

**Charlottesville/Albemarle Commission on Children and Families**  
**May 3, 2000—Minutes**

**Members Present**

Azzurra Cox

Robert Cox, City of Charlottesville Department of Social Services

Dr. Michael Dickens

Richard Merriwether, Vice-Chair

Dr. Susan McLeod, Thomas Jefferson Health District

Linda Peacock, City of Charlottesville

Kathy Ralston, Albemarle County Department of Social Services

Sterling Robinson, III

Martha Snell, University of Virginia

Roxanne White, County of Albemarle

**Others Present**

Saphira Baker, CCF

Terri Evans, CCF

Debbie Stone, CCF

Diana Embler-Vose, MSW Intern

**I. Welcome/Chair Remarks**

R. Merriwether, acting as Chair in James Peterson's absence, called the meeting to order at 5:10 PM. Members agreed to rearrange the agenda and discuss the *Stepping Stones* report first to accommodate the presenters.

**II. Release of *Stepping Stones***

Dr. Michael Dickens commented that members had received an abbreviated draft of *Stepping Stones* in their mailing, and distributed two drafts of the complete report. *Stepping Stones* is the culmination of a year of work, the majority of which was completed by Diana Embler-Vose, an MSW Intern for the City of Charlottesville Department of Social Services under Buz Cox. Sixty-four parameters were identified, placed into appropriate sub-categories, and tracked in ratios or percentages to allow for year-to-year comparisons. The report will go to press in June.

M. Dickens explained that, depending on the source of the data, statistical information on the selected parameters was available for up to nine years. He cited "birth to teens" as an indicator where data had been collected for several years, and where an observable trend could be determined. Teen birth rates have declined in the City and remained steady in the County. Because of the length of time this information has been collected, M. Dickens felt it would be appropriate to comment on this trend. However, no conclusions are drawn for indicators with less than five years of data. In addition to the data, the

report will include an introduction, acknowledgements, and explain the purpose of the publication and how the indicators in the report were selected for tracking. He stressed that when presenting this information to the public and the media, the Commission must emphasize the importance of not drawing conclusions based on the initial publication of this report.

S. McLeod suggested that CCF members with in-depth knowledge of data might want to annotate the report; for example, data collection techniques used to track STDs inflate Charlottesville's numbers. M. Dickens affirmed that there would be definitions of the parameters in the report that address such issues.

R. White remarked that she was impressed with M. Dickens introduction, and especially enjoyed his analogy of "vital signs." She noted that, in some cases, Albemarle County had data for 1998 but not 1999, and asked what agency administrators could do to assist with data collection. M. Dickens replied that he hopes agencies will realize the potential of Stepping Stones for their own reporting and funding purposes, and will get on board with data collection efforts. In fact, Dr. Castner reported that Albemarle County Schools have hired someone to collect education-specific data, and this individual would be able to assist with the collection of school data in the future. M. Dickens also noted that the definitions would help administrators identify staff members that may have access to data.

S. McLeod asked if the definitions could be shown beside the graphs or if there would be some type of numerical coding to link graphs with their definitions. M. Dickens explained that it was too late to make any dramatic changes to the report, and S. Baker commented that the graphics designer would assist with the layout of the graphs and their corresponding definitions.

R. Merriwether thanked Diana Embler-Vose for her work on the project. R. Merriwether reported that the Executive Committee had discussed the release of the report, and that S. Baker would provide details of the discussion. S. Baker communicated to CCF members that the Executive Committee agrees that it is inadvisable to draw conclusions on the data presented, but that it is necessary to put some "spin" on the information otherwise it will be left open for media interpretation. The Committee suggested pointing out noticeable trends when releasing this information to the media. Another suggestion is to have local scholars provide comments on the variables. R. White agreed that input from members of the academic community was a good idea, and suggested getting quotes Steve Nock from the Sociology Department at UVA.

M. Dickens commented that the information may produce a knee-jerk reaction from the media despite efforts to contain any negative backlash, and S. McLeod agreed that all media will not respond thoughtfully to the information in the report. M. Dickens suggested asking the Daily Progress to print a series of articles highlighting issues before *Stepping Stones* is released. M. Snell suggested that a paragraph detailing the implications of the variable beneath each graph might be helpful in suppressing a

negative media spin. M. Dickens responded that commenting on implications would effect the credibility of the report because of the limited amount of long-term data.

K. Ralston asked if there were any specific distribution plans for the publication, and if any thought had been given on how to present it to City Council and the Board of Supervisors. M. Dickens stated that a limited number of color copies would be available for City Council, the Board of Supervisors, and heads of agencies. Cheaper black-and-white copies would also be available. S. Baker suggested that *Stepping Stones* be presented to the Council and Board as a part of CCF's Annual Report. Possible dates for the report are July 3 and 17 for City Council, July 5 and 19 for the Board of Supervisors. The exact dates for the presentation would be confirmed in a few weeks. R. Merriwether asked whether the report would be released to the public after approval from the Board and Council. L. Peacock suggested that it be released at the same time as the presentations.

S. Baker and M. Dickens proposed that CCF formally thank Diana Embler-Vose for her work on the report, and that a letter of recommendation be drafted for her.

**III. Specification of Items to be added and adoption of the agenda**

There were no additions to the agenda for the evening.

**IV. Comments from the public**

There were no members of the public in attendance.

**V. Minutes from April 5, 2000**

Sterling Robinson and Martha Snell both indicated that they were not noted as being present for the April 5, 2000 meeting.

