



Family Engagement Newsletter—

Family Engagement

Volume 1 Issue 1

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“The Family Engagement Model has allotted our agency the ability to get back to the basics of Social Work. The approach promotes a strength based yet structured environment where our families feel valued, supported and most importantly they are regaining, attaining, and sustaining their healthy independence. Family Engagement works as we have seen a decrease in our foster care population which proves how powerful a team can be...” -LDSS Facilitator

Henrico County DSS Innovative Approach to Family Strengthening and Family Engagement Pays Off

Henrico County DSS is among the top agencies within the state in the number of FPM occurring & decision point documentation. Henrico DSS established a strong family engagement practice by collaborating with community partners, training staff and adhering to the Virginia Children’s Practice Model. Henrico County DSS Director Jane Crawley acknowledged her assistant director, management team and staff for the success but emphasized that it was a process. Ms. Crawley stated the process of changing the agency is similar to what families go through and it is important to realize that change may require people to accept the sense of loss for the old way of doing things. Assistant Director Shawn Rozier was credited with leading the operational success. Mr. Rozier states agencies should examine things that don't cost money like engaging partners and building staff buy-in to gather support for family en-



Henrico County DSS Assistant Director, Director & Family Partnership Implementation Team (Seated left to right) Shawn Rozier, Assistant Director, Jane Crawley, Director, Carol Jellie, Brenda Sample. Standing (Left to Right): Riva O’Sullivan, Jim Carey, Tawana Olds, Ty Parr, Crystal Brinchfield, Gretchen Icard, and Phillip White

Family Support

An interview with Greg Winge, CSA Director, Franklin County Government

Question: How did you collaborate within your system to develop the family engagement policy?

agement. Henrico DSS has infused a family framework into their practice to include the formation of an implementation team focused on family partnership and engagement. The implementation team included representatives from CPS, Prevention and Stabilization, Foster Care and CSA. Supervisors commented that follow-up with their staff dur-

Answer: In March 2010, we applied for funding assistance through VDSS and the Court Improvement Program. When we were approved to receive the family engagement training and facilitation services we formed our Family

ing individual supervision was one critical component for success. Other comments from staff for successful family engagement included having structured agency meetings, addressing resistance head on and maintaining a framework which allows flexibility. Henrico DSS has also (Continued on page 2)

Engagement Implementation Team. After the training, I drafted the family engagement policy as a starting point for the Implementation Team’s consideration. The Implementation Team’s (Continued on page 3)

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.

“The process was helpful in bringing all child welfare units together to help everyone see the “big picture”...

—LDSS Staff

“ A team that collaboratively comes to a decision with the family helps the social worker think “outside the box” and opens up additional resources for the family.”

— LDSS Facilitator

Henrico County DSS Continued

Continued from page 1. created Henrico Cares which is a program targeted to recruit and provide support for resource parents. This program is an extension of the engagement of the family framework throughout the agency. The partnerships built to originally support Family Partnership Meetings has extended to involve the Library, Police and Fire Departments to become more involved with the agency and their resource parents. Henrico DSS has embraced the concept that it takes a village or in this case a county to raise their children in care. Ms. Crawley provided some sug-

gestions to assist other agencies: 1) Agencies need time to assess themselves, 2) Agencies need to prioritize efforts caused by the competing interests, 3) Agencies should utilize colleagues & form cohorts for similar tasks, 4) Identify customers and address their situations (avoid labeling children & families), 5) Be strength based, 6) Educate community partners, 7) Elicit support of sister agencies in localities, i.e. Mental Health & Juvenile Justice, 8) Involve locality government by engaging, informing, and to support messaging, 9) Develop a plan, and 10) Work the plan.



Henrico Cares program partnered with the Henrico Fire and Parks & Recreation at a community event to make it rain for the children.

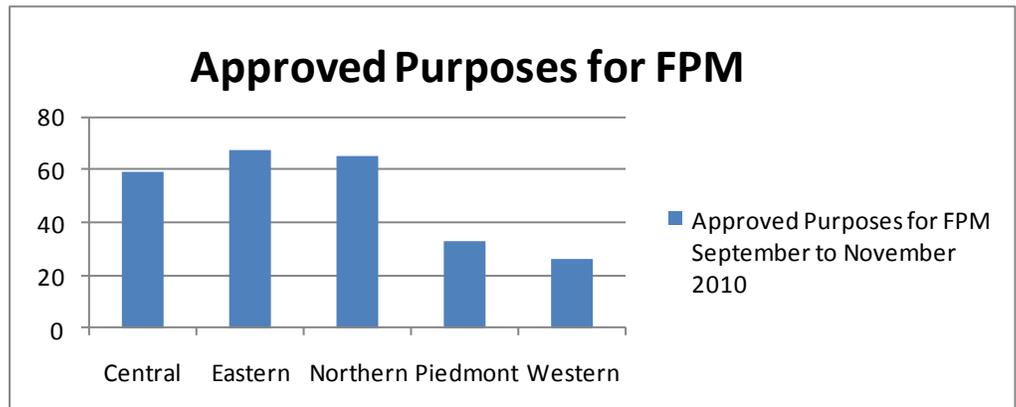
Resource Development

During 2010, several agencies across the state participated in Regional Peer Collaboratives (RPC). Agencies had the opportunity to assess their practices regarding resource families with an emphasis on making improvements. As a result of participating in the RPC,

changes made by some agencies included using data to support child-specific recruitment efforts, developing timelines for training and approvals, and identifying supports for foster parents including a Foster Parent Handbook or “Welcoming Books” for new

foster parents. The benefits gained from the RPC can best be described by one participant who stated “ The team response for foster parent issues has shifted tremendously and I think the RPC has better informed their work and re-energized their commitment”.

