NORTH CAROLINA
FAMILY-CENTERED MEETINGS
PROJECT

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE NORTH CAROLINA
DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

FISCAL YEAR 2010 - 2011

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with Kara Allen-Eckard, Jenny King, & Marianne Latz

Support from Stacy Comey, Susan Gasman, Claudia Kearney, Elizabeth Meadows, Billy Poindexter, RV Rikard, and Anne Wakefield

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Child and family teams (CFTs) engage children, youth, and their families in decision making over their affairs and widen the circle of partners around them. At the Center for Family and Community Engagement, we seek to encourage family engagement through conducting CFT training, technical assistance, and evaluation. In order to carry out our work, we also need a wide circle of collaborators. These partners include a strong center team; university faculty, students, and staff; community advocacy groups and services; and government agencies. Cultivating these partnerships takes time and care.

The North Carolina Division of Social Services identifies partnerships as crucial for accountability and improving practice and remains firmly committed to CFTs as a vehicle for strengthening these partnerships. Since 2002, the Division has funded our training on CFTs, and previously from 1998-2002, the Division funded our demonstration project on family group conferencing, which has served as a foundation for our ongoing work. This consistent funding has made it possible for us to develop a full repertoire of CFT supports and to adapt them in response to emerging issues. A special thanks to Bob Hensley and Kathy Dobbs for their understanding and support of our work.

Our training coordinators, Jenny King and Kara Allen-Eckard, along with the exceptionally dedicated training team members carefully reviewed their work over the year and used this self-reflection to enhance even further our curricula and mode of delivery. Our evaluation and contract coordinator, Marianne Latz, organized the assessment of the contributions of family and youth partners to our training program. The report would never have been completed without our project coordinator, Stacy Comey, ensuring that all components were in order.

The list of acknowledgments below recognizes our important partners. They include partners within the state, nationally, and internationally. I apologize in advance for any inadvertent omissions.

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Bob Hensley  
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Hank Bowers  
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Kathy Dobbs  
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Jacinta Wright

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Lisa Cauley
Giang Le
Dr. Warren Ludwig
Dr. Ramon Rojano
Barbara Waite
Beutrice Walker
Katherine Williams
ACCOUNTABILITY AND COLLABORATION

By engaging children, youth, and their families in decision making, agencies hold themselves accountable to those whom they serve. As staff members interact with families, they clarify why their agency is involved, enlarge their understanding of other cultures, and adapt their interventions to fit better the situations of the families. This respectful process affirms that families can take responsibility and exert leadership in improving their lives. Child and family teams (CFT) are one strategy for promoting accountability and collaboration of families and involved services.

The Center for Family and Community Engagement has promoted accountability and collaboration through CFT training, technical assistance, and evaluation. Its commitment to accountability and collaboration is reflected in its incorporating the voices of youth and family in its curricula, training team, evaluation focuses, community partnerships, and advisory council.

Family engagement thrives in service environments that uphold accountability and partnering in all areas, including the organization’s philosophy, practice approach, community collaboration, policy formulation, workforce development, and sharing evaluation findings (Chovil, 2009; Pennell, Shapiro, & Spigner, 2011). Such an all-encompassing approach has been encouraged by planning efforts in North Carolina.

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2011) in its strategic plan embraced six values all related to accountability and partnership: “customer-focused” in service delivery, “anticipatory” by using feedback in planning, “collaborative” by fostering partnerships inside and outside the agency, “transparent” in communications, and “results-oriented” by upholding performance standards (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, p. 13). In like manner, the North Carolina Division of Social Services (2011) and the North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services sought to advance these values in their Reaching for Excellence and Accountability in Practice (REAP). The REAP initiative sought to improve service outcomes through a web-based system that tracked performance data and through a model of self-assessment. The self-assessment involved social services and their community stakeholders, including youth and families, in evaluating progress and in establishing a plan to enhance achievements.
CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM TRAINING

The center offered a CFT training program that included formal curricula, facilitator forums, policy modules, and technical assistance and learning support delivered on request. Training events were open to both social services and their community partners, who included mental health, schools, juvenile justice, schools of social work, and others. Cross-system training encouraged a system-of-care approach in which agencies work in partnership to support children and their families.

