

# FAMILY TIME WORKGROUP

4/22/2014

*of the Child Welfare Council*



The Family Time Workgroup, originally called the Visitation Subcommittee began in 2010 in order to promote positive visitation practices for children and families through leadership, teamwork and collaboration. Julie McFarlane, with Youth, Rights and Justice, chaired the workgroup from its inception through 2013.

The workgroup reviewed best practices in other jurisdictions, made recommendations to Child Welfare Council, facilitated changes in child welfare practice, and engaged a number of new community partners in the effort to increase the frequency and quality of family time.

## OBJECTIVES

- Research ways to improve time with parents and siblings for children who are in foster care
- Make recommendations to Child Welfare Council regarding how system partners can facilitate achieving the least restrictive, least intrusive, and most appropriate conditions for each family
- Increase participation of community based and faith based organizations in expanding family time opportunities for families
- Increase flexibility and involvement of Social Service Assistants (SSAs) in conducting family time

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Developed recommendations and check list for judicial officers and attorneys to apply in individual cases
- Provided three sessions of training based on best practices research directed to judicial staff, attorneys and child welfare workers on improving visitation for 90 participants
- Worked with faith based groups to beautify and maintain family time rooms at child welfare branches
- Developed a system to utilize parent mentors during parent orientation at the court to solicit information about family member who might be able to support family time
- Created Family Time Coordinator positions in each DHS Branch, who can facilitate up front visits and compile information about local family time resources
- Raised the expected minimum for family time from 1 hour per week to 3-5 hours per week
- Worked with community organizations to host family time events for about 50 families on a monthly basis
- Compiled a district-wide list of resources to support family time, which led to family time increasingly happening outside DHS offices
- Expedited initial visits so that they usually occur within 24 – 48 hours
- Schedule visitation review staffings monthly with SSA, caseworker, and respective supervisors to review level of supervision needed and to problem-solve any issues.
- Changed work schedules to accommodate supervision of evening and weekend family time
- Developed SSA “floaters” in each branch who can fill in where needed and prevent missed family time due to SSA absences
- Developed process through which SSAs are informed at transition staffing about the conditions of return, so that they can structure family time in a way that might allow the parent to demonstrate identified skills and to specifically note them in their documentation

## KEEPING THE MOMENTUM

### Areas for Continued Improvement

- Need more faith based partnerships in North and East Portland
- Need more culturally specific family time activities
- Need to identify ways to partner with schools around supporting family time in their buildings
- Need to continue to conversations with case workers in each unit and branch to help facilitate a culture change regarding expectations of family time
- Need to continue to expand the frequency and quality of family time

### Action Plan for the Future

- DHS Supervisors from each branch will provide a quarterly written report to the Child Welfare Council regarding progress on action items related to family time.
- Designated DHS family time spokesperson will provide a quarterly verbal update to the Child Welfare Council regarding the contents of the quarterly report.
- DHS will bring requests for assistance on particular action items to the Child Welfare Council as needed.