

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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January 2007

The Benefits of Work First/Child Welfare Collaboration

Note: nationally, the federal program Temporary Assistance for Needy Families is commonly known by its acronym, TANF; in North Carolina TANF is known as Work First.

Webster's defines collaboration as "working together." Although technically this is accurate, the people we consulted helped us understand that collaboration in a DSS context also means:

Walking Your Talk. Especially in child welfare, we expect families to develop strong support networks and to be an active part of the team. Yet, as one person asked: "How can we ever expect families to develop strong support networks if we don't have these internally? If we can't play together on the same team, what right do we have to ask this of them?"

Being Open. When someone questions our intentions, we should be open to the possibility that the stereotypes and assumptions we have about each other might be wrong.

Collaboration requires some degree of personal risk. It also takes guts and perseverance. But, given the potential benefits it offers, we owe it to our clients—and ourselves—to try.

Benefits for Families

The Right Service at the Right Time. Nationally, Work First and child welfare serve many of the same families. The substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health concerns, low levels of education, and other issues "dual-system" families struggle with often are barriers to securing employment and to effective parenting. By working together, Work First and child welfare can do a better job getting families the support they need, when they need it, thereby enhancing child safety and economic self-sufficiency.

Fewer Conflicting Demands. Anecdotal evidence suggests dual-system families are often overwhelmed by multiple, sometimes mutually exclusive, requirements. For example, Work First work requirements often conflict with services mandated by child welfare, such as attending court hearings or visiting children



Photo Illustration

Enhance child safety and make families economically stronger.

MRS Meetings

Meetings will be held from 10 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Eastern

January 30
Pitt County DSS
Greenville

February 28
Wilson County DSS
Wilson

Central

January 22
Rowan County DSS
Salisbury

February 22
Guilford County DSS
Greensboro

Western

January 24
AB Tech, Enka Campus
Candler

February 20
AB Tech, Enka Campus
Candler

No MRS meetings will be held in March.

For details about meeting locations and directions, contact Holly McNeill 828/757-5672 holly.mcneill@ncmail.net

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Training Dates

Shared Parenting

February 7-9
Fayetteville
Contact: Amy Campbell
910/677-0460
(fax) 910/677-0468

March 21-23

Asheville
Contact: Lou Decker
828/670-5050
(fax) 828/670-5053

April 18-20

Kinston
Contact: Betty Williford
252/520-2413
(fax) 252/520-2417

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Comments?

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Online

www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/mrs

Work First/Child Welfare Collaboration *continued from page 1*

in foster care. Thus, it is not surprising that some dual-system families have difficulty meeting reunification case plans.

When workers from different programs communicate with each other and understand each others' roles and mandates, they can be sure all their efforts make it easier—not harder—for families to become safer and stronger.

Feeling Heard. If professionals manage to coordinate intake procedures, families may even be asked to tell their stories fewer times, to fewer people.

Better Experiences with DSS. When workers are on the same page, families' interactions with the agency are less confusing. They get a clear and consistent idea of what is expected of them.

The cumulative effect of collaboration is the message: we see your family as a unit and we care about its success. When this message is expressed through effective support, families begin to see even involuntary services as valuable, and the agency as an important ally.

Benefits for Workers

Better Assessments. When information about families is shared across program lines, workers may get a more accurate understanding of a family's strengths and needs.

Better Use of Time. Timely and coordinated provision of services helps families avoid protracted involvement with the agency. This saves families time and frees up workers to serve other clients. Collaborative strategies, such as including people from other programs in child and family team meetings, also give workers the opportunity to develop plans simultaneously, and to ensure their plans are not in conflict.

Better Support. When workers understand each others' needs and mandates, they are better equipped to help and support each other.

Better Solutions. Workers from Work First and child welfare sometimes see problems in very different ways. Strong collaborative relationships enable them to use this difference to develop better solutions with families.

Benefits for Agencies

Improved Relationships. When people understand each other and work together across program lines, there is a greater sense of community among agency employees.

