



Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana

Meeting Minutes

Commission on Improving the Status of Children in Indiana
Wednesday, August 21st, 2024
Indiana Government Center South

- Rachel McCaffrey (non-voting member for Christine Blessinger, Deputy Commissioner of Re-entry and Youth Services, Indiana Department of Correction)
- Jay Chaudhary, Director, Division of Mental Health and Addiction
- Bernice Corley, Executive Director, Public Defender Council
- Representative Dale DeVon
- Senator Stacey Donato
- Brooke Huntington (non-voting member for Dr. Katie Jenner, Secretary, Indiana Department of Education)
- Justin Forkner, Chief Administrative Officer, Indiana Office of Judicial Administration
- Kory George, Chief Probation Officer, Wayne County Probation Department
- John Hammond IV, Office of the Governor
- Joseph Habig, Director, State Budget Agency
- Senator La Keisha Jackson
- Hon. Dana Kenworthy, Court of Appeals of Indiana
- Aly Leonard, Youth Commission Member
- Eric Miller, Director, Indiana Department of Child Services
- Chris Naylor, Executive Director, Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council
- Todd Rokita, Indiana Attorney General (non-voting member)
- Dr. Dan Rusyniak, M.D., Secretary, Indiana Family and Social Services Administration
- Julia Stumler, Youth Commission Member
- Representative Vanessa Summers
- Dr. Lindsay Weaver, State Health Commissioner, Indiana Department of Health

1. Welcome & Introductions

John Hammond called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and welcomed members and guests.

2. Consent Agenda

Action: To approve the [minutes from the June meeting](#), was motioned by Dr. Rusyniak, seconded by Senator Donato, and approved unanimously 15-0.

3. BEST Youth Initiative Update

Aly Leonard, Youth Representative

The presentation can be found on slides 3-5 of the [meeting slides](#). Aly introduced herself and reminded members and guests that Indiana was selected as one of five states for the Forum for Youth Investment's

Building Ecosystems Statewide for Thriving (BEST) Youth Initiative. Aly shared that members of Indiana's team, who are focusing on chronic absenteeism, traveled to Washington D.C. in July for the launch event, where they heard from speakers and panels, participated in workshops, and established a support network. Aly mentioned that learning from other states and their successes and gaps was informative. She also highlighted the initiative's aim to constantly improve the ways states can uplift the voices of those with lived experience. She referred to the work of the Commission's summer intern and takeaways from the launch event when emphasizing the need for consistent staffing and support for all lived experience efforts happening in Indiana. She mentioned that the Forum's assigned consultants will be in Indianapolis at the end of September to conduct stakeholder interviews. Aly thanked the Commission for her role as a youth representative and shared excitement to be working on a topic that is personal.

Discussion: John Hammond thanked Aly and asked her if the product from one of the activities from the launch event is available. Mark Fairchild shared that it can be circulated out after the meeting along with other relevant items as they come up.

4. Department of Child Services Prevention Programs

Hannah Robinson and Ashley Purdue, Indiana Department of Child Services

The presentation can be found on slides 6-23 of the [meeting slides](#). Hannah introduced herself and Ashley and listed the prevention programs that they were going to outline. First, Community Partners for Child Safety includes three tiers of prevention based on a family's risk to become system involved. She shared the 5 agencies that provide services and their respective regions, which included serving over 27,000 children in fiscal year 2023. She outlined the funding flexibility, target populations, evidence-based models used, and concrete assistance options. Next, she shared the locations of the family resource centers and the many services these "one-stop shops" can provide in local communities. These centers are located in places that families are already going, and future goals include opening ones in schools. She shared that not all family resource centers look the same, but they do include similar services surrounding system navigation and resource referrals. Ashley introduced herself and Healthy Families, which is the home-visiting prevention program. She began by mentioning some of the positive outcomes and the total number of people involved in Healthy Families Indiana. Next, she outlined eligibility requirements, which included enrollment age, screening scores, and system involvement criteria. Ashley then described referral patterns, goals for improving safe environments, and target populations. She showed that 99 percent of families that fully engage with this program go on to avoid formal system involvement. Moving to My Healthy Baby, Ashley shared that this statewide partnership works as a referral system to the different home-visiting programs. She shared ways to get connected, referred, and asked the Commission for any questions.

