

Northern California CPYP Counties Meeting

November 7, 2007

10:00 a.m. to 2:00 pm

1747 Copperhill Parkway, Santa Rosa CA

Minutes

Next Meeting: Wednesday, March 19, 2008, San Rafael, CA (hosted by Marin County)

Attendees

Anthony Barrows, Family Builders by Adoption
Terry Clauser, Sacramento County
Cyndy Doherty, Marin Advocates for Children
Mignon Evans, Sonoma County
Tova Feldmanstern, Family Builders by Adoption
Rachel Fronce, Sonoma County
Bob Harper, Sonoma County
Naomi Jimenez, Stanislaus County
Eileen Johnson, California Permanency for Youth Project
Gail Johnson Vaughan, Mission Focused Solutions
Frederick Jones, Sonoma County
Gwen LaPena, Humboldt County
Charles Lerner, Family Builders by Adoption
Mardi Louisell, California Permanency for Youth Project
Terry Marroquin, Humboldt County
Karen McClure, Sonoma County
Nancy McDonald, Family Builders by Adoption
Neely McElroy, Contra Costa County
Katharine Odle, San Mateo County
Leslie Olson, Sacramento County
Jim Paulsen, Contra Costa County
Ellen Scharffenberg, Contra Costa County
Karla Self, Stanislaus County
Kerry Stokes, Sonoma County
Cynthia Sutcliffe, Humboldt County
David Turk, San Francisco County
Debra Williams, Sacramento County
Geri Wilson, Sacramento County

Regrets

Nenita Dean, Stanislaus County
Christine Lerable, Monterey County
Robin Lockett, Alameda County
Nancy Wiltsek, Pottruck Foundation

Agenda

- 10:00 am Welcome, introductions
- 10:15 am Brief update on CPYP: practice guides, next year with CPYP, review of October conference call, discussion
- 10:30 am Update on a key action step each county has completed and a difficulty the county is working on. Input from counties on questions and challenges they wish to strategize about with other counties.
- 11:00 am Highlights from Sacramento County
- Planning of A.C.T. training (Adoption Clinical Training) in a partnership
 - Darla Henry's training and how that work will continue
 - How Sacramento is using permanency expert Bob Lewis
 - Use of Sacramento website for permanency
- 11:30 am Lunch
- 12:00 pm Discussion and brainstorming of above questions and challenges
- 1:45 pm Set next meeting date and topics
- 2:00 pm End

Minutes

Welcome and Introductions

Mardi Louisell, CPYP, chaired the meeting. She welcomed the group and introduced Bob Harper, Sonoma County, the host for the meeting.

CPYP Update – Mardi Louisell

Practice Guides

Mardi Louisell recently completed writing two practice guides, one on family finding and engagement, the second on organizational practice. The family finding guide is being published by the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Permanency Practice and Planning at Hunger College, and will be available shortly on their website. The organizational practice guide is being published by CPYP and will be available in January or February 2008.

County work in 2008

CPYP will be ending its monthly work with the current group of ten counties at the end of March 2008. Starting in April 2008, CPYP will begin working with a few new counties, mostly in southern California. Travel is an issue if we work in northern California, because it is not easy to get to some of the northern counties.

All-County Conference Call, October 2007

- One of the topics for this call was the Intent to Maintain Contact Form. Cheryl Jacobson did a presentation, showing how to use this document as a tool. She explained that the form was used when the permanent connection was ready to make a commitment to youth. The process of doing the form helps to clarify expectations for both parties, and the form itself serves as a written record of any decisions made.
- Some counties are still experiencing resistance from workers as far as using the form. However, Jacobson commented that if workers are not using the form, how do we know that the needed conversations are taking place? Youth need to know what they can count on and what they can't.
- As an outgrowth of the All-County Conference Call, Mardi Louisell will be scheduling a separate conference call specifically for county administrators. The idea for the call came from Bob Harper.

Accomplishments and Difficulties

Mardi Louisell asked each county present to share one key action step they have completed and one difficulty they are working on.

Contra Costa

- After a great deal of staff turnover and management changes, the county has gotten going again; they have a plan and are doing case conferring around permanency issues. Various supervisors come together with Mardi Louisell and Neely McElroy. Their goal for CPYP is to get permanency into the entire county. The new Contra Cost West County Manager, Richard Bell, is on board with permanency; he is encouraging supervisors to look at it from intake to the end. The county is also getting Accurint.
- Their challenge is having many projects going on at the same time as SIP (Self-Improvement Plan); the county is trying to coordinate all efforts.

