

Using Comprehensive Family Assessments
to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes
Ramsey County Community Human Services &
University of Minnesota School of Social Work
St. Paul, Minnesota

Comprehensive Family Assessment Case Management Baseline Report: Family Interview Addendum

June 5, 2009

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This report was developed through funding provided by the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #90CA1753/01, "Using Comprehensive Family Assessments to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes."

Family Interviews

Introduction

The following addendum is based on seven interviews of families and youth involved with Ramsey County Community Human Services Department (RCCHSD) Child Protection services between July 2006 and June 2007. Interviews were conducted between July and November 2008. The purpose of the interviews was to better understand families' experiences of various aspects of child protection services at Ramsey County.

Methods

Instrument Development

Researchers at the University of Minnesota developed a family interview guide based on a review of Ramsey County child protection case records and with assistance and guidance from Ramsey county staff and project advisory groups. Questions included in the guide were developed to incorporate select items from the following: Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008), the Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines for Child Welfare (Children's Bureau, 2005), the Comprehensive Family Assessment Project Parent Satisfaction with Services Delivered Illinois Foster Care Scale (Harris, Poertner, & Joe, 2000), the CFSR Toolkit for Youth Involvement (Ansell et al., 2007), and the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (Casey Family Services, n.d.).

Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted by two University of Minnesota researchers; one researcher asked questions while the other recorded the family's or youth's responses. The interviewer first introduced the consent form explaining the voluntary nature of the study, families' rights, confidentiality, procedures, and compensation. If the family still consented to participate in the interview, all family members signed and dated the consent form.

Sample

During the five month time-span, attempts were made by the Ramsey County Project Coordinator to contact a total of 31 families or youth who had been randomly selected from the 60 cases included in the case record review. Of the 31 families, nine

respondents from six families agreed to participate in the interviews. Of the six families, two had both parents/caretakers present for the interview. Three of the six families had in-home cases and three had out-of-home cases. In one of the out-of-home cases, both the parent and the 16-17 year old youth participated; the parent and youth were interviewed separately, resulting in a total of seven interviews from the six families. Throughout the addendum, responses from the youth and her parent are reported separately because each experienced the case differently, their interview instruments were slightly different, and neither was present at the other's interview. Hereafter, the youth is referred to as the "16-17 year old youth" or "youth" where appropriate.

More than half of the families had at least one member who identified his/her race as non-white. Of the nine respondents from the six families, three respondents from three different families identified as being of Hispanic/Latino/Spanish/Mexican/Mexican American/or Chicano descent. Of the other three, one respondent identified her race as Hmong and the other five respondents identified their race as White.

Although researchers attempted to obtain a representative sample of families' experiences of Ramsey County Child Protection services through several attempts to contact families, participation fell short of the project goal of 10 families (five in-home and five out-of-home). The nature of the sample impacts the findings in the following ways: 1) there were fewer responses from fathers, and 2) the small sample limits the breadth and depth of family stories represented, especially as any unique or systematically different experiences of those who refused to participate may not be captured.

Results

The following is a brief summary of both the positive and challenging experiences families and youth had with Ramsey County Child Protection services. In general, one of the in-home families and the 16-17 youth often reported different feelings or experiences than families of the other cases. Families in two of the in-home cases generally reported more satisfaction with their worker and their overall experience than families in the out-of-home cases. The results are divided into six broad categories: 1) families' and youth's experiences with their worker, 2) families' and youth's experiences with their case plans, services, and other professionals, 3) families' and youth's experiences with services and the coordination

with other professionals, 4) family and youth culture, 5) families' and youth's experiences with foster care and out-of-home placement, and 6) families' and youth's overall likes, dislikes, and suggestions for Ramsey County child protection services. General conclusions are presented at the end. Throughout the report, some of the results are presented from six interviews and some are presented from seven because of differences between the youth and adult interview guides. The youth was not asked some of the questions that the adults were asked because they were not relevant, so some of response summaries include only six interviews.

Families' and Youth's Experiences with their Worker

The following section provides a summary of families' and the youth's responses to various questions asking about their overall experience with their particular program worker.

