

MRS Conference Call Notes  
May 2009

Counties Participating 5/13: Due to a snafu with the phone connection this call was terminated and all counties decided to call back on the 14<sup>th</sup> or 26<sup>th</sup>.

Counties Participating 5/14: Alamance, Alleghany, Buncombe, Catawba, Duplin, Durham, Gaston, Halifax, McDowell, New Hanover, Northampton, Rockingham, Swain, Wake, Washington, Watauga, Wilkes.

Counties Participating 5/26: Anson, Avery, Bladen, Brunswick, Caldwell, Caswell, Catawba, Cherokee, Davie, Gaston, Gates, Graham, Guilford, Halifax, Harnett, Hoke, Macon, Moore, Nash, Person, Pitt, Stanley, Transylvania, Union, Washington, Wilson, Yadkin.

#### Announcements from Raleigh

A discussion of how best to combine CFTs and PPATs.

How are counties using the foster care record?

Are you using the 1797, inter county agreement on the placement of children?

#### News from Raleigh

##### Letters

- Change to the 5106 – this was not a letter but was a terminal message that went over the list-serve. The numeric risk score fields were removed in anticipation of the new risk assessment and re-assessment tools. The tools are not out yet, but we went ahead and eliminated those fields from the MRS database.
- Change with the 5027 – if you have an unknown SSN you need to put in all zeros instead of all 9's.
- New Opportunity attached to the conference calls. We are going to add to the conference calls. Once the call that Holly facilitates is complete then Tom Smith and/or Susan Sanderson will be available to answer questions around IV-E issues. They will ask that you send your questions in advance (if possible) so that they can research them if necessary. This will probably start in June but we will send out more information on the mrs listserve.

#### Combining CFTs and PPATs

Opened it up to discussion about what folks are doing.

#### Discussion from 5/14:

- Wake - For the 30 day PPAT using their meeting at the court so that they don't have to have so many meetings. They have the subsequent ones facilitated. For the CFTs the workers just schedule those as needed. They are separate meetings – thought about combining them and when they can naturally be combined they do that, but doesn't happen that often.
- Durham - 60 and 90 PPAT are usually facilitated by the program manager and they have been able to be combined with CFTs. So far they have not had any families (to her knowledge) that are not comfortable with the GAL.
- *Holly wanted to remind people not to assume that families are ok with the GAL and others being at the meeting. The family will likely not speak up and say if they are not comfortable unless they are asked directly because they see us as an authority figure and may not feel comfortable questioning people that DSS says have to be there.*

- Gaston – has trouble trying to combine them. PPATs are scheduled for specific times and have time constraints, and CFTs do not. Routinely it is hard to combine.
- Holly's question is: *Many counties schedule PPATs on specific days and hold many of them – does this have to happen?*
- Some counties said it probably could be changed, but it has been this way for a long time and it is easier for people to know when they are. If not at standard times, may be hard to fit in with the GAL's schedule. Holly believes this is an education issue - some county partners will see the need to meet on the families schedule and will be flexible and others will not be as much so.
- Other counties have issues with not having a set time is the community partners because those folks have a busy schedule and they can't meet at just any time. Many families do not attend, probably some can't and some don't want to.
- How much leeway do you have to schedule the PPAT? They are set by the feds 30/60/90 but can you meet a week early, a week late, etc.? *Holly didn't think she could speak for the feds on that but knows it will take some time up front to figure out how to be more flexible with the scheduling. Speaking for the State if you held your 60 day PPAT at 62 days because you were working with the family to find a day that was good for them, the Division would not have a concern with that, but she will check with the people that are in communication with the feds to find some guidance on that.*
- *How do you identify community reps? Are their multiple people or just one person?*
- Wake has a organization that provides reps and they are rotated and trained.
- *We have never been able to get a clear definition from the feds about who a community partner is, so the definition is fairly flexible, so Holly believes it could be a minister, etc. that the family knows.*
- *How about kids that are placed outside your county? How do you do the PPATs and CFTs? Seems these would be even more beneficial to combine.*
- Wake – when the SW goes down to do their monthly visits, they schedule them around those.
- Has anyone thought of trying to get a church or other organization to provide transportation or gas money so that everyone can get to the meeting that needs to be there?
- If everyone can't be there in person, they are at least there via telephone (this works better for the formal resources – professionals).
- Some counties find that the families tend to bring their folks with them, they will all ride together so that they can be there.
- *Does anyone regularly combine them?*
- Duplin is trying to combine the first one as often as possible.
- *It is easier to bring the PPAT into the CFT than make the PPAT a CFT. What we don't want is to make the regulated PPAT take over the family centered CFT.*
- *If you have a thorough CFT you will cover everything that is supposed to be in a PPAT anyway, it is just the participants required at a PPAT that may prevent the combining, because it is up to the family.*
- *GALs want to be invited to the CFTs – combining these meetings (if ok with the family) makes one less meeting for everyone involved.*
- Billy has run into the post custodial situation – there is a court order that trumps whatever else someone might have developed. One of the things that has been discussed in training, is to look at how the CFT can help the family try to meet the court ordered mandates because that is the bottom line for everyone.

