

MRS Conference Call Notes
June 2011

Counties Participating 6/20: Davidson, Gaston, Hyde, Madison, Nash, Perquimmans, Rowan, Stokes. Partner Agencies: Barium Springs (formerly AFI)

Counties Participating 6/29: Alexander, Jackson, McDowell, New Hanover, Orange, Pitt.

Counties Participating 6/30: Alexander, Anson, Beaufort, Carteret, Catawba, Chowan, Hoke, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, Onslow, Pitt, Pender, Person.

: Agenda

- Letters from the Division
- Moving practice forward both with our families and each other
 - Using the “Not Knowing Stance”
 - Looking for “Positive Intent”
 - Seeking first to Understand
 - Doing “With” rather than “For” or “To”
 - Asking these questions: Exception, Survival, Relationship, Scaling, Miracle, What’s better?
 - Avoiding the “Ladder of Inference”

News from Raleigh

Letters:

- Administrative letter regarding new tribal forms coming out soon.
 - There is also a list of tribal representatives and how to contact them. That was sent out on the Child Welfare Listserv around June 8th (believe it is included in the letter as well).
 - Emily will join us in July to talk about these forms – they were to start being used as of 6/15.
- Letter summarizing the Best Practice for Supervisor’s Guide (15-11).
 - The actual Best Practices for Supervisor’s Guide (15-11a).
- Letter regarding TANF DV plan and MOU’s for executing those funds (13-11).
 - Next 3 documents relate to this: Set of Guidelines, Sample MOU (2 of these).
- Administrative letter regarding keying a 5104 for cases with an unknown perpetrator (4-11).

Other Announcements

- There is a Supervisor’s Training coming up. This is required within one year of becoming a Supervisor. It is a 9 day training (3 days a month for 3 months in a row). Not policy heavy, more about your functioning as a Supervisor – your interactions with staff and those above you. It is a great opportunity for networking and finding others to get support from later on!
 - The trainers get constant feedback that this training is also helpful to veteran Supervisors. Helps them to understand things they are already experiencing like why certain people just push their buttons, new ways to communicate, etc.

- DV training coming to Wilmington as well as a Foster Care Licensing training. Nichole and Rhoda from the Black Mountain office will be coming to the FC Licensing training.

Tools for Moving Practice Forward with our Families and Each Other

- Each of these tools is something that staff will hear about in training. Many of them are touched on in PreService and then in more detail in the appropriate discipline trainings, as well as general training such as Coaching in the Kitchen and Cultural Competence.
- Training team hears over and over that these tools work – not just with families but with the other people that we interact with, our peers, colleagues outside the agency, workers we supervise, etc.

The Not Knowing Stance (The Colombo Tool)

- This doesn't mean you don't know anything, this means you acknowledge that you don't know everything and you don't come into the interaction with preconceived notions. You allow the other person to show and teach you something.
- Most of what we see and hear is based on our experience so that we can't always see and hear what is right in front of us.
- Colombo would come across as bumbling like he didn't know a lot and he would learn a lot that way because people thought they could teach him when he acted like he did not know it all.
- One of the hard things about this stance is that we hold the idea that families are the experts about their own situations, however they oftentimes look to us for the answers, when we may not have the answer.
 - When Holly worked in Illinois she was training a new office mate. There all calls came through one central call center, so you had to call the reporter back before you went to see the family. New person called the reporter and got off the phone thinking the family was horrible. Went to the family's house and realized that the family was nothing like what the reporter had said. Realized she had only heard one side and needed to listen to both sides and form her own independent impressions and not do it too hastily.
- Sometimes when we become supervisors we think we are supposed to know everything! That is not the case so how do we deal with it when we don't.
- One supervisor said when she is asked a question she asks the worker if they have read the policy and has them bring the policy to her office where they will discuss and learn it together.

Looking for Positive Intent

- In one of her trainings, Holly gives the participants the opportunity to vent about their families. They say they are lazy, they hide from them when they come on visits, they lie, etc. Then she asks them why they think the families do that. And then asks if the participants have ever done any of those things (lied, etc.) and why they did them.....leads to the realization that frequently there is positive intent behind negative behavior.
- Doesn't change the behavior and make it any less negative, it helps to understand the reason FOR the behavior which allows us to approach it in a different light and keep a better attitude.

- Holly became a supervisor and thought she needed to support her staff when they came in so she was doing that and jumped right in with advice, and eventually they told her that they did not always need her to fix their problems. Some of them took her advice as meaning she didn't have any faith in them to figure it out for themselves. Sometimes they just needed to vent or have a sounding board. Her positive intent was trying to help them, but it incorrectly came across as not thinking they could do it themselves.
- One county has a person who is perceived as a “whiner” who is always seen as complaining about things. The intent may be to point out when things come across wrong to get people to treat each other better, but she doesn't realize how she herself is coming across. Will try to approach that person - opening with appreciation of the effort she is making to improve peer interactions, but express concern about how it may be coming across.