During the year, the center focused the majority of its effort on the delivery of the six formal curricula:

- **Step by Step: An Introduction to Child and Family Teams** – a 2-day CFT orientation, mandatory for all child welfare workers and their supervisors;
- **Anchors Away! How to Navigate Child and Family Teams: The Role of the Facilitator** (renamed **Navigating Child and Family Teams: The Role of the Facilitator**) – a 3-day (originally 4-day) skills-building workshop on facilitating CFTs, mandatory for facilitators of high and intensive risk cases;
- **The ABCs of Including Children in Child and Family Teams** – a 1-day advanced workshop on amplifying the voice of children at CFTs;
- **Widening the Circle: Child and Family Teams and Safety Considerations** – a 2-day advanced workshop on effecting safe meetings in the context of family violence, substance use, and mental health issues;
- **Keeping It Real: Child and Family Teams with Youth in Transition** – a 2-day advanced workshop on using CFTs in preparation for youth leaving care; and
- **An Introduction to Child and Family Teams: A Cross System Training from the Family’s Perspective** – a 2-day workshop designed to encourage a system-of-care approach from the perspective of children and their families.

The center offered formal CFT curricula to social services staff as well as their community partners. Cross-system training encouraged a system of care in which agencies worked in collaboration to support children and their families.

Recognizing that learning from workshops requires reinforcement for transfer of learning to the workplace, the center ensured that CFT practitioners had access to ongoing training supports. The technical assistance and learning support (TALS) was delivered onsite and online and included:

- Facilitator forums – regional and statewide exchanges encouraging information sharing and mutual support among CFT facilitators and others involved with the meetings;
- Policy modules – online discussions of policies and procedures related to CFTs; and
- Other TALS – assistance tailored to the specific requests or emerging needs in the field.
In order to encourage operationalization in the workplace, the learning from the training workshops was reinforced and enhanced through ongoing technical assistance and learning support.

Table 1 below gives a breakdown of each of the center’s training program by number of events, participants, and counties represented. Overall, more than 80 out of the 100 counties across North Carolina accessed the center’s CFT training, sending a total of 672 workers to these events over the year.

Table 1: Number of Events, Participants, and Counties Represented for Each Training Deliverable, 2010-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curriculum</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Counties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step by Step</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchors Away</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating CFTs</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABCs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Widening the Circle</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping It Real</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Introduction to CFTs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator Forums (State, Online)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator Forums (Regional, In Person)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Online</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>72</strong></td>
<td><strong>730</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table does not include the 48 TALS delivered in response to requests from the field.

Overall, more than 80 counties across North Carolina accessed the center’s 52 formal CFT trainings, sending a total of 672 workers to these events over the year. Additionally, the center provided 20 forum and online events to 189 participants and an additional 48 technical assistance and learning support events.

Formal Curricula

The training team modified the formal curricula to adapt to new policy and practice needs in the counties and to meet the advancing needs of workers to attain higher practice skills. Major revisions were made to the introductory training _Step by Step_ in partnership with family trainers, with an emphasis placed on the inclusion of the family members’ perspectives into the curriculum and training room. In response to participant feedback, the facilitator curriculum was condensed from a four-day to three-day training event. Shortening the curriculum was possible because today participants often entered the training room with greater familiarity with CFTs than when the program was first introduced in the state in 2002. The center produced videos in order to enhance the learning experience of training participants and social work students. These
videos included CFT simulations and focus groups with youth transitioning from care. Adding to this repertoire, the center is now filming interviews with family and workers about their experience of CFTs. The merits of the curricula and their modifications are reflected in the positive feedback from training participants.

For all formal curricula trained this year a total of 638 participants completed the participant satisfaction form. Nearly all favorably rated the content of the curricula, the trainer competence, and the utility of what they learned for their jobs.

All formal NCDSS curricula were evaluated through participant satisfaction feedback (PSF) surveys given to all attendees at the end of each training event. The surveys collected data on overall satisfaction with the training event, perceived learning and relevance to job function, training content, and trainer delivery. When participant satisfaction feedback was combined for all of six formal curricula, there were total responses from 638 participants. As seen in Table 2 below, 98% or more of all participants were satisfied with the content of the curricula.

