

## **Residentially Based Services (RBS) Reform Project Feedback Report for San Francisco Demonstration Site Review Conducted November 29, 2011**

### **Background:**

An on-site review of the San Francisco RBS Demonstration Project was conducted on November 29, 2011, by representatives of the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and various Sacramento RBS Demonstration Project county and provider agencies. (See Attachment A for a list of individual Site Review Team members.) By the time of the review, two of San Francisco's Demonstration Site providers had been serving RBS youth for eight months; the third provider, Seneca Center, had been offering RBS services for approximately three and one-half months. A total of 19 youth were placed by the county child welfare agency during the eight-month period.

The purposes of the review were to assess fidelity to the county's approved RBS Memorandum of Understanding and the county's continued conformance to RBS tenets as their program evolves; to monitor RBS implementation and identify implementation glitches for resolution; to identify local technical assistance needs; and to begin assessing quality of services delivered. An additional benefit of conducting the review was to engage Sacramento as a "peer" Demonstration Site in the review process in order to promote the identification and dissemination of best practices among the four RBS Demonstration Sites.

Prior to the on-site portion of the review, the Demonstration Site was asked to provide a report of the "RBS Days of Care" for each youth admitted to the RBS project since it began. This was designed to illustrate how youth have moved through the residential group care component to lower level foster care placement and, eventually, to permanency. It was also designed to capture any use of crisis stabilization.

Because the San Francisco Demonstration Site was not operational in Calendar Year 2010, it was not subject to the County Annual Report (CAR) requirement for that year. Consequently, the site was also required to submit background information in response to specific questions that approximated the information that would have been collected through the CAR.

The actual on-site review consisted of group and individual interviews, as well as the review of randomly selected provider comprehensive plans of care for enrolled youth. Group interviews were conducted separately with county staff and with provider staff. Individual interviews were conducted with eight client youth and members of three families from each provider's caseload. All interviews were conducted using standardized interview questions. For the San Francisco Demonstration Site, comprehensive plans of care were reviewed for eight youth. The review team also toured one provider facility.

## **Observations and Recommendations:**

The following discussion is intended to capture at a high level (1) what is working well in the local Demonstration Site; (2) what challenges have been encountered by the site and how the Demonstration Site has chosen to address those challenges; and (3) additional changes the Site Review Team recommends the Demonstration Site consider incorporating.

### Strengths:

The San Francisco Demonstration Site enjoys a strong, collaborative partnership among participating county and provider agencies. Successful strategies have been employed in the areas of family engagement, permanency, care coordination, therapeutic interventions, and training and support. Examples of these strategies include:

- Employing RBS staff who is supportive and responsive to the needs of the youth and family.
- Overcoming barriers to family participation by providing concrete, individualized support to families, such as transportation and scheduling events in the community and at convenient times for families to attend.
- Making structural changes at the residential facility to make it more welcoming and facilitate family visits.
- Conducting Family Finding efforts including the use of mobility mapping to identify possible connections, utilizing Family Specialists to support the connection and work towards permanency goals, providing effective and frequent trainings to support practice, and employing broad based efforts from all provider staff to identify and engage connections.
- Utilizing Intensive Treatment Foster Care (ITFC) to provide services and resources that support permanency for youth after group residential placement.
- Providing permanency services and supports early to teach youth how to integrate with family, utilizing frequent supervised and unsupervised visits between the youth and family, and establishing benchmarks to identify necessary targets to facilitate the transition from residential to community placement.
- Supporting family by conducting case management activities to address unmet needs, linking families to resources and support in their community, and collaborating with family to develop behavior management techniques that can be transferable from residential to community environments.
- Providing traditional and non-traditional therapy to youth and families, including the use of modeling and coaching.
- Ability of some provider agencies to retain qualified therapists, Parent Partners and Family Specialists who begin working with youth and families at enrollment and continue through all stages of the RBS program creating trust with the youth and family and providing continuity of care.
- Utilizing crisis stabilization planning to appropriately respond to crises in a timely manner to help prevent family disruption and stabilize youth.

- Employing RBS Project Coordinator to troubleshoot and remove barriers, assist staff in understanding roles and responsibilities, and ensure communication among county and provider agencies.
- Providing effective Family Finding and RBS foundational trainings.
- Demonstration site leadership at both the county and provider levels has demonstrated a strong collaboration and commitment to RBS.

Challenges Identified and Adaptations Made by the San Francisco Demonstration Site:

Several challenges have been identified by the Demonstration Site during the operation of their RBS program. The most significant challenges are discussed below.

