

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Program Professional Standards Committee

Meeting Minutes

May 8, 2024, 10:00 a.m. –11:30 a.m.

Tuckahoe – Henrico County Public Library

1901 Starling Drive

Henrico, Virginia 23229

Members Present:

Judy Castele, Executive Director, Project Horizon

Timika Cousins, Executive Director, The Faces Behind a Purpose for You

Shel Douglas, Director, Fauquier County Social Services¹

Leah Kipley, Assistant Director, National Safe Haven Alliance

Tamy Mann, Director, Giles County Victim/Witness Assistance Program

Markella Maschas, FVPSA Contract Administrator, Office of Family Violence, DSS

Teresa McKensie, Assistant Director, Radford/Floyd Victim/Witness Assistance Program

Heather Sellers, Director, Bedford County Victim/Witness Assistance Program²

Kristina Vadas, Manager of Victims Services, DCJS

Members Absent:

Angela Blount, Associate Director, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

Cori Davis, Program Director, Bedford Domestic Violence Services

Elvira De la Cruz, Chief Executive Officer, Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center

Leonard Hall, Jr, Director, Millstone International Logistics

Faith Power, Executive Director, The Laurel Center

Professional Standards Team Members Present:

Amber Stanwix, Professional Standards Operations Coordinator, DCJS

Andrea Sutton, Professional Standards Compliance Coordinator, DCJS

DJCS Staff Present:

Andi Martin, Sexual Assault and Intimate Partner Violence Program Coordinator

¹ Shel Douglas arrived at the meeting at 10:18 a.m.

² Heather Sellers arrived at the meeting at 10:22 a.m.

Members of the Public Present:

Tabeeba Abdul-Rahman, Director of Shelter Services, Hanover Safe Place
Jessica Bell, Director of Counseling and Advocacy, Hanover Safe Place
Stacie Francis, Director of Development and Communications, Hanover Safe Place
Sheree Hedrick, Executive Director, Hanover Safe Place
Shirnell Lewis, Director of Community Engagement, Hanover Safe Place
Mary Ottinot, Statewide Policy Advocate

Welcome & Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. A quorum was not present. As a result, the Chairperson conducted introductions and then directed the Professional Standards Team to begin with a review of the Guidelines for Processes and Procedures, as that did not require a vote.

Review of Guidelines for Processes and Procedures

The Professional Standards Team gave a brief overview of the new Guidelines for Processes and Procedures document. In particular, the Team focused on changes that will be made to the accreditation process. These include new time limitations, a clarification regarding withdrawals of applications, and a new requirement for a yearly verification form. Both the Team and Kristina Vadas emphasized that the reason for the changes was to establish defined parameters for the application process to be fair and consistent with all applicants.

Election of Committee Chair and Vice-Chair

At this point, a quorum was present. As a result, the Committee was able to address matters that did require a vote. They began with an election for the Committee Chair and Vice-Chair. Amber Stanwix explained that, under the Committee by-laws, the Chair and Vice-Chair must be elected annually and that they must be voting members and leadership staff of local sexual and domestic violence programs. In addition, such officers may serve two terms at one year per term. Thus, both the current Chair, Judy Castele, and Vice-Chair, Elvira De la Cruz, would be eligible to be nominated for their positions.

After this explanation, Tamy Mann nominated Judy Castele for Committee Chair. This nomination was seconded by Shel Douglas. Ms. Castele was then unanimously elected to the Committee Chair position. Next, Kristina Vadas nominated Shel Douglas for Committee Vice-Chair. This nomination was seconded by Tamy Mann. After a vote, Ms. Douglas was unanimously elected to the position of Committee Vice-Chair.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the February 14th Committee meeting were reviewed by the members. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Shel Douglas, and Tamy Mann seconded the motion. After a vote, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Review of Agency for Accreditation

After a presentation by the Professional Standards Team demonstrating that Hanover Safe Place met all the Professional Standards, Shel Douglas made a motion to approve the accreditation status recommendation, and Heather Sellers seconded the motion. The Professional Standards Committee voted 7-0 to grant full accreditation status to Hanover Safe Place as a dual sexual and domestic violence agency.

