

JOIN HANDS FOR CHILDREN
MINUTES FROM ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION ISSUES
MARCH 2, 2010

Committee Members Present: Ken Nichols, Maureen McGrath, Onalee Stewart, Gwendolyn Lawson Townsend, Mark Courtney, Debra Ellsworth, Steve Hassett (by phone), Roy Hogan, Mary Meinig, Jeanine Livingston, Jeanne McShane (replacement for Darcey Hancock), Gwen Gua (IPAC alternate).

Staff Present: Julie Dunnington, Melissa Takade and Benjamin Berres, POC

Others: Marna Miller and Stephanie Lee, Washington State Institute of Public Policy; Trudy Soucoup, Community Youth Services; Danny Howe and Makeba Green, Children's Home Society of Washington.

Co-chair Ken Nichols called the Outcomes and Evaluation Issues meeting to order and conducted introductions. Committee moved to the first agenda item.

First Agenda Item: Election of New Advisory Committee Co-Chair

Nichols explained that because of time constraints, co-chair Marian Harris has resigned from the committee and that a new co-chair needed to be elected. The Washington State Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee had named Ron Murphy as a temporary replacement. Murphy was unable to attend today's meeting.

Maureen McGrath suggested that the committee should wait until next month when a permanent replacement would hopefully be named, then that person could be part of the process of voting in a new co-chair. Nichols asked for a motion on this; Mary Meinig moved that the committee wait, and McGrath seconded the motion. Nichols asked for a vote; the motion was approved.

Second agenda item: Review of Marian Harris' Disproportionality Document

Nichols asked for comments on the document starting with the Program and Policy outcomes. Steve Hassett said that the outcome on "increasing use of culturally specific in-home services for children of color" provides challenges on two fronts: (1) we need a clear definition of "culturally specific", which might be difficult to do, and (2) the door will be opened to investigations on the basis that services are being provided that aren't racially neutral. He cited the OASIS office incident where the Feds mandated that the office change from providing services to African-American families to one where it provided services in a racially neutral fashion, by zip code.

Gwendolyn Townsend asked if the OASIS problem was for in-home services or placement. Hassett said both; they were looking at MEPA violations (placement), but also looking at violations of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964. Nichols asked Hassett if the committee should not measure this outcome. Hassett said if it's looked at it for data purposes it's not a problem, but to say you're going to increase the use of culturally specific in-home services could cause the problem.

Roy Hogan asked what this all means to a social worker. What is he supposed to be doing as a social worker to be cognizant of culturally specific services?

Hassett gave an example: If Hogan has two African-American clients and the need is drug/alcohol treatment, he might determine one might do well in a service targeted for African-Americans, while another might fit better in another program that isn't targeted. He would be making that decision on an individual basis to best fit the client, and he has an array of services to choose from. If he had determined that both clients should be in a program that is targeted simply because of culture, that decision would be based on race, which would cause the problem. You need to assess individual needs – race or culture may be factors, but they may not.

Nichols pointed out that the advisory committees are tasked with reducing racial disproportionality, which is a huge issue to tackle. In order to do that, we need to have measurements.

McGrath doesn't think the case-management entity in Phase I or II can be held to this outcome, because to develop a service array this broad is an arduous task. For example, an immigrant family from Africa has a very different culture from an African-American family. Hassett agreed, but said there is a legal mandate to reduce racial disproportionality. The challenge is not creating a system that provides services based on race.

Nichols suggested blending the statements into more generic terms. He asked if POC can come up measures that are generic. Hassett asked if the Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee is measuring outcomes as part of their work and suggested the committee could use their (or other agencies) outcomes for contracts.

Jeanine Livingston said that 2106 requires the committee to come up with a process to reduce racial disproportionality and that it can't be put off to another entity. Julie Dunnington recognized Hassett's point, and said perhaps we can reach out to other agencies for outcomes that can be incorporated into the committee's so there is consistency. Dunnington will follow up.

Jeanne McShane asked if the committee should be this specific in telling a contractor what their policies are supposed to look like. She suggested looking at practice level outcomes and not the program and policy level outcomes.

Nichols suggested asking the contracting department to see what outcomes they've come up with. He asked for comments on practice level outcomes.

Hassett thought the language as it stands now seems ambiguous (for example, the second bullet). Nichols suggested that Mark Courtney and Hassett wordsmith the bullets so it can become measures. Hassett suggested not wordsmithing the document now – it's the contracting that needs the wordsmithing. The committee should just use the document as a guideline. Nichols agreed that this is one of many documents to use when the committee comes up with a final document.