Worker-family/Worker-youth relationships

There were mixed reports about the nature of the overall relationship between the worker and the family or youth, with an equal number of families or youth from in-home and out-of-home cases expressing positive sentiments. Those that described their relationship as more conflicted or less satisfying in some way included one of the in-home cases and the 16-17 year old youth.

Families in two of the three in-home cases expressed that they had a good relationship with their worker using words such as "helpful" and "supportive" to describe their relationship with their worker. Additional comments included "there were no secrets with our worker," "I miss her a lot," "he was a great help," "I feel like she was like my mom," "[worker] believed in us," and "he didn't set us up to fail." These comments were supported by answers to questions throughout the families' interview; there were no inconsistencies.

Of the families or youth in the out-of-home cases, two expressed that they had a good relationship with their worker using words such as "on my side," "stood up for me," "willing to work with me," and "she'd reassure me" to describe their worker. Additional comments from these families included feeling like the case was "meaningful" to the worker; one family felt comfortable enough to call their worker after their case had closed

to ask about something else. Again, these comments were consistent with answers to questions throughout the interview.

Of the remaining families, each described some level of conflict in their relationship with their worker. One of the in-home families shared that the conflicted relationship with their worker was due to their worker not communicating with them about closing the case. Throughout the interview, the 16-17 year old youth described her experience with child protection and her relationship with her worker as somewhat conflicted (e.g. stating she didn't think they had a relationship), the youth did say she "appreciated" the help her worker tried to give her. One family with an out-of-home case expressed frustration over her worker's rescheduling of appointments; this family described the relationship as "okay" and "good" as well as "a pain."

More than one worker

Overall, families and youth reported satisfaction with the number of workers assigned to their case, with the majority of families having only two workers in their case (one investigation/intake worker and one primary case worker/social worker). Five families or youth reported having two workers, four of whom reported feeling neutral or satisfied with having two workers. The 16-17 year old youth reported not liking her first worker but found her second worker more helpful and a better listener. One of the in-home families reported having three workers, which they found "confusing." One out-of-home family was unclear about who was considered their worker. In this family's description, this particular family reported that a number of people were involved initially, but later they worked with one social worker.

Worker visitation: frequency and quality of visits

Satisfaction over frequency and quality of visits between workers and families/youth was split, with four families expressing overall satisfaction and two families and the youth expressing less satisfaction coupled with some frustration. Specifically, the two families who were less satisfied explicitly stated that their workers seemed overworked and that caseloads should be smaller so that workers could devote more time to each case.

For families that reported satisfaction with frequency of worker visitation, the families from two in-home and two out-of-home cases reported meeting with their worker once per week (though in one in-home case, visits were eventually spread out to once per month). All of these families reported feeling like visitation occurred often enough to meet their family goals. However, both of the families in the out-of-home cases reported that they only “sometimes” felt their worker devoted enough time to their case. One of these families observed that the worker seemed “bogged down,” “overloaded,” and “always in a hurry.”

Of the other two families and the youth, the meetings were less frequent and both the families and youth reported some dissatisfaction with the amount of time spent on their case. One of the in-home families reported meeting with their worker only once per month and feeling like the worker “never” devoted enough time to the case; the family also reported that their worker would often make appointments and cancel them. A mother from an out-of-home case reported that she met with her worker less than once per month, which she said was often enough *only* because she herself did the work to meet her goals. She, too, reported that her worker would often cancel appointments and recommended that workers have smaller case loads so they have more time to devote to each case. Finally, the youth reported meeting with her worker between two and three times in total over a one-month period; she also reported that this did not seem often enough to meet her goals.

