

County Fiscal Best Practices Workgroup: Managing Out-of-Home Placements

Presented by Tom Henderson
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Setting the Context

- County Fiscal Best Practices Workgroup role and membership
- Most recent study topic was managing out-of-home placements
- In total, 14 counties shared their strategies with our workgroup

General Themes

- No single “magic bullet” prevents out-of-home placements.
- Community philosophy on when and how to use out-of-home placements matters.
- Placements should be made with specific goals and an understanding that child will return to community.
- Counties must be willing to evaluate and question their policies in order to improve practices.

“Fiscal” Themes

- Counties must know and manage what they are buying in either community-based services or out-of-home placements.
- More complex caseloads are helping to drive costs.
 - Younger children placed due to parental meth use
 - Larger sibling groups
 - More challenging mental health issues
- Provider capacity contributes to cost differences.
- Other resources may be available to assist in paying for needed services.

Theme # 1 : Use data to monitor and analyze placement trends

- You must have a baseline for understanding what is happening in your county in order to devise the best strategies for addressing placement issues
 - Steele County: Focus on truancy placements
 - Carver County: Focus on kids with problem behavior
 - Dakota County: Focus on race and gender issues in juvenile detention placement trends as well as length of stay and reason for placement

Theme #2: Build collaborative relationships with key partners

- Respect roles of all parties associated with making out-of-home placements
- Educate partners about concerns with existing practices and be open to hearing concerns of partners
- Create opportunities for interactions outside of individual cases

How have counties fostered collaborative relationships?

- Informal annual lunch gathering with judges (Anoka County)
- Intensive intradepartmental cooperation with Community Corrections (Dakota County)
- Winona County Human Services and Corrections staff
- Leadership of judges in establishing Yellow Medicine County's Circle Sentencing Initiative

How have counties fostered collaborative relationships?

- Child protection staff attend law enforcement “roll calls” in Washington County to promote alternatives to placement
- Carver County’s extensive use of school-based social workers, co-located therapists and creation of Behavior Intervention Teams

Theme #3: Approach to family is critical in achieving better outcomes

- Family Assessment Response has proven to be a cost-effective way of improving outcomes and lowering costs
- Increased use of Family Group Decision-Making appears to decrease out-of-home placements

Theme #4: Foster community-based networks of support for children and families

- Carver County: Signs of Safety strategy
 - Weighs what is of concern against what strengths are present in a family's situation
 - Involves a team of people committed to supporting a child
- Yellow Medicine County: Circle Sentencing
 - Provides a child with a network of caring adults to whom that child is accountable
 - Offers support "the system" is unable to provide

More examples of community-based networks of support

- Cook County: Extensive use of informal support networks, such as Scout troops and church volunteers

Relative Custody Assistance

- Pine County strategically chose to use RCA as a means to effectively serve children in a cost-effective way

Theme #5: Innovative Services Can Help Prevent Placements

- Washington and Dakota counties use “24/7” Crisis Response Units to respond to cases that may require immediate placement of a child.
 - This is an important first step in working with law enforcement on site.
 - Washington County says this service has reduced emergency placements.

Theme #6: Carefully determine whether placement is needed

- Create a standardized decision-making process for determining whether placement is needed
 - Focuses broader spectrum of attention on child's needs
 - Assesses whether community-based services have been fully utilized
 - Ensures clear goals for placement are established and that placement is truly the most appropriate way to address issues

How do counties effectively assess whether placements are needed?

- Placement committees bring multiple perspectives to bear on a child's needs
- Standardized assessment tools more accurately assess child's specific service needs and increase objectivity in placement decision-making process
 - Dakota County uses a Juvenile Detention Assessment and a Child Needs-Provider Intervention screening instrument

Theme #7: Work at the front end of a placement to improve chances for success

- Pine County began to negotiate specific outcomes for each child placed with a Rule 5 provider
- Steele County

Theme #8: Bringing an episode of out-of-home care to closure

- Careful review of service agreements with out-of-home vendors.
- Anoka County Community Corrections holds placement review for all offenders in placement longer than 90 days.
- Working with families on issues to make “enough” progress to bring child home vs. trying to create a more ideal family situation.