



Engaging Virginia's Families

Family Engagement

Volume 1 Issue 3

September 2011

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A special thank you is sent to the members of the Family Engagement Workgroup for their commitment and dedication .

Gretchen Icard Brown, Bragail Williams-Brown, Lynne Edwards, Dawn Howard, Anita Martineau, Hayley Mathews, Charlotte McNulty, Ed Schuster, Lisa Tully, and Rebecca Vinroot

A Time for Reflection— From the Program Manager

While having a conversation with a Family Engagement Coordinator, one of her statements caused me to pause. She expressed that she was sure that being in the State Office I did not get to see everyday how the lives of families are being changed as a result of family engagement. At that moment, I realized that while I have not had the benefit of seeing this significant shift in practice daily, there are other opportunities that will impact my experiences in child welfare for years to come. I have had the pleasure of talking with all levels of staff within local agencies and stakeholder groups. Listening to the creativity, I heard individuals think not only outside of the box, but beyond the box as if it never existed. Through leading this effort, I have watched the commitment of internal Family Engagement teams as they challenged existing systems and practices to implement the tenet of the Practice Model,



Dr. Tamara Temoney is leaving VDSS to become the Assistant Director of Hanover County Social Services in Ashland, Virginia.

“We believe that children do best when raised in families”.

This journey, while often not an easy one, was needed to improve permanency outcomes for children and families. Thinking back to some of the initial and often difficult conversations in 2008, I am in awe of where we are today! Discussions are no longer focused on the various reasons why practice could not change, and I would like to thank those of you who have been willing to take risks and try something new. For others who were already using a structured approach to involving families and waiting for everyone else to get on board, thank you for your insights and expertise. The Family Engagement program continues to expand including supporting kinship providers, engaging fathers and paternal relatives, and the utilization of family search strategies. It is inevitable that with growth, new challenges will appear. Yet I remain encouraged by the belief that

Together, we can build communities committed to change in caring for children and families.

Project LIFE Provides LDSS Support for Older Youth

Interview with Jacquelyn Cowan, Director Project LIFE

Question: What is the role of the Project LIFE Best Practice Consultants?

Answer: To assist youth and

their families, DSS agencies, private providers and other adult supporters around permanency and lifelong connections for youth.

Question: How can the Best

Practice Consultants assist local agencies with family engagement practice?

Answer: 1) Best Practice

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Project LIFE Provides LDSS Support for Older Youth

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The Family Engagement Process has allowed our youth to have opportunities to explore more possibilities of finding family members and living within a family setting. It has also encouraged permanent relationships and allowed our older youth to have the support that is needed to transition into adulthood.

— **Project LIFE Consultant**

Consultants can provide training and technical assistance to youth and adults around Permanency, the Family Engagement Model, and Family Partnership Meetings.

2) They also assist in preparing older youth for Family Partnership Meetings by discussing its purpose and process; knowing when to request meetings, and learning ways to advocate for their needs.

3) Best Practice Consultants use the Permanency Pact and other tools to help youth and adults understand the importance of lifelong supports.

4) Best Practice Consultants can also facilitate Family Partnership Meetings for older youth.

5) Best Practice Consultants have been trained in ACCURINT and can assist in locating and engaging family members and other supportive adults to help youth maintain permanent connections.

Question: Who is eligible to receive services?

Answer: Youth ages 14-21 and adults are eligible to receive training, support and technical assistance. Best Practice Consultants are also

able to facilitate Family Partnership Meetings for youth who are at least 16 years of age and have been in care at least one year regardless of their permanency goal.

Question: What is the fee for services?

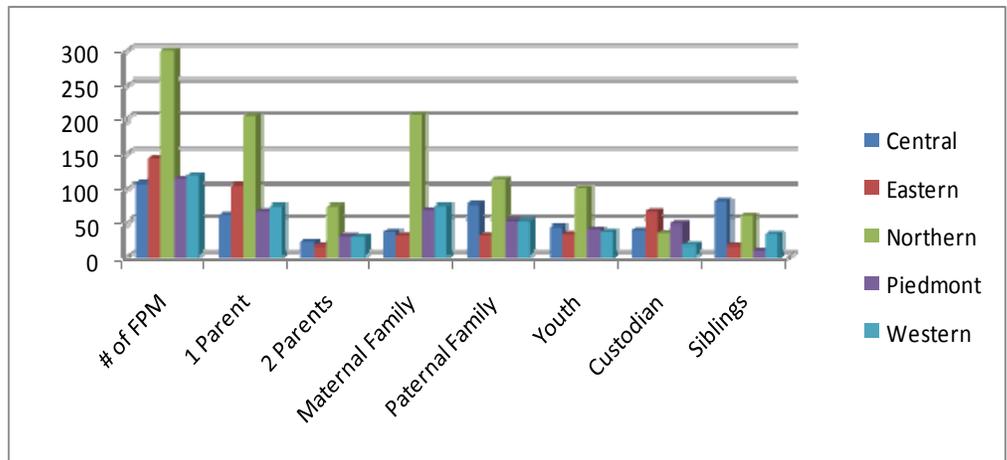
Answer: There is no fee for this service.

Question: Who do I contact for questions and assistance?

