

Ramsey County Semi-Annual Progress Report: Period 9/30/2007- 3/31/2008
Grant No. 90-1753

I. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

A. MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Project Administration

Project Staff: The project manager was hired. Interviews were conducted for the support staff position, and the position has been offered and accepted. The support staff person will begin working with the project in the middle of May.

Cultural Consultants: Criteria were developed for hiring the cultural consultants who will facilitate the parent response focus groups. One of the cultural consultant positions have been filled. (See Challenges/Barriers)

Advisory Group: Members were selected and invited to the first meeting which will be held during the next report period.

- Advisory Group Subcommittees: The subcommittees are: Integrating Family and Community Concerns, Direct Practice, Agency Management and Quality Assurance, and Utilization-focused Evaluation. Members have been chosen and invited for the four subcommittees, and the first meetings have been held.

- CFA Team: Regular team meetings of the project management staff from Ramsey County Human Services and the University of Minnesota have been held at least twice per month.

Planning and Development of the CFA Model:

- Case Review Tool and Key: Two versions of the case review tool were developed: a tool for in-home cases containing 86 items and a tool for out-of-home cases containing 97 items. The tools were developed from the CFSR, and it was operationalized so that it could be accommodated in a yes/no format. A key was developed that linked questions on the review tools to specific CFSR items. Another source used in the development of the case review tools was a tool previously developed by the University researchers for a study on racial disparities. Lessons learned in the development of that tool were used to capture information regarding each family. The case review was

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conducted by two case readers, and a series of reliability checks was done. The tools and key were sent to James Bell Associates.

Case Review: Using the tools described above, a review of 60 cases was conducted. Twenty-five cases were out-of-home placement cases, 25 were in-home cases, and ten cases involved families with a youth in out of home placement. The case review is one of the four components of the baseline study of current Child Protection practice. The other three components are:

- Focus groups with Child Protection program units. These groups have begun. The protocols for the focus groups will be sent to James Bell Associates.
- Interviews with 10 families to be drawn from the 60 cases reviewed
- Internal management review described below

A report on the study will be completed in the fourth quarter of Year 1. This study provides both a baseline for future research and a comparison to the 2005 CFSR results.

Implementation of the CFA model (including training) N/A

Dissemination N/A

Sustainability N/A

Other activities

Introduced CFA project to stakeholders:

- Community representatives: A kick-off meeting was held with representatives from key community-based agencies that provide services to child protection families under contract with Ramsey County. Also present were representatives from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, the Ramsey County Juvenile Court and County Attorney's Office, cultural consultants, a consumer of Child Protection services, staff from Ramsey County, and the researchers from the University of Minnesota.
- Minnesota Department of Human Services: Ramsey County management staff and the researchers from the University of Minnesota presented an overview of the Project to all Child Safety and Permanency administrative staff from the Minnesota Department of Human Services.
- Cultural consultants and Casey-CSSR Alliance on Racial Equity: The Project was presented to the Ramsey County Ending Racial Disparities Steering Committee and the Casey-CSSR Alliance on Racial Equity. The

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presentations served to provide information to and obtain feedback from the groups.

- A brown-bag lunch was held for all interested Family and Children's staff and supervisors using a power point created by our team.

B. CHALLENGES/BARRIERS

Project Administration

Two changes in the original plan for the administration of the project very early in the grant period led to delays in some of the start-up activities of the project. First, Susan Ault, the Director of Children and Family Services for Ramsey County left the County to take a position with Casey Family Programs. There was a six month period of interim leadership before her successor began on March 31, 2008 (see below). The second change was in the hiring of the project manager (see below) which led to a delay in filling the position. The project manager began on February 1, 2008. In addition, peripheral issues have created obstacles to moving forward efficiently. The institutional requirements associated with hiring the cultural consultants and the support position for the Project as well as with accessing funds for Project expenses have caused delays in some cases. We have dealt with the challenges posed by these changes and issues by moving ahead in a very focused way to complete the steps in our preparation to develop the new comprehensive family assessment model.

