

*Using Comprehensive Family Assessments  
to Improve Child Welfare Outcomes*

I. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

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A. MAJOR ACTIVITIES AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. **Project Administration**

Support Staff: A three-quarter time support staff person, Barac Wiley, was hired at the end of May.

Advisory Group and Subcommittees: The roles and functions of our Advisory Group and its subcommittees were refined during the period of this report. Originally, we had planned to have four subcommittees: Direct Practice, Integrating Family and Community Concerns, Utilization-focused Evaluation, and Agency Management and Quality Assurance.

- Utilization-focused Evaluation: It became clear that since our evaluators are involved in virtually every activity of this project, we did not need a separate, free-standing evaluation subcommittee. Rather, the evaluation function is represented in all aspects of our work.
- Agency Management and Quality Assurance: We clarified the function and appropriate membership for this committee. The activities of this subcommittee will be discussed below under “Internal Management Review.”
- Direct Practice: This has been the most active group and was the core of the group that created the preliminary design for our comprehensive family assessment model discussed below.
- Integrating Family and Community Concerns: This group also worked on the design of our CFA model. Its membership consists primarily of community professionals. There is currently only one family member on the committee. We are attempting to recruit more family members, and that effort that will be discussed below.

CFA Steering Committee: Team meetings of the project management staff from Ramsey County Human Services and the University of Minnesota are held regularly twice per month. A new member to the Steering Committee is the supervisor of the Revenue function. As was mentioned in the previous Progress Report, Ramsey County is involved in a year-long Medicaid Billing Project that has considerable cross-over with the CFA Project. The goals of the Medicaid Project are to improve Targeted Case Management rates and improve the agency’s performance in audits. In order to achieve these goals the Medicaid Billing Project is developing training and tools for line staff and management that will improve agency case documentation, screening, case planning, and case notes.. The Project will create standardized documentation and clinical practice resulting in the development of clear measurable performance standards for all service areas. The aim of the Billing Project is to “follow the golden thread” that connects assessment of needs and strengths, choice of services, effectiveness of services, and case outcomes. Hence, the goals of the Billing Project are very similar to those of the CFA project. Consequently, we are working closely to coordinate the development of the new CFA model with the work of the Billing Project so as not to create confusion of the two projects in the minds of social work staff.

Cultural Consultants: In July an RFP was issued for a vendor to provide cultural consultants for our project. The consultants will facilitate parent response focus groups for African American,

Native American, Hmong, and Latino parents. They will also provide on-going consultation to our project. We have chosen the vendor and are finalizing the contract at this time.

## **2. Planning and development of the CFA model**

### Activities Related to the Baseline Study of Family Assessment Processes in Ramsey County:

- Informational Meetings and Focus Groups with Child Protection Units: An informational meeting and a focus group were held with each Child Protection case management unit. The informational section of the meeting was designed to answer questions and attend to specific detail concerning the CFA project. The focus groups dealt with the ease and accuracy of use and any perceived casework difficulties or improvements encountered with the Family Centered Assessment (FCA) process since it was implemented in 2005.
- Family Interviews: Originally, the plan was to conduct interviews with family members from 10 randomly selected cases from the sixty cases reviewed during the period of the previous Progress Review as part of the baseline study. Four cases were to involve children in the home, four were to involve children out of the home, and 2 were to involve 16 or 17 year olds who are out of the home. Because of a number of obstacles that will be outlined below only 5 interviews have been held to date.

The family interviews were 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 was 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 was also guided by relevant CFSR items, the CFA guide, and the Parents with Children in Foster Care Satisfaction Scale (Harris & Poertner, 1998). In cases involving youths in placement, the interview instrument was supplemented by the Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment (Casey Family Service, n.d.).

The evaluators obtained feedback from stakeholders, including social work staff, community professionals, and a family member as they created the evaluation questions and process in order to make the process more culturally and linguistically specific to the populations served.

- Time Study: At the end of July a time study was conducted with all Child Protection Program and Intake staff who currently use the FCA. The University of Minnesota subcontracted with Myles Edwards and John Fluke of the American Humane Association for the use of their software and aid in analyzing the data from the time study. Computerizing the time study eliminated the need for paper and pencil recording of time.

Approximately 100 staff were involved in the time study. Each staff received 4 hours of training conducted by University of Minnesota staff prior to the study. During the week of the study each social worker recorded 100% of their time in 15 minute increments. The results of the time study are expected in the second quarter.

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Internal Management Review: An internal management review was begun designed to trace the quality assurance structure, process and feedback loop. Current accountability mechanisms within the Child Protection Program were catalogued. In addition, all Child Protection supervisors were surveyed regarding their views on a variety of topics relating to supervision, management, training, systems of accountability, and levels of support existing within the Child Protection program.

A meeting with the Ramsey County Human Services Management Team, composed of the Department Director and his Division Directors, was held for the purpose of explaining the CFA project to the group. In addition, the need for the group's ongoing involvement in providing support and administrative structure for the changes and resources necessitated by the new CFA model was explained. Representatives from the Management Team were selected to form an on-going administrative support team for the CFA project.

