

MRS Conference Call Notes
October 2009

Counties Participating 10/13: Currituck, Durham, Forsyth, Gaston, Halifax, Harnett, Johnston, Lenoir, Sampson, Swain, Washington, Yancey.

Counties Participating 10/14: Alleghany, Beaufort, Cabarrus, Catawba, Chatham, Davidson, Franklin, Gaston, Lee, McDowell, Pasquotank, Stokes, Union, Wilson, Yadkin.

Counties Participating 10/29: Alamance, Anson, Avery, Beaufort, Brunswick, Davie, Duplin, Durham, Guilford, Hoke, Jackson, Nash, New Hanover, Onslow, Orange, Pender, Perquimans, Polk, Randolph, Rockingham, Tyrrell, Vance, Wake, Watagua, Wayne, Wilkes.

Agenda

Switching tracks, when, why and how?

When are kinship assessments required?

How do you deal with reports that the parents are aware of a child under 16 dating/having sex with another older teen?

CFT Issues – Documentation tool revisited, when do you do it, who does it, what do you put in it?

Training Issues – how can you make the best use out of the training offered by the state?

What are you doing to partner with community agencies, what is working and what are the barriers?

News from Raleigh & Counties

- Letters
 - 9/28 Guidelines for TANF/DV fund plans
 - 10/11 Foster Care visits – as of 10/1 will be capturing Foster Care Visits not only in MRS (as we have been doing) but also on the daysheets. Code 117 for a visit other than in the home and 118 if the visits are in the home.
 - 10/13, 10/20, 10/27 – changes in how we are capturing foster care visits.
 - Baselines for special children adoption funds.
 - Webinar coming up around working with Stuck Families (Holly also sent out over mrs email)

County Accomplishments from 10/12:

- Washington Co. - Getting ready to partner with the Housing Authority in Plymouth and do a program for middle school students on dating violence. One of the things that they are trying to do is build a better relationship with the community to let them know that they provide other services besides coming into their home and taking their children or doing assessments.
- Forsyth Co. – Their family services agency has started a program called Strong Fathers partnering with NC State and Duke and are trying to get at least 10-15 fathers to participate so are getting referrals from DSS. Offering good incentives for the fathers. Has a DV focus.
- Gaston Co. – Two years ago piloted the blended team process and last year blended another 8 units into teams. It is going well, although it is quite a change for the Supervisors since they now have to wear 3 hats simultaneously.

- Harnett Co. – Have made the decision to keep up their Challenge statistics even though the Challenge has formally ended. Think this will help them keep track of these children better. Holly bragged on Harnett as they frequently stay together as a group after the call and talk about how the issues discussed in the call will play out in Harnett Co specifically.
- Holly's niece just graduated from Basic Training and is in the Army now!

County Accomplishments from 10/13:

- McDowell – Co-locating CPS workers in the schools.
- Lee – Fully staffed since August.
- Gaston – (see notes for blending in 10/12 notes).
- Yadkin - No staff turnover in 2 years.
- Chatham – Cleared 35 adoptions last year and their baseline is 12.
- Wilson – Getting a dedicated Child Support agent just to work Child Welfare cases.
- Stokes – Have 9 social workers taking a course at the Community College on working with families with substance abusing problems and got a small grant to pay for part of it and the county picked up the rest.
- Davidson – Excited about the documentation tool that is put into OneCase now that helps with the assessment notes.
- Franklin – Took custody of 3 children a few weeks ago and everyone within the agency worked together on this case jumping in without being asked. Great teamwork.
- Alleghany – Fully staffed!
- Beaufort – New Director with a strong CPS background.
- Catawba – Have gone to blended teams in CPS and are linking to adoption and intake units.
- Pasquotank – Excited that they can post a CPS Investigator position that has been vacant for nearly a year.

Switching Tracks – when, why, & how?

What questions do you have around switching tracks?

- Can switch tracks in either direction.
- Must be done while there are still assessment activities to complete (i.e. before the point at case decision.
- This is for several reasons, we want the family to understand why the track is being switched, and we don't want to conduct the assessment in one way and then end up with findings that don't match the way in which we conducted the assessment.
- If the worker brings the case to staffing and at that point the Supervisor realizes it needs to be changed up or down, at that point you postpone your case finding, go back out and talk to the family and let them understand why there needs to be a change in track and then close the case at a later time.
- After this you should discuss with the worker what some flags are that may alert them at an earlier point in the case so that you don't get to the point of case decision before wanting to switch on a regular basis.
- Must always be a 2 level decision.
- Must be able to explain how changing tracks will help to keep the child safer.
- Get reports that are screened in forensic and when you get out its not that bad, so can you switch just to make it more family centered?

Questions from 10/12:

Can you switch just to be more family centered?

