



Evaluation of California's Residentially Based Services Reform Project

Project Overview

The Residentially Based Services (RBS) Initiative was authorized in 2007 by California Assembly Bill 1453 with the goal of transforming the current system of group care for foster children and youth, and children with serious emotional disorders, into a system of residentially based services. The overarching goals of the RBS framework are permanency, well-being, and safety for children and youth who have experienced multiple failed placements in foster family homes

Background

The framework of RBS was developed by a workgroup of stakeholders brought together to reassess the roles of group homes. The stakeholders included family members, emancipated foster care youth, child and family advocates, county and state public agency officials, representatives of the legislature, and care provider representatives.

RBS consist of short-term behavioral and therapeutic interventions delivered in residential settings. The primary goal of the interventions is to facilitate the connection or reconnection with the home, school, and community settings by addressing critical unmet needs and helping children and youth find ways to understand, reduce, and replace the persistent and difficult behaviors that have been associated with those needs with positive and productive alternatives.

RBS includes the following two new and critical categories of services which group homes are now not authorized or funded to provide:

- Family support services while the children or youth are in the program to prepare families to be able to successfully care for the children when they are discharged.
- Post-discharge follow-along services to assure that children or youth are able to remain and thrive with their families after they leave the group living arrangement.

The Evaluation

The evaluation of RBS involves documenting among participating families: achievement of permanency; average lengths of stay; rates of entry and reentry into group care; the involvement of children or youth and their families in treatment planning; satisfaction with services; and the child's safety, well-being, and educational progress. Information on the costs associated with implementing RBS will also be collected. These outcomes were selected per the AB1453 mandates and by stakeholders involved in the project and evaluation planning processes.

Sample

Nearly 200 six through 18 year olds who have been referred to or enrolled in group homes, or placed in an out of state facility, and their parents/caregivers will be enrolled in the evaluation each year for two years. RBS families will be from the following California counties: Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Bernardino, and San Francisco.

Data

Information on foster children's permanency status, length of stay in group care, re-entry into group care, safety, and well-being are entered into the California Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) by county staff. These data for children receiving RBS will be compiled by the California Department of Social Services. Moreover, the evaluation of RBS will compare these outcomes available through CWS/CMS with data for children not receiving RBS.

The evaluation procedures also include collecting over time self-reported measures of well-being, education, and safety using the "Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment for Children with Child Welfare Involvement" (CANS-CW). (All the counties in the Bay Area collaborative will use the CANS-SF – the San Francisco version of the CANS.) Both RBS children and their parents/caregivers will also be asked to complete the Youth Services Survey (YSS and YSS-F) to assess levels of satisfaction with RBS.

Timeline

Implementation of RBS is scheduled to begin in early 2010. Evaluation data will be collected through 2010 and 2011.

RBS Partners

The California Alliance of Child and Family Services is responsible for helping to coordinate the planning process with the California Department of Social Services, County child welfare agencies and the local service providers. The principal investigators of the RBS evaluation are Dr. Peter Pecora at Casey Family Programs (ppecora@casey.org) and Dr. Fred Molitor at Walter R. McDonald & Associates, Inc (fmolitor@wrma.com).

Staff from the California Department of Social Services and each of the participating counties, as well as individuals from the following organizations contributed to the RBS planning process and evaluation design: Holarchy Consulting, Paper Boat Consulting, Hay Consulting, Mark Lane Consulting, Paul Harder and Associates, Sierra Health Foundation, and Martin's Achievement Place.

For More Information

For additional information about the RBS evaluation, please contact Fred Molitor (fmolitor@wrma.com) or Peter Pecora (ppecora@casey.org) at Casey Family Programs. For information about the RBS initiative please contact Carroll Schroeder (cschroeder@cacfs.org).

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