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SPECIAL REMINDERS

- **Day-to-Day Manager Call:** Dec. 3, 2008; 1 p.m. ET; noon CT; 11 a.m. MT; 10 a.m. PT; (800) 410-3590; Code: 6280207#
- **All-Collaborative Call:** Dec. 8, 2008; 1 p.m. ET, noon CT, 11 a.m. MT, 10 a.m. PT; 1-(866) 352-2112; Code: 8379893#
- **Senior Leader Call:** Dec. 15, 2008; 1 p.m. ET, noon CT, 11 a.m. MT, 10 a.m. PT; (800) 410-3590; Code: 6280207#

A Note From the Editor

The 21 teams participating in this BSC will use eight areas of practice improvement to guide the development of potential strategies and plan-do-study-act cycles (PDSAs). These key areas simplify and narrow the more detailed Change Package by focusing exclusively on those critical components of a comprehensive system of safety and risk assessment that relate most directly to practice.

This month's issue of the Safety and Risk Review will provide strategies, resources and ideas on how to actively engage in **Key Area Two: Family and Youth Engagement**. This particular key area for practice improvement is aimed at helping jurisdictions improve how they engage and encourage participation from youth and family constituents.

Integrating Method and Meaning: And Understanding That It Is All About the Relationship

By Caren Kaplan
Project Leader



It is amazing to witness growth...progress...success.

I came to this project in July 2007 with no prior experience about the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC). I did come to this BSC with a conviction and an ambition -- if during the course of this BSC, we were all able to understand the difference between *safety* and *risk*, able to demonstrate this knowledge in our assessments, and willing to honor the voices and choices of families in our practice, we would be able to help families make the changes they desired so that they could keep their children safe from harm. Yes, I am an idealist. But after participating and observing Learning Session II, I know that this ideal is achievable. Why?

It is about YOU! All of you. It is about your competency, and in many instances joy, in growing and nurturing relationships. While the first learning session was about learning the steps of the dance, i.e., the *method* of breakthrough series collaborative, the second learning session was about understanding the *meaning* and movements of the dance, i.e., understanding the principles of and differences between safety and risk and the import of family involvement in assessment and decision making. And like most dances, you quickly learn that it is never about how well any single individual does the right steps, but rather, about the exchange between the partners. It is about the relationship.

Each of you, in your own way, responds to the expectations and performs the concrete tasks associated with this effort. During the second learning session, we married the methodology with the content, and we learned as individuals and as a collaborative that trust and respect are always at the foundation of our work. No matter what role you have in your team, your voice matters. In order to achieve the desired goals, you must join with other members of your team -- some of whom you knew before you became teammates and others who you are just getting to know. And the linchpin of making this all succeed is the task that remains unspoken -- the building and sustaining of relationships. In LS II, as this became the norm in your team, and you needed to know more, you built bridges to other teams located in other parts of the nation. They are doing similar work in different ways -- and you have the opportunity to learn, to share, to trust and to build more relationships and dance with more partners. And leveraging the new solidarity of your team, you readily accepted the presence of faculty members in your team discussions. Sometimes they took the lead in the dance and sometimes you did.

And so with deeper meaning of and new energy for the BSC methodology and focus on safety and risk assessments, and the integration of the two, we recognize that the essence of our work depends on our ability and willingness to forge a relationship with the family we hope to help -- in a way that is respectful and responsive to who they are and what they need, never forgetting that the safety of children is our foremost concern.

Congratulations to all of you on a successful Learning Session II.
On to Action Period II. May you have many more dance partners!

Monthly Measures

By Stacie Hanson
Project Associate

Every team is using a short survey to measure whether they are truly engaging families and youth in safety and risk decision making. Many teams are struggling to improve survey response rates. The higher your response rate, the more representative your data will be. Collecting 10 surveys a month should be your minimum goal – we hope that most teams will be able to collect feedback from many more families!

Below are some tips that may help you improve your response rates.

Offer Incentives. An incentive doesn't have to be expensive. It could be as simple as offering a random drawing for a \$10 gift card to everyone who completes the survey or putting a dollar bill in a mailed survey.

