

NORTH CAROLINA FAMILY-CENTERED MEETINGS PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE NORTH CAROLINA

DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

FISCAL YEAR 2011 – 2012

SUMMARY

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INTRODUCTION

By 2011-2012, the North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings Project was in its tenth and final year. Through this project, the Center for Family and Community Engagement at North Carolina State University provided training, technical assistance, and evaluation to encourage child and family team (CFT) meetings in child welfare services across the state. More broadly this work reinforced family-centered practice within a system of care. From this solid foundation, the center was poised in the next fiscal year to incorporate its CFT work into the larger Family-Centered Practice Project.

The project in its tenth and final year reinforced child and family team (CFT) meetings across the state. From this solid foundation, the center was poised in the next fiscal year to incorporate its CFT work into the larger Family-Centered Practice Project.

Family-Centered Practice and Continuous Quality Improvement

CFT meetings are intended to engage families and their kin in planning and to create a coordinated response of informal and formal supports. In North Carolina, CFTs are pivotal to family-centered practice because they amplify the voices of family in child welfare planning. This partnering approach assists county Social Services with hearing the views of families and with putting into effect continuous quality improvement (CQI) of child welfare services. According to the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (2012), CQI is:

the complete process of identifying, describing, and analyzing strengths and problems and then testing, implementing, learning from and revising solutions. . . . It is dependent upon the active inclusion and participation of staff at all levels of the agency, children, youth, families and stakeholders throughout the process (Casey Family Programs, 2005, p. 1)

CFTs offer a process for ensuring the full participation of the children and their families served by child welfare in continuous quality improvement.

CFTs amplify the voices of family in child welfare planning. This partnering approach assists Social Services with putting into effect continuous quality improvement that actively includes children, youth, families, and other stakeholders in identifying strengths and finding solutions.

CFTs in Social Services Policy

The North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings Project began in 2002 to support the rollout of the Multiple Response System in North Carolina. One of the key strategies of this child welfare reform was CFT meetings. The continued commitment of the state to CFTs was evident in its *North Carolina Child and Family Services Plan for Fiscal Years 2010-2014*. In this state plan, CFTs were viewed as integral to effecting family-centered practice within a system of care, and, in particular, this approach was seen as “wrapping the necessary services around the family” (NCDHHS, 2010, p. 13). Over the 10 years, the state expanded CFT practice to encompass the spectrum of child welfare services from in-home services to foster care to adoption.

The state's commitment to CFTs was evident in its policy expanding the practice across the spectrum of child welfare services.

Supporting CFT Practice

As documented in this report, the center used a number of strategies to support good CFT practice. These strategies included orienting child welfare workers and their community partners to CFTs, providing training on how to organize and facilitate CFTs, encouraging the inclusion of children and youth at CFTs, and addressing safety considerations such as domestic violence. To assist training participants with transferring learning to their work places, the center provided ongoing consultation and online forums. This technical assistance and learning support was tailored to the request from counties and emerging needs in the field. Chapter 2 reviews the training and technical assistance carried out over the year. Chapter 3 summarizes the findings from a study of the co-training model adopted by the center. By having co-trainers with experience working in agencies and experience receiving services, the training events gave a fuller picture of the dynamics at CFTs and ways in which workers can best support the participation of family members.

CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM TRAINING ACCORDING TO GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Training to Promote Accountability and Collaboration

The curricula and training delivery were in keeping with the values of child and family teams. In particular, the training program was designed to promote accountability to children and their families and to encourage collaboration among families, community programs, and public agencies. Key methods for achieving accountability and collaboration included the following:

- Cross-system training to encourage dialogue and skills building by social services, family and youth advocacy groups, schools, juvenile justice, mental health, and social work education;
- Co-training by service-experienced trainers (family and youth partner trainers) and service-delivery trainers (agency trainers) to model collaboration and to facilitate understanding of CFTs from the perspectives of families and workers;
- Technical assistance and learning support to respond to the emerging directions and needs of county and state Social Services;
- Online forums to inform and connect participants across the state and in-person forums to promote regional sharing and skills building;
- Marketing of training events to reach a broad spectrum of participants; and
- Training evaluation to improve training delivery and to identify further areas for training.

This chapter summarizes how the Center for Family and Community Engagement implemented the training program.

