

MRS Conference Call Notes  
August 2010

Counties Participating 8/13: Call on 8/13 had to be cancelled as Holly was delayed travelling and on a plane when the call was scheduled!

Counties Participating 8/18: Catawba, Durham, Gaston, Gates, Hoke, New Hanover, Pitt, Scotland.

Counties Participating 8/24: Brunswick, Craven, Gaston, Graham, Halifax, Harnett, Iredell, Macon, McDowell, Nash, Northampton, Orange, Person, Pitt, Rockingham, Union, Wilson, Yadkin. Community Partner – Mountain Youth Resources (IFPS and Reunification provider).

Agenda

- Announcements from Raleigh
- Getting Back to Basics – where are we with successes and challenges/barriers to: Intake, Collaboration with Work First, Relationship with Law Enforcement, Family Assessments – how holistic, In Home Services, Child and Family Team Meetings, and Shared Parenting

Letters

- July 30 DV funding – TANF DV letter and MOU's – 4 attachments; 1) guidelines for appropriating your DV funds, 2) sample of combined TANF/DV plan and MOU, 3) sample MOU strategies, and 4) the allocation worksheet.
- July 30 – Additional DV funds, talked about previously on a call - these family violence funds – going to counties that used TANF/DV funds last year, but you can only use them thru September of this year.
- July 30 – State Maternity funds for next year.
- August 18 – Admin letter with the new RIL policy.

Intake

One of the things that came up last month when talking about intake is that some areas of the form are frequently skipped – one of these is the area of strengths since the reporters frequently say that there are none. We were hoping that once we started asking this regular reporters in particular would begin thinking along these lines. Has this happened? Other issues/ thoughts around intake?

August 18:

- One county prompts them with some questions. If you ask “does the family have strengths?” Its easy to say “no,” but they will think more if you ask “What are some strengths?” If they still don't know, ask some specific things like “Do you see mom play with the kids?” etc.

August 24:

- One county says reporters are shocked that DSS is even asking, so sometimes the person taking the call will tell them what kind of things they are asking for (for example if it's the school they may ask “Does the family make sure the kids are

- in school every day? Are the kids clean when they come to school? Do they have their homework done?”)
- Reports may never have thought of the family in these terms, have to help the family think through it because they have never thought of it.

Intake is an area that is sometimes overlooked. Was asked in training if intake workers needed to have a degree – many people see this as “just a clerical position”, but it is not, it helps the entire case if there is a skilled person taking these calls, who is able to tease out information.

### Collaboration with Work First

There was a lot of focus on this when we started MRS. Sometimes these relationships fall by the wayside if not nurtured. Wanted to know what people were doing to nurture these relationships.

August 18:

- Small county has one supervisor for WF and CPS – always check back and forth with the other side when a new family comes in to see if they are receiving services already.
- Sometimes do joint visits.
- Have had joint CFT meetings so that WF case manager can do her plan in a way that fits in with CFT plan.
- One county doesn't have a lot of CPS cases that are open for WF. But for the ones that are, logistically the workers sit next to each other in the building, and so there is a lot of communication – there is a lot of joint planning and communication when there is a family getting both services. They do CFTs together, home visits, and make plans that compliment each other.

Are people struggling with what they can share with WF?

- One on this call says that they each have access to each other's files. Not a problem.
- Seemed to be an issue at the beginning of MRS implantation but does not seem to be an issue anymore.
- The WF unit is aware of the days CPS staffs cases, and they come in at the beginning of the staffing and share info, which allows the CPS worker to see when there is a discrepancy between what the family has told CPS and what they have told WF.

This is another benefit of joint HV, the family knows that CPS and WF talk to each other so it cuts down on one worker being told one thing and another worker being told something else.

August 24:

- One county has WF workers trained as facilitators so they can use them as facilitators of CFT and they involve them if WF/CPS shares a client.

