Team Evaluation of the Mentor Parent Program:

Survey of FWC Professionals and Clients to Determine What’s Working and Areas for Improvement

May 3, 2012
Introduction

• This project is a partnership between SJSU and the Dependency Advocacy Center

  – DAC is a non-profit agency that provides free legal services to parents involved with the child welfare system in Santa Clara County to promote safe and timely reunification and preservation of families

  – Mentor Parents are employed by DAC to:
    • offer support and role-modeling to parents
    • reduce barriers to reunification
    • offer a message of hope and recovery
    • help parents navigate the complex child welfare system.
Introduction

• Collaboration between SJSU and DAC:
  – SJSU student and faculty were responsible for designing the Client survey instrument, based on a review of the literature, focus group findings, and modification of an existing instrument
  – DAC was responsible for identifying participants and survey administration
  – DAC staff also translated the survey one-on-one for monolingual Spanish speaking clients who were willing to participate
  – SJSU responsible for analyzing survey data and reporting results back to DAC in a “useful” manner
  – Ideally, results can guide program maintenance and improvements
Project Rationale

• A previous evaluation of Family Wellness Court (FWC) identified the MPP as a key program that contributed to parent success

• However, why the MPP could not be determined

• Therefore, the goals of this project are to identify:
  – from the perspective of clients: what are the most effective/valuable elements of the MPP? What could be improved?

  – from the perspective of collaborating FWC professionals: how do mentor parents contribute to positive outcomes for clients and inform systems change?

• Results of this Evaluation will be incorporated in grant applications to support the program’s growth in the future
Improving Response to Family Violence

• Families involved with DAC have experienced intimate partner violence and/or child abuse or neglect.

• Mentor Parents and the FWC team work with families to address child maltreatment and promote safe parenting.

• Mentor Parents help bridge communication between clients, social workers, attorneys/ court system, and other service providers

• Mentor Parents help parents quickly engage in court-ordered services.
  – This includes linking clients to services that address domestic violence and family violence.
Increasing Collaboration

• Mentor parents are key agents of systems change through their involvement in various collaborative committees.

• Mentor parents also provide trainings and speak at conferences to voice parents’ experiences and highlight opportunities for systems’ improvement (e.g. provide more intensive services to dads).

• Mentor parents are an important link between clients and other systems.

• The goal of this project is to illuminate what elements of the MPP are most valuable and to provide concrete data to justify program expansion in the near future.
Method/Process

• Steps:
  – ONE: Environmental scan/ literature review on similar programs with a parent mentor component
    • Overall consensus that mentor parents are valuable. Key reasons are shared experience/ “unique relationship, social support, ability to motivate and encourage, build trust, offer practical support
  
  – TWO: Focus group with the Mentor Parents
    • Got stakeholder/ “insider” perspective about why the program works and their ideas about what’s most effective and what could be improved
  
  – THREE: Collaborate with SJSU faculty to develop a client satisfaction survey
    • Used previously designed peer mentor client satisfaction survey as the building block for this project.
Method/Process

• Steps:
  – FOUR: SJSU team revised several drafts of current survey and submitted a draft to DAC for suggestions for improvement/approval before it was administered to clients.
  
  – FIVE: DAC intern and staff administered both the client survey and the (previously created) professionals survey to clients and FWC partners (during committee meetings).
    • Mentor Parents played a key role in recruitment.
  
  – SIX: DAC intern returned completed surveys and consent forms to lead researcher at SJSU. This intern was the primary data analyst.
  
  – SEVEN: Interpret the results and report findings to DAC and other interested parties to inform this program’s development and inspire other counties to implement this model.
Collaboration in Action

- Collaboration between SJSU, DAC and FWC partners was essential to reach participants and be able to gather data

- All stakeholders were engaged and committed to the project

- Collaboration was a positive experience, however, there are opportunities to increase collaboration moving forward
  - E.g. Student researcher should have more background knowledge/involvement with the partner agencies to better understand FWC processes, culture, and language
  - Survey example: Instead of “practical help,” using “gets me things that I need” resonates with clients
Findings/ Results

- Data is overwhelmingly positive.
- Mentor parents, FWC partners and clients are generally in agreement about what’s most valuable about the MPP.
- Specifically, the professionals survey (N = 18) found the following aspects to be most helpful:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mentor Parents:</th>
<th>Mean (SD)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide clients with personal support</td>
<td>4.83 (.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain parents trust in ways that other professionals cannot, due to their shared experience</td>
<td>4.82 (.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help parents navigate through the dependency system, including helping parents understand expectations and roles of different systems and professionals</td>
<td>4.72 (.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage and motivate parents to make positive life changes</td>
<td>4.65 (.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help parents engage quickly in recovery services</td>
<td>4.61 (.50)</td>
</tr>
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Findings/ Results

• Open-Ended Responses: What are the most important ways that mentor parents help clients?

  – “They provide an opportunity to break down barriers or hesitation, through shared experience and understanding while maintaining a professional and support-based role.”
  – “Early connection: understanding the parent experience as none of the other professionals can really facilitates early engagement.”
  – “Encouraging them. Troubleshooting.”
  – “Bridge communication with systems and enhance client understanding of systems and processes needed for recovery and reunification.”
  – “Provides client with resources and linking them to needed services.”
  – “They serve as a non-threatening role model and advocate.”
  – “They give clients honest feedback about the client’s progress.”
Findings/ Results

• Open-Ended Responses: Mentor Parent role in Collaborative Practice/ Planning between systems

  – “Creating a dual role of understanding between parents and professionals- ‘wearing both hats.’”
  – “Brings parents’ perspective to the table.”
  – “Provide feedback and identify potential challenges”
  – “Provide insight and feedback and increase communication. **Mentors educate all of us.**”
  – “Help create ways to reach out more effectively to clients.”
  – “Inform systems of what it is like to go through the system: first-hand account.”
  – “Mentors give good insight into what works best for most clients most often. **This insight is valuable to help inform practices and service delivery.**”
Conclusions/ Recommendations

• Partnered research model between SJSU and community agencies has several strengths and opportunities for growth/ increasing collaboration on future projects

• FWC partners survey data show that Mentor Parents have been a key link to increasing communication between systems and this has yielded positive impacts on service delivery

• “Pilot testing” on client survey yielded a few questions that would likely need to be re-worded or dropped (e.g. “practical help” and “shared experience” questions)

• Fatigue could also be a factor- survey is lengthy and requires high literacy level to complete
  – A short version with “essential questions” would be a logical next step
  – Spanish version would also be helpful
Conclusions/ Recommendations

• Future student researcher could revise the survey and administer it to a larger group of clients
  – Larger sample size could yield more meaningful results

• Results from the professionals survey show that Mentor Parents are key systems educators and influence positive changes to service delivery (e.g. extending FWC/ Mentor Parent services to fathers)
  – Clients have also stated that one area for improvement would be for Mentor Parents do more trainings for clients AND professionals
  – Mentor Parents empower clients to advocate for themselves