



Laramie County Juvenile and Family Supervision Court SYNC Review

- **LC-JFSC-2008-001**

- “The “buy in” and involvement of the parents helped make this case successful. Additionally, the willingness of the court to recognize the family’s strengths was beneficial and influenced the outcome of the case.”

“We can always send kids to placement” but let’s try everything else first.”

Laramie County Treatment Provider



Access to Services:

- The vehicle of the Laramie County Family Supervision Court (LCFSC) was excellent for this family; the parents were vested in their children's treatment and success and the court recognized and capitalized on the parents' strengths particularly the father's strong desire to help his sons improve.
- A "family dynamic meeting" was hosted twice by Youth Alternatives¹ in this case. This influenced the outcome of the case by helping the family communicate and providing them with tools for continued communication.
- The parents believe that the more contact the juveniles have with "good people" through a program such as LCFSC, as opposed to "just being on probation," the better the two juveniles will do in life.
- An ongoing parenting group through Youth Alternatives allows weekly startup for families wanting services.
- The Laramie County School District has a contract with Peak Wellness² and Youth Alternatives; this is used in situations where immediate services are needed.
- According to one interviewee: "If you call Youth Alternatives today, you can talk to someone today, and will have an appointment next week or the following week at the latest. If a family calls today, that is when the family is most receptive to assistance."

Quality of Services Including Recovery Support:

- The LCFSC recognized the parental strengths in this case and complimented what they were doing with their children.
- The "buy in" and involvement of the parents helped make this case successful.
- The LCFSC has been very strength based by building upon successes of the juveniles in this case.
- Probation officers and the judge have been very open to listening to the clients.
- Blended family, with cultural parenting differences, was recognized by the treatment team and court.
- LCFSC gives incentives when the juvenile does well.
- The judge did a great job of recognizing and then tailoring the services based on the needs of the juveniles in this case. This was evidenced by the manner in which the court dealt with the children's biological mother; the court had to make some tough decisions in order to do what was "right" for the clients and was needed in their treatment.
- It is apparent that the family unit as a whole was a focus in this case, not just the two juveniles.
- One of the juveniles in this case has a physical impediment (hearing impaired) which was not a barrier in this case to the delivery of services.

¹ Additional information regarding the Youth Alternatives Program is available at:

<http://www.cheyennecity.org/index.aspx?NID=264>.

² Additional information regarding Peak Wellness can be found at:

<http://wy-cheyenne.civicplus.com/index.aspx?NID=424>.



- Parent reports that family counseling through Youth Alternatives was very beneficial.
- Progressive Youth, a mentoring program through Big Brothers/Big Sisters, has helped one of the juveniles get a job. The program has also assisted with tutoring and has gotten the juveniles involved in appropriate activities.

Coordination:

- The biologic parent in this case is persistent and has advocated strongly ensuring that the family receives the services needed.
- This is a case of a community working together; good representation from education, mental health center, Youth Alternatives, court coordinator and the judge, just to cite a few.
- Guardian ad Litem's (GAL) were able to explain to the clients, in a productive manner, what the court was requiring of them.
- Educational representatives from the juvenile's home school district were involved in the case. In fact, the hearing specialist from the school district attended several hearings.
- There is a love between the biological parent and sons that creates a dynamic of each not wanting to disappoint the other; this has helped the juveniles accept the need for treatment.
- Many partners of the team provide their participation and services "in kind" with no charges; this is an incredible contribution to providing wrap around services with a clear vision on outcomes.
- Cases are assigned to this program via court order from the juvenile court; it is clear to the clients what would constitute a revocation if they are not successful in treatment court.
- The Department of Family Services (DFS) provides the case management and planning; an intensive supervision probation (ISP) officer from DFS is assigned to this family court. This DFS person works with LCFSC in addition to a regular case load.
- There is a supportive and collaborative relationship between the LCFSC and DFS.
- The Juvenile clients in this case were required to complete community service. The organization that they worked with ultimately offered one of the juveniles employment, indicating good community support in Laramie County for LCFSC.
- Parents have a sense of community and "paying it forward;" good moral fiber which helped make this case successful.



Access to Services:

- The primary way a "family" can access the LCFSC is through an identified juvenile who reports with a substance abuse issues.
- There is a perception by some, that there are lacking services for juveniles in Laramie County, until the juveniles get involved with the system through delinquent behavior.
- It takes a long time of dysfunctional behavior on the parts of children and families before they can enter the LCFSC.



