

SOLUTIONS FOR INFANT CARE AVAILABILITY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

September 12, 2018 at 6:00 pm
Florida Department of Health in Pinellas
8751 Ulmerton Road, Largo, FL

Committee Members in Attendance: Nancy McGreevy, Child Care Apprenticeship Coordinator & Distance Learning Instructor, PTC; Sonia Meier, Early Childhood Education Services Director, R' Club Child Care; Amber Britner, Home Child Care provider; Maria Piatt, Home Child Care provider; Karen Gardner, Director, Skycrest Christian Preschool; Twana Monroe, Center Owner/Director; Cynthia Sumter Home Child Care provider; Cheryl Miller, Senior Program Consultant, Juvenile Welfare Board (JWB); Colleen Flynn, PCLB Attorney; Maria Villarreal, Licensing Specialist, CCLP; Michelle Leland, Licensing Specialist, CCLP

Public Comment Volunteer: Cindy Odette, Licensing Specialist, CCLP

Official Note Taker: Lisa Zacharia, Administrative Secretary, CCLP

Committee Members Absent: Ray Hensley, Maternal & Child Health, DOH

Call to Order

The third Solutions for Infant Care Availability Committee meeting was called to order at 6:10 pm.

Nancy McGreevy welcomed everyone and stated the purpose of this Committee is to serve families in Pinellas County. She said that what we are doing won't solve the problem tomorrow but we are working for solutions and we're passionate about child care. She added the meeting will be one to one and a half hours and asked that we trust the process. She then asked the Committee members to review the minutes from the meeting of August 15th, 2018, and motion to approve them. Amber Britner motioned to approve the minutes as presented and Karen Gardner seconded the motion. The minutes were approved and the motion was carried.

Nancy McGreevy reported that at our last meeting, issues came up about obstacles such as qualified staff, additional training, funding, blending of ages, ELC reimbursement, and lowering age. Michelle Leland verified that we can't change age. We used to have about 1,200 family child care homes and now we have about 317. Some Centers are not open to infants due to the cost and caring for older children earns more money. There are centers struggling to fill schools; there are spaces out there. Nancy McGreevy asked the Committee about their thoughts. Amber Britner suggested advertising, like a community awareness campaign about opening your own business. She feels there are parents out there but they don't know who to contact. Sonia Meier thought it could be a collective effort between Licensing, ELC, home providers, mentors, and coaches talking about the benefit of staying home with their own kids. Karen Gardner mentioned having a step-by-step guide and going to job fairs. Amber Britner responded that job fairs are not a bad idea. Karen Gardner said she feels like there is fear about having babies at your home, but that lots of moms would want to stay home and make money. Sonia Meier added that she feels like most moms returning to work would prefer having their child in a home over a center due to the "softer home environment." She had her own baby in a home setting. Karen Gardner stated that some parents have their children in a center and want to have their infants in the same place, but other parents ask her about good in-home care. Sonia Meier said that Karen hit on a good idea; centers could partner with homes near their centers. Twana Monroe said she would like for more providers to see themselves as business owners. Twana Monroe asked, if it's possible to license a facility with different rooms, like in a strip mall." Colleen Flynn replied that this concept would be possible in a center, but not as a home. Nancy McGreevy pointed out that it appears more people are renters versus home owners. Maria Villarreal stated that a provider can rent but they have to live there. Karen Gardner suggested a job fair was held to identify new providers. Amber Britner asked if there are funds available for a community campaign and maybe several groups could come together. Lindsay Carson shared that ELC has a proposed budget amendment which will support recruitment for a job force. ELC has about \$75 thousand allocated and is looking in the community to see where those funds should be spent. To accomplish this, ELC plans to hold information sessions to better understand the community needs. There are a lot of possibilities, but they want to hear from the community before making any decisions on how to spend the job force money and consider what community partnerships they can support. Brainstorming about where to get this information out to community took place and locations such as pediatrician's offices, community centers, and libraries were suggested. Sonia Meier added community resources like the internet, email, fliers, and radio. Michelle Leland said that all outreach efforts should direct interested parties to contact Licensing. Lindsay Carson said ELC could offer coaching and support. Karen Gardner asked if there are any classes on how to open a day care, to which Maria Villarreal responded that there are for centers. Michelle Leland added that after the application process, providers are required to have a one-on-one meeting with Licensing. Sonia Meier agreed that having a mentor would be helpful and the PCLB website has the steps there. Lindsay Carson stated that ELC doesn't have a formal mentor program. Lynn Gibson, large home provider, said that their association has a mentoring program.

Cynthia Sumter inquired about a provider allowing another provider use their additional space. Colleen Flynn said that sharing space as two licensed providers would be a zoning problem. Regulations state that the licensed provider has to live there. But if a provider is a large home, they can have an employee. Large is 8 children birth to 24 months so a potential solution is to become a large. Sonia Meier asked if a provider has to own their home or if it can be done in an apartment. Maria Villarreal replied that licensed homes cannot be in apartments and Michelle Leland added that some townhomes can be used when play space and fencing are present.