- Baseline Study Report: The final report on all the baseline study components listed above will be completed in the early winter. A preliminary report that focused on the findings of the 60 cases reviewed and the focus groups with Child Protection units was completed in the summer. The preliminary findings were presented to the CFA Steering Committee, the Advisory Group and Subcommittees, and Child Protection staff.

The preliminary findings show that the factors that appear to have affected practice most strongly include availability of clinical supervision and ongoing clinical training to emphasize the need for and process of conducting a holistic assessment. Also, the application and implementation of the FCA guidelines was uneven and differently understood among different workers and case management units.

- IRBs: The University of Minnesota's Human Subjects Review Board has reviewed project procedures for protecting human subjects and will, upon request, provide the required certificate to the ACF. The human subjects' protection process includes informing clients of their right not to participate or to leave the study at any time. The consent forms designed for the Project represent this process and follow all the requirements of the Office for Human Research Protections. In addition, the Ramsey County Human Services Department IRB has reviewed and approved the project procedures.

Design of the New CFA Model:

- In August a group was selected to design the new CFA model. The core of the group was the Direct Practice Subcommittee. The two Child Protection managers, additional Child Protection workers who volunteered, and representatives of community agencies were also involved. Robert O'Connor, Ramsey County cultural consultant and professor of Social Work at Metro State University, was chosen to facilitate the design process. The design process consisted of a day-long retreat and three shorter meetings held in September. Using the FCA and the Children's Bureau Comprehensive Family Assessment Guidelines the group created an outline for conducting family assessments that fit within the framework of the ten phases or steps of conducting an assessment from reviewing existing case information to the point of case closure. Particular attention was paid to finding ways to target the CFSR items requiring improvement.

- Two workers from the design group were selected to do a pilot of the new model beginning at the end of November. Mobile tablets have been purchased for them to facilitate their work. The next steps in the design of the model will be discussed in Section G.

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

4. **Dissemination:**

a. Current

- **Project Updates:** Following the completion of two of the components of the baseline study, the review of 60 cases and the focus groups with all Child Protection case management units, Dr. Susan Wells and Dr. Traci LaLiberte of the University of Minnesota did updates on the preliminary results of these two baseline study components. (Dr. LaLiberte can be contacted at lali0017@umn.edu).
- **Audience:** The presentations were made to a variety of stakeholder groups: first to the CFA Steering Committee, then to the Advisory Group and Subcommittees, and then two sessions were held for case management staff.
- **Objective:** The objective of the sessions was to provide information to all the stakeholder groups in preparation for the beginning of the development of the CFA model.

5. **Sustainability** N/A

6. **Other activities** N/A

**Planning and Development of the CFA Model:**

**Family Interviews:** As was mentioned in Section A, the original plan was to interview family members from 10 of the sixty families reviewed in the case review. However, it proved to be very difficult to obtain volunteers from ten families. In many instances, the last known telephone numbers and addresses were no longer valid. In other instances, even when we were able to reach the person, they chose not to participate. Finally, in several instances, the person initially agreed to participate in an interview, but then was not home when the interviewers arrived. At the present time, members of five families have been interviewed.

**Time Study:** There were some technical difficulties involved in adapting the software developed by the American Humane Society to the Ramsey County Human Services computer system. However, with much effort the problems were worked through, and the software worked very well for the time study.

C. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

There has been frequent consultation with the Federal Project Officer regarding a number of programmatic and procedural issues. In addition, we have had some consultation with our Grants Management Specialists regarding reporting requirements. We have also dealt with the Division of Payment Management regarding the process for initiating our electronic reimbursement system.

In addition, we had a very productive conference call with our cluster members prior to beginning the design of our CFA model. We received very helpful advice from the other teams about how they approached designing their models.

D. CHANGES (ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS) FROM ORIGINAL APPLICATION OR IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

1. **Program Administration**

Cultural Consultants: As was mentioned above, because of the significant delays in hiring cultural consultants, we were not able to accomplish this during Year One as we had planned. The contract for the cultural consultants will be completed in the first quarter of Year Two. As was also mentioned above, the Agency has had substantial difficulty in engaging consumers to participate in family interviews and to be part of our Advisory Group and its subcommittees. Our project design involves consumer input in all phases: on the Advisory Group, the Integrating Family and Community Concerns Subcommittee, and in the parent response focus groups. The vendor we have recruited to provide cultural consultant services has proposed a two-fold approach to assisting us in the area of consumer engagement. First, the vendor proposes to organize the relationships with the parent focus group participants from the beginning in such a way that they experience themselves as partners and not just respondents. In addition, the vendor will assist us in establishing a consumer advisory board that is capable of partnering with us over the life of the Project.

Parent Response Focus Groups: Because of the delay in being able to hire cultural consultants, it was not possible to create the focus groups in Year One. The organization of the groups will begin as soon as the contract with the cultural consultants is completed.

