

NORTH CAROLINA FAMILY- CENTERED MEETINGS PROJECT

**ANNUAL REPORT TO THE NORTH CAROLINA
DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES
FISCAL YEAR 2005 - 2006**

SUMMARY AND PROJECTIONS

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SUMMARY AND PROJECTIONS

In its fourth year of operation, the North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings (NC-FCM) Project expanded as the demand for child and family team (CFT) training increased in North Carolina. Training for county Social Services' departments and their community partners was funded through a contract with the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Social Services.

Vision and Mission

In its work with Social Services, the vision of the NC-FCM Project is to transform child welfare practice by supporting the leadership of families in service planning. A vehicle for transforming practice is child and family teams (CFTs) guided by family-centered principles. CFTs are a core strategy in the child welfare reform called "Multiple Response System" in North Carolina. This reform seeks to respond flexibly to the needs of families and, thus, enhance the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.

The NC-FCM Project's mission in child welfare is to provide training and evaluation on CFTs. To promote the delivery of CFTs by Social Services and their community partners, the project offers training to all 100 counties in North Carolina, delivers five formal curricula, provides on-going technical assistance and learning support, evaluates the training, and in response to training assessments and participant feedback, refines existing curricula and develops new curricula and training materials.

In its work with Social Services and their community partners, the mission of the NC-FCM Project is to provide training and evaluation on CFTs in child welfare.

State Developments

Over the year, the commitment to utilizing child and family teams (CFTs) in North Carolina has continued to rise, and this, in turn, has heightened the demand for CFT training and evaluation. Expansion of CFTs and training in this approach occurred both within Social Services and in other public systems.

Expansion of CFTs in Social Services

Originally, the Multiple Response System (MRS), which began implementation on August 1, 2002, was piloted in 10 counties. As one of the seven MRS strategies, CFTs were, thus, initially limited to the pilot sites. In September 29, 2003, the NC DSS announced that it had added 42 more counties to the MRS demonstration. At the beginning of this fiscal year, CFT training was opened to all 100 counties in North Carolina in preparation for the remaining 48 counties beginning CFT delivery in January 2006. As the new counties joined the training sessions, they benefited from hearing about the CFT strategies employed by the more experienced counties. They also learned further

about the reform effort and CFTs at the MRS Meetings held by NC DSS with county Social Services in three regions of the state.

This year CFT training was opened to all 100 North Carolinian counties.

Expansion of CFTs in Other Public Systems

Utilization of CFTs in Social Services was reinforced by the interest of other public systems in this approach to practice. Interest was heightened by a number of developments, in particular, system of care CFTs and school-based CFTs.

System of Care. Public systems in North Carolina are moving more and more toward a system of care (SOC) approach in support of children, youth, and their families. SOC is compatible with Social Services' Multiple Response System emphasis on responsive and collaborative approaches. The state has received funding from federal sources to infuse SOC principles into child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice services. The North Carolina State Collaborative for Children and Families System of Care, with broad representation from advocacy organizations and public systems serving children, has pushed for greater implementation of CFTs within a SOC. Affiliated with the State Collaborative is the SOC CFT Curriculum and Training Group, representative of family and youth advocates as well as a range of public agencies. This group has developed guiding principles for implementing CFTs within a SOC. The group is providing advice on three cross-system CFT projects in which the NC-FCM Project is currently engaged. Two are funded by Bladen County Department of Social Services from a federal Children's Bureau grant: producing a cross-system training video on CFTs and developing an orientation to CFTs from families' perspectives. The latter is being developed in collaboration with a family advocacy group, the North Carolina Families United, and with the University of North Carolina at Greensboro's Center for Youth, Family, and Community Partnerships. The third project concerns school-based CFTs.

System of care is consistent with Social Services' Multiple Response System, and the involvement of wide range of organizations in child and family teams serves to reinforce Social Services' use of this approach to service planning.

School-based CFTs. Passed in the summer of 2005, Session Law 2005-275, the 2005 North Carolina Appropriations Act gave legislative authority and funding for the implementation of school-based CFTs in 100 schools. To support school-based CFTs, the NC-FCM Project is providing training to and evaluating this new program. Funding is allocated by the North Carolina State Board of Education and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The training is drawing upon the previously mentioned collaboratively designed SOC CFT training. Training will be provided jointly to community members and involved agencies including the schools, child mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and public health. The aim is to support "one family, one plan" across systems. The initial work will focus on three pilot schools in an effort to provide intensive and tailored support to their development of child and family team

programs. The preliminary evaluation will focus on community collaboration, parental involvement in school success, and feedback from initial child and family teams.