- It was reported by one interviewee that it is not clear what the conditions are for a family to be accepted into LCFSC.
 - Acceptance into the program is made by a consensus of the team members and court; system is working towards a more systematic way of evaluating potential clients.
- It is reported that there are not enough therapists in this community; the immediacy is not answered due to the long waits for state funded centers.
 - This is not the case for private therapy, however.
- Among team members there may be a lack of awareness of what services are available and how to access them.
- Programs such as Youth Alternatives need additional funding and resources.
- An interviewee reported that it is difficult to get quality psychological services in this community, due in part to a lack of capacity. In addition, it was reported that it is difficult to access psychological services through the medical community. Family Court, DFS Diversion and regular DFS cases all “compete” for services provided by these same providers.

Quality of Services Including Recovery Support:

- It appears, due to funding streams that those involved in the treatment team have to make the assumption that those participating in LCFSC have a substance abuse issue. However, in the one case reviewed, no substance abuse evaluations were completed. The juveniles in this case were under the scrutiny of intensive drug testing. Early on the incentive was offered to the juveniles that as long as they tested clean, the family and the team would see no need to initiate a substance abuse evaluation. However, the group agreed to initiate one if needed at any time. The parent in this case was comfortable with this arrangement.
- Many assessments currently are “self assessments;” it was stated in one interview that this does not always lend itself to valid information.
- The case reviewed has had three DFS probation officers in the life of this case with is approximately eight months.
 - The first probation officer had a lot of contact with the clients at schools, at home, and would inspect their rooms;
 - the second probation officer was only involved for less than two months, and
 - it is reported there was poor transition between probation officers.
- While previously reported that GALs did explain information well, they were not overly involved in this case:
 - One interviewee felt this may be a budget issue where the attorney’s are not encouraged to spend as much time with clients due to budget restraints. However, it should be noted the GALs are regularly notified of staffing sessions and hearings regarding their clients. Their participation is required if a sanction or revocation is being considered by the Court.

Coordination:



- The treatment team meets prior to the judge and clients meeting in order to staff the cases. These meetings are held in order to discuss the progress of the case since the last hearing. During the hearings the clients are often informed of the content of discussion during staffing. According to court representatives, this process is based on current widely accepted problem-solving court practice. There does not appear to be a great deal of involvement of the clients in the planning process³. Any prioritizing and/or setting up of services is done between the family and the DFS Probation Officer.
- Schools, particularly junior high schools, were reported to be “too lenient” by not holding children accountable and allowing them to “slide backwards” once they have made progress.
- One client received an in school suspension and the school did not notify the parent.
- Under the current creation of family treatment courts, there are no sanctions for the parents in these types of cases.
- Funding for the Laramie County Family Treatment Court is drug specific. However, the case reviewed was not particularly a drug case according to one of the parents, although both juveniles, prior to involvement in the program used marijuana. It was however a very successful “family treatment” case. During the initial intake process when the pre-dispositional report was completed by DFS, the juveniles self-reported extensive drug use. This information was used in the screening process to include them in Family Court.
- Once standards are established for problem solving courts, it will be beneficial for DFS workers to be trained.
- Sometimes the family work gets put on hold while the system, necessarily so, has to address other issues; this is a capacity and prioritization concern.
- It would be helpful if the school would become involved earlier in cases and stay involved.
- Due to the speed of beginning in family court, evaluations are not always able to be done in a timely fashion. This is also due to the aforementioned lack of qualified professionals available in the community to provide these services.

Systemic:

- In the past, it was reported that the school district gave their counselors a significant pay raise, then state funded mental health centers expressed their concern to the legislature and got more compensation. Now it is difficult for programs such as Youth Alternatives to be able to pay their staff at the same rate in order to keep counselors.
- Duplication of services can occur in Wyoming when a “monetary bone” is thrown out creating a competition of services and ultimately duplication; Wyoming needs to invest more systematically in a true continuum of care initiative.

Family Court Considerations:

³ This is not unique to Laramie County Family Treatment Court.



- “Depends on how it is run and how it is funded; it must have community acceptance. If a family court is run properly, it keeps children out of placement and families together.”
- Under the current structure of problem solving courts, due process rights may not be given the consideration needed; i.e. kids sent to a weekend in a correctional facility without the proper court process.
- Single point of entry should be at lowest level of court such as municipal court or earlier.
- It would be beneficial for there to be more statutorily dictated structure regarding these family courts; sometimes the judge has to deal with probation violations summarily in the absence of statutory procedures.
- Education and keeping parents together would assist in keeping children out of trouble. This is a benefit to these types of problem solving courts.
- The juvenile court and adult courts in Wyoming do not look at families; they look at individuals. It can be theorized that family court, in appropriate cases, is more effective working with an entire family as opposed to one person in a family.