Worker responsiveness and attention to case

In addition to the above summary of frequency and quality of visits, there were other indications of how families felt about their worker’s responsiveness and attentiveness to their case (the youth was not asked these questions). Specifically, families were asked to rate whether they felt their workers returned calls, offered contact information when gone, were reliable (as measured by whether workers did what they said they would do), and admitted to and corrected their mistakes. All six families who were asked these questions felt their workers either “frequently” or “sometimes” returned their calls, yet not all reported that their worker frequently gave them someone to contact if their worker was unavailable. One of the in-home families and one of the out-of-home

families reported that their worker “never” gave them an alternate contact; all other families reported workers “frequently” provided alternate contacts or that this did not apply. The in-home and out-of-home family who reported dissatisfaction in this area also reported that their workers “rarely” did something when they said they would do it and thus were generally unreliable. This finding is consistent with reports from these two families throughout other areas of the interview. In fact, the family in this out-of-home case also reported that her worker canceled appointments, was late, and generally seemed to have too large a case load. In contrast, families in the other cases reported their worker either “frequently” or “sometimes” did what they said they would do. Four of six families also reported that their worker did not make mistakes; of the two families which experienced mistakes, one said her worker “sometimes” corrected the situation while the other said this “never” happened. This, too, is consistent with these families’ other reports throughout their interviews.

Worker’s clarity about initial involvement in child protection

Overall, there was some inconsistency between what families/the 16-17 year old youth remembered their workers telling them about the reason(s) they first became involved in child protection and what they themselves saw as their own issues and concerns. Three families reported having the same understanding of the reasons for their initial involvement in child protection as their workers. For example, one family thought their own substance abuse was the reason for initial involvement and also reported that this is what their worker told them. Three families, however, reported a different family issue/concern than what they remember their worker telling them. For example, one family remembered their worker telling them the reason for involvement was abuse when they felt their family’s issues were related to their child’s bad behavior, truancy, and drug use. Finally, the 16-17 year old youth did not report the reason her worker thought she needed to be involved in child protection. It is unclear whether the worker did not tell her this or whether she misunderstood or chose not to answer this question during the interview.

Worker's clarity about case closing

Five of six families reported their workers were clear about what was expected of the family and about what needed to happen to close their case; however one of the in-home families and the 16-17 year old youth reported a lack of clarity in this area. The in-home family reported that their worker was “sometimes” clear about his/her expectations. This family also reported that they did not have a clear case plan, and were therefore unclear about what had to be done to close their case. The 16-17 year old reported being unsure why her case was closed. In contrast, the other two families with in-home cases and two of the families with out-of-home cases said their workers were clear about their expectations and the necessary steps the family would need to take to close the case.

Worker's discussion of family strengths

Families and the 16-17 year old youth were asked questions to assess the extent to which their worker focused on or identified their strengths – both when things were better for the family and things the family did well. Five families and the youth reported that workers asked about times when things were going well for their family, but not all reported that workers included what they did well or what was going well for them in their case plan. Two of the in-home families said that their worker “frequently” encouraged them to discuss when things were better with their family and included things the family did well or that were going well in their case plan. The youth also reported that her worker included things in the case plan that she did well or that were going well (note that she was not asked the first question about when things were better). Of the other out-of-home families, two said their worker “frequently” encouraged them to discuss when things were better with their family but that their worker did not include things that they did well or that were going well in their case plan. One of these families, however, reported that her worker said “you are so much more than this” when she felt like she wanted to give up which indicates the worker saw strengths in this mother. One of the in-home families said the question about things being better with the family did not apply because their case plan was with another agency, but they reported that that the worker did talk about things that were going well for them and things they did well on more than one occasion. In contrast, one mother in an out-of-home case reported that her worker “never” encouraged her to

discuss when things were better with her family nor did the worker include anything the mother did well in the case plan.

Additional worker relationship topics

Families were also asked some specific questions about the extent to which they felt their worker respected their privacy, listened, cared about their kids, and calmed their fears (note that the 16-17 year old youth was not asked this set of questions). With the exception of one in-home family (who said this question did not apply, though it was not clear why they felt this way), all families reported that their worker respected their right to privacy. Responses to the question as to whether their workers listened were consistent with these families' previous responses about their relationships with their workers and the feelings about how workers did their jobs. While four of six families were satisfied, at least two expressed at least some dissatisfaction with the process. When asked whether their worker listened to their side of the story, four families said "frequently" and two (one in-home and one out-of-home family) answered "sometimes." These same two families endorsed "sometimes" when asked about whether they felt their worker cared about their kids and both had expressed at least some conflict in their relationship with their worker and some dissatisfaction with their child protection experience in other parts of the interview. In contrast, the other four families said they "frequently" felt their worker cared about their kids. Finally, when families were asked whether they felt their worker calmed their fears about what child protection could do to them or their children, five of the six replied "frequently" while one of the in-home families replied "never."

