

# PEER LEARNING COURT PROGRAM 2018

## TOMPKINS COUNTY FAMILY TREATMENT COURT

### LEAD AGENCY

**Tompkins County Family Treatment Court**

### LOCATION

**Ithaca, New York**

### JURISDICTION SERVED

**101,564 (Rural)**

### FIRST DATE OF OPERATION

**2001**

### CAPACITY

**60 families**

### MODEL

**Integrated**

### AVERAGE DURATION OF PROGRAM

**14 months**

### POPULATION SERVED

**66% female**

**34% male**

### RACE/ETHNICITY (ADULTS)

**Caucasian: 93%**

**African American: 5%**

**Hispanic/Latino/a: 2%**

### PROGRAM OVERVIEW AND BACKGROUND

The mission of the Tompkins County Family Treatment Court (FTC) is to provide for the health, safety and permanency of children of parents with substance use disorders (SUDs) that are involved in neglect proceedings. Tompkins FTC works to accomplish this mission through intensive judicial oversight, provision of comprehensive services, and close collaboration between FTC Team members. The Team provides rapid assessment and referral to services for both children and parents and provides ongoing monitoring of the family. In doing so, the FTC ensures that parents and children receive the help and support they need and that a holistic and strength-based approach to success is maintained.

Tompkins FTC began in 2001 under the supervision of Family Court Judge John Rowley. Since its inception, Tompkins FTC has utilized a collaborative team approach, which consists of staff from child welfare, SUD treatment agencies, parent respondents' attorneys, attorneys for children and domestic violence services. Additional community partners include mental health, child development, and parent education services.

Throughout the past sixteen years of operation, Tompkins County FTC has implemented a number of program enhancements and revisions. Overall, the program was relatively static with slow, steady growth until about five years ago. Since then, significant increases in the numbers of families served and a heightened focus on services to address the needs of children have spurred many changes. A dramatic influx of cases over the last five years, primarily fueled by the opioid epidemic, pushed the FTC team to make structural and programmatic changes. For example, the team doubled its case review and court time by adding an additional half-day court session and added new structure to case conferences by standardizing the order in which team members provided updates. Among other things, this adaptation ensured that the needs of children were highlighted and discussed for every case.

In 2014, Tompkins FTC received the Prevention and Family Recovery (PFR) grant through the Doris Duke Foundation and the Duke Endowment. Through the PFR grant, Tompkins FTC implemented several new activities and services. A Department

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of Social Services (DSS) Liaison was added to the FTC team and serves as the primary contact for communication and collaboration with parenting and child development agencies. In collaboration with parent and child serving agencies, the DSS Liaison has developed procedures and protocols for referral, linkage, follow-up and communication with the court.

Tompkins County FTC has also enhanced existing home visitation services and parenting education with the implementation of two evidence-based practices, the Strengthening Families Program (SFP) and SafeCare. SFP was implemented for FTC families to support improvements in overall family functioning for families with children ages 6 to 11. SafeCare, a home visitation coaching model for families with children ages 5 and under was fully integrated into the overall continuum of care.

In the fall of 2017, Tompkins FTC was awarded a five-year Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) grant to further enhance services for families. Through the SAMHSA grant, additional services that will be implemented include: Peer Recovery Support Specialists (PRSS), Child-Parent Psychotherapy (CPP), and Family-Centered Substance Use Treatment. The grant will also allow for the increased availability of substance abuse and mental health staff who will complete early assessments and pre-treatment sessions and will facilitate quicker linkages to treatment services.

## PROGRAM GOALS

The primary goals of Tompkins FTC are to:

- 1) Keep more parents engaged in the program to completion
- 2) Reduce the number of cases with outcomes other than return home to parent
- 3) Increase the rate and speed of return home of children to their parents

## TARGET POPULATION

All child welfare cases that have a neglect petition filed in which substance abuse is alleged are referred to Tompkins FTC.

## PLC DESCRIPTION



***Center for Children and Family Futures has identified best-practice models from across the nation and designated them as mentor sites called Peer Learning Courts. These exemplary programs are willing to help further education about Family Drug Courts through peer-to-peer technical assistance.***

***Peer Learning Courts provide:***

- *Consultation*
- *Site Visits*
- *Sharing of Program Policies & Procedures*
- *Peer-to-Peer Virtual Learning Opportunities*
- *Developing Technical Assistance Action Plans*
- *Operational Tune-Ups*

There are no prescribed exclusionary criteria. Hence, Tompkins FTC works with parents that also have mental health disorders and/or domestic violence histories.

