

Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate (OCYFA) Advisory Council
Wednesday, June 12, 2024, 12:30pm – 2:00pm
via Zoom

Virtual:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/81642714142?pwd=B6OvyRGNgsoDBUippzwideZCUwT5go.1>

Meeting ID: 816 4271 4142

Passcode: 733671

Members Present: Arial Beaulac, Council Member, Lyndon Center
 Melanie Hudson, Council Member, Brattleboro
 Mercedes King, Council Member, Montpelier
 Angel Mason, Council Member, Calais
 Ashley Nutbrown, Council Member, Barre
 Matthew Bernstein, Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate
 Lauren Higbee, Office of the Child, Youth and Family Deputy Advocate

Members Absent: Celine Davis, Council Member, Montpelier
 Mike Farnham, Council Member, Winooski

Public Members: Nate Hine

Minutes by: Lauren Higbee, Deputy Advocate, OCYFA

Agenda:

12:30pm Welcome
12:35pm Introduction of Chair
12:40pm Review Advisory Council Mission and Community Agreements

Mission and Statutory Mandate

“The Child, Youth, and Family Advocate shall appoint and convene an Advisory Council composed of nine stakeholders who have been impacted by child welfare services provided by the

Department for Children and Families. The Advisory Council’s membership shall reflect the growing diversity of Vermont’s children and families, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well as with regard to socioeconomic status, geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status. Members shall provide advice and guidance to the Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate regarding the routine administration and operation of the Office, including providing advice and guidance to the Advocate upon request.”

Community Agreements:

- Allow a person to finish their thought. Try to limit comments to two minutes.
- Show kindness and compassion for each other and differing perspectives.
- Speak from the “I”.
- Assume best intentions.
- Be open-minded and respectful of other opinions and experiences.
- Be nonjudgmental.
- Agree or disagree with the idea, not the person. No personal attacks.
- Mistakes are opportunities.
 - Raise issues and follow the “ouch rule” meaning raise your hand and voice if you feel funny or hurt by something someone said.
 - No political discussions (like who you voted for, or which politician you like or don’t like, or what TV channel has the best or worst news).

12:45pm	Review and adopt minutes of last meeting (No approval needed for last meeting since quorum not reached)
12:50pm	Add or Delete Agenda Items for today’s meeting
12:55pm	Public Comment
1:05pm	Legislative Updates (H.661 and next steps; H.644; S.58; Veto Session 6/17/24)
1:35pm	Updates from Matthew and Lauren (Referral themes; Facilities discussion; Fall Conference; Advisory Council Payments; Website bios)
1:50pm	Scheduling Next Meeting (Set schedule?)
2:00pm	Adjourn

Minutes:

Group started with introductions. Community Agreements, OCYFA Advisory Council Statute language, and meeting agenda posted in the Zoom chat.

March 20, 2024 meeting minutes reviewed. April meeting occurred but did not have sufficient participation for quorum. March minutes are on the OCYFA website and shared via link in Zoom

chat. Ariel suggested focusing on making SMART goals to prioritize and create action items. Matthew made the motion to add to agenda item. Ariel seconded the motion. No opposition. Motion carried. Motion made to approve the minutes made by Ashley. Seconded by Ariel. Motion carried.

Matthew made a motion to schedule next meeting earlier in the agenda. Seconded by Ariel. Motion passed. Agenda item added to prioritize action steps and create SMART goals as previously motioned by Ariel. No other agenda items added at this time.

Meeting scheduling discussion began. Group planned to set the next month's meeting and then invite new Council members to the larger discussion of a set, recurring schedule. Next meeting to be Wednesdays, July 24th, 12:00pm – 1:30pm.

Public comment was presented about adding new members to the OCYFA Advisory Council.

Matthew outlined the legislative updates. Discussion began by summarizing H.661 to review the substantiation process conducted by DCF. H.644 allows for those who were in DCF custody to see their records once they turn 18, both judicial and DCF records. S.58 was opposed by OCYFA due to delaying Raise the Age and charging young people with drug trafficking. Veto session is scheduled for June 17, 2024 and potentially June 18, 2024.

Discussion continued about H.661. Harmful impacts of the substantiation registry were discussed and H.661 is seen as a step in the right direction. Council members identified the need for due process as significant during investigations. Council members identified that raising the evidentiary standard to preponderance of evidence is important. Council members expressed interest in future participation in rulemaking about the substantiation process with DCF.

The next agenda item covered was General OCYFA Updates. Council member asked about budget updates. Council members recommended continuing to weave in lived experience.

Member of public mentioned restraints of children and youth in DCF custody in in-state and out-of-state residential treatment program placements. Council members echoed the concerns. Residential programs are becoming more restrictive. Concerns were raised that Seall programs are not therapeutic and overuse restraints and seclusions. There is more fear of the children/youth and the reaction is to control them. Concerns about Beckett facilities were raised.

Council member wanted to choose specific topic areas to focus on and create next steps. The foci were in buckets of front end work and once children are in custody:

- Residential Treatment Programs

- Mandated Reporting v Mandating Supporting
- Working with families using substances
- Integrating Lived Experience
- Change neglect language in legal and other definitions
- Peer support and peer navigator

Council members to be involved and active in:

- Mandated reporter training
- Statewide meetings
- Editorials or writing sections of reports
- Legislative testimony (training for members requested)

Discussion continued to per diem payments and OCYFA website bios for Council members. Request to send to OCYFA@vermont.gov. New membership discussed. Next meeting is scheduled for July 24, 2024 at 12:00pm – 1:30pm.

Motion made to adjourn by Arial. Seconded by Mercedes. Motion carried. Meeting Adjourned.