

BELKNAP COUNTY, NEW HAMPSHIRE

System Integration Initiative Report: Executive Summary

**An initiative sponsored by:
The Belknap County Citizens Council on Children & Families**

Since 2002, the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families (The Council) has been addressing the needs of youth and families involved with the juvenile justice system. During its history, the Council has brought together schools, law enforcement, faith communities, and providers of juvenile justice, substance abuse prevention and treatment, mental health, domestic violence and citizens to improve the community's response to the needs of Belknap County youth and families. The Council came to recognize that tracking youth only through juvenile justice involvement is not enough. Systems do not coordinate well. Children, youth and families are often lost in the processes of intake, referral and treatment. Agencies find themselves dealing with only a portion of the issues impacting the family rather than the whole child, the whole family. The Council asserted that while services were said to be underfunded and lacking capacity, often lack of communication and coordination created redundancies and inadequate case coordination across systems – without successful outcomes for the Belknap County community. As a result, the Council partnered with the NH Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to convene a symposium in June 2008 to provide a platform for further examination of the need for service coordination and system change across juvenile justice, child welfare and ancillary support structures serving children, youth and families in Belknap County. The symposium provided the opportunity to inform participants about the growing body of credible research indicating the long-term negative consequences of substantiated child abuse and neglect, the increased likelihood of abused and neglected youth becoming involved in the juvenile and criminal justice system, and the array of associated negative outcomes experienced in multiple domains for these youth - and their families.

Following the symposium, in September 2008 a diverse and broad-based array of youth-serving professionals in Belknap County, NH embarked on an effort to improve and better coordinate system responses for youth with a history of multi-agency involvement.

The Belknap County System Integration Initiative (BC-SII) became a collaboration of state and local community agencies and organizations that came together to examine and improve integrated program development, policy development, and service delivery for children, youth, and families served by the CPS/child welfare and juvenile justice systems as well as other youth-serving entities (such as education and the mental/behavioral health communities). The stated purpose of this initiative is to review and analyze policies, programs and practices impacting children, youth and families served by the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Services Systems and to address issues leading to enhanced levels of collaboration and improved quality of services delivered to children, youth and families by public and private agencies and organizations. The initiative was consistent with the historical mission of the Belknap County Citizens Council on Children and Families (*to promote Community Justice so that Belknap County is a safe community where children and families can live with dignity and respect*) and the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services (*to join communities and families in providing opportunities for citizens to achieve health and independence*). Recognizing the complexity of multi-system reform, the BC-SII utilized the consultation of John A. Tuell, Senior Consultant for CWLA and the framework articulated in the *Guidebook for Juvenile Justice & Child Welfare System Coordination and Integration: A Framework for Improved Outcomes* written by Janet K. Wiig and John A. Tuell. The BC-SII also recognized that to ensure progress of this reform, the initiative must create a clear management structure to support and drive the process through all of its phases of activity, and through the development of a sound action strategy and implementation. The organizational structure created by the BC-SII, utilized a Leadership Executive Committee, an Administrative Oversight Committee (AOC), a Steering Committee and a set of subcommittees with defined tasks and activities.

Through this work, the BC-SII adopted the following vision, mission and goals:

Vision: Families will have access to a quality system of care that is cost-effective, efficient, and based on the individual needs of their child

Mission: To develop and implement a unified system for the delivery of services and support for the children, youth and families of Belknap County

Goal 1: To provide system support to the initiative through resource allocation, oversight, and removal of barriers

Goal 2: To provide ongoing leadership and management to the initiative and track progress of work plan development and implementation

Goal 3: To develop a comprehensive response to identifying, collecting and analyzing defined data elements across juvenile justice, child protection and other systems serving children, youth and families.

Goal 4: To perform an examination of resources and assessments that support the implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated and collaborative juvenile justice and child welfare system for the children and families of Belknap County.

Goal 5: To conduct a review of existing statutory, policy and protocols governing the roles and responsibilities of agencies and recommend means to collaborate effectively among agencies serving the targeted population.