Table 2: Total of All Courses Content of Training Feedback, July 2010 to June 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training had a good mix of learning activities.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n 638</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
<td>4 (0.6%)</td>
<td>169 (26.5%)</td>
<td>464 (72.7%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of training reflect issues of diversity.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n 638</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
<td>7 (1.1%)</td>
<td>232 (36.4%)</td>
<td>394 (61.8%)</td>
<td>4 (0.6%)</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content of training was well organized.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n 638</td>
<td>1 (0.2%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>153 (24.0%)</td>
<td>484 (75.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0.0%)</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content was appropriate to my job.</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n 636</td>
<td>2 (0.3%)</td>
<td>6 (0.9%)</td>
<td>156 (24.5%)</td>
<td>468 (73.6%)</td>
<td>4 (0.6%)</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Question response options include: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.

In regards to participant responses to trainers, the aggregated data compiled below in Table 3 shows nearly a 100% positive rating across all categories. Participants felt strongly positive about their presentation, expertise, and group management skills, with 99% and above of most ratings in the agree and strongly agree categories. It can be surmised that the individuals taking the training viewed the trainers as a competent, knowledgeable, and respectful team, able to present and share information in a way that supported their learning.
Table 3: Total of All Courses Trainer Feedback, July 2010 to June 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was respectful to training participants.</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(13.0%)</td>
<td>(86.7%)</td>
<td>(0.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knew subject matter well.</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>1,146</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(12.0%)</td>
<td>(87.5%)</td>
<td>(0.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectively presented the material.</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>1,121</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(14.1%)</td>
<td>(85.6%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was responsive to trainee questions and feedback.</td>
<td>1,308</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>1,142</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(12.4%)</td>
<td>(87.3%)</td>
<td>(0.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managed group well.</td>
<td>1,309</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>1,128</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(13.2%)</td>
<td>(86.2%)</td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worked well with others.</td>
<td>1,306</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>1,127</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(11.2%)</td>
<td>(86.3%)</td>
<td>(2.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Question response options include: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.

Table 4 below provides aggregated data for the participants’ perceptions of all training curricula. It is very clear that the majority of participants who responded had a positive opinion of the trainings, with combined feedback in all categories but one, being 94% or higher. The largest area of disagreement about the trainings was in the category where 17.1% of participants indicated they were not looking forward to attending the training. After the training was over, however, less than 1% stated that they were not glad they attended. This being said, the majority of participants reported overall positive experiences with these curricula, and most of the participants indicated that they would recommend these trainings to their peers.
## Table 4: Total of All Courses Perception of Training Feedback, July 2010 to June 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception of Training Feedback</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>N/A</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My understanding of the topics has significantly increased.</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
<td>(41.4%)</td>
<td>(56.6%)</td>
<td>(0.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this training I have developed skills to improve my practice.</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.6%)</td>
<td>(40.1%)</td>
<td>(58.8%)</td>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a result of this training I am more capable of performing my job.</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>282</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.3%)</td>
<td>(42.2%)</td>
<td>(53.1%)</td>
<td>(1.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I intend to use what I learned in training on my job.</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.5%)</td>
<td>(34.4%)</td>
<td>(64.2%)</td>
<td>(0.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work, I will be supported as I use what I learned in training on my job.</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>292</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.46</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td>(46.0%)</td>
<td>(48.0%)</td>
<td>(3.8%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior to attending this training, I was eager to come.</td>
<td>638</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(14.9%)</td>
<td>(48.9%)</td>
<td>(32.4%)</td>
<td>(1.6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Now that the training is over, I'm glad I attended.</td>
<td>636</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.6%)</td>
<td>(35.5%)</td>
<td>(63.2%)</td>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this training to a colleague.</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.3%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.9%)</td>
<td>(35.7%)</td>
<td>(61.9%)</td>
<td>(1.1%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Question response options include: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree.*

Nearly all participants were in agreement that “as a result of this training I have developed skills to improve my practice.”

