

Mansfield YSB Advisory Board  
Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, March 7, 2006  
12 Noon @ DCF  
322 Main Street Willimantic, Ct 06226

In attendance were Jake Hovanic, grade 7, homeschooled; Brittany Cushman, grade 7, Mansfield Middle School; Kevin Grunwald, Director, Department of Social Services, town of Mansfield; Eileen Griffin, Clinical Social Worker/Altrusa Network Representative; Ethel Mantzaris, Resident/Chairperson; Janit Romayko, YSB Coordinator; Pat Michalak, YSB Counselor; Cheryl Smith, Social Work Supervisor/Training Coordinator, Department of Children and Families, State of Connecticut.

Regrets: Frank Perrotti, Shawnee Mason, Chris Marphy, Tom Miller

Agenda items included:

1. Update: February 2006 Activity Sheet attached: Comments: Dr. Haney spoke on Spectrum Disorders of which there are several. When they surface in the classroom, there are strategies for teachers. There have been advances in medications that are quite effective. The COVE meetings are in the evening in Manchester. The Juniper Hill Valentine bingo was a great success much in part to the appearance of Girl Scout Troop #5470. The Cultural Exchange trip was also a great success according to Brittany. She was one of the six Mansfield individuals chosen to participate. Game Night was highlighted with pizza and ice cream sundaes and visit to the Mansfield community Center. The next Special Education Parent dinner is at the end of March. The dinners have been well attended by both the students and their parents.

2. DCF Presentation: Cheryl Smith, Social Work Supervisor then spoke on the process by which abuse and neglect cases are processed. The mandated reporter (see attached list of mandated reporters) can call the 1-800 # at any time of the day/night. The toll free # is in Hartford and is staffed by 20 social workers per eight hour shift. The social worker takes the information and decides whether to open the case or not based on the information given by the caller. Most times, the case is opened, as most calls are serious enough. The mandated reporter may be in an outlying area and that worker is always communicated with about the deposition of the case. That caller receives a letter from DCF within 48 hours of the call. In the past, "new hires" were graduated with a non-specific undergraduate degree. Now, undergraduates who have in social work, sociology, psychology, human development and/or family therapy are hired. The probationary period is 10 months with a great deal of time for training. The investigations unit is usually made up of newer social workers that have less than 6 years of experience. The job is a difficult one as most of the time, clients are not cooperative and the police have to be called in to assist with the initial contact. DCF has under 30 days to determine whether a case should/should not be opened. If the case is opened, DCF has up to 45 days to make a determination about a course of action. If a case is opened, it then gets transferred to a treatment unit. Treatment unit cases typically have a "shelf life" of 6 to 9 months. Visits are made to the family twice a month. Every effort is made to have families remain together but occasionally children are removed and placed in foster care.

Foster care can last up to 24 months. There is now a newer federal mandate where an order of commitment for foster care can last only 18 months so social workers are scouring for adoptive families. There are 4 permanency/planning units in the Willimantic office and several social workers are busy with recruitment of foster and adoptive families. There is also an adolescent unit in the Willimantic office with an independent living skill course offered to 16-18 year olds. Most of the time, these cases are juvenile court related as parental rights have been terminated. The regional office also has a voluntary services unit with 5 social workers with 20-30 cases each. This unit serves those children/adolescents with a mental health diagnosis. These cases receive the maximum of resources in the community including Husky insurance. Approximately 75% of these cases are neglected and 25% are physically abused. The regional office has an adoptions unit and all cases are processed through municipal probate courts. Social workers investigate and determine appropriate homes of licensing. Background, life style and criminal records are also checked on each family. The YSB has worked extensively with adoptions and with Mansfield probate. This unit has 5 social workers with 12-15 cases each. Cheryl remarked that reduced caseloads are a more common practice for workers but there is no substitution for age, experience and maturity. These enhance workers' decision-making skills. At that point, Cheryl took questions about the interface of DCF with Juvenile Court. There are permanent DCF workers placed at Juvenile court to handle the "Families With Service Needs" petitions. This is an asset to clients as the communication flows directly from the judge to the worker and the decisions are handled in a timely manner at the court.

3. Other: Next meeting may be at the scheduled at the convenience of the speaker.  
Meeting adjourned at 1pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Janit P. Romayko  
Secretary

JR/jr