

JOIN HANDS FOR CHILDREN
MINUTES FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SITE SELECTION AND TRANSITION
ISSUES

JANUARY 7, 2010

Members Present: Jeanine Livingston; Nancy Sutton; Mark Courtney; Tommy Williams; Mary-Jean Smith; Brenda Lopez; Joe Menko; Trudy Marcellay

Staff Present: Benjamin Berres, POC

Others: Carrie Hoon; AGO; Stephanie Lee and Marna Miller, WSIPP; Randy Bolderjack, Ryther Child Center; Dana Phelps, DSHS CA

First Agenda Item: Welcome and Introductions

Committee chair Nancy Sutton welcomed the committee.

Before getting to the agenda items, Sutton asked Carrie Hoon of the Attorney General's Office to answer a couple of technical, legal questions. The committee first asked her about the effect the governor's veto on page 20 of 2SHB 2106 and whether it gives CA the ability to release case information to private agencies about cases with unfounded allegations of abuse or neglect. Hoon said that the Governor changed the clause to say that CA is required to report this information to private agencies.

Before moving forward, the committee took a quick break to do introductions.

The committee also asked Hoon whether the AGO believed that the statute would allow for random assignment in the demonstration projects. She said that the AGO does not believe it would be possible to interpret the statute to allow for a random assignment methodology within the same geographical region. If the committee wishes to pursue a random assignment model, they must ask for legislative change.

The committee reviewed the reasons why they were advocating that demonstration sites follow a model of random assignment. A primary reason to use random assignment is that it is much more difficult to reach a definitive conclusion than comparing two geographical regions. Committee members felt that the results of the evaluation must be able to withstand scrutiny from parties arguing that the results are invalid or inconclusive. The committee recognized they couldn't make a recommendation to the legislature without the consent of the larger committee.

The committee began to think how to present the recommendation to the full committee.

Sutton summarized four primary reasons why the committee was advocating for random assignment. She said that using a random assignment model would:

1. Allow for strengthen evaluation process by controlling for powerful geographical differences;
2. Allow for future flexibility;
3. Provide transition supports for the supervising agency; and
4. Provide for an easier transition for children in the system.

The advisory committee agreed they had consensus around those reasons. Sutton then asked the committee for next steps and suggested that Jeanine Livingston, Hoon and her, with consult from Sydney Forrester and Jennifer Strus, meet and craft an email to be sent to the full committee. If the committee is able to vote in time, this recommendation could become an addendum to the quarterly report.

Second Agenda Item: Evaluation Methodology

Mark Courtney reported on a meeting that took place between all the researchers involved in this project. He discussed first the issue that arose from wanting to measure rare events, such as runaways. To measure events as rare as this, it would require a large sample size taken over a very long period of time. Some committee members were concerned that if decisions were not made based on the statistical likelihood of these rare events, that data collecting on these rare events would fall to the wayside. Courtney recommended that the advisory committee not scale the sites to measure statistically rare events. The committee also discussed the identified outcomes indicators from the outcomes advisory committee as well as sample size.

They reviewed two documents prepared by the Washington State Institute of Public Policy: a flow chart illustrating how the total number of yearly referrals breaks into smaller subsets and a table that estimates the sample size necessary for each demonstration site. The estimate for the demonstration sample size was based on achieving a 10 percent improvement for the group of children that reunify with family after spending seven days or more in out-of-home care.

There was some disagreement whether to base the sample size on a reunification indicator derived from using the number of children whose time spent in care meets or exceeds the threshold of seven days, or to use the total number of all children that enter out-of-home care. If the committee decides that it wants to use the seven-day threshold, the number of children needed to achieve a level of significance would need to be larger. The committee was curious why WSIPP was advocating for only looking at the number of children that stay in care in excess of seven days. WSIPP said that their estimate of sample size was based solely on one outcome measure they believe is fundamental in weighing the overall effectiveness of the intervention.

