

MRS Conference Call Notes  
March 2010

Counties Participating 3/18: Avery, Davidson, Forsyth, Jackson, Macon, Orange, Scotland.

Counties Participating 3/19: Catawba, Chatham, Davie, Durham, Gaston, Lee, Nash, New Hanover, Pitt, Rockingham, Rowan, Union.

Counties Participating 3/23: Brunswick, Buncombe, Burke, Caswell, Durham, Gates, Harnett, Hoke, Onslow, Perquimans, Polk, Wake, Washington, Wilson, Yadkin.

Agenda

Announcements from Raleigh  
Adobe Connect Pro  
Questions regarding the RIL  
CFTs in Foster Care

News from Raleigh

Letters

- 2/26 – Reallocation of TANF/DV funds (questionnaires were due back March 12<sup>th</sup>).
- 3/10 - Letter with updates on the RIL. As hopefully everyone knows the current process with the RIL was deemed unconstitutional. The RIL itself is no longer there but as of today you still have to complete field #39 on the 5104, but it doesn't go anywhere. The Division is working on changing this – more information to come.

Announcement

- Many counties have changed their email addresses, Holly has most of these on the MRS list-serve, however you will also need to change your email on the child welfare list-serve if you have a new email address.

Adobe Connect Pro

- Asked if any of the county folks have used it before – no one had.
- If you have used Illuminate it is very similar to Adobe Connect Pro.
- Holly included a handout that includes a 5 minute orientation to this process.
- When we start using this for the meetings we won't just do it with Connect Pro, which requires everyone to have a headset. Because we typically have multiple people in a room in the counties, we will continue to use the conference call number but will have Connect Pro in addition to so that we can share documents etc. with each other but we can talk to larger number of people more easily.
- There are some things you will want to do with your computer while we are on the meeting – these are mentioned in Holly's handout (such as closing email pop-up alerts).

- Since counties do not have NCID user names, counties will have to sign in as a guest – but we need to determine how we want to sign in – just as a county name or a lead person? It will appear this way on the participants list so that other people can see.
  - Our thought is that we might have to have one name for the county even though there are multiple people in the room.
  - When one county had the APPLA webinar they had a group of people in the room they had their county name as the participant. But in their office they had the computer hooked to an overhead projector so that all their workers could see it, and one person was designated as the typist and if any of the county staff wanted to ask a question, they told the typist who put their question in the text box for everyone on the call to see.
- We will now be able to share documents with each other instantly and there will be more ways to give feedback to the presenter and each other (icons, text typing box).

#### Questions on the RIL -

- DIRM has confirmed that they are on track with schedule to remove field #39 from the 5104 system by March 22<sup>nd</sup>. The Division will notify counties when this has been completed and also when the policy manual has been updated.
- Someone asked if they needed to contact the people that were on the RIL and let them know that the list is no longer in existence.
  - This is a good question, no one has brought this up before. Holly will ask. County thought it would be nice for the state to draft a letter so that all counties said things in the same way.
- Currently only need to send letters explaining that the RIL is no more to those people who have requested expunction.

#### CFTs in Foster Care

When Holly thinks of topics for these meetings she thinks of topics that she continually gets questions on. She gets a lot of questions on this, and yes, CFTs are required while children are in foster care (even if the parents are no longer in the picture), and also questions about combining PPATs and CFTs.

- Has anyone successfully combined the two?
- The issues are that PPATs are not designed for the families and are frequently scheduled all on one day, for about 30 minutes. It is a shift in thinking from a PPAT to a CFT.
- Also there are certain people (particularly the GAL and community partner) that must be at a PPAT to have it count, but the CFT is the family's meeting and they can decide who is at the table.
  - Many times the family does not want the GAL at the meeting. We need to educate the family how much access the GAL actually has, and let them know that the GAL knows so much about them, that it may be better to meet them face to face.
  - Never have gotten clear guidance on who can count as the community representative. Counties are using all sorts of people.

### Discussion 3/18

Have people been able to combine PPAT/CFTs?

- No one on this call has come up with a really good way to combine them.
- Since no one on the 3/18 has done this, asked what barriers they have seen to doing this.
- One county has decided to try to do this over the summer since they now have a full time facilitator, but have run into all the barriers she just mentioned. In addition the time frame is a challenge because PPAT were one after the other, and lasted 30 mins, but with CFTs combined in there, it is not possible to have them in one day, or so many back to back.
- Currently this county has very little family participation in the PPAT which is one of the reasons they want to try to combine them.

How are CFTs going in cases where there are older children? Are people able to identify people who are important to the children?

- When there are older children if their birth parents do not want to participate any more, need to identify who the children see as supports. Include teachers, coaches, ministers, even parents of friends that they have connected with.

### Discussion 3/19

Have people been able to combine PPAT/CFTs?

