

WRAP UP

Program Improvement Initiatives

In Week One, we discussed state and federal program improvement initiatives in the field of child welfare. Now that you have learned more about child welfare practice, we return to this subject. Recall from the Child Welfare Overview that when Adoption and Safe Families Act was implemented, the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) was developed to monitor *outcomes* in relation AFSA goals. You have now learned more about the more about how your work is directly impacted by ASFA. Now we will learn more about the monitoring process. As the saying goes “*the best laid plans of mice and men often go awry.*” Child welfare professionals can tackle their work with all the best intentions, but if those intentions are not translated into positive outcomes for children and families, these efforts amount very little. Our intentions do not provide safety, permanence or well-being for children. But providing the best evidence-based practice that we are capable of usually does.

Assigned Reading: Child Welfare text, Chapter 8, pages 290—294 (beginning at “Child and Family Services Review Process” and ending at “State Role in Child Welfare.” Be sure to read through Table 8.1 on pages 292-293. This table provides the standards required by CFSR and outcomes from the initial round of reviews.

If you're interested: You can access the **Path to Excellence** at <http://www.state.tn.us/youth/dcsguide/PathtoExcellenceOverviewandDomains.pdf> and the **Second Strategic Plan for 2008-2013** at <http://www.state.tn.us/youth/dcsguide/Strategic%20Plan%202008-2013.pdf>

You may also recall that, in compliance with ASFA regulations, each state was to submit a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). Tennessee complied with this requirement with a plan entitled “*Path to Excellence*” and was one of only a few states to pass its first round of monitoring. After passing the initial review, Tennessee is now operating under its next practice improvement plan. At the same time, DCS has made significant practice improvements in compliance with the Brian A. Settlement. In the same way that CFSR monitors

compliance with and progress toward ASFA goals, there is a **Technical Assistance Committee (TAC)** that is responsible for monitoring compliance with Brian A. Principles. This committee is frequently referred to as “the Monitor’s Office.” Following the Brian A. Settlement, the monitor’s office worked very closely with DCS on its plan to comply with the settlement. TAC monitors practice improvement indicators closely to determine if DCS is in compliance. TAC is also responsible for reporting to the court on the progress toward the Brian A.

Assigned Readings: Brian A. Principles and Executive Summary of the 2008 Technical Assistance Committee from the *Course Contents page*, or the *Curriculum CD*. These documents are also available on the DCS website.

principles and make a recommendation regarding whether they believe the Department is upholding the agreement.

The DCS website provides a wealth of information regarding best practice efforts and the results of those efforts. You have already read about a number of successes and challenges in the most recent Brian A Monitor's Report. Some key recent successes include:



- ✦ Reducing the number of children entering custody by providing in-home services. One of the key methods of reducing the number of children entering custody is the Multiple Response System.
- ✦ Improvements in the adoption process have resulted in Tennessee having the 2nd highest state ranking for adoption improvements.
- ✦ Tennessee was the first state in the southeast to pass the first round of CFSR reviews.
- ✦ Tennessee has reduced the time that children remain in custody, increased placement stability, reduced the number of youth on runaway status, and increased the capacity of Youth Development Centers to better serve the needs of DCS youth and the community.
- ✦ Tennessee ranked #1 nationally last year in the number of children exiting custody to permanent placements and #3 in timeliness of adoptions.

It is important to understand the successes made by the Department, as well as the continuing challenges we face. Understanding these principles guides our practice and helps us understand many of the policies and procedures required by the Department.

Taking Care of Yourself

Reading Assignment:
Read “Beyond Burnout” from the link on the Course Contents page or the curriculum CD.

One of the most important reasons to develop self-awareness is the ability to recognize when our own resources have been depleted and to develop a plan to take care of ourselves.

Working in the field of child welfare is a demanding job. Often the stories of

the children and families that we work with are heartbreaking and it is difficult to avoid taking those stories home at night.

Additionally, our work is never really “done” and it frequently feels like there are not enough hours in the day to accomplish all that is required.

The stress of these demands often builds and, without an effective plan to manage that stress, workers “burnout”—a term that refers to the emotional exhaustion and cynicism that often occurs in the helping professions.

Assignment: Read through a slide show on **Stress Management** by clicking the corresponding link on the Contents page. How do you manage stress? Jot down some of your stress relievers and bring them to class.

Another form of burnout is “Compassion Fatigue” or “Secondary Trauma.” The slide show on “Beyond Burnout” briefly discussed this concern. Workers who have themselves suffered childhood trauma are more likely to experience compassion fatigue. To read more about this issue in the field of child welfare, see the assignment box .

If you're interested: You can read more about compassion fatigue in the child welfare field at: http://www.childtrauma.org/ctamaterials/SecTrma2_03_v2.pdf

Reading Assignment: **Child Welfare Work and Secondary Traumatic Stress** by clicking the corresponding link on the Course Contents page or the Curriculum CD.

The expectation that we can be immersed in suffering and loss daily and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet. ~ Rachel Remen, Kitchen Table Wisdom



It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson