Engaging Families for Success in Adams County

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Melissa Tanguay Laney

- Solicitor for Adams County Children & Youth Services since July 2014
- Representing child welfare agencies since 2010
- Dependency cases before the Juvenile Court
- Termination of parental rights cases before the Orphans’ Court
- Child abuse and subsidy appeals before the DHS Bureau of Hearings and Appeals in Harrisburg
- Regular case consultation and training on child welfare law topics
Sean Lazarus

- Program Director for JusticeWorks YouthCare (JWYC) Adams County
- Experience in Child Welfare/Juvenile Delinquency since 2007
- Crisis Intervention and suicide prevention 2005-2007
- Master’s of Social Work
- Affiliation with JDCAP and PCCYFS
- JWYC: founded in 1999 with mission to fill the gaps of services provided within the Child Welfare/Juvenile Delinquency realm
Goal of Presentation

- Increase awareness of family engagement efforts in the child welfare system as a whole and here in Adams County

- *Families are the best place for children and youth to grow up*

- Let’s start with the law.....
How did we get here?

- Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (federal)
  - Agencies started relative notification and connections for kids placed in foster care
- Guidance from Department of Human Services (formerly DPW) regarding family finding and family engagement, effective 2013
  - Family search
  - Kinship care
  - Family group conferencing
Family Finding and Kinship Care Act

- 62 P.S. § 1301 et seq., 2013 amendments
- *Family finding*: ongoing, diligent efforts of an agency to search for and identify adult relatives and kin, to engage these positive adults in order to provide support for the family
- *Kin*: individual with significant, positive relationship with child or family
Is family finding voluntary?

- Required when a child is accepted for services, and at least annually after
- If child is not in custody, contacts to kin only with consent by parent
- 30 day notification to relatives required when a child is in agency custody
- Can be discontinued only if family finding is a threat to the child’s safety
Family Finding and Kinship Care Act

- Family finding can be used to:
  - Identify supports for a family
  - Build a network
  - Involve kin in the agency’s service plan
- Kinship care is a preferred alternative to foster care for every child in placement
New Family Finding Rule

- Rule 1149 of Rules of Juvenile Court Procedure, added in 2015
- The purpose of family finding is to promote engagement of family to:
  - Be involved in family group decision making conferences or family meetings
  - Assist with visitation, transportation, child care, etc. when a child is in foster care
  - Provide kinship care as an alternative to foster care
New Family Finding Rule

- When does family finding begin?
  - As soon as the child is in agency custody
  - Should begin earlier to prevent placement
- Is family finding required when a child is adjudicated dependent but remains at home?
  - Yes! Family finding is important to build supports and create an alternate plan if the child is removed from the home
ACCYS Tools for Family Finding

- Caseworkers do ecomaps with each family
- 2 contracted paralegals through SWAN
  - Accurint by Lexis-Nexis – online person locator for last known phone numbers and addresses
  - Diligent search – ongoing process
- Engagement staff: 1 full-time, 1 part-time
- Referrals on all cases in initial 60-day assessment, and re-assess every 3 months
ACCYS Tools for Family Finding

- Social media, especially Facebook!
- Cold calls/letters – important when a child is at imminent risk of placement or has been placed in foster care
- Consent of a parent is required for contacts when a child is not placed in foster care
- Conversations with parents, children and relatives throughout case....
ACCYS Engagement Results

Since July 2015:

- 216 family meetings or family group decision-making conferences
- Almost all considered to be successful (i.e. meetings took place)
- 98 Adams County families served
FAMILY GROUP
DECISION-MAKING
What really is “Engagement”?

“Engagement is often synonymous with involvement. Involvement of families in child welfare services is important, but real engagement goes beyond that. Families can be involved and compliant without being engaged. Engagement is about motivating and empowering families to recognize their own needs, strengths, and resources and to take an active role in changing things for the better. Engagement is what keeps families working in the long and sometimes slow process of positive change.”

WHAT IS FAMILY GROUP DECISION-MAKING (FGDM/FGC)?

- Problem-solving/Task-focused group process.
- Collective decision making process which emphasizes the importance of the youth/family’s voice in treatment/rehabilitation.
- Viewed as an excellent mechanism for family/youth engagement.
- Recognized as an evidence-based practice:
  - Positive outcomes; and,
  - Reimbursed at higher rates from the state.
WHAT IS FGDM/FGC?

- **Purpose:**
  - Create a teamed practice between CYS, JWYC and the family that promotes teaming and family engagement during the family plan development.
BELIEFS, VALUES, & ASSUMPTIONS:

- Youth/Families have strengths and can change.
- Youth/Families should be the primary decision makers regarding their lives.
- Doing ‘WITH’ youth/families is better than doing ‘TO’ or ‘FOR.’
- Youth/Families generally want to do their best.
- All youth/families have the ability to come together and solve concerns.
- All youth/families have resources that they can call upon to support their success.
STAGES OF FGDM/FGC:

- Referral.
- Coordination.
- Pre-Conference.
- Conference.
- Post-Conference/Follow-Up.
Family Engagement/Coordinating Supports

- Motivational Interviewing
- Ecomaps
- Genograms
- Social Media
- Cell phone activities
THE ECOMAP

The EcoMap is a simple visual assessment tool used to highlight relationships between a child, their family and their social network. Practitioner and service user together map out the key connections between the child, the family and their ecological environment. Identifying these links clarifies and organises information displaying familial dynamics, raising issues about the character and reciprocity of relationships, and access to or absence of available resources.