Barriers

- Scheduling – hard to be able to find a time that they can both meet. It's a long process to find a time that both can meet.
- Another county schedules a lot of CFTs after 5pm and WF is often not able to do this.

Holly asked is the barrier that the agency doesn't allow WF to work after 5, or personal that they do not want to.

- Some of both she thinks.

- WF handles the DV funds and is good with helping CPS get access to those funds for clients who need it. Come to CFTs and sit on Adoption Team and frequently have new and different ideas that CPS has never thought of before.
- CPS and WF have different goals for the family. CPS working to eliminate a crisis which affects what they can do on a day to day basis, and sometimes there is not always an easy transition because CPS and WF rules are not always complimentary.
- Frequently if the children come into custody the WF has to stop and that is a hurt to the family.

### Collaboration with Law Enforcement

What are you doing to nurture, anything innovative or working well?

August 18:

- One county says it is an up and down relationship – when the administrators met and did an MOU that didn't really help much on the base worker/cop level. But they have 6 investigative workers and they work with the detectives on a really close and regular basis. These folks now know each other, they respect each other, and know which ones to call so by building those one-on-one relationships the overall agency collaboration is working better.
- Other counties agreed that personal working relationships then spill over to other units.

Barriers?

- Time frames – these are very different for law enforcement. Example – A detective made the report but didn't want them to respond until they talked to him but he was out on another case all day and it was a 24 hour response case according to policy. Law enforcement does not always have the same priorities as CPS.

It is important to have some sort of regularly scheduled meetings with partners such as law enforcement so that issues like this can be talked about. Let them understand the reasons why we have these timeframes and communicate that we are just as obligated to meet our statutory obligations just as they are. Brainstorm on how the agencies can meet in the middle to get everyone's needs met the best way possible.

- Always easier to deal with when not right in the middle of an actual situation and there is less stress or chance for anyone to take it personally.
- One county has had a lot of DV issues crop up lately and one of the things they have been struggling with is the law enforcement not making reports or saying that the kids didn't see anything, etc. Just because kids didn't hear anything does not mean they are safe. Have a lot of education to do in the community regarding the effect of DV on the children.
- One county did a whole new training on DV in small groups of 10 or so workers. There has been a lot of DV in their county lately and wanted to take a new approach.

August 24:

- One county feels that they do not have a good relationship. Not really sure why. Trying to start some other collaborative efforts but so far the efforts that they have made have not been able to get off the ground. In the cases they have had, only have had one person charged over the last year.

- Have a monthly meeting with the Assistant DA and carry a file from each case that should have law enforcement involvement. Sometimes can use the DA to involve the law enforcement.

### Family Assessments

Have these become more holistic or are staff still struggling with being more incident focused?

August 18:

- Engagement during the assessment – trying to engage families earlier and making the family's more of a part of the assessment.

How are the new Risk Assessments working for folks.

- One county thinks they make the risk level really high, and that it's a false positive making them seem high based on demographics and not the situation in the home. Don't feel that they are useful or accurate.
- Multiple counties have the same thoughts. Have cases that come out as high on the assessment, but they don't feel that it really is.

Candice and Rick will be talking about these assessments in a future meeting – not only risk factors but mitigating factors. Not sure which month this will be yet, but will let everyone know.

Are issues the same with the risk re-assessment once you move to In Home Services?

- Not as many issues with the re-assessment.

August 24:

- When a worker goes to a person's house for the first time and she needs to take notes, this creates an appearance of power, she brings two pads of paper, and gives a pad and paper to the child or parent and explained why she had to take notes and allowed them to take notes as well, of questions they might want to ask or anything else. A great way to share power.
- One supervisor notices that they may get a report on one thing but once they go out there are other things that enter the case file even though they were not mentioned in the original report. Takes a while because we were so incident focused for so long, but workers are coming along with this!
- Question – In family assessments they are meeting with the children and parents together, but was given the advice that they should see the children away from the parents at some point during the 45 day assessment. Obviously if there is suspicion that something else is going on, then certainly do. But, if there are no red flags or suspicion, her question was, is it best practice to always talk to the children alone at some point?
  - Holly said no. If there are no indications that there is something going on, and you feel good about this, then no, you do not need to talk them separately. Based on the needs of each case.
- Valerie (Policy Consultant from the state) asked counties to please let families know when they were extending the assessment past the 45 days – she gets calls from families who don't understand why their case is still open after 45 days – so make sure they understand.

