



DATA BRIEF:

Conferencing and Teaming in Allegheny County: Participants' Perspectives and Satisfaction

January 2016

BACKGROUND

Conferencing and Teaming is the Allegheny County Department of Human Services' (DHS) practice model that combines participant/family engagement, assessment and planning in a continuous process of client-driven service integration and strength-based goal setting and achievement. Conferencing and Teaming is designed to involve community and natural supports in helping the participant and/or family increase personal responsibility, manage risks and improve long-term functioning.¹

1 For more information about Conferencing and Teaming, see <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/Programs-Services/Children-Families/Conferencing-and-Teaming-in-CYF.aspx> and <http://www.alleghenycounty.us/Human-Services/News-Events/Accomplishments/Conferencing-and-Teaming.aspx>

PURPOSE

This brief describes family members' perspectives about their participation in Conferencing and Teaming as part of their ongoing involvement with DHS's child welfare system.

METHODOLOGY

Between January and June 2015, staff from DHS and the Consumer Action Response Team (CART)² conducted over 200 telephone interviews with family members³ who attended a Conferencing and Teaming meeting. This represents approximately one third of families whose client record indicated participation in a Conferencing and Teaming meeting.

Staff asked family members questions following a structured interview guide, which included items about their perceptions of the meeting logistics and participation in the Conferencing and Teaming process and meeting. Family members were asked to rate their level of agreement with the items on a four-point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." At the end of each section, interviewers asked the family members if they had any additional open-ended comments or details they wanted to share that were not covered in the structured interview questions. Finally, at the end of the survey, family members were asked about their overall experience, such as whether they felt the Conferencing and Teaming meeting accomplished something. Family members were asked to respond "Yes," "Somewhat" or "No" for these questions.

FINDINGS

For a visualization of the survey responses, please see the infographic at the end of this data brief.

The majority of family members expressed satisfaction with how the meeting was scheduled and their overall participation during the meeting. For instance, 91 percent agreed that the right support people were there. The vast majority, 98 percent, felt that they had participated

2 CART conducts interviews with consumers receiving services from behavioral health providers in Allegheny County in order to assess satisfaction and concerns.

3 All but five of the respondents were parents; the other five identified themselves as grandparents.

meaningfully in the meeting (e.g., by talking, making suggestions or asking questions). Finally, two-thirds (67%) felt that the meeting accomplished something. However, the other third (33%) were uncertain or responded “no” to that question, which indicates that there is room for improvement in meeting client-centered outcomes. See **Table 1** for survey responses on meeting logistics and processes.

TABLE 1: Survey Responses: Meeting Logistics and Participation (n=215)

SURVEY ITEM (ABBREVIATED)	YES*	NO**
	% (N)	
Involvement in deciding who would be invited/present	90% (194)	10% (21)
Right people were at the meeting	91% (195)	9% (20)
Participant informed about what to expect	90% (193)	10% (22)
Meeting was held at a convenient time/place	94% (202)	6% (13)
Participated in meeting	98% (210)	2% (5)
Participant’s ideas were respected and valued	90% (193)	10% (22)
Family’s strengths were discussed	95% (205)	5% (10)
Family’s strengths were added to Family Plan	92% (197)	8% (18)
Participant’s opinions were listened to	93% (199)	7% (16)

*Strongly Agree or Agree

**Strongly Disagree or Disagree

Open-ended comments were collected throughout the survey interviews to allow family members to clarify or further elaborate on their perceptions, experience and concerns. Comments of family members reporting positive experiences included praise for child welfare caseworkers or staff, descriptions of noticeable improvements with their family, and general satisfaction with their participation in the meeting. Below are some examples of the positive comments:

- “Everybody was expressing what they felt and we were all on the same page”
- “In the beginning, I did feel pulled in different directions and like I had to continually repeat myself with my service providers. The meeting helped stop that because with everybody at the table on one page, I did not feel that any longer”
- “The caseworkers I’ve been working with... are awesome. I can really see the difference in how they are helping my son”

Comments related to dissatisfaction or negative experiences were summarized and included:

- Lack of information (prior to, during and/or after) the meeting
- Limited opportunities to provide meaningful contributions during the meeting. Reasons included disruptions caused by arguments or flare-ups, family members feeling they were not being listened to by staff or other family members and/or perceptions of disrespectful behavior or communication from staff

- Feeling that the meeting was not focused on the family. Instead, the focus was on completing paperwork and/or family-centered goals were not addressed
- Interpersonal problems arose with caseworker or other staff
- Feeling that there was limited progress in resolving issues with their active CYF case

CONCLUSION

Overall, family members indicated that they were generally satisfied with how staff implemented the Conferencing and Teaming meetings, but not completely satisfied that the meeting resulted in a positive outcome. While DHS staff will continue to collect family members' perspectives on the Conference and Teaming process, DHS should be asking family members about what a positive outcome from these meetings would look like. It is important that DHS continue to monitor family members' perspectives of the process, identify client-centered outcomes and work towards creating a positive client experience with Conferencing and Teaming.

SURVEY DESIGN, ADMINISTRATION AND ANALYSIS

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