The plan to hire new cultural consultants led to unexpected challenges. There were strong differences of opinion within the agency as well as among the agency's existing cultural consultants as to whether the emphasis should be on hiring individuals that had strong connections with their particular cultural community or whether the emphasis should be on the individual having child protection content expertise; yet also a connection with their cultural community. Also, there was much discussion, and at times, varying opinions about how open (competitive) the hiring process should be for these new cultural consultants. Some of our existing cultural consultants felt that it was paramount that any new consultants hired for this project needed to be able to work in concert with them so that progress on our agency's on-going cultural initiatives would not be compromised.

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Having analyzed the situation it now seems clear that we should have solicited input from our existing cultural consultants at an earlier point in the project. In addition, the unexpected departure of Ms. Ault (see above) prevented a definitive administrative response as to what direction the agency should take. Hence, the issue could not be addressed until a new director was hired. This has led to some delay in completing the hiring of the new consultants. In order to deal with the issues raised in the hiring process, we are developing a new hiring process for cultural consultants that can be utilized across the entire Ramsey County Children's Services Department.

Planning and Development of the CFA Model:

(This change has been discussed with and approved by the Federal Project Officer.)

Culturally Specific Parent Response Groups: Based on Ramsey County's experience with previous projects, a decision was made to use on-going parent focus groups (parent response groups) to inform the changes in assessment methods and case practice that will be part of the CFA Grant project. Parent response groups of parents from the African-American, American Indian, Hmong, and Latino communities will meet regularly with cultural consultants from their respective communities who will facilitate the groups to provide perspective and feedback on the development and implementation of the CFA.

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E. CONTEXTUAL EVENTS OR COMMUNITY CHANGES

Project Administration

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Medicaid (MA) Billing Project:

The Ramsey County Community Human Services Department began this agency-wide project in November, 2007. It is a one year project involving national consultants that is designed to improve agency case documentation, screening, case planning, and case notes. The goal is to improve the Targeted Case Management rates, improve the agency's performance in audits, and help develop training and tools for line staff and management. This will be accomplished by concentrating our work in the areas of standardized documentation and clinical practice resulting in the development of clear measurable performance standards for all areas of the Agency.

This project will have definite implications for and impact on the CFA project. We will need to be cognizant of the changes occurring as part of the MA Billing project as we make changes in assessment practices. Also, we are currently planning to enlist project management staff from all agency change efforts, including the MA Billing project, to communicate with the CFA process for improved continuity.

F LESSONS LEARNED N/A

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G. ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

Project Administration

CFA Team Meetings: Ongoing meetings will be held twice a month between the University of Minnesota researchers and Ramsey County Human Services team.

Parent Response Focus Groups: The participants will be selected and the focus group meetings will begin.

Planning and Development of the CFA Model

Advisory Group Subcommittees: Roles and tasks will be established and clarified for the four Advisory Group subcommittees. The finer planning detail of the

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development and implementation of the new CFA model will be accomplished within the framework of these subcommittees.

Informational Meetings and Focus Groups: These meetings are being held with each Child Protection program unit to answer questions and attend to specific detail concerning the CFA project. In addition, all workers and supervisors currently using the Family Centered Assessment (FCA) process will participate in focus groups regarding the ease and accuracy of use and any perceived casework difficulties or improvements encountered since implementation. The results of this initial evaluation will inform potential changes to the format and content of the existing FCA.

Originally, the plan was to hold an informational meeting with each unit first, and then at a later date hold a focus group with each unit. Difficulty in scheduling free blocks of time with the units led to a revised plan. The informational meetings and focus groups were combined into one session with each unit.

