

Using Comprehensive Family Assessments to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes:

A Partnership between the Ramsey County Community Human Services Department and the University of Minnesota

Center for Advanced Studies
in Child Welfare

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Project

Background

Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) are used by the Children's Bureau to assess the performance of state child welfare agencies' efforts at achieving positive child and family outcomes. A 2001 CFSR indicated that child welfare agencies needed to improve family assessment and service provision. This led to the development of the Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA) Guidelines and the funding of five state sites through a Children's Bureau Demonstration Grant to examine and improve their comprehensive assessment process.

A Partnership between the Ramsey County Community Human Services Department and the University of Minnesota

Ramsey County was chosen as one of five state sites and is partnering with the University of Minnesota on a five year project to develop, evaluate, and disseminate a new model of comprehensive family assessment. This new model is being developed in collaboration with community members, cultural consultants, and cooperating agencies. External evaluators at the University of Minnesota are implementing a comprehensive evaluation plan and will assist with project dissemination.



Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs)

Federal Evaluation of Child Welfare Practice and Outcomes

Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) assess several areas of child welfare practice. In this study, analysis will focus on specific areas including safety and risk assessments (Items 3-4), maintaining children's connections to the community, extended family, friends, etc (Item 14), placements with relatives (Item 15), comprehensive assessments (Item 17), family involvement in case planning (Item 18), patterns of worker visits (Item 19), connection of services related to a child's physical and mental health and educational needs (Items 21-23). Children's Bureau evaluators note that family assessments impact outcomes on these measures.

Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA)

An Assessment Model

The proposed project will provide evidence-based knowledge about the emerging role of comprehensive assessment in child welfare. The CFA will be effectively linked to family engagement and inclusion of fathers, support of healthy marriages, worker-family visits, and case planning and service delivery – all of which lead to better outcomes for families involved in child welfare.

Project Details

Seven Part Baseline Study: Evaluate Current Comprehensive Assessment Approach



Development of a New Comprehensive Assessment Model by Ramsey County: Incorporation of Findings from Baseline Study



Implementation of New Model



Dissemination

Evaluation Methods

Utilization-Focused Evaluation (Patton, 2002) including formative (implementation and process) and summative components.

- Case Record Reviews (CRRs)**
 - CRR Questions are based on CFSR Items with a focus on items 3, 4, 14, 15, 17-23
- Family Interviews**
 - Qualitative, structured interviews including the Poertner Client Satisfaction Scale and the Youth CFSR Tool Kit (Ansell-Casey Questionnaire)
- Focus Groups**
 - Worker and supervisor input on baseline practice and again on the new model
- Management Study**
 - Internal management review to trace the quality assurance structure, process, and feedback loop
- Time Study**
 - 100% workload, week-long study pre and post implementation
- Cost-Effectiveness Study**
 - Using time study data pre and post implementation, In-House Time Logs, SSIS data, CFSR data
- Educational Progress and School Study**
 - Use Minn-LInK data (a database linking child welfare files with school data)

Focus	Intermediate Objectives	Service Outcomes	Client Outcomes	Products Developed
Family assessment Child Parents Family relationships Environment	Assessment clearly identifies family needs and strengths and addresses individual family members, family dynamics and environmental/social context.	CFSR items reflect accurate, holistic family assessments	Family members feel understood and valued and engage in the casework process	Transferable model for CFA intake (Investigation and AR) and ongoing services (In-home and Out-of-home)
Case planning Service selection Service delivery	Case planning reflects a specific, accurate, holistic assessment that pinpoints the need for specific services; Services are coordinated and delivered as planned	CFSR items reflect specific and appropriate service targeting and worker follow-through	Higher percentages of family members follow through with services and engage in the service delivery process	Guidelines accompanying the model for assessment that lead workers to identify appropriate services
Case monitoring and follow-up	Casework supervision and quality assurance accommodate the design of comprehensive family assessment and are structured to ensure its appropriate use	CFSR items reflect client engagement in the appropriate services and changes for the family	Family members' circumstances and/or behavior changes as a result of achieving the appropriate services	Infrastructure recommendations to accompany the family assessment model
Completion of child welfare services	Cases more often closed with goals in the case plan met	Unnecessary removals and re-referrals decrease; timely reunification and permanency improve (CFSR Outcomes); Percentage re-referral diminishes	Family community supports are used more frequently; Substantiated re-abuse declines; Foster care entries decline; Stays in foster care decline	Model includes composite de-identified case examples in training/guidelines to illustrate various assessments, approaches, and outcomes.

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