

Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group Meeting Minutes – 05.02.2018

The twelfth meeting of the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) was held by the University of North Carolina School of Government (UNC SOG) on May 2, 2018. A recording of the meeting can be found at https://www.sog.unc.edu/SSWG_meeting8.

Working Group Members in Attendance

Sen. Tamara Barringer, co-chair
Rep. Sarah Stevens, co-chair
Hon. Robert Stiehl, Chief District Court Judge, Cumberland County
Hon. Page Lemel, Commissioner, Transylvania County
Angie Stephenson, DSS Attorney, Orange and Chatham Counties
Hon. Kevin Austin, Commissioner, Yadkin County
Glenn Osborne, Social Services Director, Wilson County
Chris Dobbins, Consolidated Human Services Director, Gaston County
Susan Osborne, Social Services Director, Alamance County
Hon. Brenda Howerton, Commissioner, Durham County
Hon. Bob Woodard, Commissioner, Dare County
Michael Becketts, Assistant Secretary for Human Services, DHHS
Lisa Cauley, Chief, Child Welfare Section of the Division of Social Services, DHHS
Susan Perry-Manning, Deputy Secretary for Human Services, DHHS

Working Group Members Not in Attendance

Rep. Jonathan Jordan
Rep. David Lewis
Sen. Joyce Krawiec
Sen. Kathy Harrington

Convene/Stage One Wrap Up

- Welcome by the Co-Chairs
 - Rep. Stevens and Sen. Barringer welcomed SSWG members. Both commented on the successful presentation of the SSWG Stage One Report by A. Wall to the NC General Assembly on April 10, 2018.
- Introductions by SSWG members, SOG support staff, and meeting attendees.
- K. Austin moved to approve the minutes from the March 18, 2018 meeting; Comm. Lemel seconded. Minutes from the March 18, 2018 meeting were approved unanimously.
- M. Henderson reviewed the meeting plan and agenda, both were adopted without change.

- SSWG members provided updates regarding the dissemination of the Stage One Report:
 - M. Becketts reported that NC DHHS has received the Stage One Report. On May 14th, 2018, the Department leadership will gather to review and discuss the report recommendations.
 - SSWG members may want to attend stakeholder meetings moving forward to ensure coordination and clarity.
 - The Center for Supportive Families has also had the opportunity to review the Stage One Report and found the recommendations to be thorough; they will continue to refer back to the report as their work progresses

Preparing for Stage Two

- A. Wall provided an overview of SSWG's Stage Two charge; accompanying PowerPoint slides can be found at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services>.
 - Stage Two has two distinct components: County Collaboration and Regional Administration.
 - County Collaboration: Recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory changes necessary to improve collaboration between counties in the administration of social services programs and services.
 - Not all reform strategies identified by SSWG will require regulatory or legislative change.
 - SSWG agreed that these types of less formal recommendations should also be included in the discussion/put forth in the Stage Two report if appropriate.
 - Regional Administration
 - This piece of the legislation changed during the draft process. The legislation no longer mandates a transition into regional administration. It charges the SSWG with coming up with a *vision* for regional administration. These departments would be public authorities that are separate from county governments
 - Discussions of liability and responsibility may surface as options for regional administration and enhanced inter-county collaboration are explored.
 - Avoid the use of the term “regionalization” because it does not make the distinction between regional supervision and regional administration, which may confuse the issue when discussing the potential for a regional presence with stakeholders and other interested parties.
 - Counties will be able to voluntarily organize into regional departments beginning in March 2019.