The training program was designed to promote accountability to children and their families and encourage collaboration with and around families.

Curricula and Technical Assistance and Learning Support

During the year, the center focused the majority of its efforts on the delivery of a core group of courses designed to support learning on CFTs. These curricula were *Step by Step: An Introduction to Child and Family Teams*, *Navigating Child and Family Teams: The Role of the Facilitator*, *Widening the Circle: Child and Family Teams and Safety Considerations*, *The ABCs of Including Children in Child and Family Teams* and *Keeping It Real: Child and Family Teams with Youth in Transition*. All curricula supported the learning growth of the participant as he or she moved from a foundational understanding of child and family team meetings to advanced skills and specialized practice techniques. *Step by Step* and *Navigating* provided an overview of CFTs and CFT facilitation skills. *Widening the Circle*, *The ABCs of Including Children*, and *Keeping It Real* offered advanced training for CFT practice with specific populations. These curricula used both didactic and practical learning approaches to train participants effectively.

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The center continued to support CFT facilitation by providing facilitator forums to participants across the state. These events were offered to facilitators based in Social Services as well as to CFT facilitators in other child-and-family-serving systems across the state. Facilitator forums provided a unique opportunity to promote a system of care model by bringing together CFT facilitators from these systems to discuss practice, policy, and resources. The facilitator forums were offered through a combination of online and in-person events. Online events were offered statewide through an interactive web-based format, and in-person events were hosted regionally by county Social Services offices.

In order to promote mutual learning and supportive connections among CFT facilitators, the center offered statewide online forums and regional face-to-face forums.

Additionally, the center promoted discussion of state Social Services CFT policy in both facilitator forums and online policy events. These events were developed to explore the understanding and implementation of CFT policies and practices. This year, policy events focused primarily on guidance for the use of the new tribal notification forms developed by North Carolina Division of Social Services (NCDSS) in partnership with the Standing Committee on Indian Child Welfare.

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Finally, the center continued to reach out to provide specialized support for CFT implementation and learning through its technical assistance and learning support program (TALS). The strength of the TALS program has remained rooted in the methods the program uses to approach county requests for CFT questions around such matters as implementation, practice improvement, and engagement of families.

Number of Events and Participants

In 2011-2012, center trainers were asked to deliver 92 events for a total of 370 trainer days. Over the year, the center trainers actually offered a total of 110 events for a total of 406.25 trainer days. The greater number of events and trainer days were a result of increases to formal training events and variable technical assistance requests. Totals for these events were a combination of formal training events requested by NCDSS and informal support offered to counties through TALS. Training days required for informal technical support events were variable and, thus, hard to anticipate. To accommodate training needs for workers across the state, the center intentionally located CFT curricula in areas of need identified by county agencies to assist in their ability to access necessary events.

In 2011-2012, center trainers were asked to deliver 92 events for a total of 370 trainer days. Over the year, the center trainers actually offered a total of 110 events for a total of 406 trainer days. The greater number of events and trainer days was a result of increases to formal training events and technical assistance requests.

Overall, 79 counties across North Carolina accessed the center's CFT training, sending a total of 597 workers to formal events and an additional 254 to forums and policy events, totaling 851 participants from July 2011 through June 2012. These numbers include all but informal TALS. Requests for informal TALS came from 11 counties. Formal TALS requests came from 9 counties. In addition, educators and foster parents requested TALS presentations and workshops.

Overall, 79 counties across North Carolina accessed the center's CFT training workshops, sending a total of 597 workers to these events. Additionally, the center provided in-person and online facilitator forum and policy and good practice events to 254 participants.

Curricular Development

In 2011-2012, the center trainers developed and delivered 14 new curricula modules to support the TALS, facilitator forums, and online policy events. In addition to the development of new curricular materials, the center continued to modify and improve existing formal curricula to adapt to new policy and practice needs in the counties and to support workers' developing more advanced practice skills. The curriculum on CFTs and safety considerations was revised, and pilots of the revised curriculum were positively received. Participants shared that they were now clearer about needing to pause and engage families to ensure safety.

Pilots of modules for the revised domestic violence curriculum were positively received. Participants shared that they were now clearer about needing to pause and engage families to ensure safety.

