate involvement of other DC stakeholders?
- What is needed to strengthen the future of older youth?

This topic led to group discussion about the 2022 final report “Older Youth Project”¹ that focused on financial literacy and educational/vocational needs. Recommendations were well received from CFSA and there will be follow-up to monitor the progress. The group suggested that since CFSA has made a commitment to address the recommendations of this report, perhaps we can drill down to get more improved outcomes for this target population. It was stated that this area of youth development remains a priority for CFSA. A meeting is scheduled for September 2022 to get feedback from CFSA. There are several unresolved issues that could benefit from further research. It was felt that the panel should consider going deeper into the concerns about emancipation of older youth. The minutes of prior meetings can provide a historical look at the panel's work in this area.

Dr. Mattie Cheek raised additional comments on how the panel can expand on the work of the Older Youth Project. She proposed the following options:

- CRP should follow up on other financial literacy and vocational programs to see what a better fit for CFSA youth may be.
- Based on the findings of low reading levels of CFSA youth, CRP can explore other financial literacy projects that may be a better fit than what is currently in place.
- CRP can amplify the issue by conducting seminars, forums, or writing policy papers.
- Engaging the community and marketing the work of the panel for increased visibility. This may motivate other individuals to join the CRP.

Both Theresa and Mattie focused on the need for projects to demonstrate outcomes and progress not just finding problems. All agreed the panel should move beyond identifying gap and should promote strategies for new knowledge. There was positive discussion about the CFSA meeting on March 10, 2022 committing to recommendations to the Older Youth report. Panel members expressed this was a productive and positive session and a follow meeting is scheduled for September 2022. Shana suggested that a decision is needed whether to assign next steps to a working group or to involve the full panel.

Emily Bloomfield offered the broad topic of tracking levels of services available to families in need. She referred to a report in the City Paper² about non-compliance, and she proposed the CRP should look at levels of client follow through. Her projects were:

- What is the level of access, compliance, and follow through for CFSA clients?
- Does CFSA have all the tools that are needed in the toolbox?
- What are the mandated training needs in DC?

This generated group discussion about the perceived shortage of mental health providers, bottlenecks in the referral process, and the role of DBH and other agencies. It was mentioned that there is a shortage of mental health providers in DC, and CFSA has no control of this problem. The group was also reminded that the child welfare system is broader than CFSA and there are challenges in getting accurate data to

¹ See [www, dc-crp.org](http://www.dc-crp.org) website

² <https://washingtoncitypaper.com>

examine these concerns. It was mentioned that the current MOA is between the CRP and CFSA, but perhaps it can be a guide for gathering information from other agencies.

Pierrea Wallace began her remarks by stating in her role as a Guardian Altium trust is lacking in the community, and there is no buy in from the community. She went on to mention the gaps in services and the overall communication issues.

She presented several ideas for possible consideration which included: (1) system harm as a result of racial disparity in CFSA, (2) investing in target communities to focus on neglect reports, and (3) examining the effects of Covid-19 pandemic on child welfare in DC. She indicated that these are ideas for understanding the needs rather than promoting a specific project. Systemic harm is the underlying concern about racial disparities. She mentioned how some child welfare agencies are using a system known as “race blind removal”³ for dealing with concerns about racial disparities and there is less implicit bias for removing children from their homes. She believes that in general, there is a lot of devaluing of the community. This is especially true in Wards 7 & 8 in southeast DC. She further references the federal legislation⁴ that sets a timeline for children to remain in foster care placement. According to the Adoption Safe Families Act 1997, there is only 15-22 months that parents must make progress. A child can remain in foster care for reunification; otherwise, they are likely to be moved toward adoption. This is harmful and traumatic for generations.

The following are comments from other panel member.

- Racial disparities are happening in many child welfare agencies throughout the country. This is not unique to DC.
- We need to know more about who are making reports of child abuse.
- Most cases that come into the Hotline are unsubstantiated.
- There are many silos that prevent a good exchange of communications.
- There is underrepresentation and lack of information about available services.
- We need to look at what is happening in the Office of Victims of Crime. There are problems about slow payments to providers.
- How are we engaging recipients of service?

Pierrea’s second topic focused on “Community Investment” and the role of CFSA. Concerns that were mentioned included:

- Can CFSA ameliorate problems of neglect without separating the family?
- What types of services are provided in-home?
- What are the different types of foster care placements?
- How much resources are paid to foster parents?

Pierrea’s third issue focused on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on DC child welfare system. Due to time constraints, this topic was not fully discussed. She indicated each of her topic was intended to promote thoughtful discussions that can serve as background information.

³ <https://childwelfaremonitor.org>

⁴ Adoption Safe Families Act 1997, Federal legislation signed into law by President Bill Clinton.

Shana thanked everyone for their contribution, and we need to step back and reflect on these ideas.

Facilitator Report

Joyce Thomas gave the Facilitator report to include an update on the annual report, membership status, financial report, and the MOA status.

CRP 2022 Annual Report

The Facilitator provided the panel with a summary overview of the preparation, review process, and submission of the annual report to CFSA. In general, the report content focused on changes in the DC Child Welfare System, capacity building, working group activities, and recommendations for future directions. Recommendations focused on preparation for the new Facilitator. Joyce Thomas thanked the panel members for their review and comments on the draft report. All suggested changes offered by panel members were included in the report. Additional thanks were directed to Meron Meshesha for finalizing and submitting the report on time to CFSA.

Membership Status:

After tonight's swearing-in of Pierrea Wallace and Emily Bloomfield, and the resignation of Maura Gaswirth, currently, there are eight full DC-CRP members. Dr. Megan Schott is waiting to be sworn-in. On May 3, 2022, Pierrea participated in a 2-hour orientation provided by the Facilitator. The new person of contact at MOTA is Alexandria Guzman, and she will assist with ongoing recruitment of new members.

Fiscal Report

The Facilitator reported that CCPFS received a three-month extension of grant DCRL-2017-U-0030 for the period of March 12, 2022 to June 11, 2022. The budget for that period was \$10,692.00, which primarily covers personnel and administrative cost.

MOA Status

The CRP/CFSA Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) is under review by CFSA Office of General Counsel and a few remarks were sent back to CRP leadership for comments. Initially, CFSA focused on issues of confidentiality, and this was easily resolved because language was added to make the MOA in compliance with HIPAA regulations. In a second set of concerns CFSA General Council stated, CRP must provide written documentation with signatures of each panel member's confidentiality statement. Comments were returned to CFSA with needs to modify language to accommodate the virtual meetings of the CRP. It was pointed out that "each CRP member and guest makes a verbal confidentiality statement at the start of meetings, and information is recorded with written documentation in the minutes." Another issue from CFSA implied the CRP must obtain prior approval from CFSA before dissemination of any information that was provided to CRP. Both Shana and Joyce interpreted this would limit the CRP from sharing information to community stakeholders, conference presentations, or training sessions. We are currently waiting for additional comments and language changes from CFSA General Council.

Identification of CRP Chairperson

The Facilitator informed the panel that there is a need for a chairperson to assume leadership of the CRP. Pierrea Wallace has expressed interest in being the Chairperson and this has met the approval and support of Shana Bartley. The panel expressed support to Pierrea and the name of this potential chair will be forwarded to MOTA

Adjournment: The meeting ended at 8:30 PM.