Phone surveys. Conduct the survey over the phone rather than relying solely on mail. This could be done by an administrative assistant, intern or case aide.

Objective administration. Make sure families know that their survey responses will not have any bearing on their case. If their caseworker collects the survey, families may feel intimidated to give only positive answers. We encourage teams to use their birth parent and youth representatives to help collect surveys.

Talk to other teams! This is a collaborative, and we encourage you to talk to other teams to see if their survey collection methods have been successful. Although every system may be slightly different, every team can learn from each other!

Are Assumptions Hindering Your PDSAs?

By Jen Agosti and Susan Dougherty
Model for Improvement Advisors

In Anaheim, the Collaborative engaged in a thoughtful and challenging conversation about assumptions that might affect our work in Key Area I: Respecting and Responding to Race, Ethnicity and Culture.

In keeping with this month's newsletter focus on Area II: Engaging the Child/Youth and Family, we wonder what assumptions might exist about the young people and parents on your core or extended teams, or who are part of your target population, and how these assumptions might be impacting your PDSAs. To help you begin to explore these assumptions, we have come up with a few questions you might want to use to guide a discussion within your team and your target area:

- ❖ *What are some assumptions that staff may tend to make about parents or youth?*
 - Do we assume that parents or youth are too busy to attend meetings, participate on conference calls or test their own PDSAs?
 - Do we assume that parents or youth don't understand how to do PDSAs?
 - Do we assume that parents or youth don't understand enough about child welfare practice to develop their own PDSAs, e.g., survey questions, tools, etc?
 - Do we assume that parents and youth only understand their own case experience and aren't able to generalize that experience to overall child welfare practice?
 - Do we assume that parents and youth aren't smart enough or articulate enough to carry our work forward and spread our successes and learnings beyond our immediate core team?

Parents and youth - you may have your own assumptions about agency staff and community partners. Here are some questions for you to ask yourselves:

- ❖ *What are some assumptions that parents and youth may tend to make about staff?*
 - Do I keep my ideas about PDSAs to myself because I assume that either they're not very good ideas, nobody will listen to me or nobody will want to try them?
 - Am I willing to speak up when I'm talking to my caseworker, but not to our or overall team, because I assume they are too important or "high up" to listen to me?
 - Am I quiet because I assume that agency staff already have all the good ideas?
 - Do I assume that everyone on the team is more educated, has more experience or is more likely to have "right" answers than I am?
 - Do I assume that no one on the team really wants the system to change and improve as much -- or as fast -- as I do?

As you have these conversations within your teams, we strongly suspect that many PDSAs will emerge. We look forward to hearing about them as debunking these types of assumptions – just like addressing assumptions about race, ethnicity and culture - get at the core of relationships between agency staff, families, youth and partners, which *is* our work. And the greatest thing about these PDSAs - like all PDSAs – is that *anyone* can have an idea, and *anyone* can test it!

Meet Your Faculty

By Anne Comstock
Project Director

Our Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Safety and Risk Assessments is truly fortunate to have skilled, experienced and passionate co-chairs and faculty to provide support and technical assistance to teams in this critical work. We thought you might enjoy getting to know them a bit better, especially as you are now immersing yourselves in PDSAs and measures. We'll plan to highlight some interesting information about a couple of faculty in each of the coming newsletters. This month, we hope you get to know Zeinab Chahine and Ernestine Gray just a bit better.



Zeinab Chahine

- Zeinab Chahine is a Managing Director for Strategic consulting and head of Casey Family Programs' New York City office, a national foundation established by United Parcel Services founder Jim Casey in 1966.
- Prior to joining Casey Family Programs, Ms. Chahine served as the Administration for Children's Services' Deputy Commissioner for Child Welfare Programs. She was

responsible for the operation of all direct and contracted New York City child welfare service programs.

- Ms. Chahine has spent the past 22 years working in the field of child welfare.
- Ms. Chahine serves on various national and local panels aimed at improving services to families and children.
- Ms. Chahine holds a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from Hunter College and a Master of Social Work from Columbia University.
- Currently, she is a doctoral candidate at City University of New York, Hunter College School of Social Work.