- DHHS is working on developing rules for counties that are interested in voluntarily creating regional administration of programs
 - The way in which counties utilize this option may vary – some may choose to share resources and responsibilities for the administration of certain programs or services but not others (i.e. sharing resources and responsibilities related to child welfare services but not economic assistance).
 - SSWG may want to speak with counties that have already developed collaborative relationships to help inform the SSWG’s stage two work.
- A. Wall provided an overview of the proposed Stage Two Work Plan. Accompanying PowerPoint slides and a copy of the proposed Stage Two Work Plan can be found at <https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services>. The proposed Stage Two plan includes a timeline for information gathering and proposed SSWG meeting dates.
 - Meeting Dates:
 - The report may need to be completed earlier than originally anticipated.
 - More meetings may need to be scheduled for August, September, and October to ensure that the Stage Two Report is completed on time.
 - Information-only webinars were proposed as a possible strategy for accelerating the process.
 - SSWG agreed to use webinars for information sharing, but not for discussions.
 - Webinars will be provided to SSWG in August synthesizing information gathered from May-August.
 - Extended meeting times were also proposed for dates that have already been agreed upon.
 - Long-form, in-person meetings allow for a substantial amount of work to be done.
 - Meetings in September and October will be extended to full-day meetings.
 - Information Gathering:
 - The primary goal over the summer (May-August) is to gather relevant information from the following stakeholders about the two areas of focus included in SSWG’s Stage Two charge (improving collaboration and vision for regional administration).
 - Social Services Directors
 - Preliminary survey to be sent in mid-May to gather perspectives on both issues

- SOG will synthesize survey results
 - Facilitated discussions at the annual legal conference (6/27-28) will allow directors to build on those results
 - Social Services Attorneys
 - Focus groups at the summer conference to discuss barriers to collaboration and potential solutions (7/26-27)
 - County Commissioners
 - Focus group with commissioners from across the state to discuss the vision for regional administration (date TBD)
 - Boards of Social Services
 - Focus group with board members from across the state to discuss the vision for regional administration (date TBD)
 - Open and Mixed Focus Groups: We will extend invitations to all of the other stakeholders identified in the legislation to participate in online focus groups (dates TBD)
 - Two focus groups on collaboration
 - Two focus groups on the vision for regional administration
 - If demand is high, additional focus groups will be organized
 - Social Services Commission
 - Consult with the Commission Members at one of their upcoming meetings (date TBD)
 - Public survey
 - Post a survey on the microsite to solicit feedback from the general public about both issues
- The list of stakeholders included in the information gathering plan is not intended to be a limited group – additional stakeholders can/should be identified by SSWG and invited to participate in focus groups and information gathering:
- SSWG members proposed several additional stakeholders that should be included in the information gathering process including district court judges, county managers, Tribes, justice officials, department staff (state and local DSS), clerks, and LME/MCO's.
 - SSWG members will continue to identify stakeholders that should be invited to participate in the information gathering process.
 - Opportunities for reaching these stakeholders in a timely fashion were discussed.
 - SSWG may want to identify groups outside of the social services system (i.e. Public Health) that are related to the system and already have regional entities in place

- It may also be valuable to reach out to other states to gather information about why they have/have not incorporated regional entities into their social services system and any experiences they have had with regional administration and inter-county collaboration
- Additional comments from SSWG members regarding the information gathering plan:
 - Stakeholders participating in focus groups should be well-informed with regards to how the information from the focus groups will be used and should be provided with any reports/discussion points that result from the focus group
 - Transparency and accuracy with stakeholders is important to the process
 - Information that is synthesized and presented to SSWG will be made available to the stakeholders and the public for additional comments/feedback to ensure transparency and accuracy
- Any interested person can be encouraged to provide input through the survey that will be available on the SSWG website.

Collaboration Between Counties

- SSWG members were asked to meet in small groups at their tables to discuss their present knowledge of inter-county collaboration, identify challenges and successes to collaboration, and discuss what conditions contribute to successful/unsuccessful inter-county collaboration.
- Following small group discussions, SSWG members were asked to report out to the larger group on what they had discussed at their tables.
 - What kinds of challenges have you seen in terms of collaborations between counties?
 - Coordinating quality services in situations where a conflict of interest exists has been a challenge in the past, specifically with regards to the timeliness of responses to reports of abuse or neglect.
 - In the past, the need for collaboration resulted from system failure (i.e. one county is unable to adequately provide a service without the help of a neighboring county). Because of this, counties may view mandated collaboration as a punitive measure and are less likely to buy-in to inter-county collaboration as a long-term solution.
 - What kinds of success have you seen in terms of collaborations between counties?
 - Counties across the state have joined together successfully to form Child Advocacy Centers which provide training and oversight in the foster care system.
 - Adult home supervision