- One county has combined them and people appreciate it because it cuts down the number of meetings which is great particularly for people who have to travel. They have not had issues with the family accepting the GAL at the meetings, because they have had the family and the GAL talking already.
  - The way they worked it is that the PPAT is first and then it flows into a CFT – and while the first family has moved into the CFT another family has started their PPAT. This has worked out except you can't schedule two families with the same social worker back to back.
- Another county tried, but it didn't work so they just hold them separately because PPATs tend to be during the day and CFTs tend to be in the evenings or at least late in the day.
- Children who are in Mental Health also have to have a CFT monthly so one DSS is trying to piggyback on that meeting so there is one meeting for the family.
- One county is struggling with having meetings with children in foster care. The families feel like there are too many meetings and they already have to go to PPAT and treatment team meetings and this is too many. Although sometimes they can't combine them because the parents are not there.

Question was asked by a county about anyone having problems with attorneys coming to CFTs?

- This county has all the parents inviting their attorneys and it gives the meeting an adversarial feel but the families won't do anything without their lawyer.
  - Holly's first suggestion would be to make sure the attorneys understand the purpose of the CFT and that these meetings actually give their clients more say, not less. Try to get on the agenda at a bar association meeting or some other type of venue where you can reach these attorneys.

- If the county DSS has an attorney perhaps they can speak to the other attorneys as the outside attorneys may be better able to listen if it is presented by another attorney.
- Holly will send out an email explaining how to log on to the Center for Family and Community Engagement and instructions for how to get to a Google group to use this resource.

### Discussion 3/23

Have people been able to combine PPAT/CFTs?

- One county's barrier is that PPATs are so structured and need to adhere to time frames, and when you try to combine them, you get parents that don't show up or people running late, and all of a sudden you are over your time.
- One county said their attorneys are the barriers. They are at the PPATs but not at the CFTs therefore they cannot combine them. Are other counties doing this?
  - Another county agrees that when the attorneys are there, the entire meeting changes its tone and they don't feel that is it a CFT.
  - One other county has had attorneys at CFTs, when the parents invite them. This actually works out well because the attorney knows exactly what is expected of the family. Since the attorneys were invited by the family, the meeting is still family driven.
  - Another county has had the parents invite the attorney, but the attorneys do not want to come because they see it as too time consuming.
  - One county asked what is the stance when you have a parent who needs their own GAL? (Always seems to be an attorney serving as a GAL).
  - Just like with any participant, educate them, explain the ground rules of a CFT and what it is (family driven meeting) and what it is not (a courtroom).
  - Typically the attorneys are resistant to their clients sharing much in meetings and they will advise the parents not to speak much at the meeting. Personal opinion is that having attorneys there is a barrier to having a truly open CFT and engaging best practice.
  - Some other counties have had the same experience, but a couple of counties have not had that problem.
  - One county has actually has a meeting where the family never spoke, only the attorney did and was negotiating for the family.
  - County suggested that we probably need to concentrate more on gaining their client's trust at the beginning of the process. If the family feels that they are being treated respectfully and honestly listened to then perhaps they will not want/need to bring their attorney.

### Questions regarding facilitator

- One county has recently gotten a full time neutral facilitator and she cannot believe the difference it has made. This was a county that previously felt that the social workers were good at facilitating their own meetings.
- Holly agreed, not saying that the social workers weren't good at it, they were, but it's a huge difference to have someone as a facilitator that is neutral and facilitating is all that they do.
- Other counties on the line contract with an outside facilitator and think it is much better.
- County said that the state training is very, very good.

- Also kudos to the facilitator forum.

Other things that you may be doing or have questions on?

- One county is making an effort to concentrate on shared parenting – when a child has to be moved, shared parenting does not have to just be with the current foster parents and the biological parents, it can also include previous foster parents if there is still a connection there.
- Reminder from Holly – just because you have a TPR or a cease reunification this does not mean that you have to cease involvement with the parents. They may still be involved with their children, just because they do not have legal rights.
- A good portion of kids that are adopted return to their birth families at age 18, so it is silly for us to turn a blind eye to these folks.

### Other issues for discussion

From 3/19

- One county said they are considered a family court county and wanted to know if there are any other family court counties on the line. One of the issues they are facing is that they have between 60-70 hrs of after hours visits per week for foster children and are wondering how counties are accommodating that. Some things are court ordered to be on weekends, but not all of them, some of them just fall out this way due to work and school. It is becoming a burden for their workers to accomplish it all.
  - Another county also has this issue but they are looking to let staff adjust their schedule as they can come late the next day if they had an evening meeting.
  - One county has a Saturday visitation schedule that is set up with a church run day care. There is a police officer there and non-DSS staff supervise the visitation (although these people are able to give DSS the information that they need). This has to be court ordered (and is usually for families who are working and have no other option) so there is a fee, but it is a small fee and since these are usually working families there has not been an issue with it.