School-based CFTs will further build partnerships with children, youth, and their families by a range of community organizations and public agencies, including Social Services.

Training

Program Developments

During the trainings, participants frequently raised issues about implementing CFTs. Many of the expressed concerns were similar to past years. Counties continued to worry about being able to fully adhere to good practice when faced with inadequate budgets and low staff numbers and the lack of designated CFT facilitators. Many participants struggled with how to maintain facilitator neutrality in meetings and whether it was all right to facilitate their own cases. While attempting to define their social work role, most counties concluded that facilitating their own cases was not appropriate; however, some counties shared that they were doing so with what they felt was success. Nevertheless, the counties just starting CFTs benefited from hearing from more experienced counties about their solutions for overcoming these programmatic challenges. County sharing provided participants with innovative ideas for facilitation such as utilizing volunteers, staff rotation, and contracting out facilitation.

Training participants raised similar programmatic issues to prior year. Nevertheless, newer counties benefited from hearing about solutions developed by more experienced counties.

Curricula Overview

This year two curricula—“Setting the Stage” and “Caution”—were combined to create a new curriculum called “Step by Step.” This merger was undertaken in response to participant and trainer feedback and was intended to offer a more intensive and interactive two-day orientation to CFTs. Training of “Step by Step” will commence in the new project year. The original five curricula and the new “Step by Step” curriculum are described below.

“Setting the Stage for Child and Family Teams: An Agency and Community Orientation”

This one-day training orients participants to the philosophies and benefits of convening meetings that include family, extended family, friends, service providers, and community members.

“Caution: Family Meeting Ahead! A Guide for Social Workers Attending Child and Family Teams”

This one-day training prepares the referring worker for participating in CFTs.

“Step by Step: A Introduction to Child and Family Teams”

This two-day, interactive training introduces CFTs and serves as the pre-requisite event for all other CFT trainings.

“Anchors Away! How to Navigate Family Meetings: The Role of the Facilitator”

This four-day learning event is an intensive skills-building opportunity for those facilitating CFTs.

The “ABCs of Involving Children in Child and Family Teams”

This one-day advanced curriculum provides specialized training for facilitators and social workers on how to involve children in CFTs.

“Widening the Circle: Safety Considerations and Child and Family Teams”

This two-day advanced training develops skills for conducting CFTs when families have a history of family violence, substance addictions, and mental illness.

“Technical Assistance and Learning Support”

This training is provided in response to county Social Services’ requests. It includes delivery of additional formal trainings as well as more informal assistance in the form of CFT coaching, debriefing, facilitator forums, and presentations.

Two curricula were combined into a two-day CFT orientation in response to participant feedback on having a more integrated and interactive training.

Training Participants and Training Events

This year CFT training was provided to 1,237 participants at 100 formal training events. These participants came from 79 of the 100 counties in North Carolina. The NC-FCM Project delivered five formal curricula: 39 one-day orientations to CFTs (“Setting the Stage for Child and Family Teams: An Agency and Community Orientation”), 25 one-day trainings for the referring social worker (“Caution: Family Meeting Ahead! A Guide for Social Workers Attending Child and Family Teams”), 18 four-day facilitator trainings (“Anchors Away! How to Navigate Child and Family Teams: The Role of the Facilitator”), 14 one-day advanced trainings on the inclusion of children (“The ABCs of Including Children in Family-Centered Meetings”), and 4 two-day advanced trainings on safety issues concerning CFTs (“Widening the Circle: Child and Family Teams and Safety Considerations”). Participant feedback was generally quite positive for all of the training curricula. Notably, close to 99% of participants said that they would recommend the training to a colleague.

In addition to offering pre-scheduled formal training events, the project provided technical assistance and learning support (TALS). The intent of TALS was to encourage transfer of learning from formal training events, respond to county requests for specific CFT training, and encourage learning connections among CFT facilitators and others. In

2005-2006, TALS was provided at 8 regional facilitator forums, telephone and on-site coaching, and holding of additional CFT trainings at the request of counties.

Training on CFTs was provided to 1,237 participants at 100 formal training events. These participants came from 79 of the 100 counties in North Carolina. In addition, technical assistance and learning support was provided to encourage transfer of learning.