According to Table 5, 94.4% of participants who responded rated their overall training experiences in the high and very high categories. A small group (5.5%) rated the experience as moderate, and one sole individual gave an overall rating of very low. This shows an overall high level of satisfaction with the training experience.

## Table 5: Total of All Courses Overall Perception of Training Feedback, July 2010 to June 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall rating of training experience</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Very Low</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Very High</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>635</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.2%)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(0.0%)</td>
<td>(5.5%)</td>
<td>(30.9%)</td>
<td>(63.5%)</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Question response options include: 1 = Very Low, 2 = Low, 3 = Moderate, 4 = High, 5 = Very High.*
As expected given the overall level of satisfaction regarding the formal curricula, the feedback on all the individual curricula was likewise quite positive. The participant satisfaction responses on the orientation to CFTs, *Step by Step*, showed that participants generally agreed that the curriculum was well designed, useful, and the right length. These findings stand out given the training was mandatory for social workers and their supervisors in their first year of employment. Moreover, prior to attending, 16% of the participants stated that they had been reluctant to attend; after attending, this percentage had shrunk to less than 1%. The positive response supported the modifications to the curriculum, including the incorporation of the family voice, new materials, and reorganization of the modules.

**Participant satisfaction with the CFT orientation curriculum was quite positive. Their favorable rating of the training stands out given that the training was mandatory for social workers and their supervisors in the first year of employment.**

The facilitator training was now mandatory for all facilitators involved with high and intensive risk cases. Overall, 100% of participants agreed that the training had a good mix of learning activities, and 98% agreed the content was appropriate to their job. All participants perceived the training as increasing their understanding, competence, and confidence with CFT facilitation. This is very notable given many participants had already been involved in facilitating CFTs or were moving into facilitation right after the training.

**All participants perceived the facilitation training as increasing their understanding, competence, and confidence with conducting CFTs. This is notable given many participants had already been involved in facilitating CFTs or were moving into facilitation right after the training.**

Participants agreed that the *ABCs* curriculum on inclusion of children at CFTs increased their competence in this area, and they would transfer the learning to their workplaces. Nearly all thought the one-day workshop was just the right length.

The *Widening the Circle* workshops were well received. The participants particularly singled out the content on family diversity as helpful. This response was very positive given that the purpose of the advanced training was to support workers learning how to partner with families when there are complex issues such as domestic violence/family violence, substance addictions, and mental health issues.

*Keeping It Real*, an advanced training, focused on amplifying youths’ voices as they prepared for transitions out of care. The training included youths through filmed focus groups with youth in care and through the incorporation of youth partners on the training team. Many of the participants expressed excitement around this training topic, emphasizing the importance of the youth perspective and involvement needing to be shared broadly across social services and other child-serving agencies.
After attending the advanced training on CFTs for youth in transition from care, participants expressed excitement about learning from youth.

A cross-system workshop, *An Introduction to Child and Family Teams*, focused on highlighting the family’s perspective as key to the success of the process. The curriculum was trained with a family partner and an agency partner and placed a strong emphasis on how CFTs could help families, youth, and children to balance working with more than one system at a time. This mirrored what trainers observed in the training room as multiple systems had opportunity to collaborate on how to make this process successful for families.

**Facilitator Forums**

Beginning in 2005, the center has offered facilitator forums to support the development of CFT facilitation practice throughout North Carolina. Over that time period, forums evolved into discussions of facilitation practice (both within social services and across systems), research findings, and policy implementation. Topics were generated via participant request, practice trends, new policies, and statewide, national, and international practice guidance. Forums focused on such matters as the changing landscape of CFT facilitation and abandoning assumptions about families. Facilitator forums provided a combination of practice information, skills development, and an environment for supportive sharing about CFT experiences and effective strategies.

The facilitator forums brought together CFT facilitators and others involved with the meetings. The forums focused on facilitation practice, research findings, and policy implementation; encouraged sharing about CFT experiences and effective strategies; and promoted networking within regions and across the state.

