

Improving Outcomes for Children and Families



PIP TIPS Item 18: Involving Families and Children in Case Planning

Each issue of Program Improvement Plan (PIP) Tips focuses on one aspect of the safety, permanency and well-being of children in Minnesota. This issue examines involving families and children in case planning, included in well-being outcome one.

Well-Being Outcome 1

Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Related Performance Items

Item 17: Assessing Needs and Services

Item 18: Involving Families and Children in Case Planning

Item 19: Worker visits with Child

Item 20: Worker visits with Parents

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Review evaluates involving families and children in case planning based on the following criteria:

- Extent of agency efforts to involve mothers, fathers and children in case planning activities.
- Consideration of child and family input in the development of the case plan.
- Current written case plan.

Children interviewed as part of the Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews in 2003 and 2004 expressed their desire to have more information and more involvement in the way decisions are made about their lives.

National and statewide findings consistently identify involvement of fathers, both custodial and non-custodial, as a primary challenge to performance on involving families and children in case planning (Administration of Children and Families, 2004).

Statewide performance on involving families and children in case planning, measured by the Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews, declined by over five percent between 2003 and 2004.

The Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews rated involving families and children in case planning a Strength in only 61 percent of the cases reviewed in 2004. In a ranked order of performance, involving families and children in case planning ranked 22 out of 23 performance items.

**The Minnesota Department of Human Services and County Social Service Agencies:
Working Together to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families**



Putting Good Practice Into Practice

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM), introduced in Minnesota in 1999, is an innovative process that supports shared decision-making and provides a venue for involving families and children in case planning. Once used almost exclusively for permanency planning, FGDM is being used successfully to prevent placements and support families.

Evaluation of Family Group Decision Making program models, on an international level, has identified positive case planning outcomes:

- Families develop plans that provide for safety
- Families develop plans that blend requests for formal services with family-delivered supports
- Family plans are rich, diverse and original
- Family members perceive they have considerable voice and decision making authority
- FGDM increases the involvement of fathers and paternal relatives
- FGDM plans create stability for children, (Merkel-Holguin, Nixon, Burford, 2003).

Involving Mothers, Fathers and Children in Case Planning

Agencies should make extensive efforts to involve mothers, fathers and children in key case planning activities, such as: (1) identifying strengths and needs, (2) requesting services and service providers, (3) establishing goals, (4) evaluating progress, and (5) attending case planning meetings.

Efforts to engage mothers and fathers, regardless of their custody or household member status, in case planning broadens permanency options for children in placement and enhances efforts to provide for children's overall safety and well-being. Involving non-custodial fathers in case planning often requires special efforts on the part of the agency to identify, locate and assess their current or potential role in the family (CASCW, 2004).

Children should be involved in case planning at a level appropriate to their age and development. Visits between children and social workers provide opportunities for involving children in case planning decisions. Children should be prepared and supported when they choose to participate in more formal settings, such as case planning or Family Group Decision Making meetings.

Family member's signatures are required in each case plan, however, a signature alone is not sufficient documentation of involvement in case planning.

Consideration of Child and Family Input

Case plans evolve from information gathered during a comprehensive family assessment accomplished in partnership with children and families. Social workers build a relationship with families and engage with them to identify expectations for change that will result in a practical plan of action to achieve safety, permanency and well-being for each child. Involving children and families in case planning leads to services, other interventions and community-based supports that are individualized and reflect the strengths, needs, goals and choices of the child and family.

Current Written Case Plans

County agencies must ensure that each child in placement and each family receiving child protection services has a current case plan with all the required content elements. Furthermore, agencies must ensure that children and families have the opportunity to participate in developing the case plan. Case plans must be reviewed and updated to reflect new assessment information and changes in family circumstances.

“The case plan document formally records the agreed-upon action plan, and ultimately serves as a contract that guides the social worker, the family and other providers in working toward their

common goals,” (Rycus, Hughes, 1998). The case plan should be clear about what services will be provided, how they will be accessed, expectations for change, the responsibilities of each family member, the social worker and other service providers.

