

Volunteer Advocates in Juvenile Matters Advisory Board

Minutes

May 3, 2011

The Advisory Board meeting was called to order on Tuesday May 3, 2011 at 2:00 pm at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield.

Members in attendance: Honorable Barbara Quinn, Honorable Christine Keller, Honorable Mary Sommer, Cynthia Cunningham, Esq., Michael Miller, Esq., Jill Bicks, Esq., Joan Jenkins, J.D., Martha Stone, Esq., Tom DeMatteo, Esq. for Barbara Claire, Esq., Chris Rapillo, Esq., Elysa Gordon, Benjamin Zivyon, Esq. for Susan Pearlman, Esq., Cynthia Bernard, Esq., Karen Hardy-Massaró, Esq.

Staff: Michele Massores, Marilou Giovannucci

Materials distributed:

- Minutes of the March 2, 2011 meeting

Minutes of March 2, 2011 meeting:

Attorney Jenkins asked that the minutes under the Youth Empowerment section be revised to reflect that Diane Sawyer is working with the National CASA program to produce a feature on the CASA program and the youth involved.

Attorney Bicks asks that a sentence be added to the fourth paragraph under the CAC Training Presentation section that reflects that it is envisioned that the pilot program will follow the National CASA model.

Amendments to the minutes were unanimously approved.

Amended minutes of the March 2, 2011 meeting were also approved unanimously.

Danbury and Stamford Juvenile Matters/CAC Update

Judge Sommer and Attorney Bicks reported that several meetings in Danbury and Stamford with the stakeholders. Based on feedback received, Judge Sommer has a revised draft of the order that mirrors the role of the volunteer monitor. Attorney Bicks reported that the group is looking into how CASA works when attorneys are involved in other states. Judge Sommer envisions that once the appointment is made, the first step will be a meeting between the monitor and the attorney.

Attorney Stone and Attorney Zivyon request to see the order. Judge Sommer states that it is still being drafted but will be glad to circulate it at a later date.

Judge Keller reports there are still several issues that need to be resolved:

- When will the appointment be made?
- What access will be permitted to children with an attorney or attorney/GAL?
- What access will there be to the parents?
- How will the information be provided to the court?
- What information can the monitor access?

Judge Keller and Judge Quinn both mention that there is an interagency memorandum of understanding that deals with standardizing the release forms. DCF and Judicial are two of the agencies that will sign or have signed the MOU.

Attorney DeMatteo raised concerns about a portion of the draft version that he had seen. Judge Keller and Judge Sommer responded that the section to which Attorney DeMatteo was referring would be removed from the next draft.

Attorney Zivyon stated that the OAG priority is the best interest of children but reiterated that court is an adversarial process of which the integrity needs to be maintained. Ex parte communications and shared communications can lead to compromised positions especially depending on the stage of the court case in which this occurs.

Marilou raised the issues encountered with RSVP program and how they addressed the issue of whether a volunteer could be required to give testimony. Attorney Zivyon recalled that CIP monitors when they existed in the past had been called to give testimony.

Judge Keller feels there is a role for a volunteer monitor in juvenile court. There are times in the process where they could assist especially post adjudication.

Attorney Bicks states that reports to the court by the volunteers would provide information not opinions. The volunteers are not a participant in the process but more of an observer.

Judge Sommer reported that there is a meeting in Stamford scheduled soon. Judge Sommer stated this is a work in progress and understands many people are initially concerned when change is suggested.

Attorney Miller gave his opinion that it seems that contact with clients will be minimal from the process he heard described.

Attorney Stone stated that the pilot could be looked at in a way to spur systemic changes. If there are things that are not working well, the pilot could be a tool to effect change.

Elysa Gordon suggested having on-going monthly or quarterly meetings to evaluate the program and address any concerns that may arise.

The Advisory Board discussed how and when the monitor's report would be submitted. Judge Keller prefers that the report be distributed to counsel prior to a hearing so that if an attorney objects they may do so prior to the judge seeing the report. Attorney Rapillo suggests that the report could be offered in court by the party wishing to submit it. Attorney Rapillo relates her experiences in delinquency court where counsel reviews a document, such as a probation report or a letter by the juvenile, prior to court and then offers it as evidence during the court hearing.

Attorney DeMatteo and Marilou both suggest having some type of outcome measures. They both suggest that people would more likely buy in to the program if the benefit to them can be shown. Judge Quinn reiterated the importance of evaluating pilot programs

Zero to Three (ZTT) Pilot Program/CIP Update

Marilou reported that an introductory meeting between Marilou, Attorney Jenkins and Ebony Miller (ZTT Coordinator). They had some information from New Orleans where CASA volunteers are used in connection with ZTT. Marilou also reported that the DCF IRB still has not approved the application for data collection and evaluation submitted by ZTT.

Marilou reported that she will facilitate a meeting with key participants in New Haven to identify ways to use volunteer GALs in connection with the ZTT pilot program.

Attorney Jenkins mentioned that CIP was working on their strategic plan. They have identified education as well as pediatric medically fragile children in out of home care as potential areas on which to concentrate.

Attorney Stone mentioned a new initiative at DCF called the Early Childhood workgroup which is being established and whether there is crossover potential. Marilou reports that there are members of the ZTT committee who are from DCF that have ties to the Early Childhood workgroup.

Miscellaneous

Judge Quinn asked Attorney Rapillo if there was anything to report from her contact in Rhode Island. Attorney Rapillo stated that the professor was no longer teaching in Rhode Island. Judge Quinn will contact her counterpart in Rhode Island.

Judge Keller reported that Elisabeth Borrino had resigned from her contract in order to pursue other opportunities. Judge Quinn is willing to hear recommendations for her replacement to this Advisory Board.

Attorney Miller raised the issue of using volunteer GALs in delinquency. While acknowledging that there are times when GALs are needed, Attorney Rapillo states her surprise that there is such a need for GALs on the delinquency side. Attorney Rapillo states that best interests of the child isn't the only thing that judges must take into account; there is also a liberty interest. Judge Keller offers that there may be uses for GALs post adjudication. Attorney Rapillo agrees that the timing of the appointment of the GAL would make a difference.

Marilou reminded the Advisory Board of the Child and Youth Law Forum which is being held on May 25, 2011.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on June 7, 2011 at 2:00PM at 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield. Items for the agenda may be submitted.