

# Somerset County Children’s Inter Agency Coordinating Council (CIACC)

## Meeting Minutes October 24, 2023

**Attendance:**

Linda Porcaro, SC Office of Youth Services	Kristy Soriano, SC Office of Youth Services
LaToya Zeller, Mobile Response	Marla Mathews, SC Family Crisis Intervention Unit
Lori Soto, Catholic Charities	Rheanah Johnson, SC Department of Human Services
Zach Berliner, SC Dept. of Human Services	Elaine Howe, SC Vocational/Technical HS - Linkages
Michael Frost, SC Department of Human Services	Lashonda Dumas, DCP&P
Melissa Von der Heide, Contextual Family Services	Lisa Ranieri, Carrier Clinic
Antonietta Phelan, SC Office of Youth Services	LuAnn Dias, Catholic Charities
Lily Yip, Parent	Michelle Roussos, Family Support Organization of HSW
Michelle DuFour, DCP&P	

**Guests:**

Luisa Hernandez, SC Office of Youth Services	Lisa Federico, SC Department of Human Services
Kristen Schiro, EmPoWER Somerset	Falesha McGhee, SC Office of Youth Services
Michael Scherer, DCP&P	Ebeny Torres, SC Department of Human Services
Danielle Lehtonen, New Hope, IBHC - Open Door	

Linda Porcaro began the meeting at 1:30 p.m. Minutes from the September 26, 2023 meeting were distributed and reviewed. A motion to accept the minutes was made and consensus was received.

**SYSTEM PROVIDER REPORTS:**

**Tri-County Care Management Organization (CMO):**

Deja Amos from Tri-County CMO reported the monthly census figures for the period spanning February to October. The County Census numbers exhibited a fluctuating trend over the months, starting at 455 Somerset County youth in February, reaching a peak of 486 in April, and gradually declining to 449 by October. Meanwhile, the Agency Total showed a similar pattern, commencing at 885 in February, peaking at 962 in May, and concluding at 924 in October. The percentages calculated in relation to the agency total remained relatively stable with Somerset County youth accounting for 51% of total enrollment, from February to June, then a slight dip to 49% in July and August, before returning to 50% in September.

CENSUS	<u>FEBRUARY</u>	<u>MARCH</u>	<u>APRIL</u>	<u>MAY</u>	<u>JUNE</u>	<u>JULY</u>	<u>AUGUST</u>	<u>SEPTEMBER</u>	<u>OCTOBER</u>
<b>County Census</b>	455	469	484	486	466	469	466	455	449
<b>Agency Total</b>	885	915	945	962	942	939	940	934	924
<b>Percentage</b>	51%	51%	51%	51%	49%	50%	50%	49%	49%

**Mobile Response Stabilization (MRSS):**

LaToya Zeller reported that in September, Mobile Response recorded a total of 142 dispatches, representing an increase from August. Out of these dispatches, 73 were from Somerset County. Notably, our most significant referral sources included DCP&P, schools, and parents, with the highest age ranges consistently falling within the 6 to 12 and 13 to 18 brackets.

Kristy Soriano asked about the reported increase in referrals for the zero to five population, specifically mentioning that in September alone, there were eight more referrals.

LaToya responded acknowledging the observed increase in referrals for the zero to five population in September. She expressed uncertainty about whether this rise could be attributed to the commencement of the school year, noting that even though the children are young, the underlying concept remains the same. LaToya then delved into potential contributing factors, mentioning the observation of younger children

engaging in activities such as karate classes. However, she also highlighted a concerning trend where these children, despite participating in karate, display behavioral issues such as physical aggression towards their parents. The situation involves a complex interplay of behavioral and emotional challenges, and LaToya expressed a desire to closely monitor if this trend persists, especially during the upcoming busy season.

In response to Kristy's inquiry about the age of the youngest child, LaToya provided the information that the youngest age recorded was 2 years old. However, she emphasized that such cases often lean more towards being associated with parenting issues rather than inherent behavioral health challenges in the child, unless the behavior is a direct result of a specific incident or circumstance. In addition, LaToya mentioned a notable influx in four-year-olds among the observed cases.

