Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group
Meeting Minutes – 09.04.2018

The thirteenth meeting of the Social Services Regional Supervision and Collaboration Working Group (SSWG) was hosted by the University of North Carolina School of Government (UNC SOG) on September 04, 2018. A recording of the meeting can be found at http://www.sog.unc.edu/SSWG_meeting9/.

Working Group Members In Attendance
Sen. Tamara Barringer, co-chair
Rep. Sarah Stevens, co-chair
Hon. Page Lemel, Commissioner, Transylvania County
Michael Becketts, Assistant Secretary for Human Services, DHHS
Chris Dobbins, Consolidated Human Services Director, Gaston County
Hon. Robert Stiehl, Chief District Court Judge, Cumberland County
Glenn Osborne, Social Services Director, Wilson County
Susan Osborne, Social Services Director, Alamance County
Susan Perry-Manning, Deputy Secretary for Human Services, DHHS
Lisa Cauley, Chief, Child Welfare Section of the Division of Social Services, DHHS

Working Group Members Attending Remotely
Hon. Kevin Austin, Commissioner, Yadkin County
Sen. Joyce Krawiec

Working Group Members Not in Attendance
Rep. David Lewis
Rep. Jonathan Jordan
Sen. Kathy Harrington
Angie Stephenson, DSS Attorney, Orange and Chatham Counties
Hon. Brenda Howerton, Commissioner, Durham County
Hon. Bob Woodard, Commissioner, Dare County

Convene

- Welcoming remarks by the Co-Chairs
  - Rep. Stevens and Sen. Barringer welcomed SSWG members and thanked them for their continued commitment to this important work.
- Introductions of the SSWG members, SOG support staff, and meeting attendees.
- M. Henderson reviewed the meeting agenda.
- Comm. Lemel moved to approve the minutes from the May, 2, 2018 meeting, seconded by C. Dobbins. Minutes from the May 2, 2018 meeting were approved unanimously.

Collaboration Examples

- A. Wall presented examples of existing inter-county collaborations and feedback from other states about supporting inter-county collaboration. Presentation slides can be found at https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.
    - Reminded of the two-prong charge for the SSWG in Stage Two: Inter-county Collaboration and Regional Administration. The focus of the SSWG in this meeting is on the first prong – developing recommendations regarding legislative and regulatory changes necessary to improve inter-county collaboration in the administration of social services programs and services.
    - Existing example in North Carolina of voluntary county collaboration is the Catawba Region, with six counties working together to manage conflicts of interest (COIs).
        - Overview of how the Catawba Region COI collaboration works:
            - A COI report is received by Catawba County who then assigns the case to a partnering county.
            - There is a structured, scheduled system of partnering counties to manage the rotation of COI cases.
            - Catawba County is not the arbiter or decision maker for COIs. There is a grievance process in place where a full group of the counties in the region serve as a council to resolve disagreements.
            - Communication between the counties involves the home county sending an information sheet and then continues with counties sharing information as necessary.
                - A challenge with communication is that collaborating counties differ in what information they share.
            - The full Catawba Region COI profile, memorandum of understanding, information intake sheet, grievance form, and background information sheets for supervisors and social workers can be found at https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.
        - Shared R. Kelly's profile from the interview with those involved in the Catawba Region collaboration.
            - Benefits of this model:
                - Regular regional meetings are helpful for the standardization of COI decisions.
                - System helps alleviate the element of doing 'favors' and instead brings shared responsibility to partnering counties.
            - Challenges of this model:
                - Counties have differences in both staffing and practices.
            - Recommendations:

- o Single point person in each county in the region to handle COI collaboration.
- o Standardized documentation system.
- o Alignment with judicial districts.
  - ▪ In the Catawba Region COI collaboration, partner counties are in the same judicial district.
  - ▪ SSWG follow-up: How long has this regional collaboration been in place?
- o R. Kelly is researching and gathering information on other existing inter-county collaborations to present to the SSWG soon, including collaboration in CPS training, child support enforcement, and conflicts of interest.
- o Colorado is an example of a state-supervised, county administered system with six regions.
  - ▪ Full profile sheet of the Colorado system is available at https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.
  - ▪ Highlights given in the interview with CO:
    - Beneficial to pool resources of counties to hire a floating eligibility trainer/troubleshooter for the region ("gap-filling" person).
    - The state does not resolve COI disagreements.
    - For some programs such as child subsidy, future counties cannot re-determine eligibility in order to give stability and consistency.
- o Comments from SSWG:
  - o A challenge for inter-county collaboration is that policy is not well established or standardized such as with conflicts of interest.