Seeking first to understand

- Research shows the need to be understood is the second biggest need for humans behind getting basic needs (food, water, etc.) met.
- To understand we have to listen without judgment without screening for the things we know ahead of time that we want to get out of the conversation.
- We need to listen to understand and then check back in to ensure that we understood it the way they meant it.
- E.A.R.S – Elicit, Amplify, Reflect, and Start Over
- Don't have to agree with the other person's perspective, but need to understand it. If we don't understand their perspective, then everything we do will miss the mark.
- If you are thinking “this family just says the same thing over and over and over again” one of two things has happened. Either you don't understand what they are trying to tell you or they don't think you have understood.
 - Holly did a planning call with a county and Supervisor said she was trying to get her workers to get a family's whole story and not just focus on the allegations. She was telling the workers to do it and they weren't. Workers did not understand her, and she just kept telling them the same thing over and over. She needed to talk with her workers in a different way and have them then reflect back to her to see if they truly understood – because clearly the way she was initially explaining it, they did not.
 - One county said you need to consciously stop yourself from making assumptions and really listen.
- Stopping and slowing down is one of the hardest things for us to do in this field, but it needs to happen. Not just with families but supervisor to staff and staff to supervisor.
- Have you ever walked out of a meeting with your supervisor thinking “Why the heck would I do that – that makes no sense?!” – instead of walking out thinking that make sure you understand before you leave her office.
 - Example: DCD letters – counties stated that they didn't understand how some of the issues in the letters related to them so there was no understanding and investment. The Division now tries to write DCD letters differently and include a context so counties can immediately see how the information in the letter is relevant.

- One of the Work First workers says she gets that a lot from clients who say over and over they don't want to go to a job searching class, or volunteer, or anything. She stops and asks them what they want to do to meet their hours and become self-sufficient and then we can work with them to see if their idea meets policy requirements.
- One county types up notes during staffings and they are shared so it quickly becomes clear if there was a difference in understanding and they can address it immediately.

Doing "With" rather than "For" or "To"

- Sometimes when you do something "for," the recipient feels like you are doing it for them because you don't feel like they can do it themselves.
- We also create a lot of work for ourselves, and are not doing the recipient any favors by denying them of the chance to improve their skills and competencies.
- One county has a worker that is always transporting her client where she needs to go. So the client calls for every errand that they have that needs running. Seems as if the SW is enabling the client and doing her a disservice – what happens when DSS services are over? Why not help her with the bus:, get her a schedule and her route and give her some bus tickets to start.

Some of the question that they train in almost any training:

Exception questions

- "So tell me about a time when this was better/different.", "When you were able to keep up with your daysheets – how were things different then?"

Survival questions

- "Wow you have been thru a lot, how are you still standing here today? Can you tell me how you did that? Can I share the ways you did that with some of my other families (workers)?"
- Validate their experiences and let them know that you understand what they have been through but remind them that if they have made it through whatever else, they are likely to be able to make it through this too. Empowers them.

Relationship questions

- "Tell me what you think your mom would say about that?"
- Holly used to use this with teens who claimed they were punished for absolutely nothing "What do you think your sister would say you did before Mom punished you for nothing?" Often time it's easier to say those things you don't want to admit if it's from someone's else perspective.
- "What do you think the judge would think about that?"
- These are good for issues that are hard to discuss.

Scaling questions

- Give folks safe language to use. Can be used with co-workers and families as well.
- A worker has a family that is getting under their skin – rate the family on a scale and then think about what would make them better (move up the scale).
- Helps to organize thoughts when it gets crazy – helps to narrow the problem and focus on solutions. If you do this on a regular basis, you can compare week to week.

- Use scaling to determine how frequently workers use these other types of questions/strategies. (“How often do you use the Not Knowing Stance?”)

Miracle questions

- “If a miracle happened over night what are some things you would see that would let you know the miracle happened?”

What is Better

- Helps us to focus on the strengths and what is going well rather than constantly beating people over the head about what is not going well.

Ladder of Inference

- The idea of how we sort all the information that comes into us. There is a lot of information that comes in and no way we can pay close attention to it all. So we take a piece of information and assign ‘x’ meaning to it. Therefore for every subsequent piece of information we come across, we will only truly pick up on the ones that support the meaning we assigned to X, and whatever conclusion it leads to. (Like when the police have a suspect and only follow through on leads pointing to that suspect.)
- Instead of approaching it that way, challenge your self to look fir information to prove you wrong.
 - This happens frequently with DV cases. As soon as we get the report its already in out minds that the victim is still there so she must not be able to make good decisions or she would have been gone by now. We may miss some strengths and protective strategies that she has put into place. Don’t just look for data that supports your preconceived idea.

Next month: July calls: 21st, 22nd, 27th.