- Can work with the court system to try and make some of the orders less specific. The court can order for certain issues to be addressed, but not specify in the order how they will be addressed. This allows the family the ability to become involved with solving their own issues.
- *Still need to be holding CFTs when the birth parents are no longer involved (regardless of the reason), no matter where we are in the life of the case, that child needs to have someone that they can call family. It is important to ensure that that person or people are involved.*
- When you have an adoptive family they are definitely the family that needs to be involved, but Catawba struggles when there is a child who may be moved to an Independent Living situation and there is no one who is willing or able to become a guardian. They struggle with the treatment team meetings (even though that is a bit different).
- Some of this requires more advance planning by the facilitator and social worker. Have to get all the information prior to the meeting and meet with the family and make very clear to them that in order to have one meeting here are all the issues that we need to be discussed and addressed at the meeting.
- Gaston – learned that despite the fact that they let their new social workers shadow several CFT meetings when they do their first one what they are surprised by is how much prep work is required. If people are aware of this up front and they know the meeting will be long but also know what specifically will be addressed and the meeting stays on track, focusing on only essential things that need to happen at this meeting and can't be handled elsewhere, things will go better.
- *Don't try to do every single little thing at this meeting if there are things that can be done elsewhere.*

#### Discussion from 5/26:

- Brunswick said the biggest barrier is that the two meetings serve different purposes. The CFT is for the family and the PPAT is for court purposes. Although the families may agree to all the personnel that are required at the PPAT, many times it is artificial and they don't feel that the family really wants that person there. This is particularly true for the community rep.
- *Holly has heard this a lot and a lot of this may be that different counties handle the selection of the family rep very differently. Some counties have used the person filling the role of family representative as someone that the family wanted at their CFT anyway.*
- Wilson has had to roll in all SW supervisors to get all the meetings done. They are running into challenges with cases that have been in the system for some time. CFTs may take a really long time. They are combining them and it is going fairly smoothly. Doing more legwork on the front end for those of them not in the foster care unit.
- *PPATs are federally required so that we can make sure that things are getting done as they should be. These were put in place when we were not going to court as often. Currently we go to court more, so these things do get done, but the PPATs are still required. Whereas CFTs are supposed to put the family in the drivers' seat. It is easier to think about putting a PPAT into a CFT than the other way around.*
- Some counties are doing the consecutively but this is confusing for the families and made it hard to exclude the attorneys from the CFT when the families do not want them there. Have started doing it differently. Have recruited some community reps but since

these people are volunteers they have to schedule the PPAT on days that they are available. Wondering if they can connect the PPAT to the court or the pretrial?

- Confused about what is supposed to come out of a CFT when the children are in care because you have court orders, etc.
- *Hopefully there has been a CFT prior to court orders. Court orders, of course, trump CFTs, but hoping we can work with our court partners to make the court orders a little more broad “the family must address XYZ” and not specifically say how they must address the issue. Then the specifics can be developed in the CFT. Usually the attorneys are good with this because it gives their clients buy-in and accountability.*
- One county says if they had a CFT before making a case decision or before taking a child into care, and then have another one within 30 days the family feels like they just had a meeting and the issues are already being addressed.
- *Although this is in policy (to ensure that the original case plan was written) it is possible if they are already working on the issues and everyone was at the initial meeting that needed to be there, then you can have a short one, and the Division can continue to look at it. Just want to make sure that we don't lose the family's involvement in service agreements.*
- Some families can do this at the 7 day conference, and some families are not emotionally capable of this.
- One county has child planning conferences – has anyone done CFTs as part of this in the courtroom? Wanted some clarification on what this was from another county. These are like week one hearings.
- *How many meetings are later in the day or after hours?*
- One county holds the majority at around 4pm, seems to be a good compromise for professionals and the families schedule. Others have the majority of them during the day.
- Counties have seen that if they schedule too many meetings they lose attendance very quickly. If they have a big court day they will have a meeting a week before the court day they can develop a memorandum to present to court.
- How about teenagers – how do families feel about their teenagers being there?
- For long term foster children one county has found that teens are eager to have the meeting because it is their meeting, but the foster family is less enthused about the meeting and they just sort of want to get out of the meeting as soon as possible. (These are situations where the birth parents have sort of dropped out.)
- One county developed a form where kids can rate things with various smiles – frowny face to smiley face (Lichert scale). She will email it to Holly who will send it out on listserve. Also have the foster child's lifebook at the CFT.
- Some counties have had the parent's request that younger children be taken out of the meeting because the parents can't focus on the meeting because they are having to keep an eye on their children (especially younger ones).
- Other counties meet with small children beforehand.
- *With the new requirement regarding children's involvement in court, this makes the child's involvement in the CFT even more important. Most of the time there is something that the child can do to move the plan forward, no matter how small.*
- *A lot of professionals don't need to be there the whole time (or don't have to be) and scheduling them for a specific time may make them more willing to come to the meetings. (For example one county has her MH person come and they only need about 30 mins, so once they get what they need they can leave. Although if they stay they will*