Evaluation of Widening the Circle Curriculum

Rationale for Study

In the spring of 2005, the NC-FCM Project developed and piloted a new curriculum entitled “Widening the Circle: Child and Family Teams and Safety Considerations.” The curriculum was prepared at the request of NC DSS. Numerous county workers had raised questions about how to implement child and family teams (CFTs) in the context of family violence, addictions, and mental illness: Can the meetings be carried out in a safe manner? Can family members with serious health and safety issues participate effectively? Will the meeting process be manipulated and detrimental plans developed?

These questions are especially raised in situations where there is a history of family violence, that is, child maltreatment and domestic violence. Although very limited in number, outcome studies of family group conferencing point to reductions in indicators of domestic violence (Pennell & Anderson, 2005; Pennell & Burford, 2000). Nevertheless, given the extensive concerns about holding meetings in the context of family violence, the evaluation of the Widening the Circle curriculum focuses on the training outcomes of its family violence component.

Given the concerns about holding CFTs when there is a history of family violence, the evaluation of the Widening the Circle curriculum focused on this safety consideration.

Theory of Change

The curriculum is based on a theory of “widening the circle” to safeguard children, young persons, and other family members (Pennell & Anderson, 2005) and utilizes research conducted in North Carolina on pathways for widening the circle (Pennell, 2004, 2006). The four pathways are as follows:

Cultural Safety – a context in which family members can speak in their own language, express their values, and use their experiences and traditions to resolve issues.

Family Leadership – a relationship in which the family group members are central and their efforts are supported by community organizations and public agencies.

Community Partnerships – a local collaboration in which each partner retains its distinctive role while striving to realize common goals.

Inclusive Planning – a decision-making process that involves different sides of the family in making a plan, incorporates means of sustaining the family group’s participation, and is authorized and supported by the protective authority.

The two-day workshop orients participants to the pathways and introduces them to an instrument for assessing the extent to which these pathways are realized during the CFT preparations and at the meeting. This instrument called the “Achievement of CFT Objectives” is a means of measuring fidelity to good practices in conducting CFTs. These practices are each associated with one of the four pathways.

The curriculum is based upon a theory of widening the circle to safeguard children, young persons, and their families.

Logic Model

The long-term, desired outcome of the family violence focus of Widening the Circle is promoting safe and effective FCM participation when there is a history of family violence. In reaching this long-term outcome, a series of linked steps are assumed to precede it. They form the logic model. Some concern inputs (resources for the training), activities (delivering, evaluating, and refining the curriculum), and outputs (training materials, training participant satisfaction). Others concern the immediate outcomes and intermediate outcomes.

The immediate outcomes fall into two areas: (a) increasing the knowledge of the training participants at Widening the Circle regarding how to promote safe and effective participation at FCM meetings and (b) heightening the training participants’ sense of efficacy in conducting FCMs where there is a history of family violence and giving them a sense that the training has utility. Knowledge, sense of efficacy, and utility judgments are all important for workers transferring what they learned to their work settings. The intermediate outcomes concern the transfer of skills by the training participants and support for such skill transfer by their organizational setting. Preliminary findings on immediate outcomes are now available. In this coming fiscal year, the data collection of intermediate and longer term outcomes will commence.

The research design was guided by a logic model setting forth the training components and its desired outcomes.

Preliminary Findings on Immediate Outcomes

The two immediate outcomes concern changes taking place at the Widening the Circle training sessions in terms of (a) the participants’ demonstrating skills and (b) their enhanced sense of self-efficacy that they are capable of carrying out the learning objectives. These are measured through two separate instruments.

Participants' Skill Demonstration. Given that the curriculum is based on the theory of widening the circle, the evaluation checked to see if the participants could assess the extent to which its four pathways were realized in skills exercises. After participating in CFT role-plays, the participants completed the Achievement of CFT Objectives to rate the extent to which the four pathways were realized and reflected on their experience of applying the instrument. These activities gave the trainers the opportunity to assess the participants' understanding of using the evaluation instrument. The trainers reported that participants rapidly learned how to complete the form.