- Yes, because you can make the argument that using the family assessment track may help to engage the family further and has options not available in forensic assessments, that may work to make the child safer.

Questions from 10/13:

If they have a case that came in as sexual abuse and it is clear that there is nothing that meets the legal definition, can they switch down to family assessment or, because it came in as abuse does it have to remain investigative?

- No, if there is no evidence of abuse when you get out there, you can still switch “down” to family assessment.

One county is concerned about cases like the one mentioned above when you are switching from investigative to family assessment that something might be missed. Can't you just use family centered techniques but still do an investigative assessment?

- You can, but there are options available to you in family assessment that are not available in investigative assessments (such as a In Need of Services finding rather than a substantiation). But you would only want to do this when it, for example, appears it might have been a malicious report, not if there are any red flags but not enough to prove.
- Always remember that you can and should use family centered practice even in investigative assessments.
- Bottom line it is a county decision.
- One county has had a situation where they cannot “prove” the allegations but there are some other issues in the family and they would like to make a decision of “Services Recommended” and be able to provide voluntary services, rather than just unsubstantiated and not offer any services.

Questions from 10/29:

One county asked if they start off and get a family assessment report and then they may get a 2nd report that is a sex abuse on top of that so it has to change to investigative, so sometimes it gets convoluted with multiple reports, so it gets very hard to deal with when you have multiple reports. So you start family, switch to invest, there is no evidence of the sex abuse, so you want to switch it back but this is awkward with the paperwork and to explain to the family.

- Another county, once they switch they keep it investigative for the remainder of the case, however the first county wants the benefits of going back to family assessment because of the options of findings and the additional engagement of the family (provided that they find no evidence of the abuse).
- Holly: We will always have to deal with abuse allegations in an investigative way, and you don't have to switch it back, but you can if there is no evidence of abuse and switching back promotes engagement of the families. Have to be a case by case basis and yes, it is difficult as to the paperwork and documentation, but there is no easy way around this.

Are all conflict of interest cases automatically investigative?

- No, only automatic if it is on a foster home.

Kinship assessments – when required?

Required any time we become involved with the family and the child is placed outside the home, even if that placement has already been going on for several months before the report was called in. We don't want to have a placement out there that we are aware of that we

cannot say that it is safe. Because once we become involved and allow a placement to be maintained, it becomes implicit that we believe it to be safe.

Questions from 10/12:

- The child has been living with mom and you do a safety resource with father, do we have to do one on the absent parent?
 - One is not required, but you will be looking at safety a lot of those questions will end up being answered, but the formal form is not required.
- When you have a mom that is living alone and once we get involved she decides to move into her mother's home. Do we do a kinship care with Grandma to keep those boundaries clear? (Notice that later on Grandma may call in and report mom.)
 - Kinship is not required if the parent is still in the home with the child, but it is a tool and if it would be appropriate or helpful to set up boundaries and rules within the home, it is certainly OK to use it.
- A child has been with a relative already when DSS gets the case – why are we doing a kinship?
 - Once we become involved, it falls to us to determine that the placement is a safe one, even though it was made before we became involved. By allowing the placement to continue while we are involved with the family we are in effect saying it is safe, so we need to formally do so. Also can avoid future potential problems by doing the assessment up front.
- If the child is in a kinship care placement prior to our involvement, and mom's plan is for the child to live with Grandma, we can't close that case with the child living there can we?
- Yes, but only if we are comfortable with mom coming to get the children at any time. If we are comfortable with that we can close.
- We have a family who is working with Mental Health and is thinking of placing a child in a group home. Do we have to stay in that case working with the mom somehow, or can that be looked at as a permanent plan for that child?
 - No permanent plan needed, child is still in mom's legal custody if she is making the decision with Mental Health to place the child there. As long as we are saying Mom could come pick up the child at any time, then it is ok.

Questions from 10/13:

Father had legal custody and had placed the child with a relative. The relative home was where the child had been residing. The allegations were against dad. Who does she need to do the kinship care assessment on?

- The relatives because dad could come back and get the child at any time.

If the child is in a kinship care we need to create permanence before we can close a case – how do we do that?

- If you are comfortable with the parent coming to pick the child up then you do not have to worry about legal permanence (because the child has legal permanency, with the legal parent even if they are not living at that house). If there is a safety issue with that parent coming back and picking up the child, then there is not legal (safe) permanence.

In a legal training they talked about if mom is missing and there is a dependent child but dad is willing to take the child, they can't place with dad because mom is missing. If we don't know for sure if he is the dad then DSS has to take custody and then work to prove he is the dad?

- Holly will get information on this from legal resources. May depend on the specifics of the case.

- May want to have this a topic on a call (but would have to focus on general issues, not a case by case review.)

What is the timeline for the Comprehensive assessment to be completed and how many visits are to be done to complete it?

