

SDM NEWS

Also Inside:

**Cuyahoga County
Refresher Training**

New SDM Jurisdictions

Fifth Annual Structured Decision Making Conference a Hit!

Minnesota's Hennepin County Children and Family Services and the Olmstead County Community Services, Child and Family Services hosted over 150 participants in Minneapolis for the Children's Research Center's (CRC) 5th conference. In addition to a strong showing from Minnesota, participants came from California, New Hampshire, Maryland, Michigan, New Mexico, Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Day One was packed with information about how, when, and why child welfare agencies can and should be involved in strategic planning. Noting the downturn of the economy and

the increase in numbers of children in poverty, Shay Bilchik of the Child Welfare League of America pointed out the timeliness of the focus on strategic planning for CRC's Structured Decision Making (SDM) conference. "When the safety net frays, the smallest bodies fall through first," Bilchik stated.

Models of strategic planning were presented and participants had the opportunity to practice the models. Participants learned about the generic approach to strategic planning utilized in Michigan, a logic model as implemented in Minnesota's Olmstead County and

Continued on page 3...

SafeMeasures™ Quality Improvement Tool Introduced in California

Supervisors in public child welfare agencies shoulder responsibility for assuring that all of their workers comply with all regulatory and audit functions on their cases. Until now, supervisors had few tools to support their efforts. Their options were limited to tedious review of every case for every regulatory requirement, or random review which risked missing instances of noncompliance. Relying on what crosses the supervisor's desk leaves little confidence that all is well in what does NOT cross the desk.

Statewide data systems presented the promise of gaining valuable information about cases, but most



Photo by Kathy Park

Maro Kerk and Avery Mason, supervisors in Riverside County, California, learn how to use SafeMeasures™ under the direction of Peter Quigley of CRC

systems are not useful for day-to-day supervisory functions.

SafeMeasures™ is a new quality improvement system that provides supervisors with easily understandable, timely, and useful information about key performance measures.

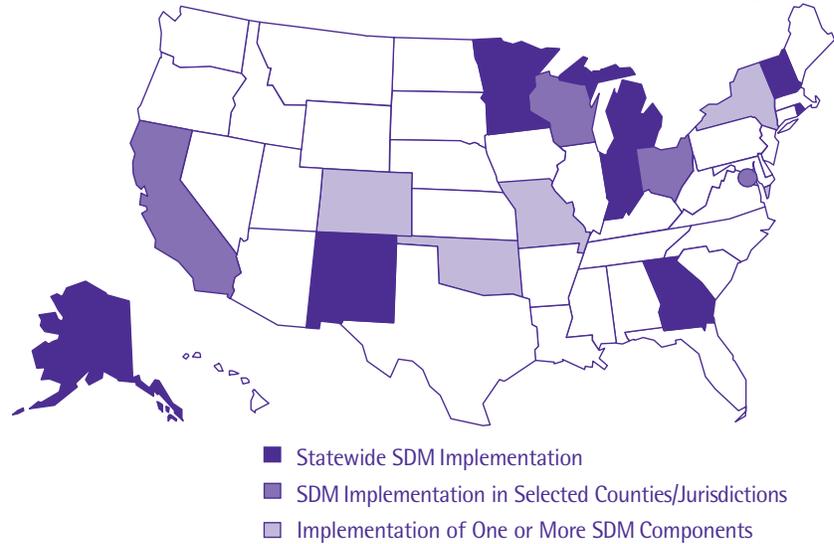
Continued on page 4...

New SDM Jurisdictions

CRC is currently working with the New Mexico Protective Service Division (PSD) staff to (1) design screening and response priority tools for use by the central intake staff, (2) design and review formats for SDM management reports, and (3) complete a risk validation study. In addition to these tasks, PSD, in partnership with CRC, has provided all of its staff with one day of training on the SDM model via a video conference set up. Supervisory training was also given to PSD supervisors in both the investigation and ongoing units. New Mexico's PSD has been using SDM since the Fall of 1997.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (MDHS) is

Children's Research Center Structured Decision Making Systems



implementing SDM statewide. In 1999, the SDM system was developed by seven metro counties with CRC's assistance. Earlier this year, CRC consulted with a statewide advisory committee to convert the metro

county SDM model into a statewide model and training was held for line staff and supervisors. CRC will provide a one-year follow-up to revise the SDM system based upon MDHS's experience over the year.

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Cuyahoga County Refresher Training Popular with Staff

Since implementing SDM in the Spring of 2000, the Cuyahoga County (Cleveland) Ohio Department of Family and Children's Services has been conducting annual "refresher" SDM training for all supervisors and staff. The small group sessions (typically involving three or four supervisory units) have covered the impact of recent policy changes on SDM, clarified SDM issues identified by staff and provided re-training on selected SDM assessment tools. The sessions have been conducted by members of the SDM Steering Committee and feedback from

staff has been uniformly positive. Several supervisors have even requested that the sessions be held every six months. Says Nancy Simon, chair of the Steering Committee: "It gives everybody an opportunity to work out new (and old) wrinkles in the system and helps us make sure everybody is doing things the same way. But the discussions also help re-enforce the big picture about why we're using SDM and what we want to accomplish. People seem to really get a lot out of it and we're going to keep on doing it."

