Evaluation of Community-Based Care in Foster Care and Related Services in Florida

Table of Contents

Preface ii
Executive Summary iv
Introduction 1

Section I – Quantitative Research Using Program and Department Data Sources TAB I
Section II – Case File Review TAB II
Section III – Survival Analysis: A Quantitative Examination of Children’s Placement Episodes TAB III
Section IV – Quantitative Research – Fiscal Analysis TAB IV
Section V – Community-Based Child Welfare Services: Listening to Caregivers TAB V
Section VI – Conceptual Mapping of Community-Based Child Welfare Services from the Perspectives of Birth Parents, Foster Parents, Case Managers and Community Stakeholders TAB VI
Section VII – Community Based Care Framework: A Comparison of State CBC Models TAB VII
Section VIII – Community Based Care Implementation (Procurement and Contracting) in Pinellas and Pasco Counties TAB VIII
Preface

The Institute for Health and Human Services in the School of Social Work at Florida State University was selected to conduct the evaluation of community-based care implementation during FY 2000/01 required in Section 409.1671(4)(a), F.S. In addition to providing a greater understanding of the operation of the community-based care programs for foster care and related services in Florida, this report presents recommendations that will guide improvements in these programs. The products based on this research will also assist the Department of Children and Families in preparing for the future evaluation of community-based care programs providing foster care and related services throughout the state.

The scope and level of rigor in the research conducted under this contract required the participation of many professionals. First, the project benefited from the expertise and experience of the principal investigators in the School of Social Work, Dr. Mary Kay Falconer, Dr. Scyttie Cash, and Dr. Scott Ryan. Second, officials at the Department of Children and Families contributed in a number of different ways to the development and completion of this project. Their expertise with federal and state legislation as well as Department client data and outcome measures was helpful. Facilitating communication with program and other Department officials in order to obtain information was another contribution. Assistance was also provided during the preparation of the preliminary report which covered the first component of the quantitative research. The key members of the project team from the Department included Becky Lyons, Keith Perlman, Coleman Zuber, and Drucilla Carpenter. Several other Department staff were instrumental in efforts to obtain and interpret data files. These individuals included Susan Chase, Diana Wood, Ceijay Jackson, and Joan Davis.

Research assistance was provided by several graduate students in the School of Social Work, as well as, undergraduates at Florida State University. The graduate students were Chris Eppler, Sarah Lewis, Dawn Tanner, Ashley Bennett, Shelly Kirsch-Smith, Kerri Snyder, and Alison Glover. Undergraduate students assigned to this project included Alez Cruz and Tracy Burns. These students assisted with the field work, telephone interviews, mail surveys, information searches, and the preparation of the final research documents.

Officials with the community-based care programs for foster care and related services in Sarasota, Manatee, Pinellas, and Pasco also assumed an important role in the completion of the necessary research. Chris Card with Sarasota YMCA Children, Youth and Family Services, Inc. shared advice on certain aspects of the research. Christy Kane with the Sarasota County Coalition of Families and Children and Russ Kitching with the Manatee County Partnership for Safe Families facilitated the case file review by providing space and other resources necessary for that component of the field work. Mr. Kitching also assisted project staff in making arrangements for use of facilities and resources in the qualitative research. Barbara Simmons with the Sarasota County...
Coalition of Families and Children shared her expertise on the client database maintained by the CBC program in Sarasota and Manatee counties.

In Pinellas and Pasco Counties, officials working in and familiar with the CBC network for foster care and related services were important in efforts to complete the necessary field work for the implementation of the CBC program in those counties. In the CBC lead agency, Family Continuity, Jeff Richard, the Executive Director, and Roxanne Fixsen, Director of Community Care, shared their expertise and insights and facilitated subsequent contact with the service providers by the research team. Staff with the Suncoast Region in DCF also provided valuable information and shared expertise.
Executive Summary

Children deserve to live in a safe and permanent environment in which they are free from abuse, neglect, and other forms of maltreatment. Social programs must respond to the priority of child welfare in a way that will ensure the safety and welfare of children while providing services that will attempt to strengthen the family. Community-based care in efforts to privatize and manage foster care and related services has emerged as one viable model. Community-based care introduces greater flexibility and opportunities for efficiency in the provision of protective services for children.

