



Minnesota Association of County
Social Service Administrators

Counties Unique Role in Case Management: A MACSSA Policy Statement

Child Welfare Case Management

What is Child Welfare Case Management?

Child Welfare Case Managers coordinate social and other services designed to help the children under age 21 and the child's family gain access to needed social services, mental health services, habilitative services, educational services, health services, vocational services, recreational services, and related services including, but not limited to, volunteer services, advocacy, transportation, and legal services.

The need for child welfare case management services can present in a number of ways. A child may need ongoing child protective services, or may have become involved with the juvenile justice system through issues surrounding truancy, running away from home, or being a sexually exploited youth. Case management services are also beneficial when the parent of a new child is also a minor, a parent has expressed the need for additional support and outreach, a child is moving through the adoption process, or for a child who has been put into an out-of-home placement. In some situations, case management can begin during a child protection assessment or investigation.

Unique Characteristics of Child Welfare Case Management

Child-Centered. Child welfare case management is child-centered. This does not imply that family needs are neglected or ignored, but it does place the needs of the child above all else. Maintaining the safety of the child is paramount.

Wide scope. Due to the varying possibilities that lead a child to need case management services, the scope for services is broad. The individual needs of the child make it so that each case plan is completely unique from another. This requires a tremendous amount of collaboration with system and community partners, the availability of a wide array of resources, and training on varied approaches.

Inherent tension. Child welfare case management may be delivered on a court-ordered, non-voluntary basis. Counties have a duty to provide core protective services. Case management in this, and other disciplines, is most effective when the person is engaged and willing to receive services. Because of the non-voluntary nature, the possibility for tension and conflict is high. This requires case managers and providers to be highly skilled in negotiation, engagement, and mediation skills.

Four Primary Functions of
County Case Managers



Court Involvement. Many times, the court is involved due to civil or criminal proceedings on the part of the child or their parents. The child welfare system is closely integrated with the county attorney, law enforcement and court systems to assure that the legal timelines and parameters have been met by the case manager, to support the best possible outcome for the child.

What Does Success Look Like?

As in other forms of case management, individualized goals are set and worked on throughout the duration of services. In situation where the child has been removed from the home, reunification with their family is a significant indicator of success. In those where reunification is not possible, permanency for the child, including adoption, is the best form of success.

One of the best strategies to sustain positive change is to focus on educating the child and their families about the specific needs of the child. When families have improved understanding of the needs of their child and know how to access resources to support the child's well-being, it illustrates the intervention has produced positive outcomes. Ultimately, the goal is for the child's family to be able to provide a safe and supportive home that meets the child's needs, and no longer require the services provided by child welfare case management.

Example from the Field...

Jaimie entered the child welfare system due to conflict between her and her custodial parent. She had a history of being involved in the juvenile probation system. Jamie was placed in a family foster care home and child welfare case management services was provided to support Jaimie in addressing her educational needs, address parent-child conflict issues, and build increased family connections between Jaimie and her non-custodial parent as well as siblings.

Jaimie experienced challenges in her transition to family foster. Case management services included supporting Jaimie's foster parents, coordination with the school system to support Jaimie's academic needs, planning and coordination of visitation schedules between Jaimie and her siblings, referral and coordination of family group conferences focused in building a permanency plan for Jaimie, and addressing the parent-child conflict issues.

Based upon assessment of risks it was agreed upon that it was in Jaimie's best interest to remain in family foster care. Jaimie did well in her family foster care placement and graduated from high school with honors. Jaimie was offered and accepted Extended Foster Care benefits to support her as she attends college. Case management services continue to support Jaimie in her visitation with her birth family including siblings, development of independent living skills, and support of the foster care provider who continues to be a resource for Jaimie. ▲

January 2016



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