- There is a lack of viable permanency options for some youth due to the criminal histories, and both mental health and lifestyle challenges of some of the identified family members. In addition, because many of the RBS youth have been in the child welfare system for a number of years, they have experienced significant disconnection from their families, requiring additional effort and resources to identify and/or re-establish family connections.
- Transitioning youth from residential group care to the community in an average of five months is a key component of the San Francisco RBS program model. This shortened length of stay in residential group care has limited the amount of pre-engagement work that can be done to prepare the youth and family for a successful transition and exerted pressure on county and provider agency staff to accelerate plans for youth transition out of residential group placement.
- Staff turnover at some of the provider agencies has resulted in confusion around roles and responsibilities and has required additional efforts to provide introductory RBS trainings for new staff.
- Some of the providers have underutilized Family Partners as a result of the challenges of hiring to fill all positions during the project's start-up phase.
- While it is to be expected that families would rely more heavily upon the agency for support in the early phase of this program, it has been difficult for providers to effectively balance the level of support over time to families to facilitate self-sufficiency and mitigate the family's ongoing reliance on the system for support and services.
- Communication issues among some county and provider agency staff have resulted in confusion and conflict. In those instances, this also has resulted in confusion regarding what, if any, services and supports are being provided to strengthen the family and youth's connection to his/her community.
- Some county staff is not consistently participating in the care planning process. This may be due to the difficulty of scheduling Family Support Team (FST) meetings and notifying all FST members timely, especially Social Workers, of the meetings and/or their outcomes.
- The Human Services Agency and County Behavioral Health department are not aligned on the goals or timeframes of the RBS program. Behavioral Health staff voice concern that the target goal of an average of five months in group residential placement may not be in the best interests of the youth. They also express concern about the fiscal implications to their own program of RBS increasing EPSDT costs to the county.

- There is an ongoing tension experienced by the county and providers about the need to maintain sufficient RBS enrollments and the need to ensure that the youth selected for enrollment are appropriate for the RBS program.
- The county automated payment system, CalWIN, prohibits multiple payments on behalf of the same client for the same period. Consequently, the system will not permit payment for the provider's claim for services provided to the youth while in the community component of RBS in the same month that the family receives a payment.

The Demonstration Site has not made any adaptations to their RBS model. However, the Demonstration Site has instituted a temporary workaround to the CalWIN problem by issuing manual checks. In addition, the site has requested and received approval from CDSS on the two exceptions discussed below.

- An exception was granted by CDSS to permit the site to hire an individual who did not meet the minimum education qualifications of the RBS Supervisor as described in the job descriptions submitted to CDSS, but did possess appropriate, compensating work experience.
- An exception was granted by CDSS to enroll a youth who did not meet the RBS target population age limit, but was expected to benefit from the RBS program.

#### Observations and Recommendations of the Site Review Team:

The following are observations and recommendations the Site Review Team made in addition to those identified above by the Demonstration Site:

- Successfully transitioning youth out of residential group care within an average of five months is a fundamental component of the San Francisco Demonstration Site's RBS program model and critical to the sustainability of its funding model. Review of the RBS Days of Care Schedules submitted from the three RBS providers shows that two youth disenrolled from RBS prior to achieving permanency or emancipation. Although Days of Care Schedules were submitted by all three RBS providers, the following discussion will not include data for youth enrolled at Seneca Center due to insufficient time in operating the RBS program. During the reporting period, San Francisco had four youth in a permanent placement with aftercare services being provided. [Additionally, it should be noted that, during the reporting period, the county had four youth placed in ITFC bridge care with RBS aftercare services.] A total of 12 youth have been enrolled in the RBS program (residential plus community placement) for five months or more during the reporting period. Of the 12, seven youth remained in RBS group residential placement longer than the target goal of five months by the end of the reporting period. Because the RBS program has not been in operation long enough to determine if timeframes are being met, the county should continue to closely monitor youth's progress in each RBS provider.
- Consider additional ways to address county and provider concerns regarding the targeted goal for shortened lengths of stay for youth in group care by broadening Family Finding to identify additional permanent connections earlier in the youth's enrollment, intensively working with youth and family to resolve unmet needs, and increasing efforts to establish natural services and community supports.

- Consider offering more frequent RBS refresher trainings to continue developing skills of existing staff and provide timely trainings for new staff. Also, continue to explore ways to retain qualified staff to mitigate turnover and, where this has occurred, encourage the utilization of all RBS staff, especially Family Partners.
- Continue addressing ways to balance the level of support and services offered to families so as to promote, rather than weaken, self-sufficiency.
- Consider ways to strengthen communication and participation among the various care coordination team members, facilitate shared decision-making, promote a common understanding of the services and supports needed for each youth and family, and establish agreement on the permanency goals for youth.
- Ensure consistent Social Worker participation in FST meetings, by, at a minimum, addressing communication and scheduling issues.
- Consider identifying and implementing ways to better align the county Child Welfare and Behavioral Health agencies in support of established RBS tenets and the particular goals of the site's approved model.
- Continue implementing ways to address county and provider tensions concerning maintaining sufficient RBS enrollments while ensuring these enrollments are appropriate for the RBS program.
- Some youth and family members did not know why they were in the RBS program or what the program was about. The site should consider employing more effective methods to not only explain the RBS program to youth and families, but also ensure that they have a clear understanding of the youth's goals and milestones that indicate progress toward achieving those goals.
- Review of the Comprehensive Plans of Care found that most of the Plans of Care included permanency options, lifetime support networks, and innovative ideas for connecting youth to potential permanency options. However, the Crisis Prevention and Response Plan focused on what the youth will do to control unwanted behaviors instead of identifying the actions that will be taken in the event of a crisis and identifying the triggers for initiating action. The site should consider developing more detailed Crisis Prevention and Response Plans.
- Continue to pursue long-term resolution to the CalWIN system to align with the RBS program and authorize appropriate RBS payments to caregivers and providers.

### **Training and/or Technical Assistance Requested:**

No specific requests for training or technical assistance were made by the site.

### **Conclusions:**

The San Francisco RBS Demonstration Project is operating in substantial conformance with the program described in its Memorandum of Understanding with CDSS and with the principles and practices of RBS. However, it is still too early to draw conclusions about client outcomes and fiscal implications.

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