Family Interviews: Interviews will be conducted with family members from 10 cases randomly selected from the 60 cases read during the case review. Four of the cases will involve children in the home, four will involve children out of the home, and 2 will involve 16 or 17 year olds who are out of the home. Youth in placement will be interviewed in addition to the parent(s). For four out of the 10 cases, if the father is not in the home at the time of the interview, the interviewer will also attempt to contact the father for an interview.

The evaluators will hear directly from cultural consultants and family representatives about their concerns and will aid in making the evaluation questions and process more culturally and linguistically specific to the populations served.

The family interviews will be guided in part by the Family Assessment Form (FAF). Because of the FAF's proven reliability and validity in capturing detailed information related to family functioning (parent-child interactions, living conditions, caregiver interactions, supports for parents, financial conditions, and developmental stimulation), its structure will be used to outline questions designed to gather the family's perspective of the issues present at the time their case was open in case management services. The family interview instrument will also be guided by relevant CFSR items, the CFA guide, and the Parents with Children in Foster Care Satisfaction Scale (Poertner, Harris & Joe).

In cases involving youths in placement, the interview instrument will be supplemented by the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment.

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Study Report: A report on the data obtained from the focus groups, the case review, the family interviews, and the management study will be completed in the

fourth quarter of Year 1. It will form the base line for the development of the new comprehensive family assessment model.

Time Study: A time study will be conducted of all staff who currently use the FCA. The current data collection system used by Ramsey County, the Social Service Information System (SSIS) was examined for its capacity to gather appropriate information for the time study. It was found that SSIS did not have the capability necessary to secure accurate and timely information for a reliable time study. Consequently, researchers and county staff met with human service time-study experts, Myles Edwards and John Fluke, of the American Humane Association. Edwards and Fluke have developed software designed to facilitate comprehensive time studies within human service fields. Researchers are currently exploring the possibility of utilizing this software within the county's existing computer software set-up as a means of conducting the time study.

School Information Linkage: The University of Minnesota will investigate whether their MNLink system can provide linkage with public school information for the children in the study so that they can track school attendance, progression to the next grade, and level of school achievement.

IRBs: The University of Minnesota's Human Subjects Review Board will review project procedures for protecting human subjects and will, upon approval, provide the required certificate to the ACF. The human subjects' protection process will also include informing clients of their right not to participate or to leave the study at any time. The consent forms designed for the Project will represent this process and follow all the requirements of the Office for Human Research Protections.

Development of the New CFA: Development of the new CFA process based on the findings of the FCA evaluation will begin. The new CFA model will be introduced and promoted to case management staff and community agencies.

Drafting, Reviewing, and Piloting the New Model: The new model will be drafted, reviewed, and piloted by two County workers in collaboration with community agency workers.

Internal Management Review: Prior to the pilot, an internal management review will trace the quality assurance structure, process, and feedback loop. In addition, the most recent management change efforts will be reviewed and critiqued for any necessary improvements. Management staff will articulate or re-affirm the monitoring, quality assurance, and change management functions already in place

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and articulate them for the purposes of developing transferability of the model. They will address: policies, training, clinical supervision, systems of accountability and internal evaluation, and contracting.

The model development will include guidelines for supervisors, for managers, and for the collaborative practice between agencies.

Study Report: The report on the evaluation study composed of the case review, family interviews, focus groups, and the internal management review will be completed during the fourth quarter of Year 1.

Implementation Manual: Work will begin on the implementation manual. The manual will have two components: instructions for use of the new CFA model, and an administrative section that will address how an agency wishing to use the new model could go about replicating the steps required to make the change. Training materials for the manual will be created. The manual will provide a tested, revised, more user-friendly approach to assessment in case management in in-home and out-of-home child protective services.

Protocols for documentation of implementation activities will be finalized while the initial evaluation is conducted. Such protocols ensure fidelity to the model and outline acceptable levels of adjustment.

Other Activities

Cultural Consultants: Hiring and training of the cultural consultants who will facilitate parent response focus groups will be completed.

H. ATTACHMENTS

- Logic model
- Timeline (revised in February, 2008)

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References

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