

Montgomery County Citizens Review Panel (MCCRP)

June 9, 2020 Meeting

Minutes

Persons Present:

Angela English
Kay Farley
George Gabel
Marci McCoy-Roth

Lisa Merkin
Stacey McNeely
Sarah Stanton
Jane Steinberg

Welcome

Marci McCoy-Roth called the meeting to order and welcomed the participants.

DHS Update

Lisa Merkin and Angela English provided an update on the agency activities and changes in operations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Teleworking has been working well. Moving to the virtual platform took some time, but the staff really stepped up. Teleworking is now the new normal.
- Managers rotate so that someone is in the office building every day. Staff only come into the office to scan documents and pick-up mail.
- All meetings and trainings are being handled on-line.
- Despite the shutdown, they have been able to hire a number of new staff and have filled most of their vacancies. They were able to hire some of the social work students that interned in the spring. They still have a few more Social Worker III positions to fill.
- Montgomery County implemented the new Child Juvenile Adult Management System (CJAMS) during the shutdown. The implementation was smooth and seamless. The lower caseloads during the pandemic provided an opportunity to conduct data clean-up. Half of the state is now operating on CJAMS. The remainder of the state will implement the new system by the end of the summer.
- The agency conducted 2 on-line informational sessions for potential foster parents. It also conducted 1 on-line training session for new foster parents. The attendance for all of the sessions was very good. On-line sessions may make it easier for some people to participate.
- In developing their teleworking policies and procedures, agency leadership was guided by the guidelines issued by Montgomery County, the State of Maryland, and the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- They are moving to fillable forms that can be completed on-line.
- This week leadership will be discussing what court-ordered child-parent visitation should look like in the midst of a pandemic. Thus far the visitations have been handled virtually on-line. Now that summer is arriving, visitations outside are an option. They will also be discussing possibility of inside visits and what to do if a parent refuses to wear a mask.

The national press has reported a decline in the number on child abuse and neglect reports nationwide. A question was asked about reporting and number of reports of suspected abuse and/or neglect. Lisa advised that there is a concern because with school closed that teachers and other mandated reporters are not seeing the children. The numbers were initially down, but they are seeing a little increase in the

number of reports each week. They need to dig a little more into the numbers to look at the percentages of reports that are ruled out compared to previous months. Domestic violence-related reports have pretty much remained steady. These cases mainly concern neglect.

It was pointed out that staff are working closely with the older youth that are scheduled to transition out of care to make sure that they are safe and have jobs/resources to meet their needs. Youth scheduled to transition at the end of May were given an additional month of care. There aren't many jobs available to these youth right now. Amazon and other delivery jobs are about all there is.

The other population of concern are the runaways. When they return to foster care, it is difficult to determine their exposure to COVID-19 while in runaway status and to find placements for them.

A question was asked regarding the availability of protective masks for staff. All staff have received at least 1 mask and some have received more. They have also been well supplied with sanitizer washes and cleansing wipes. They are keeping an eye on supplies to anticipate when new orders should be submitted.

Some states seem to be expediting reunifications. A question was asked regarding the impact on reunifications in Montgomery County. There has not been the case in Montgomery County. The court system is only holding emergency shelter hearings. Without court approval the reunifications cannot be finalized. Additionally, psychological studies and evaluations have stalled during the pandemic, which will have the effect of slowing down reunifications. It is also possible that some service providers will not reopen, which will exacerbate the problem of catching up the backlog.

The courts are scheduled to reopen the week of June 15th. Court staff are working this week to schedule hearings, which will all be held virtually. One way to expedite cases ready for reunification is through a stipulation agreement that can be submitted to the court for approval.

Spring/Fall Forum

Kay Farley and George Gable reported on the status of the AODAAC/MHAC/Citizens Panel for Children Spring Forum.

- The scheduled forum on May 21st was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The planning committee reconvened by conference call on June 2nd to discuss the feasibility of a virtual forum.
- There was definite interest in hosting a virtual forum, but research is needed to determine which virtual platforms would be available through the county and whether the county can provide the technical support to ensure that the meeting would run smoothly. AODAAC staff will talk to county staff to investigate the capabilities before a firm decision is made.
- For a virtual meeting, participants would need to register in advance of the forum. This would be a departure from the walk-in approach for the previous in-person forums. This has pros and cons. It may be easier for some people to attend. Some might not want to register. It will also impact how the marketing is done.
- There was some discussion about how resource tables might be incorporated. It might be possible to have designated "on-line rooms" for the resource tables that people could access. If that is not feasible, there may be ways to advertise the availability of the resources.
- The timing of the forum is likely to be in October 2020, but no specific date was discussed.

- If the forum goes forward, the planning committee members expressed interest in staying with the theme and speakers previously discussed. AODAAC staff will reach out to those speakers to gauge their willingness to participate in a virtual forum.
- Another planning committee call will be scheduled after AODAAC staff complete their research.

MCCRP Membership

Kay Farley and Sarah Stanton reported on interviews to fill the current vacancies.

- Lisa Merkin scheduled interviews with 6 candidates. Kay and Sarah participated in the virtual interviews.
- Of the 3 vacancies that need to be filled, one of the positions is designated as a subject matter expert. One of the interviewees was determined by Montgomery County Commission staff to have the qualifications to fill this position.
- All of the candidates were interested and enthusiastic and would be good panel members. The interview panel ranked the candidates.
- Lisa is reaching out to the candidates and working with Montgomery County Commission staff to secure the appointments.

Recruitment Investigation

George Gabel and Sarah Stanton reported that they will be working with Angela English to schedule a meeting with the agency recruitment staff. The meeting will be sometime after July 7th.

Mental Health

Jane Steinberg reported that there are no pending issues, but asked about the possibility of scheduling a training session for agency staff as the MCCRP did in December 2019.

- Jane indicated a willingness to find another mental health-related speaker.
- There was consensus to host another continuing education unit (CEU)-accredited meeting for the social workers.
- There was also discussion about hosting a non-CEU-accredited meeting that would help the social workers deal with the stress of COVID-19. Potential self-care topics included anxiety, additional stresses, burnout, and parenting in the pandemic environment.
- There was consensus to try to host both a self-care in the coming months and a CEU-accredited meeting later in the year.

The meeting adjourned.