

Minnesota Children's Summit 2005: Smart Policies, Strong Families
Monday, March 28, 2005
Practicing Family Impact Analysis
1:45-2:45 p.m.

Alternative Response (AR)

Background:

- There are 18,000 plus cases of child abuse and neglect throughout MN each year.
- These cases generally move thru investigation with substantiation.
- Triggers petition drafted by a social worker finding child in need of protective service.
- Government's job is to show that the child should remain in the system because of danger in the home.
- So...social work makes finding of maltreatment, which gives services.
- AR says case worker can decide that a family can participate in another program. Avoids the stigma.
- AR is a voluntary program for families. Use investigation not to determine fault but to find out what services families need. Investigation used to find strengths. Parents get to participate.
- Piloted 5 years ago and now everyone has an AR program.
- 80% of child protection cases are neglect – not the horror story.
- Go into AR, put together a plan, and parents need to follow the plan. If not, the parent shifts out of AR.
- Counties vary greatly with regard to what percentage of kids are in AR.
- Parents involved in AR are satisfied (in some cases there is self-selection). Family sees social work differently.

Family Impact Analysis

- Family Support and Responsibilities
 - Pro:
 - Tries to be less intrusive than other programs. Supports parents to carry out their responsibilities. Case plan builds on family strengths – surprised to do this.
 - Parents can do creative things they wouldn't do in an open child protection file.
 - Gives different lens for family to see themselves.
 - Con:
 - In the hands of authority, you've already linked the power/ability of family.
 - Already late – disempowered family already because an AR decision is made by an authority figure.
 - Not really voluntary because the alternative is to go to child protection.
 - Flows from a deficit: Negative incentive to “join AR” and access point is a problem.

- Already pass judgment on a family.
- Communities cannot rely on systems that oppress them – even AR gives jobs usually to a person outside of the family that is experiencing the intervention. So there are economic reasons for keeping such programs. It almost exploits the family. It is to the system's benefit to keep finding problems to keep their jobs.
- Principle 3
 - Con:
 - Keeps the family dependent upon structure. We need to put families in touch with systems when it is the right time- should be systems upstream, not child welfare.
- Principle 1
 - Pro:
 - AR does better at avoiding outside incentives than traditional child protection.
 - AR does help strengthen ties with other family members.
 - Core issue of family dysfunction is economic – related to last bullet of Principle 1.
 - AR does nothing to address economic structure, poverty.
 - Con:
 - AR might help family with some things but not change the economics of a family.
- Principle 6
 - Con: Families in extreme – all AR deals with.
- Parents shouldn't work several jobs. Maybe need 24-hour child care but really need living wage for regular day job.
- Who should be accountable in making these things happen? Accountability needs to be rooted in community and family, not system and families.
- Who gets to say if AR is working?
- Checklist is a tool designed to use as a tool to speak to legislators.
- AR is a way to try to get resources to families. Would we strike down AR because it does not do everything?
- There should be a zero-dot on the checklist for what is the problem and how is it defined? We are discussing this stage before getting to the checklist.
- Timing of AR happened when there was a need to reform out-of-home placement. This is a wrong reason to develop an AR system.
- Need to teach families to stay out of the system.
- We've made a decision to take government out of private lives – we'll move out of the human services and into bond and police business.