After the vote, the Executive Director of Hanover Safe Place spoke briefly about the accreditation process. She felt that the process can serve to elevate programs; and she expressed how supportive and informative Andrea Sutton was during the agency's site visit.

Review of Legislative Changes to Virtual Meetings

Amber Stanwix gave a brief presentation on legislative changes made regarding virtual meetings. She explained that these changes were largely technical and would enhance access for those with disabilities and those who are caregivers of people with disabilities. Ms. Stanwix informed the group that she is awaiting updated guidance from the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council. Once that has been published, she explained that she will update the electronic meetings policy and provide it to the Committee for their approval. A member of the group inquired whether this would impact the current schedule of the Committee. Ms. Stanwix confirmed that it would not.

Review of Revocation Language

Andrea Sutton presented an overview of the new language in the Professional Standards Manual regarding revocation of full accreditation status. She explained the process for revocation and explained that this process would only be used in cases of serious violations. A Committee member asked if the Team has received any complaints about any agencies. Ms. Sutton responded that the Team has not. There was some further discussion as to how the Team would be notified of complaints. Kristina Vadas explained that there is no formal complaint process at DCJS, but that it was anticipated the revocation process would only be used for agencies that had well-known issues. Another Committee member pointed out that revocation is a useful tool to help maintain a threshold of compliance with the Professional Standards.

Tamy Mann then made a motion to accept the language as presented. Shel Douglas seconded the motion; and it passed unanimously.

Final Approval of Professional Standards Manual

Amber Stanwix explained that, with the approval of the revocation language, all the individual pieces of the revised Professional Standards Manual have been approved. The Committee could now approve the Manual as a whole. The Committee Chair then opened the floor for discussion on this topic.

A Committee member began the discussion by reiterating concerns regarding counseling services offered by agencies. Under the revised Standard #13, agencies will be required to provide “supportive counseling” services, which are defined as, “a one-to-one interaction between an advocate and a survivor for the purpose of benefiting the survivor. Examples of supportive counseling include emotional support, education on dynamics of sexual and/or domestic violence, problem solving, and discussing options.” The Committee member felt that this would not be sufficient for many clients, and that every agency should be offering counseling by licensed counselors. In addition, she expressed concerns regarding a potential lack of reimbursement from the Virginia Victims Fund for counseling services offered by those without a license.

This sparked a lengthy discussion about the responsibility of agencies to refer out to licensed counselors as required under Standard #14, funding issues surrounding the hiring of licensed counselors, and the services that are within the purview of sexual and domestic violence agencies. There was also an emphasis on the difference between counseling and advocacy. Finally, several members expressed concerns that, if the Standards required agencies to provide licensed counselors, many agencies would not be able to qualify for accreditation.

Andrea Sutton added that, when she is conducting site visits, she regularly asks about this topic and inquires about the processes for referral to mental health services. She also pointed out that Standard #14 has been revised to require agencies to regularly update their referral resources. She informed the group that she feels confident agencies understand the difference between supportive counseling and therapeutic counseling and can recognize when referrals must be made.

Shel Douglas then made a motion to accept the Professional Standards Manual as presented. Tamy Mann seconded the motion. After a vote, the Manual was unanimously accepted.

Selection of Next Meeting Date

The Committee then discussed the date of the next meeting. Amber Stanwix informed the Committee that the Professional Standards Team will be offering information sessions on July 10th and July 17th to explain the revised Professional Standards Manual and the new Guidelines for Processes and Procedures. She suggested August 7th as a potential meeting date. The Committee accepted this recommendation. This meeting will be held at the Tuckahoe branch of the Henrico County Public Library.

Public Comment

Mary Ottinot briefly addressed the Committee.

Closing Remarks

The meeting adjourned at 11:28 a.m.

Future Meeting

- August 7, 2024, 10:00a.m. to 3:00p.m., Tuckahoe – Henrico County Public Library