**Task Force on the Monitoring**

**Of Children in Out-of-Home Care**

***November 17th, 2023 10:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.***

## Meeting Minutes

Assistant Commissioner (AC) Binder, Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE), called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.

Wendy Prince, FDLE, called roll and a quorum was present.

AC Binder led the Task Force staff in introductions and welcomed everyone present.

Minutes Approval

AC Binder requested approval from the Task Force Members for minutes from the Task Force Meeting held October 13, 2023. Brena Slater, Safe Child Coalition, motioned to approve the minutes and Jenn Petion seconded the motion. With all members in favor, the motion was passed.

Old Business

AC Binder inquired if anyone had any ‘Old Business’ to discuss. Hearing none, the meeting proceeded to the presentations.

DCF Required Monthly Report

AC Binder asked Daniel May, Department of Children and Families (DCF), to provide the data from his report to the Task Force.

Mr. May began by stating that there were a couple of updates based on the feedback received last month. Mr. May stated that he would share his screen with the Task Force Members.

Mr. May stated that the first change that was made was to add the ‘Person ID’ which was requested so that further research could be done. Along with that, for each person, the number of missing episodes was added associated with that individual. Mr. May shared an example of an individual who had fifty-five episodes associated with their single person. This allowed DCF to look at 11,000 plus missing episodes in the data set. That individual youth contributed to about half of the percentage point.

Mr. May stated that this next column with just under 2,000 actual missing children, based on just their ‘Person ID’, to the fifty-five episodes would account for three percent - if you look further at it from the child level.

The other major change is that everything highlighted in yellow, is an active missing child report with the earliest case that is still open from 2016. From there, DCF also provided data going back from the previous year – even if the missing child has been located/resolved and closed by law enforcement, DCF) wants the Task Force Members to have the whole perspective. Mr. May stated that DCF also had a request to appropriately label the column around ‘child exploitation’ that was taken care of, that this is the report the Task Force is expected to see.

AC Binder asked if anyone had any questions or comments for Mr. May. Jenn Petion, Family Support Services of North Florida & Suncoast, asked if the data in yellow reflected the youth that are still missing. Mr. May replied with yes, those are the youth that are still actively missing.

AC Binder asked if anyone else had questions for Mr. May. No more questions were asked, so AC Binder stated that the meeting would move on to Dr. Katie Berry, Florida State University – Child Welfare.

Dr. Berry provided a couple of updates. The first update is that her group is in the process of submitting an IRB and to conduct interviews and focus groups with current and former foster youth as well as foster parents, who are experienced with kids that have gone missing from care. They are hoping to begin recruitment in January for those interviews. She also stated that her group will provide the Task Force Members with materials, that the Task Force can see what they are asking as well as receiving their recruitment email(s) – that will be sent in January 2024. By then Dr. Berry stated that she feels they should be squared away with their IRB.

Dr. Berry introduced Emily Davidson who is with the Florida Institute for Child Welfare, and she will be assisting with this evaluation.

Dr. Berry asked if anyone had any questions, otherwise they would move along. AC Binder asked if there was anything that she and her team needed to accomplish their goal. Dr. Berry stated that she would definitely need help in January – and that’s why she is going to provide more concrete definitions about who their target recruitment is, so that the Task Force Members can help them think of folks and avenues in which to try to recruit youth and caregivers. Dr. Berry continued that the Task Force Members can provide whatever type of support they would like and with the Quanteda reports, there may be possible interest to have Dr. Berry and Ms. Davidson analyze them. Potential MOU drafted.

AC Binder brought forth the Legislatures expectations of this final report – he stated, he has a vision in his mind but that he hopes to get some direction on that, so we are moving towards the desired goal. Dr. Berry stated, that made a lot of sense and that her group would be sketching out their milestones and timeline, and would be providing that to the Task Force Members as they initiate the project.

Dr. Berry stated that they were waiting on the IRB to provide clearance “to go” for the date they are missing right now, she said she would be happy to provide that outline.

House Representative Chase Tramont responded that he would like to set-up some type of appointment with the group to discuss as he connects with the speakers as well as, to get direction on what the expectations are. Dr. Berry said that sounds great. AC Binder stated that the Task Force definitely wants to be sure that we meet the Legislature’s needs of this mission.