Answer: You can contact Kimberly Gilley at 434-906-1269 or at kgilley@umfs.org or Craig Simmons at 804-239-1066 or at crsimmons@umfs.org

*Family Engagement:
Practice Makes
Permanence*
—**Central
Regional
Team**

Regional Notes— FPM Report March– May 2011



Can Data Drive Your Practice?

As data about family engagement is shared it should be reviewed to determine next steps to change areas in need of improvement. Current family engagement data suggests that throughout the state, additional

support is needed in improving the following areas:

- **2-parents participating in FPM**
- **Youth involvement**

- **Involving maternal and paternal relatives**

Use data to discuss whether there are existing internal or external policies that are impacting the information or if collaborating with community stakeholders can have a positive impact.



Piedmont Regional Facilitator Collaborative

Virginia Department of Social Services Mission:

People helping people triumph over poverty, abuse, and neglect to shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities.



Gayle Brown

The Piedmont Regional Facilitator Collaborative (PRFC) is comprised of participants of the 2011 Family Engagement Facilitator Project from the Piedmont Region. The PRFC provides support to Family Partnership Facilitators within the region and has met quarterly since March 2011.

Through group email, the participants discuss time sensitive issues and use a live forum to discuss FPM challenges and solutions. Participants of the PRFC have assisted others in training their respective agencies and assisted in implementing FPMs in other ways. The PRFC also examines facilitation techniques to enhance skills and incorporate best practices. Additional supports the PRFC

Did you notice the change in the newsletter's name? Often when naming something the name will denote its nature. If this is true, then the stage is set for the Virginia Commonwealth Social Services System to continue "**Engaging Vir-**

would like to provide include a website for facilitators within the Piedmont region. The website would contain Helpful Facilitator Tips, *Ask Tracey* advice column for problem solving, a library section to post resources from various agencies and localities, and a calendar of events occurring within the region.

If you are interested in participating with the PRFC please contact: **Benjamin S. Jones, LCSW (AL)**, Senior Social Worker, Roanoke County Department of Social Services at (540) 387-6087 ext. 431 or **Kirsten Parker-Smith**, FPM Coordinator/Senior Social Worker, Charlottesville Dept. of Social Services at 434.970.3474



Ben Jones



Kirsten Parker-Smith

What's In a Name?

ginia's Families."

Gayle Brown from Virginia Beach Department of Human Services provided the winning submission for naming the newsletter. Ms. Brown has been with the Virginia Beach Department of Hu-

man Services for the past year and a half as a CPS Supervisor. Prior to working for Virginia Beach, she worked for the City of Chesapeake in various positions. Ms. Brown has also served as a foster parent.

Family Engagement— Through the Eyes of a Child

—From an LDSS in the Northern region

A 6 year old child felt that his father and uncle hated each other. His placement with maternal relatives created enormous tension and conflicting communication within his family. The family was able to agree that their lack of communication and support for each other was hurting this child and was

not acceptable.

During a FPM, amends were made and the family began planning for him to transition back to his father with services. At the conclusion of the meeting, the family asked if they could share the beginning of their healing process with their child. They called him in

to witness their hugs and expressions of love and appreciation for each other. Visibly relieved and tearful, the 6 year old fell into the arms of both his father and uncle. This family left with pride that they were able to begin the healing process for their child and ultimately for themselves.



*Best Practice In
Action Highlights*

The number of valid FPM across the state increased from **514** from Quarter 2 (December 2010-February 2011) to **782** for Quarter 3 (March 2011 to May 2011)

Family Engagement Unit

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VIRGINIA SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEMS— BEST PRACTICE IN ACTION

The **Eastern Region** is hosting a “Community Day” on September 8 to involve more community partners in family engagement. During a Family Engagement Roundtable, it was determined that agencies were doing a good job of involving community partners; however, it was believed that additional information was needed for the community as a whole. “Community Day” will be an opportunity for community partners to come together and learn from each other as well as learn from local agencies. One of the main purposes is to have community partners understand family engagement along with an opportunity to see and discuss new efforts to help strengthen communities and families. This day will help to expand the engagement of old partners and create new ones!

The day was planned by a diverse committee of members including representatives from state and local partners, non-profit agencies, and the faith-based community. The committee felt that if the event was going to build partners it was important to have representation from the various stakeholders. Each committee member agreed to have conversations with their own stakeholder group to establish buy-in. When asked how will the success of the event be measured, the committee stated “The collaboration of committee members, their work within the community to develop this event, as well as the fact that these partners have participated, signifies a degree of success in itself.” The committee is already planning a second event and has committed to remaining together and partnering with other agencies within the region to plan other activities.

Family engagement has changed the way agencies look at biological parents, extended family, fictive kin and family connections. Foster care case loads have decreased and on-going service case loads have increased. Agencies are finding that families feel heard, children can remain out of foster care or can be returned home sooner, workers feel more satisfied with the work they are doing and seeing positive outcomes. Agencies are being creative in ways to include family at the meeting and there is more sensitivity as agencies dispel the myth that “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree”.

—Northern Regional Team

We are very excited with the progress local agencies are making with the implementation of Virginia’s practice model and engaging families. The results are yielding positive results for children and families and we are seeing two months of casework completed in two hours.

—Western Regional Team



Do you have good news or ideas to share? Email tracey.jackson@dss.virginia.gov