

SDM® Conference – Daily Practice for Performance Improvement: October 3 - 4, 2006

The Children's Research Center's seventh national SDM® conference, Daily Practice for Performance Improvement, will be located on New Hampshire's scenic seacoast in downtown Portsmouth. This event will take place during New England's picturesque autumn season, October 3 - 4, 2006. Please plan on joining CRC staff, fellow SDM users, and co-hosts, New Hampshire Division for Children, Youth and Families, at the Sheraton Harborside Portsmouth. See the CRC website for further information and for links on the City of Portsmouth, Sheraton Harborside Portsmouth, and autumn activities in New England.

www.nccd-crc.org

www.sheratonportsmouth.com

www.portsmouthchamber.org

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CHILDREN'S RESEARCH CENTER
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Improving Foster Care Placements through Research, Evidence, and Collaboration

For 20 years, the Children's Research Center (CRC) has supported valid decision making by collaborating with child protective services (CPS) agencies to develop research- and evidence-based assessments. The first effort was an actuarial risk assessment for families referred to the CPS system. CRC staff and CPS agencies expanded this work, developing a series of assessments on the referred family, or its members, to support the numerous critical decisions workers make regarding that family. In combination, these Structured Decision Making® (SDM) assessments have demonstrated ability to improve outcomes

for families and children. Until now, the SDM® system has not been used to guide decisions related to foster or relative providers. Can SDM assessments support valid and consistent decision making in determining the appropriateness of a child's placement?

The answer is in the application of research and evidence. In collaboration with five California counties (Los Angeles, Fresno, San Diego, Riverside, and San Bernardino), CRC staff developed an assessment system that will result in improved procedures for assessing foster and relative providers. A key component of the system is an actuarial assessment used to classify foster and relative providers by the likelihood that they will provide inadequate care to a child.

The research completed in California builds on similar research CRC conducted in collaboration with New Mexico's Children, Youth and Families

Department in 2003. Both studies showed that a set of provider characteristics accurately classified foster or relative care providers by their likelihood of maltreatment and/or inadequate care of a foster child. Agencies can use this assessment to provide support and additional services to those placement providers most at risk. Providing these families with additional resources such as increased visits from workers, respite care, foster parent mentoring, or additional training will help ensure the safety, well-being, and placement stability of children in foster care.

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The complete report can be found on the CRC website: www.nccd-crc.org.

The RESOURCE FAMILY SUPPORT ASSESSMENT TOOL is one element within an SDM placement module being developed in California with leadership from Los Angeles, San Diego, San Bernardino, Orange, Fresno, and Riverside counties, as well as the California Department of Social Services. In addition to assessing the optimal support level for the resource family, other tools will help ensure that the specific needs of an individual child align with the willingness and capability of the resource family and will review the safety of the home. The combined set of tools promotes dialogue among the agency, resource family, and birth family and are ideally suited for use within various family engagement practices.

For more information, contact Kathy Park at 608-831-1180 or kpark@mw.nccd-crc.org.

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New and Ongoing Research Efforts

PREVENTION SERVICES IN TANF

CRC is currently working with two jurisdictions to monitor an SDM system used to identify families for child maltreatment prevention services. In late 2004 and early 2005, two counties in California incorporated an SDM system in the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families application process. The SDM system begins with screening families who apply for public financial assistance for select risk factors and making referrals for at-risk families who volunteer to participate in child abuse prevention treatment programs. If you have any questions about SDM and child maltreatment prevention efforts, please contact Kathy Park at kpark@mw.nccd-crc.org.

COMPARATIVE CASE REVIEWS

Another new effort is to assess the effect of comparative case reviews in Michigan's foster care services. Over the last two years, CRC staff conducted reviews of cases previously reviewed by an agency supervisor, which provided an opportunity to give feedback about the completion and use of SDM assessments and about supervisors' understanding of SDM as it relates to case decisions. The research effort will assess the outcomes for previously reviewed cases to determine if cases for which policies and procedures were followed and with appropriate documentation had better outcomes than cases that did not. Additionally, the research will also determine whether case review efforts improved counties' aggregate performance over time, such as time to permanency and the nature of permanency.

RISK REVALIDATION

A number of jurisdictions have worked with CRC to conduct a risk assessment validation study. The purpose of a risk assessment is to classify families or individuals based on certain outcomes. For example, a CPS risk assessment classifies families being investigated by the

agency according to the likelihood that a caregiver will maltreat a child in the future. Validation studies ensure that a risk assessment is correctly classifying families or individuals. Demographic and/or economic shifts, as well as agency policy changes and successful services, can change the nature of an agency's client population and therefore impact a risk assessment's performance ability. Child protection agencies that adopted a risk assessment from another jurisdiction and have not yet validated the assessment on a sample of their population will especially benefit from a validation study. Studies were recently completed for the Missouri Office of Juvenile Court Administrator, New Mexico's juvenile justice system, and Rhode Island's child protective services agency.

