

WHAT'S WORKING

APA's Quarterly Bulletin on Promising Practices

Dear Child Welfare Colleagues:

We are pleased to bring you the Spring edition of "What's Working," a newsletter through which providers share promising practices that they have implemented to strengthen services to children and families. This issue includes articles targeting three different areas of strengthening services:

- a Childstat-type of case review that strengthens practice in Case Planners and supports the connection of all staff to the mission, from the Case Planner to the Executive Director;
- a Quality Management approach to monitoring indicated cases; and,
- support for foster parents in their front-line work of caring for children.

We appreciate the willingness of the provider community to share their promising practices. We value the way that you have engaged with your APA teams and your colleagues in the improvements we are experiencing collectively in the delivery of child welfare services. We have seen great strides in the assessment of safety over the past two years, and we look forward to working with you to strengthen permanency through our focus on One Year Home. Please accept our continued thanks for all you do for children and families.

Valerie Russo and Susan Fojas

CHECK POINT

Below please find a list of data that has been sent to agencies recently. If you are missing any information, please contact your APA Monitor/Consultant.

Foster Care:

February and March 2010 FASP
Timeliness Data

Quarter 3 Outcomes Data

Quarter 2 OSI Data

Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 Foster Parent
Recruitment Data

Quarter 2 and Quarter 3 Adoption
Data

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CAMBA STAT

BY JANE HARVEY, PROGRAM DIRECTOR, CAMBA

CAMBA Stat is a forum for providing technical and clinical support to case planners. Each week, the Program Director randomly selects a record from a case planner and reviews the chart utilizing some of the criteria set forward by PAMS including cultural competence, parent/child interactions, and assessing the home. After the Program Director has completed a thorough review of the file, including reading all Progress Notes and ensuring the notes correspond with PROMIS, reviewing the most recent FASP, ensuring all children in the home are receiving the adequate amount of casework contacts, a conference is held with the Director, Program Supervisor and the Case Planner. This review occurs weekly on Friday morning for approximately an hour. The Program Director rotates between three sites and each planner has the opportunity to present twice a year.

The Director begins CAMBA Stat by asking the Case Planner to reflect on the work with the family and to share what is working with the family and what barriers exist to achieving the established goals. During this conversation, all points of safety and risk are discussed, in addition to any other clinical dynamics pertaining to the functioning of the family. After the clinical review is

completed, the Director shares with the Case Planner feedback on the work that has taken place with the family

and in the case record. This part of the presentation focuses on the physical case record including contacts, documentation, and data and progress note entry in PROMIS and Connections. After the strengths are reviewed, the Director shares with the Case Planner the expected "next steps" that must take place. These suggestions can range from printing the last FASP to developing a safety plan when domestic violence is present. A written summary of the review is given to the Case Planner. This is used as a guide to promote best practice.

This whole process provides the Director with an opportunity to remain connected with the work Case Planners are doing, to ensure that preventive standards are being met through documentation, and for the Director and Supervisor to collaborate in providing clinical feedback to the Case Planner in order to strengthen the work with the family.



NYC Foster Care Youth Survey 2010

Please think about your experiences with NYC Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Agency that works with you. Please access the link below and respond to our survey. Read each question in the survey and select the answer that best represents how you feel about the support and services you receive. Your input is greatly appreciated.

The results of this survey will be shared with youth on the youthsuccessnyc.org website and in "Represent." In addition, we will provide periodic updates when we receive more responses. The link for the survey is:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/nycyouth>

NYC Administration for
Children's Services
DIVISION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE



OSI: HOW TO DEVELOP INTERNAL SYSTEMS TO REDUCE TOTAL NUMBER OF INDICATED CASES

BY STANLEY CAPELA, VICE PRESIDENT, QUALITY MANAGEMENT & CORPORATE COMPLIANCE OFFICE, HEARTSHARE HUMAN SERVICES OF NEW YORK

Our child welfare system always has placed a priority on safety. One measure by which agencies are assessed on their ability to ensure safety is by the total number of indicated cases reviewed by OSI. Over the years, HeartShare has developed a number of systems that help to reduce indicated cases. The following is an overview of those systems.

HeartShare places a fundamental value on children's safety. As a result, all staff, from Case Planner to Executive Director, play a key role in ensuring safety. One way that this value plays out is to reinforce the belief that all workers have no discretion when there is any indication of potential abuse. The philosophy is —better to err on the side of caution.

