

Alternative Response

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AIM



THE SUPREME COURT of OHIO

Ohio

Department of Job and Family Services



AIM Team Meets With Subcommittee

Caren Kaplan, AIM Team

On Dec. 10, 2008, I had the opportunity, along with Tony Loman and Christine Shannon of the Institute of Applied Research, to meet with the Subcommittee on Child Abuse, Neglect and Dependency. In addition to the 20+ members of the subcommittee, chaired by Barbara Riley, executive director of the Ohio Department of Aging, the attendees included the state child protection policy staff and representatives of several allied service organizations. The purpose of the AIM team (American Humane Association, the Institute of Applied Research and the Minnesota consultants) presentation was to highlight the progress of the Ohio Alternative Response Project; detail the successes and challenges for the state, ODJFS, counties and workforce; provide an explanation and summary of evaluation activities; and discuss issues that require consideration in order to “grow” this work.

The subcommittee, authorized until January 2011, is charged by the Advisory Committee on Children, Families and the Court to seek expanded legislative authority, enact an Alternative Response to child abuse, neglect and dependency reports in Ohio, and seek budgetary support, if appropriate. Thus, this subcommittee, much like the Ohio Leadership Council, is a linchpin in the current and future success of Alternative Response in Ohio.

Using words spoken and written by the 10 pilot county leads, I shared that which is working well in the pilot counties and that which is not working so well. I described, from

my perspective, the requisites and guideposts in order for statewide implementation to be plausible. I prefaced my remarks by reminding the subcommittee members that Alternative Response is an inclusive practice and it will not survive — let alone thrive — on the efforts of a few. Many diverse stakeholders must become champions. Selected guidance, at the “lofty level,” included the need to: 1) build political will; 2) monitor progress and keep the results in the public eye; 3) keep Alternative Response a top priority; 4) sustain momentum for the long term; 5) refuse to “do it on the cheap”; and 6) remember that the economic downturn hurts families we serve more than it hurts us.

Following the post-presentation discussion, Chairwoman Riley asked me what my thoughts were on what the subcommittee should do. My response: The subcommittee should develop a management plan that details the essential activities to move from the Alternative Response pilot phase to statewide implementation. Each subcommittee member should take responsibility for the execution of these activities. Subcommittee meetings should be dedicated, in part, to monitoring progress on the management plan. In addition, each member should agree to educate one target audience about Alternative Response — what it is and why it is important. Awareness and understanding is expected to grow in response to this strategy.

At the close of the meeting, the subcommittee’s commitment to embrace this path was palpable. The road ahead is filled with promise.

The Ongoing Alternative Response Experience

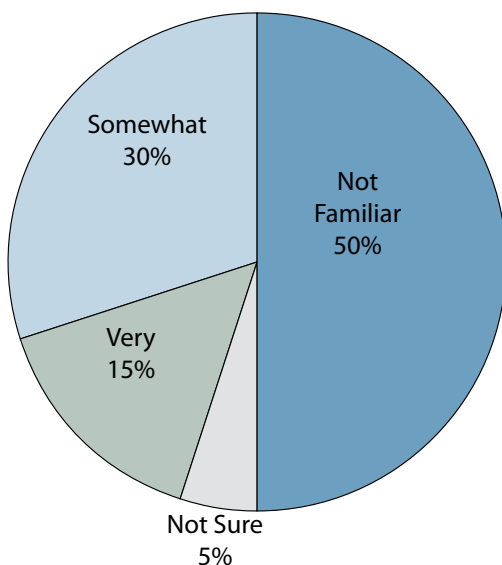
Rachel Brewer, Caseworker, Ross County

Our agency's first Alternative Response pilot case remains with us for ongoing case management, and despite trials and complexity, the family is an exemplary portrait of the ability of Alternative Response to promote and maintain child safety. The case was initially received as a neglect report for inadequate home conditions, and the agency was able to utilize flexible Alternative Response funding and Family Preservation assistance to secure alternate safe housing for the family. Financial, educational and mental health needs were also highlighted as family and agency identified services areas. As the family realized Children's Services' intent truly was to work with them to meet parent and child needs, a foundation was laid for trust, engagement and positive change. The mother even expressed to her worker on one occasion that her "life really turned around when Children's Services became involved this time."

Enhanced agency trust facilitated this mother to contact her worker one day to disclose a substance-use addiction that she had been hiding. She was using opiates and benzodiazepines and advised that her substance use had begun to hinder her ability to parent her three small children. She expressed a desire to work with the agency to keep her kids safe while she received treatment services, but it was her priority to prevent foster care placement. Because this mother was willing to proactively make arrangements with her Alternative Response worker, and admit she had a need, a safety plan was able to be coordinated with local relatives. Despite the need to place these children temporarily out of their home, their mother has been able to seek treatment services, maintain regular contact with her children, and have peace of mind in knowing that the agency is committed to keeping her kids safe and in a care setting that she was able to choose.