Evaluation of Community-Based Care Programs

The Institute for Health and Human Services in the School of Social Work at Florida State University was selected to conduct the evaluation of community-based care implementation during FY 2000/01 required in Section 409.1671(4)(a), F.S. This report documents the research products developed during the contract 2000-2001 contract. In addition to providing a greater understanding of the operation of the CBC programs for foster care and related services in Florida, this report presents recommendations that will guide improvements in these programs. The products based on this research will also assist the Department in preparing for the future evaluation of community-based care programs providing foster care and related services throughout the state.

This Executive Summary provides a brief explanation of the relevant federal and state law, the theoretical framework, the research methodologies, the sources of information, and the analyses that were completed in this research. Several key findings are highlighted or overviews of selected sections in the report are provided. Selected recommendations are presented and guidance for future CBC research is also included. This report also appears at the web site for the Institute for Health and Human Services Research, www.ihhsr.fsu.edu.

Relevant Federal and State Law

The existing and newly created community-based care models for delivering foster care and related services must respond to and meet requirements in federal and state law. At the federal level, foster care and related services received attention most recently in the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89), known as ASFA. Florida statutory law addressing foster care and related services is extensive. Service goals for the care of children in statutory law include:

- prevention of separation of children from their families,
- reunification of families,
- permanent placement of children who cannot be reunited with their families or when reunification would not be in the best interest of the child,
• protection of dependent children or children alleged to be dependent, including provision of emergency and long-term alternate living arrangements. (Section 409.145, F.S.)

Key provisions guiding community-based care for foster care and related services correspond with the goal of privatizing foster care and related services statewide. Section 409.1671, F.S. states that the definition of “privatize” is “to contract with competent, community-based agencies.” Related services are specified as “family preservation, independent living, emergency shelter, residential group care, foster care, therapeutic foster care, intensive residential treatment, foster care supervision, case management, post-placement supervision, permanent foster care, and family reunification.”

The Vision of the Florida Department of Children and Families

The Department’s vision for implementation of the relevant federal and Florida law within a community-based care model includes the following:

• The safety of children at all times will be a foremost concern, and rapid permanency resolution will be the system’s standard.
• Services will be provided by comprehensive, community-based networks of providers who are equipped to manage and deliver all needed services.
• Resources will be efficiently and effectively managed to achieve better outcomes for children.
• Services will be coordinated across systems to maximize limited resources and ensure a single, unified case plan, managed by a primary case manager.
• Financial support will be available from diverse federal, state, and local sources.
• There will be a coherent allocation model that equitably distributes resources based on actual needs, costs, and performance expectations.
• The system will be able to collect and use data to forecast what services and supports are needed, gauge intensity and duration and at what cost, to achieve desired outcomes.

The community-based care model relies on a partnership between the dependency court judges, an effective lead agency, the Department, a community alliance, as well as collaboration and communication between service agencies providing traditional and non-traditional services. Consistent with the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act and Florida law, Florida’s community-based care for foster care and related services will:

1. promote the safety of children first and foremost;
2. decrease the time it takes to achieve permanency for all children;
3. promote adoption for children when that is the best permanency option; and
4. enhance the state’s capacity and accountability for both safety and permanency.
Evaluation Methodology and Sources of Information

The logic model was used as the theoretical framework for conducting the evaluation. The logic model proposes that there is alignment between the needs of the client, the processes of a program or service and the outcomes. The model includes the following components:

- **Problems/Needs** *(The current situation and what needs to be changed.)*
- **Goal** *(The desired state to be achieved.)*
- **Objectives** *(Milestones or minigoals that lead to goal achievement.)*
- **Inputs** *(Concrete and intangible resources needed to achieve the objectives.)*
- **Methods** *(Services and activities that put resources into operation.)*
- **Results** *(Short-term impacts of applying inputs and methods.)*
- **Outcomes** *(Long-term impacts of applying inputs and methods.)*

Methodologies and data collection techniques used in the research included a variety of approaches. The use of multiple methodologies allowed the research to not only be comprehensive in its collection of information, but also enhance the reliability and validity of the information and the analyses conducted. The methodologies included both quantitative and qualitative techniques. Case file reviews, secondary analysis of information in program and Department electronic data files and reports, cost analyses using available fiscal documentation, case study interviews, focus groups participating in concept mapping, semi-structured interviews, and mail surveys were among the multiple techniques applied. Each methodology was applied in selected CBC programs.

