



## **Division of Specialized Care for Children**

### **Family Advisory Council**

#### **Open Meeting**

**August 7, 2025, 9:00 AM**

#### **Attendees**

**FAC Members:** Jasmine Deida, Robert Liab, Kelly Whistler, Chelsie Hacker, Gail Koshgarian, Byran Fager, Jaclyn Vasquez, Yesenia Aiken, Aurea Garvin, Aida Estrella, Krystal Meyers, Dena Chapman, Kassandra Santos, Theresia Davis, Areli Flores, Joyce Clay

**FAC Workgroup:** Stephanie Leach, Haley Phelps, Adell Scott, Erica Stearns

**DSCC Team Members:** Tom Jerkovitz, Molly Hofmann, Lisa Washington, Ruann Barack, Terri-Lynn Jones-Wood, Ebonie Zielinski, Jaleesha Allen

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#### **Welcome**

The University of Illinois Chicago's Division of Specialized Care for Children (DSCC) held its [Family Advisory Council](#) (FAC) Closed Meeting, beginning with a warm welcome and introductions led by *Erica Stearns*, DSCC Home Care Family Outreach Associate and Co-Chair of the FAC, and *Jaclyn Vasquez*, Co-Chair of the Family Advisory Council. Jaclyn reminded everyone that this is a closed FAC meeting under DSCC, Illinois' Title V organization for children and youth with special healthcare needs. Accessibility guidance was given, with emphasis on choosing English or Spanish channels for interpretation. Erica added light humor while ensuring all members had proper access to interpretation functions before moving forward.

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## Member Introductions

To begin the meeting, all current and new FAC members took time to introduce themselves. Each member shared their connection to DSCC, a bit about their caregiving journey and family, and what motivates them to be part of the Family Advisory Council. In addition to these meaningful insights, members also shared a recent joy or celebration from the past year, offering a heartfelt glimpse into their lives and the moments that have brought them happiness. This intentional time for connection helped strengthen relationships and reaffirm our shared commitment to supporting families of children and youth with special healthcare needs.

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## Communications Team Updates

***Erica Stearns***, DSCC Home Care Family Outreach Associate and Co-Chair of the FAC, on behalf of Violet, Claire, and Amanda, reported that DSCC would be running a sensory room at the Illinois State Fair from August 7–10. She also highlighted the Family Institute for Parents of Preschool Children Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, noting that videos from the program are available online. In addition, she announced the upcoming Illinois Statewide Transition Conference, scheduled for October 30–31 in Springfield, where DSCC will cover costs for eligible families and encouraged members to contact Claire for support. Finally, Amanda requested volunteers for the FAC Spotlight in the DSCC Annual Report, and Dena volunteered to be featured.

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## Youth Advisory Council (YAC) & Subcommittee Updates

***Erica Stearns*** shared that Claire Cook continues to lead the [Youth Advisory Council](#), developing resources for transition-age youth. The [Caregiver Toolbox](#) Subcommittee is producing family-friendly tools, with drafts to be shared for FAC feedback.

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## LRA/CNA Updates

**Stephanie Leach**, Associate Director of Systems of Care, presented updates, noting that during COVID, legally responsible adults (LRAs) who were licensed nurses could be paid as caregivers, and this policy has now been made permanent. It was explained that legislation was passed to include CNA service for LRA and that HFS has worked on this, and it is currently under federal CMS review. **Molly Hofmann**, DSCC Director of Care Coordination, Systems Development, and Education, shared that legislation passed in 2025 creating a new role, the Certified Family Health Aide, which will formally recognize parental caregiving skills, though implementation will take several years.

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## Quality Update

**Ruann Barack**, DSCC Associate Director of Quality Improvement and Education, shared an overview of DSCC's education and training program for care coordinators. She explained that her team's focus is to support staff with consistent onboarding, orientation, and ongoing professional development that enhances the quality of services families receive. The program begins with a structured onboarding series, where new staff learn about DSCC's mission, systems, and resources, alongside family stories that ground the training in lived experience. Additional courses cover key skills such as connecting with families, listening, conducting assessments, proactive appointment planning, and transition to adult care. Ongoing education includes instructor-led sessions, self-paced modules, and annual competency training to ensure staff remain prepared and aligned with DSCC's standards.

**Ruann** highlighted the importance of family input in shaping this curriculum. She shared that DSCC has incorporated family-led trainings, panel discussions, and real caregiver perspectives to make education more relevant and meaningful. Training topics in the current fiscal year include documentation practices, motivational interviewing, youth mental health first aid, and navigating difficult conversations—all reinforced by the "Mission Possible" initiative, which emphasizes communication, person-centered planning, and re-education

around family engagement. Staff also have access to tools like the Care Coordination Toolbox, Learning Hub, and discussion forums to support collaboration and resource-sharing across offices.

Family Advisory Council members affirmed the value of keeping family voices central to training and quality improvement. **Jaclyn**, FAC co-chair, noted that hearing real family experiences is often more impactful than reviewing data alone, while **Krystle**, FAC member, emphasized that families are the “true experts” who should guide systemic change. Members encouraged DSCC to strengthen training in areas such as trauma-informed practices, home visiting approaches, and resource identification to support deeper partnerships with families. **Ruann** thanked the group for their feedback and reaffirmed her team’s commitment to ensuring family perspectives remain at the heart of DSCC’s education and quality initiatives.

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## Discussion

During the open discussion portion, members reflected on the importance of the meeting and the stories that had been shared. **Robert**, FAC member, spoke first, saying how uplifting it was to listen to the personal journeys of other FAC members. He noted that although many families face ongoing challenges and hardships, the focus on resilience, victories, and progress was powerful and motivating. He described the session as a reminder that “we are stronger together,” and expressed gratitude for the supportive atmosphere the FAC provides.

**Yesenia**, and **Crystal**, FAC Members, both emphasized the importance of taking what is learned and shared within the FAC and extending it outward to broader communities. Yesenia explained that advocacy is most impactful when families not only support each other inside the council but also bring resources, strategies, and hope to families who may not yet have access to the same networks. Crystal agreed, highlighting that the FAC is uniquely positioned to influence both policy and peer-to-peer connections, making it critical to share knowledge across systems and organizations.

*Erica* closed the discussion by reminding members that the FAC is truly the “family’s table,” a dedicated space where caregiver and family voices guide DSCC’s work. She stressed that the perspectives and experiences members share are not only valued but essential in shaping systemic improvements. The discussion ended on a note of gratitude and empowerment, with members voicing excitement to continue the work of supporting one another and advocating for change.

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## Closing

The meeting closed with gratitude expressed by both family members and DSCC staff. *Molly Hofmann* emphasized that FAC truly represents families’ voices and that DSCC leadership takes member feedback seriously. Members were encouraged to stay connected, share resources, and consider attending the Transition Conference. The session ended on an uplifting and collaborative note, affirming the FAC as a supportive and action-oriented community committed to moving forward together.

The Next **OPEN** FAC meeting is scheduled for **November 6, 2025**.