



National Resource Center for
Family-Centered Practice and Permanency Planning
at the Hunter College School of Social Work

***INFORMATION PACKET:
Child, Youth and Family Involvement in
Case Planning***

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Summary of Issue

For much of the history of child welfare in the United States, child serving agencies have excluded families, children, and youth from the case planning process. Child welfare workers have typically used their own discretion to decide the best plan for the family. The Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) in 1997 and The Foster Care Independence Act P.L. in 1999 have marked a shift towards family, youth, and children involvement in case planning (McGowan, 2005). Several states have made dramatic efforts to incorporate families into their work through in-depth family assessments, Family Group Conferencing, Family Centered Services, and Systems of Care.

In this new effort, partnering is paramount. The worker engages with the family in the first meeting and works to create a team of people to support the family including neighbors, community members/leaders, and public agencies that protect, nurture, and assist the child/family members by building on the strengths of the family and their community. The family is the center of planning and is involved in all decisions about services for the child. Parents and children define the strengths and needs of their family, and agency professionals take on a role to advocate in helping families identify and create resources that will help meet their needs. It is a process that requires continued contact, flexibility, creativity, and cooperation with families. Child welfare, mental health, education, juvenile justice, and other agencies work together with the family to ensure that they have access to the services they need. Family, youth, and child involvement is a partnership that builds on the unique strengths of each child and family, to create an environment where they can flourish.

Fact Sheet

- According to the Child Welfare League of America (2006), family involvement is crucial to the success of the overall assessment and treatment process. Including all family members gives the family the ability to recognize the problems that exist, identify strengths and resources and make decisions that can help them learn different ways to manage their life events.
- Youth involvement in planning "enhances adults' perception of youth's competence, heightens their commitment and energy, makes them feel more effective and confident, and makes them more aware of the needs and concerns" (Morse, Markowitz, Zanghi & Burns, 2003, p.1).
- In involving family in case planning, staff strive to be culturally competent and ensure that services provided to children and families are respectful of and compatible with their cultural strengths/needs to help the family develop a meaningful plan of action (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006).
- Strengths based assessments lead to better cooperation between families and providers (Lutz, 2000).
- Many, but not all states require that the child welfare department include the parent or guardian in the case planning process (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005).
- The Administration for Children and Families has funded 9 states to develop family systems of care to improve service delivery for children, youth and families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2006).
- Despite the increase in family involvement in case planning, there is a lack of statistical data verifying its effectiveness.
- There is current skepticism and a need for buy-in by many child welfare staff and other stakeholders (Chagine and Higgens, 2005).

Review of Legislation

Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980

This act provided the largest federal funding stream for child welfare services, reimbursing states for services that they provide children in foster care, provided the child's family qualifies for TANF. This created an incentive for states to implement program changes to meet federal standards, and required that a case plan must be developed for any child receiving foster care payments (McGowan, 2005).

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)

Approved by Congress in 1997, this stresses that the child's health and safety is paramount, and sets time frames to move children quickly toward permanent placement to achieve health and safety. This act encourages planning efforts to reunify child with family. The emphasis on permanency planning requires family centered, child focused, and culturally competent philosophies in helping children and youth to live with their families. To accomplish this, case planners must use collaborative case planning to establish partnerships among birth parents, foster parents, agency staff, legal providers, and community service providers (McGowan, 2005).

The Foster Care Independence Act P.L. (1999)

This expanded funding to states and improved upon federal programs for youth transitioning from foster care. The centerpiece of this legislation is the establishment of the John H. Chafee Independent Living Program. It created funding to states to assist youth by providing educational, vocational, practical, and emotional services and supports. This act led to the development of new and innovative ways to work with youth, including youth involvement in case planning (McGowan, 2005).

Model Programs

Minnesota, Connecticut, North Dakota, Kansas, Oregon, North Carolina and Arizona have been active in collaborating with the family. Some practice tips used by states are:

- Utilize a specific worker whose role is to engage with the family and facilitate a family conference. This person will integrate social work values into the practice, treat conference participants with respect, dignity, and encourage self determination (Chahine and Higgins, 2005)
- Hold the family conference where it is most convenient for the family (Chahine and Higgins, 2005).
- Workers should identify family supports including relatives, neighbors, and clergy (Chahine and Higgins, 2005).
- Identify the family strengths (Community Resources for Children and Families in Illinois, 2006).
- Effective family involvement requires looking at interests, needs, culture, language, and belief system of the family (Arizona's Children's Executive Committee, 2004).
- Assess the family's readiness of involvement and their ability to assume tasks (Arizona's Children's Executive Committee, 2004).
- Utilize joint meetings and consistent case plans to promote family involvement in coordination with other agencies (Arizona's Children's Executive Committee, 2004).
- Provide on-going training to staff that defines, demonstrates, and reinforces the necessity for family and choice in service provision (Arizona's Children's Executive Committee, 2004).
- Include families in trainings to assist with promoting the culture of family involvement (Arizona's Children's Executive Committee, 2004).
- Involvement of a parent advocate can lead to better partnerships (Salisbury, 2006).
- Use solution focused interventions (Salisbury, 2006).
- Agencies should involve families in policy development, care coordination, evaluation, strategic planning, service provision, and system advocacy. (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2005).

Resources

Pennell, J. (2002). *Family Group Conferencing in Child Welfare: Practice Guidance for Planning, Implementing, Training, and Evaluating*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University, Social Work Program, North Carolina Family Group Conferencing Project. Available:
<http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/jpennell/ncfgcp/pracguid.htm>

This comprehensive guide has specific steps for creating, implementing, and evaluating Family Group Conferencing for child welfare.

Morse, J., Markowitz, N., Zanghi, M., & Burns, P. (2003). *Partnering With Youth: Involving Youth in Child Welfare Training and Curriculum Development*. Portland, ME: Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Services. Available:
<http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/resources/publications/pdfs/partneringguide.pdf>

This manual provides a guide to help workers engage youth in the decision making process.

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2005). *Systems of Care*. Washington, DC: Author. Available:
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/soc.pdf>

Provides a comprehensive guide to Systems of Care including guiding principals and applications.

Administration for Children and Families. (2005). *Comprehensive Family Assessment*. Washington, DC: Author. Available:
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/family_assessment/intro.htm#assumptions

This has tools on finding family strengths.

Lutz, L. (n.d.). Position Paper: Family Centered Assessment in Child Welfare Practice. Available:
http://www.l3passociates.com/upDocs/Conducting_Family_Centered_Assessments.pdf

A comprehensive work that details family centered assessments, its impact, and best practice models.

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