



Emergency Shelter Task Force Meeting

March 24, 2020

2:00 PM Welcome and Tech Trouble-Shooting (Christine Gendron, TNOYS)

- Packed agenda, will work to keep things moving to fit it all in during the hour
- Speakers joining us: Alan Schonborn, Jenny Hinson, Erin Whelan, Shannan Stavinoha, Jeff Alexander, Clara Thomas
- TNOYS staff: Christine Gendron, Ann-Charlotte Proffitt, Rachel Brownlie, Lauren Rose, Shannon Bloesch, Mary Bergeron
- Roughly 45 additional participants, mostly from emergency shelters but also some from ISDs and other organizations.
- Raven McKinley with Office of Foster Care Ombudsman wanted to let us know that she is on the call. Please let youth know that her office is still here for them.

2:05 PM Update on TNOYS Resources (Ann-Charlotte Proffitt, TNOYS)

- Ann-Charlotte mentioned the TNOYS Emergency Response Resource Center, which is available on the TNOYS website at <http://tnoys.org/emergency-response-resource-center/>. This includes updates from DFPS, DSHS, HUD, ACF, and other agencies.
- The resource center also includes a document that provides guidance for provider organizations on developing emergency response plans and implementing emergency response protocols. That can be accessed directly at <http://tnoys.org/wp-content/uploads/Guidance-for-Providers-1.pdf>.
- TNOYS also has resources that dive into specific issues, including working remotely.
- Organizations can order free fabric masks (not medical-grade) from manufacturers working with TNOYS by emailing Christine at cgendron@tnoys.org.
- TNOYS will be sending an email blast out to member organizations tomorrow on how to access hand sanitizer from local distilleries. (Update: this email went out on Friday.)
- Wednesday's Statewide Collaborative on Youth Homelessness meeting will include an update from National Network for Youth on federal policy.
- Thursday's Transitional Living Services meeting will be for TLPs, SIL, and PAL.



- Friday's meeting for Services to At-Risk Youth ("STAR") providers will focus on marketing their services in the changing climate and with the re-brand.

2:10 PM Updates from the Department of Family and Protective Services
(Jenny Hinson)

- Jenny thanked shelter staff for what they do every day to overcome "insurmountable odds" to care for the state's children.
- DFPS is sending out updates nearly every day as the agency learns more and gets guidance from leaders at the state and national levels.
- **Visits with CPS Caseworkers:**
 - ACF has given Texas authorization to move forward with virtual visitation for the caseworker/child visits. **It does need to be a virtual visit that includes video in addition to audio. Just audio is not acceptable.** CPS is required to "see" each of the young people in its care monthly.
 - DFPS sent this message to its staff late last week and has continued to send reminders w/ practices on how to do this. The caseworker needs to work with the contact at each agency to discuss the date and time for the visit, as well as the technology platform. CPS staff now have access to FaceTime, Skype, Zoom, Google Duo, and the Go To Meeting app. CPS staff will reach out to case managers, therapists – whoever they normally schedule the visits with at residential operations. If the provider does not have the technology needed on their end, let the Department know and they can help troubleshoot.
 - These visits should take place in private when possible. The agency recognizes that computers may be located in offices with private files and in those cases there may need to be a staff person present. If needed, the youth can do a private phone call with the caseworker after the virtual visit (if the visit is not completely private).
- **Family Visits:**
 - There have been concerns about children continuing to have visits with parents and siblings and the risks these visits can present to the operation. DFPS understands these concerns and is working to address them where they have the authority to do so. Everyone involved is worried and uncertain, including the



children. This means it's important for the children to maintain contact with the people that they love and that care about them.

