

SDM Story: Motivating Staff to Use SDM™ in Los Angeles County

Any new concept or policy change can be challenging or sometimes even intimidating to a caseworker. In Los Angeles County, prior to SDM implementation, a caseworker used a one-page risk assessment form (DCFS 180) which took all of about ten seconds to fill out. When I first introduced the staff to SDM and explained what they would now be required to do (risk assessments, safety, FSNA, etc.) I heard an uproar: "We can't!" "This is too much work!" "This isn't helpful; who invented this?," etc. As a manager, I knew I had to do something drastic to turn around these misconceptions. I decided I would have to become an SDM expert myself so I could motivate

my staff and let them know I'd help them every step of the way and that we could be the best performing office in Los Angeles County by using SDM.

I informed the staff that I would be available to help them work through their fears about SDM. I implemented contests between units for the best performance, and every month I run the SDM numbers and give "kudos" and awards to staff. I also started an SDM review team by gathering staff including county counsel, public health nurses, supervisors, and managers. This team is available to hear high risk and very high risk referrals on a weekly basis.

As a result, the CSWs love the opportunity to present their SDM cases to the team. Currently, my office is one of the highest performing offices in L.A. County with SDM compliance. These same workers who were saying SDM will never work are the same caseworkers presenting on a regular basis to the SDM review team. I think what's most valuable to motivate staff to use SDM is for the manager to be motivated him/herself.

Believe me--it works!

*Jennifer A. Lopez
Assistant Regional Administrator
Los Angeles County*

CRC

CHILDREN'S RESEARCH CENTER
426 S. Yellowstone Dr., Ste 250
Madison, WI 53719



July 2005, Issue 10

SDM™ NEWS

Contents:

2006 SDM Conference: A Call for Papers

CRC Welcomes New Staff

Team Decision Making in Fresno County

SDM Story: Motivating Staff to use SDM in Los Angeles County

Family-Centered Practice and SDM™

Many jurisdictions are implementing Structured Decision Making™ (SDM) and Family to Family, Family Group Conferencing, or similar forms of family-centered practice. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and the Children's Research Center (CRC) recently hosted a meeting of about 30 participants from across the U.S. to discuss the integration of family-centered practice and SDM™.

This important gathering addressed the question of whether SDM and family-centered practice can be integrated into a coherent, effective practice model. The clear conclusion was, "Yes!" While there have been concerns, participants came to recognize the potential benefits of combining both strategies. Integrating both approaches will require thoughtful planning and careful attention. Two sites, Orange County, California (represented by Scott Burdick and Carol Greenwald) and St. Louis, Missouri (represented by Kathryn Sapp and Fran Johnson) provided reports of successes and struggles as they implemented both SDM and family-centered practice. Typically, staff are assigned responsibility to implement one initiative, while other staff are assigned responsibility to implement the other. Training is often separate, and line staff are rarely provided ideas on how the two different initiatives fit together. Both sites recommend opening up lines of communication and providing clear guidance to staff about how

the two fit.

For example, locations implementing Team Decision Meetings may establish clear expectations for each type of meeting (upon removal, when considering return home, etc.) for which SDM tools are required prior to the meeting and how the SDM information should be incorporated into the meeting.

It was further recognized that SDM training is typically focused on the use of the tool itself. The training does not address how workers should build relationships with those interviewed, the importance of engaging families from a strengths perspective whenever possible, ways to engage the family in planning, or other aspects of family-centered practice. While these efforts have been considered desirable, it was expected that training in these areas would be conducted separately from SDM training. As a result, SDM is often seen in isolation and as an additional component rather than an integrated part of practice.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy, and CRC have committed to working together to find ways to support jurisdictions where SDM and family-centered practice are both being implemented.

For more information, contact: Raelene Freitag (rfreitag@mw.nccd-crc.org) or Susan Notkin (susan.notkin@cssp.org)

CRC Welcomes New Staff

Elaine Squadrito joined the Children's Research Center in May 2005 as a Special Advisor with the responsibility of overseeing multiple projects and program implementation.