Since their inception, facilitator forums have been attended by a total of 982 participants. The forums were offered both onsite and online (see Table 6). In 2010-2011 alone, facilitator forums were accessed by a total of 179 participants. Variations in attendance reflected in large measure travel restrictions, preventing face-to-face meetings.
Table 6: Facilitator Forum Onsite and Online Participation by Contract Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contract Year (July-June)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Onsite Forums</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2008-November 2008</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2010-June 2011 (7 events)</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for Onsite Forums</strong></td>
<td><strong>675</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Online Forums</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2008-June 2009</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-June 2010 (15 events)</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2010-June 2011 (8 events)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for Online Forums</strong></td>
<td><strong>307</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total for All Forums</strong></td>
<td><strong>982</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Travel restrictions imposed in October 2008 caused cancellation of several planned on site forums. Online forums were initiated as a substitute in December 2008.

Forums were initially offered on a quarterly basis to NCDSS workers. These facilitator forums were held onsite in the western, central, and eastern parts of the state. This regional model was intentionally designed to address both the realities of county travel restrictions and the need for informal regional connections among CFT programs. In 2006, the center expanded the facilitator forums by outreaching to other child-serving systems using CFTs as a primary practice for working with families. These systems included mental health, schools, juvenile justice, public health, and family organizations in regional forum events. Participation of these organizations varied regionally and was influenced in large part by the cohesiveness of local system-of-care efforts. The facilitator forums provided a system-neutral space for ongoing relationship building among child-serving agencies. By 2008, participation in facilitator forums warranted the development of a fourth site, the southeastern forum.

**Attended by workers from multiple systems, the CFT forums offered a system-neutral space for building relationships among child-serving agencies.**

In the fall of 2008 through the summer of 2010, statewide travel restrictions prevented the center from continuing to offer onsite regional facilitator forums. Hoping to maintain the momentum created by onsite forums, the center responded to the needs of county facilitators by converting forums into online, or “remote,” events. In July of 2010 with lessening travel restrictions, the center sought to reinvigorate in-person facilitator forums by offering bi-annual, onsite forums in different regions. These were held in addition to regular statewide online forums and in response to feedback that facilitators preferred a combination of online and in-person forum events. In order to reestablish connections in the counties, the center looked to county facilitators to act as
site hosts for in-person facilitator forum events. With county support, the center reactivated three original regional forums.

In 2010-2011, center staff offered facilitator forums in a blended format utilizing both in-person and online avenues. Center staff noted that participants who had been regular consumers of the in-person events did not readily adapt to the online format. Nevertheless, online events invited participation from facilitators who in the past had not chosen to travel to in-person facilitator events. Each format appealed to a different audience. Those who had participated in both variations indicated a preference for a blend of modalities and just appreciated the opportunity to connect with other facilitators to discuss CFT practice. This year online facilitator forums were offered to a statewide audience while in-person facilitator forums fostered the development of relationships among regional facilitators.

Participants varied in their preference for in-person versus online facilitator forums. The in-person forums facilitated networking among participants while the online forums did not require travel. Overall, participants voiced a preference for a blend of the two modalities.

Online forums offered interactive discussion and encouraged sharing from across the state. The web-based format permitted participants to exchange documents and resources directly with others online. In-person forums offered a better avenue for developing facilitation skills and self-awareness of personal facilitation styles. Facilitators at in-person forums responded well to the pairing of structured information and skill development with informal time to connect directly with their peers.

The online and the in-person events complemented each other. Online events made it possible to connect facilitators across the state without the demands of travel costs and time. Facilitators were able to participate from the comfort of their own desk in a two-hour window of time. In-person forums supported cohesion and connection among facilitators regionally. CFT practice and support varied across the state and by offering the in-person forums as a regional model, CFT facilitators were able to discuss and share information that might be more directly relevant to the culture in their locale.

Online forums offered interactive discussion and encouraged sharing issues from across the state. In-person forums offered a better avenue for developing facilitation skills and self-awareness of personal facilitation styles.

