**Council on the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren**

**March 25, 2014**

Minutes

**Members Present:**

Stacy Mills, Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs

Merieta Hathorne, Grandparent citizen committed to raising grandchildren

Toni Buxton, Department of Children and Family Services

Mary Norris, Department of Health and Hospitals

Dot Thibodeaux, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Winona LeJeune, Grandparent citizen committed to raising grandchildren

Amanda Brunson, Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana

**Others Present:**

Elizabeth Anthon, Department of Children and Family Services

Delores Dyer, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Alexandra Hazlaris, LA CASA

**Members Not Present:**

Representative Regina Barrow, Louisiana House of Representatives

Donna Bowie, Office of Juvenile Justice

Senator Sharon Broome, Louisiana Senate

Judge William Dupont, Louisiana Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

Judy Harrison, LA Children’s Trust Fund

David Helveston, Louisiana Workforce Commission

Mary Joseph, Children’s Defense Fund

Monte Mollere, Louisiana Bar Association

Anthony Recasner, Agenda for Children

Linda Ruffin, Department of Education

Christie Smith, Children’s Cabinet

Carmen Weisner, National Association of Social Workers

John Wyble, LA CASA

Rose Noel, Grandparent Committed to raising grandchildren

Danna Spayde, Grandparent Committed to raising grandchildren

Participants were present in the meeting room at the Louisiana Municipal Building, 700 N. 10th Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802.

A quorum was not present, so minutes from August 28, 2013 and November 20, 2013 were not able to be approved.

Toni Buxton led discussion on the agenda items, including the legislated purpose of the council. Everyone feels that the council should be moving forward because it can play an important role in the community, but the lack of participation by members is a hindrance to the purpose. Letters were sent to each organization reminding of the legislated role in the council with the option to reassign a designee to participate, if needed. DCFS has received some responses from the organizations and contact will be made with those organizations that have not yet responded. Verification will also be made to ensure that the Louisiana Maternal and Child Health Coalition has been removed. Christie Smith is only able to represent the Children’s Cabinet, so another representative must be named for the Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board.

Copies of the January 2014 Annual Report were provided to members present. Statistics regarding grandparents raising grandchildren in Louisiana have been compiled for a “fact sheet”. The statistics will be used to increase awareness in the community. DCFS’ communications department can design the “fact sheet”.

In order to possibly increase attendance at meetings, the council would like for a teleconference line to be established at all meetings so grandparents from around the state can participate by phone. There is also an opening on the council for the 5th grandparent seat.

Amanda Brunson provided a sample card to join the mailing list, with the suggestion that it be added to the website and email. It was also suggested that a list of support groups around the state be added to the website.

Discussion then centered on the addition of a social media presence for the council, including Facebook and Twitter. The sites could be used to inform the public of important issues related to grandparents raising grandchildren. DCFS will discuss the option of having a Facebook page and Twitter account with the communications department.

The next meeting was rescheduled from April 24, 2014 to May 9, 2014 to coincide with the annual grandparents conference. The meeting will be held at 10:00 a.m. at the Holiday Inn South on Airline Hwy in Baton Rouge. The next quarter’s meeting will be held on August 12, 2014 at the Louisiana Municipal Building. A date for the November meeting has not been determined.

Suggestions made to increase participation in meetings include:

* Meeting more frequently
* Possibly combining meetings with the Children’s Cabinet Advisory Board
* Have workgroups conduct CSGRG work and business
* Have discussions with Suzy Sonnier, DCFS Secretary, Representative Barrow, and Senator Broome
* Provide a list of items needing votes if a quorum was present, and encourage members to attend
* Inform members that the council cannot move forward with the strategic plan if full participation is not obtained
* Survey members to determine barriers to participation
* Possibly have a written ballot for voting
* Schedule meeting earlier in each quarter so there is the opportunity to reschedule if a quorum cannot be achieved

Council members discussed the lack of communication between government agencies and suggested that “grandparent friendly” staff be trained for each agency. Suggested that one or two staff be dedicated to grandparents. Most staff do not know about kinship care or support groups, and feel that these services should be automatically offered to grandparents. It was suggested that posters and pamphlets be put in local offices to inform grandparents of resources available to them.

Senator Broome and Representative Barrow could possibly request local businesses to partner with the council to increase funding.

Meeting was adjourned.