

WRAPPING ONE'S MIND AROUND WRAPAROUND SERVICES IN MONTEREY COUNTY UNDER SENATE BILL 163

Al Redwine*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Wraparound is a family-based, strength-based, needs-driven planning process. It creates individualized services and support activities for children and their families. The wraparound model of service delivery provides services to children and youth who are at-risk of placement in a foster care, group home facility.

Wraparound provides options for intervention in the family that rely on the family's self-determined goals and confrontation of problems. A plan of action is developed by the family with the assistance of the public agencies responsible for the child.

SENATE BILL 163

State legislation passed in 1997 allowed California counties to participate in a statewide pilot project to keep children in, or return them to, permanent family settings as an alternative to placement into group homes. Senate Bill 163, authored by Hilda Solis, allows counties the flexible use of state foster care funds to provide eligible children with family-based service alternatives to group home care using wraparound as the service model. Eligible children include wards or dependents of the court who are in a group home at a rate classification level 10-14, severely emotionally disturbed children voluntarily placed in out-of-home care or a ward or dependent

who is "at risk" of placement in an RCL 10-14 group home.

SB163 allows the use of state foster care funds to provide wraparound services, pay for staff and program costs and establish a "flex fund" from which services to the child and their family are paid. Uses of the flex funds for services to the child and family are unrestricted.

MONTEREY COUNTY'S WRAPAROUND SYSTEM

In response to rising costs and numbers of children being placed in out-of-home care, Monterey County established several initiatives to address the needs of children being placed in foster care. One of these initiatives is the wraparound service model under SB163.

Monterey County contracts with a non-profit service provider, Unity Care Group, to provide wraparound services. A separate contract is held with Hartnell Community College to provide training leading to certification in wraparound services.

In operation less than a year, Monterey's wrap-around system is currently serving 21 families at an average monthly cost of \$9,800. Many of the costs have been covered under Title IV-E, leaving SB163 funds available for use in the flex fund. The pro-

*Al Redwine is a Program Development Manager in the Employment and Training Division of the Sonoma County Human Services Department.

gram appears to be cost neutral so far.

PROPOSAL FOR SONOMA COUNTY

I recommend that the Sonoma County Human Services Department evaluate the feasibility of developing an SB163 wraparound service system. The committee currently designated to implement the Empower Support Protect (ESP) multidisciplinary initiative could conduct initial evaluation and planning. Added representatives from the juvenile justice system, fiscal, public health and community representatives would provide input for establishing a wraparound system.

WRAPPING ONE'S MIND AROUND WRAPAROUND SERVICES IN MONTEREY COUNTY UNDER SENATE BILL 163

Al Redwine

INTRODUCTION

Frankie, aged 15, entered the Child Placement system when he was nine. His mom, Jan, felt he was out of control and he might harm his two year-old brother. His mom and dad dropped him off at a shelter and went home. Over the intervening years, there have been about a dozen completed visits. Most visits have been canceled by his parents. No other relatives are in touch because Frankie's parents have led them to think he is in an out-of-state military school. Frankie loves his parents, especially his mom, and hates his brother.

When first placed in foster care at age nine, Frankie had been convicted of two breaking and entering offenses. He was on probation and in community service until he assaulted a younger child at school. That was followed by detention and placement into a residential treatment center, where he did alright until he assaulted another younger child. This resulted in yet another residential treatment center placement, where he was kicked out for fabricating a small bomb in the chemistry lab, which he put in the center director's office, and dangling a younger boy out of a fifth story window. He says that little kids annoy him.

Federal law requires that children who are removed from their families be placed in the least restrictive setting that will meet their needs and to the fullest extent possible, allow them to remain in their own schools and communities. This goal, however, is not always reached. In a report from the California Department of Social Services in August 2002, 18% of children in child welfare supervised foster

care were placed outside their own counties, and 3% were placed outside California. These placements occurred because of in-county shortages of foster homes, placement of children with relatives, or other needs.

Sonoma County has an excellent child welfare system. Under a review conducted by the National Child Welfare Resource Center, through the University of Southern Maine, Sonoma County exceeded all other states reviewed at that time in the areas of safety, permanence in placement, and child well-being. Sonoma County also is committed to providing the best available emergency housing facilities and is now breaking ground for a new children's home, the Valley of the Moon Children's Home.

