

Statewide Racial Justice Workgroup Meeting

December 8, 2017

Hosted by: New Haven Area Office

Minutes by Ryan Williams

Present: William Rivera (CO); Vanessa Dorantes (Region 5); Monica Rams (New Haven); Natalia Sieira Millan (CO); Gail Reyes-Walton (CO); Joy Voltaire (Region 5); Cheryl Wamuo (CO); Tony De Jesus (USJ); Anne McIntyre-Lahner (CO); Nedra Muley (New Britain); Chrichton Stewart (Milford); Susan Smith (CO); Cindy Butterfield (CO); Elizabeth Duryea (CO); Jameson Folke (CO); Chris Lau (Region 4); Latosha Johnson (Region 4); Melanie Rossacci (CO); Ryan Williams (CO); Federica Wolman (CO); Ellen Whelan (Solnit South); Steve Smith (CO); Breresford Wilson (FAVOR); Lorraine Thomas on behalf of Shawn Punzalan (Region 3); Paul Bernard (Region 1); Kim Watson (Region 1); Tiffany Thomson (Region 5)

I. Welcome and Introductions

The meeting began with an invitation to members to share a brief testimony of the most exciting and notable things they've done about racial justice in 2018.

II. 2017 Year End Updates and Challenges

Vanessa Dorantes spoke about the conception of integration between the personal and the professional self...how that what is happening in the world impacts our clients as well as us. The more we can remind others that there are peers that we can share our ideas and concerns about current event issues in our communities and country, the better off we will be able to find balance in these difficult times.

By continuing to share information, it will move the racial justice work forward. While DCF's internal and external partnerships are evolving, we observed that there aren't many external partners at the table. Vanessa also posited that systems reform isn't about flipping the switch, but about how we work together to evolve. She encouraged us to remember that racial justice work is hard, and despite changes in management, we press forward. Jen Agosti stressed that we can't divorce the personal from the professional in the racial justice work. She reminded us that this is not a "check box endeavor." We must marry the personal and professional and embrace difficult subjects when opportunities present themselves, at work and outside of work. Vanessa added that when approaching the work by doing it thoroughly, we can't ignore when things are going well, things fall behind simultaneously. Bill Rivera observed that current events are evidence of the need for the SWRJWG to keep moving forward.

Jen Agosti reminded the group about 2018 be a year of change, as the November elections will bring a new administration. We have to think about concretizing the racial justice work within the DNA of DCF. The question for us to focus on at this juncture what do we need to do to "bake this in"? Barrisford Wilson suggested expanding the racial justice work to include a health equity issue. Anne McIntyre-Lahner inquired if any decisions have been made about we measure success of the racial justice work. Chris Lau talked about how the decisions of the work impact the work. She shared that Judicial would like for DCF to discuss their involvement to racial justice in the Region 4 district. Chris suggested looking at how DCF could impact other systems within the state, Judicial in particular.

Bill Rivera observed that there appears to be a disconnect between the department and the Judicial branch. Elizabeth Duryea suggested having a standing member from Judicial on the Workgroup. She recognized that judges change, however she suggested highlighting race and ethnicity data in court cases. Barresford Wilson stated that the tools we are using are more passive and we are not getting the results. Barresford asked how much of the stick that holds the string attached to the carrot could be used to mandate racial justice practice at Judicial. There are statutes and laws requiring that we must do this work. Yet, it does not appear to him that we are making progress at the systems level.

Vannessa Dorantes stressed that pointing out the data related to outcomes shines a light on the issues. How does DCF influence the systems that impact our outcomes? We can only be as effective as the systems that we interact with collaborate with us. Melanie Rossacci reported she participates at several meetings throughout the state for DCF. She observed how one office is openly talking about how race influences their catchment area, while in another office they have difficulty even discussing it. Melanie suggested that we have to get people to the table whether we use 'the stick' approach or other means.

