

Kent County
Family & Children's
Coordinating Council



KCFCCC Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, February 7, 2023 1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.
Lake Michigan and Superior Rooms, Kent County Health Department
700 Fuller Ave NE – Grand Rapids, MI 49503

**Council Members/
Alternates Present:**

Candace Cowling, Eileen McNeil, Lynne Ferrell, Shaunte Paul-Oliver, Joas Occes, Mary Muliatt, Jason Loepp, Madelyn Hall, Maureen Kirkwood, Tracie Coffman, Bill Ward, Chris Becker, Judge Deborah McNabb, Jacob Maas, Tracey Fountain

Council Members Absent: Misti DeVries, Kristen Gietzen, Scott Smith, Michelle Van Dyke, Adam London, Kendrick Heinlein, Leadraine Roby, Ron Koehler

Council Partners/Guests: Tracey Silas

Kent County Staff: Brian Hartl, Christopher Eakin, Jennifer James

1. Welcome & Call to Order

Candace Cowling called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. Roundtable introductions were completed.

2. Approval of Agenda and Minutes of November 1, 2022

Lynne Ferrell made a motion to accept the November 1 meeting minutes, which was supported by Judge Deborah McNabb. Vote was unanimous.

3. Public Comment

There was none.

4. New Members

Candace Cowling welcomed new members:

- Joas Occes – Private Funding Representative
- Jason Loepp – Business Representative
- Tracie Coffman – Private Funding Representative
- Kendrick Heinlein – Area Agency on Aging Director

Additionally, Tracey Silas, Child Welfare Director from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services-Kent County, joined today's meeting. She is going through the appointment process with the Kent County Board of Commissioners to join the Full Council and will hopefully be approved by the April meeting.

5. Election of Executive Committee

Candace Cowling said that the Executive Committee is looking to add more members. The bylaws state that the committee is composed of seven to nine members. If anyone is interested in joining the committee, they should express interest to Chris Eakin. It was clarified that there are no qualifications needed to serve on the committee; however, only an appointed member can serve on the committee and the committee must have diverse representation from the various sectors represented on the Full Council.

6. Strategic Plan

Brian Hartl introduced and presented that draft strategic plan that the Executive Committee has been working on for several months now. He reviewed the process timeline and the strengths/weaknesses/opportunities assessment that was conducted by the Executive Committee. Using that information and information from the community listening sessions held in 2021, he assisted the Executive Committee in putting together this draft plan. Brian went through each of the three strategic initiatives, including tactics and key actions, in detail, asking for member feedback after each initiative was described.

Regarding strategic initiative #1 (Governance), discussion was held about creating a systems map that identifies organizations' missions and foci and how they relate to other organizations working in the realm of children and families. K-Connect has a systems map posted on its website but it is outdated; because the landscape is constantly changing, it is difficult to make these updates and how to visually represent it. It was suggested that a good first step might be to do a system map or some sort of matrix of the organizations represented on KCFCCC and then look to do a larger one later with the help of a contractor or intern.

Regarding strategic initiative #2 (Communication), discussion was held about broadening communication with elected officials other than just the County Board of Commissioners, such as other state or local officials. Jennifer James stated that the Board Liaison will be scheduling KCFCCC to present during a special order of business in the fall. She stated that she can provide updates on upcoming board activities at and in between these meetings.

Regarding strategic initiative #3 (Data), discussion was held about possible data sources. There is a variety of data sources in the community, and data collection is constantly evolving. Presentations by Datawise regarding the Community Data Trust and by the Michigan League of Public Policy regarding Kids' Count were suggested as possible ways to help learn more about what data exists. It was also suggested that perhaps this council would benefit from learning more about the organizations and services offered and then identify overlap or gaps before working on the data initiative.

Following this discussion, discussion was held about KCFCCC's interaction with elected officials and other governmental bodies and whether this council has a policy agenda. It was noted that because KCFCCC is appointed by the County Board of Commissioners and that creates a need for clarity on what this body can or cannot do. It was also noted that the plan will need to identify necessary resources to move the key actions forward.