During the past 18 months, the BC-SII committees have examined and analyzed a wide range of difficult issues that confront this kind of multi-system reform. These have included data collection, data management, information sharing, legal and policy mandates, resources (fiscal and workforce), access to evidence-based programs and services, competing or duplicative initiatives, state/local and public/private partnerships, creation of a practice model for reform and sustainability.

With the compilation of recommendations from the subcommittees, the Belknap County System Integration Initiative (BC-SII) had completed the investigative and analytical stages of work. The collaboration of state and local community agencies, through the Leadership Executive and Administrative Oversight Committees, again came together to synthesize their findings and finalize a broad set of recommendations for system and practice reform that addressed data, resource and legal/statutory implications.

During this deliberative process, it became clear that a number of the recommendations for broader system reform would rely on coordination with and approval from the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Since the initiative was undertaken with the realization that

the outcomes may inform the DHHS regarding practices that could be replicated in other local jurisdictions in New Hampshire, these recommendations would be important to put forward. However, it was also clear that many of the analytical findings were unique to Belknap County and Laconia and would specifically inform the development of practice reform on behalf of the target population. The BC-SII is recommending – and has developed - a specific practice reform protocol that is ready for endorsement and implementation. This protocol can be found in Appendix K of the full report. It is offered as a method by which the system and client outcomes sought by this practice reform may be more rapidly measured for efficiency, efficacy, and impact on a remarkably disadvantaged population of youth and families in Belknap County. It is also important to note that while this undertaking was not engaged to develop a strategic plan per se, the stakeholders recognized the importance of commitment to an organizational and governance structure that permitted ongoing oversight and monitoring of the protocol and support for the broader system reform recommendations.

The Belknap County System Integration Initiative is pleased to offer the following set of 12 recommendations for consideration and endorsement:

- ☞ Implement the BC-SII Dual Jurisdiction Youth Multi-Disciplinary Protocol (Appendix K). The protocol will utilize:
 - multi-disciplinary assessment and wrap-around case coordination between post-adjudication and pre-dispositional phase of juvenile justice intervention;
 - multi-agency case planning and coordination based on multi-system consideration of :
 - prior treatment,
 - family dynamics,
 - prior mental health and substance abuse involvement,
 - education history and achievement, and
 - other relevant case characteristics of the youth and family;
 - assessment of medical histories of youth involved in the juvenile justice system;
 - identification of a set of multi-system outcome measures for the target population upon which the efficiency and efficacy of the protocol will be measured; and
 - existing and newly developed (where necessary) multi-disciplinary information-sharing agreements.

- ☞ Utilize the BC-SII Dual Jurisdiction Youth Multi-Disciplinary Protocol in a demonstration project beginning in 2010, to be reviewed at the end of 2011, to examine benefits to the child and family; program and system challenges that were overcome and those that remain; and implications for future systematic changes and resources to further improve the efficacy and outcomes for children and families.
- ☞ Develop and implement improved data collection systems and methodology, through protocols and legislative action, for accessing and sharing data between the state and the communities for the purpose of collaborative quality improvement initiatives in the future. The system should be driven by a focus on interdisciplinary case management and performance measurement.
- ☞ Develop a process/method by which State and community stakeholders are able to access de-identified data in a collaborative manner in order to speed response processes at a local level for multi-system youth and families.
- ☞ NH DHHS encourage lay member participation in understanding and responding to needs and solutions to issues confronting children, youth and families.
- ☞ NH DHHS should involve community in reporting and responding to reasons families fail to complete Family Support Plans.
- ☞ Family Resource Centers should receive sustainable funding support from the State.
- ☞ Provide allocation of funding resources for training by DHHS in evidence based practices (i.e. FFT, TF-CBT, and MST) for multi-system application to youth and families.
- ☞ Develop and implement a Family and Community Conference process at time of case closing for all multi-agency involved youth and families.
- ☞ Laconia District Office is to be selected to participate in the 2010 Child and Family Services Review (Federal).
- ☞ Consider the development of a logic model for adopting common goals placing families and children first.
- ☞ Endorse the authority of an existing or newly formed organizational and/or governance structure to provide ongoing oversight and monitoring of the protocol implementation and support the broader system reform recommendations of the BC-SII.