CFA Pilot and Training: The need to redraw the sample for the case review component of the baseline study (mentioned in Section II of the previous progress review) caused a delay in the completion of the case review. Because the results of the case review were a necessary foundation for the development of the new CFA model; the model development, model pilot, and the associated training were delayed. The pilot and the creation of training materials were to have occurred in the fourth quarter of Year One. Now, the pilot will begin during the first quarter of Year Two. Also, during the first and second quarters we will contract with a vendor to create materials and conduct some aspects of the training needed for the implementation of the new model.

Computers: Our original plan called for purchasing a mobile tablet for each of the staff who will be in the experimental group during the randomized trial of implementation of the new CFA model. The randomized trial will begin in the second quarter. However, our Information Services Division recommended that we defer the purchase of the tablets until Year Two as Ramsey County Human Services is changing mobile tablet models soon. In order to facilitate technical support of the CFA Project mobile tablets, it is desirable that they be the same model as others in use in the Agency. Hence, during Year One we only purchased mobile tablets for the two pilot workers who will need to use them immediately. The purchase of the balance of the mobile tablets for the randomized trial will be made in the second quarter.

E. CONTEXTUAL EVENTS OR COMMUNITY CHANGES     N/A

F. LESSONS LEARNED     N/A

G. ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR THE NEXT REPORTING PERIOD

**1. Project Administration**

Change in Principal Investigator: Dr. Susan Wells, current PI, will be on leave of absence during the winter semester. Dr. Wells has recommended that Dr. Traci LaLiberte, currently the Co-principal Investigator, will become the PI in January. Dr. LaLiberte, the Director of the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota School of Social Work has been deeply involved in all aspects of this project. She has many years of experience in child welfare and is superbly well suited to be the Principal Investigator. This arrangement is proposed as a permanent change. Dr. Wells will remain involved as a consultant regarding evaluation methodology and substantive issues as needed. We believe that Dr. LaLiberte's extensive experience and Dr. Wells' continued involvement will create a seamless transition.

Cultural Consultants: It is anticipated that the new cultural consultants will begin working with the project during the first quarter. They will begin recruiting members for the four parent response groups: African American, Native American, Hmong, and Latino. In conjunction with the project staff they will help to establish the focus groups. The consultants will also assist us in shaping an effective consumer advisory component for our Project, as was discussed above.

Parent Response Focus Groups: It is anticipated that these groups will begin during second quarter. They will meet approximately 10 times per year and will provide feedback to the project staff regarding the new CFA model.

Advisory Group: The project Advisory Group will meet on a quarterly basis.

Subcommittees: The Direct Practice and Integrating Family and Community Concerns subcommittees will meet regularly during the year. The Direct Practice group will be involved

with helping to oversee the development and implementation of the new CFA model. The Integrating Family and Community Concerns group will help to oversee the progress of the parent response focus groups.

CFA Steering Team: The Steering Team will continue to provide oversight for the project and will meet twice each month.

## **2. Planning and Development of the CFA Model**

Continuation of the Design of the CFA Model: The draft outline created by the CFA design group in September will be modified and elaborated. Procedural steps and instructions about how to conduct the comprehensive family assessments will be added and the material will be converted into a manualized format for staff to use. Guidelines will be developed for supervisors, managers, and collaborating agency partners.

CFA Pilot: In November the two staff who have been identified will begin to use the new CFA format with their caseloads. This pilot will continue through February.

Review of the CFA Pilot and Development of Training Materials: In February the pilot will be reviewed and modified. A consultant will be hired to develop the training module and create role-appropriate materials for all levels of personnel. Review of the materials by all involved stakeholders will be conducted prior to final dissemination. Appropriate trainers, including some consultants, will be used to conduct the training.

Computers: As was mentioned above, mobile tablets will be purchased for the staff in the experimental group in the randomized trial of implementation of the new CFA model which will begin in the second quarter.

## **3. Implementation**

Model Implementation for Case Management Services: A randomized trial will be implemented in Case Management Services beginning at the end of the second quarter. The new CFA model will be used with half (two) of the case management units. Training will be conducted with Ramsey County and collaborating agency personnel. Training will include examples and exercises and will address both overall implementation and specific issues like family engagement and paternal involvement. The new model will be presented and explained to staff; there will be educational outreach visits from the Project Manager; a reminder system will be initiated; the quality assurance process for inclusion of the model will occur; and follow-up training sessions will be held to discuss practice. These activities will help to ensure fidelity to the model.

## H. ATTACHMENTS

- Logic Model
- Timeline

## References

Casey Family Services. (n.d.). Ansell Casey life skills assessment. Retrieved June 19, 2007, from [www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/assess\\_acls.htm](http://www.caseylifeskills.org/pages/assess_acls.htm)

Harris, G., & Poertner, J. (1998). Measurement of client satisfaction. Retrieved June 19, 2007, from <http://cfrcwww.social.uniuc.edu/pubs1.htm>