Criteria Discussion

- A. Sachs facilitated a full group discussion on developing criteria the SSWG should use in making recommendations for inter-county collaboration.
  - o The group was asked to think about what kinds of impact the SSWG intends to make through the recommendations for inter-county collaboration? How should the recommendations be focused?
    - ▪ The full group was asked to fill in the blank: "The SSWG should make recommendations regarding collaboration that _____."
      - Improve service delivery, efficiency, and minimize conflict.
      - Emphasize safety and consistency.
      - Generate good outcomes for those served – for example timely, accurate benefits.
      - Include ethical decision making that produces ethical outcomes for all family members.
      - Provide equitable resources between counties and accounts for financial impacts.
      - Provide services seamlessly between counties with equity and fairness in quality of service across county lines.

- Transfer services in a timely, seamless, and collaborative manner.
- Foster more comprehensive and ongoing collaborations, collaborations that extend throughout the whole provisions of services – more comprehensive policies from assessment through ongoing case management.
- Provide quality customer service with caring and compassion.
- The large group was asked how the SSWG's recommendations should balance local autonomy and flexibility with statewide consistency. Comments from the SSWG members included:
  - Counties are proponents of flexibility but structure is needed.
    - There is appeal in the Catawba Region model in that it provides structure but is not rigid.
    - Counties can benefit from state structure but want some flexibility in administration.
    - Noted the continued dilemma of mandating collaboration versus incentivizing collaboration.
      - Skeptical if voluntary collaboration will ever work state-wide. Mandate may be necessary.
      - Local focus groups voiced concern over lack of control with regionalization.
    - Noted issue with focus groups not able to concentrate on one issue due to the interconnectivity of all social services issues.
  - Concern that local government/commissioners' legal obligation regarding social services is not well understood.
    - Layers of complexity complicate local responsibility.
    - Builds on moving towards more state responsibility to lessen local responsibility.
  - One-size fits all rarely works and local flexibility will allow for ebb and flow of the model to better serve each county and region.
    - Support still needed from state organization; state structure and support are incentives for collaboration.
  - Pushback from counties involves the fear of constant movement and combination of offices by the state such as with the supervision of LME/MCOs in the mental health field – the perceived result has been lack of local control.
  - Some services may be more efficiently administered by the state rather than the county.
  - Collaboration is going to involve understanding and trust between partnering counties.
    - Challenge will be having counties commit to successful collaboration.

- o Promotion by a regional state office of protocols working in other jurisdictions may help incentivize collaboration.
  - o Leadership is needed to establish shared services, especially for counties lacking capacity.
- Both mandates and incentives are necessary as there are mandated services but/and the provision of necessary resources are an incentive for collaboration.
- Focus recommendations on the **what** (example: designate a point person in each county to manage COI's) and not the **how** (example: who the point person must be).
- State can take on some services that counties can voluntarily participate in in order to free up other resources or meet needs that otherwise cannot be met by the county.
  - o Example: placement of older foster children.
- Savings and efficiency should be the goal at all levels of government.
  - o Example from Ohio with eight counties developing one application for public assistance, keeping intake localized and developing a regional call center that handles most of the backend of the paperwork.
- ▪ Reminder of SSWG discussion at the May 2, 2018 SSWG meeting: Not all reform strategies will require regulatory or legislative change; less formal recommendations should be included in the SSWG Stage Two report as appropriate.
  - Less formal recommendations are not required by the SSWG's legislative charge.
    - o Example: state regional offices promoting best practices and incentivizing inter-county collaboration.
  - SSWG agrees with the idea of including less formal recommendations that may surface in the Stage Two report.

Small Group Work and Working Lunch

- SSWG members were asked to meet in small groups at their tables to review at least two of the three main topics concerning inter-county collaboration (conflicts of interest, inter-county movement, and information sharing) based on the Summary of Feedback document presented in the August 30th webinar. The Summary of Feedback document can be found at https://www.sog.unc.edu/resources/microsites/social-services/materials.
  - o Small groups were asked to draft a list of recommendations and turn in a summary sheet of their proposed recommendations and/or requests for more information regarding a main topic. Following small group discussions, SSWG

members were asked to report out to the larger group what they had discussed at their tables.

