



**Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment
November 09, 2023, 10:00 AM
Virtual Meeting**

A general meeting of the Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment convened on **November 09, 2023**, with notice duly given.

Members Present (15)	Members Absent (07)
Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair	Dr. Lorrie Henderson
Colleen McNally, Co-Chair	Kate Brophy McGee
Berisha Black	James Molina
Pastor Terry Crist	Darlene Newsom
Obed Escobar	Kathryn Blades Ptak
Claire Louge	Torrie Taj
David Lujan	Ryan Young
Shawn Cox (Proxy for Rachel Mitchell)	
Paul Mulligan	
Katie O'Dell	
Leslie Reprogle	
Jeff Taylor	
Mark Upton	
Ginger Ward	
Richard Yarbough	
Staff and Guests Present (07)	
Amy Peep, GOYFF	Andrew Sugrue, Presenter
Emily Uline-Olmstead, GOYFF	Tanya Abdellatif, Presenter
Tonya Hamilton, GOYFF	Katy Buehler, Presenter
	Nikki Lehman, Presenter

Call to Order

- **Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair**, called the Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment (CSFE) meeting to order at **10:05 AM** with **15** members and **seven** staff/guests present. She reviewed meeting procedures and welcomed all members joining via Zoom, thanking them for their flexibility.

Approval of Minutes

- With the quorum met, **Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair**, requested a review of the **September 09, 2023** meeting minutes.
 - **Leslie Reprogle** moved to accept the **September 09, 2023** meeting minutes.
 - **Ginger Ward** seconded the motion.
- The motion passed with no dissenting votes.

Arizona Department of Child Safety Update

- **Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair**, welcomed **Cabinet Executive Officer (CEO) David Lujan** to give an update from the [Arizona Department of Child Safety \(DCS\)](#).

- **CEO David Lujan** began his presentation by updating members on the 96,000 undisclosed documents in the DCS system, an issue that started after launching the Guardian System in February 2021.
 - **CEO Lujan** noted one reopened case due to the discovered documents and does not expect many other cases will be affected because, on average, the documents discovered had already been disclosed to the Courts (or through other means), not the Guardian system.
 - The attorneys and the Courts will decide whether or not to reopen the case based on the newly discovered information.
 - The DCS is working on an audit report for the Arizona Attorney General's Office, noting the number of impacted cases and strategies they implemented.
- Secondly, **CEO Lujan** provided an update regarding the newly passed legislation, [HB2559](#). This bill deals with Social Security and disability benefits that youth in foster care receive. For decades, child welfare agencies across the country have been seizing children's Social Security and disability benefits to pay for the cost of care in the foster care system. Those seizures amounted to approximately \$4 million per year. With the passage of HB2559, Arizona is the first state in the nation to stop that practice statewide. Currently, funds are in holding accounts and will provide financial planning and literacy services.
- Thirdly, **CEO David Lujan** referenced the Department's [2024 Strategic Plan](#), highlighting diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). He noted that DEIA has significant disproportionality in the child welfare system, and the Department is hiring a DEIA Manager to lead their equity efforts.

Governor Katie Hobbs' Goals, Objectives, and Priorities

- **Colleen McNally, Co-Chair**, introduced Governor Hobbs' Policy Advisor for Human Services and Housing, **Andrew Sugrue**.
- **Andrew Sugrue** noted that Governor Hobbs is the first social worker to be elected Governor in the United States. The values of social work have informed her policy about the children's physical, economic, emotional, and social well-being in DCS care or at risk of coming into care.
 - Governor Hobbs is committed to creating an Arizona for everyone, and centering the voices and perspectives of those closest to the issues is necessary to provide wrap-around services to families in care. Collaborating with trusted community partners and DCS is key to building community trust.
 - The Governor is working to prevent DCS involvement by facilitating the expansion of services for families before a report or a call to the DCS [hotline](#) while expanding resources and support for families currently involved with DCS, particularly kinship placements.
 - As a result, the DCS and the [Arizona Department of Economic Security \(DES\)](#) are collaborating to develop upstream services.

Reducing Congregate Care

- **Colleen McNally, Co-Chair**, introduced **Tanya Abdellatif** to discuss reducing congregate care needs in Arizona.
 - **Tanya Abdellatif** has 25 years of child welfare experience directly supporting caregivers in meeting the needs of children impacted by abuse and neglect. Tanya's child welfare career began as an intern with DCS conducting investigations, later working at a DCS provider agency overseeing multiple contracts (including Foster and Adoption Supports, Home Assessment and Courtesy Supervision, and Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)), and ultimately returning to the Department as the Office of Licensing Program Administrator and now Assistant Director of Foster Care and Post Permanency Supports.
- **Tanya Abdellatif** began her presentation by explaining that 'group placement' is a broad term encompassing staff/family-operated group homes, shelters, residential/inpatient treatment facilities, psychiatric hospitals, and supervised independent living programs. The terms 'group placement' and 'congregate care' are used similarly.
 - Passed in 2018, the [Families First Prevention Services Act](#) shifted the focus of child welfare systems to the child's safety with families. However, it limited states' use of federal funds for congregate care and directed them toward Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTPs).

