

NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Technical Assistance Site Report



Prepared for Puerto Rico Administration for Children and Families
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Regarding Site Visits of June 28, 29 and September 27, 28 and 29,
2005

Situation and Technical Assistance Request

Puerto Rico's Administration for Children and Families (ADFAN) modified its request for technical assistance from NRCCPS to include an examination of its safety assessment and planning model, and assistance with decisions about how to rectify its failed efforts to implement a safety model.

Site Visits

Terry Roe Lund from NRCCPS made a site visit to ADFAN on June 28 and 29, and a follow up site visit on September 27, 28 and 29.

June site visit

During this visit, the ADFAN administrator and administrative staff representing Family Preservation, Protective Services, Substitute Care and Adoption and the Central Register met with Terry Roe Lund. Administrators discussed their impressions of their current safety model and implementation efforts. Most of these impressions matched the observations offered by NRCCPS: the model, while having a sound conceptual foundation, is too lengthy and abstract for use. This would be true given the workload and workforce problems experienced by most CPS agencies, but these problems are significant at ADFAN and must be reconciled no matter what safety model is designed and implemented.

Despite vacancy problems and workload issues, the administrators were enthusiastic about starting over with a safety model. Terry Roe Lund provided information on what constitutes the state of the art in safety decision making (at investigation), and examples were discussed regarding how this can translate into a process that is more practical and usable to the line staff.

It was agreed by the group that whatever ADFAN decides to do regarding a safety model, certain principles must drive the effort:

- For successful implementation, clear concepts regarding child safety decision making must be translated into a clear and practical "roadmap" for line staff to follow; the model must be logical and practical
- Supervisors must become experts in the safety model
- There must be information collection standards that drive safety decision making
- When implementation begins there must be available immediate feedback and coaching
- Consultation must be available

- Preparing to have problems and preparing for problem solving are critical before implementation begins
- Workload issues of workers, supervisors and the needed experts who must check for compliance and quality—all these issues must be addressed
- The safety model must have philosophy, concepts, framework, etc. that are easily adaptable to all parts of the case process (ASFA requires safety management beyond investigation, so further model implementation must be planned for)
- The professional competencies of workers and supervisors that will be necessary to use the model must be supported by the following systemic supports:
 - Policy and procedures
 - Supervision
 - Staff Development
 - Information system (data and documentation)
 - Program Management
 - Quality Assurance (expert review for quality)

The site visit concluded with a decision to proceed with further exploration of a new safety model. Much discussion was held regarding the importance of buy-in from management, particularly since the last implementation effort failed.

It was decided that technical assistance from NRCCPS with the administrators from the regions throughout the island could 1) better inform the process of deciding on a new model and 2) better ensure any implementation effort through their investment in the development, training and implementation phases.

Therefore, no decisions were made during the June site visit regarding model development in order to have further discussion with the larger management team.

September site visit

Terry Roe Lund from NRCCPS met with the ADFAN administrator as well as a large managerial discussion group on September 27, 28 and 29. The first two days of the site visit the group was given an overview of child safety decision making along with essential time for discussion, contrast with the current safety model, and identification of implications.

On the third day, the ADFAN administrator gave the group the charge of making decisions regarding a safety model, with the following conditions. Decisions must be reached by consensus; the group members must feel that they can defend decisions (to staff, etc.) with passion; the model must be doable/practical.

The group spent considerable time deliberating its charge and recommendations are as follows:

- Definitions for safety will include a distinction between present and impending danger/safety threats; a distinction between a protective and safety plan; and a distinction between a safety plan and a case plan
- Information collection standards must be implemented; the group agreed with the suggestion by NRCCPS that these standards are in the form of six categories of information: maltreatment, surrounding circumstances of maltreatment, child functioning, adult/caregiver functioning, parenting, and discipline
- When investigation staff (Emergency Services Program) receives a case, staff will assess for present danger at first contact. If no present danger, staff will continue to collect information around all six categories. Staff will then assess for impending danger and, if necessary, develop a safety plan. The case will then transfer.

When investigation staff (Emergency Services Program) receives a case and assesses that present danger exists and a protective plan is necessary and involves court removal, the first two categories (maltreatment and surrounding circumstances) will be the minimum standards of information collection. Staff will not go on to assess for impending danger but will transfer the case immediately.

- Ongoing (post investigation) staff will be held to these information collection standards as well.
- Hotline staff should be involved in this effort since safety information collection and decision making begins at the point of the referral. Hotline staff should ask the reporter for information around the six categories of information. Hotline staff should receive an abbreviated training on safety and information gathering, perhaps one day.
- The present danger and impending danger lists discussed with NRCCPS (with respective definitions) were approved by the group
- The group approved implementing a formal analysis of how to control for safety (“safety intervention analysis”)

- Further examination of how to address workload issues must be a commitment: this includes examining who the agency serves, whether current open cases can close, streamlining processes, etc.
- The group identified who must be trained in a new safety model:
 - Emergency Services staff: ~200 staff (including vacancies and supervisors)
 - Ongoing staff and supervisors: ~1000 staff
 - Regional supervisors: ~ 50 staff
 - Associate Directors: ~ 10 staff
 - Other staff can receive a shorter overview of the process
- The training (except where noted as being abbreviated or an “overview”) will be up to three days in length, but must be scheduled as one day at a time. The group felt it would be workable (and possibly most economical) to have up to two training days in one week, if scheduled in such a way where workers could return to the office in between the two training days.

Recommended Plan

With due consideration to the importance of not failing with this second effort, the group formulated the following plan:

- ADFAN will select 5 or possibly more trainers who are fluent in both Spanish and English
- The group that met throughout the September site visit will remain involved and invested as an advisory group that forms recommendations to the Administrator regarding model development and implementation
- A safety model and training curriculum will be developed according to the recommendations identified above. Before the model and curriculum are finalized (and translated into Spanish) the advisory group will meet, review and approve the model and curriculum.
- Upon approval, the material will be translated into Spanish and a training of trainers will be scheduled. The audience will be the selected trainers and the advisory group. (This will allow the advisory group to develop further expertise in the model). The training of trainers will involve 3 days of delivering the training content, and a 4th day involving just the trainers (i.e., the advisory group adjourns but the trainers stay for discussion).
- Approximately two weeks later, the selected trainers will deliver the training to the advisory group and the original trainer(s). Feedback and opportunity for refining/understanding will ensue. This may be scheduled similar to the first training: 3 days with the advisory group and a 4th day with the trainers alone.

- As the advisory group gains expertise in the model, workgroups will be formed among the areas needing strengthening to support implementation:
 - Policy and procedures
 - Supervision
 - Staff development
 - Information system
 - Program management
 - Quality assurance

- A small group will be identified (by the advisory group or Administrator or both) to have the following task: to learn about implementation problems and be prepared for solutions. This group must be expert in the model and receive consultation to gain this expertise.

Next Steps

No further technical assistance is planned as the fiscal year ended at the time the site visit concluded. It is recommended that technical assistance be requested in order to maintain the momentum and continue with this planning effort.