AC Binder said that a lot of times, we look at the bad and how it’s important to look at some success stories of the children that have aged out if in-home care. Because of this, he requested the Guardian Ad Litem, which have the ‘CHAMPIONS’ program to speak to the Task Force. AC Binder introduced Melissa Bujeda, Guardian Ad Litem, and turned the meeting over to her.

Ms. Bujeda greeted the group and introduced herself before introducing Kerena Camacho, an aged-out- youth, who was formally in out-of-home care.

Ms. Bujeda provided a bio for Ms. Camacho, of her being a first-generation high school graduate and first-generation college student in her family. Ms. Camacho is studying sociology and plans to move to University of Central Florida in the Spring. She entered the foster care system at age seventeen. Ms. Camacho came out of a nuclear household, where she was trafficked, abused and ashamed. Aging out of the foster care system at age twenty-one. Ms. Camacho advocates for voices that are quiet, as her voice once was. Today Ms. Camacho is survivor, a dog mom, a student, a PACE consultant, a youth advocate, and a prodigy to resilience. Ms. Bujeda turned it over to Ms. Camacho.

Ms. Camacho greeted the Task Force and thanked everyone for having her. She said she appreciated the opportunity to speak. This is something she is very passionate about and she feels like we can walk away learning something today.

Ms. Camacho started with the statistic that out of 250,000 children that go missing, 90 percent of those are endangered runaways, 47 percent are minors that run away from homes, and a lot of the time, she thought it was 90 percent, actually told a parent or guardian that they were going to run away and the parent/guardian didn’t care.

Ms. Camacho stated that she wound up in foster care when she was 17, by a family that presented themselves as family. DNA was later provided that this was incorrect.

Ms. Camacho stated, that she couldn’t find her biological parents – the story that was she was told was that she was given to the family by a woman named Lucy in New York, she was born in Macro Island. The lady that was contacted was not her biological mother, she had no idea why her name was on Ms. Camacho’s birth certificate. There continued to be problems. This caused Ms. Camacho to get lost in the system, making it seem like she “had gotten lost into this hole” if she were to go missing. No connections back to parents, no connections back to the family that presented themselves as hers. She showed up at police station, they took her statement, they took down her story. Ms. Camacho went into foster care/a group home at age 17. She said, she didn’t really get the time to really be with the foster family since she was just four months from turning eighteen. She felt like she was thrown in until she aged out. She felt like she didn’t really grow up in the proper environment, with proper parental advocates. This made it so easy for her to want to leave, for her to run away, because she didn’t have people she felt protected by. No one was truly listening to what she had to say.

Ms. Camacho stated that foster kids can speak but questioned if they are truly being heard and followed up with. Additionally, she feels like the youth are usually the ones that are blamed. These youths then may turn to pimps, prostitution because of this, they may do things because it’s their freedom.

Ms. Camacho stated that extra-curricular activities like sports – they’re not going to have time to do other things – are what holds them accountable to keeping their grades up. They don’t think about their future, they’re thinking solely about how to get through it. The youth want to feel safe, to have that place to rest their head at night. When they’re having to deal with conflict, with the legal side, the courts, etc. the youths aren’t going to stay. Gaining the youth’s trust is a lot of the process. It’s very different with the people that genuinely want to help, as to “the foster parents” that are not there for you. Those youth are most likely going to run and at the end of the day, consequences are how they learn – it’s “how to bridge the gap” for these youths.

AC Binder thanked Ms. Camacho for her testimony.

Discussion

AC Binder asked if any Task Force Members joined the meeting after roll call, that would like the record to reflect their presence. No responses were received.

AC Binder asked if there were any guests that that wanted the record to reflect their name(s). No responses were received.

Action Items

AC Binder asked Ms. Bujeda if she would be able to invite another youth to provide their testimony at the next meeting. Ms. Bujeda stated that there are a lot of ‘CHAMPIONS’ and they all want to use their voices to make it better for others.

AC Binder offered for anyone that may have success stories that they may want to share – to feel free to share them in the upcoming meetings. Further that Ms. Camacho shared both bad and good within her testimony, that her testimony was tremendous. Her story has given the Task Force a path to move forward.

Ms. Camacho stated that she was thankful for the resources she had to help her get to this point in her life.

AC Binder reminded the group that the next meeting is scheduled for Friday, December 15, 2023 at 10:00AM. He closed the meeting by thanking all Task Force members for serving.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40AM.