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

**May 9, 2014**

Minutes

**Members Present:**

Toni Buxton, Department of Children and Family Services

Stacy Mills, Governor’s Office of Elderly Affairs

Donna Bowie, Office of Juvenile Justice

Judy Harrison, LA Children’s Trust Fund

Amy Zapata, Department of Health and Hospitals

Danna Spayde, Grandparent Committed to raising grandchildren

Rose Noel, Grandparent Committed to raising grandchildren

Dot Thibodeaux, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Merieta Hathorne, Grandparent citizen committed to raising grandchildren

**Others Present:**

Elizabeth Anthon, Department of Children and Family Services

Crystal Culbreath, Grandparent

Faye Ferdinand, Grandparent

Karen S\_\_\_\_, LSU Ag Center

Diane Johnson, St. Vincent de Paul

Alma Typor, Grandparent

Juany Howard, Social Worker

Rose Paul, Grandparent

Amanda Swanner, Senator Vitter’s office

Gerrie Baker Allen, GRG Board

**Members Not Present:**

Representative Regina Barrow, Louisiana House of Representatives

Senator Sharon Broome, Louisiana Senate

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

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

Winona LeJeune, Grandparent citizen committed to raising grandchildren

Amanda Brunson, Prevent Child Abuse Louisiana

Participants were present in the meeting room at the Holiday Inn South, 9940 Airline Hwy, Baton Rouge, LA 70816. The meeting was held in conjunction with the Grandparents Conference.

A quorum was not present, so minutes from August 28, 2013, November 20, 2013, and March 25, 2014 were not able to be approved.

Toni Buxton led discussion on the background on the Council of the Status of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, including its purpose and how the council has evolved. It was reported that the council has had difficulty in obtaining a quorum during most meetings, but members see the benefit of their work. Grandparents present were advised of their ability to participate in the meetings and invitations to future meetings will be sent to those present today. The council’s email was provided to those present (DCFS.GRGCouncil.DCFS@la.gov). Council members present introduced themselves to the guests.

Judy Harrison of the Children’s Trust Fund discussed the “Fact Sheet” that was developed.

Discussion then centered on the questions of the guests who were present including:

* Details about frequency of meetings, where meetings are held
* Issues with signing IEPs for grandchildren, if they only have notarized custody
* Grandparents report that it is expensive to get custody of their grandchildren, so most are just caring for them unofficially. They expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that they are not guaranteed to get custody of their grandchildren even if they do pay the money.
* Many of their grandchildren have special needs and the costs of addressing those needs are expensive
* Several reported that they would not qualify for Kinship Care through DCFS because they have too much income, but not enough income to support themselves and their grandchildren. Several grandparents also reported that staff do not know how to talk to people and are frequently disrespectful. They feel that agencies need to be responsive to individual needs of families and children.
* Grandparents reported they a have difficulty with legal issues. They would like for someone to address this in the legislature.
* Some expressed frustration because they do not have a biological relation to the children and they were removed from her care. It is too expensive to fight the system. Policies of other states put relationships over biological ties to the children. Louisiana does recognize fictive kin for placement of children in foster care. Fictive kin relationships supersede some relationships, but not all.
* Grandparents stated they want the judicial system to appreciate the unique struggles of grandparents raising grandchildren. It was proposed to invite a representative of the Court Improvement Program to a future meeting.

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.

Meeting was adjourned.