Ernestine Gray



- I am a daughter, granddaughter, niece, cousin, sister, wife, mother, aunt, grandmother, friend, mentor/role model, mentee, teacher, student, lawyer, judge, board member, runner, Christian, Black, Democrat and boss (The list is not necessarily in order, nor is it exhaustive! Thought it might be interesting to see how many roles I give myself).
- I am the Board resident of the National Court Appointed Special Advocates for Children
- I love to read.
- I enjoy travel.

The Board Tells the Story!

For Learning Session Two, each team completed a pre-work assignment to craft a visual depiction of a family's journey through the safety and risk decision-making process within their particular jurisdiction. Check out some of the fabulous displays that were crafted and displayed on-site for all to see.



Fresno Fuel's Storyboard



The Innovators' Storyboard



Go Team Safety's Storyboard

Did You Know...
By Karl Chan-Brown
Chronicler

Did you know how youth representatives became part of the core team in every BSC?

Youth were not always represented on core teams in child welfare-focused BSCs, but they have been since 2002. Their addition was a modification of the basic model that shows how the same principles that move a practice change from small test to large-scale spread govern BSC planning.

The teams in the 2002 BSC on Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families had only five members. One team, Carver County, Minn., had selected a youth as a core member. Organizers of the BSC were uncertain about the wisdom of this choice, but at the conclusion of the first day of Learning Session 1, Bobbie, a quiet 15-year-old, stood up and asked, "Why don't you tell us anything about the resource family before you place us there? Do you have any idea what it feels like to be picked up from everything you know and dropped off with a total stranger?" Participants were riveted by the courageous question from the lone young person in a room full of 130 adults.

The next day when teams shared ideas for PDSAs, nearly every jurisdiction had a plan to gather information from resource families and share it with children and young people before placement. On the first monthly conference call after the Learning Session, most teams reported a test of this process, and within a year almost every team had fully implemented a related practice throughout its entire jurisdiction.

But Bobbie changed more than the tenor of the meeting, the first set of PDSAs and ongoing practice -- she also improved the composition of teams. Every jurisdiction explored ways to ensure that the youth voice was present and heard. By the second Learning Session, eight teams included young people; by the third and final meeting, 14 did. And since then, every BSC has required the inclusion of a youth representative on the core team.



A Former Youth's Perspective on
Strategic Sharing

By Shawn Mines
BSC Faculty

Strategic sharing of a youth's experience in foster care is a fairly new phenomenon. I am aware of this because I was a part of the creation of the first strategic sharing for youth training. Countless times I have heard horror stories from attendees of conferences or trainings where youth are

asked to "share their story" but not properly informed on how to do so strategically. One story that stands out is when a young woman was asked to share her foster care story in a room full of child-welfare professionals. The girl started out generally talking about the reasons why she was in care: physical, verbal and sexual abuse. Her sharing took a turn for the worse when she explained in graphic detail the ways in which she was sexually abused, started crying profusely, and caused many members of the audience to walk out simply because they could not continue to watch -- or stop -- this train wreck from happening. Worst of all, she glanced periodically at the person who asked her to participate for confirmation about her presentation, and her glances were met with encouragement to keep talking.

Youth don't know what they don't know. That is why they are educated through parents, other adults, schools and their peers. A youth who is asked to share his story might not be aware of the impact that sharing will have on the rest of his life. Who is to say that this young woman's presentation was not transcribed? Better yet, who is to say that a future employer will not Google her and make a decision about her based on a story she gave years ago? Better still, who is to say that the guy she's been interested in, who she wants to pursue a long-term relationship with, will not do an Internet search on her and decide he does not want to date her anymore? It may sound extreme, but I have a good friend, unrelated to my opening story, who was interested in a guy and before they went on their first date he did an Internet search on her. He found out that when she was 18 and out of the foster care system, she was homeless and digging into dumpsters to find food. He did not date her.