**S. ROBINSON MOVED TO ACCEPT THE MINUTES, WITH THE CORRECTIONS INDICATED, AS A RECORD OF THE APRIL 5, 2000 MEETING. R. COX SECONDED THE MOTION, AND THE MINUTES WERE UNANIMOUSLY APPROVED.**

**VI. Update**

S. Baker announced that a flyer describing the activities of the Outcome Funding work group would be distributed soon, and that the full outcome measurement report was expected in June. The consultants from Tactical Advantage are presenting an update on the outcome-funding pilot at the United Way board meeting on May 25, 2000; CCF members are invited to attend. She commented that the agencies involved in the pilot had a chance to provide input on the process, and appreciated the opportunity to communicate their views. Next steps for the work group include the rollout of a review process

incorporating outcome measurement and provide technical assistance and training to agencies.

S. Baker informed the Commission that on May 12, 2000, Leadership Charlottesville would be holding a networking event to kick-off the email listserv for local providers of services to children and families. The listserv presents an opportunity for providers to communicate with one another and share information on upcoming events, grant opportunities, and best practices.

K. Ralston asked if the listserv is only available for agencies, and if a filter was in place to monitor the content of the information sent. S. Baker responded that access to the list serve is available to anyone in the community. Terri Evans will act as the site's administrator and will have the ability to approve or deny requests to log on to the list serve, but there is no way to monitor content. K. Ralston expressed reservations about the service because of the potential for abuse by users. M. Snell commented that the list serve could be a useful communication tool, and suggested multiple assessments of users of the list serve to reduce the likelihood of abuse. CCF members also questioned Leadership Charlottesville's commitment to the list serve after it is established. S. Baker will share these concerns with Leadership Charlottesville, and staff will periodically evaluate the listserv to determine if it is being used effectively.

The survey for the information-sharing study is in the developmental stage, and will be mailed to agency staff on May 18, 2000. S. Baker asked CCF members to encourage their staff to fill out the survey. K. Ralston suggested alerting agencies about the survey before it is sent out. S. McLeod asked to review a copy of the survey before it is distributed, and commented that it is important to be aware that some line staff do not adhere to confidentiality policies. K. Ralston reminded CCF members that the survey is not designed to find out who is giving out information, but to determine if roadblocks due to interpretations of code hinder communication between agencies.

The City's Comprehensive Plan survey questions are in draft form. Preliminary results will be available in July and reported on at the July or August Commission meeting. S. Baker has been helping members of the Youth Council design a survey to be conducted at the Youth Summit/College Symposium in July. CCF staff has been attending neighborhood meetings associated with the City's Comprehensive Plan to document citizen concerns relating to children and families. The discussions focused mainly on issues of infrastructure, so others forums to get citizen input are being explored.

S. Baker noted that she is serving on a small task force to help the City schools develop options for pre-school education and that there is interest in closer collaboration with Charlottesville's Department of Social Services. She also noted that, in the future, Commission staff may need to look at how to allocate time on issues that are not the same for the City and the County, but that, so far the balance has been appropriate. S. Baker reported that the Office on Youth Workplan is due June 2, 2000. A draft of the plan will be presented to the Executive Committee for approval on behalf of CCF.

**VII. Report from the Nominating Committee for Officers**

Susan McLeod reported that the nominating committee has recommended that Richard Merriwether and Meredith Gunter serve as Chair and Vice-Chair, respectively. James Peterson and Robert Cox were recommended to serve as Executive Committee Members-at-Large.

The floor was opened for other recommendations and none were presented.

**K. RALSTON MOVED TO CLOSE THE FLOOR FOR NOMINATIONS, SECONDED BY S. ROBINSON.**

R. Merriwether asked if a new Private Provider Representative had been appointed to serve on the Commission. S. Baker reported that Ruth Stone, Director of Piedmont CASA, had been appointed by the Albemarle County Board of Supervisors to fill the slot.

**VIII. CSA Committee Update**

R. Cox reported that Charlottesville has served 248 children to date and is currently operating within budget, which includes supplemental CSA funds. Albemarle County has served 222 children to date and has also been approved to receive supplemental funds. A decrease in the availability of IV-E funding has been noted. IV-E income eligibility guidelines have not changed to reflect a rise in the cost of living and other increases; therefore, families currently earning slightly higher incomes because of these increases may no longer qualify to receive these funds.

Diana Embler-Vose, MSW intern, has completed an analysis of Charlottesville CSA data. The analysis indicated that children coming into the CSA system for the first time are costing more initially and that the majority of children recently placed into foster are not long-term City residents. The number of children requiring services costing more than \$75,000 annually has more than tripled, but improvement was noted for approximately one-third of CSA cases from 1998-1999. R. Merriwether asked if there was any indication of the previous localities that the children in foster care were coming from. R. Cox replied that Social Services personnel is unsure of this, but suspect that some families relocated to Charlottesville in search of subsidized housing, employment, or services.

M. Snell asked if the State allots more CSA funding to urban areas since they are magnets for people with need. R. Cox stated that CSA funds are based on the number of children that are legally required to be served. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism in place to address the funding issues of urban areas, but the General Assembly has changed its allocation formula. This change was supposed to provide administrative relief, but the State may have overestimated the costs of services that could be paid for under Medicaid and underestimated CSA funding; thus, the overall situation has not changed significantly.

The Children Needing Extensive Services work group is nearing completion of their study and the report should be available soon. Debbie Stone and Diana Embler-Vose have done a lot of research, and the emergent trends are indicative enough for the work group to begin planning next steps.

**IX. Members' Comments**

There were no comments from the members in attendance.

**S. MCLEOD MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING, SECONDED BY MARTHA SNELL. THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED AT 6:38 PM.**