Participants' Increased Sense of Self-Efficacy. At the start and again at the conclusion of the workshop, the participants were asked to assess their abilities in regards to the curriculum's learning objectives. This provided a means of comparing the participants' sense of self-efficacy during the pre and post periods. A comparison of the pre and post findings on the self-assessment showed that self-ratings increased on all learning objectives. Notably, the area in which participants rated themselves the lowest at the beginning of the workshop concerned steps for preparing participants and facilitating CFTs in the context of the safety considerations. By the end of the two days, their self-assessment in this area had climbed extensively and approached the overall average score on objectives.

The positive self-assessments at the end of the workshop hold out the promise that participants will transfer learning to their work settings.

Projections

The Multiple Response System (MRS) is no longer an initiative being piloted in some counties. Although its practice is uneven across counties, MRS is mainstreamed into child welfare expectations in North Carolina. CFTs are one of the seven strategies of MRS. Now that all counties are expected to use CFTs, social services departments are facing issues on how to ensure its delivery. With the surge in counties applying this decision-making approach, the less experienced counties will continue to benefit from learning from the more experienced counties.

Establishing CFTs as part of practice as usual will be fortified by other public systems also utilizing this approach within a system of care. A system of care is a means by which the involved agencies and community groups come together with and around a family to provide integrated support to family members. Developments in schools, mental health, public health, and juvenile justice and delinquency prevention will help to increase the likelihood that children, young persons, and their families take part in CFTs and that their service providers become more familiar with CFTs and how to collaborate on implementing the service agreements.

With the expansion of CFTs in the state, the demand for training from a range of partners will continue to rise. This makes it possible for the involved agencies to take part in trainings together and with child and family advocates and to encourage the development

of cross-system training. Because CFTs are to be built around children and their families, many aspects of CFTs are generic across systems. For instance, CFT facilitators should explain the purpose and process of the meetings in a manner that makes sense to families. Each system, however, will have its own particular mandates and policies in regards to CFTs, and these will need to be taken into account in the development of CFT curricula.

The widened appeal for CFT training will lead to developing new modes of training. In particular, it is likely that mixed methods utilizing both in-class and on-line training will be needed. In addition, to ensure that formal training is transferred into work settings, technical assistance and learning support will be important and needs to be shaped to the particular requirements of a county and public agency.

The increased demand for CFT training from different agencies will provide opportunities for cross-system training. Each system, however, will have its own particular mandates and policies in regards to CFTs, and these will need to be taken into account in the development of CFT curricula.

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The North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings Project has seen this year extensive expansion in its scope of work and project team. Accordingly, we proudly acknowledge our many mutually supportive linkages among county, state, university, and national partners. Our county partners ensure that we remain grounded in practice realities and reaffirm our commitment to advancing child and family teams for the benefit of both families and workers. Our state, university, and national partners keep us informed of broader developments that influence policy, practice, evaluation, and training.

At the North Carolina Division of Social Services, we must particularly thank Teresa Turner for her unstinting work to foster quality training and good synergy among all of the training groups. Holly McNeill has been especially helpful in ensuring that county representatives and training groups keep abreast of policy changes and emerging issues. At NC State University, Dean Brady provided warm support to our community engagement, and the college's Office of Research, Dr. Zingraff and Amanda Tueting, have responded to our numerous questions on contracts. Our ongoing relationship with the American Humane Association's National Center on Family Group Decision Making has offered avenues for sharing learning and resources that only enhance both of our endeavors.

Within the North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings Project, our training coordinator, Cherie Spehar, assisted the trainers in facing new challenges and provided the needed caring support and structure. Our training team undertook a broad spectrum of work from formal training workshops to more informal and county-specific assistance to development of curricula and training materials to maintaining close relationships with county staff. Along with Cherie Spehar, particularly instrumental in curricular development were Kara Allen-Eckard, Sylester "Tee" Henderson, Susan Gasman, and Billy Poindexter. Marc Morgan was always willing to take on more trainings, and Catherine Williamson-Hardy provided keen insights into organizational structure. As new trainers—Ashton Privette, Jenny King, and Vega Johnson-Swepson—joined the team, they were warmly welcomed and quickly immersed in the work. Our project coordinator, Amy Coppedge, skillfully marshaled the resources necessary for our growing program of work and worked closely with our registrar, Ashley Duncan, in fostering positive relations with training participants and county partners. They were both aided by our industrious and technologically competent project assistants, Chrissy Dembowski and Erin Bergstrom.

This has been a very positive and challenging year, and my hat is off to our supportive partners and productive team!

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