### Risk reassessment

- Families do not understand why when we ask about their prior Cps history this bumps them up even if it was an unsubstantiation. If nothing was found, then why should it bump them up?
- This was what was found when the National Resource Center reviewed cases in NC. However, it is situations like this that are the reason why we have the ability to override up and down. This may not be the easiest thing to explain to families, but let them know that this number is not the only thing that is going to be making the case decision for us.

### In Home Services

What are you doing to get the buy-in of the family and involvement of the family?

August 18:

- Some counties have used things like Nanny 911 or SuperNanny and have the DVD's and if there is an episode that deals with the issues that the family has, workers have watched the episode with the family and then talk about it, or let them watch it on their own and then discuss how it might work for them.
- Or, the family may not want to go to a formal parenting class, but mom respects this woman at church and she has really well behaved kids and she may be able to work with that woman to get parenting ideas.

August 24:

- Mountain Youth Resources tries to use laptops and media clips with the kids. This engages them because they are so media and technology oriented. Keep a library of them. Frequently use comedies because they are fun but also have scenes that start some good discussions.

### Child and Family Team Meetings

One thing that seems to still be an issue is getting informal supports to the table. Hard to identify even who those support are. It's the easy way out to say 'the family doesn't want anyone and its their meeting' but does the family really understand what it means to them to choose some of their supports to come to this meeting?

August 18:

- One county has a contract with a mediation center and this is the best thing they could have done. It is not a DSS run meeting which gives it a whole new feel. And the mediation center people are the ones who contact everyone about coming to the meeting.
- A facilitator commented that sometimes it is obvious that the families and their supports are not aware of the type of meeting it will be and the exact items that will be discussed. The best meetings are those when everyone walks in knowing what the expectations are.
- Gaston Co - SOC collaborative has just designated a "one child one plan" committee made up of multiple systemic people to look at all the different meeting that the families involved with multiple agencies have to go to. Want to take a look at how we can meet the needs of the families and the agencies without having so many meetings.

August 24:

- One county not sure they see any more inclusion from family members bringing informal supports, but they make a concerted effort to have multiple levels of people ask the family, don't just ask once and dismiss the issue.

### Shared Parenting

Last time we talked about this was a big struggle to get them done within the first 7 days. Is this still a struggle?

August 18:

- One county is doing it pretty well. Foster care workers had to accept it as a requirement and some adjustment on the part of foster parents as well. Usually works out well, and often foster parents are giving biological parents their number and often arranging visits outside the DSS.
- Asked licensing workers who have the relationship with the foster parents to participate in the meetings so they are sort of a facilitator. Has worked fantastically and seem to have almost no problems anymore.

August 24:

- Sometimes hard because the foster parents work and are not available when the visits occur.
- All of Shared Parenting does not have to be in person, can do it by phone, in the evenings.

### Other issues/discussion 8/18:

- Asked about some specific report situations.
- Wanted to know if we could talk about the issue with Mental Health. Feel that the state of Mental Health service provision in NC is negatively impacting DSS and the clients themselves. Holly will work to find out the status of things, but just as the county DSS are frustrated but can't control their local mental health, we are the Division of Social Services, not Mental Health and we cannot control the Division of Mental Health.
- Gaston wondered if anyone else was struggling with keeping children in their home school while they are in foster care.

September – some counties that have been doing the Family Finding project will share their experiences.

Calls will be on the 21<sup>st</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and 30<sup>th</sup>.