

**Providers Advisory Minutes**

**Wednesday, September 19th , 2018**

**8:30 – 10:00a**

**Polk County - River Place Office - Conference Room 2**

**Attending:** Teresa Burke, Ellen Overton, Jordan Kauffman, Diamond Denney, Amy Myers, Dee Martin, Tamra Jurgemeyer, Alejandra Alvarado, Julie Cacker, Tony Reed, Andrea Wilson, Tom Aldrich, Jordan Tarin, Kathy Hall, Kiley Fleming, Sarah VanGorp, Randy Jansen, Kelly Marble, Anna Sunstrom, Pam Gumm, Deb Kesling, Charles Hill, Robert Bibens, Danielle Welsher, Katie Kamienski, John Douglas, Juan Padilla, Chris Villalobos

**Teresa Burke called the meeting to order at 8:34.**

The meeting started with introductions from the group.

**Presentation: Molly McPartland and Layne Huey, KidsFirst Law Center : What providers need to know about trauma that occurs in children whose parents divoice, legal representation for these children and other services.**

KidsFirst Law Center’s mission is to give kids a voice in high conflict divorce cases, custody proceedings, parental separations, and other legal situations. Their goal is to strengthen family relationships through reducing exposure to conflict, connecting to community resources, and allowing kids voices to be heard. Reducing conflict helps kids focus on being kids: going to school, learning, playing, growing, and building healthy relationship. These services strenghten families through helping kids learn how to self-advocate and build healthy relationships with both parents, so kids can experience safety, stability, and ability to love both parents. KidsFirst works with parents on what they call co-parenting sessions but also work with parents in 1:1 capacity, and anyone who is involved with the case in order to create sustainable situation for the family and find the resources available in the community to connect with family. They believe they can get parents on the same page in terms of settling their divorce or custody case, creating more stability for family that reduces trauma in high conflict divorces. It allows kids to thrive later on. KidsFirst takes court-appointed cases and their attorney represents the child’s actual interest and position. They also work to mitigate resistance from parents. KidsFirst tries to keep negotiations outside of the courtroom.

KidsFirst workshop started 10 years ago in Eastern Iowa. It became mandatory for school-aged children due to its effectiveness. Layne began in 2009 as a volunteer workshop coordinator. Workshops are broken up by age-group. Curriculum workbooks guide conversations. Layne shares that one kid will share an experience or feeling and another child will always say “I kinda feel that too” or “That happened in my house also.” Workshops help kids learn and practice how to be respectful self-advocates – how to communicate with parents when they feel caught in the middle. Class surveys indicate kids feel a great sense of relief when they learn they aren’t alone in their experience and that it is okay for them to feel and talk to parents and loved ones about it.

**Question & Answer**

Do you get any resistance from the parents in co-parenting?

* There is often initial resistance, but once KidsFirst builds the foundation of trust with the child and builds the relationship with the family, not always but the results are better. Parents are more willing to come to the middle.

Do many judges eliminate kids’ testimony and think their judgement is not reliable?

* Yes that is often the case. Kids’ “wishes and wants” actually tend to be reasonable and rarely outside the realm of what would be considered in the child’s best interest. Molly points out parents make the primary decisions but, in general, kids input tends to be pretty honest about what would make their lives better. “Parents make the choice, but kids have a voice.”

Do you plan on providing judicial education about children testifying in court?

* Education component is very crucial and KidsFirst is trying to approach judges to share their vision and best practices. There are strong feelings about children testifying in court. A majority of Molly’s cases do not result in a child testifying; only when the child expresses a clear, strong preference to testify. They try to keep it informal as possible and make it as least stressful as possible.

What is referral process like?

* KidFirst currently represents children ages of 6 to 17 for divoirce cases in Polk and some areas of Dallas. It must be least 3 months until the hearing and there must be pending court petition – divorce, custody, or modification.

Who pays for your services?

* If client is under 250% poverty level it’s free of charge. They keep the price as affordable as possible. KidsFirst runs on grants, private donations and corporate sponsorships.

How many cases?

* They usually have a 40 client caseload that is 80 to 100 kids a year.

Do you work with only kids who are going through divorce? Or kids whose parents are already divorced?

* Generally KidsFirst works with families up until the decree or modification cases. Even though the decree is granted they keep working with family if needed.

**Upcoming Events & Activities**

* KidsFirst One Year Anniversay – 4 to 7pm, October 11 at Confluence Brewing Company
* CPPC 101 Immersion – All day workshop Oct 3, 2018
* Teen Talks - THURSDAY, OCTOBER 25 | UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, DES MOINES CAMPUS, A day of fun activities, informative workshops, with new friends and fun prizes. This event is free and open to all middle and high school students in central Iowa.
* Introductory Mediation Training – October 15 – 17, 2018 at Iowa Mediation Service
* Hip Hope Young Men of Color Conference and resource fair – 9 – 3pm Oct 27, 2018 at Drake Olmsted Center 2875 University Des Moines, Iowa 50321

**Upcoming speakers and topics:**

1. October 17, 2018 – Frida Espinosa Cardenas, Transnational Independent Consultant, What providers need to know about options for children whose parents are detained and/or deported
2. January 16, 2019 – Stephanie McFarland, Des Moines Public Schools, Behavioral Health Intervention & Prevention services in the Multi-tier Systems of Support
3. Future meetings: Special session – Mike McInroy & Darin Thompson on current happenings with DHS; Refugee mental health
4. Who else would you like to see?

**Adjourn – Teresa Burke 9:53**