- The comprehensive assessment is to be done within 30 days. There is not a specific number of visits required.

What if the child is with grandparents and has been there for some time? Do we have to initial and comprehensive as well even though this is the place the child lives?

- Yes, one of the things with the comprehensive is to allow the caretaker to think about things that are involved in being a long-term caretaker. It is one thing to take a baby from your daughter to raise, but have they thought through the financial, mental, and emotional issues involved in raising a teenager?

Conversation got very case specific and detailed. Conclusion was that the Division needed to get clarification and let counties know. Holly will do that.

Questions from 10/29:

Question of when to do it. If a family makes their own plan to place their children elsewhere and they do it on their own, do we do a kinship on that assessment?

- Even if we come into a case and the kids were already placed, we still need to do it, because once we become involved we are condoning it, therefore we need to do the assessment.
- There was a long discussion of legal concerns that although it may be policy but that we cannot take many of these cases to court. Holly will take these concerns forward.
- Counties would like to see if there is some way that grandparents can get legal custody without a long, expensive legal process.

Can you close it with a kinship without legal action?

- Yes if you are ok if the parents picked up the children.

If other states are asking for kinship assessments when they don't have custody are other counties doing it? One county is uncomfortable with it.

- Yes, one does because we would like them to return the favor when it goes the other way, also they want to know who is in the county.
- One county asks specifically what the requestor wants, don't use our form.

Billing question – when we do something for another state, we don't open a SIS and all that, what should they bill that under?

- She just uses an intake code.
- Others use 211.

Got a report that dad was arrested for drunk driving and he made a placement for the highway patrolman's wife. Was this an immediate or 24 hour response?

- Should have been immediate.

So, does this mean whenever someone places their child after we go there we have to go immediately there.

- We are supposed to see it before the child goes there, so if the child is already there; you have to go as soon as you know.
- Policy 1408 under F #3 Providing permanence (right before switching tracks).

If you investigate on mom and the father is not in the home do we do a kinship assessment and criminal checks on him?

- You need to assess his home for safety. You do not have to do the kinship assessment per se, but you can use that form to document your assessment if you want.

Reports of parental knowledge of under 16 teens being sexual involved with older teens?

What do you do? Do you take it as a report? Under what? Any community guidelines or norms?

Comments from 10/12:

- One county took it as Inappropriate Supervision.
- Another county looks at on an individual basis and don't just accept it, but explore it further and see if the parents are aware and what specifically is going on? (Are they just dating, or is the boyfriend moving into the home?)
- One county sees a lot of reports come in on the Latino population, not only on teen girls having sex with older male teens, but also older men that are not teens. Looks at specific cases and see what the parental knowledge/awareness is.
 - There are sometimes some cultural issues. One case the older gentleman went to the girl's father and asked him if his 15 year old daughter could move in with him and the Dad gave permission.
 - Also have to think about, if you substantiated, what services would you provide?
- One county took a report from the biological father in another state and he thought his ex-wife's boyfriend got his daughter pregnant. This child has now come to live with her biological father but there is a younger female child still in the home of the biological mother and her boyfriend. They did a sexual abuse investigation and found no evidence. Also checked to see if the supervision was adequate to see if the child would not get pregnant. Mom tried to put some supervision place. County ended up unsubstantiating, biological father went to the ADA and now the county has been directed to file a petition. Has anyone else had any experience with something like this? Not sure what else Mom is supposed to do? Having trouble bringing a petition for something that we didn't even substantiate on!
 - Suggestion to contact your AG's liaison.
- Look at it when screening it. How much knowledge does the parents have? If mom buys pills for daughter and the daughter has sex when she is supposed to be at the football game that is one thing, if she lets boyfriend stay over in the bedroom, that is something else.
- How about if the parents allow the girl to move in with the boyfriend?
 - Most counties would open that. You cannot directly "encourage" the act to occur.

Questions from 10/13:

- Depends on the specifics of the situation. Are they having sex in secret or is mom letting boyfriend spend the night knowing that are having sex.
- Question is does it matter if the child is 16 and the boyfriend is 17 and spending the night.
 - Since 16 is the age of consent if that is the only thing going on that is not really improper supervision, but there may be other things going on. Also if the boyfriend is much older, that changes things.
- Lesson learned here is that each case needs to be looked at individually.

Questions from 10/29:

- Lack of supervision on the part of the parents if they are aware.
- Based on court feedback one county now takes ALL child on child cases as investigative assessments. (Judge thought they should investigate all cases cause they don't know for sure if children are safe until they go out.)

- Another county says this is not the issue of the parent if they have done all they need to do, they can't chain the child up at night. At some point it becomes a delinquent juvenile.

What is the safety factor?

- What is tricky is when it asks if the parent "allows" the child to participate in this behavior.