- Group 1
  - Topic: Information Sharing
    - 1. It is necessary to build a bridge of information between data held by Medicaid, schools, courts, and child welfare services.
      - Commented on the inconsistency in understanding confidentiality of information across social services.
      - Noted the reality of funding implications.
      - Noted that the group would like more information concerning:
        - The confidentiality limitations matrix that surround sharing different types of information.
          - Would like to better understand confidentiality limitations and their sources, specifically regarding guardianship, child welfare services, schools and AOC.
            - For example, members would like to know the existing federal confidentiality limitations for each institution.
          - Would like AOC to present to the SSWG about the data they hold and how it can be accessed.
    - 2. Need to develop and mandate a cooperative agreement with the other bordering states like what is in place between North Carolina and Georgia.
    - 3. Need mandated, consistent cross-divisional policy.
      - Ex: Child welfare and child support cases (spanning across divisions).
    - 4. Need access to Medicaid data, specifically claims.
    - The small group added that these four recommendations on information sharing foster inter-county collaboration most significantly by helping those working on the "front-lines" in social services.
  - Topic: Inter-County Movement of Clients
    - Need to clarify residency law and policy.
      - Noted that the term *residency* seems to be obsolete in our current environment as people are so transient.
      - Need to define *residency* to fit the current social environment and the context of each social service program and division.
      - Will have to account for different areas, policies, etc.

- o Possibly base a framework around the Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act (UCCJEA)
- o Set out guidelines for establishing a home county and residency for temporary or emergency situations.
- o Give a construct for who can make a residency determination when there is a dispute, such as the respective regional directors.
- o However, various jurisdiction statutes for Termination of Parental Rights, Abuse Neglect and Dependency, and Adult Protective Services cases present a barrier to modifying residency law.
- o Takeaway: There is a desire to clarify the system surrounding residency law and policy, but it may not be feasible to create consistency in jurisdiction across the services.
  - ▪ Topic: Inadequate Resources/Staffing
    - • "Build your own" idea of staffing.
      - o "Grow Our Own" example at the University of Arizona (Dr. Michael Crowe).
        - ▪ Work with community colleges and mandate curriculum for teacher education programs to develop a social work program where students study and complete a two year program at a community college, then study for one year at a University, and then return to a one-year clinical/internship in their community.
        - ▪ Similar to the existing community college to BSN Teaching Fellows program in NC. Can modify this approach to develop a skilled social service workforce across the state.
        - ▪ A SS workforce of local people can be beneficial because of their knowledge of the county culture.

- o Group 2
  - ▪ Topic: Conflicts of Interest
    - • Discussed in their small group members' county level experiences with COIs and the complexity of COI issues.
    - • Propose regional offices (recommended by the SSWG in Stage One) to house a person who is an arbiter or coordinator of COI cases (the group titled the position "COI Inter-County Collaboration Coordinator").
      - o The regional/county structure for managing COIs would include the regional COI coordinator - responsible for working with clusters of counties in the region – and a

designated COI person (or persons) from each county in the region – responsible for managing COI cases for other counties in the region.

- o The regional COI coordinator would be responsible for relationship building between counties by means of:
    - Meeting periodically with the county designees to dissect past COI cases and discuss outcomes.
    - Discuss the capacity of the county clusters and allow a county lacking capacity to be removed from the COI assignment rotation. Noted that in the short-term this may create inequity, but can resolve the inequity created over the long-term by having rules for corrective action plans for those counties to build capacity to return to the COI rotation.
    - Make decisions based on what is best of all counties in the region and also be responsible for overseeing capacity building for counties to return to the rotation.
- o More than one COI point person at the county level is potentially necessary because of caseload concerns.
- o It is important for the regional COI coordinator to maintain past county cooperation and respect current working relationships between counties.
- o The regional COI coordinator should clearly set out the standards for a COI for consistency across the region.
- o The regional COI coordinator should take into account county resources, pressures and demands in transferring COI cases among the counties.
- o Collaborative effort must focus on building the ability of all counties in the region to take on COI cases.
- o A regional coordinator would be in a position to know what county is in the position to take on additional cases.
- Topic: Inadequate Resources/Staffing
    - Need to focus on developing directors of social services first, as county DSS directors' leadership is possibly the best incentive to create and maintain skilled social services staffing.
        - o Justification that focusing on 100 directors is more manageable to begin to tackle the staffing issue.
        - o Strong leadership for inter-county communication and negotiation is important.
    - Staffing concerns will not be resolved without addressing the financing of social services.