Brian Hartl stated today's feedback will be brought to the next Executive Committee meeting to further develop the plan. Any additional comments on the plan after the meeting can be sent to Chris Eakin.

7. Agency Updates

Bill Ward: A few months ago, Network 180 experienced flooding at their administrative offices. They have since moved out and are temporarily operating out of Network 180's Fuller location. Board and committee meetings are being held at the Kent County Health Department. Their new training center will be opening in the spring, and they anticipate moving into 82 Ionia soon.

Jacob Maas: 2023 Going PRO Talent Funds were announced last week. \$47 million is being distributed to 750 employers, including 193 in West Michigan for a total of \$18.6 million. This funding can be used towards new hires, apprenticeships, and training. The fund helps support employees so that they can increase the individual's earning potential. It has been historically underfunded; a close eye is being kept on the governor's budget recommendations, which are due to be released soon.

Mary Mullett (D.A. Blodgett-St. John's): D.A. Blodgett-St. John's new building is currently under construction and is anticipated to open this spring. This building will consolidate all DABSJ locations to that site. Anyone is welcome to stop by to see the building.

Lynne Ferrell: Lynne suggested we consider offering a State of the Children to help people become familiar with the issues facing children in Kent County.

Tracey Fountain: Tracey asked members to encourage Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) beneficiaries to be patient with the financial assistance call center that went live recently. An interactive voice response system is being used to help route callers to the correct location. It appears that clients are frustrated with the new system, so there is an increased presence in the office. Tracey stated that if callers follow the prompts long enough, they will get to a live person who can help assist them. While clients still have caseworkers, these caseworkers are not the primary points of contact anymore when issues arise. Tracey provided an update that MDHHS is planning for the public health emergency (PHE) to be ended soon, which will trigger Medicaid redeterminations that had been on hold for the past few years. Additionally, the PHE also temporarily increased food assistance, which is expected to end March 1. These factors along with inflation seen in housing and food prices are pinching families and children. Tracey stated that she will pass along additional information on the termination of the PHE and its implications to Chris Eakin to distribute to the Full Council.

Tracey Silas: Tracey said that there is not much to report on child welfare at the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The department continues to examine the overrepresentation of minority child in care. Additionally, the department was back in court related to a lawsuit that began several years ago; there appear to have been positive outcomes from that hearing.

Jason Loepp: Jason reported that with the imminent end of the PHE, COVID vaccines will be covered as part of preventative care for subscribing Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan (BCBSM) members, and over-the-counter testing will also remain a covered benefit. He also reported that BCBSM signed a seven-year lease to remain in downtown Grand Rapids.

Eileen McNeil: Eileen said that she will send a list of resource organizations that are trying to be helpful to their communities to assist with implementing key actions.

Joas Occes: Joas stated that many immigrants continue to face issues with the immigration system. Additionally, the shortage of housing, especially affordable housing, has made it difficult for immigrants to find places to live. Learning to navigate these systems with a language barrier makes it very difficult for these families.

Maureen Kirkwood: Maureen noted that the State's Earned Income Tax Credit is now 30% and retroactive to 2022. This will help put money back in families' pockets. Anyone needing tax help can visit the Kent County Tax Credit Coalition.

Judge Deborah McNabb: Judge McNabb stated that delinquency filings are up 60% and child welfare filings are approaching pre-pandemic levels. She also remarked that the juvenile treatment and support court will be celebrating its second anniversary soon, and so far it has seen four graduations.

Jenny James: Jenny reported that there will be a lot coming before the County Board of Commissioners that will impact children and families. She will send updates to Chris Eakin to distribute to the full council.

8. **Miscellaneous-**

- **Future Agenda Items:** Candace Cowling asked that any ideas for suggested items for future agendas be sent to Chris Eakin to compile.

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned at 2:29 p.m. Next meeting is Tuesday, April 11, 2023, at 1:00 p.m.