Minnesota Requirements

Case planning requirements for children in out-of-home placement are found in Minnesota Statutes 260C.212, Subdivision 1 and Subdivision 7. For children receiving protective services and remaining at home, requirements are located in Minnesota Rules 9560.0228. Both citations are explicit regarding requirements to involve children and families in the initial development of the plan and in ongoing evaluation of progress toward meeting goals of the case plan.

Requirements for independent living plans for children age 16 or older who are in placement as a result of a permanency disposition are also found in Minnesota Statutes, section 260C.212, Subdivision 1, b (8)(i-vii).

Improving Performance

County agencies can improve performance on involving families and children in case planning by addressing key systemic issues, focusing supervision on critical areas of practice and implementing quality assurance practices, including use of data. Strategies for improving performance on involving families and children in case planning include the following:

- Define clear expectations, policies and procedures that support child and family involvement in case planning. For examples:
 - 1) Ensure that children and families are notified about case planning meetings.
 - 2) Provide children and families with clear and friendly information about the case planning process and their right to participate.

- 3) Explain the importance of family involvement at the beginning of the case and encourage child and family participation.
 - 4) Implement procedures that prepare and support child and family participation in case planning meetings.
 - 5) Reschedule or relocate meetings to accommodate child and family needs.
 - 6) Allow flexible work schedules for social workers in order to conduct meetings that accommodate child and family schedules.
 - 7) Provide supportive services, such as transportation or childcare, that assist parent participation in case planning meetings.
- Train and prepare staff on case planning practice that emphasizes the importance of family-centered practice.
 - Support and guide decisions about child and family involvement and case planning practice through supervisory oversight and consultation.
 - Conduct supervisory case reviews that target involvement of children and families in case planning.
 - Institute naming protocols to clearly identify case planning activity in SSIS chronology. For example, “case planning with child,” or “case planning with family,” could be used to identify relevant case planning activities.
 - Track the number of case planning meetings with all family members present. Target the attendance of non-custodial fathers and children.
 - Consider surveying parents, children and other participants to assess the level of their involvement in case planning.
 - Use data systems and reports to monitor performance on involving children and families in case planning.

Resources and Technical Assistance

- Administration of Children and Families, (2004). *General Findings from the Federal Child and Family Service Reviews*. Available on: <http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/cwrp/index.htm>.
- *Case Review and Consultation Guide* (Based on Minnesota Child and Family Service Reviews) available on DHS Supervisor's Web site: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp
- *Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) Practice Notes, The Fatherhood Factor in Permanency Planning*, Issue No.15 March, 2004. Available on: http://2ssw.che.umn.edu/cascw/practice_notes.htm
- Merkel-Holguin, Lisa; Nixon, Paul; Burford, Gale. *Protecting Children*, Volume 18-Numbers 1 and 2. (2003). *Learning with Families: A Synopsis of FGDM Research and Evaluation in Child Welfare*. Retrieved December 30, 2004 from: http://www.americanhumane.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pc_fgdm_research
- *Minnesota Child and Family Service Review, County Self-Assessment* document, available on: DHS Supervisor's Web site http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp
- Minnesota Child Welfare Training System: *Specialized Training for Case Planning*. Contact your MCWTS area training manager.
- Recommended Web site: National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/crcfcpp>
- Related *PIP Tips* for Items 17, 19 and 20. Available on the DHS Supervisor's Web site: http://www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/groups/county_access/documents/pub/dhs_id_000308.hcsp

- Rycus, Judith and Hughes, Ronald. CWLA Press, 1998. *Developing the Case Plan, Field Guide to Child Welfare, Volume II*.
- SSIS Resources:
 - Access to all case planning documents
 - General Reports: Service Plan Report, Work Groups without Open Service Plans, Placements without Open Out-of-Home Placement Plans.

Quality Assurance Regional Contacts

Christeen Borsheim, NW Region
christeen.borsheim@state.mn.us (320) 563-8890

John Hanna, NE Region
john.hanna@state.mn.us (651) 296-3972

Steve Johnson, Lower SE Region
steve.h.johnson@state.mn.us (651) 282-5306

Lori Munsterman, SW Region
lori.munsterman@state.mn.us (320) 634-0048

Larry Wojciak, Upper SE Region
larry.wojciak@state.mn.us (507) 359-4666