Youth who want to talk about their foster care experience should be aware of several things: 1. Who will be in the audience? Youth are relating personal information. A rule of thumb is to not relay information to any audience of strangers that you would be uncomfortable with on the front page of the New York Times. 2. What is the topic of the story? Youth should never be asked to "share their story" for the sake of sharing it. The story should have a topic and a purpose (for example, sibling visits, permanency, clothing allowances, interaction with social workers, etc). 3. What's the resolution? When sharing a story, youth should think about what can be done to solve the problem and be prepared with ideas if they have them available. Youth can also defer to the audience for information on solutions as well. 4. Youth who share their story *will* be asked inappropriate questions. Youth should remember that when doing a topic-oriented presentation, they only share information that they are comfortable sharing. When youth are asked an inappropriate question or one they do not want to answer, a response should be something similar to "I am not comfortable answering that question; however, if you have a question on the topic I will be glad to answer it if I can."

These considerations protect the youth and the extremely personal details of his story, allow for issues in the foster care system to be addressed and allow youth to be agents of change in their own lives and the lives of other youth who will be in care after them. An old Ghanaian proverb states, "Only a wise person can solve a difficult problem." Youth are wise by their experience and you should use that experience in your work to inform assessments of risk and safety and in your everyday work in child welfare. Youth just need to be given the tools to share strategically.

Team Spotlight: Rocky Mountain Families - Larimer, Colorado

By: John Gillies
Day-to-Day Manager

The opportunity to participate in the BSC on Safety and Risk Assessment could not have come at a more opportune time for us here in Larimer County. Like you, we have been committed to continuous quality improvement for many years and have seen lots of gains relative to our outcomes for children and families. This being said, we had hit a plateau and have been having a hard time going to the next level of service delivery and related outcomes in certain areas. In reviewing our progress we realized we had not really scrutinized and revamped the "front end" of our process. Enter Olmsted County, their excellent outcomes and the BSC Collaborative with a focus on Safety and Risk Assessment.



and practice shift.

While we were aware of differential response as a model, it had not seemed a viable option or a way for us to move beyond the apparent dichotomy of assessment versus investigation. As we are steeped in the wisdom of the collaborative, it is as if the layers of assumption are being stripped away. I'm observing this process impelling us to become more honest about the extent to which we have retained vestiges of old child welfare practice. It is a challenge to balance the "small test of change" approach with what feels like a significant paradigm

The BSC is providing fuel for this transformation and further changing the lenses through which we view the work. Thanks to those of you reading this who are directly and indirectly assisting us in our growth as individuals and as an agency.

Engagement with Special Populations: Military Family Engagement in El Paso, Texas

By Sondra Smith

When El Paso was chosen to participate in the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, we quickly embraced this honor and knew that it could be used to assist us with the influx of military families to our area. As we began to discuss what we as an agency needed to do to engage these families, we found that our best asset was a particular investigator with a unique past. He served our country as a sergeant in the U.S. Army. Mr. Luis Figueroa had always excelled in military cases, not only in maneuvering through this complex culture, but also in preserving the families as well. In speaking with him, we learned his story on how his family dealt with his time away from home and what obstacles are being placed in the way of our military families. We began to have those discussions with him in how as an agency we could better engage our military families.

Mr. Figueroa has a philosophy of respecting the difficulties these families face and being versed in the community agencies and military support systems that could best assist the families in their time of need. Upon entering a home, Mr. Figueroa speaks to each family member about the abuse that is being alleged and inquires on how the family is dealing with their experience in military life. With this knowledge, he can better assess the current situation. Once that discussion has taken place, he begins providing the families with helpful referrals and services. Mr. Figueroa also brings together a support system that may not always be traditional. Some support systems being engaged are the command of that particular soldier, other soldier in the unit and the Family Advocacy at Ft. Bliss, Texas. The collaborative efforts by these partners are used to ensure the safety of the children and to preserve the family.

As a collaborative, we reviewed our current risk and safety tools and enhanced those tools to better assess military families. The questions created were risks that he saw not only in CPS cases but while he served. This of course is a work in progress and with every case that he investigates, an effort is being made by all collaborative members to ensure that the family's voice is being heard. We began to have several cross-trainings with military personnel to educate them on how CPS works and they as well have educated us on their systems. We also have been invited to join the Ft. Bliss Case Review Committee. This committee is comprised of military officials, community agencies and law enforcement. As the Southwest Thunderbirds continue our journey with the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, we will continue to create new PDSA'S that will allow us to engage our military families.