Discussion: Representative DeVon mentioned that he was able to tour one of the family resource centers nearby and asked if he could get access to data surrounding positive outcomes and potential need for more centers. Hannah shared that the requirements around data collection are new and there is not much data to show yet, but that she can share some impact profiles with the group after the meeting. Representative DeVon wondered if there are benefits and drawbacks of being in schools in terms of outreach and mentioned if tracking data in comparison to the fatality review would be helpful. Hannah mentioned that DCS funding is currently capped for these centers but discussion around other funding options is taking place. Kory George complimented how Firefly set up a family resource center in Wayne County. Hannah shared that Firefly was the first organization that served as an implementer on this project. Bernice Corley mentioned that she noticed rent and utilities in Hannah's slides as two common family needs. Hannah mentioned families that need more expensive concrete assistance like rent, utilities, and transportation are usually referred to receive case management. Bernice followed up by asking if Hannah sees these centers as able to combat the increase in caregiver stressors. Hannah shared that these centers have staff that aim to help alleviate a family's individual symptoms, whether it be difficulty finding a job and childcare, accessing mental health care, and much more. Senator Jackson asked Hannah if each center is a separate non-profit organization, to which she confirmed is accurate. Senator Jackson followed up by mentioning a grant opportunity for Marion County as a potential avenue to expand into schools. Senator Donato asked if services are available for those who are chronically

absent or truant, to which Hannah confirmed they are. Rachel McCaffrey asked Hannah to clarify which potential systems families may be involved in would be disqualifiers. Hannah explained that the criminal justice system is not a disqualifier, but child welfare and juvenile justice systems can be, but each family is reviewed, and exceptions are often made. John Hammond shared that a map with service emphasis might be helpful. Dr. Weaver agreed and asked for potential contacts to connect with them. Hannah shared that the slides include a link to each center with additional information. John Hammond asked if the child abuse grant that Hannah mentioned is recurring and/or increasing. Hannah confirmed and mentioned that sustaining the nine centers is feasible since implementing them required the most effort and resources.

5. Indiana Behavioral Health Access Program for Youth (Be Happy)

Rachel Yoder, MD

The presentation can be found on slides 24-37 of the [meeting slides](#). Dr. Yoder introduced herself as a child and adolescent psychiatrist with Riley's Hospital for Children and the co-director of the Indiana Behavioral Health Access Program for Youth (Be Happy). She explained that Be Happy is a program that provides child psychiatrist consultation calls with any primary care provider. She outlined its funding timeline and emphasized the critical need for support surrounding mental health care. Dr. Yoder shared that this program helps expand the mental health workforce and shared some quotes from pediatricians that highlighted their feelings of support. She shared the number of providers enrolled and how many consolation calls occurred, providing maps to outline which counties engage the most. Dr. Yoder shared that an adult version of this program began in 2023 and has expanded to include therapists and training for emergency departments. She shared hope that the 2025 legislative session may be able to establish permanent support for this program when its grant funding expires.

Discussion: Dr. Weaver mentioned that this support program allows primary care providers to gain confidence, which decreases unnecessary referrals and allows for the calls to focus on higher acuity cases. She also mentioned that there is not a current way to bill for clinician-to-clinician calls, so a consistent way to fund this is needed. Dr. Yoder agreed and Dr. Weaver shared that IDOH surveyed birth centers, asking if they are screening for substance use issues, to which many are not and do not know who or how to refer. She shared that tools like these are crucial for supporting providers.