Sacramento

Since the county would be sharing in depth later, they didn't discuss their accomplishments. Their difficulty is getting staff on board and seeing a change in practice as a result of the work. They are trying to figure out what is behind the resistance and how they can get workers to change.

San Francisco

- One accomplishment is the expansion of permanency services and practice within the county due to the adoption contract with Family Builders. Initially, there was only one worker, Anthony Barrows; now he is supervising five workers, including a Spanish speaker, and will soon have another.
- Their challenge is having a real shift occur in the way people approach their work. Best practice tends to trickle down from management, and things get lost in-between. The county held training with Bob Lewis for half of their supervisors/managers; training for workers and foster parents was also held. They are trying to strike a balance between not

alienating staff and still holding workers accountable when they are not doing what they are supposed to do regarding permanency.

Dumisha Project – Family Builders by Adoption

- Family Builders has co-located seven workers at Alameda County and referrals are picking up. The project has two new positions, including a recruiter for children/youth in Alameda County who will go out into the community. They are also creating a position for someone to be a “family supporter” (i.e. help with post-permanency services).
- In the area of training, they are designing a family preparation course. They also had Bob Lewis come, and he will start to come on regular basis. Family Builders is trying to incorporate his Family Bound Program, which helps youth understand what family life is, into their monthly youth group.
- In terms of challenges, they have the same issues already shared by other agencies.

Marin

The county is just getting started in permanency work. They are familiar with the CASA curriculum.

San Mateo

There is only one permanency social worker, so it is extremely hard to do the work and get the word out. Katharine Odle has done some mini-training; she is trying to get Darla Henry to come, but money is an issue. The county is also going through accreditation, which takes time away from permanency work. The county is partnering with the CASA coordinator to do permanency training with the ILP (Independent Living Program) unit.

Stanislaus

- There are two permanency workers, Karla Self and Naomi Jimenez. They are starting to track connections on a database.
- They do a permanency interview once a year with all youth. In the interview, they talk about permanency guardianship and adoption, and write up report. They have completed 2,773 interviews and are starting to enter the information in a database. Currently, a copy of the report is not going to supervisors; more two-way communication (such as the report) between administration and workers would be helpful.

Humboldt

- They have scheduled four monthly training sessions with Darla Henry starting in January 2008; they are in the process of getting attendees.
- They are finalizing getting Accurint.
- Their challenge is to find a way to infuse permanency principals and practice across the board, and find how this work can benefit all units in the county. They held a meeting with supervisors to discuss this issue.
- County personnel meet twice monthly to staff cases; they spend 40 minutes per case, with 15 cases total. They are having all supervisors, FM (family maintenance), FR (family reunification), and PP (permanent placement/planning) staff share responsibility so everyone involved can go in and out of staffing knowing what to do, including the social workers, the social worker’s partner(s), and the supervisor. It is a team meeting; attendees

discuss what was done with action steps from the last meeting and what needs to be done going forward. Family members are not necessarily included in these meetings, although family and non-professional partners may be.

- Gwen LaPena would like to expand so that she's not the only one calling the meetings; she would like to have non-case carrying partners on each case. David Turk commented that at San Francisco County they want to eliminate having one social worker take sole responsibility for decisions made in isolation.

Sonoma

- The county has begun holding community partnership meetings. At these meetings, real work is accomplished and the county is learning from its partners. After the community group meetings, staffing for cases is done; partners can stay if they agree to confidentiality. At the last meeting, they had 23 partners, including FR workers, CASA workers, and attorneys. The topic was "What do our partners perceive as barriers?" Items included:
 - Group homes that use levels to control access to family members
 - Having appropriate boundaries
 - The need to involve kids in family finding, and sharing finding with them
- Referrals are picking up; the downside is staff feeling overwhelmed. Resistance is still an issue.
- The county is starting to do up-front searches with Accurint.

Mission Focused Solutions

Gail Johnson Vaughan, chair of the CPYP Task Force Policy Committee, shared that she wanted to bring a state perspective to this meeting. She raised three points:

- The need to balance practice and policy
- Funding is always an issue
- The easy cases and issues have been dealt with; the hard work is starting now.

Highlights from Sacramento County

Geri Wilson began by sharing that their county has really benefited from their work with CPYP. She also explained that part of their success was due to public/private partnerships. Due to very high caseloads (60 cases), the county couldn't have done the work without their partners.

Adoption Clinical Training (ACT)

ACT is a curriculum provided by Kinship Center, Salinas. It is training for permanency competence, and is geared toward clinical workers. (For more information, see www.kinshipcenter.org/act.html.) Kinship Center is considering changing the name of the training to "Permanency Competency Training."