- Shared DSS attorneys
- What were the conditions that contributed to the challenges or success?
 - A lack of consistency in practice and practice standards across counties presents a challenge for collaboration
 - Direct service providers may not be adequately trained in conflict of interest management, may not be able to accurately assess instances when inter-county collaboration is beneficial/necessary
 - Often times, collaboration requires that a county take on the responsibility of handling a case without being provided any additional resources to do so.
 - Some counties feel over-burdened by collaborative relationships while others appear to be under-burdened
 - Close proximity has facilitated more successful collaboration in the past; a lack of accessibility has undermined collaboration.
 - Collaboration between counties has been more successful when the counties involved have considered the arrangement to be mutually beneficial.
 - Cultural similarities between counties facilitate enhanced collaboration.
 - Naturally formed relationships based on trust and reciprocity between individual county officials/departments facilitate collaboration between county governments.
 - Infrastructure factors can either facilitate or hinder inter-county collaboration – what would it actually look like to collaborate in terms of staffing, office space, technology, travel time, etc.
- Based on these ideas, what are some potential changes that would generate greater success in collaboration between counties?
 - Cross-county training for social service professionals and administrative staff
 - Develop personal relationships that result in better collaboration at the system level
 - Shared practice orientation, shared understanding of practice standards
 - Thorough understanding of conflict of interest management
 - Identifying incentives for collaboration that already exist and incorporating those incentives in reform strategies to ensure county buy-in could generate:
 - Higher quality services for county residents
 - Reduced burden on county departments (county staff)
 - Access to additional resources/services that cannot be accessed without collaboration

- Developing clear options for enhanced collaboration may increase the likelihood that a county will engage in collaborative relationships.
 - If counties understand best practices with regards to *how* they can collaborate, they are more likely to do so
- Develop additional incentives for collaboration outside of those that already exist.
- The sharing of resources between counties may have to become a more common practice – sharing of resources will make it easier to share responsibility
- Regional supervisors should facilitate (not dictate) collaborative relationships between counties in their region
 - Regional supervisors can identify incentives for inter-county collaboration within their region
 - Ensure that no one county is over- or under-burdened
 - A sense of regional identity and shared responsibility for residents in the region may enhance collaboration
- Flexible options for collaboration that can be tailored to fit the needs of the counties involved
- Options for collaboration should also be tailored to meet the needs of specific programs – successful collaboration in child protective services may look different than successful collaboration in adult protective services.
- Additional comments from SSWG members and/or meeting attendees:
 - County commissioners, as the public faces of local government, should be out in front of this conversation and should be well-informed on the subject so they can accurately advocate for enhanced collaboration.
 - A representative from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners expressed the Association’s interest in participating in SSWG’s focus groups and also indicated that the Association would be interested in hearing from A. Wall and other SSWG at one of their upcoming meetings.

Wrap Up

- Next steps
 - Additional follow-up regarding scheduling changes
 - Maintain an online calendar detailing stakeholder meetings that SSWG members might want to attend
 - Updates regarding information-only webinars in August
 - Consider bringing in two speakers to inform the SSWG’s work:
 - SOG faculty member Rick Morse, who specializes in inter-government collaboration

- Kenan-Flagler faculty member Dr. Jim Johnson, whose expertise relates to demographic changes in the NC population
- Last thoughts from SSWG members:
 - Continuing education of elected officials is critical to successful reform and will energize local leadership to buy-in to inter-county collaboration.
 - Excited about stakeholder involvement in the next stage.
 - Stage One process has given SSWG members a more comprehensive understanding of local government
 - Stakeholder and constituent involvement is critical as work continues
 - Appreciative of the open-mindedness and dedication demonstrated by SSWG members and SOG staff
 - It is important to ensure that the entities pursuing interrelated reform efforts are well-informed of SSWG's process and have the opportunity to provide SSWG updates on their progress.
 - It's a privilege to be a conduit between outside stakeholders and the SSWG.
 - Directors of county DSS have been feeling the pressure, the "can-do" solutions developed by SSWG will provide them the relief they need
 - There is national attention on this reform effort; reform strategies developed in North Carolina may go on to inform the reform efforts underway in other states.