Community Familiarity With Alternative Response Project

Tony Loman and Christine Shannon, Institute of Applied Research



Total Respondents: 167

74% have made a report of CA/N

81% have had some professional contact with a child protection worker

The Institute of Applied Research recently conducted the first of two surveys of community stakeholders in the Alternative Response pilot counties. Community service providers, mainly from youth-serving or educational agencies, answered a series of questions about Alternative Response, the adequacy of resources in the community, and their personal perception of child protection services. The figure here shows the current level of familiarity with the Alternative Response pilot among the survey respondents.



Thank You for Hosting the Differential Response Conference!

Lisa Merkel-Holguin, American Humane

American Humane would like to extend its gratitude to the many Ohioans who made it possible to host the 3rd National Conference on Differential Response in Child Welfare in Columbus in November 2008. We had a great turnout, with more than 450 attendees from 24 states and five Canadian provinces. Also, special thanks to the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Supreme Court of Ohio for providing scholarships so that many interested people were able to attend the conference. Our 2009 conference is scheduled for Nov. 10-13 in Charlotte, N.C. Hope to see you there!

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund — Encouraging Collaboration to Strengthen Families

Candace Valach, Executive Director

The importance of collaboration among service providers and systems in strengthening families and preventing abuse and neglect has been known for many years. The need for collaboration exists throughout the entire developmental lifespan of a child and occurs within all systems involved in raising that child to adulthood.

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund is focused on strengthening families and preventing child abuse and neglect by acting strategically across disciplines, systems and jurisdictions to promote thriving children, families and communities. When identified action steps are implemented in concert with each other, there is greater prevention impact across a broad range of individuals, organizations and systems.

In 1984, the Ohio Children's Trust Fund was created as the only dedicated public funding source for primary and secondary child abuse and neglect prevention. The Trust Fund is a quasi-governmental entity in that an independently appointed board governs the expenditure of Trust Fund dollars for child abuse and neglect prevention programs. The board itself is a case in point in terms of highlighting the necessity of collaboration to achieve our stated mission. The Trust Fund board is comprised of individuals representing various fields that, at the local level, are the "community" that supports children and families.

In identifying the action steps in Ohio to fully achieve the Trust Fund mission, we focus on children and youths, families and their communities. We work to ensure that

children and youths are safe and healthy, families are connected and strong, families have access to services, and communities have the capacity to proactively respond to identified needs. Once activities are implemented, it is our responsibility to ensure quality control so that families and children can be guaranteed effective, up-to-date services. It is also important to track outcomes so that family strengthening and the prevention of child abuse and neglect can be reported.

The principle of collaboration is inherent in Ohio's Alternative Response Pilot Project. As a sponsor of the project, the Trust Fund is pleased that county public children services agencies are empowered to seek community collaborations in order to provide the most efficient and effective preventive services for at-risk families. These community collaborations are not restricted to the public sector. As

a success of the Alternative Response model, there is an increased local interest in public and private partnerships to proactively serve children and families at risk of abuse and neglect. These public and private partnerships will yield positive social and economic benefits for families and the entire community.

The Ohio Children's Trust Fund commends the 10 Alternative Response pilot counties for their courage in taking an innovative approach in seeking additional community partnerships to promote strong families and healthy children.

"It's possible to have difficult conversations about practice and reach different resolutions without compromising child safety."

– Representative from Greene County



We Want to Hear From You !

If you have an idea or would like to contribute a short article to the *Ohio Alternative Response Quarterly newsletter*, contact Amy Rohm at (303) 925-9413 or amyr@americanhumane.org

Message from Casey Family Programs

Paul DiLorenzo

In the arena of child welfare, small beginnings are not insignificant. Recently, I accompanied a Greene County social worker on a home visit. For the social worker, and the single mother of three very young children, there was nothing unusual about the event. After several weeks, they had come to know and rely on each other. Both were committed to keeping the children safe and out of foster care. The social worker has been creative and flexible, doing whatever it takes to preserve the family's integrity. The parent's situation is strained, but she has managed to make incremental and important steps. Things were tentative for these three youngsters with whom I spent some time. However, all three were fiercely attached to their mother — and each other. Removing them from their mom, and their community, and perhaps separating them from each other, as is often the case in foster care, would be a mistake with generational consequences.

