

# Documenters

POWERED BY CITY BUREAU

## DCFS Advisory Board

Documenter name: Mildred Seward

Agency: [Cuyahoga County Children and Family Services Advisory Board](#)

Date: Oct. 15, 2021

[See more about this meeting at Documenters.org](#)

---

## Summary

- The advisory board members seemed frustrated and overwhelmed with the number of services needed to help children overcome many of the situations they face on a day-to-day basis.
- The organization “A Place 4 Me” relayed some ideas that, if they can be implemented, might help with youth homelessness.
- The Division of Children and Family Services is not allowed to ask its workers if they are vaccinated, per county policy, officials said.

## Follow-Up Questions

- How do you help children with emotional issues if you don't have people trained in that area?
- Can there be more oversight when placing children in protective service?
- What are the criteria that must be met when removing children and turning them over to the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)?

## Notes

The meeting was called to order by Lakecia Wild at 12:03 p.m. and ended at 2 p.m. The total number of people attending was 13.

The board members present were:

- M. Gabriella Celeste
- David S. Crampton
- Natasha Davis
- Verna Darby
- Andrew S. Garner, M.D.
- Marielee Santiago
- Lakecia Wild, Board Chair

- DCFS Director Cynthia Weiskittel was in attendance.

There was a motion to approve the minutes of the July 30 meeting. Celeste asked that the spelling of her name be corrected and also requested that the names of the members and guests be added to the minutes. The minutes were approved with the requested changes.

Kate Lodge, Vice President of Strategic Initiative and Executive Director of [A Place 4 Me](#) gave a presentation followed by some discussion:

Lodge: A Place 4 Me is an initiative aimed at ending homelessness, with special focus on youth in foster care. How do we do our work? We do system change work. We work to obtain additional resources for young people. We have young people working with us. We do direct service work. Young people call us who are facing homelessness, and we try to get emergency funding for help with rent or legal issues. Working on the needs for placement helps young people transitioning out of foster care. That's the scope of the areas we are working on.

The presentations cover several major points:

### **1. Assessment of market forces behind the scenes**

She discussed the vital role families play in preventing youth from going into the foster system into the juvenile justice system. She said 18- and 19-year-olds now can continue to stay in foster homes, but that change means some placements are no longer available for younger children.

### **2. Foster home resources and potential assets at the Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS)**

Concerned with provider contracts not eject/no reject placements, payment increases and Kinship care placements with payments.

### **3. Potential trauma reduction for waiting children**

There is trauma for kids sleeping overnight on a cot while waiting for placements. Discussed providing comfort food and clothing and augmenting child care staff with retired workers.

### **4. Internal recruitment assessment**

Areas about the recruitment, retention and support of foster/adoptive parents. Need to look at inquiries, response time, length of time to approval. Insufficient payments to foster

parents are sometimes a reason for foster parents leaving the field. Foster parents are recruiting other foster parents.

**5. Data wishlist to help understand the needs of the youth in care who have no placement and are staying at the Jane Edna Hunter Building.**

Covered such things as the custody status of youth in the building, the grouping of youth in the building (i.e. diverted from Juvenile Justice, returned from residential, the level of care of youth in the building, youth returning from AWOL status, etc.).

**6. Charge for effort: The children who do not have placements is a community issue and an opportunity to innovate** -She define the swim lanes as (a) interrupt market forces, (b) private providers (c) child-centered recruitment, (d) multi-system youth collaboration (e) broker new resources and (f) supports to reduce trama

Need to develop a team that can support all of the “swim” lanes, but the team can’t be all supervisors; it must include people across the board. Looking for a call to action to enlist a renowned facilitator with roots in the community to convene all children and adult service centers to unite to serve all children in Cuyahoga County. It's an emergency situation, and the luxury of time to plan is not there.

**Thoughts and Feedback**

Crampton: I attended a fundraiser in Shaker. People willing to write checks, can we also ask them to be mentors?

Celeste: Would like to hear all of our members’ thoughts and discussion.

Darby: Are there sibling groups who don’t have placements?

Darby: When looking for kinship care, is there a particular thing on a person’s record that keeps them from getting custody of a family member?

Kinnect: There is consideration if it is something minor. There were two children in the building last night. We now have a young child that can’t be placed. We are seeing a lot of 17- to 20-year-olds. Most providers aren’t licensed to take youth 18 and up unless they are already in their care. Last year 52 kids were placed out of state, now we have 72. Big increase in one year.

Celeste: As an advisory board, what can we do?

Garner: Complex issue, not just homelessness. Must appreciate that some kids don't belong in foster care.

Cynthia Weiskittel : That assessment is right on. We see a lot of kids from Juvenile Court who are not going to be taken by foster parents because of their behaviors.

Garner: Some kids need residential therapy.

Cynthia Weiskittel : The court needs to mandate child support from parents. Parents can't just say I'm done and walk away.

Garner: Must try to advocate for services up front, when parent reaches out for help

Darby: Do they get to go out for therapy or treatment if needed?

Santiago: The parents are struggling and their mental health is not being addressed. Connecting parents to organizations like Family Connections,- which can offer help with child engagement at an early age.

Celeste: I hear we can't ignore this emerging population.

Lodge: I want to create a planning process. Some advocacy would be good, making it a community issue.

Garner: We need to look at this as a public health crisis. Then it will be a framework that is more inclusive of services across disciplines.

Cynthia Weiskittel : We are the only system that is not allowed to say no. We are saturated with kids that we can't take care of. These are multi-system kids who need multi-system care.

Celeste: I see these kids as our kids, I would not let that example be a reason to say these are not CF welfare kids. These are the kids of our community

Garner: What is the appropriate care, and who is responsible?

## **Director's Report**

On COVID, I can't answer the questions about two of the three items on the grid. The county has taken the position that they are not asking staff whether or not they are vaccinated. We were able to disclose vaccinations for a short period of time. So, I have no idea how many of my foster parents are vaccinated. I can tell you about kids in custody. We have to ask the parents if they will allow their children to be vaccinated. Now of those in county care, 168 are fully vaccinated and 55 have at least one dose. We are working with our law department to send a letter out to all parents trying to recommend that kids get vaccinated.

Question: What is the number of kids in custody age 12 and above? (Ages that children are eligible for the vaccines.)

Garner: If you are a foster parent, are there any other requirements for the job?

Cynthia Weiskittel : I think that the state has not taken the position. If we start to eliminate the homes who are not vaccinated, we are going to have an even bigger problem. That's not a reason not to do it. Just being honest about the struggle.

**Intervention Committee:**

Crampton and Celeste reviewed several areas from the DCFS Advisory Board Dashboard. You can view the dashboard [here](#).

The next meeting was set for 3:30 p.m. Dec. 13. . This meeting was adjourned.

---

If you believe anything in these notes is inaccurate, please email us at [documenters@citybureau.org](mailto:documenters@citybureau.org) with "Correction Request" in the subject line.