Even within our own system, the racial justice work is not transmitting systemically and seamlessly at this time. Jen Agosti suggested that working more with the outside partners could be the "stick" to encourage people within DCF move racial justice forward. Monica Rams offered that the DCF system have to do more (i.e. legislation and policy has to be dedicated to racial justice). She talked about how the required 30 training hours we need a year may be one option for including racial justice themes. Monica offered that enhanced racial justice practice training at Intake level training should be mandated for all staff in an effort to "bake it in". Jen Agosti stated that we have to get to the point where racial justice is at the same level as trauma informed practice as an essential part of DCF's policy and practice.

Dr. Wolman shared that her experience and her team's experience is about whether or not folks are able to have conversations in an effort to address racial justice matters. Dr. Wolman offered that resolving issues isn't quick, but how to work through the issues is key. Unless there is a way to support staff, folks would fall flat. Staff feel embarrassed dealing with racial justice issues. Dr. Wolman expressed concern in this area.

Vannessa Dorantes shared that the Regional Administrators realize that the regions are at different places in the racial justice conversation. She recommended going to the RA's with questions about what's going on in offices to promote racial justice. Latosha Johnson shared that she is consistently challenged to walk the walk regarding racial justice and be brave. Jen Agosti stressed that we are changing DCF culture (e.g. belief, behavior and language). We must believe in our mission, but we must likewise recognize that we aren't going to change everyone's beliefs.

Dr. De Jesus offered that how we interpret the culture in DCF informs the work within the agency. There are tools the agency could build upon as the administration changes. Dr. De Jesus asked what, if any, skills staff at DCF are rewarded for. He stated that expecting racial justice as a performance measure for leadership moves the work forward. Joyce Voltaire suggested looking at the right people to be on the team. She stress that people who are hired should have the right frame of mind regarding racial justice and its implications for the work. We have to look at how effectively staff and potential staff can articulate their journeys towards racial identity development. A racial justice practice guide might contribute helping staff change their behavior.

Lorraine Thomas recalled when the department made the decision to become a racially just agency. During the conversation at her office, staff felt confused, hurt and unable to process. Staff continues to be uncomfortable talking about race. She shared her own experience recognizing internal bias and the need for individuals to be open to understanding each other. Vanessa Dorantes shared that an understanding of our view is key to this work. Barrisford Wilson observed that changing laws is faster than changing hearts and culture. We have to pay attention to what we do and how we think as we approach this work. We live in a competitive environment and environment inspires culture. Racism touches every system and racism is also a universal health issue, as it affects health outcomes in many areas. Jen Agosti questioned whether there is such a thing as being objective. Everything is contextual and laced with biased.

III. Regional and Office Updates

In Region I, conversations are taking place about implementing a tool to examine the issue of recidivism. They are all in agreement with the fact that we can't stop people from calling the Careline to make reports of suspected abuse and neglect. However, we have to do a better job at assessing safety and the basis for our decision making. The staff attorneys and AAGs haven't participated in any racial justice discussions. Assistant Agency Legal Director Natalia Sieira Millan, shared that she challenged her team to talk about racial justice and got pushback. She reviewed the data and confronted her team to be a part of changing the numbers by asking racial justice questions when appropriate. Natalia charged legal staff to partner with Judicial in effectuating the changes. Vanessa Dorantes asked if the tools we are using are getting at answering the right questions.

Gail Reyes Walton shared that there have been good conversations to allow for critical thinking. Joyce Voltaire commended Natalia Sieira Millan for her efforts with the legal team. She asked how many her legal staff are involved in racial justice subcommittees. Natalia shared that not many legal staff are involved on the subcommittees but they are charged with moving the work forward. I was stressed that the legal division has to come to the table and identify and discuss these issues. Staff are discussing racial justice more than before. Joyce Voltaire suggested that Legal partner with the judicial branch to address these issues. Elizabeth Duryea shared that racial justice at the local level would be different than having the conversation with a group of judges. The system isn't just DCF, but all systems that touch families. Nedra Muley asked what it would look like if management was evaluated based on their racial justice efforts. She shared that she is trying to reach people to change their beliefs. Vanessa Dorantes encouraged Nedra not to give up.