American Indian Children: Guidance for Implementation of Tribal Notification Forms

The development of the online event, *American Indian Children: Guidance for the Implementation of Tribal Notification Forms*, represented a partnership among the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, NCDSS policy consultants, and the center. Through ongoing participation with the Standing Committee on Indian Child Welfare, center trainers were aware of efforts to develop DSS policy and practice that addressed inconsistencies in the way that state and federally recognized Indian tribes are treated by the law. The 2011 Tribes, Child Welfare and Court Partners Gathering identified that new tribal notification forms were being developed to support earlier notification of state-recognized tribes when children were to be placed in out-of-home care. While federally recognized tribes were guaranteed this notification through the federal Indian Child Welfare Act, the notification requirements for state-recognized tribes were not as clearly defined. Through consultation with state and tribal leaders, NCDSS

policy consultants had developed and were in the process of obtaining feedback on new tribal notification forms designed to support notification of state-recognized tribes when children were to be placed into out-of-home care. Center trainers worked with NCDSS policy consultants in an effort to more closely tie the new notification forms with good practice in supporting CFT participation and cultural relevance.

Out of this partnership, an online event was developed to encourage an increased awareness of the state and federal law regarding inclusion of tribes as well as an accurate reflection of American Indian populations in the state of North Carolina. Partners from the Standing Committee on Indian Child Welfare offered the perspective of the American Indian families from a historical context and as potential service recipients. This piece was essential in distinguishing the tribal notification forms as something more than additional paperwork. Offering the perspective of the American Indian families through the voice of tribal members emphasized the practice behind the forms.

The development of the online event, *American Indian Children: Guidance for the Implementation of Tribal Notification Forms*, represented a partnership among the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs, NCDSS policy consultants, and the center. Co-training with the Commission was essential in identifying the philosophy and practice behind the new forms.

***CFT, What's in It for Me?* The Center's first Curriculum for a Youth Audience**

The center staff developed a CFT curriculum aimed at supporting youth in care and their participation in CFTs. This curriculum, called *CFT, What's in it for Me?*, was prepared and delivered in partnership with a youth partner trainer. The aim was to prepare youth in care to take part in CFTs and use the forum to develop plans for transitioning out of care. Through the course of the training event, youth began to identify some of the people they would want to attend their CFT and discovered why it remained important for them to be a part of their team. Emphasis was given to the benefits of good communication during their CFT meeting and how they could practice and improve their communication skills. As with other center curricula, practical tools were provided to youth to help them in asking for and participating in their own CFT meeting.

The curriculum *CFTs, What's in it for Me?* was the center's first curriculum delivered to youth in care. The aim of the curriculum was to prepare youth to participate in CFT meetings.

Issues Raised by Social Services Staff

During training sessions, the trainers became aware of challenges faced by counties. Feedback from participants was used by the training team to identify barriers to CFT implementation and

to support greater partnerships with NCDSS staff in providing consistent information to workers statewide.

Workers across the state faced multiple challenges associated with limited resources and tight county budgets. They expressed frustrations with having to juggle multiple roles, having access to few providers for services, and trying to involve families in CFTs when their basic needs such as food and shelter were priorities. Trainers reported that cross-county exchanges in the training room encouraged creative thinking and connected workers around difficult service dynamics.

Time related issues posed challenges to workers who were trying to move forward best CFT practices. Trainers responded to questions and requests for clarification around various time issues which primarily revolved around worker desire and investment in engaging in best CFT practices while adhering to agency expectations. While workers desired to have more dedicated facilitator positions in their agencies, they struggled with differentiating between roles of social worker and facilitator at CFTs. Workers who had to facilitate CFT meetings, as well as be the worker responsible for child protection in the meeting, struggled with remaining neutral and being able to adhere closely to the role of the facilitator. This posed the risk that the integrity of the CFT model would be compromised.

This year an increasing number of workers shared their struggles in engaging children and youth in the CFT process in a meaningful manner. Trainers offered assistance on how to manage outside factors not in their control such as limited lead time in having a CFT meeting, lack of resources to help workers focus on preparation with children and youth, and differences among agencies on whether children of certain ages should be a part of CFTs.

Feedback from participants was used by the training team to identify barriers to CFT implementation and to support greater partnerships with NCDSS staff in providing consistent information to workers statewide.

