MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

MA/DSS has 29 Area Offices organized in 6 regions; 78,054 consumers (41,302 are children < 18 years of age); 9,352 children and youth in placement; and approximately 3400 employees (FY2007; 3rd quarter).

FAMILY NETWORKS

Family Networks is a comprehensive system transformation initiative to redesign and integrate traditional categorical services across the Commonwealth into local systems of care for children, youth, and families served by the child welfare system. The Family Networks Implementation Study, a partnership between MA/DSS and UMMS, is a two-year study of the process of implementing local systems of care that began in January 2007, and will continue through December 2008.

WHAT IS IMPLEMENTATION RESEARCH?

Implementation research is the study of strategies to promote the translation and adoption of research findings into routine practice (Eccles & Mittman, 2006). Purveyors of innovations acknowledge the difficulty overcoming barriers to implementation at the practice, managerial, and systemic levels of health care and human services organizations (e.g., Fixsen et al., 2005; Schoenwald & Hoagwood, 2001).

Implementation research focuses on questions like (Werner, 2004):

- What is happening?
- Is it expected or desired?
- Why is it happening as it is?

Implementation Study vs Outcomes Study

Implementation Study	Outcomes Study
Question: What does it take to make "something" happen? What works to help achieve the goal? Under what circumstances? How is business being done differently?	**Question:** What is the impact of "something" on stakeholders—children & families? Staff & volunteers?
(a) Study parameters are not totally specified from the beginning. Study changes over time in response to findings & needs. An iterative process of research.	(a) Hypotheses are specified before the study begins & tested with study data. No interaction between researchers & study participants.
(b) Researchers acknowledge they are not totally objective. Their observations & impressions are part of the data; they provide feedback in an on-going way.	(b) Researchers are objective. They may be "blind" to conditions of the study.
(c) Don't know exactly where you're going when you start. Flexibility required. Anxiety & confusion possible.	(c) Typically is well-specified at the beginning, with set management plan & study stages.
(d) Typically requires mixed methods & data, i.e., qualitative & quantitative. May include open-ended interviews with variety of stakeholders, review of relevant documents, focus groups; monitoring of specified progress benchmarks, e.g., # of contracts signed, # of people trained, # of providers participating.	(d) Typically quantitative methods, data & analysis.
(e) Products may be produced during the study period as well as at the end, & reflect what is learned through studying factors contributing to the process of change.	(e) Products are most often produced at the end of the study period, & reflect testing the effectiveness (or not) of an intervention, for whom, under what circumstances, etc.

The Family Networks Implementation Study

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STUDY OVERVIEW

Building Research Partnerships

The partnership between MA/DSS and UMMS is the foundation of the Family Networks Implementation Study. The benefits of active stakeholder involvement are numerous, including increased buy-in to the study process, assistance in identifying key outcomes, and the proliferation of study results (Kaufman et al., 2006).

- *Shared Project Management* – The study is co-managed by MA/DSS and UMMS project leads;
- *Creation of a Study Design Team (SDT)* – The SDT includes representatives from MA/DSS and UMMS working together to determine the study framework, sampling, research methods, measures, and analyses;
- *Creation of a Study Advisory Team (SAT)* – The SAT includes representatives from MA/DSS, family advocates, providers, and UMMS who assist in framing research questions, providing input into data collection strategies, interpreting findings, designing feedback loops, and reviewing products; and
- *Design of Feedback Loops* – The SAT is creating strategies for feeding back study findings and products to relevant stakeholders.

The Research Questions

What structures, processes, and conditions influence the implementation of Family Networks?

- What needs to happen over the next 6 to 12 months?
- What has worked so far, i.e. in the past 6 to 12 months?
- How do we keep our eye on what's happening?

Study Design & Methods

To identify change domains → Concept Mapping
Concept mapping is a participatory approach to organizing the ideas of a large group that combines qualitative methods, e.g., brainstorming, with quantitative methods, e.g., multidimensional scaling and cluster analysis. Comprehensive maps are generated that visually display results. Four focus groups were conducted in the Summer of 2007 with a purposeful sample of MA/DSS social workers and supervisors, family advocates, providers, and the SAT. Focus group participants brainstormed items related to change, sorted them into conceptual groups, and rated them for importance and feasibility. The results and feedback from participants will determine study change domains, and will inform further data collection procedures.

To identify criteria for successful change → Most Significant Change Technique
The most significant change (MSC) technique is a form of participatory monitoring that can be used to assess the process of program implementation (Dart & Davies, 2005). Change stories are systematically collected and reviewed by stakeholder groups to determine shared criteria for success, and to identify the most significant change stories. The results are continuously fed back to stakeholders in iterative feedback loops.

To elaborate the key ingredients of change → In-Depth Interviewing and Case Studies
In-depth interviews will be conducted with relevant stakeholders regarding a subset of most significant change stories, to validate stories and to obtain detailed information about factors contributing to change, i.e., the key ingredients that facilitate change. Case studies will be developed that elaborate these key ingredients.

The Family Networks Implementation Study: Questions & Methods

What structures, processes, and conditions influence and shape the implementation of Family Networks?

(1) What needs to happen over the next 6 to 12 months?

CONCEPT MAPPING

Focus Groups(s) generate statements
↓
Participants sort & rate statements re: importance & feasibility
↓
Data analyzed
↓
Participants interpret concept maps, & identify change domains & relevant stakeholders
↓
CHANGE DOMAINS & STAKEHOLDERS

(2) What has worked so far, i.e., in the past 6 to 12 months?

MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGE TECHNIQUE

Change stories solicited in identified domains from relevant stakeholders
↓
Key group(s) review stories, develop consensus re: success criteria, & select stories for in-depth interviewing
↓
CASE STUDIES

In-depth interviews conducted, & case studies compiled & analyzed re: "key ingredients" for change
↓
SUCCESSFUL CHANGE STRATEGIES

(3) How do we keep our eye on what's happening?

POTENTIAL "PRODUCTS"

Success Stories
Success Criteria
CQI Benchmarks
Fidelity Guidelines
↓
INFORM STRATEGIC PLANNING, REFINEMENTS & OUTCOME EVALUATION

Summer 2007 → Fall 2007 → Winter 2008 & on-going

STUDY IMPLICATIONS

Findings from the Family Networks Implementation Study will inform MA/DSS strategic planning, system refinements, and the Family Networks outcomes evaluation. Continuous quality improvement strategies, drawn from study findings, will be relevant and useful to other Massachusetts EOHHS agencies with similar service delivery systems and agendas. Project activities and products will promote the Commonwealth's participation in the national dialogue regarding systems transformation in child welfare, mental health, and juvenile justice.