

Volunteer Advocates in Juvenile Matters Advisory Board

Minutes

January 10, 2011

The Advisory Board meeting was called to order on Monday, January 10, 2011 at 2:00 pm at One Long Wharf, New Haven.

Members in attendance: Honorable Christine Keller, Honorable Mary Sommer, Honorable Peter Brown, Cynthia Cunningham, Esq. Carolyn Signorelli, Esq, Michael Miller, Esq., Jill Bicks, Esq., Joan Jenkins, J.D., Martha Stone, Esq. Barbara Claire, Esq., Chris Rapillo, Esq., Liz Phillips, Elisabeth Borrino, Esq., Karen Hardy-Massaró, Esq.

Staff: Michele Massores, Marilou Giovannucci

Materials distributed:

- Minutes of the November 23, 2010 meeting
- Summary of CASA Models for Young Children and Youth From Around the Country prepared by Elysa Gordon
- “Building Bridges for Babies in Foster Care: The Babies Can’t Wait Initiative” by Sheryl Dicker and Elysa Gordon
- “Judges’ Page Newsletter, June 2005 published by National CASA Association and the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges
- “Babies Can’t Wait: A Judicial Response” by Judge Sharon S. Townsend
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Judicial Branch, Department of Children and Families and Zero to Three, National Center for Infants, Toddlers and Families, Zero to Three Project in the City of New Haven, CT.

Minutes of November 23, 2010 meeting:

A motion to accept the minutes of the November 23, 2010 meeting was made by Judge Brown, seconded by Attorney Claire.

Minutes of the November 23, 2010 meeting were approved unanimously.

Volunteer Advocates in Hartford and New Haven SCJM – Update

Judge Brown gave an update on the status of volunteer CIP/GAL appointments. There have been volunteer GAL appointments for 5 -6 children since the last meeting of the Advisory Board. Judge Brown indicated that some attorneys raised objection to the appointment of non-attorney GALs. The objections were of a general nature and not specific to any child’s case. Judge Brown made the appointments but indicated to the attorneys that if they have specific objections he would entertain them at the time they are raised.

Judge Keller indicated that the CIP Coordinator contacted the Clerk's Office to schedule an appointment with Judge Keller. Judge Keller instructed the Clerk to send an e-mail to the Coordinator instructing her to request an appointment with Judge Dyer as he is the Presiding Judge in Hartford. As of this date, the Coordinator had not yet responded to schedule the appointment with Judge Dyer.

Judge Keller indicated that she sent a letter to all the Presiding Judges suggesting that they consider using the CIP volunteer GALs when making a GAL appointments.

Judge Keller indicated that she would follow up with the Presiding Judges asking them to reach out to the CIP Coordinator in their court location including inquiring about the number of volunteers available to them.

Volunteer Advocates in Stamford SCJM - Update

Attorney Bicks updated the Board on the status of cases and volunteers in Stamford and Danbury. Child Advocates of CT (CAC) currently has 25 to 30 active volunteers. Judge Sommer added that in Stamford there are 9 cases, involving 13 children assigned to CAC volunteers. Thus far, she has received one (1) status report and CAC volunteers have attended 12 case status conferences. In Danbury there are 8 cases, involving 11 children assigned to CAC volunteers. The volunteers are attending court proceedings and DCF treatment planning conferences and ACRs.

A discussion ensued about training for volunteers; both CIP and CAC have training starting this week. Attorney Bicks explained the CAC training briefly stating that 18 new volunteers would be trained. Attorney Jenkins explained that the CIP uses the National CASA curriculum which is a five (5) day training, they conduct the training every 6 to 8 weeks. CIP conducts both pre-service and in service trainings for their volunteers.

In connection with the training discussion, Marilou mentioned the DCF Provider Academy and their policy that would allow volunteers to attend trainings that may be helpful to them. In conjunction with the Provider Academy, the Concurrent Permanency Plan Curriculum has been developed in response to the Child and Family Services Review/Program Improvement Plan. There will be a training held on March 15th. Marilou offered to reserve some places that would allow volunteers to attend the training.