Family and Agency Collaborative Training Team (FACTT)

The center continued its partnership with parent organizations and other child-serving systems in support of the Family Agency Collaborative Training Team (FACTT). FACTT, established formally in September 2007, was developed to provide leadership in the recruitment of family trainers and to provide support in the partnership efforts between system and family partner trainers. FACTT this year had representation from state foster parent and foster youth agencies; family partner trainers from mental health, social services and juvenile justice; exceptional children advocacy organizations; schools; and university partners.

The center was an active member of the Family-Agency Collaborative Training Team (FACTT) and supported efforts to increase resources and partnership opportunities for family, youth, and agency trainers.

EVALUATION OF THE CO-TRAINING MODEL

The center conducted an evaluation of co-training by a family partner who had received services and an agency partner who had delivered services. The pairing of the family and agency experience in the training room was intended to enrich the learning of participants by demonstrating partnership principles and by grounding the training delivery in the experiences of both those delivering services and those receiving services. The evaluation used an appreciative inquiry approach to learn what worked about the co-trainer partnership model and what could be done to make it even better. The training participants consisted of Social Services staff and community partners from such areas as schools, juvenile justice, and mental health.

Online surveys were sent to participants after each training event led by a family-agency co-training team to obtain participant impressions and assess their transfer of learning and the transfer climate provided by their agencies. One survey concerned impressions within one month of the training and the second concerned impressions one month or more after the training. Of the 277 formal training participant surveys distributed, 20 participants responded to the first survey, and 39 responded to the second survey. A more robust response would have permitted according greater confidence to the survey results. Nevertheless, the qualitative responses yielded insights into the benefits of the co-training model.

Results from the first survey show that the large majority of the 20 respondents appreciated the contributions of the co-training partnership. Of these 20 respondents, 95% found the information shared by the training team to be valuable; 85% stated that the trainers offered new insight into how to partner better with the families at their agency; 95% believed that their agency would support their using what they learned from the trainers; 90% planned to share what they learned with their colleagues; and 90% planned to use what they learned in their job. Six participants shared some changes they planned to make based on what they learned from the co-trainers. One participant planned to use what s/he learned to help prepare and include teens in their CFTs. All six planned to make some kind of change to increase the family-centered nature of their CFT process. Overall, participants appeared to want to practice in a more family-centered manner, respecting the experiences and input of the families with whom they worked.

Results from the second survey, administered one month or more after the training, showed that of the 39 respondents, most agreed they had applied what they had learned in their work settings: 90% shared what they learned from the training team with their colleagues; 97% found that their agency supported the use of what they learned from the co-training team; 95% used what they learned from the trainers on the job; 92% found that their relationships with families had become more positive as a result of the changes they made after hearing from the trainers; and 94% shared that their CFTs became more successful as a result of changes they made after hearing from the trainers.

Results from the second survey found that most respondents had applied what they had learned in their work settings, and 92% found that their relationships with families had

become more positive as a result of the changes they made after hearing from the trainers.

Most respondents shared that they had made broad changes to their practice with families because of what they learned from the training team. A few participants made very tangible changes in their documentation and referral processes or in meeting locations. Several found they had become more open to hearing the families' perspectives and worked to improve their communication with families in a variety of ways including listening better, working to be responsive to the families' requests, and staying impartial. Two respondents became more careful when preparing and holding CFTs where domestic violence was involved.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Center for Family and Community Engagement is dedicated to promoting partnerships with and around families. Integral to partnership is people having a voice over their affairs. The center is strongly committed to advancing a participatory approach to decision making and to including diverse groups at the table. Child and family team (CFT) meetings are an important strategy for child welfare to engage families in planning and carrying out plans that fit with their goals and cultural heritage.

Supporting family engagement requires a collaborative approach across family and youth groups, community organizations, public agencies, and universities. The North Carolina Division of Social Services must be credited for ensuring consistent funding over a 10-year period, making it possible for the center to support CFTs through training, technical assistance, and evaluation. The center looks forward in the next year to take this work another step forward. The newly funded Family-Centered Practices Project will place CFT practice squarely within a framework that fosters the leadership of families and social inclusion.

Listed below are the collaborators who have supported the center's work on CFTs. I offer in advance my regrets for any unintentional omissions.

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