The electronic data files used as sources of information were the Client Information System (CIS), Florida Abuse Hotline Information System (FAHIS), and a program data file maintained by the YMCA Children, Youth, and Family Services, Inc. for both the Sarasota and Manatee program locations. Several measures of program performance were calculated using each data file. In addition, a survival or event history analysis was completed using client data from the Sarasota and Manatee CBC programs. For the fiscal analysis, only the CBC programs in Sarasota and Manatee were included. Standard reports from the Department of Children and Families derived from management information systems were reviewed and selected items are presented in this report in relationship to other sources. In addition, copies of financial reports for fiscal years 1998, 1999, and 2000 were consulted with a variety of standard ratios employed for the cost segment of the evaluation. The case files reviewed in this project were only those maintained in the Sarasota and Manatee CBC programs. The case study interviews referred to the Sarasota CBC program and the focus groups included participation of those in the Manatee CBC program. The implementation procedures, which emphasized procurement and contracting, were examined using semi-structured interviews and a mail survey of providers in Pinellas and Pasco counties.
Major Findings and Observations

Major findings regarding the experience of the children before or during their contact with the program, including those relevant to child safety and permanency (Sections I and II), are listed below:

- Among the 57 cases reviewed in the case files maintained by the Sarasota and Manatee CBC programs, the overwhelming majority of children had several reports of abuse and maltreatment prior to being served by the program. Other common problems included substance abuse by a parent, economic hardship, disability, and poor performance in school.
- Among the 57 cases reviewed in the case files maintained by the Sarasota and Manatee CBC programs, 10 children had 5 or more placements or disruptions after the early services intervention (ESI) staffing date. Children did not typically experience multiple placements or disruptions within a short period of time. In 19 cases, there were no additional placements after the placement recorded within a month of the early services intervention staffing date.
- Among the 57 cases reviewed in the case files maintained by the Sarasota and Manatee CBC programs, verified reports of abuse or maltreatment occurred in only 3 cases after the program’s early services intervention (ESI) staffing date.
- Several different types of services were provided by the CBC network of providers in Sarasota and Manatee for the children and their parents, including mental and physical health assessments, medical treatment, and drug treatment for drug abusing parents.
- According to information in FAHIS, 95.3% of the children served by the Sarasota and Manatee CBC programs had no additional maltreatment reports after services began.\(^1\)
- According to the program data file, the average number of placements for children in the Sarasota program location is 2.7 and for the Manatee program location, 2.8.

In the survival analysis (Section III), it was possible to examine qualitative changes in the events experienced by the children or to explain and predict the dependent variable of placement time. This analysis was completed using data entered and maintained by the CBC programs in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. The relationship between the permanency goals and the placement episodes was the key relationship of interest in this analysis. As an overview of the findings generated in this analysis, it was observed that the differences between the permanency goals, on the whole, are in the intended direction. In addition, it was learned that independent variables, such as gender and minority status, are related to the time the children spend out of the home. Taking into account these differences, the programs are working toward meeting the permanency outcome in the Adoption and Safe Families Act. In the future, these types of analyses would be improved if the CBC programs captured additional information that would assist in explaining the variations observed.

\(^1\)Includes both Sarasota and Manatee, reports since 3/1/97, no distinction between reports during or after services ended; figure calculated by evaluators from original data source.
Several highlights from the fiscal analysis (Section IV) are listed below:

- The YMCA Children, Youth & Family Services, Inc. (which includes the Sarasota and Manatee program locations), reported an almost 61% increase in its revenue and support over the previous fiscal year.
- Debt Ratio: (total liabilities/total assets) – Although this ratio has been increasing at an accelerating rate, a debt ratio of .64 shows that the parent agency has enough assets to cover its obligations.
- Contribution Ratio: (specific revenue source/total revenues) – The agency is less than 50% dependent on any one source.
- For FY 2000, foster care grant money was 48% of total revenue and support, matching the revenue and support generated by all other grants. The remaining 4% was split between contributions (3%) and foundation grants (1%).
- Increase in Support Over Time: All sources of support increased each fiscal year from 1998 through 2000. Foster care grant money increased 21% from FY 1998 to FY 1999, which was followed by an increase of 185% between FY 1999 and FY 2000.
- Of interest in the community-based care model, private contributions increased a slight 8% from FY 1998 to FY 1999, but 83% from FY 1999 to FY 2000. This could demonstrate increasing support from the community for this endeavor.
- General and Management Expense Ratio: The costs attributable to management and general activities mirrors those for total support costs, 7%, 8% and 8% respectively, across the fiscal years. The proportion of management and general costs is well within established parameters of acceptable practice.
- The mix of local, state, and federal funding has remained relatively stable from 1998 to 2000. However, the percentage of funding covered by local and state contracts was lower in 2000.
- The program in Sarasota County claimed revenues per child in FY 1999 of $4,592.36 per child (n=785). This amount grew in FY 2000 to $6,827.30 per child (n=879).
- The average expenses per child for the foster care program in Sarasota County for FY 2000 was $6,562.46; which has consistently remained below the FY 1996 Department of Children and Families’ rate of $7,553.64. In FY 1999, the program reported expenses per child of $5,097.17. These amounts are also fairly consistent with the amount provided for FY 1998 ($6,799.62), as reported in a previous evaluation of the program.
- During FY 1999 the Sarasota County program lost an average $504.81 per child. However, this turned around in FY 2000, with the organization collecting $264.84 in revenue per child in excess of expenses.
- The average revenue per child for the program in Manatee County was $13,760.14 (N=410). The average expenses per child for the Manatee County program were $13,471.96. Only one year was available for analysis due to the short time the program has been in existence.
The case study interviews and the concept mapping conducted with focus groups yielded numerous findings and built the foundation for several constructive recommendations for improving the CBC programs in Sarasota and Manatee Counties. For specific recommendations, the relevant sections in this report (Sections V and VI) should be consulted. Overviews of the case study interview and concept mapping research are included in the following two paragraphs.