The EcoMap uses standard symbols to express how the child/youth person connects with the radial elements in their life – family, people, organisations, activities etc. For example, a solid line may indicate a strong and healthy relationship, while a broken line represents a weaker tie. Arrows can be added at the end of each line to indicate reciprocity of some relationships while stressful or adverse relationships are represented by a dotted line crossed by several hashed lines.

Using the EcoMap the practitioner can work directly with the child/family in an effort to better identify those relationships that are strong and resilient and those that may be characterised by risk and adversity.

As a simple visual tool the EcoMap can helpfully support the analysis and understandings of family relationships and assist improve grasp of the child’s/youth person’s wider circumstances. Practitioners should:

- Place the person of focus – child/youth person, parents/carers or family – at the centre
- Identify the significant relationships this person has to other people, organisations and activities
- Using the key below, draw connecting lines that identify the character of relationship between the person of focus at the centre and the other people, organisations, and activities that are noted around them

KEY

[-] = A Strong Relationship

[-----] = A Weak/Vulnerable Relationship

[=/=/=/=] = A Stressful/Adverse Relationship
EcoMap

BLANK TEMPLATE FOR ECOMAP

NAME OF CHILD/YOUNG PERSON:
DATE STARTED:

[Diagram of blank template for EcoMap]
CONFERENCE

- Conference uses a co-facilitation model, and includes:
  - Establishing expectations/group norms.
  - Strengths/Concerns.
  - Bottom-line concerns.
  - Resources.
  - Sharing a meal.
  - Private family time & developing a plan for the youth/family.
  - Review of the plan.
WHO SHOULD BE REFERRED?

- Families experiencing:
  - Homelessness
  - Childcare issues
  - Parent/child conflict
  - Mental health/substance abuse concerns within the home
  - Truancy with school aged children
  - Home environmental concerns
  - Parents seeking reunification
  - Youth Transitional Conferences
Family Engagement Program
Adams County

- A modified version of FGDM
- Families involved in ongoing services with ACCYS (beyond 60 days)
- 30-30-30-90 model of conferencing
Engagement Program

- Allows for ongoing review of progress and services needed for the families
- The plan developed becomes part of the Family Service Plan (FSP)
- Family becomes their own advocate and more motivated during their ACCYS involvement
- Increase participation from community supports
- Decreases time of ACCYS involvement with the family
Engagement Program: What we have seen so far

- July 2015-July 2016
  - 18 Families participated
  - 10 Successful conferences
  - 5 Family team meetings
  - 3 Unsuccessful referrals
  - Recidivism: 1 family returned from the Family Engagement Program has re-entered the program
Family Engagement Program: A Mother’s Success Story

At the start of the FGDM Family Engagement Program this family was in crisis. The youngest child was hospitalized at Hershey Medical Center for chronic health concerns. The grandmother was the primary caretaker for both children due the mother not taking responsibility nor showing motivation as a parent. The relationship between the mother and grandmother was hostile at times as the mother would often shut down and not follow through with her child’s medical appointments.

The FGDM Family Engagement Program was crucial in providing an environment where the supports could express themselves and hold everyone accountable. This also allowed for engagement with both the children’s fathers in a healthy and positive environment.

Throughout their five-month involvement with the program, the mother achieved great success both individually and as a mother. She achieved the goals set forth by the plan by obtaining employment, counseling, housing, ongoing childcare and an understanding of her child’s medical needs. The engagement of the fathers in the program also resulted in an increase of visitation between one of the children and the father. The team mentality and effective communication between the family and Agency allowed for an environment where the mother could set her goals, complete the tasks and successfully thrive!
Family Engagement Program: A Team Success Story

At the onset of the FGDM Family Engagement Program, the mother was incarcerated while her two children resided at their grandmother’s home. Aside from considerable environmental and supervision concerns, the children’s severe mental health, developmental delays and physical needs were not being met.

The children were at imminent risk for out-of-home placement; however, the Agency and providers worked directly with community resources and stakeholders (including the county jail) to develop a transitional plan for mother to return home. While on house arrest, the mother participated in all conferences in order to address concerns through a detailed plan. Since her return home on house arrest, she has obtained employment, independent housing and alleviated safety concerns while in her care.

The children’s developmental needs have been met through extensive evaluations and appointments with specialists, which allowed for diagnosis and eventually services. In addition, one of the children is now in the process of receiving hearing aids and both children are receiving permanent dental care. The continuum of conferencing allowed for the support of community stakeholders, such as schools, psychologists and county case managers. The children have made tremendous progress in school and the teachers have participated in meetings, allowing them to help the mother learn and utilize similar techniques at home.
Questions?

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