

MRS!

INFORMATION IN SUPPORT OF NORTH CAROLINA'S MULTIPLE RESPONSE SYSTEM

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October 2008

Working with the Courts: Child Planning Conferences

In the child welfare system in North Carolina we have spent a lot of time lately talking about the importance of Child and Family Team Meetings, or CFTs. There's good reason for this, of course. Studies in the United States and elsewhere have found that holding family meetings is a key strategy for promoting active concurrent planning, stabilizing foster care placements, recruiting and retaining kinship foster and adoptive homes, and achieving a host of other positive results.

Clearly, CFTs are a useful tool in our efforts to ensure the safety, well-being, and permanence of children.

Yet there are other types of meetings outside the child welfare system that have a huge impact on child welfare-involved children and their families. One of the most important of these is the CPC, or Child Planning Conference, which comes to us from North Carolina's court system.

Child Planning Conferences

Child Planning Conferences—sometimes called Day One Conferences—are a recommended best practice being applied in some court districts in North Carolina. Although there is some variation, most judicial districts that hold CPCs use similar rules. The description of the CPC we provide here is based on the Juvenile Court Rules used in judicial District 1, which serves Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Dare, Gates, Pasquotank, and Perquimans Counties.

In court districts that use Child Planning Conferences, a CPC is scheduled whenever a juvenile is taken into DSS custody and a petition is filed with the court alleging child abuse, neglect, or dependency. CPCs are typically scheduled by the Juvenile Court Case Manager and occur after the child enters DSS custody and before the seven day Nonsecure Custody hearing. CPCs seldom last longer than an hour.

The purpose a CPC is to expedite the process of establishing stability for the child by bringing all the interested parties and community resources together in a timely fashion to begin the planning process for the child's well-being. A CPC is a permanency-focused meeting.

continued next page

In a 2006 study, Kirk and Griffith identified Child Planning Conferences as the most important component of Family Court for child welfare cases.

MRS Meetings

Meetings will be held from 10 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

East

October 16
Halifax County

November 13
Onslow County

Central

October 29
Cabarrus County

November 19
Randolph County

West

October 14
Buncombe County

November meeting: TBA

For details about meeting locations and directions, contact Holly McNeill 828/757-5672 holly.mcneill@ncmail.net or consult the MRS Calendar on Google at <http://www.google.com/calendar/embed?src=multipleresponsesystem@gmail.com>

Training Dates

Shared Parenting

October 1-2
Greensboro
Contact: Elaine Highsmith
336/954-1747
(fax) 336/954-1750

November 17-18
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

Child Planning Conferences *continued from page 1*

According to Melanie Jordan, the Juvenile Court Case Manager in District 1, CPCs bring everyone—including schools, DSS, mental health, parents, guardians ad litem, and the courts—to the table in a relaxed, respectful, nonadversarial environment.

The Juvenile Court Case Manager facilitator usually begins by giving all parties an opportunity to present information and to ask brief questions of each other. Typically the DSS social worker presents the grounds for taking custody of the children, but there is no formal presentation of evidence. When all parties have been heard, the Juvenile Court Case Manager determines whether there is agreement among the parties as to whether the juvenile needs to remain in nonsecure custody.

If there is agreement that the child needs to remain in DSS custody, the rest of the meeting is spent determining whether placement can be found with family or friends, what services need to be initiated immediately to expedite resolution of the problems that led to the child's removal from the home, and to establish a visitation schedule appropriate to the developmental needs of the child and the circumstances of the family. Paternity may also be addressed.

Many times, the things decided in CPCs are what families and other parties choose for themselves. This can feel much better to families than having things mandated by the court. After most CPCs the parties involved usually agree that it is not necessary to hold an official Nonsecure Custody hearing; these cases go straight to adjudication.

Want to Learn More?

If you'd like to learn more about Child Planning Conferences, read the Rules for Juvenile Court in District 1. They can be found online at <http://www.nccourts.org/Courts/CRS/Policies/LocalRules/Documents/1128.pdf>

Tool for Figuring Out Court Dates

There's a new tool that's being used in some judicial districts that some child welfare social workers and supervisors find very helpful. It is a simple Microsoft Excel file that calculates dates in the court process for a child, once you enter in the date a Petition is filed.

Ann Holley, child welfare supervisor at Gates County DSS, who first received a copy of this tool from Melanie Jordan, Juvenile Court Case Manager in Judicial District 1, says it is a huge help. "It's peace of mind," Holley says.

You can download a copy of this tool by going to <http://www.practicenotes.org/TrackingForm.xls>.

"The whole idea behind this program is to get permanence in children's lives within one year. That's our goal."

*— Melanie Jordan,
District 1 Juvenile
Court Case Manager*

NC's Child Welfare System Focuses on the Courts

The court system has great influence on the child welfare system's ability to achieve the outcomes it seeks. This fact was underscored during North Carolina's most recent the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), which took place in March 2007. During this review evaluators expressed concern with the slowness with which termination of parental rights (TPR)—an essential precondition of adoption—is achieved in our state. The main barriers to timely TPR cited by reviewers were court scheduling difficulties, a lengthy TPR appeals process, and the reluctance of some agency attorneys, caseworkers, and judges to seek TPR, particularly for older children. In response to the CFSR, North Carolina has dedicated a portion of its federal Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to court involvement. Under the PIP, we have three court-related goals:

1. To implement strategies to increase responsiveness to child safety issues by judges, attorneys, and other professionals.
2. To implement strategies to achieve permanency which address court delays at all stages of the court process.
3. To implement strategies that encourage efficiency, consistency, and child well-being for Juvenile Courts throughout NC's 42 judicial districts.