Facilitators’ ability to participate in forums during 2010-2011 was affected by increased demands on their time and reassignment to other county responsibilities, including post-tornado recovery efforts. Nevertheless, the forums remained popular. Participants from social services included designated facilitators, line staff who provided back-up facilitation, supervisors, program managers, LINKS coordinators, community support specialists, and family advocates. Representatives from schools made up the next largest group of participants at facilitator forums. School participants represented counties in which Child and Family Support Team (CFST) initiatives or other grants provided staffing and program support for meeting facilitation in
schools. Students made up the third largest group and consisted primarily of social work and criminology students.

The increased demands of child welfare work typically did not afford workers the time and opportunity to network with their colleagues from other counties, and forums offered that chance. When asked what they found helpful about online facilitator forums, participants responded: “Interacting with other facilitators,” “sharing experiences,” “hearing from others about what works and what doesn't,” and “discussion about how other counties are doing things.” This connection was especially important as counties had implemented CFT policy and practice in a variety of ways across North Carolina. By hearing facilitation approaches from other counties, participants were able to adapt their practice to meet better the needs of their agencies and the families they served. Shrinking state and county resources and increased demands on facilitator time intensified the need for validation, sharing experiences, and time to discuss strategies to accommodate a shifting child welfare landscape. The value of connecting with other facilitators was a consistent thread through the participants’ feedback.

**When asked what they found helpful about online facilitator forums, participants responded: “Interacting with other facilitators” and “Hearing from others about what works and what doesn’t.”**

**CenterPeace for Youth**

With additional funding from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at North Carolina State University, the center developed and delivered curricula on family engagement for youth involved with both child welfare and juvenile justice. These well-attended training events, called “CenterPeace for Youth,” galvanized the involvement of a wide range of organizations. The events also helped those familiar with CFTs to identify how to expand their practice to include restorative justice approaches bringing together both those offending and those affected by the offending.

**Online Policy Events**

Besides the facilitator forum events, the center offered online events focusing specifically on NCDSS policy as related to CFT practice. These events included a follow-up to the CenterPeace for Youth forums, working with Native American families, and documenting CFTs.

**Working with American Indian Tribes: Current Practices Focus Group**

Two focus groups on working with American Indian tribes were held to assess current CFT facilitation practices with state-recognized tribes. Anchored in the distinction between federally-recognized tribes (over which strict laws apply) and state-recognized tribes (which have less legal protection), these focus groups asked for clarity on current practice trends.

At the focus groups, the participants emphasized the need to identify the Native American status of children and to make contact with tribal representatives. There appeared to be no distinction
made between state- or federally-recognized tribes in their practice. All facilitators thought that outreach to the family and tribes would represent good preparation practices for any CFT.

*CFT Documentation Form: Sharing Practices from the Field*

This topic came from requests by online facilitator forum participants who wanted a better understanding of how counties were completing and modifying the NCDSS form on CFT documentation that had been in place for over a year. Variations in the use of this form had been shared by facilitators and Department of Social Services (DSS) training participants across all center training events. In addition, NCDSS committee members were beginning to examine forms and how they might be combined to minimize paperwork for DSS staff. This intersection of conversations made it timely to share and discuss current practices in using the CFT documentation form.

In the forum on CFT documentation, the facilitators indicated that the identification of family strengths and meeting purpose were the most useful parts of the form in regards to their facilitating the meetings. Identifying the purpose allowed for discussion and revision of the purpose before the actual CFT. The strengths section, they explained, reasserted the importance of this component of the meeting.

**Other Facilitator Support Resources**

In addition to offering scheduled events such as facilitator forums and policy discussions, the center provided ongoing support to CFT facilitators in other ways such as a Google group. Especially well received was the center’s electronic newsletter called *Facilitation Focus* distributed to CFT facilitators and child-serving agencies across the state of North Carolina. The functions of this newsletter were to share information about family-centered meeting practice, to inform recipients of upcoming training events and happenings, and to highlight practice trends.

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**The center’s e-newsletter Facilitation Focus was well received by CFT facilitators, community partners, and child-serving agencies across the state. The newsletter shared information about family-centered practice, statewide trends in practice, and upcoming events.**

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**Technical Assistance and Learning Support**

Technical assistance and learning support (TALS) was created to provide a method by which county social services agencies could access necessary support for their CFT practices through formal and informal means. The center’s trainers worked directly with counties to assess their needs for technical assistance and developed or refined curricular materials in response to their requests.