Presentation of Model Children's Law Offices

Attorney Miller provided an overview of the Model Children's Welfare Law Office model. His firm, Southeast Center for Juvenile Justice (SCJJ) was created in May 2008 and began taking children's cases in Waterford Juvenile Matters in August 2008. Since that time, the Model Child Welfare Law Office Model has been expanded to other jurisdictions.

SCJJ now has contracts for Waterford, Willimantic and Hartford Juvenile Matters court locations. New Haven Legal Assistance has a contract for the New Haven Juvenile Matters court location. Connecticut Legal Services has a contract for the Bridgeport Juvenile Matter court location.

Attorney Miller explained that a multidisciplinary approach is used. A Child Welfare Advocate (CWA) is teamed up with an attorney. They share obligations for visiting the child. The CWA attends the ACRs on behalf of the team. The attorneys and the CWA meet monthly on each case. The model uses a combination of legal skills and child welfare expertise.

Attorney Miller's firm has developed an Operations Manual to articulate the role and responsibilities of the CWA. For example, he pointed out that the CWA is considered part of the legal team, and therefore, can not be called as a witness and any notes the CWA takes in the course of the work are confidential.

Zero to Three Pilot Program – New Haven SCJM:

Marilou gave an overview of the Zero to Three (ZTT) Pilot Program in the Juvenile Matters at New Haven. The ZTT goal is early permanency for children. They focus on family engagement. As part of the program, there will be a ZTT coordinator whose responsibility will be to coordinate providers, convene meetings and provide reports to the court as to the progress of the family.

Concerns were raised by Attorney Stone about the children receiving different levels of care. These concerns were discussed and it was explained that this was a pilot program, the children were not receiving different levels of care, and the funds that were provided for the pilot were for the hiring of the coordinator.

Marilou offered to set up meeting between Attorney Jenkins and the ZTT Community Coordinator and the New Haven Legal Assistance to discuss how CIP may be able to become more involved in the ZTT using volunteer advocates.

Update on CCPA and possible use of volunteer advocates:

Attorney Signorelli provided some suggestions about the use of volunteer advocates to create a multidisciplinary approach with those attorneys who are not part of the firms in place. Attorney Signorelli also mentioned there is a learning curve as to the team approach being suggested. There was discussion about legislation to further clarify the role of the GAL.

A discussion ensued about other model for use of volunteer advocates. The materials distributed were discussed.

Attorney Jenkins mentioned scheduling focus groups with her volunteers to find out there concerns and suggestions. Judge Keller agrees holding focus groups with volunteers

would be helpful, as well as, focus groups with CCPA attorneys to discover their views on the issue.

Attorney Borrino suggested that adolescents may be an area where volunteers could be helpful.

Attorney Jenkins spoke about the “Fostering Futures” program and a program they are running called “Youth Empowerment”

Attorney Bicks suggested volunteers being appointed as court appointed special advocates. Discussion ensued about concerns of using the volunteers in a monitoring role. Attorney Signorelli stressed again the importance of deciding on a model. In addition, defining the role of volunteer GAL versus the role as a court appointed special advocate is important.

Attorney Stone suggested using the volunteers in order to help address deficiencies that currently exist in the system shown in the court monitor’s report.

Judge Keller thanked Elysa Gordon for providing the information about various CASA model.

The members of the Advisory Board agreed to have further discussion about these models at the next meeting. Member of the Advisory Board and staff have agreed to present information at the next meeting.

Attorney Jenkins and Attorney Bicks will present information on their volunteer training programs;

Attorney Jenkins will present information about her CIP “Youth Empowerment” program;

Marilou will present information about the ZTT CASA and Infant –Toddler Specialist program in New York;

Attorney Stone will present information about using volunteer advocates for educational advocacy;

Attorney Rapillo will explore the use of CASA in Rhode Island and report on their model.

Miscellaneous:

Judge Keller will ask Judge Quinn’s approval to invite Judge Knierim to appoint a representative from the Probate Court to the the Advisory Board.

Next Meeting:

March 2, 2011 @ 2:00pm

Court Operations – 225 Spring Street, Wethersfield

225 Spring St

Wethersfield