In pursuit of these goals North Carolina is engaging in a variety of strategies. Efforts are underway to cross-train judges, attorneys, court personnel, and child welfare staff to educate everyone about best practices for increasing child safety, well-being, and permanence. Collaboration and communication are increasing between the Administrative Office of the Courts and the NC Division of Social Services, the agencies that oversee the court and child welfare systems at the state level.

Also, a new chapter of child welfare policy related to the courts is in the works. Look for an announcement about this soon.

Bringing about Change in Your Judicial District

When it comes to improving relationships with the courts, traditionally child welfare professionals have often felt somewhat stymied. Communication with the judicial system—let alone change—has felt out of their control.

For front line supervisors and child welfare staff, to some extent that is still the case. Their best means of directly communicating with judges and the judicial system is practicing good social work and being prepared and professional when they appear in court. That said, the courtroom is not an appropriate forum for advocating for change or interagency dialogue.

With DSS directors the story is different. Because they and Chief District Court Judges are peers—each leads an essential institution of the local community—they can initiate interagency dialogue and/or advocate for change.

If there are issues you feel need to be addressed or innovative practices you would like to see introduced in your judicial district, speak to your director. Sometimes change needs to come from the top.

Training Dates

CPS Assessments in Child Welfare Services

October 14-17
Charlotte
Register online through
ncswLearn.org

October 21-24
Fayetteville
Contact: Amy Campbell
910/677-0460
(fax) 910/677-0468

November 18-21
Charlotte
Register online through
ncswLearn.org

December 9-12
Charlotte
Contact: Bonnie English
704/395-2110
(fax) 704/395-2101

Introduction to Substance Abuse for Child Welfare Services

October 14-15
Greensboro
Register online through
ncswLearn.org

November 12-13
Kinston
Register online through
ncswLearn.org

A Sincere and Heartfelt Thanks

by Holly McNeill



I would like to offer up a special thanks to everyone who attended the 2008 MRS Learning Institute in Greensboro this past August. Once again, this event was a huge success. The Planning Committee would like to extend some special thank-yous to people who made it such a special and exciting event.

First, to our learned and dynamic presenters: thank-you for engaging participants and providing a wide range of activities and information that will serve the families and children of North Carolina. This year's presenters included professional trainers, county and private agency staff, as well as family members and youth. What a wealth of experience!

Next, to the administration of the North Carolina Division of Social Services, a huge thanks for your support. In particular we'd like to give a special thanks to a special lady, Ms. Jo Ann Lamm. Jo Ann has been an inspiration and a leader for MRS since the beginning. Her participation in the Institute has been a highlight for staff and participants. As Jo Ann looks forward to her well-earned retirement this November, we offer our profound thanks for all that she has done to develop and support the Multiple Response System.

The Institute would not be possible without the help of our Advisory Committee, as well as Division and county staff members who volunteer to work behind the scenes. Because of them, participants reported a positive experience during the entire event, from the registration desk through the closing session. These are the folks who put the goodies in the bags and provide a seemingly endless supply of smiles. Our hats are off to you!

Of course, last, but certainly not least: our participants. Where would we be without your energy and commitment to learning, growing, and providing services to help the families, youth, and children of North Carolina achieve the best possible outcomes? Thanks to all!

For those of you who couldn't attend this event and for those of you who were there and want to relive the glory, on the next page we have included some photos of former NC foster child and professional speaker, Jimmy Wayne, who performed at the Institute, as well as a number of other familiar faces. Enjoy!

Reach Your Dreams

A goal is a dream with a deadline. To reach your dreams, set goals you can reach.

- **Discover your dream.** Imagine that you only have one year to live and that you're protected from failure. Anything you try you will achieve.
- **Set goals.** Goals bridge the span between your present and future—your dream.
- **Avoid dream killers.** Negativity and fear jeopardize dreams. To succeed, you must try.
- **Make a commitment.** Know there will be obstacles along the way.
- **Make a change.** Face uncertainty and take action on your dreams.

Source: *It only takes a minute to change your life* (1997) by W. Jolley, St. Martin's Press, cited in *People at Work*.

Training Dates

Coaching in the Kitchen: Guiding Parents through Teachable Moments

To register contact:

Donna Walters-Pearson
828/433-7187

(fax) 828/430-8762

November 4-6

Raleigh

Supervisors Strengthening Staff Performance: Managing Transfer of Learning in the Work Place

To register contact:

Donna Walters-Pearson
828/433-7187

(fax) 828/430-8762

Asheville Class

November 12-13

December 10-11

Understanding and Intervening in Child Neglect

To register contact:

Judy Prophet
704/545-9512

(fax) 704/573-4802

October 16-17

Kinston

Adult Mental Health Issues Which Impact Families Served by Child Welfare

November 6-7

Greensboro

Register online through
ncswLearn.org



Jimmy Wayne and participants



*Closing keynote speaker
Jeanne Robertson*



NCDSS Deputy Director Jo Ann Lamm



Jimmy Wayne and participants



Patrick Betancourt, MRS Coordinator; Charisse Johnson, Chief of Family Support and Child Welfare Services; Teresa Turner, Staff Development Team Leader; Shery Bradsher, NCDSS Director; Jackie Sheppard, Assistant Secretary, NC Dept. of Health and Human Services