

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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June 2006

From the Field: Remote Control

A story from a family assessment worker, collected and presented by Appalachian Family Innovations' Courtney Smith

After going through Cornerstone III training as a family assessor, I asked the trainers to send me an electronic copy of the remote control activity we used for our practice sessions. In the training practice session, we used the remote to collect our thoughts, discuss strategies, or get feedback from the person playing the role of the client or the other workers at the table. I really liked being able to "Rewind" when I slipped into social work jargon or "Pause" to collect my thoughts so I decided to try it with the families I went out to assess the following week.

At first many of them thought I was weird, but using that remote control helped me be "human" in front of my families. They saw that I made mistakes too, that I didn't always have the answers, and that sometimes I needed some time to think about what I wanted to say next. It also helped me be more willing to try out new tools with families because I knew I could "Pause" and look at my note cards or ask them for feedback about how I was doing.

One evening, I was visiting with a single father who had been mostly cooperative during my assessment with him. This day, however, I confronted him about his substance abuse and how it might be affecting his children. He got angry and just went off, venting about how "you people are messing in my life," and how disruptive and upsetting my involvement was for him.

Using the principle, "Everyone Needs to be Heard," *continued next page*



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MRS Meetings

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

Eastern

June 29
Pitt Co. Ag Center

July 26
Sampson Co. Auditorium

Central

June 28
Stanly County

July 25
Forsyth County

Western

June 23
Buncombe County

July 28
Buncombe County

There will be no MRS meetings in August due to the MRS Learning Institute, which will be held on August 21-23

For further details about meeting locations and directions, look for an email from NCDSS Policy Consultant Holly McNeill.

Questions? Contact Holly directly (828/757-5672, Holly.McNeill@ncmail.net)

Training Dates

Shared Parenting

August 9-11
Fayetteville
Contact: Amy Campbell
910/677-0406
(fax) 910/677-0468

October 4-6
Asheville
Contact: Lou Decker
828/670-5050
(fax) 828/670-5053

November 1-3
Kinston
Contact: Betty Williford
252/520-2413
(fax) 252/520-2417

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Comments?

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Online

www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/mrs

Remote Control continued from page 1

I just let him talk, validating his feelings and agreeing that my involvement was intrusive. After about 10 minutes, his anger subsided.

Then the funniest thing happened. He said, "Where's that remote control of yours?" Surprised, I handed it to him.

He pushed the rewind button and with a calm voice said, "Now, you were saying something about my drinking weren't you? Tell me more about what you are concerned about."

I smiled at his use of my own tool, regained my composure, and was able to focus on having a serious but compassionate discussion about the issues I was concerned about.

I left that day with a plan for keeping his children supervised that he came up with himself. I also came away with a new appreciation for the benefits of offering my own tools to the families I work with.

The dad came up with a plan for keeping his children supervised. I left that day with a new appreciation for the benefits of offering my own tools to families.

Important Change in CFT Meeting Training

Effective August 1, 2006, North Carolina's Family-Centered Meetings Project will offer a brand new training called "**Step by Step: Your Guide to Child and Family Teams.**" A two-day event, "Step by Step" replaces the courses "Setting the Stage" and "Caution" and will serve as the prerequisite event for all other child and family team meeting training events.

What's so exciting about this training? Based on your feedback and in keeping with the style of fun, interactive learning, "Step by Step" presents an easy-to-follow framework for understanding and learning about child and family team meetings (CFTs). Throughout the two days participants will be exposed to practice and previews of what CFT meetings actually look like.

Now, any time a course change such as this takes place, questions or challenges inevitably arise. If you have questions about the calendar or about prerequisites (for example, if you have taken "Setting the Stage" but not "Caution"), please contact Ashley Duncan (919/513-0488, amduncan@chass.ncsu.edu) or Cherie Spehar (919/367-8394, Cherie_Spehar@bell.south.net).

The Family-Centered Meetings Project looks forward to seeing you in this updated, fun, and interactive training that will guide you, one step at a time, through understanding and practicing the basics of child and family teams.

Practice Guidelines for Family-Centered Meetings

- Go to <http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/mrs/docs/Practice%20Guidelines%20for%20Family%20Centered%20Meetings.pdf>

Family-Centered Practice: How Are We Doing?

by Holly McNeill



Lately we've been talking an awful lot about family-centered practice, but it's not a new concept. Here in North Carolina we've been training child welfare workers in family-centered practice for years! Literally years! This is probably why I hear a lot of folks say, "We are already family-centered, this isn't new for us."

I'm always thrilled to hear that. However, I have to remember that up until fairly recently our child welfare system only allowed us to be family-centered to a certain degree. After all, at the same time we were training people about family-centered beliefs we were teaching them to always talk with children without their parents' knowledge or permission. At the same time we were telling people "family members are our colleagues," we routinely responded to ALL maltreatment reports by arriving at the house unannounced and fully expecting the family to cooperate with our investigation, with little or no thought to their needs.

