There is no Margin of Error: A Calm Approach to Child welfare

Center Hosted Webcast
Cultural Change Session
Friday May 16, 2008
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OBJECTIVES

• System challenge
  – Panic impact
  – Unintended Results

• Community Review
  – Threatened harm
  – Investigator observations
  – Passion and Bias
  – Conflict necessary
  – Longitudinal Studies

• Identify Fix
  – Remove Bias
  – Educate to options
  – Do No Harm
  – Leadership

• State Policy
  – Safe Family Preservation
  – Task Force on Child Welfare
THE PROBLEM IN CHILD WELFARE

- Mistakes happen
- Fix is total focus
  - It will be fixed, but...
  - Unintended results
- Inefficient
- Ineffective
Deaths precede spikes in removal

The deaths of Palm Beach County children who had a history with the Department of Children and Families have led to spikes in the number of children taken from their homes. Through 2004, DCF took an average of six or seven children away from their parents for every 100 reports of abuse. That rate doubled after recent child deaths.

Source: Department of Children and Families

BRENNAN KING/Staff Artist
The “deck is stacked” against the “best interest of the child”

- Question: Why does Quality Assurance support virtually every removal?
  - Discussion
  - Quality Assurance challenge
  - Solution
- Question: Why historically have investigators been asked to resign when a child is hurt that was not removed?
  - Discussion
  - Why this decision is adverse to children
  - Solution
DO NO HARM

Hippocratic Oath – Excerpt Classical Version

“… I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgment; I will keep them from harm injustice…”
PROTECTING A CHILD

A professional judgment based on all the facts and determining services which will mitigate risk, if possible.
The Math of Passion
Max Weber (1864-1920)

• Social Workers have passion

• Passion + Bias = 🙁

• Passion – Bias = 😊

• Bias can be increased or decreased
Agassi compiled a career-best 26-match winning streak, which ended when he lost in a hugely anticipated U.S. Open final to Sampras.

Andrea Agassi had just attained been #1 in world.
Foster Care panic!

Drastic change in child removal called a foster care “spike”

Conflict discouraged

Negative impact of spike on system of care

Negative impact on children resulting from spike

Community develop plan
TEAM FINDING

• Remove bias
  – Conflict has positive effect
  – Leadership needed
  – Team Approach

• Remove fear
  – Support staff
  – Understand harm of removal
  – Decision on right level in org chart

• Shelter rate
  – Spike at all levels of organization
  – Spikes harm children
• Food Stamps, Cash Assistance and Medicaid
• Poverty is the number one indicator of abuse or neglect
• Stress impact
• Partner collaboration – Look at quality of life
TOGETHER WE REMOVE BIAS
An Approach which removed bias in the 5th Circuit

Circuit 5
Children Served

Who: J. Johnson
What: HSN Report
When: 06/14/07
2007 MIT Study

15,000 children / No high risk cases

Conclusions

1. Arrested at least once
   1. Stayed with family: 14%
   2. Went to foster care: 44%
2. Became teen moms
   1. Stayed with family: 33%
   2. Went to foster care: 56%
3. Held a job 3 months
   1. Stayed with family: 33%
   2. Went to foster care: 20%
2006 Minnesota Study
“The Impact of Foster Care on Development”

- Kincare better outcomes than foster care
  - 189 children longitudinal study
  - Similar maltreatments for foster care and relative care
    (in home, out of home, and control group)
- “Children placed into unfamiliar foster care showed ‘higher levels of internalizing of problems compared with children reared by maltreating caregivers, children in familia care, and children who receive adequate care giving.”
Chapin Hall / Jim Casey:

- Chapin Hall: The 500,000 children in foster care are more likely than other kids to drop out of school, commit crimes, abuse drugs and become teen parents.

- Jim Casey: Confirms kids who can remain in their homes do better than in foster care... Some kids, for their own safety, need to be removed from their families, but in marginal cases of abuse, more should be done to keep them together.
Children in Out of Home Care Perform Poorer than their Peers in School

- Score substantially lower than other youth on the FCAT
- Twice as likely to be held back a great
- Two and Half time more likely diagnosed with a “less severe” learning disability
- Seven times more likely to be diagnosed with a “severe” disability.
- Twice as likely to have disciplinary problems
FORMER FOSTER YOUTH LIKELY TO ACHIEVE SELF SUFFICIENCY AS ADULTS

• Were employed at same rate, but earned ¼ th the median wage for their age group.
• Four times more likely to receive food stamps and nine times more likely to receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families.
• 17 times more likely to be homeless
• Three times more likely to be in prison or probation.
Foster Care Waiver returns Florida to Safe Family Preservation:

– Enables funds to be used for ... prevention, intensive in-home services to prevent placement of children outside the home, reunification and foster care....

– Funding incentives in line with the goals of providing services that help families remain intact whenever possible.
Recommendations: ... the Department and Community Based Care Lead Agencies explore the promise of the IV-E waiver implemented in October 2006 and the opportunity to use available funds to prevent removal by providing intensive and effective home services.
Other Culture Changes Needed

• Communication
  – Continuous Community information sharing is critical
  – Sharing good news with protective investigators on cases will remove bias

• Quality Assurance (oversight)
  – Judgmental to Critical thinking
  – Goal of Improvement not judgment
  – Need to recognize that CBC is impacted by cbc (lower case letters)
  – Must not shift to “best practices” instead of “best interest”

• Disciplinary Action
  – Look at career as well, not just the case
  – Are children better served with employee on team or with a new employee
  – Decision should be understood by staff and must be transparent with staff

• Tracking Front Door
  – Understand removals impact on CBC outcomes
  – Clearest way to determine if CBC will succeed or fail

• Measure success in a “child first” waiver world
  – Must plan savings to front end prevention
  – If abuse / neglect occurs community already failed
“… There is no margin of error when working with children. No one is allowed a bad day…”

-- Secretary Bob Butterworth, Statewide Dependency Summit 2007