Kristy asked about the support measures in place for two-year-olds and four-year-olds, specifically in terms of safety planning and other interventions. LaToya explained that, depending on the specific area, they can implement various strategies. One approach involves incorporating Intensive In-Community (IIC) services, which include therapeutic sessions to delve into the root cause of issues within the home environment. She noted that frequently, the challenges stem from a frustrated parent in need of assistance. In such cases, the child and family team can address these concerns and offer support. Additionally, LaToya mentioned the possibility of connecting families to different parenting classes or groups within the community, indicating a holistic approach that extends beyond therapeutic interventions to include educational and communal support structures.

#### **Family Support Organization (FSO):**

Michelle Rousso shared that their organization currently serves 349 families, with 169 in need of support. Nearly half of these families, 48%, are from Somerset county. They are working on hiring bilingual Family Support Partners to better help diverse needs, though it's proven challenging due to the unique nature of the job, involving home visits and specific skills.

Michelle highlighted a successful event at the Agape Homeless Shelter, featuring sessions for parents and an 'Our Lives' activity. Collaborations with Agape and the Tri-County CMO are growing, with an upcoming event including a game board night and Halloween festivities.

Support group participation is on the rise, and Michelle is excited about upcoming holiday activities, including distributing meals and baskets. She expressed gratitude for everyone's involvement and support.

#### **CIACC REPORT:**

Kristy Soriano reported on her recent initiative, which she calls a "resource tour." She engaged with various schools, meeting with individuals from each to discuss the available resources. During these resource tours, Kristy reviews brochures from each provider on the Education Partnership team, addressing topics such as services, access, appropriate referrals, and obtains feedback regarding trends and barriers.

These efforts have resulted in numerous Education Partnership roadshow presentations. Recognizing the need to expand their outreach beyond frequent school visits, Kristy sought new avenues. Understanding the significance of libraries for families and youth, she reached out to the director of youth programming at the Somerset County Library System. Kristy is planning a resource tour with the director and is exploring opportunities for presentations, including potential training for library staff and monthly workshops for parents. She is scheduled to visit the library next week to further discuss these collaborations.

Antonietta Phelan reported on the Resource Fair held on October 6th in collaboration with Tri-County CMO, emphasizing the positive partnership for resources benefiting families and providers. Despite being on a Friday night, the event drew an impressive crowd, with 40 vendors showcasing their offerings. Feedback from participants echoed the sentiment that it was a wonderful and amazing event.

Antonietta highlighted the significance of networking with other agencies, emphasizing that such gatherings had been infrequent. Many providers expressed a keen interest in hosting similar events during the day to encourage broader participation. She explained that this event was held at the Somerset County Vocational High School gymnasium, where both the girls' and boys' soccer teams actively participated in the event by visiting tables and speaking with providers and vendors.

The presence of youth at the fair was particularly encouraging, providing them with an opportunity to be actively involved in the community. Antonietta expressed gratitude to all participants and extended thanks to Elaine for the collaboration at the vocational high school, expressing hope for future events.

**BARRIER/CHALLENGES** (*Open discussion*):

Linda Porcaro raised concerns about the absence of NJ4S representatives at both Youth Services Commission (YSC) and CIACC meetings. Linda also asked CIACC members for feedback in their experience in working with NJ4S.

Mike Frost responded, mentioning Zach Berliner's attendance at the recent DCF meeting on his behalf. He inquired if NJ4S was discussed, specifically with the Commissioner. Zach Berliner provided an update on the DCF meeting, stating that NJ4S was addressed. The Commissioner highlighted statewide staffing improvements, but challenges with school access were noted. Directors raised concerns about NJ4S's attendance at CIACC meetings. Zach clarified that, based on their contract, NJ4S is expected to attend, despite varied reported attendance.

Linda Porcaro discussed her involvement on the NJ4S Advisory Board but explained there has been limited progress beyond the initial presentation. She expressed concern regarding the application requirement for schools seeking NJ4S services and the lack of visible outcomes.

Kristen Shiro suggested better communication, noting an Advisory Board meeting conflict. She highlighted NJ4S's programs at Pioneer Family Success Center and emphasized communication challenges.

Marla Mathews reported NJ4S's active engagement with the FCIU, and Kristen Shiro mentioned their participation in community events. Kristy Soriano expressed concerns about NJ4S's outreach to Student Assistance Counselors (SACs). Lisa Federico agreed and noted the lack of awareness (about NJ4S) during the monthly SACs meetings.

LuAnn Dias expressed concerns about NJ4S's staffing pattern and suggested community feedback for clarity. Mike Frost highlighted a lack of focus and detail, emphasizing the need for alignment between concept and delivery.