Families' and Youth's Experiences with Case Plans, Services, and Other Professionals

The following section summarizes several aspects of the case plan process from the families' or 16-17 year old youth's perspective.

Case plans

Five families and the 16-17 year old youth reported that they did have a case plan; of those who had a case plan, four families remembered signing it. The other family (an in-home family) and the youth either did not remember signing the case plan or did not respond to the question. One in-home family reported that they had a case plan with a child

welfare agency other than Ramsey County. They reported that their Ramsey County case worker did not know what was in the other case plan.

Families' and youth's involvement in case plans

Five families and the 16-17 year old youth responded to a number of questions about their involvement in their case plan, including whether they were involved in making decisions and the development of goals, actually writing the plan to include things they wanted in the plan, and whether their plan was updated as their situation changed. One in-home family reported not having a case plan with Ramsey County, so they did not respond to this set of questions.

All five of the families and the 16-17 year old youth responded that they were involved and included in all of the aforementioned areas, though three families reported they did not update the plan over time as things in their life changed. One of these families stated "we stuck to it," which may reflect their reported involvement in frequent drug and alcohol testing and the fact that they did not feel they needed to change their plan if it was working. The youth, who reported not updating her plan, had somewhat contradictory statements, stating at one point that she and her worker made the initial plan together and then revised it later to include her parents' plan. The third family also had somewhat contradictory statements as the mother had described changes in their case plan over time in other parts of the interview (e.g. after she and her husband got out of rehab/the work house); so either the question was not clear to her or she did not see these changes reflected in her case plan.

Families' and youth's access to help and services

Five families (excluding the youth and the in-home family who reported having a case plan with another agency) responded to questions about the extent to which they felt their worker informed them of help available to complete their case plan, and whether their worker was responsive to their needs by getting them services in a timely manner. Four thought their worker "frequently" informed them of help available and the fifth responded that this happened "sometimes." Four families also thought that their worker "frequently" connected them with services in a timely manner; one family thought this

happened “sometimes.” The two families who reported “sometimes” to the above questions were involved in out-of-home cases.

Families’ and youth’s clarity about case closing

Four families reported being sure about what needed to be done to close their case while two families and the 16-17 year old youth reported being unsure about this. In one of the three families who reported being unsure about what had to be done to close the case, the mother expressed an otherwise overall good experience with child protection and her worker. This mother reported that she was satisfied with the services she received and that her worker asked her about what the mother wanted for the future. Of the other two, the youth reported that she did not know how her case was closed and she “just went home [from the foster care shelter] one day.” The in-home family had expressed dissatisfaction with the way their case was closed saying “she closed it without an explanation” because the subject youth had run away. The nature of this particular in-home family’s overall dissatisfaction with their entire child protection experience was related to how their worker closed the case.

Families’ and Youth’s Experiences with Services and Collaboration with other Professionals

This section summarizes whether families’ services matched their needs and the extent to which there was collaboration between workers and other professionals throughout their case.

Matching family and youth concerns to services

Families and the 16-17 year old youth were asked several questions about the services they received and the extent to which they felt those services matched both their own initial and ongoing concerns and their worker’s initial and ongoing concerns.

Five families and the 16-17 year old youth reported there was a good match between the services offered by the worker and the initial concerns (one in-home family reported that the services for the initial concerns were handled by the other child welfare agency). In two instances, however, the family was not able to take advantage of a service offered due to their own scheduling conflicts or the service’s waitlist.