During her 24 years of public child welfare experience in Rhode Island, Elaine accepted ever-increasing responsibility as



she moved from a line staff position into management positions including Clinical Training Specialist, Project Manager, and Regional Director. Additionally, in 2000, Elaine coordinated Rhode Island's pilot CFSR review and also their full CFSR review through the development of their Performance Improvement Plans from 2004 to 2005.

During 2001, Elaine was on loan to the Children's Bureau in Washington, DC to assist with the implementation of the first year of the CFSR reviews.

A.J. Norris has joined CRC as the Project & Development Coordinator with responsibility for coordinating staffing, project deliverables, and contract demands for project and development efforts in the Midwest Office.



Prior to joining CRC, A.J. was the Administrative Director for Pathways

Transition Programs, Inc., a private non-profit mental health center in Atlanta. In this role, he was responsible for submitting grant applications and proposals, and he secured national accreditation for the agency as a recognized out-patient substance abuse program for wom-

en. A.J. has also worked with Georgia's Family Connection office in Morgan County and Family and Children Services in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

A former classroom teacher with experience in both rural and urban school systems, A.J. has a degree in Education from Shorter College in Rome, GA.

John Wilson has joined CRC as a Senior Research Associate.

Before joining CRC, John worked as a project manager and workforce director for BellSouth Telecommunications in Atlanta.

From 1994-2000, John worked for the Georgia Division of Family & Children Services as a case manager in all areas of child protective and foster care services; he then worked as a supervisor in both rural and urban Georgia counties, piloting and implementing the SDM model.

John has a B.A. in Psychology from the University of Georgia and an M.A. in Organizational Management from the University of Phoenix.



Team Decision Making in Fresno County's Department of Children and Family Services

One of the most difficult situations for any family is having children removed from their care due to abuse or neglect. For child protection workers, sitting down with a family under such difficult circumstances to discuss and plan for the safety of the children is often a formula for disaster. This does not have to be the case. Recently, under these very circumstances, I observed a Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting at the Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS). Utilizing the TDM process in combination with SDM tools, effectively provided the family and department staff with the opportunity to

concerns. When the decision was made that the children needed to remain out of the home, everyone clearly understood why--although they wanted their children to come home, they fully understood that it was necessary at that time.

The success of this TDM meeting is attributed to the excellent skills of the TDM facilitator, the respectful manner in which DCFS social workers and supervisors shared their concerns and also identified the strengths of the family, along with honesty of the family and the parents. Utilizing SDM tools helped to keep the issues focused

Utilizing SDM tools helped to keep the issues focused on the safety of the children -- something everyone in the room was concerned about and committed to addressing.

make a safety decision everyone understood and supported.

The social worker began the meeting by very clearly laying out the safety issues as identified using the SDM tool. As the meeting proceeded, extended family members questioned issues surrounding safety. The parents responded with a great deal of honesty and explained quite frankly how issues in their lives led to harm to the children. When the meeting progressed into the brainstorming/plan development stage, the parents and extended family members had a clear understanding of the safety

on the safety of the children -- something everyone in the room was concerned about and committed to addressing. The SDM tools and the TDM process effectively helped the family to clearly see the safety issues that concerned the Department. The family agreed with the plan because they had walked hand in hand with the DCFS to get there.

Margaret Jackson, MSW
Supervisor Mentor
Central Calif. Child Welfare Training Academy
CSU Fresno College of Health and Human Services
mjackson@csufresno.edu

Share Your SDM™ Stories

If you have a story you would like to have published in SDM™ News, please submit a draft article to: Raelene Freitag via mail, fax, or email (rfreitag@mw.nccd-crc.org). Please include your name, title, agency, and how long you have been using SDM (to be included in the article). Include your address, phone, and email so that we can contact you regarding your submission. All submissions will be acknowledged; however, we cannot guarantee publication of every article submitted. Please submit articles by November 1, 2005, to be considered for the next issue.



Raelene Freitag, Ph.D.
Director

426 S. Yellowstone Drive,
Suite #250
Madison, WI 53719

608.831.1180
www.nccd-crc.org

SDM™ News is published by the Children's Research Center to provide information to CPS staff working in jurisdictions using SDM. Send article submissions, address corrections, and other correspondence to:

Publications Department
426 S. Yellowstone Dr., Ste 250
Madison, WI 53719