When would it move from supervision to be sexual abuse?

- First for it to be sexual abuse you have to have a qualified caretaker that is "permitting" it. The trick is how do you define permitting.

One county asked about two 15 yr olds having sex, the boy is kicked out of his house so girlfriends mom lets him stay there cause he is homeless even though mom knew they had sex.

- Some other counties say they need more info. If mom provides a separate room and the kids have sex in the house before mom comes home from work but they do not sleep in the same room at night, then probably not.

CFT Issues – Documentation tool revisited, when do you do it, who does it, what do you put in it?

- The CFT documentation tool is meant to document the process with the family, not to take the place of the Service Agreement or to document the plan.. It is not documentation of the meeting alone, but the entire process, so it should begin when the assessment worker first introduces the idea of the CFT to the family. That portion of the tool could actually be filled out by the assessment worker.
- About half the tool is to document the process leading up to the meeting. The reason we put so much emphasis on the preparation for the meeting is because this preparation is what will make or break the usefulness of the meeting. Many people think that they may sometimes not be a very useful meeting, but Holly challenges them that the preparation is done correctly they are useful meetings (and acknowledges if you skimp on the preparation so that all participants don't understand the purpose of the meeting or their role in the meeting, they can be less than productive.
- What should be documented as far as the meeting is who brought what ideas to the table, were those ideas used, if someone's idea was not used why not, what was the discussion that led the group to believe that the idea was not an appropriate solution? This goes to show that we are truly engaging the family.
- Clarify something in regards to CFT with Foster Care and Adoptions. Clarify when CFTs are required in FC. First one is required with 30 days to develop the first service agreement. After that they follow the timelines with Permanency Planning.
- CFTs should go through the life of the case even if the parents are not involved anymore. Even in a case where reunification has ceased, the parents may still be involved. Just because we are working toward adoption, the parent may still be involved in some way with this child and therefore it is entirely appropriate for them to still be at the CFTs. If the parents are no longer involved, we need to find out who the teen thinks of as "family" and be sure that they have supports at the meeting.
- What qualifies as a CFT? Every meeting between a parent and a social worker is NOT a CFT. Oftentimes a family says they don't want or have anyone, but don't take that at face value and not ask again. That is usually just an initial fear response because they don't understand what this meeting is and they are being protective of their business. Some of the first meetings may be just the parent and the social worker, but hopefully they will grow as the case moves forward. This allows us to grow a strong support

network. We are not doing ourselves any favors by not fostering the growth of this support network, because the family is more likely to bounce back to us in the near future without one. How do you determine if it was a true CFT? Everyone attending is prepared properly and that the family gets to make some decisions around when and where.

Questions/Comments from 10/12

- How do you couch some of the negativity or do you actually put in there “Dad absolutely refused to take his children to counseling”?
 - As long as you are not judging, if you are reporting what actually happened then you need to report that. It is important for people who come behind to know that it happened. Report behaviorally and factually not emotionally. What you saw, not what you thought about what you saw. Then can ask Dad “If you think counseling is not a good idea, what do you think will work?”
- Counties wanted to know if they could add information to the tool that their county wants to have in there.
 - Yes this is fine, and other counties would like to see what people have added. So, if you have added to it can you send to Holly and she can send it out.
- If there are cases that Mental Health is having and the DSS social worker comes to the meeting do they have to complete the CFT tool?
 - No, if they are just attending they do not need to do the CFT tool
- On the foster care CFT when reunification has ceased, who determines who will be at the CFT? If the child is only 4 or 5 and cannot decide, who then is the “family” who decides who will be at the CFT?
 - If the biological parents are still involved, should try to include them in the actual meeting and also the decision of who to invite, but the foster care or kinship care providers “bottom-line”.

Training?

Some of the things Holly has noticed since she is been training.

Making sure staff come prepared to training – they know why they are there and what they are supposed to get out of it. They are protected as much as possible so that they can focus on the training (there will always be emergencies, but as much as possible allow them to be handled by someone else so that the worker can focus on the training material).

What happens when they go back to the agency – does someone talk to them about what they took away from the training and how that may change their practice? On evaluations they get a lot of comments from workers that they will not be supported in implementing their training when they get back to the office (or they are not sure if they will). Not sure if this is the case or just the perception of workers, but either way we need to support this or the training is wasted time.

Questions/Comments from 10/12

- One county asks the persons who attended the training to share with the whole agency. Do a presentation or something.

Additional questions or items to discuss at future meetings:

From 10/12:

- Asked for an update on training of the new risk assessment tools.
 - Working on this – believe it will be face to face training of supervisors and some designated workers (cannot train all line social workers in the state face to face!) but will keep counties informed.
 - State heard counties loud and clear that they needed some training before implementation.