Regarding ongoing concerns, five families reported there was a good match between services offered and ongoing concerns (two in-home and three out-of-home). In one of those families, however, the worker was concerned about the mother not having enough support; while there was not a specific service for this, the worker did continue the family's connection with a local culturally appropriate social service agency. Of the other two, the in-home family listed respite care and foster parent classes as services but did not link them to a concern, and the youth expressed frustration that she did not receive ongoing help for her drug addiction.

The same five families who had seen a good match between services and ongoing concerns also indicated that the services were a good fit for their needs and that there were no services which they felt they needed but did not receive or have offered to them. Of the other two, the in-home family had conflicting answers, stating that the services were a good fit but also stating that the classes were for foster parents of younger children so the classes did not exactly fit their needs. The youth reported that the service she did receive (counseling) was a good fit but that she felt she needed additional help for her drug use.

Workers' involvement and collaboration with other professionals

Families and the 16-17 year old youth were asked various questions about the extent to which their workers collaborated or communicated with other professionals – both with whom they were already working, if applicable, and those with whom they started to work after their case opened. Regarding speaking up for families with other professionals, six families were asked about this (excluding the youth) and four reported that their worker “frequently” spoke up for them with other professionals. One family in an out-of-home case said this happened “sometimes; and one in-home family said this “never” happened. Follow up questions revealed that in all four families where there were other professionals already involved with the case, the worker collaborated with those professionals. For four families and the 16-17 year old youth, new professionals became involved after the case opened or had already been involved and workers collaborated with those people and all reported that their workers included other professionals in their case work when applicable. Of the others, both reported that they were not working with anyone previously nor were there new professionals involved as the case progressed.

Family and Youth Culture

Families and the 16-17 year old youth were asked a number of questions about the extent to which they felt their culture was respected by their worker during their child protection case, whether the help or services offered respected their culture, and other questions related to culture. A summary of the data is provided below, though it is important to note that at times families and the youth were inconsistent in their responses. In these cases, the inconsistencies are noted.

Defining culture

When asked to share how they themselves define their culture, families and the 16-17 year old youth defined their culture in various ways. These included their race or ethnicity (e.g., Hmong, "American," Swedish, Southwestern Hispanic), community (e.g., Mexican-American), religion (e.g., Catholic, Protestant), class, beliefs, morals, and family tradition.

Worker respect of families' and youth's culture

The six families and the 16-17 year old youth all reported that their worker spoke to them in their language. This included families whose primary language was Hmong or Spanish. When asked specifically their opinion on the extent to which their worker respected their culture, five of six families answered "frequently" while the other one answered "sometimes." The 16-17 year old youth was not asked this specific question. There was one inconsistency; while one in-home family answered "frequently" regarding the worker's respect for their culture, they later responded that they did not feel their worker thought about their family culture as she worked with them to close the case. This family indicated that they had other misunderstandings with their worker regarding their case closing.

Inclusion of families' and youth's culture in case plan

Though most workers respected the families' or youth's culture, five families and the 16-17 year old youth reported that their case plan did *not* include anything about their family's culture. The family that reported that their case plan did include their culture was from an in-home case; this family also reported that the services matched the family culture by incorporating activities through the family's church. These answers are

somewhat inconsistent with the next set of answers in which families report on whether the help or services they received addressed their family's culture given that help and services are often in the case plan.

Alignment of services with families' or youth's culture

Most families reported that the help or services they received addressed their family's culture. Of the five families and the 16-17 year old youth who received services as part of their Ramsey County case plan (one of the in-home families received services from another child welfare agency, so they reported that the questions about the services did not apply), five reported feeling that the help or services received did address their family's culture. For example, one family shared that the services were coordinated through the family church while another family shared that the worker listened to her desire for a culturally appropriate foster placement even though she was not necessarily able to meet this request. *(Note that this particular family had specific requests about the placement (i.e., they had a particular family in mind), but these were not met. This family reported that they felt the help or services received matched their family's culture and that their worker listened to their request for a certain kind of foster placement.)* The youth reported that she did not think her services matched her culture, stating that she felt assumptions were made about her as a "white American girl" who comes from a white family. She did not share ways in which she felt her culture could have been respected through services.