Zach Berliner expressed concerns about equity in NJ4S services. Kristy Soriano again expressed concern regarding the SACs lack of awareness about NJ4S.

Linda Porcaro sought clarity on NJ4S's integration with existing programs, emphasizing the need for effective communication. Marla Mathews reported NJ4S's interest in learning about the FCIU for better collaboration in the referral process.

**RECOGNIZING GREATNESS & SUCCESS STORIES:**

Antonietta Phelan acknowledged the efforts of the Montgomery Youth Action Board, consisting of eight high school students and a teacher leader. Established last year with funding from the Municipal Youth Services Commission, these students are recognized for their exceptional compassion, caring nature, insightfulness, creativity, and a strong commitment to aiding and supporting their peers. Antonietta emphasized their active participation in the October 6th Resource Fair, where they hosted an engaging table with interactive activities.

She took a moment to express gratitude to the Somerset County Vocational High School for generously providing their gym for the resource fair event. Antonietta commended the school for their gracious hospitality, accommodation, and helpfulness in making the event possible. In conclusion, she extended her thanks to all the providers and vendors who attended the resource fair, recognizing the rapid filling of the 40 available spaces and expressing appreciation for their interest and participation, especially considering it was a Friday night.

### **NEW/OLD BUSINESS:**

Lashonda Dumas conveyed her gratitude to Kristy and others for allowing her to participate in the resource fair, describing it as a great event. During the fair, she focused on raising awareness about the critical need for foster and adoptive homes in Somerset County. While her agency primarily investigates abuse and neglect to ensure family safety, Lashonda highlighted the instances where children require out-of-home placement.

In her role, Lashonda collaborates with community providers to emphasize the necessity for foster and adoptive homes. She is actively seeking individuals willing to offer a safe and nurturing environment for children until reunification with their biological parents becomes possible. Lashonda is available for speaking engagements, providing information, and supporting outreach initiatives to raise awareness about the need for homes in Somerset County. Lashonda expressed her eagerness to work with everyone, attend future meetings, and address any inquiries regarding becoming a foster or adoptive parent. She shared her contact information for further communication and extended her gratitude for everyone's cooperation.

Danielle Lehtonen discussed the services provided at two locations under her supervision in New Brunswick and Marlboro. Although New Brunswick is outside Somerset County, it is accessible for Franklin Township residents. The New Brunswick site offers outpatient services for adolescents with substance use needs, accepting referrals from various sources. Services include outpatient treatment for adolescents as young as 12, with psychiatric Advanced Practice Nurses available for psychotropic medication.

Danielle emphasized that substance use challenges can impact adolescents, and their services extend beyond adults. The Marlboro location provides adolescent inpatient services, including withdrawal management and residential care with amenities such as pool services and parent visits. Danielle welcomed referrals and provided contact information for those interested. She expressed gratitude for the invitation from Kristy to share information about their adolescent services during the meeting.

Kristy Soriano inquired about payment options for outpatient services, and Danielle confirmed that they accept New Jersey FamilyCare, Medicaid, private insurance, and can access county funding, including Somerset County funding. As the unit director, Danielle expressed a commitment to finding ways for services to be covered, encouraging referrals, and assuring that they would accommodate adolescents in need.

Danielle acknowledged challenges faced during the past school year, including a late launch and disengagement over the summer. Despite efforts, she recognized the growing need for more services, especially for adolescents exhibiting high-risk behaviors. She mentioned the potential launch of an Adolescent Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) in response to increased demand, drawing on the success of a past IOP at their New Brunswick location.

Marla Mathews shared that their team is now fully staffed after several months of being down Crisis Intervention Specialists. The new additions to the team include a trilingual specialist proficient in Punjabi, Hindi, and English, and another bilingual specialist fluent in Spanish and English. With these additions, they now have a total of three bilingual specialists in Spanish, contributing to the team's language diversity and capability.

Lily Yip shared information about the SPARK study, the largest autism genetic research study, and her active participation in it. Lily and her family are involved in the study, regularly undergoing interviews as part of the process. She mentioned that an article about her experience will be featured in the study's newsletter, which she plans to share with the group.

**AGENCY UPDATES:** *N/A*

***The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.***

*The next CIACC meeting will take place on Tuesday, December 12, 2023, at 12:00 pm and will be held in person at 27 Warren St, Somerville NJ 08876 – Conference Room 1.*