An overview of the case study interviews (Section V) conducted in Sarasota County indicates that these interviews produced a significant amount of data that reflects the agency’s involvement with parents providing care along the full service array. Many parents had a difficult time identifying and articulating positive interactions with the agency, and focused on the many challenges needing to be addressed. However, this is not to say that there are no strengths to be found. Despite the many hurdles encountered, such as high case manager turnover, limited resources, and others, there were many fine people described by the parents who are working at the agency. Indeed, some workers respond to calls, answer questions, and provide appropriate notification for meetings, etc., as well as display enormous respect for the role each parent plays. The challenge at hand is to further institutionalize those values into all interactions between the case managers and other agency representatives, and the day-to-day caregivers – with the focal point being that each has assumed the enormous responsibility of caring for a child that has been abused and/or neglected.

For the concept mapping sessions (Section VI) in Manatee County, it was recognized that there was a significant amount of data that reflected the CBC lead agency’s efforts to work with its various constituencies. The participants found similar concepts and ideas to be important. Yet, conversely, when asked how the CBC lead agency has assisted the individual in meeting these challenges, the scores were somewhat low and reflected room for improvement. In fact, there was not a single cluster where the agency met or exceeded the needs expressed by the respondents. However, it is important to note that as a theoretical measure, these data are opinions of the respondents. Thus, actual ‘real life’ may indeed be significantly different. It may therefore be as important to educate the respondent populations on the actual situation as it is to address the situation itself. For example, by pointing out the discrepancy between potential faulty thinking and reality, a dialogue may be initiated to identify the breakdown in communication that led to such a misunderstanding. Thus, a two-pronged effort must be made – education and communication regarding the issue, as well as actual attention to the issue identified.

The national comparison of CBC models (Section VII) included ten states: Kansas, Florida, Michigan, Illinois, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, Colorado, Arizona, Connecticut, New York, and Ohio. The comparison highlighted foster care programs that have been evaluated or have information about their development and implementation. The Community Based Care (CBC) programs that were presented throughout this document are as varied as they are similar. The most prominent similarities were a focus on the protection of children, the provision of targeted services, flexible use of funding, encouragement of creativity, network of providers are established, the reduction of costs
while maximizing benefits, and the achievement of outcomes in ASFA. The differences between the models were the definition of services, the level of risk of the clients, the clientele, the levels of responsibility (lead agency or shared between the state and lead agency), the definition of managed care system, types of evaluations, and whether the outcomes are measured consistently. This synthesis of the models provided in the report does not represent all of the CBC initiatives or programs. However, it provides an initial starting point from which to begin to understand how child welfare services are changing and being provided throughout the country.

The implementation of the CBC program in Pinellas and Pasco Counties is the primary focus of attention in Section VIII. Procurement and contracting are the procedures that were of particular interest. The research and the related findings were divided into two categories: 1) procedure set 1 which focused on the relationship between the Department and the CBC lead agency; and 2) procedure set 2, which focused on the relationship between the CBC lead agency and the network of providers. Specific recommendations were developed and appear in Section VIII.