6. Court Appointed Special Advocates and Guardians ad Litem

Rae Feller, Esq., GAL/CASA State Director

The presentation can be found on slide 38-61 of the [meeting slides](#). Rae introduced herself and an internal project proposal with the State GAL/CASA office. She shared the state office's role with supporting local programs, the 87 counties that have programs, and the professions that make up the list of volunteers. Rae described the qualifications to become a GAL/CASA and their training requirements. She then shared some quotes from young people describing how their volunteers supported them. Next, Rae shared the GAL and CASA are interchangeable terms describing a party to a child welfare case that serves as a best interest advocate. Rae shared the national best interest advocate model and that volunteers look at all pieces and parties in a case to promote child safety, which she explained is different than direct legal representation. Rae described that every child is assigned a GAL/CASA, and those volunteers/staff have access to legal counsel. She added that the court has the ability to appoint direct representation on a case-by-case basis. Rae shared a map that outlined which states require direct representation and which use the best interest model. She also provided national rankings in time to permanency, kinship placements, educational needs being met, and more, where Indiana ranked in the middle. Rae mentioned that in other states where representation is required, some children are not being seen prior to their hearing, attorneys are not adequately trained, and/or caseloads are unmanageable. She shared quotes from judicial leadership that highlighted the attorney shortage, and the number of kids involved with the child welfare system. Rae outlined that her proposal is to expand GAL/CASA access to attorneys, that way less complicated cases may require little to no attorney involvement while more complicated cases can access legal help. She shared ways that best interest attorneys may be able to expedite permanency, petition for termination of parental rights (TPR), and intervene in adoptions. Rae provided some of the circumstances that call for GAL/CASA volunteers to ask for direct representation and the screening tools used. She also shared that

GAL/CASA currently does and could provide training around child welfare topics. Rae thanked the Commission and provided her contact information.

Discussion: Representative DeVon asked if data exists on whether GAL/CASA volunteers are effective in their recommendations to judges. Rae shared that anecdotal evidence from attorneys, judges, DCS, etc. would point to confirm Representative DeVon's question. Julia Stumler complimented her CASA volunteer and shared that she never spoke to her attorney. She also shared that she is an advocate for legal representation for every child. Julia mentioned that her CASA recommended her wishes to the judge in her case, to which Rae mentioned that Julia's best interest and what she wanted were likely the same thing. Julia asked if children appointed an attorney because their involvement with the juvenile justice system can receive a second attorney in their child welfare case. Rae shared that depending on the case, they can have one or two. Jay Chaudhary referenced his own experience as a young lawyer and asked Rae if they do anything to help GAL/CASA folks with their own mental health. Rae shared they do sessions on self-care and vicarious trauma and that each program has a crisis manager, but that they are always looking to improve. Justin Forkner complimented GAL/CASA volunteers and referenced his conversations with the Chief Justice about how to navigate the attorney shortage while making sure that children who need a lawyer get one. Judge Kenworthy agreed with Justin and shared personal experience as a judge in child welfare cases, mentioning that she reads every note and appreciates the extensive effort of GAL/CASA volunteers. John Hammond asked if states with required direct representation have correlative data with faster times to permanency. Judge Kenworthy said that the Commission could find that data and Rae reiterated that Indiana is in the middle. Justin shared that Rae's proposal will go before the Chief Justice soon. Aly Leonard shared that she had a GAL and an attorney in her case, in which her GAL knew about a court therapy dog program. Aly asked Rae if all GAL/CASA volunteers are provided with information about the services that exist locally. Rae answered by explaining that local directors help share this information with their network. Bernice Corley mentioned that the Public Defender Council developed a wellness program for itself, DCS, and CASAs as well.

7. Executive Director Updates

Mark Fairchild

Mark shared that the Commission's [annual report](#) is finalized and available electronically. He also echoed Aly's earlier presentation on the BEST Youth Initiative, mentioning that the Forum's consultants will be on site soon to conduct interviews and invited any Commission members to join. Mark also introduced the first cohort of Jean Breaux Collaborative Fellows, Alyssa and Payton, and briefly described their projects. Lastly, Mark mentioned the Commission's rapid growth in its first year with legislative funding. With this growth, especially in youth and family engagement, Mark shared that the Commission should consider a second coordinator to better support these efforts statewide. He mentioned that more details on this proposal will come at the October meeting.

8. Commission Member Announcements & Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

Next Meeting

Wednesday, October 16th, 2024, 10:00 a.m. – 12 p.m. Indiana Government Center South, Conference Room B, 302 W. Washington St., Indianapolis, IN 46204.