

Collaborative Outcomes Conference Summary Report

As outcomes become increasingly important to funders, government agencies, consumers, and accrediting bodies, it is vital that leaders in child welfare services communicate and collaborate in their efforts to collect outcomes and evaluate services. The Collaborative Outcomes Conference, hosted by the IARCCA Institute for Excellence and funded by a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc., was held on Sunday, November 7th through Tuesday, November 9th 2010. The Collaborative Outcomes Conference was inspired by the National Conference on Residential Center Treatment Outcomes, held in 2004 by Bonnie Brae with funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Collaborative Outcomes Conference sought to continue and expand upon Bonnie Brae's vision by bringing together nationally known experts in child welfare outcomes with the goal to increase awareness and understanding of outcomes evaluation importance, methods, and utilization.

Conference Proceedings

During the course of the conference, there were a total of 55 participants, including the presenters, invited guests, and IARCCA representatives. Participants represented 18 states, including California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington, and Wisconsin, as well as Washington, D.C. and Ontario, Canada. Please see Attachment A for the final Participant List.

The Opening Reception on Sunday provided guests with an opportunity to network with fellow attendees. We were also honored to be joined by Willis K. Bright, Jr., Director of Youth Programs at Lilly Endowment, Inc. The generous support provided by Lilly Endowment, Inc. over the past several years has greatly enhanced IARCCA's efforts to evaluate outcomes in child services.

The conference presentations were formatted in 15-minute intervals to allow all 24 presenters an opportunity to highlight their work in child and family service outcomes. Time was also allotted for question and answer sessions so that guests could further explore topics presented. Conference participants continued to network during the lunches and Monday evening reception. Additionally, each participant was given a binder with the full participant list and all available presentation materials; this material was also provided on a USB drive.

The Closing Luncheon provided attendees a final chance to connect with each other and raise questions. Cathleen Graham, Executive Director of IARCCA, also presented a summary of the themes and trends that emerged during the conference. Please see Attachment B for the final Conference Agenda.

Conference Evaluations

Following the conference, attendees were asked to complete a conference evaluation. Of the 32 respondents, 97% rated the opportunities to network with fellow conference guests as good or excellent and 88% rated the conference format as good or excellent. Comments regarding the conference format indicated that most attendees found that the short presentations allowed for a great deal of information to be shared, and that the built-in networking events allowed for follow-up. Additionally, 100% of respondents rated the overall conference experience, as well as the expertise and knowledge of the conference presenters, as good or excellent. Most of the respondents indicated that the conference increased their awareness and understanding of: various efforts to collect and evaluate child services outcomes; the importance of outcomes evaluation in child services; the various methods used to monitor child services outcomes; and, the ways in which child services outcomes are utilized.

Respondents were asked to identify the most beneficial aspect of the conference; the two most frequently identified aspects were the opportunities for networking, and the quality and variety of the presentations. Also mentioned as beneficial were the increased knowledge of outcomes in child services, the conference format, and the provision of handouts. Respondents also provided the following suggestions for improvement: increased presentation time, grouping of presenters into themes, thirty minute panel presentations, and increased time for discussion. All of the survey respondents indicated that they would be interested in attending this type of conference again in the future.

Themes and Trends

The following themes and trends were identified during the Collaborative Outcomes Conference and presented at the Closing Luncheon:

- The importance of a shared vision of goals for each child and for the system as a whole;
- The importance of collaboration and the need for additional collaboration, particularly public-private collaboration;

- Delivering the right services at the right time for the right length of time in the right location for each child;
- How the federal outcomes of safety, permanency and child well-being can be further refined in the third round of CFSRs;
- The importance of being proactive in collecting outcomes, establishing a national data-set with input up-front rather than having this legislated or forced;
- Collecting outcomes and using the information is hard work and takes financial and staff resources;
- Collection and use of outcomes builds capacity and has broad application to the work within the agency as it contributes to the agency's knowledge base, as well as application to public policy development and to system change;
- Are numbers going down in certain indicators because of real change, or is a service being denied? For example, are disproportionate numbers of children of color in foster care going down because the children do not need this service, or are the children being denied a service that they need in order to "make the numbers come out right?" There is a need to determine that cases are being closed for the right reasons for children's sake.
- What would a good measurement look like for placement stability in the CFSR? The federal government is looking for input and listening to our ideas;
- Outcomes data collection may represent trial and error over a number of years; it is important to keep at the work to have a system that is successful in collecting and utilizing the data;
- Use of outcomes measurements are for quality improvement and learning, not for punitive purposes – can still be accountable without being punitive;
- It is important to take a leadership role in defining residential treatment as a necessary service for some children;
- It is important to have a coalition of the "willing and able" in developing outcome measures, try to be real and to be respectful of where people are in the process;
- Appropriate services achieve more positive outcomes;
- Math is the language of the funders, policy makers, and legislators. We need not only to have the anecdotes and stories of children and families who are being served; we need the numbers that show the outcomes of services that are being delivered.