- Looking at the director position was taking the first step in building a system where the SS system recruits the caliber of leaders needed.
- Solutions to develop better directors:
  - Work with state school programs in social work.
  - Increase macro practice in leadership.
  - Use appointing authorities at the county level to ensure the use of best approaches for screening for qualities and qualifications needed for a strong SS director.
  - Use appointing authorities to develop directors after hire to encourage collaboration with partner agencies around the county and state.

- The full group was asked to review the remaining topics and recommendations from the Feedback Document that had not yet been discussed in small groups and determine whether the SSWG desired to move forward with those.
  - Inter-County Movement of Clients:
    - Clarify supervision expected for transfers/establish a standard practice for knowledge transfer.
      - Yes, move forward.
        - Consistent feedback to SSWG argues transfers are arbitrary – a more structured policy or practice is needed.
    - Develop reliable statewide case management system to ensure all case records are accessible by all counties.
      - Yes, move forward.
    - Medicaid-funded services should continue uninterrupted during transitions, regardless of LME/MCO.
      - Yes, move forward.
        - SSWG members noted common issues with gaps in coverage.
        - SSWG members noted that a determination is needed as to whether the breakdown/interruption is a federal or state issue.
    - Medicaid eligibility determinations and service approvals should apply statewide
      - Yes, move forward.
  - Inadequate Resources/Staffing:
    - Finds ways to increase or reallocate funding to allow social services agencies to have adequate staffing.
      - Yes, move forward.

- Establish a uniform pay scale for county staff; consider prohibiting supplements.
    - No, do not move forward.
- Variations in programs and policy interpretation:
    - Consistent interpretation and application of policies and expectations will foster greater trust and willingness to collaborate.
        - Yes, move forward.
        - Related issue in the protection of social workers delivering services believing they are following the law (noted that there is legitimacy in the existence of some inconsistencies in the application of policies).
        - SSWG members commented that a statewide practice model can provide consistency
            - A practice model can be used to apply critical thinking to social work situations, giving flexibility, purpose and justification of social work. Additionally, causes client to critically think.
            - Noted that a practice model is different than a DHHS policy.
    - Adequate and accessible staff training is essential.
        - Yes, move forward.
- Travel demands to comply with policy:
    - Set policies that broaden the expectations for providing assists to distant counties and that clarify the financial obligations of each county.
        - Yes, move forward even if generally.
    - Allow participation remotely.
        - Yes, move forward.
            - SSWG members request the SOG follow up with possible existing DSS resources for communication with incarcerated parents and access to those resources.
            - SSWG members request the SOG bring in AOC to discuss technology/equipment.
- Lack of models for successful collaboration:
    - State, central or regional or others should develop resources to facilitate inter-county collaboration.
        - Yes, move forward.
- Ad hoc collaborations
    - State, central, or regional or others should develop resources to facilitate inter-country collaboration.
        - Yes, move forward.

- o Noted the tension between a state push and counties working it out among themselves.
        - o Noted regional staff will be in a unique position to recognize where there can be collaboration, economies of scale and efficiencies.
        - o Commented the day to day needs of counties necessitate the need of regional staff to identify opportunities for collaboration and encourage collaboration.
        - o Commented that forced collaboration is not the answer.
    - Regional offices should establish a financial incentive program to encourage counties to invest in the start-up.
        - o Yes, move forward.
        - o Consider option of allowing collaborating counties to reinvest savings locally.

Review Next Steps

- Review of the SSWG meeting schedule.
    - o The next SSWG webinar will be held September 5th. The Center for the Support of Families (CSF) will present their findings.
        - ▪ The CSF report will be available for viewing online the morning of September 5th. SSWG members are asked to review the report and the webinar before the Sept. 14th meeting.
    - o The next in-person SSWG meeting will be held on September 14th. CSF will be present to answer questions on their findings presented and the SSWG will develop a list of recommendations for inter-county collaboration.

Adjourn