Due to their work with Sierra Adoption Services and Destination Family, Sacramento County realized they needed to have their clinical workers trained in permanency. They used saved monies from a WRAP provider (EMQ) to fund the training; they also asked for funds from the

Northern California Training Academy. UC Davis agreed to fund the training as a pilot project. The county obtained additional funds from other WRAP providers and Title IV-E.

The county had 80 people (two groups of 40) receive the training; participants included county social workers, other agency providers, and some therapists. The training was one day per month for eight months. The hope is that the value of training will be recognized, and that the Training Academy will fund future training.

Darla Henry Training

Dr. Darla Henry held four training sessions (one per month for four months) on her 3-5-7 model of grief and loss. In addition to regular county staff, four staff from partner agencies attended. Initially, the training was intended for permanency services staff, but Wilson realized part-way through that others need to come as well. As a result, administrators were invited to come for two entire afternoons to help emphasize the need for implementation. This led to conversations with agency administrators, who agreed to start the work. Also, Sacramento invited Henry back to meet with staff who are actually doing the work.

Another outcome of this training is the chance to meet with other agencies. The county scheduled its first 3-5-7 cross-agency meeting to discuss the training. It included clinicians from group homes, Sierra Adoption Services, WRAP providers, and Destination Family. Wilson realized that FR (family reunification) staff should also be involved. The clinicians are thrilled.

One issue came up around FR: should searches be done even when FR is in process? What if the adoptive or existing family is resistant to or disapproving of potential new connections? This is an ongoing discussion for all agencies that relates to concurrent planning practice.

Bob Lewis Training

Bob Lewis provided training to Sierra Adoption Services for Destination Family. His work has continued to guide their permanency practice. Key items are:

- establishing bridge families through WRAP providers
- helping youth prepare for permanency

So far, Lewis hasn't trained county staff, other than at the 2006 CPYP conference. However, the county uses his expertise indirectly through Destination Family.

To find out when Bob Lewis will be training in the Bay area, call Seneca Center. David Turk invited people at the meeting to attend the San Francisco sessions, space permitting.

Sacramento Website - Permanency for Foster Children: There's No Place Like Home

The county launched a permanency website, as a way to get word out. The website is at: <http://www.sacdhhs.com/article.asp?ContentID=1755>

Funding

The county funded these projects from a variety of sources. Some money came from an Adoptions Opportunity Grant (which is ending); some from WRAP savings. Wilson plans to write funding requests into future contracts with partner agencies.

Two attendees offered comments about overcoming barriers to funding.

- Gail Johnson Vaughan documented the cost-savings as a result of the Destination Family Project. Documentation can help create the political will to reinvest dollars, or get EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment) contracts to providers.
- Anthony Barrows stressed focusing on the work. Try to get around “turf issues” by statements such as “Here’s a child that needs a family” or “Here’s a way to get kids out of foster care/group homes, etc.”

Discussion and Brainstorming: Overcoming Resistance

Mardi Louisell took a poll of the group to see what topic(s) they would like to discuss; the group decided on worker resistance. As people offered comments and suggestions, several themes developed:

“We’re already doing the work”

- When workers ask why the county went “outside” to do the work (i.e. used partner agencies, hired other workers), explain that the “new” permanency workers are here to support the case-carrying social workers, that they have expertise in the area of permanency work, and they don’t have any case management responsibilities.
- A county manager suggested that when workers say “we’re already doing the work,” point to current statistics about emancipated youth. It is clearly evident that the work *isn’t* being done.
- Sometimes a new face (i.e. not the case-carrying SW) can be helpful when working with family members, particularly if there are any negative feelings about the “old” SW due to his or her role in removing a child.

Overcoming worker guilt and grief

- Help the social worker (SW) understand that this isn’t a case of them “doing something wrong,” but rather a systemic change in practice and philosophy. Maybe the worker is afraid of having to go back to the existing family and admitting that s/he “did wrong.” Put the focus on restructuring and redesign.
- Help the worker understand that new resources are available that they didn’t have before.
- Sometimes workers feel that they are being told, “You are the problem.” Sometimes there is the perception that the SW is trying to keep family apart. Offer the perspective of “This is a change in the system,” not that the SW did something wrong.
- Grief work: “Oh, I did this to all these families.” Supervisors need to let staff have these feelings and work through them. In addition, allowing workers to go to the sad places and hard places won’t happen unless supervisors are also dealing with these issues themselves. It is a challenge to balance disassociation with “feeling one’s feelings.”
- Stop to celebrate the good things that happen. Try to do more public recognition of successes. For example, some counties have visual displays, such as trees showing all the connections that are made. Stanislaus County has a quilt that shows children/youth with permanent connections. One county administrator sends an email every month to all staff in which he describes permanency success stories.