Regional Notes





Family Engagement Roundtable Panelists– Northern Region

(Left to right) Taren Lambert, Kristin Zagar, Cathy Cooper, Amber Johnson, Sarah Wingfield, Tamara Green, and Craig Klein

Family Engagement Continuum

Virginia utilizes four components to engage and support families. Family search and engagement begins the process by providing early support and interventions along with efforts for ongoing identification of family members or other permanent connections. The next component is Family Partnership Meetings which are a deliberate and structured approach to engage youth and families regarding decisions that affect them. The next component is Family Supports which provides families, youth, and resource parents with the services and supports to maintain successful and stable connections. The fourth component of the contin-

uum of Family Engagement is Family Resource Development. Family Resource Development consists of recruiting, developing and supporting resource families. Resource families include kinship parents, informal kin, foster and adoptive parents. By defining the four key components of family engagement, a practical and replicable system can be utilized across the Commonwealth to improve outcomes for children and families that come in contact with the social services system. Family engagement strategies such as the four key components are methods to strengthen and empower families to achieve better outcomes. Additional infor-

mation regarding the key components and resources are available to assist in the implementation of family engagement by contacting the program area Regional Consultants or the



Family Engagement Continuum Model

“The social workers have stated that the burden of making decisions to remove children or terminate parental rights has been reduced since the implementation of the meetings.”

— LDSS Facilitator”

Family Search

After being born in Alabama and adopted at age 2, William moved to Hampton with his adoptive family at the age of 8 years old. William, after displaying many complex behaviors was placed in a residential facil-

ity. After being discharged, he was placed in foster care in Hampton. William talked often about reuniting with his adoptive family or finding a family he never known.. Over a year ago William became involved

with law enforcement and was convicted of “breaking and entering” a home in Hampton. William began his jail sentence in November 2009. In September 2010 after months of (Continued on page 4)

Family Support Continued

Continued from page 1.

membership consisted of the same agency representation from FAPT and CPMT, our J & D Court judge, our proposed facilitators and our FAPT parent representative. After a few meetings the Implementation Team had agreed the policy was ready to submit to CPMT for approval.

Question: What advice would you offer CPMTs that are working to develop family engagement policy or change their practice in the upcoming year?

Answer: Form a Family Engagement Implementation Team and collaborate with the J&D Court Judge. Utilize the resources that are

available to customize a family engagement program to meet your locality’s needs.



Best Practice In Action Highlights

Wise County DSS has 149 children under the age of 18 in their care. Of those 149 children only 2 children are placed in congregate care which represents 1.3%. Wise County DSS also has 27% of their children placed with relative foster homes in which they are providing support services.

Petersburg, Prince George, Dinwiddie, and Hopewell partnered to receive a grant from the Cameron Foundation for \$96,000 to support the facilitation of family engagement.

Essex County, King & Queen, Richmond County, Lancaster, Middlesex Northumberland, and Westmoreland developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to share facilitators.

Do you have good news or a story idea? We would like to hear from you.

Family Engagement Unit

Tamara L. Temoney, Ph.D.

Family Engagement and Placement Program Manager

Tamara.temoney@dss.virginia.gov or (804) 726-7538

Tracey G. Jackson, MA

Family Engagement Senior Consultant

Tracey.jackson@dss.virginia.gov or (804) 726-7983

VIRGINIA SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEMS— BEST PRACTICE IN ACTION

Staff Quotes Regarding the Impact of FPM:

“The parent failed to attend the FPM but the extended family members went forward with the engagement discussions as to the best interest of the children and their recommendations were accepted by the court. It proves that the family is indeed the best source of facts about the history and needs of the family. We can provide the format (FPM) but the family will & does provide the meat of the matter & cast a larger net of stability for the children in question.”— LDSS Staff

“I have noticed changes with both DSS workers & families. Staff are allowing the FPM process to work & families to make decisions, without DSS having to dictate what happens to the family. It becomes what happens “with” the family.”— LDSS Staff

“I have found it very helpful when using FPM reports during home visits/contacts, to keep the family focused & aware of the direction of the service plan/treatment.”— LDSS Staff

“Having an FPM after an ERO allowed the family to see that DSS is not looking to keep custody of kids but putting the power back in the family’s hand; that was positive & also gave the opportunity for the family to hear DSS’ concern as a whole & avoids confusion down the road”— LDSS Staff

“Children get to be heard. It has been truly amazing to see my kids open up & talk about their life as a foster child, their emotions, their wants, their needs. It is great to hear from the team all the wonderful things about the children & for the children to hear them all.”— LDSS Staff

Contest

Help name the
newsletter.

Please submit all entries to:

tracey.jackson@dss.virginia.gov

by April 8, 2011. The entries will be reviewed by a panel and the winner will be announced in the next edition of the newsletter.

Family Search (continued)

searching and cold calling William’s biological mother was located still living in Alabama. Two days after the contact she went online and got the information of the jail and began communicating with William through phone calls and letters. William and his mother began the process of getting to know each other through their various forms of communication.

In October 2010 Hampton sent William’s former foster parent and one of their Family Finding Private Providers to Alabama to meet with William’s biological mother. During their meeting

they were able to create a videotape of his mother sending a message to her son that she hasn’t seen since he was 5 months old. She also agreed to take William, now age 21, into her home once he was released from jail in January.

Help for Older Youth for Family Partnership Meetings

Need help with Family Partnership Meetings for older youth? If so, call Project LIFE with UMFS for assistance and additional information.

Telephone: 1-800-292-0305

www.vaprojectlife.org

Additional information about Family Engagement is available at vafamilyconnections.com