This year the center received TALS requests from 17 counties as well as additional requests from social work educators and foster parents. County workers accessed TALS informally, making phone calls or sending e-mail messages seeking guidance on their CFT practice questions. County budgetary issues led to some counties requesting formal CFT training events in their
locality. Through the TALS program, the center was able to support CFT practices for county and state social services, social work students, and social services’ partners in schools, mental health, and other fields.

The flexibility of the TALS program has been one of its greatest assets to the requesting counties. With continuing budget cuts, social services agencies welcomed the center’s offering in their counties formal training and customized training events. This outreach by the center saved counties many dollars in travel and other training expenses that otherwise would have been incurred to send workers to training. The TALS program especially enabled counties with small staff to obtain needed technical assistance on implementing CFTs.

**EVALUATION OF FAMILY TRAINER CONTRIBUTIONS**

In 2009, CFFACE hired two part-time family partner trainers. The center paired family trainers with agency trainers for delivery of select workshops. An agency trainer was identified as someone who had experience working in service settings. A family partner trainer was defined as “a youth or adult who has received services or who is a caregiver/parent of someone who has received services and therefore has firsthand experience within the system” (North Carolina Families United, 2011). This experience allowed the family partner trainers to bring the family voice to the training as they related curricular concepts to how their family and other families experienced CFTs.

Over state fiscal years 2010 and 2011, 57 training events included at least one family or youth trainer. The training participants consisted of two main groups: (a) facilitators, workers, and supervisors based in social services, and (b) facilitators and other staff of child-and-family-serving organizations working in collaboration with social services (e.g., schools, child mental health, juvenile justice, public health).

The center conducted a two-year evaluation of the impact of the family trainers on CFT training participants. Areas of impact included the training experience, transfer of learning by participants, and transfer-of-learning environment once these participants returned to their agency. The study used an appreciative inquiry approach to determine what was helpful about the incorporation of family partners into the training team and ways to enhance further the
effectiveness of this training approach. The evaluation included the participant satisfaction feedback on the family trainers, online surveys, trainer feedback on the events, and interviews with family and agency trainers.

The center conducted a two-year evaluation of the impact of the family trainers on CFT training participants. Areas of impact included the training experience, transfer of learning by participants, and transfer-of-learning environment once these participants returned to their agency.

Online surveys were sent to participants approximately 1-2 weeks after each event co-trained with a family partner and again six months later. These surveys were intended to obtain participant impressions of the family trainers’ contributions and assess their transfer of learning and the transfer climate provided by their agencies. The first online survey was sent to 585 participants of whom 48% completed the form. The second survey was sent to 468 participants and had a response rate of 27%.

The participant satisfaction forms provided a place to comment on the individual trainers at the end of each workshop. These comments were overwhelmingly positive across the evaluation period. The trainees indicated that they enjoyed both the training skills and the personal stories that the family trainers brought to the curriculum. As one participant commented, “Loved hearing a real situation. Gives hope!” Another respondent wrote, “I think it's awesome to have a real ‘client’ train other social workers.”

“I think it's awesome to have a real ‘client’ train other social workers.”

On the surveys completed shortly after the training events, the training participants gave high ratings to what they learned from the family trainers and were optimistic that they could apply what they learned to their workplace. Although the ratings were quite positive in 2009-2010, they were significantly more so by 2010-2011. The higher ratings by the second year may have been a function of the center clarifying to prospective training participants that the events would include a family trainer and the training team refining its integration of the family voice.

On returning to work, participants said that they planned to prepare professionals and family members more, including children and youth; encourage the participation of more extended family and advocates at the meetings; and consider holding CFTs off-site from their agency. Several found the family trainer presentation to be a way to ground the system-of-care principles in their daily work. For example, some planned to look more for strengths and help families build on those strengths. Others planned to begin calling parents by their names rather than the titles of “mom” and “dad.”

