



Washington State Department of **CHILDREN, YOUTH & FAMILIES**

Parent Advisory Group (PAG)

Meeting Minutes

April 9, 2024 – 4:30p.m.- 5:30p.m.

Special Meeting

Family Voluntary Services (FVS) Brochure

CFWS Program Manager Michelle Hetzel walked PAG members through the suggested edits of the FVS brochure. Members provided feedback on the brochure and on their experiences with FVS.

- **FVS Brochure (current)**
- **FVS Brochure (with suggested edits)**

Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there a direct email someone can reach out to? Sometimes email is easier for people.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ That is helpful feedback. I was thinking we could model it after the Child Protective Services (CPS) brochure. Maybe we do caseworker phone number and email. We can also include the email for Constituent Relations (const.relations@dcyf.wa.gov).○ Is there a place on the DCYF webpage where a person with a child involved with CPS could find their caseworker online?<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ You can find the local office assigned to your zip code and get an office phone number. Then the office could tell you who is assigned. Maybe there is something we can add for who to contact if you don't know who the caseworker is. I hear this frustration from other parents a lot.<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sometimes it's just easier to gather your thoughts and say things in an email too• Parent/Guardian/Caregiver - anything like that.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I think adding in caregiver may cause confusion for foster caregivers, who I don't believe are eligible for this.<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ That is correct. This is not for foster care. I will clarify guardian vs caretaker.• Do you have feedback on if we should add 'and youth'?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I think children encompasses it for me since they are children until 18.○ It should say child/ren• We have gotten some feedback that the language is threatening.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ I think part of the problem is that parents choose to participate. If you say you don't want to participate anymore
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then you are being assessed and that doesn't feel voluntary. Why are you automatically put on an assessment when the services were supposed to be voluntary in the first place? I was told I had to do the voluntary services and that was really frustrating having someone who doesn't have kids coming in to my house. Maybe I only needed FVS for the first 28 days or 2 weeks and felt like it wasn't working for me.

- If I get voluntary services I feel like I am going to get help and feel valued, and now I am being faced with something that is being used against me.
- When I read this it sounded like a threat and did not sound voluntary to me. There needs to be different wording. Voluntary means if you choose not to participate that is fine. I have had people make calls on me because they are spiteful about my children playing and I shouldn't have to participate in services because people are making false calls.
- I used voluntary services as a lesser of two evils situation. I think it is deceiving to call it Family Voluntary Services. I would recommend changing the name of the program to reflect what it truly is, instead of trying to wordsmith the description. The name is very deceiving.
- I do think you all are picking up on something very important. We do have to do an assessment when we engage in FVS, and I do want families to know that there is a risk or need for the agency to stay involved with a family when there is a safety issue.
 - I think being transparent is the biggest thing. When this happened to me, I didn't know why it was happening and found out that asking for a basket of food offered at my child's school triggered a CPS call. No one told me it could turn into a CPS case.
 - Perhaps better wording might be something like, "regardless of whether you choose to accept or decline FVS, or decide to continue or stop using FVS at any point, DCYF will continually



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re-evaluate safety and risks and decide whether to close the case or file a dependency petition."

- There's so much stigma with CPS even though it is supposed to help families. I wish the stigma wasn't there, but there is stigma for a reason.
- I think you should share that DCYF are mandatory reporters on the brochure. When a social worker comes in and says the house is too messy, I understand it is a preventative measure, however there are a lot of systemic issues. DCYF has some high standards sometimes that are hard for families to meet. How do you fix things on the systemic issue, so they really are voluntary services?
- The reality is that more of us have been lied to and deceived and treated poorly than not. We want kids protected of course and obviously if kids aren't safe, action to protect them is needed. But we are distrustful for a reason and having to constantly prove we are decent parents who are trying is harmful.
- Yes, adding specific examples of services is really helpful because it can help parents think of things.
 - Yes, it helps to know what can be helped. A list of concrete goods.
 - I like that idea, maybe we could add a QR code or something on our webpage so families can get more information.
- When you list parenting classes could you list acceptable parenting classes? When I worked with CPS they paid to send us to Love and Logic and then would mark me down for using Love and Logic teachings. Consistency across the board and naming it.
 - We have things that talk about what your rights are as a parent, and maybe we can link or have QR codes for more information.
 - Love and logic is the number one parent class provided through the FRC in pierce county.
 - They had me do lots of classes and therapies and they are all different from each other and it was never enough.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is not consistency in caseworkers seeing children once a month.• Reporting up the chain of command doesn't always work, because I kept going up the chain of command and they just kept talking about me and not what was done wrong by the caseworker.• I think personal safety is fine and I think you need to make sure both parties are interviewed out of earshot and view of other person if domestic violence (DV) is suspected.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ My case was due to domestic violence. It was the only reason we entered FVS and ended up on the CPS side. I think there needs to be extras like having caseworkers truly understand DV and the harms that can come of it. Going back to basics, when we were in the system we were never provided any type of services to help with d DV. If we are going to provide services for the family and what they need and touch on personal safety, then those need to go hand in hand in truly providing what the family needs and understanding families facing DV.• Is it possible to implement having a peer go and work with voluntary services that will help ease the mind of someone coming in? Someone that can be there as a peer?<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ That is an amazing thing, the caseworkers are supposed to be trained to give out contacts on parent allies and support groups.○ DCYF is a state government agency and CPS receives federal funding which comes with requirements. One of those things is engaging folks with lived experience. There was a pilot on that type of model, but it needs to be worked on.
Follow up	Please reach out to Michelle.Hetzel@dcyf.wa.gov for more feedback on the FVS brochure.