Nancy McGreevy is supportive of a community awareness blitz. There are moms out there that want independence but don't want to pay over \$300.00 per week for child care. They might be interested in becoming providers if there was a training track with orientation, processes, information on the financial investment, rules and regulations, and physical environment. It would be an actual process with a timeline and partnering with Licensing. Sonia Meier said she was a trainer with DCF and would reach out to Debbie Barker, DCF Training Coordinator. Nancy McGreevy would like to see more training available to home providers, similar to the ones centers can access. This curriculum could include caring for the needs of infants. She also believes that a mentor program would be beneficial. Amber Britner agreed with Nancy McGreevy regarding community awareness, training, orientation, and ongoing mentoring. Amber Britner asked how to make it easier for a center to open infant rooms and Nancy McGreevy replied that one of the obstacles is play space. Maria Piatt said that she opened a home because after working with Licensing and looking for a facility to open a center, she was not able to find suitable space.

Karen Gardner said that she is asked all the time for infant care and that she would love to provide it but it would be filled up with employees' babies. Sonia Meier said that to encourage more centers to take infants, they could limit the hours of the infant room to 7:00 am to 5:00 pm which would make it more affordable and there's also a differential fee. If you're contacted by school readiness you don't have to accept ELC's fees. You can charge a different fee to parents. Amber Britner then asked if there is any input from Licensing on blending ages at the beginning and ending of the day. Maria Villarreal replied that we don't blend one's and infants with any other age group, and ones and infants can only blend if that are in the correct ratio. Michelle Leland stated that we have an 8 hour rule; teachers can only be with infants 8 hours per day.

Public Comment:

Ann Brooks said she would like our regulations to have a term that doesn't box us in regarding infants. Medically speaking, there are "newborns," and then children 2-12 months are "infants," but for providers in Pinellas County, children are considered infants until 24 months. She included some ideas about getting the word about being a provider, stating the use of Bay News 9, WEDU and WUSF do mostly educational advertising, but city and community papers are free. FFCCA has a mentoring program and added that we need to get new parents connected with new providers.

Andi Bell spoke about ratios. She stated that she has three new providers she is mentoring. She has been providing day care since 1999. Southside Partnership's website will walk you through how to get started. She started a daycare because her son has autism and she had special needs children in her care. In her experience, it's hard to become a daycare and you have to spend a lot of money on items like toys and insurance.

Lynn Gibson stated that she brought up ratios at the last Solutions for Infant Care Availability meeting but she will bring it up again. She said that centers are almost at state ratios but homes are not. She suggested providers be offered a second tier with higher ratios if the provider has met certain criteria in areas like education and experience. She also added that local Provider groups and PCLB share information and blast information. We're trying to network and work together. Deed restrictions, counties, and VPK put some people out of business.

Karen Holloway said most of them are small family homes and asked for a show of hands of people wanting to have spaces filled. Many people raised their hands. She claims a lot of them need infants, have completed all the clock hours of training, and love babies. ELC has resources as well. We need to get the age down to 12 months, not 18 months. She feels providers are stagnant and stuck, and would like to move forward and they are ready.

Gordon Martin said that when you become a licensed provider, there's a two-year period you have to be in the field and get your CDA. After a couple of years, you can start managing that dynamic. It would behoove our geographical area to do that. I have been a large home in Clearwater listening to calls about how there's not enough infant care. Gordon Martin stated he is opening a center between December 10 and January 7. There are going to be 12 infant spots and 10 infant/toddler spots. that's 22 additional spots.

Susan Daniels said she has been a provider for 25 years. She enjoys babies and raised three kids of her own. She stated that If you're committed, you can do what you have to do. Her friend started a Facebook page that helps parents find care, it helps tremendously but some people can't find us. Thank you for listening."

End of Public Comment

Nancy McGreevy asked Susan Daniels and Lynn Gibson, what they felt would be a proven record. Their response was, at least 5 years of experience, no non-compliances, and having a CDA. They also suggested that to qualify for a higher ratio, a provider would have to attend "Beyond Cribs and Rattles" and "Beyond Centers and Circle Time." If a provider got non-compliances, they would have to reduce their ratio. Nancy McGreevy stated that some home child care providers are not looking at it as a profession

Sonia Meier asked the group for a show of hands on who has infant openings? <some people raised their hands>. She then asked, "What's stopping you from filling them?" Someone answered, "under 18 months and private pay." Sonia Meier then asked, "how many openings for infants can you have tomorrow?" < Only two raised their hands>. She asked, "what would help you, if they changed ratio? Most of you are full. I think we need to focus on getting more family child care providers. I don't think that most people know about all the support the home providers in Pinellas County have out there."

Lindsay Carson stated that as far as referrals, they get calls every day. Sometimes people can't find care; they can only find it in a center, and/or they can't find care they can afford. She also said she's been seeing a shift of moving from family homes to centers but ELC always shares options.

A provider, Laurie Garrett, spoke and said she has been licensed 23 years with no issues. She agreed about the ratio of 4:1 and said they lost 3 year olds due to VPK. She also said she has been full for a long time.

Nancy McGreevy asked the panel if they had any more discussion and there was none.

Action Items: Nancy McGreevy stated we probably need another meeting. She said, Licensing's Board meeting is on September 26 and that she will review a media blitz for new licensed providers. We'll partner with Licensing and providers but the immediate need is to raise community awareness.

Karen Gardner said she agrees with the need for more providers but existing providers don't have to go through everything new ones do. If there were a special tier where proven people could get a change of ratio, there would have to be a benefit to the earned status.

Nancy McGreevy asked if there is a need to mail another survey and the consensus was no. Then she asked about our next meeting date, which will be our last meeting. It was decided that October 17th at 6:00 pm we would have our last Solutions for Infant Care Availability Committee meeting.

Nancy McGreevy adjourned the meeting at 7:45 pm and thanked everyone that participated.

Respectfully submitted,



Lisa Zacharia