Second, HeartShare vests the Vice President for Quality Management with the task of monitoring and tracking all internal and external reports that have anything to do with abuse allegations. Monitoring includes everything from tracking the initial internal report to convening the appropriate staff to replying to all corrective action plans that may result from OSI findings. Further, the Vice President chairs the incident committee that includes the Executive Director for Children and Family Services, the Vice President for Foster Care Services and all Unit Supervisors. During those meetings, all reports are reviewed to ensure implementation of action plans, assess interventions and conduct additional reviews for cases that require follow up. Incident reports are shared with all members of the Board of Directors and, in more detail, with members of the incident committee from the beginning of the process because HeartShare believes that all management and supervisory staff are responsible for ensuring the safety of children in its care.

Another major component is the focus on trend analysis. Specifically, the Quality Assurance Department provides ongoing reports to the Executive Director, the Vice President and Unit Supervisors. Those reports provide detailed information on incident findings, as well as corrective action plans, and updated status reports. Another dimension is an emphasis on asking very specific questions which focus on type of incidents, perpetrators, and findings. Further, data is reviewed to determine if there are specific workers, teams, and/or regular or kinship foster parents who make up a significant number of indicated cases and/or unfounded cases. Finally, the Vice President for Quality Management reviews data to determine if most, if not all, reports are generated by workers calling in the allegation.

Over the past few years, HeartShare's data shows the causes of indicated cases have been a pronounced shift from an increase in substance abuse to inadequate guardianship. Interventions focused on increasing the role of the Homefinding Unit to assess homes, workers providing home visit reports regarding current status of homes and if there are any problematic issues. Finally, senior management places an increasing emphasis on the importance of supervisors monitoring safety issues during home visits, as well as utilizing supervisory sessions, to ensure supervisors and workers respond in an expeditious manner to any areas of concern.



Although there are many ways to review OSI reports, the fundamental success of HeartShare's systems is an inherent core value that all workers at every level, including support staff, have a primary role ensuring the safety of all children in care. This philosophy is embedded in HeartShare's mission, vision, and core organizational values.

Ask APA!

Agencies are welcome to send questions to "What's Working" for APA to answer. Think of it as the performance management version of Dear Abby. Please email your questions to: erin.mccann2@dfa.state.ny.us



SUCCESS THROUGH CRISIS INTERVENTION AND STABILIZATION

BY CARLTON L. MITCHELL, ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, LEAKE AND WATTS SERVICES, INC.

Supportive, nurturing foster parents are the cornerstone of every successful foster boarding home program. Unlike caseworkers, foster parents have daily contact with the children and teens that require our collective care. They provide the constant nurturing and support so necessary to children during a difficult and stressful time in their young lives. But how do we, as a child welfare agency, support our foster parents? What do they need to feel supported by us so they can better care for the children and teens that concern us all?

At Leake & Watts, we have been taking a long and hard look at this question. In response to requests for better overall support from foster parents, we facilitated the formation of our Foster Parent Association. The feedback after our first two meetings indicated that our foster parents sometimes felt neglected and on their own. In several cases, staff heard that foster parents had difficulty reaching caseworkers or that caseworkers did not return phone calls for a day or two. With large caseloads and the demands of court appearances, caseworkers were doing the best they could to respond to foster parents in a timely manner, but it was not always possible. Most importantly, foster parents complained that they could not reach a caseworker or a supervisor in a crisis situation, at 3am, on a Sunday morning, and that they wanted to be supported better by the agency. Thus, the Leake & Watts Crisis Intervention Unit was born.

Leake & Watts introduced the Crisis Intervention Unit (CIU) in 2007. The

CIU provides support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through a crisis hotline that is specifically designated for foster parents. The job of a foster parent can often be difficult and challenging. Some children have emotional or behavioral challenges. Many children are in need of special education services. Others have specialized medical or mental health needs that must be addressed. Teens who have been in and out of care or in several placements can be particularly challenging for foster parents. The CIU is designed to immediately address all outreach from foster parents to meet these needs, especially in a crisis situation. It is also available in non-crisis situations for support and advocacy.

The CIU is led by Crisis Intervention Specialist, Cynthia Robinson, and is supported by

“We really want our foster parents to understand that they are part of a team and that their input and opinions matter.”