Regarding procedure set 1, the research identified the perception on the part of Lead Agency representatives that procurement and contracting procedures were generally effective as intended, but not necessarily as implemented. While some of the respondents praised the brevity and flexibility allowed in the ITN, one specific area of concern was the lack of information in the Invitation to Negotiate regarding the amount of available funding, legal context, and anticipated number of children to be served. The contracting procedures were seen as efficient primarily due to the inclusion of DCF officials in the negotiating sessions who had expertise and authority. In the procurement process, DCF District staff members were able to respond to questions, but one respondent indicated that involvement of District and Headquarters staff at times created confusion and uncertainty. Equity and openness were highly valued by the Lead Agency representatives, but oversight was not.

In the research addressing procedure set 2, providers perceived procurement and contracting procedures favorably in terms of general effectiveness and efficiency. However, the opinions were not consistent among all respondents. Similar to the Lead Agency respondents, service providers believed equity and communication to be key features of the process. Financial assistance and oversight were seen as relatively unimportant. However, when respondents were asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their top three effectiveness criteria, nearly half reported fair, neutral, or poor experiences. Perhaps ineffective communication contributed to these experiences, as evidenced by a lack of agreement among providers regarding the steps in the contracting and procurement process. Service providers reported that several steps in the contracting and procurement process required more time than was provided. In addition, there were concerns expressed regarding the level of experience displayed by the Lead Agency, and expectations regarding budgets, overall plan, sense of partnership, and application evaluation criteria were not clearly communicated. Positive aspects of the application process included its systematization and streamlining (via the credentialing process), and provision of performance standards. Service providers also indicated that the process
might be too sophisticated for small providers, which is similar to feedback from a respondent referring to the questions addressing procurement of a CBC lead agency.

**Answers to Several Research Questions**

Recognizing the limitations in the information available and the analyses conducted for this project, answers to several research questions are presented.

**Are children and families receiving timely and adequate assessments of their service needs?**

Relying on the case file review, it was unclear if assessments of all needs of the cases were completed. There was no information available in the electronic data files on the assessment of service needs.

**Are children and families receiving services based on their needs in a timely manner?**

Relying on the case file review, a variety of services were provided for children and the biological parents. Documentation of services in the case files referred to medical care, drug treatment programs, mental health assessments, and referrals to Healthy Start. This documentation also indicated that services were provided by agencies other than the lead agency.

**Was the program performance consistent with the Adoption and Safe Families Act?**

Relying on the case file review, it was evident that efforts were made to address at least two of the program performance emphases in ASFA. Only 3 of the 42 case files with abuse information had documentation indicating there was verified abuse or maltreatment of a child after the program early services intervention (ESI) staffing date. Effort to ensure permanency for the children was documented by the specification of primary permanency goals, the use of concurrent planning, and a relatively small number of children with a high number of placements. The highest percentages of children had maintain and strengthen family (26%), reunification with parents (21%), and adoption (21%) as permanency goals.

Relying on the information in the program data files, it was found that around 40% of the cases had temporary placement/reunification as a permanency goal. The average number of placements for the children in the Manatee program location was 2.84 and for the children in the Sarasota program location, the average was 2.7. Based on the data in the FAHIS, the percentage of cases with no additional maltreatment reports after services began was 95.3%.

**What is the cost/financial structure of the Sarasota Family Young Men’s Christian Association, Inc. and its subsidiary, the YMCA Children, Youth & Family Services, Inc. (including the Coalition and Partnership)?**
It appears that the Sarasota Family Young Men’s Christian Association, Inc. and its subsidiary, the YMCA Children, Youth & Family Services, Inc. (including the Coalition and Partnership) are financially stable, with relevant calculations showing generally positively trends. However, the discrepancy between the foster care grant money reported in the organization’s audit report and the amount provided by the Department of Children and Families has yet to be adequately explained and needs to be resolved.

**How has the financial mix changed over the project’s life cycle?**

In general, all ratios calculated over the community-based care project’s life cycle indicate either positive trends or continued amounts that fall within acceptable ranges. The average revenue and expenses per child are generally in-line with previous years. However, the basis for the calculations (i.e., number of clients served) has shown great variability based upon the data source. As such, a mechanism to better track clients and the services they receive is needed to accurately obtain numbers which can be confidently asserted.

**What is the level of financial support demonstrated by the community?**

From the information obtained, it appears that community support has remained stable, as a percentage of the total revenue and support, since the project’s inception. Based on the information obtained, contributions increased 8% from 1998 to 1999 and 83% from 1999 to 2000. Relying on this funding source as an indication of community support, it appears that community support has been evident and increasing. However, this source of financial support continues to represent a relatively small amount.