Families' and Youth Experience with Foster Care and Out-of-Home Placement

Overall, families and the 16-17 year old youth had mixed experiences with foster care. All three out-of-home families and the youth reported that Ramsey County paid for foster care or their child's/own out-of-home placement. The parent of the youth reported that she felt the worker "frequently" respected her rights to make decisions and "frequently" helped her talk to her child, but the other two parents did not report feeling this way. One of these parents said she "rarely" felt her right to make decisions was respected. The mother in the other family said she felt her right was respected "sometimes" because she did not want her child to be in a foster home of her same culture and instead had a specific foster home in mind where her siblings had been. She reported that the

county did not listen to her wishes about which foster home she wanted. While in care, she reported that she “sometimes” got to talk to her children.

The youth reported that she had a negative experience in her shelter foster care. She specifically reported the following: that the foster parent left her with other adults who were not licensed to care for her while the worker and her boyfriend “went out drinking;” that a biological child in the home tried to look at her while she showered; that the shelter adults listened in on her phone calls, but for the most part she could not talk on the phone; and that overall she felt isolated and “like a delinquent.” She said that “they should not let those people be shelter parents” and that “no one deserves to go to [name] shelter.” An additional complaint was that her confidentiality was not respected by her foster parents because they told their biological children what was happening and their children told other children at school. At the end of the interview she said she hoped other kids would not have to experience what she experienced.

The three families that experienced out-of-home placements (not including the youth) were asked whether they felt their worker understood how hard it was to have their child(ren) taken away; two families answered “frequently” and one answered “rarely.” The one who answered “rarely” did not elaborate on this response but her overall description of her relationship with her worker included frustrations over her worker canceling meetings and not returning calls. She was the parent who also reported that her worker “rarely” respected her rights to make decisions about her child. These answers reflect an overall negative experience in this area with her worker, but this parent’s other answers show that she had some positive experiences with her worker in other ways (e.g. her worker showed her some new parenting techniques).

Families’ and Youth’s Overall Likes, Dislikes, and Suggestions for Child Protection

Families were asked for input on their overall likes and dislikes about child protection services. Table A summarizes responses in each category, though many of these have been covered in other areas of the report.

Table A. Families' and Youth's Likes, Dislikes, and Suggestions for Ramsey County Child Protection Services

Likes:	Dislikes:	Suggestions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers' priorities were with the kids, visiting kids - Workers make sure kids are with the right person - Family liked services, e.g. camp, big brother/big sister, education classes (several families reported this) - Family liked the fact that the worker came to their house - Family said: "It woke me up to the fact that my child was important" - Family said: "They were serious but caring" - Family said: "They helped when you needed help. They want you to ask for help." - Worker was supportive - Impressed with [worker] as a person - Worker was organized, timely - Worker was sensitive, nice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Worker did not come as often as family would have wanted - Worker did not communicate with another agency - Worker canceled appointments, was late, hard to schedule visits/appointments - Worker seemed overloaded - Family disliked the movement of children to different foster homes and RCCHSD not paying for the foster home the family chose - Youth reported disliking her shelter foster parents - Wish worker would act more quickly in evidentiary cases - Wish worker would take into account the parents' point of view - Wish there could be a change in the way police look at parents - Frustrated that foster parents did not respect confidentiality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workers should be more organized (regarding cancelling/rescheduling visits) - Have more workers so there is enough time for visits - Reduce case load size - Prevention – "a way to reach out to women sooner" (specifically women who are chemically dependent and pregnant) to let them know they can receive help and not go to jail

Discussion

The purpose of the family interviews was to identify ways in which families were engaged in the assessment and case planning process while also giving families and youth an opportunity to share information about their experience with Ramsey County Child Protection. This information supplements other areas of the Baseline Study, including case record reviews, worker focus groups, and the time study in order to construct a multi-faceted analysis of Ramsey County's child welfare practice and to inform the implementation of the new Comprehensive Family Assessment model.