Elizabeth Duryea shared that we have to address racial justice when approaching statutory mandates. She also mentioned the formation of a taskforce to develop recommendations to bring to the general assembly. Who would be at the table hasn't been discussed, but it's a thought.

Regarding the development of a racial justice practice guide, Jen Agosti suggested placing that in the hands of the policy and practice subcommittee. Vanessa Dorantes suggested revisiting the functions of the existing subcommittees, and whether we need to keep existing ones and/or create new workgroups. Bill R. suggested created a foster care subcommittee.

IV. Case Consultation Model Update

Dr. De Jesus provided an update on the Case Consultation Model (CCM). He that the CCM manual incorporates a how to section. Perhaps it should include a website to access different resources to support the CCM. Conceptual underpinnings and a glossary of terms in the manual would also be essential in order to make things clearer. The subcommittees can contribute to this effort, as well as include a link to the ethnic hair and skin guide (located on the Office of Multicultural Affairs website). A chronology of the racial justice work at DCF would also be useful. Barrisford Wilson stressed that that we have to look at history, as well as whose history and from whose perspective is guiding our work.

V. Subcommittee Updates

Jen Agosti mentioned the subcommittees and asked if the Workforce Development subcommittee would take the lead in the development of a racial justice practice guide. Elizabeth Duryea stressed that that the Community of Practices would be involved as well. Bill R. suggested setting time for commencement. Jen offered that we could talk about next steps at the next meeting. She suggested nominating people to be a part of the plan. Jen asked for the subcommittees to document their goals for 2018; i.e. what does the committee expect to accomplish. Barrisford Wilson asked if there was funding attached to our efforts and stated that this work has the potential to break down silos. Bill Rivera pointed out that the national Cultural and Linguistic Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards were not referenced in any of the work we have completed the racial justice narrative.

Workforce -Tabled

Contracts -Tabled

Community - Gail reported that conversations continue to evolve regarding best approaches to integrate community partners. Facility and regional work continues. The workgroup is learning about what's making a difference. Having a variety of individuals from different discipline has enriched the committee. Jen Agosti asked if the committee wanted to do outreach. Gail stated that along with the regional efforts taking place, Central Office (C.O.) needed technical support. Vanessa Dorantes reported that certain divisions within C.O. and the facilities have partnered with other TAs in the region. Crichton Stewart shared that in Reg. 2 CAFAF and YAB are involved and questioned if they should be a part of the Community subcommittee. Jen Agosti asked if SRJWG could learn what they've done in Reg. 2 and if they could implement it across the state.

There was discussion about who would chair the FASU subcommittee. Crichton S. suggested Yadira Ijeh be a part of the conversation as to the composition of the FASU subcommittee. Bill R. stated we must also considered the growing number of children and families who undocumented in our racial justice efforts.

Jen Agosti asked if there was a need for technical assistance for CY 2018. Dr. Wolman asked for assistance and was reaching out to SRJWG to help her group deal with staff issues associate with racial

matters. Jen Agosti suggested asking the Academy for assistance with leadership development to increase folks' ability to address racial issues. Cheryl Waumo suggested a certification in this area. Jameson Folke asked about how people who have exited the system would be integrated into DCF's racial justice work.

Jen Agosti asked Susan Smith about a statewide summit not limited to DCF. There are talks about expanding the next racial justice summit, taking a "three branch" approach, incorporating the systems that affect children and families. Elizabeth Duryea suggested convening a small workgroup to obtain \$20,000 to put on the event and open it to the community at large. Jen A. suggested tapping our university partners.

Members suggested reaching out to the youth and young adults, the tribes and law enforcement in 2018.

Prior to the end of the meeting, the group watched an uplifting and inspirational video about the heroism of those viewing the video, as well as those in the world effectuating change for the benefit of others.

VI. Next Meeting: February 9, 2018 at 1:00. The meeting adjourned at 3:55pm