Foster Parent Advocate, Valentina Staton, who is also the President of the Foster Parent Association. Both are available by phone 24 hours a day to meet the needs of foster parents and don't think twice about responding on the scene in the middle of the night. “Cynthia is my right hand,” says foster parent Ms. Vargas. As a foster parent to teens with a history of gang involvement and other complex challenges, Ms. Vargas relies heavily on the CIU for continued

support. She says that she feels that she can count on the CIU to assist her promptly and comprehensively in all situations.

Over the past several years with the introduction of Improved Outcomes for Children (IOC) and the Family Team Conference (FTC), Leake & Watts has looked at how to better support children and families overall. Through the CIU, we are able to better meet the needs of foster parents, anticipate potential conflicts and stabilize placements as well. “We really want our foster parents to understand that they are part of a team and that their input and opinions matter,” says Debra McCall, Director of the Leake & Watts Foster Boarding Home program. By responding to foster parents in real time and giving them this extra support, foster parents are more willing to work with caseworkers and supervisors to maintain placements in crisis situations. All of these efforts have proven fruitful. Since launching the program, we have seen a marked reduction in step-ups as well as lateral moves for children and teens in foster care.

Foster parents call our CIU for a variety of supports. Sometimes parents need assistance in order to calm a teen with behavioral challenges. Other times, foster parents struggle with communication and the ability to access proper supports at their local public school. In these cases, Ms. Robinson and Ms. Staton are able to provide advocacy. They even personally accompany foster parents to their local school to ensure that children have their educational needs met. In

other cases, the CIU can act as a sounding board for foster parents who may feel overwhelmed. With the added support of the CIU, foster parents feel as if someone is truly in their corner which makes them feel heard and better understood. While foster parents can always call their Caseworker as well, Caseworkers have a primary responsibility to meet the needs of the child in addition to filing court and city-mandated paperwork. Our CIU, on the other hand, is devoted primarily to the needs of our foster parents and can take the extra time to be there for foster parents whatever the need. In all cases, the CIU works with caseworkers and supervisors as a team so that children receive the care that they need promptly.

To inform foster parents of the support available, the CIU is present at monthly Foster Parent Association meetings. Over time, we are proud that our Foster Parent Association has become a robust and thriving forum for foster parents to share ideas and find a community of support. In this setting, parents are able to meet Ms. Robinson and get to know her in case they need to reach out to her in a crisis. The purpose and benefits of the CIU are discussed at each meeting. Ms. Robinson informs foster parents that they should call whenever they need extra support or have questions. It doesn't need to be a crisis. If a parent feels confused or in need of an extra hand, the CIU is there to act

as an advocate. Foster parents are encouraged to recognize signs that may lead to a crisis and call the CIU before a problem escalates.

In addition to a reduction in step ups and lateral moves for youth, our overall communication with foster parents has improved greatly. We have a better working relationship with foster parents across the board, leading to improved retention in the number of certified homes. The Unit has also bolstered our recruitment efforts. Because foster parents know that they have the support they need to sustain challenging placements, we have been able to attract homes for teens with behavioral and emotional challenges, historically the most difficult placements. In effect, the Unit has helped prevent foster parent "burn out."

The CIU has been interwoven into the Family Team Conference (FTC) model as well and has greatly influenced placement preservation as a result. The Crisis Intervention Specialist attends FTCs involving high-risk youth (meaning those with more challenging behaviors and at risk for placement disruption) and is able to be an advocate on behalf of the foster parent as well as the

"In effect, the Unit has helped prevent foster parent "burn out." "

needs of children. In many cases, a pre-meeting with the foster parent, youth, Caseworker, Supervisor, and the Crisis Intervention Specialist is able to preserve placement even before a Placement Preservation FTC takes place. Overall attendance at FTCs is increased as a result of the CIU as well.

At Leake & Watts, as in all foster care programs, the principal goal is to provide children with a safe, stable, and nurturing environment while they are in care. To be successful in this goal, we rely heavily on foster parents to provide this safety and stability for our children. At Leake & Watts, we discovered that in order to help our foster parents better support children, especially teens, we needed to better support our foster parents. We have adapted and changed our Foster Boarding Home program according to the needs and requests of our foster parents. We know that we can still do more to support our foster parents, but believe that our CIU is an excellent beginning.