It's All About Speed!

Learning Session Two allowed for a fun, interactive speed sharing session in which 15 simultaneous sessions occurred on various topics related to safety and risk assessment and decision making. The presenter, collaborative team members and faculty provided a brief snapshot of a learning, tool, idea, resource or process that will benefit members of the collaborative. This was tons of fun and filled with great learnings all around! Many thanks to all that presented!



Lake County, Ind. -- "Family Matters" Session



Buncombe County -- "How to Prevent Protective Services from Knocking on Your Door"

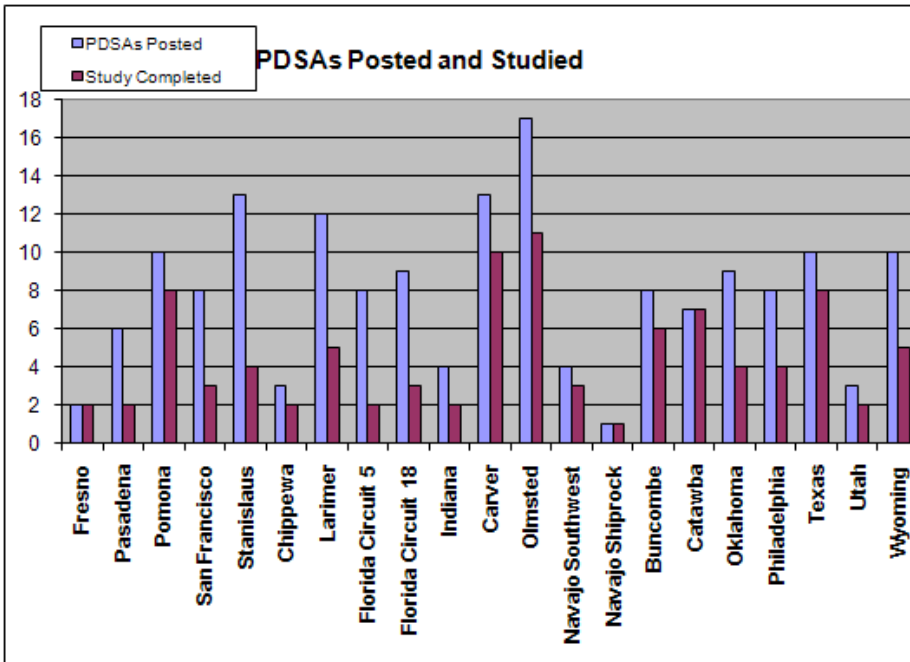


Engaging American Indian/Alaska Native Families -- Involving American Indian Tribes

PDSAs in Plain View

The collaborative has been hard at work conducting small tests of change. As you can see from the following graph, many teams have not only been testing, but also studying and preparing their changes for practice improvement to get ready for spread. This was a fabulous first action period! Below is a breakdown of all of the PDSAs by ey reas of ractice mprovement.

Congratulations to all of the teams for a job well done!



As of Nov. 12, 2008

- 172 PDSAs posted by 21 teams
- 94 PDSAs have been studied
- 32 PDSAs are ready for spread!

PDSAs by Key Areas of Practice

1. Race/Ethnicity/Culture - 24
2. Family/Youth Engagement - 61
3. Tools - 16
4. Sound Decisions - 21
5. Integrated & Comprehensive - 9
6. Permanency & Well-Being - 14
7. Community Collaboration - 15
8. Services - 4
9. Requisite -1; Workforce-3
10. Requisite - 2; Data -5

In December, The Safety and Risk Review Will Get a Makeover!

Maritza Villagomez, administrative assistant for the Children's Division at American Humane, will be the new graphic designer for the *Safety and Risk Review*. We look forward to her creative efforts in making this publication even more spectacular!

Looking for Contributors!

If you have an article you'd like to write or share with members of the BSC, guest columnists are always welcome.

Extranet Discussion Board!



There were tons of great conversations started on our simulated extranet discussion board at Learning Session Two. We encourage you to continue these discussions by going to the "real" extranet discussion board! If you need assistance on getting a thread started, please contact Stacie Hanson.

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