- DFPS has advised its staff to utilize virtual family visits and/or telephone visits when possible. But when there is a court order requiring a face-to-face visit, DFPS must follow the court order.
 - DFPS has advised its staff that when there are court-ordered face-to-face visits, they must happen away from the operation and it must be the CPS caseworker who facilitates the visit. If anyone is having challenges with this, please elevate it up the caseworker's chain of command or to Jenny directly.
 - If there is a risk that a child will be discharged because of visitation, please reach out to DFPS to see if there is something we can do with the courts so that we don't have children who are displaced.
- **Screening:**
 - Statewide intake does ask screening questions on all calls they are taking in.
 - When children enter care there are questions about whether they've been around anyone who has COVID-19.
 - CPS staff have also been asked to participate in any screening questions that residential providers may have for engaging with them.
 - DFPS understands the staffing challenges everyone is facing now, as well as the desire to keep everyone as safe as possible.
 - Providers should have received through the DFPS residential child care mailbox some guidance on providing residential care with COVID-19. The email contains information from the CDC as well as from some other states that have put together information on residential care, including how to handle isolation and quarantining, and other practices that can be employed during this time. At the back of the presentation there is a listing with source documents.
 - Please reach out to the CPS management chain in the regions, or to Jenny directly, if you are encountering any challenges with visitation, intake, getting information, etc.
 - Within the last week, DFPS has gone from having one operation saying it would not take new placements to being in the double digits. Almost every hour Jenny is getting emails from another operation saying they are not taking any more children. DFPS would appreciate the opportunity to talk through this with the provider to try to identify solutions. The last place they want children to be is in offices.
 - Jenny's phone # is 512-438-3376. Her email is jenny.hinson@dfps.state.tx.us.



- Jenny recommends contacting STAR Health if anyone is interested in implementing telehealth. The agency has already worked with STAR Health to make telehealth available for CANS and some other services.
- Several providers on the call indicated that RCCL is telling them not to take any more placements right now because they've had clients or staff who have displayed symptoms or been confirmed as having COVID-19. Jenny said she talks with RCCL daily and was not aware that this was an issue. If anyone is dealing with this, she asks that they let her know and she can reach out to RCCL.
- Jenny does not have information on decisions from RCCL relevant to hiring new staff during this time. (Some may be stuck in the pipeline.) She can get this info for us from RCCL.
- Jenny has not been notified of any changes relevant to investigations but they could better answer that question.

2:20 PM Updates from the Office of the Governor, CST Team (Alan Schonborn)

- The Governor's Office sent out a message to everyone connected to their funding streams that shows relaxation in performance reporting deadlines, financial status reports, etc.
- OOG has been working closely with TNOYS and others to identify what the needs are for provider organizations. If you recognize something that OOG may be able to help with, please let Alan know. You can reach him at alan.schonborn@dfps.state.tx.us. Or you can let Christine know and she will pass it on to OOG.
- They'll be postponing the summit they had scheduled for foundations but will be sharing information with foundations about how to support providers during this time.
- They're hearing from TNOYS and others that we see the need for the child welfare community to be elevated in front of funders, legislators, and others.
- It's important that those who are caring for children right now, and stepping up to meet the need, be recognized for that heroism.

2:25 PM Information Sharing on Emergency Response Protocols:

- Erin Whelan, LifeWorks
 - LifeWorks is down to essential services. This means the youth resource center is not a physical place to hang out anymore. At



the emergency shelter they are trying to stay at a census of 16 in order to be within licensing standards and stick with a staff of two on each shift. They do have capacity but are trying to just take emergency placements – new removals, youth aging out, etc.

- They are doing back-up for shelter staff in the event that people become ill and can't work. This means any LifeWorks staff would be able to work in the shelter or in the kitchen. All of their staff have background checks currently but not necessarily the ones needed for this work.
- They've implemented hazard pay for all essential staff, which is time and a half. They continue to work to ensure they can bill contracts for hazard pay. It does incentivize staff by recognizing that what they are doing is above and beyond.
- If any staff are ill or have children at home or are just not comfortable with working in the climate they are able to make their normal hourly rate and not use PTO.
- The shelter has mandatory hand-washing protocols and has ordered hand-washing stations.
- Questions they have for the group: what are you all doing in terms of protocol, conversations, and procedures for clients who insist on going in and out of the shelter? And what about with clients who are working? Would it be fair to ask clients not to choose to work right now, since their working puts others at risk?
- Last week Lifeworks had a leadership call with staff to ask how they're feeling, what shifts they'd be prepared to work, what shifts they would not be prepared to work, etc. Most staff who have taken time off for illness have already returned.
- Shannan Stavinoha, Parks Youth Ranch
 - PYR has really been working to communicate to staff that they provide an essential service.
 - PYR has not stopped taking placements. The intake team continues to answer those requests 24 hours per day and is considering placements they would normally deny.