WORKLOAD STUDIES

CRC has conducted over 90 workload studies in child protective services, juvenile justice, and adult corrections. Whereas descriptive studies reflect existing conditions, CRC recommends prescriptive workload studies. This workload method is a standards-based effort used by agencies to estimate the number of staff needed to perform work according to policies and procedures—in other words, to “do the job right.” This method measures work performed under actual field conditions and builds in the capacity for positive case outcomes by incorporating a performance-based outcome. Agencies across the nation have used workload study results to request additional staff positions and/or to reallocate workers to understaffed areas. CRC is currently working on workload estimates for Tennessee, conducting a study in Missouri, and recently completed workload studies in Michigan adult corrections and child protective services.

For more information about these efforts, please contact Kristen Johnson (kjohnson@mw.nccd-crc.org) or Theresa Healy (thealy@mw.nccd-crc.org).

CRC and Educational Accountability

Since 1998, CRC has worked with the City of Milwaukee to monitor its charter schools. Milwaukee's Charter School Review Committee holds each school accountable for meeting academic criteria as described in each school's charter. CRC has monitored between four and six schools each academic year.

In 2005, our work expanded to include ten Milwaukee public high schools funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation as part of the “New Vision of Secondary Education in Milwaukee” project. As part of the project, the Technical Assistance and Leadership Center (TALC) was established, which provides leadership and guidance to schools as they strive to achieve the principles of the Gates foundation's vision of educational excellence.

CRC has worked with TALC and each of the schools to establish clear, measurable objectives related to each of the Gates foundation's academic principles.

As part of the monitoring process, CRC conducts interviews with school administrators and, in some instances, parents, students, and teachers. Educational achievements and survey results are summarized and presented in annual monitoring reports that reflect each school's unique approach to education, progress toward meeting academic objectives, and suggestions for school improvement. For examples of charter school monitoring reports, please visit our website at www.nccd-crc.org. For more information, please contact Sue Gramling at 414-475-9923.

SDM® State Updates

VIRGINIA

During 2006, the Virginia Department of Social Services will be expanding the number of localities using SDM and transitioning toward self-sufficiency with respect to staff training in SDM and the provision of technical assistance to SDM counties.

As part of its phased implementation strategy, Virginia will be adding about 15 new localities to the 32 jurisdictions that are already implementing SDM. Most of the new jurisdictions are located in the Piedmont region of central Virginia (near Lynchburg and Charlottesville). Representatives from the new localities recently attended an orientation and planning meeting conducted by CRC staff and are now beginning to prepare themselves for the changes that will take place this summer.

Virginia is also expanding its “in-house” SDM expertise. The state has identified a group of 20 people from different areas of the state who are: 1) already well-grounded in SDM concepts and practices, and 2) have substantial training experience. This cadre of experts will be groomed to assume responsibility for all SDM staff training and for the provision of ongoing technical assistance to the jurisdictions that are using SDM. One of the key activities in this staff development effort will be an intensive three-day training that will be conducted by CRC staff. This training will focus on key issues such as understanding and being able to explain the SDM research base, being able to use the principles of SDM to find appropriate solutions to emerging and/or complicated implementation issues, organizing and conducting case reading reviews, and delivering effective SDM training programs.

MICHIGAN

The Michigan foster care system is in the process of implementing its SACWIS database that, for the first time, incorporates SDM reunification assessments. Previously, Michigan had completed SDM tools on Microsoft Word templates.

Michigan CPS is redesigning its portion of the SACWIS database to incorporate all SDM tools. Prior to the redesign, some SDM assessments were automated, and some were completed on Word templates. As a result, in the near future, Michigan will have comprehensive SDM data available.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Since May 2005, the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) has collaborated with CRC to update the SDM risk assessment and family strengths and needs assessment initially implemented ten years ago. This update included a dramatic change in policy, providing ongoing services to families based on safety and risk rather than investigation outcomes.

In addition, CFSA implemented the SDM risk reassessment, reunification assessment, and an SDM in-home safety assessment. System partners, including private providers, were invited to participate in the development and training sessions, as well as the training of trainers session. The inclusion of critical system partners in effectively implementing SDM continues through an upcoming presentation to the Washington, D.C. Model Court judges.

CONNECTICUT

This year got off to a bright start as the Connecticut Department of Children and Families began their SDM planning and development work with CRC staff. Connecticut has selected SDM to strengthen their investigative, assessment, and treatment decision making processes. SDM will further enhance management's ability to plan and evaluate the allocation of CPS staff and program resources with an eye toward improved outcome measures. Following development and integration efforts, training and implementation of their new and updated decision making tools will begin.

SDM® Conference: Daily Practice for Performance Improvement

The 7th annual SDM® Conference is right around the corner! Watch for your registration information, which will be arriving in the coming weeks. Please see Page 4 for more details.