Better Use of Resources. Collaboration can translate into cost savings. For example, sharing information and coordinating efforts across program lines can help agencies eliminate duplication, thereby reducing person-hours. Also, if programs can help families meet urgent material needs that might otherwise lead to their children coming into foster care, agencies may avoid the higher costs of out-of-home placement.

Reprinted from Children's Services Practice Notes. For a discussion of how collaboration between Work First and child welfare produces these benefits, see Practice Notes vol. 9, no. 3 (www.practicenotes.org).

Child Welfare Involvement among TANF Applicants

A recent study of Wisconsin applicants for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) found that almost two-thirds were also involved with the child welfare system. The study also examined the characteristics associated with Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement.

Researchers interviewed 1,075 Milwaukee County families who applied to receive TANF during six months in 1999; most were re-interviewed twice during the following two years. Administrative data from Wisconsin's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS) indicated whether these families had been investigated by CPS and whether children had been placed in out-of-home care at any time through July 2005.

Results show that almost 64 percent of families had experienced child welfare involvement, and those families had been investigated an average of 5.35 times each. The best predictor of experiencing CPS involvement after the baseline interview was having CPS involvement *before* the baseline interview. Other characteristics associated with CPS involvement included:

- Parents identifying themselves as having a drug or alcohol problem
- Higher levels of parental stress
- More material hardships during the previous year
- More minor children
- Having at least one minor child living somewhere else

The TANF families in this study were much more likely to have CPS involvement than previous studies of TANF families have indicated. The authors speculate about this jump, suggesting that the state's unprecedented reductions in cash assistance may have made some families more vulnerable to child maltreatment and neglect. They suggest that greater coordination between child welfare and TANF agencies could help parents who might have conflicting demands from the different agencies; in addition, high-quality childcare and parenting assistance could be targeted for parents who have previous CPS involvement. To obtain the full study, *Findings from the Milwaukee TANF Applicant Study*, by Courtney and Dworsky, go to <www.chapinhall.org>.

Family Resilience

Child welfare workers will find a practical guide to helping families build their resilience in Froma Walsh's new edition of *Strengthening Family Resilience*. The book covers key family processes in resilience and practice applications for workers. Case illustrations show how diverse families handle loss, trauma, disaster, and other crises. The author highlights ways to help family members rebuild relationships and draw on cultural, spiritual, and community resources for support. *Strengthening Family Resilience* is published by the Guilford Press <www.guilford.com>.

Articles on this page are reprinted from the *CB Express*, Dec 2006/Jan 2007 Vol. 7, No. 9 <<http://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov>>

Training Dates

Cornerstone IV: Supervisors Working with Others, Working with Outcomes

To register for any of the following events, contact:

Amy Ramirez
919/962-4365
(fax) 919/962-3653

January 29-30 &
February 5

Richmond/Anson/
Montgomery

February 23-24 &
March 2

Davidson/Rowan

March 12-13 &
March 19

Surry/Yadkin/Davie

April 16-17 &
April 23

Caldwell/Burke/
Alexander

May 7-8 &
May 15

Ashe/Wilkes/Watauga/
Avery

June 18-19 &
June 25

Hoke/Scotland/Moore/
Stanley

Training Dates

Child Forensic Interviewing

To register for any of the following events, contact:
Clarence Lamb
919/733-7672
(fax) 919/733-9204

February 26-March 2
Greensboro

April 16-20
Fayetteville

May 14-18
Kinston

June 18-22
Charlotte

Step by Step: An Introduction to Child and Family Teams

To register contact:
Ashley Duncan
919/513-0488
(fax) 919/513-7980

January 23-24
Elizabeth City

February 7-8
Asheville

March 12-13
Jacksonville

March 13-14
Charlotte

April 17-18
Lexington

April 24-25
Louisburg

May 7-8
Hickory

May 9-10
Wilmington

June 12-13
Sanford



MRS Year in Review: 2006

by R. Patrick Betancourt

Wow! What a tremendous year 2006 was for MRS in North Carolina. Kicking off the year, in January we took MRS state-wide to the remaining 48 counties. In the depths of the summer, the 2006 MRS Learning Institute was held in beautiful New Bern. And in the fall North Carolina had tremendous representation at the National Differential Response conference in San Diego, where our state was recognized as a leader in child welfare.

