

Case Flow Workgroup

As part of the Resource and Assessment Inventory Subcommittee, the Case Flow Workgroup was established to achieve the following goals:

- To generate flow charts outlining how children and families involved with both Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the judicial system moved through the system.
- Illustrate how Department of Children and Families and Court Support Services Division (CSSD) interface with each other when working with a child involved in both systems, for example, FWSN cases.
- Note gaps and barriers to successful collaboration between the two systems.
- Propose solutions to barriers in order to establish more effective collaboration.
- Identify internal assessments and screening tools that exist in both departments.
- Identify gaps in the variety of assessments used.

The group outlined how a child enters and moves through the system for both Department of Children and Families and CSSD depending on their legal involvement with either or both of the systems. *(See flow charts presented at subcommittee meeting on May 19, 2005)*

Several gaps and solutions were outlined although details of the solutions continue to need further exploration, allowing interested stakeholders input into the recommendations.

The first gap noted was insufficient communication between and within all the agencies involved with the child. This may include several different agencies, most often it is primarily DCF and CSSD. This issue expands to the Department of Corrections when a child is unable to be kept in the community and is incarcerated in the Adult System in addition to having open juvenile cases in either system. A barrier to effective communication is often impacted by the need to maintain confidentiality. Although the need to maintain confidentiality is understood, the inability to share information often results in duplication of efforts or incorrect interventions implemented.

Opposing goals and objectives on the part of both agencies can also impede effective communication. The fact that one agency is responsible for the safety of that child and the other is responsible for the safety of the community poses a dilemma for those trying to prioritize what to focus on when making recommendations.

Another barrier identified is the inconsistent use of the FWSN protocol among offices. Part of this is due to the fact there is not clarity of roles within the two departments. Many staff are confused who is to do what task and who is responsible for the case. Tension comes from deciding whose recommendations should be implemented.

Communication is further impacted by the fact that a number of people involved do not necessarily understand both systems. Legal representation is often insufficient due to the fact that many attorneys representing children in the court system are limited in their knowledge of the protective service issues as well as what resources are available to assist the children and their families. Attorneys are often faced with high caseloads which interfere with the amount of time they are able to commit to each child to assure the proper supports are put into place.

Proposed Solutions:

- A review and clarification of the current statutes, and if at all possible a change in policies to enhance collaboration and a sharing of responsibility between agencies would greatly improve outcomes for the children involved. Periodic reviews and updates of current policies would promote consistency among workers.
- Notification of involvement by Department of Children and Families to the adult court and DOC and visa versa would assist in continuity of care. This may be possible by establishing a protocol to enable DOC to have access to information in a computer database that will provide them information to provide meaningful discharge planning.
- Cross training for staff from both agencies (including judges) as well as an opportunity to share information on a regular basis would enhance the collaboration. Discussion of each other's roles, and responsibilities would assist in understanding the logic and limitations of each other's work as well as building an awareness of available resources to all.
- Recently a recommendation was made in the last legislative session to establish a commission to create standards for attorneys working with children, support for this commission will help improve outcomes for children involved in both Department of Children and Families and the Judicial System.

In order to offer children an alternative to entering the legal system, behavioral health Services need to be available on a regular basis and in a timely manner. Currently, delinquent cases are not eligible for Department of Children and Families Voluntary services. Although there is a way to request an exception, it can take a long time for a child to access services. Additionally, court supervision is not allowed to continue for FWSN or delinquent committed children lessening the structure and support needed to assure compliance to treatment. Court involvement is often needed to encourage or ensure participation in needed interventions.

Proposed Solutions:

- Currently the Department of Children and Families is reviewing the Voluntary Services policy and protocols, including eligibility. Consideration of children with delinquent status should be included in that discussion.
- Review of statutory changes needed to allow for continued supervision for those children needing additional support. This would include children who are committed as Children with Family With Service Needs.

Next Steps:

- Additional time is needed to review all the assessments to note rationale and function of each.
- Review of current policies and practices as well as statutory requirements is needed to implement recommended solutions.
- Cross training and increasing the opportunity for staff to meet outside of a particular case is an action that can be implemented immediately and can only improve the relationship between the two agencies.