Group homes

- Workers may feel, “The only way this kid will function is in this structured setting (i.e. group home).”
- What is so unique about kids in group homes versus disturbed kids already living with their families?
- Try to show that keeping the youth in a group home won’t be in the best long-term interest of the youth. Begin conversations immediately at intake: “How do we get the child/youth ready to go home?”
- One supervisor finds the “culture of contingent care” the most challenging barrier. The idea that the placement is “contingent on” something is itself a barrier.
- Our goal is to try to find homes for youth in care. Workers may have rational and reasonable “what if’s” related to a possible placement. The only way to address this question is to address the worst case scenario: “You’ll have to do another placement.” However, it is not that big a deal, when compared to this: “What is the youth learning now? – how to be a successful institutional creature?” Consider that something non-ideal *may* happen (in other words, a possibility) if the youth is placed with family versus the probability of what *will* happen if the youth stays in the group home – having mental health issues, prison, etc. See examples of current youth stories: “If that had been done for me I might not be where I am now.” (Adoption agency Permanency Team Leader)
- Some workers feel that finding connections may be setting up the youth for potential disappointment. However, which is better, being “safe” in a group home or taking the risk with a potential opportunity?

The “perfect” family

- Just because a youth has a stable placement, it doesn’t necessarily mean a permanent connection exists. From the court’s perspective, the child is finally stabilized in placement, but this may not be permanency. What about a youth who may have been in a “stable placement” for years?
- SW worry about a placement disrupting can be a barrier. Address the concern directly: “Yes, it might disrupt.” Ask the worker, “Is it our job to keep the youth in stable placement until age 18?”
- It is much better to try to reconnect with families while the youth still has the child welfare safety net in place, rather than after the youth is 18 or 19.
- SWs all know that our current system isn’t working: no family is perfect, and surely being with family is a better alternative. Allow youth to make their own choices about what family members they will relate to. One SW said that the idea of “not telling” youth about certain things comes from our own fear. As workers, *we* don’t want to be sad, *we* don’t want to be disappointed. However, youth want information, even if it might be negative: “Don’t hide things from us, don’t protect us – tell us what is going on.” One worker shared, “It’s never as scary as it is in your head.”
- A worker still may be depressed after conversations between youth and possible connections. There is a need to support *both* the workers *and* the youth.
- One social worker said, “It’s not that I expect the family to be perfect, but I feel it’s my responsibility that the family works out.”
- Judges, attorneys, and CASAs are biased toward the “perfect family” as savior.

- Contra Costa has had success with bringing parents on board. During meetings with the parents, county staff came to realize that “we aren’t that different.” The parent should be seen as a partner, not “an alien person who did those horrible things.”
- Rather than being a “child-advocate” or a “foster parent advocate,” be a “family advocate.” Develop sensitivity to biological families; be aware of the systemic problems that cause parents to have problems to begin with. Have compassion, empathy, and sensitivity to all in the system, including the SW and foster parent; avoid putting blame on the biological family.
- Have supervisors push for permanency as much as they can. Used the tactic of reframing the family. Don’t keep reliving incidents from 10 or 20 years ago but look at how the family is doing now. Recognize the possibility of change occurring for the better. Find ways to promote the experiences of those who have “lived life,”– that is, made mistakes earlier in life – but overcame them.
- “It’s our job to try it out and make it work. We owe to them [the youth] to try and make it work.”

Suggestions for Future Topics

- Funding - specifically, how are the issues of sustainability and partnerships addressed? Are there specific monies that are flexible? Louisell suggested keeping this topic for the county administrator conference call.
- Finding and maintaining partnerships with the bench; possibly inviting Kelly Beck, Administrative Offices of the Courts, to give a presentation
- Different workers’ experience going through the steps; possible role playing
- What are we doing to ensure that permanency plans work?
- Efforts to integrate Mental Health
- When is the permanent relationship sustained? When are you finished?
- How can we best utilize the data to political advantage?
- How do counties document what they have done?

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be on March 19, 2008, either in Marin or San Francisco County. Post-Meeting update: Marin Advocates for Children offered to host the meeting, as well as provide lunch. The meeting will be at Lucas Valley Community Church, 2000 Las Gallinas, San Rafael, CA.