Miller addressed WSIPP outcomes and said they are looking at CA several programs to see if the programs have altered things such as disproportionality rates of removal, if minority children are moving to permanency faster, etc.

Dunnington will talk with the Racial Disproportionality Advisory Committee to see what outcomes they are looking at and will bring them to the next meeting.

Third Agenda Item: Begin Defining Key Outcomes to be used in Phase II WSIPP Evaluation

Nichols asked for comments on the Draft Outcome Domains and Potential Measures document. A conversation ensued around the reporting time periods (3, 6, 12, 24 months). The majority wanted reporting for all time periods listed. Hassett pointed out that it really depended on the life of the contract. Most contracts are for only 12 months and the budget process is a biennial process. For purposes of evaluation, a longer time period makes sense, but for contracts it'll be more difficult.

Livingston brought up that the demonstration sites are running for two years (probably closer to three years), and we don't want to go through another bidding process while the test is running. If you already have the master contracting agencies in place at the demonstration sites, their contracts are going to overlap that period of time.

Hassett says that the solution is beyond their scope. The committee can identify the problem but the fix is with the legislature.

There was a conversation about performance-based contracts and how contractors are to be paid. Hassett thinks we need to talk with the contractors on PBC and see what they have to say.

Nichols refocused the meeting and said the committee's mandate is to focus on outcomes measures, not how contractors are going to be paid.

Nichols asked Hassett if he saw any issues extending the reporting time frame out to 36 months. Hassett didn't see a problem putting it into our document, but it will be difficult to translate it into contracts.

Stephanie Lee of WSIPP pointed out that the document contains a mix of outcomes – some that are pertinent to contractors, but some that are only pertinent to the evaluation. The conversation turned to "founded" and "unfounded" reports. Miller said in her experience, founded and unfounded were not particularly helpful statistics.

McGrath asked to wait until Courtney arrived so he could walk the committee through the rest of the document.

BREAK

Nichols updated Courtney on the conversation re: reporting time frames. Courtney said that on the safety side, most repeat maltreatment happens pretty quickly and the occurrence after 2 years is pretty small. He thinks most variations are going to happen in 6-12 months.

Livingston asked if we want to introduce the variable of adding contractors during the demonstration time. Is it a problem to have a 3-year contract? Dunnington said as long as there's an out, there should be no problem. Courtney concurred, saying you don't want to wait three years to address a problem that occurs sooner. Courtney doesn't see anything wrong with having a longer term outcome. The reality is, we won't have enough cases transferred over in time to evaluate at three years.

Courtney went over the question over founded vs. unfounded reports. He concurred that there's almost no difference between the two in repeat contact with the child welfare system. For the committee's purposes, there might be some value in keeping the terms in order to learn about the system.

Hassett said his problem is how to translate these outcomes into contract language that ties into compensation for contractors' performance. Courtney said he doesn't think every single outcome has to be in a contract. His understanding is that when contracts come into play is when there is a referral for in-home services or out-of-home care, not a case where the department investigated and had an unfounded case. The system needs to monitor unfounded cases that are closed with no services and see if any came back.

Hassett still thinks we need to at some point we need to address outcomes for contracts. Courtney agreed that outcomes which are appropriate for contracts should be distinguished, but reminded the committee that their purpose right now is to not to think about contract language. It's to establish outcomes to hold the system accountable.

Courtney walked the committee through the rest of the document. Changes were suggested and will be incorporated by POC.

Courtney shared what the Site Selection and Transition Issues Advisory Committee is thinking regarding outcomes that are relevant to performance contracts or supervising agencies. For the evaluation data available, there will be a finite set of outcomes for which a demonstration project can be designed on a big enough scale to say there's statistical significance difference between CA and supervising agencies. The committee is not finished with the process; the direction is leaning toward a safety outcome for in-home service cases, a permanency outcome for new out-of-home cases (reunification), and probably a permanency outcome (broader than reunification) for transferred out-of-home cases. The committee should have more data for the next meeting.

McGrath asked what kind of numbers are being looking at for the demonstration site. Miller said to think in terms of percentages, so approximately 30% of caseload in sites where there's random assignment.

Courtney reminded the committee that one key outcome in each domain needs to be looked at to get good statistical data. Some of the other outcomes will be kept track of but the differences will be pretty substantial. For example, re-entry is a subset of kids who go home. It takes multiple years of data to see statistical difference.

Public Comment

Nichols opened up the floor to public comment. Soucoup asked if the test sites are going to be incentivized in the same way the potential master contractors are in Phase II. How will the test sites be funded? Or, is it strictly research to find out what works and what doesn't? The consensus is that issue still needs to be decided.

MEETING ADJOURNED