- Program coordinators are putting together educational programming so that every day the kids do something educational. For example, watching the history channel, doing vision boards, doing gardening outside, etc. This will continue until schools start back up.
- PYR is facilitating group time with kids to answer their questions about COVID-19. What is it, what does it mean for them, etc.?
- Because of where PYR is located, there isn't anywhere for the youth to go. So they're not having issues with youth trying to come and go.
- The kids at the shelter have not had outings for at least 10 days.
- PYR is having trouble getting food in the volume needed to feed their kids. Grocery stores are limiting the number of products that shoppers can buy so PYR is having to send multiple staff out on separate trips.
 - Someone on the call suggested to try Sysco. PYR has begun the Sysco application but Sysco is a week behind. (Update: You can sign up to become a Sysco customer at <https://www.sysco.com/Contact/Contact/Become-A-Customer>).
 - Getting access to the volume of food needed is difficult. Even store managers are not able to help out because the rationing restrictions are coming from higher-ups in corporate offices.
 - Someone else recommended the Labatt Co and said it just takes two days. (Update: looks like you can learn more at <http://www.labattfood.com/>.)
 - Can the Governor's Office help residential providers get access to groceries? Maybe they can shop at later hours when the crowds aren't there? Stores are doing senior citizen hours. Can providers also have access to some of these times?
 - TEA has resources to find meals for students at <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/news-and->



[multimedia/correspondence/taa-letters/texas-meal-finder.](#)

- Alan suggested that local food banks may be eager to provide support.
 - It was acknowledged that youth don't necessarily want to eat the food being offered through charity projects.
 - There was also discussion about whether local restaurants may be able to help, especially given that providers can pay for the groceries.
 - Alan offered to work with TNOYS to share this information with the Office of Emergency Management.
- Jeff Alexander and Clara Thomas, Harris County Protective Services
 - Right now the census at HCPS/Kinder is low. They are down to 6 youth. This is because they suspended new placements due to having an employee who may have possibly been exposed to COVID-19. They don't have confirmation yet so can't accept new placements.
 - They are maintaining staffing coverage through all shifts. They have suspended home visits, group activities such as group therapy, volunteer access, etc. to limit outside possible exposure.
 - They have a kitchen or cafeteria where they typically serve meals. They've begun serving meals individually, so the kids don't have to congregate inside one dining area.
 - Janitorial staff and shelter staff are working together to do "deep cleaning."
 - Their layout includes a work station with long hallways of dorms on either side of it. They've designated the dorms closer to the workstation for youth who are sick or presenting symptoms so they can easily isolate those youth if needed. They've also identified a secondary area within the shelter in case the youth get cabin fever within their dorm room. It's the library, where they have electronics, books, TV, etc.



- Right now they don't have any youth who are wanting to leave. They are keeping their fingers crossed that they won't get those. The youth they have at the shelter have been very cooperative.
- The shelter is still having classes from 9 to 1. The teachers are providing packets. They're trying to get set up to do classes virtually. Right now, the teachers are talking to the youth by phone.
- They are taking temperatures of the staff entering every day and the youth. They are also asking "have you been out of the state or the country," and "have you been exposed to anyone who has been diagnosed with the virus."
- If someone shows symptoms Kinder won't let them into the shelter.

2:50 PM Open Discussion

- There was a question for Jenny about how to respond to runaways. Jenny said she did see an email from an organization about this last night.
 - She said that in situations when children are returning from runaway status, if we can get enough information from the to do a screening to determine if they may have been exposed, that coupled with quarantining the youth while checking for symptoms in consultation with a physician is the best approach.
 - These are older youth who can likely answer questions about where they've been, who they've had access to, etc. The Department can help track down additional information if needed.
 - Jenny does anticipate, like we see with our community trends where youth who are on runaway start to come in (such as when the weather turns or when school starts) she anticipates that we'll see kids who want to come in from being out in an unstable housing situation.
 - DFPS can help providers get in touch with STAR Health, physicians, etc.
- There was also a question about how to handle school transfers right now, due to new placement.
 - PYR has already experienced this and was told to get a letter from the ISD about why they can't enroll the youth – that they can't enroll anyone while schools are closed. This covers the provider agency and also gives the ISD a target of the # of



youth who are currently not enrolled as they are transitioning to an online learning environment.

- Jenny said they had not gotten the question yet but she will get with her colleague who has education policy.

3:00 PM Adjourn

The following questions for Jenny Hinson were submitted to TNOYS via the chat box or by text or email. She sent the following replies:

- Several organizations indicated that RCCL instructed them not to take new placements. It looks like in those situations there were very specific circumstances. RCCL has not issued any general guidance indicating that providers should not take new placements.
- There was a question about steps the agency is taking to limit emergency or request for removals from placements. Jenny replied that they're doing what they always do, which is try to mitigate the issue by contacting the caregiver to see if there are supports or services that can be put into place.