As the brand new coordinator for MRS in North Carolina, one of my personal highlights this past year was being a part of the staff that helped bring the MRS Learning Institute together. This year's event was attended by over 380 people from 60 different counties. This included 324 participants and 62 community partners, Division staff, and presenters. My favorite moments from the 2006 Learning Institute include the following:

- The dramatic flair of keynote speaker Dr. James Manseau-Sauceda, who taught us that multicultural learning is about respecting the equal human worth of distinct groups of people, and who inspired us with his vision of culturally proficient child welfare practice.
- Hearing about the personal tragedy and triumphs of Mikki Williams, our other keynote speaker—what an emotional roller coaster!
- The intense competitiveness I observed during ice cream social and game night.
- The chills I got when the the 82nd Airborne Chorus trooped into the ballroom and lifted our spirits in song.

Despite some flooding, brief power loss, and fire drills, this event offered participants more than 30 workshops designed to enhance their implementation of MRS's seven strategies and family-centered practice in general. I was truly moved by the commitment to North Carolina families shown by everyone who attended.

To continue the commitment the Division has made to Family Support and Child Welfare in North Carolina, planning for this year's MRS Learning Institute began last fall. Please keep your calendars open and be ready to head to Asheville in August for the 2007 MRS Learning Institute!

"Father Gregory Boyle said, 'Violence comes from a lethal absence of hope.' We are here to add a voice of hope."
—James Manseau-Sauceda

MRS Evaluation Update

Spring promises to be a busy time for the MRS evaluation. The researchers at Duke University are currently making preparations for the facilitation of 30 focus groups designed to collect information from three distinct groups including social workers, supervisors and collaborative partners. Each of the 10 pilot counties will host three focus groups slated to be held during the months of January, February, and March. Some of the areas to be probed through the focus groups include:

- Collaboration/interface between CPS and Work First
- Implementation of the new finding “services provided, no longer needed”
- Child and Family Teams—quality and impact
- Redesign of in-home services
- Shared Parenting, and
- Practice variations in social worker assignment—whether they keep or transfer cases after case decision is reached

In late April, Duke will begin the process of conducting family phone interviews to assess the quality of MRS implementation as it relates to family satisfaction. During the month of April, each of the 10 pilot counties will collect consent forms from all families with whom they have contact during the month. A sample of 300 families will be selected and interviewed by phone. Families that complete the phone interviews will receive a \$10 gift card as an incentive to participate in the survey.

We are looking forward to gaining new insight from multiple perspectives with regard to how effectively MRS is being implemented at the county level. Further, this information will help inform our work around MRS and foster continuous improvement as we move forward.

In consultation with the 10 pilot counties, Duke is also in the process of developing a report template that will utilize administrative data to provide county “fact sheets.” These fact sheets will highlight county-specific data as it relates to MRS implementation. This is a newly added component of the evaluation this year and we feel that it will be very useful for counties in monitoring their progress on MRS related issues. We plan to make these reports available to all 100 counties in subsequent years of the evaluation.

We will continue to keep you informed as the evaluation progresses, but if you should have any questions, please feel free to contact Nicole Lawrence of Duke University’s Center for Child and Family Policy at (919) 668-3282.

Duke is developing reports that will use administrative data to provide county-specific “fact sheets” that will highlight county data as it relates to MRS implementation.

Training Dates

Anchors Away! How to Navigate CFTs: The Role of the Facilitator

To register contact:
Ashley Duncan
919/513-0488
(fax) 919/513-7980

February 20-23
Kinston

March 20-21
Lenoir

March 27-28
Lenoir

April 24-27
Jacksonville

April 24-27
Asheville

May 15-18
Sanford

Widening the Circle: Family-Centered Meetings and Safety Issues

To register contact:
Ashley Duncan
919/513-0488
(fax) 919/513-7980

March 22-24
Charlotte Area

June 14-15
Fayetteville Area

For a complete listing of the dates and locations of these course offerings, consult the Division’s training calendar at www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/training/