## **PROGRAM SERVICES**

Because of Tompkins FTC's longstanding partnership with Tompkins DSS, child welfare caseworkers are well-trained in identifying indicators of substance abuse. When there are unverified concerns, parents are referred for an SUD evaluation.

With the new SAMHSA grant project, Tompkins FTC has developed capacity and procedures to ensure that all parents receive SUD and mental health evaluations within 30 days. SUD treatment providers now have staff co-located at the FTC office during designated times devoted to providing evaluations for new parents and there are set clinic hours devoted to providing mental health evaluations for new parents. SUD treatment liaisons are also present during FTC court sessions to meet with new parents and to setup evaluation appointments. In addition, Tompkins DSS has utilized a SUD specialist to accompany caseworkers on home visits to talk with parents and to support their re-engagement.

Tompkins plans to hire two PRSS. One of the primary responsibilities of these positions will be outreach and engagement of new FTC parents. The PRSS will also provide ongoing aftercare support to parents who have graduated from the program.

In January 2017, Tompkins FTC switched from a phase system to a milestone-based system. Milestones focus on the completion of specified tasks related to substance abuse and mental health treatment, engagement parenting and other services. Completion of these tasks demonstrate their readiness to move towards unsupervised parenting time, return home of their child and graduation.

Tompkins FTC's two SUD treatment partners have worked to include treatment services and interventions that address the complex and unique needs of FTC clients. Specifically, during the past three years treatment staff have attended several trainings on providing trauma-informed services and gender-specific services and incorporated these into practice. More recently, one of the providers has added parenting education as part of their treatment groups and the residential director is working with child welfare staff to improve frequency and quality of

## **OPERATIONS: HIGHLIGHTS**

### **Substance Use Treatment**

- Residential/Inpatient Treatment
- Intensive Outpatient Treatment; Outpatient Treatment
- Aftercare/Continuing Care
- Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) for Opiate Addiction
- Psychiatric Care Including Medication Management
- Trauma-Specific Services (Seeking Safety, Knowledge is Power, and Women's Empowerment Group)

### **Parenting & Family Strengthening**

- Strengthening Families Program
- Family Support Services
- Early Head Start
- Facilitated Visitation "Parenting Time"
- Parenting Skills Workshop

### **Developmental & Therapeutic Services for Children**

- Early Intervention
- SafeCare

## **KEY PARTNERS AND AGENCIES**

### **Child Welfare, Substance Use Treatment & Mental Health**

- Tompkins Department of Social Services
- Cayuga Addiction Recovery Services (CARS)

parenting time available for FTC participants in that program. Under the SAMHSA grant, both agencies will receive training in family-centered SUD treatment and provide treatment to FTC families as a whole.

Tompkins DSS maintains an open case for FTC parents for three months after graduation. This enables parents to continue to receive support services as well as have regular check-ins with caseworkers and the FTC Coordinator. The addition of PRSS will enable additional post-program supports including recovery check-ins, linkages to other services, and the addition of alumni activities.

## KEY OUTCOMES

The following outcomes were identified in the final summary report from the PFR grant initiative, which lasted from 2014 – 2017.

### **Reduced time of out-of-home placements – Tompkins FTC significantly reduced time in out-of-home placements in the past year.**

- During the time period of November 2013-October 2014, 38% of children were returned home within one year
- During the time period one year later, November 2014-October 2015, this number increased to 73%
- This has been the result of a clearer focus by the team on safety versus risk issues. In addition, the presence of a SafeCare Home Visitor working with parents has provided additional supports needed to expedite trial discharges for some families

### **Implementation of Strengthening Families Program (SFP) for families with children ages 6-11**

- As of March 2016, 71% of eligible families participated in/completed SFP

### **Development and implementation of increased parenting time for parents with infants**

- Parents with infants in foster care placements have regular and increasing parenting time
- Parents with infants have approximately six hours per week (two hours, three days a week) of supported parenting time

- Alcohol and Drug Council of Tompkins County (ADCTC)
- Tompkins County Mental Health

### **Courts**

- Attorney for Children
- Parent Respondents' Attorneys

### **Parenting, Child & Family Services**

- Tompkins Health Department (Early Intervention)
- Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCETC)
- TCAction Early Head Start (EHS)
- Child Development Council-Family Support Services

## ARE YOU INTERESTED IN VISITING TOMPKINS COUNTY FTC?

### Day and Time of Court Hearings:

Staffing – Tuesdays, 1:30 PM - 3:30 PM

Court Hearing – Wednesdays, 9:30 AM - 11:00 AM

### Hosting Availability:

Quarterly

### Visitor Capacity:

10 visitors

### Nearest Airport:

Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport (ITH)

## CONTACT INFORMATION

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