Under the old way of doing things—even when we were being respectful as we could—child welfare work often felt more like doing something "to" families rather than "with" them. MRS gives us a much more freedom to create true partnerships with families and welcome them to their rightful place at the table.

Of course, true partnership is more than just "making nice." For example, if you are conducting an assessment and there is a collateral you feel it is important to contact but the family does not want that person called, you can't just say "OK, if you don't want us to, we won't." We must always be clear about our role: the responsibility for assessing safety and risk sits squarely on the shoulders of county departments of social services.

The beauty of MRS is that it makes it easier for us to support and partner with families at the same time we fulfill this responsibility. We still have to discuss issues that make many families uncomfortable. We will continue to disagree with families about some things. But we can use the principles of partnership to guide us in these interactions.

Really, when I hear the word "family-centered" the first thing that comes to my mind is keeping children safe. Is there anything more important to parents? Is there a greater help that we can offer them? I don't think so. Sometimes that means we have to bring up those difficult subjects and work through disagreements. Doing that in a family-centered way means that we make sure we are respectful, honest, and open to new ideas. This way of working occasionally takes more time, but in the end it saves time because it allows us to address underlying issues and bring about lasting change.

Working with a family so that you never have to knock on their door again—now that's what I call family-centered!

Training Dates

Cornerstone III: Family-Centered Partnership in Child Welfare Practice

To register for any of the following events, contact:
Donna Pearson
828/433-7187
(fax) 828/430-8762

August 8-10
Marion (McDowell Co.)

August 29-31
Albemarle (Stanly Co.)

September 12-14
Williamston (Martin Co.)

September 25-27
Asheville (Buncombe Co.)

October 10-12
Raleigh (Wake Co.)

October 16-18
Charlotte
(Mecklenburg Co.)

November 13-15
Fayetteville
(Cumberland Co.)

November 14-16
Mocksville (Davie Co.)

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

July 11-12 & 25-26
Asheville (Buncombe Co.)

August 3-4 & 17-18
Fayetteville
(Cumberland Co.)

September 7-8 & 28-29
Charlotte
(Mecklenburg Co.)

Training Dates

Family-Centered Meeting Learning Events

There are a great many events being offered to train counties in the use of child and family team meetings. The Division, in partnership with the Family-Centered Meetings Project at NCSU, is now offering:

Step by Step: Your Guide to Child and Family Teams

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

The ABC's of Including Children in Family-Centered Meetings

Widening the Circle: Family-Centered Meetings and Safety Issues

County-Specific Transfer of Learning Activities in Support of Family-Centered Meetings

For a complete listing of the dates and locations of these course offerings, consult the Division's training calendar at www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/training/

MRS Staff Changes at the State Level

In May, Patrick Betancourt joined the staff of the Division as the new statewide MRS Coordinator, filling the vacancy created when Tony Troop left to become the School-Based Child and Family Support Team Initiative Coordinator for the Department of Health and Human Services. Betancourt comes to the Division from Franklin County DSS.

"North Carolina is at an exciting crossroads with MRS," Betancourt says. "The way we partner with families and communities to keep children safe and healthy is something this state can be extremely proud of." You can contact Betancourt by phone (919/733-4622) or e-mail (patrick.betancourt@ncmail.net).



Patrick
Betancourt

Study Links High Turnover with Maltreatment Recurrence

Adapted from the CB Express (May 2006)

A new study shows that high child welfare staff turnover is associated with higher rates of recurrence of child abuse and neglect.

The study, *Relationship Between Staff Turnover, Child Welfare System Functioning and Recurrent Child Abuse*, used 2002 data from 12 diverse California counties. By analyzing data about nearly 3,000 workers and more than 40,000 cases, researchers were able to classify the 12 counties as high, moderate, or low functioning based on workplace characteristics, efficiency measures, and recurrence outcomes at 3, 6, and 12 months.

The highest functioning county agencies had both the lowest turnover rate, at 9%, and the lowest rates of maltreatment recurrence, at 6–15% over the three time periods. In comparison, the lowest functioning agencies had a staff turnover rate of 23% and maltreatment recurrence rates of 15–22%.

The study, which was released by Cornerstones for Kids, offers recommendations for better agency functioning. It can be found at: www.cornerstones4kids.org/images/nccd_relationships_306.pdf

Announcing the 2006 MRS Learning Institute

We are excited to bring you the news that the second Multiple Response System Learning Institute will take place August 21 through 23, 2006 in New Bern, North Carolina. This event will offer many opportunities to learn about the various facets of the Multiple Response System. On Monday and Wednesday there will be a variety of MRS-related workshops delivered by experienced professionals. Tuesday you will get to choose from many day-long, skill- and knowledge-building workshops. Evenings will offer opportunities to network, meet new people, and get reacquainted with friends from across the state. There will be something at the Institute to interest just about everybody, and it will all take place on New Bern's historic waterfront. Be on the lookout for registration information. We hope to see you there!