- **Tanya Abdellatif** explained DCS' utilization of the Theory of Change Model, taking action to develop strategies that drive and change the thinking culture to achieve desired goals.
 - DCS understands that reducing the use of congregate care will take internal and external collaboration, and using the model reinforces their commitment to creating a culture that strengthens relationships between families with reduced bias and increased empathy and equity.
- **Tanya Abdellatif** explained the strategies DCS plans to implement.
 - Kin-first Culture: The first preference for kids coming into care is placement with kinship (family members/friends, pastors, coaches, teachers), having the mindset of "rule-in" instead of "rule-out."
 - In 2019, 30% of Arizona kids in care were placed with kin. In 2023, over 50% of children in care are placed with kin.
 - Closer review of current congregate care demographics, system processes, and community partners.
 - Minority children are disproportionately coming into care, even more in congregate care as their placement.
 - New contracts for Foster and Adoptive Support (FAS) and Kinship Support Services (KSS) are expected to launch in February and March 2024, expediting licensing for kin.
 - With KSS, a home visitor will aid in providing kinship navigation services regardless of obtaining a license (e.g., identifying behavioral health services or primary-care physicians).
 - Improve foster home recruitment strategies by having family-like setting homes that match the racial and ethnic makeup of kids in care.
 - Utilize a recruitment estimator to identify where kids are coming into care and be strategic about the need to have group homes placed in higher needs areas through their partners.
 - Create messages that counteract negative perceptions and bias about children in group homes, empowering foster families to care for older children in congregate care.
 - Devote trained full-time staff to finding family-like settings for children. An ongoing effort to talk with the kids in care to find connections for kinship placements.
 - Re-engage congregate care contracts to reduce the number of agencies listed to care for the children placed into DCS care.
 - Improve engagement in the [Ending the Need for Group Placements](#) peer learning forum, an initiative from the [Away From Home](#) report published by [Think of Us](#) that included recommendations to eliminate group placements.
 - Three Goals:
 - To ensure all children and young people grow up with their families in safe, supportive homes.
 - To end our country's over-reliance on group facilities and institutions to raise young people.
 - To design and build equitable systems of care and support that ensure that children and their families have what they need.
 - The Learning Exchange Logic Model with videos/discussion guides, live learning sessions, resource sites, and ad hoc sessions.
 - Seven Levers of Change:
 - Engaging with partners with lived expertise.
 - Advancing a kin-first culture.
 - Developing trauma-informed, healing-centered mental health services.
 - Accelerating provider transformation towards family support.
 - Partnering with resource caregivers.
 - Facilitating legislative and court partnerships.
 - Instituting technical roadblocks to facilitate systemwide behavioral change. Making it difficult for youth placement in congregate care.
 - Of the 50 states, 15/16 have implemented report recommendations with some states named "demonstration communities" through their efforts of achieving 10% congregate

care placements: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maine, Connecticut, Washington, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

- **Tanya Abdellatif** explained DCS' goals.
 - Decrease the percentage of time in a DCS-licensed group home, QRPT, or shelter to 10% or less.
 - Increase the percentage of children living in family-like settings to 85% or more of the total out-of-home population.
- **Leslie Reprogle** asked about DCS' motivation to have kinship providers licensed.
 - **Tanya Abdellatif** responded through incentives, explaining finances are often the reason for disruption or requesting the removal of the child placed with them. Feedback from the public stated obtaining licensing is difficult, so DCS is looking at the requirements for kinship placements compared to non-kinship. The goal is to license within 60 days of placement.
- To view **Tanya Abdellatif's** presentation, click [here](#).

