



## **SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IN CHILD WELFARE:**

### **WHAT WORKS FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

**Congressional Briefing – June 6, 2013**

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Meeting the substance abuse and mental health treatment needs of families involved in the child welfare system requires collaboration between child welfare agencies, substance abuse and mental health treatment, family courts and other family-serving organizations. Following are Children and Family Futures' recommendations for policy and practice changes derived from our work in more than 200 sites and organized by a framework of ten areas of system linkages.

##### **1. Establish Joint Mission and Collaborative Principles**

- Agencies that serve children and families can discuss their expectations and goals for families entering the system due to parental substance abuse, specifically identifying roles and responsibilities across agencies for meeting the substance use, mental health and co-occurring disorder prevention, intervention and treatment needs of the families

##### **2. Provide Effective Services to Children of Parents with Substance Use Disorders**

- Recognize that the majority of young children entering child welfare services have a parent with a substance use disorder, many of whom were prenatally-exposed to alcohol and other drugs, and they require specialized interventions to meet their social, emotional and developmental needs
- All children involved in child welfare services are in need of trauma, developmental and mental health services, as well as substance abuse prevention supports
- Parental substance abuse, trauma and co-occurring disorders must be addressed with prevention and early intervention services to prevent entrance into out-of-home care and to more quickly reunify children with families
- Services should be geared toward the family's individual strengths and challenges and address the full range of potential physiological, developmental, social-emotional and behavioral effects of their exposure to substance use disorders and child abuse or neglect

##### **3. Conduct Appropriate and Timely Screening and Assessment for Substance Use and Mental Disorders**

- Establish roles and responsibilities across child welfare, substance abuse treatment provider agencies and family court systems for screening to identify substance use and mental disorders among parents and youth and the effects on children
- Assess the nature and extent of the identified substance use or mental health issue and the appropriate prevention services and treatment interventions needed
- Recognize that the majority of parents involved with child welfare are themselves also survivors of adverse childhood experiences and require trauma-informed screening procedures

##### **4. Engage and Retain Youth and Family Members in Effective Treatment and Child Welfare Services**

- Ensure the results of screening and assessment protocols lead to immediate access to the indicated substance abuse and mental health prevention, intervention and treatment programs
- Enhance retention in services by implementing trauma-informed, gender-specific, and evidence-based practices

- Focus on engagement in substance abuse treatment for parents to intervene in the intergenerational transmission of substance abuse and trauma from the parent to the child and increase the likelihood that the parent who has multiple risk factors will participate in other services

#### 5. Working with the Community and Supporting Families

- Provide family-centered treatment options for parents and children to ensure the entire family's needs and strengths are being addressed
- Connect families with community-based resources to address substance use and mental disorders including strategies specific to relapse prevention including: recovery management and recovery community services such as self-help, recreational activities, and drop-in support centers, mutual aid and peer supports, and faith-based organizations support

#### 6. Working with Related Agencies

- Collaborate with partners that offer recovery supports such as education and employment services to promote long-term outcomes and self-sufficiency for families
- Ensure that housing and domestic violence agencies are key partners in this community's work with these families

#### 7. Efficient Communication and Information Systems

- Document the existence of substance use, mental and co-occurring disorders in the families in existing data systems to better monitor the extent to which service gaps exist and what kinds of services are needed
- Develop protocols to share information such as screening and assessment results, case plans and treatment plans between substance abuse, child welfare, mental health, courts, educational systems and other partner agencies

#### 8. Budgeting and Program Sustainability

- Leverage state and federal funding and provide flexible funds to design integrative and collaborative programs that support these families to connect them to effective treatment
- Assess successful strategies to be infused within existing service systems such as co-location of staff, efficient drug testing and monitoring programs and improved cross-agency communication protocols

#### 9. Training and Staff Development

- Require training on how to screen, when to refer and how to support family members with substance use and mental health disorders in the child welfare system
- Ensure substance abuse and mental health treatment providers provide family-centered programming

#### 10. Joint Accountability and Shared Outcomes

- Partners agree on shared outcomes for children and families affected by substance use disorders and routinely monitor families' and agencies' progress

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