While information gathered in this process is certainly valuable, it may be most helpful to consider family interviews as case study data rather than as representative data. The sample of families who opted to participate in family interviews generally had a good experience with Ramsey County Child Protection. However, it remains unclear as to whether this is a common experience of all or most families who received child protection services through Ramsey County or whether selection bias influenced the findings of the interviews. It is important to note that the findings of this study did not provide information about families who had an overall negative experience or what may have led to that experience. Families who had been engaged with Ramsey County reported a positive experience; however, families were also able to articulate instances of non-engagement. The variability of families' experiences supports the need for a clear practice model which provides workers the opportunity to consistently engage families, allowing families to have a good experience with Ramsey County Child Protection. The response rate for participation in the family interview process was low. As workers engage families using the new Comprehensive Family Assessment model, the response rate itself may change.

The findings from the family and youth interviews offer valuable information about families' experiences. This is especially true in light of the 2005 MN Department of Human Services (MN DHS) Review findings regarding outcomes for children and families in child protection in RCCHSD (MN Department of Human Services, 2005). The 2005 CFSR findings indicated that while Ramsey County Child Protection was strong in protecting children from abuse and neglect and preserving the continuity of family relationships and connections for children, there were some areas that needed improvement.

The 2005 CFSR report indicated that the area most in need of improvement was helping families develop the capacity to provide for their children's needs. As part of this main area, several sub-areas were found to need improvement at that time, including identifying needs and providing services to meet those needs; involving children and families in the case planning process; improving the frequency and quality of worker visits with children and families; and providing services to address children's mental health, educational, and physical health needs. The findings of the family interviews indicate that, overall, workers in the Ramsey County Child Protection system were meeting families' needs; however some families thought that large case loads were preventing workers from being able to devote enough time to their cases.

Identifying needs and the services provided to meet those needs

Most families reported that workers "frequently" let them know of available help or services. Most reported that the services they received were a good match for their needs, and that there were *not* any services they needed but did not receive.

Involvement of children and families in the case planning process

All families that had case plans through Ramsey County reported being involved and included in the development of their case plan. Some families reported having clear expectations about how to close their case while families reported that this was not clear. One area Ramsey County may wish to improve is the inclusion of what families did well or what was going well for families in their case plans; only two families and the youth reported this happening. Interestingly, most reported their worker asked about family strengths, but this was not incorporated in their case plans. Finally, with one exception, most families' and the youths' case plans did not include anything about their culture, though most reported that the help or services they received did address their culture. Again, this may be an area where these issues need to be more explicitly included in case plan development and discussion.

Improving the frequency and quality of worker visits with children and families

Both strengths and challenges were evident in this category. *Frequency of visits* continued to be an area for improvement, as many families reported wanting to meet with their worker more often, wanting their worker more involved, and wanting their worker to

devote more time to their case. Some reported that their worker seemed overloaded or to have too large a case load, as evidenced by canceled visits. In some ways, this finding demonstrates that many families valued their worker and would benefit from more time together.

Families were also asked to answer questions that tapped into their perception of the *quality of visits* the worker had with their families. More families than not reported having an overall “good” relationship with their worker, for instance finding their worker responsive and a good listener. However, two families and the 16-17 year old youth reported some level of conflict due to either how the case was closed or issues such as the rescheduling of appointments. Most families said their worker did not make mistakes, and all said their worker respected their privacy. Most also reported their worker respected their culture, and all reported their worker spoke their language.

Children’s services to address mental health, education, and physical health needs

Of all families interviewed, only the 16-17 year old youth reported wanting help with a drug problem and not receiving it. The rest of the families did not express concerns in these areas and, as reported above, said there were no services they felt they needed but did not receive.

In terms of the main goal of helping families develop the capacity to provide for their children’s needs, Ramsey County has shown some improvement in some areas according to the families and youth interviewed. Going forward with the implementation and evaluation of the new model, it may be important to continue to incorporate strengths and cultural factors into case plans as well as finding systematic ways to allow workers to spend more time with families. The sample is quite limited and does not represent the experiences of all families in Ramsey County Child Protection; still, these findings do show improvements in Ramsey County Child Protection in some of the key areas identified by the 2005 MN DHS Review for at least some families.

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