SDM Conference a Hit *continued*

the Balanced Scorecard model presented jointly by professionals from Santa Cruz, California and the State of Washington.

Strategic planning's applicability to the current Federal Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) was a key feature of the day. As Elaine Squadrito, who assisted in the implementation of the CFSRs in the first 17 states, said "Having a strategic plan is like having an answer key," i.e., you can get to where you need to be faster and with less effort if you know where you are going.

CRC's Next SDM conference will be held in New Hampshire, Spring 2004

Each strategic planning model presented had elements of inclusion and deliberateness. They were mission driven, data driven, and comprehensive. Each presenter urged strategic planners to keep the strategic plan simple and to disseminate it to all stakeholders. The dynamic nature of good strategic plans was emphasized with the importance of revisiting and updating plans based upon ongoing analysis of data collected.

Day Two of the conference was devoted to topics specific to the SDM model in CPS. This was an

opportunity for participants from old, new, and prospective SDM jurisdictions to learn more about SDM. Initial sessions included information on new developments and research updates. Janice Ereth pointed out new SDM sites in Minnesota, Vermont, Missouri, Riverside County, and Los Angeles County in California. Ereth also spoke of possible opportunities to work with CWLA and OJJDP to link SDM concepts and approaches across multiple systems.

Breakout session topics included the use of SDM data in budget preparations, ideas for implementation of SDM, the use of SDM in alternative response systems, and the relationship of administrative leadership (including active case reading by supervisors) to the successful implementation and ongoing use of SDM.

Of special interest to those working in foster care systems, was a report on New Mexico research which resulted in the first actuarial, objective risk assessment procedure that classifies foster home families into categories of low, moderate, or high risk of disruption of foster care placements. Disruptions included department



Photo by Kathy Park

JoAnne Nagy receives the Children's Research Center Award of Excellence, Promoting Outcomes-Based Practice, presented by Chris Baird. JoAnne recently retired as Foster Care and CPS Manager in Michigan.

disapproval of placement or license revocation and alleged child maltreatment. This tool, applied to a case prior to placement of a child in the foster home, guides the level of support that needs to be provided to a caregiver to increase the likelihood of stability for the child placed in that home.

As a follow-up to Day One, the applicability of SDM to Federal CFSRs was thoroughly discussed. Participants received an analysis of the outcomes that are the focus of the federal on-site reviews, the performance indicators, and the SDM procedure(s) that relate specifically to each outcome.

CRC's next SDM conference will be held in New Hampshire in the Spring of 2004.

SafeMeasures™ Introduced *continued*

Supervisors begin by viewing a menu of reports customized for their state. Each report represents a state audit requirement, a federal standard, or other key case management function. For example, there are reports that

Simply clicking on a section of a pie chart leads to a display of all of the cases that make up that section.

show how many days currently open investigations have been open; whether children in foster care have received required physical examinations; or which cases have received required contacts in the current month. When the supervisor selects a report, that report is displayed graphically. The display typically provides trend data as well.

The greatest value of SafeMeasures™ may be in what

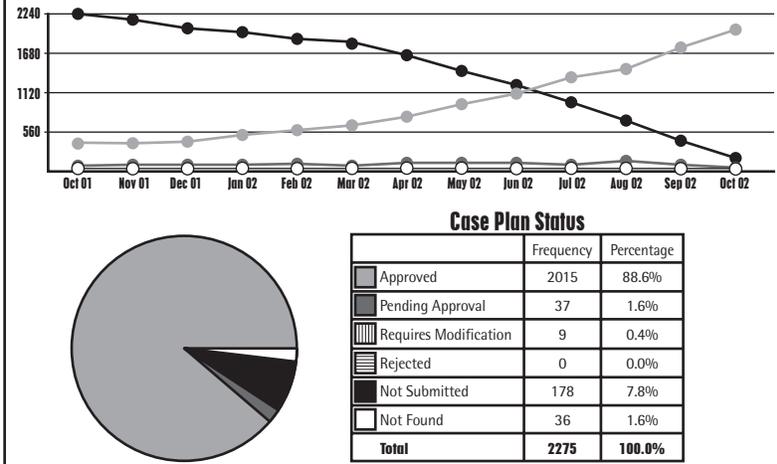
comes next. It's interesting to know what percentage of cases have not had physical exams. But it's useful to know which cases still need them.

Simply clicking on a section of a pie chart leads to a display of all the cases that make up that section of the chart. In this way a supervisor can alert staff to cases that are now out of compliance, or more importantly about to go out of compliance, so that corrective action can be taken.

This proactive approach to quality improvement assists jurisdictions to achieve compliance in advance of formal audits. Of greater significance, however, is recognizing that audit measures reflect good social work practice.

Case Plan Status

Current Status (as of last observation date) of case plan for all FR cases open during the selected month. As of last observation date: 11/9/2002



Counties implementing SafeMeasures™ have demonstrated substantial strengthening of their compliance on key measures. For example, one county dramatically increased the percentage of cases that had an approved case plan completed on time.

Achieving audit compliance has important implications for funding and regulatory environments, but behind each audit measure is a child or family who benefits from receiving services according to standards.

SafeMeasures™ is a subscription service. Because it is web-based, no software or hardware is involved. For additional information, contact Peter Quigley at CRC, 608-831-1180.

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