*get valuable information, but they are more likely to at least show up if they know they can go when they are complete.)*

- *Clarified that CFTs are still required even if the biological parents have been TPRed. And depending on the relationship to the biological parents, they may still be coming to the meetings because the child may still consider them family!*
- *When child has aged out and is in a CARS agreement, PPAT is no longer required, but CFTs are. Think about it not as a requirement but to ensure that the child gets everything he or she needs.*
- *Each situation will be different; the meeting is for the family. Depends on who is the family. If TPR has happened, then the child is the family and it depends on who they feel is important to them. When you get into pre-adoptive meetings, what matters is the emotional relationship to the child, not the legal (TPR or not) relationship.*
- *Can a CFT meeting and a SP meeting be the same?*
  - *Goal of CFT to come up with a service plan for the family. SP is to build a relationship between bio and foster parents. Having a bunch of extra people in the room is really hard to make that relationship work. You can however, have the SP and CFT meetings consecutively.*
- *Can TDMs and CFTs be combined? TDMs are a model, not a specific meeting. A true TDM that adheres to the model has some components that we in NC do not support for CFTs (for example if there is someone that the social worker wants at a TDM and the family does not, then TDM says the social worker can overrule the family, but the CFT policy says that the family's wishes are predominant.)*
- *How do other counties deal with talking about sensitive information with children old enough to understand? Most counties that responded said they pulled the child out, but Holly said you need to look at each situation specifically. Have some conversations with the child about the issue beforehand, if they have a therapist talk to them. Realize where that child has been living and the child may already know more than we think and getting it out in the open may be a good thing. But be sure to talk to the child and someone that knows the child (therapist, teacher) beforehand. Parents may think the child knows nothing about it and want to honor the parent's wishes, but the child may already know what is going on and they need to be able to talk about it too.*

How are counties using the foster care contact record?

Holly wanted to check in and see how this is working for folks. Is it helping making the meetings more productive.

Discussion from 5/14:

- Wake – it is a good outline and if you follow the form you tend not to miss anything. The foster care workers have found that if there are different children in the home that have different workers, the workers may trade off and combine the visits, and with this form it is easy to trade information and give a copy to the worker that didn't make the visit that month.
- Catawba – one challenge is ensuring that people write so that other people can read it, but overall very helpful. There is some duplication because of documentation needs.
- Question – Does the State actually want to see those forms in the record? Holly said yes and Catawba said they just had a review last week and it was extremely helpful to have those in the record during the review.
- The review will look at not just did you have a visit, but were those visits substantial and accomplish desired goals. That form will let you do that.

Discussion from 5/26:

- Catawba – document one visit per month on this form (others are in the chart but only complete this form once a month on the visit in the home).
- One county thinks people would get all that information anyway, but this focuses it more and makes sure that it is all completed.

Are you using the 1797 (inter-county agreement when you have a child placed in another county) – and if so when?

Discussion from 5/14:

- One county had to do one earlier this year, and in the midst of the transition of the children the originating county social worker left the agency, so it was very confusing. Need to make sure that if another county is assisting us, we do everything we can to make it easier on them and provide them with as much information as possible. Remember that sometime we are giving to others, but other times we will be on the receiving end, and “do unto others as you would have done to you!”
- Can be used for in-home services and for foster care. Not necessary for a one time courtesy interview, but particularly for an ongoing assistance situation, this is helpful.

Discussion from 5/26:

- Some counties have used this with no problems.
- This can be a preventative tool to lay out what is expected from each county up front before there is a crisis.
- Can be used in-home and out-of-home services.

Questions – From 5/14:

One county is having a hard time getting stuff back from child advocacy centers after you have a CMEP done? Wanted to know if other people had similar concerns?

This county has an issue that the Child Advocacy center was putting larger counties first and serving them and waiting to get to this county even if they had their paperwork in first. They are having to wait a couple of months to get reports back. The DV people in their county are trying to get one in their own county.

- No other counties on this call had a similar issue.

Check the MRS calendar or Holly’s email for June dates!!