As it turns out, Greene and many other counties in the state have been successful in protecting kids and turning the tide on unnecessary placements. I thought about why that might be the case, and why other agencies remain inconsistent in their charge to protect children and preserve families. Even when a child welfare agency has more than sufficient resources, provides training for all staff and lowers its caseload, why do children within its purview still remain inadequately served? While agencies such as the one I visited continue to produce improved results for compromised families, many others remain mired in mediocrity for years.

When I observed the social worker on my Ohio visit, I thought of the term “advocat” used by one of my colleagues. Though she is employed by county government and is accountable in part to the citizens of her community, this Greene County social worker understood unequivocally that children are always her first responsibility. She works in an agency where the culture supports individualized solutions for complex problems and never accepts a “business as usual” approach. The agency administration and the social workers have a fire in their bellies for child safety and the value of a permanent home. In fact, most successful agencies intentionally recruit, train and promote those types of individuals. They do this because they understand that what happens on the front lines, between a social worker and a family, far outweighs anything written in a report by experts or on an editorial page.

Visiting this successful agency was a helpful reminder. I was also grateful to this mother who allowed me to spend time with her wonderful children. Like any other young mom, she said she loved them and, at times, she said, they were “driving me crazy.” But I was struck mostly by the capacity, compassion and commitment of the social worker that was unshaken in her resolve to keep the children safe, and the family intact.

The state of Ohio has many pockets of child welfare excellence. Strong leadership and creative approaches to supporting families distinguish those county agencies. And this commitment to advocacy on behalf of children and families will make them successful partners with our national 2020 initiative.



NATIONAL QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CENTER on Differential Response in Child Protective Services

National News

Eric Fenner, director of Franklin County Children Services, has accepted an offer to be one of 12 National Advisory Committee members to the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services, a project of the Children's Bureau. American Humane, in partnership with Walter R. McDonald & Associates and the Institute of Applied Research, the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law and the National Conference of State Legislatures, were awarded this project in October 2008. Fenner will help guide the work of the project over the next five years.

Save the Date

As part of the National Quality Improvement Center on Differential Response in Child Protective Services, a special Information Summit on Disproportionality and Differential Response is being held in Columbus, Ohio, on March 24-25, 2009.

If you are interested in attending, please contact Michelle Howard at michelleh@americanhumane.org.



Spotlight:

Franklin County

Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

Mary Kay Hawkins, Franklin County Children Services

Franklin County Children Services has developed a new mission statement: "Through collaboration with families and their communities, we advocate for the safety, permanency and well-being of each child we serve in a manner that honors family and culture." In developing the mission statement, guiding principles were identified that address values for child welfare professionals, children, families and partnerships. Executive Director Eric Fenner states, "I believe that by creating a principle-driven agency, we will significantly improve our chances of successfully creating a practice that honors and respects our families."

In the past year, the agency has dramatically changed how it provides prevention services and defines prevention along a continuum of services that is aligned with evidence-based practice. These services are integrated throughout the agency as a way of providing prevention services at every stage of a family's involvement. Franklin County Children Services has altered its service model to respond quickly and effectively early in our relationships with families by focusing on the intake level, or the "front door." We know that if we access effective services quickly, there becomes less of a need for families to penetrate deeper into the child welfare system. We also believe that community ties help families remain strong and supported in the long run. As a result of these beliefs, the agency issued request for proposals in mid-2007 and made awards to eight family support contract agencies. These contract services include family support services, comprehensive parenting services, early childhood intervention and multidimensional family therapy. In addition, the agency has partnered

with five community-based settlement houses to increase families' connectedness with the supports and resources already established in their neighborhoods.

Franklin County Children Services realizes that collaboration is an essential component of child welfare practice and has several initiatives and partnerships in the community that strategically position us to pilot the Alternative Response Project. In 2008, the agency allotted \$8.3 million for community-based contracts and approved \$10 million for 2009. The agency has initiatives with the Alcohol, Drug and Mental Health Board (ADAMH) to jointly fund multiple evidence-based initiatives to expand service delivery capacity to the families and children in Franklin County. One example is the collaboration with ADAMH and Children's Hospital Behavioral Health, called the Consultation, Assessment, Liaison and Linkage Project (C.A.L.L.). This project employs independent, licensed mental health clinicians onsite at the agency intake and regions offices. The clinicians consult, complete diagnostic assessments, and assist families in finding the best level of care, including mental health services providers.

We are already seeing the positive results that come with these partnerships and quick linkages to effective services, as reflected in a decrease in the number of case openings and placements. The Alternative Response Project is strongly aligned with the mission and principles of Franklin County Children Services. The project has energized our staff and allows them to better serve families and proactively address family needs in partnership with them.