Training participants commended the family trainers for helping them rethink how to relate to families and recognize the impact that their own actions have on family members at CFTs. They were especially moved by the youth trainers’ voices, which encouraged them to increase youth participation in CFTs. One participant explained, “The youth trainer helped me see a little better into the minds of our youth so I am less likely to offend them, shut them down, or leave them out of important decisions they need to have input in making.”
“The youth trainer helped me see a little better into the minds of our youth so I am less likely to offend them, shut them down, or leave them out of important decisions they need to have input in making.”

On the surveys administered six months after the training events, over four-fifths of participants said that they had applied what they had learned from the family trainer in their work settings. Three-quarters of the participants stated the training resulted in their improving their relationships with families, and over two-thirds stated their CFTs were more successful. The lower numbers for the impact on CFTs was likely a function of participants not yet facilitating the meetings.

Six months after the training events, the large majority of respondents said that they had applied what they learned from the family partners, the training improved their relationships with families, and their CFTs were more successful.

In the spring of 2011, center staff conducted interviews with a mix of nine family and agency trainers. These included center employees and other trainers affiliated with the center. Each interviewee brought experience with the family-agency training partnership. The family and agency trainers reported that the perspectives of the family trainers enriched the learning experience in the workshops. The family trainers lent validity to the training curricula by grounding the CFT principles in lived experience. The trainers recognized that the co-training approach modeled family-agency partnerships. As one trainer observed, the co-training gave participants “an idea of how they can partner with families as well and it gives the participants an opportunity to see families in another light as real people.” The family trainers observed that the center provided them with the opportunity to speak from the heart and interact with participants “on a personal level that still lined up with the curriculum.” Their voice offered “a second conscience in the room.”

The family trainers offered “a second conscience in the room.”

ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY SOCIAL SERVICES STAFF

On their return from the field, trainers recorded issues that social services staff raised in the workshops. The training participants identified a range of concerns, obstacles, and successes as they sought to follow child welfare protocol in implementing a CFT approach.

Limited County Resources

Workers across the state faced multiple challenges associated with limited resources and tight county budgets. They expressed frustrations with having to juggle multiple roles, having access to few providers for services, and trying to involve families in CFTs when their basic needs such
as food and shelter were priorities. Trainers reported that cross-county exchanges in the training room encouraged creative thinking and connected workers around difficult service dynamics.

**Dual Roles of Facilitators**

Workers expressed a desire to have more dedicated facilitator positions in their agencies. CFT facilitators who also served as the family’s case worker struggled with remaining neutral in regards to case decisions. These dual roles posed the risk that the integrity of the CFT model would be compromised.

**Inconsistency in Practice**

Questions about CFT policy and procedures were regularly voiced in the training room. Participants shared contrasting accounts of how CFTs were rolling out in the field. These accounts covered inconsistencies around what elements were included in a CFT meeting, what the role of a facilitator was, how to complete the CFT documentation tool, and how to follow up on the CFT plan. Nevertheless, workers appeared more familiar with state policy on CFTs than in past years and wanted to figure out better ways to align their practice with policy guidelines.

**Time Constraints**

Time-related issues posed challenges to workers who were trying to move forward good CFT practice. Agency expectations in some counties led to abbreviated CFT preparations and shortened meetings. Workers also identified that their multiple duties pulled them away from preparing families adequately for meetings. Despite the challenge that time restrictions presented to the CFT process, trainers were encouraged to hear the high level of investment from workers in trying to manage this issue. Supervisors who attended trainings shared they learned a great deal about what their workers faced with CFTs and how to better support them in carrying out good CFT practices.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This report documents the contributions of the Center for Family and Community Engagement’s over 2010-2011 to advance accountability and collaboration in support of children and their families. The center encouraged accountability and collaboration through its CFT training, technical assistance, and evaluation. The high marks that the training team received from workshop participants reflected well on their innovations in curricular development, their expertise in training, and their support of transfer of learning to the workplace. The center held itself accountable for fostering youth/family leadership and community collaboration in all aspects of its work. Incorporating family and youth partners into the training team heightened awareness of family perspectives in the training room. Including participants from different
agencies encouraged collaboration across systems. The center identified that training participants arrived with greater knowledge about CFTs than in prior years and even in the midst of budgetary and time constraints, evinced a strong investment in good CFT practice.
REFERENCES