Efforts Being Made in Child & Family Service Outcomes

Research into outcomes of child & family service outcomes is ongoing. The IARCCA Outcome Measures Project dataset has been used in many past and current research efforts. This

research has resulted in multiple conference presentations, doctoral dissertations, publications in peer reviewed journals, and publications in book chapters. Currently, Paul Sunseri, Psy.D., of Psychological Assessment Systems, Inc., is utilizing the IARCCA dataset to further his research on the relationship between family functioning and residential treatment outcomes.

The Foster Family Treatment Association's project Benchmark TFC measured outcomes for children in Therapeutic Foster Care, with goals of increased quality and application of benchmark data to impact public policy. Although Benchmark TFC is no longer an active project, their dataset on therapeutic foster care is valuable and should be utilized.

The Council on Accreditation has hosted two webinars on Benchmarking, allowing their member agencies to learn about current benchmarking projects, the importance of benchmarking, and practical considerations when choosing to join or implement a benchmarking effort. Panelists on these webinars included Jeff Bormaster of the Child Welfare League of America, Paul Lefkowitz of the Alliance for Children and Families, and John Link and Cathy Graham of IARCCA.

The Building Bridges Initiative (BBI), a national endeavor to promote practice and policy that creates strong partnerships between families, youth, community-based and residentially-based providers, advocates, and policy makers, is developing a tip sheet regarding the tracking of outcomes for youth. Four of the participating organizations in the Collaborative Outcomes Conference are represented on the BBI Outcomes Work Group.

Additionally, in planning for the third round of Child and Family Service Reviews, the Children's Bureau; Administration for Children, Youth and Families; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, is evaluating the measures that it collects to assess each state's performance regarding the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children and families that are served in the state's child welfare system.

Future Directions

The Themes and Trends developed during conference discussion (see above) suggest the path for future collaborative work. Shrinking budgets have necessitated hard choices for service providers, and it may be tempting to reduce or eliminate outcome measurement and evaluation unless value can be demonstrated. Education and training on outcome measures and use is critical in this effort. Collaboration between IARCCA and the Child Welfare League of

America (CWLA) for a future conference was suggested; an Outcomes SuperSession has been scheduled for the 2012 CWLA conference.

The IARCCA Outcome Measures Project dataset has been frequently used in research efforts. Further research is welcomed and encouraged to expand the knowledge base in child welfare outcomes. Development of specific guidelines for utilization was suggested during the conference; this has been accomplished.

The greatest challenge to the broad spectrum of stakeholders is working together to improve outcomes measures and use. Stakeholders, including state agencies, providers and other organizations may be tempted to begin anew and develop unique systems. Unfortunately, this limits true benchmarking and expends both time and finances that are not available in this environment. The shared vision for each child and family, and the system as a whole, must translate into compromises that enable broad adoption of measures. It is the fervent hope of conference sponsors and attendees that discussions in this area continue and result in a more cohesive method for evaluating services delivered to children and families.

Closing

The IARCCA Institute for Excellence would like to thank everyone who attended and supported the Collaborative Outcomes Conference. The reaction of attendees of the Collaborative Outcomes Conference was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging of similar events in the future. As funding for child and family services continues to be limited it will be increasingly important for providers, foundations, and public agencies to collaborate on efforts to collect and evaluate outcomes. IARCCA looks forward to future partnerships with other organizations to hold similar conferences.

To request information about the Collaborative Outcomes Conference, ongoing collaborative efforts, or the IARCCA Outcome Measures Project, please email IARCCA@IARCCA.org or visit www.IARCCA.org or www.EvaluateOutcomesNow.org