BRIEF BREAK

Third Agenda Item: Outcomes to be Measured in Evaluation

Marna Miller reported that she met with Courtney to center in on a sample size, but that they still disagree on which relative placement outcome indicator to use.

Courtney suggested that another way to achieve the number of cases necessary to evaluate certain outcomes is by increasing the length of the evaluation period. Miller said that the law would need to be amended to allow for an extended evaluation period.

There was also a discussion around how best to transition the implementation of Phase II. One idea was to allow an additional time period for private contractors to take on the balance of cases. An alternative is to allow a grace period before the beginning of evaluation so that contractors have time to refine their operations. Sutton asked the advisory committee if it makes sense to make a large transfer on the initial date of implementation or to transfer them more slowly.

Joe Mienko asked whether it makes sense to transfer existing CA cases to private contractors because it might create methodological flaws for the evaluation. If a change is made, Livingston reminded the advisory committee, there will need to be a change made to the statute. Courtney added that transferring foster youth from a public to private agency is not unlike current practice and can sometimes lead to positive outcomes for children. Mienko added that it would be unfair to give only new cases to a new agency because a mix of new and old cases is more balanced. Many people spoke in favor of transferring cases because it forcefully applies a new lens to a case.

The advisory committee came back to the discussion around extending the ramp-up time for private agencies to build capacity and contend with receiving a huge caseload on a single date. Many advisory committee members were cautious about transferring a large caseload to private contractors so quickly.

The committee also discussed issues that stem from ICWA mandates. Some members were concerned that private contractors might not have the training to stay compliant. Sutton said that this committee would take a look at those issues, but that there is no doubt that private contractors would be mandated to follow ICWA mandates.

Before the committee took a break, they talked about the option of extending the evaluation period to three years. By doing this, they could drastically reduce the number of children required to participate in the study.

BRIEF BREAK

Fourth Agenda Item: Caseload to Achieve Statistical Significance

When the committee reconvened, they began to discuss hypothetical geographical regions for the demonstration sites. The advisory committee concluded that each pilot site would require 2,088 removals, which is approximately 28 percent of all yearly removals. That number of children would be divided so half would be placed into a treatment group and half would stay in the control group. The committee brought out maps and began to look how the regions might look like. The committee members made sure that all possible scenarios have both rural and urban areas within each demonstration site. Some members of the advisory committee were concerned that not too many tribes be taken up by the demonstration project. Many members expressed their frustration at the complexities in breaking up regions. They also acknowledged that it would be unfair to use Snohomish, King and Pierce Counties as a demonstration site. In the end, they were unable to fully plot out hypothetical regions for each of the 1-, 2- or 3-year evaluation period scenarios. A smaller group of advisory committee members planned to meet with the Research and Data Analysis Division in DSHS to use their technology to plot out different scenarios to present to the committee at the next meeting.

At the end of the meeting, Sutton summarized the committee's immediate tasks. She said that she would craft an email poll for distribution to the larger CWTDC. The email would focus on the legislative language that talks about a geographic site. The first recommendation of the Site Selection and Transition Issues Advisory Committee would have two components: 1) To adopt a model of random assignment that creates treatment and control conditions within each of the two pilot projects; and 2) that CA be allowed to continue case management services within those pilot sites as the control condition. Some of the reasons to adopt a random assignment model includes, but are not limited to:

1. To allow for a strengthened evaluation;
2. To preserve CA infrastructure;
3. To provide support to new agency; and
4. To provide safety to children.

The second recommendation would ask that the full CWTDC consider or endorse an extension so that the 2106 timeline will incorporate a three-year evaluation period. The primary reasons for this extension include, but are not limited to:

1. To provide a sample size sufficient enough to meet the statistical validity threshold;
2. To have a site on the east and west sides;
3. To detect relevant outcomes; and
4. To have a sufficient ramp-up period.

Fifth Agenda Item: Public Comment

The committee opened the floor up to public comment. There were no comments.

MEETING ADJOURNED