Partnership to Reduce Congregate Care

- **Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair**, introduced **Katherine Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman**.
 - **Katherine (Katy) Buehler** is the founder and executive director of [Arizona Faith and Families](#). Since 2006, she has worked in foster care, equipping and empowering others to serve this population with a bachelor's in social and behavioral sciences and a master's in psychology.
 - **Nikki Lehman** is the founder and executive director of [Garden House](#). Nikki has worked directly with foster children for over 25 years, striving to create a nurturing environment where children feel loved and at home. After graduating from Biola University with a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education, she taught at-risk children in Title 1 schools for five years, providing her great insight into obtaining educational services for foster children.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** started their presentation by explaining the partnership between the two organizations began in 2015 with the shared vision of connecting each youth in foster care with a safe and caring adult and congregate care being a stepping stone toward a child's healing and a setting that works in partnership to transition successfully into families.
 - The mission is to encourage community members to participate in foster care through regular volunteer opportunities, equip congregate care staff with structured training programs in preparation for the transition, and empower youth to build strong and healthy attachments through regular community engagement.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** explained barriers to connecting youth in congregate care with families.
 - Congregate agencies are not open to partnering with licensing agencies.
 - Foster families are less likely to care for children aged seven years or older or accommodate larger sibling groups.
 - Youth may require more attention due to increased behavioral needs from nerves around transitioning into a family.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** explained the partnership barriers between agencies.
 - A history of mistrust between congregate care agencies, DCS, and licensing agencies.
 - Once establishing a relationship, they can transfer trust to the foster families, helping to create smoother transitions from congregate care. Additionally, including the child's voice to explain their perspectives, wants, and needs.
 - Establishing strong, mutually beneficial partnerships.
 - Investing in training, care, and support for staff members.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** explained how they remove barriers to recruiting foster families.
 - Provide regular volunteer opportunities with youth in foster care.
 - Humanizing the child while building a connection before placement leads to more successful outcomes and alleviates anxiety from both the child and caregiver. Currently, the disruption rate is less than 1%.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** explained their programming design was developed through the lived experiences of foster care youth, catering to individualized needs.

- Foster youth shared being fearful of being “kicked out” or disrupted from a foster home but still have hope of being accepted by a family.
- To alleviate fears, regular opportunities are provided for youth to build relationships with caring and committed volunteers/foster parents.
 - Some older youth express not wanting a family-like setting but still need a committed adult to help them transition into adulthood.
- Four abilities were identified and fostered within the congregate care setting to decrease disruptions and promote stability: self-regulation tools, process and coping with change, developing flexibility, and building healthy connections.
 - Garden House helps develop these before a foster placement.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** explained strategies to help reduce the abovementioned barriers.
 - Practical Applications: Quality training focusing on reunification and transitioning into foster homes
 - Employee and Volunteer Training
 - “Camp Revive” is a five-day camp for youth focusing on helping kids build coping skills and manage anxiety through healthy eating, exercise, and social/emotional tools
 - Practical Applications: Support
 - Honor the staff for the effort and time they have provided
 - Volunteer check-in after events through surveys
 - Provide a safe and secure environment for youth
 - Provide basic needs (hair care)
 - Solicit requests and feedback
 - Build a network of support
 - Practical Applications: Events
 - Unplugged: Partner with [The Family Room](#) to host monthly events, the second Saturday of the month, retreats, camps, and birthday parties/celebrations
 - Holiday Parties: Invite group home partners to agency events and celebrations. Staff and youth are welcomed and celebrated as Faith and Families honorary members
 - Christian Community Center: Partner with [True Pursuit](#) to host tutoring and skill-building three times a week for youth in congregate care.
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** shared a few success stories of children no longer in congregate care from statistically more challenging demographics (e.g., older kids, sibling groups, pregnancy).
- **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman** noted program funding is from Arizona Faith and Families but seeks to expand their partnerships.
- To view **Katy Buehler** and **Nikki Lehman’s** presentation, click [here](#).

Workgroup Updates

- **Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair**, introduced the Prevention Workgroup Chair, **Claire Louge**.
 - **Claire Louge** explained the Prevention Workgroup had not had the opportunity to meet and if anyone is interested in joining the workgroup before they meet next, to contact her.
 - **Claire Louge** mentioned a shift in the prevention space since awareness of overreliance on DCS, noting the need for an easily accessible hub for all Arizona family resources and community centers.

Upcoming Meeting

- **Colleen McNally, Co-Chair**, reminded members that the next meeting will be on **January 11, 2024**, at **10:00 AM** in a hybrid format at the Executive Tower.

Adjournment

- **Colleen McNally, Co-Chair**, thanked everyone for being part of the meeting and asked for a motion to adjourn.
 - **Maria Cristina Fuentes, Co-Chair**, moved to adjourn.
 - **Richard Yarbough** seconded the motion.

- The motion passed with no dissenting votes. The meeting adjourned at **11:40 AM**.

Dated 13 of November 2023
Governor's Council on Child Safety and Family Empowerment
Respectfully Submitted By:
Amy Peep
GOYFF

FINAL