However, Sonoma County is currently spending over \$8 million dollars annually on group home placements. Although it has not become an issue for the Board of Supervisors, I think it may come under scrutiny in the future since the current budget problems in the state appear to be with us for awhile. Based on my review of wraparound services in Monterey County, adoption of a similar system in Sonoma County could help reduce out-of-home placement costs and provide a better service for some children and their families.

Wraparound is a family-based, strength-based, needs-driven planning process. It creates individualized services and support activities for children and their families. The wraparound model of service delivery to children and youth, who are at risk of placement in a facility (defined as foster, group

home), seeks to provide broad options for intervention in the family. Wraparound relies on the family's self-determined goals and confrontation of problems, which are addressed through a plan of action and response developed by the family with the assistance of the public agencies responsible for the child.

BACKGROUND

In 1997 the Monterey County Board of Supervisors conducted a study of the rising costs and numbers of children in the county being placed into out-of-home care. Its findings led to charging the directors of Social Services, Probation, and Health with developing a plan to address these concerns. From this plan several initiatives were undertaken. These initiatives included the Cherish Project, to address emergency shelter for abused children, the Marina Public Safety Program, which allows police officer or city employees to serve as emergency foster parents in exchange for receiving subsidized housing, and the wraparound project under SB163.

Monterey County's wraparound program was initiated on July 1, 2002. It is conducted collaboratively among the county's departments of social services, health and probation and two service providers under contract, Unity Care Group, a Santa Clara based community based non-profit organization, and Hartnell College, the community college in Salinas.

As an orientation to the overall approach and philosophy of wraparound services, Hartnell College provides a ten-week series of training sessions that focuses on the means for child family teams to identify strengths and develop plans to assist families with special needs children in becoming stable. The goals are to have children remain in the home,

succeed in school and stay out of trouble.

Having no background in child welfare, I chose Monterey's SB163 wraparound system for my case study, first because it is in the beautiful Monterey area, second because of Monterey's similarity in size and population to Sonoma County, but mainly because the concept of an alternative funding strategy and service delivery system intrigued me.

WRAPAROUND PHILOSOPHY

Wraparound exists as a child welfare philosophy independent from California's wraparound legislation, SB163. It is a family-centered, strengths-based approach that seeks out and encourages the positive elements in family circumstances to achieve stability and a nurturing environment for the child. SB163 is a combination of this philosophy coupled with a funding strategy to support it in practical terms.

The philosophy of wraparound services is to help families become self-sufficient and end their dependency on public services. It also envisions a way of looking at the family situation that focuses on its strengths. When a family facilitator goes into a home, she sets aside the problems the family may have and instead scans the environment for what is working; not looking for what is wrong, but instead for what is right. The family is given assistance in deciding what their needs are and in writing a plan to address those needs.

Wraparound provides an option for children to remain in their familiar surroundings at a presumably lower cost to the taxpayer where possible. This is not to say that group home placements may not be the best solution for some children. Many severe cases will require out-of-home placement.

Paperboat.com is a website devoted to the wrap-around approach to children's services. It describes six elements for establishing wraparound services.

1. Individualized child and family planning that identifies need and solution based on family decisions and goals.
2. Training and staff development and on-going supervision and support.
3. Funding and resource access.
4. Interagency agreements, policies and contracts.
5. Information management.
6. Quality assurance and improvement

Planning for wraparound services is critical because of the close and cooperative relationship required of the county agencies and service providers. Issues to be considered include the following:

- Community input via public forums, written and on-line comment.
- Ability of the service providers to cover costs through the Medi-Cal and SB163 claiming processes.
- Funding and management of specialized, unconditional services through the "flex fund" authorized under SB163.
- Cost efficiencies of wraparound service model compared with group home placements licensed at a rate classification level of 10-13.
- Individualized family planning: from initial identification to child family team plan development to discharge and subsequent follow up (note need for formal provision of this post-program service.)

- Planning with the family as lead organizer.
- Evaluation using mental health's system of care criteria.
- Customer satisfaction.

SB163

State legislation passed in 1997 allowed California counties to participate in a statewide pilot project to keep children in, or return them to, permanent family settings as an alternative to placement into group homes. Senate Bill 163, authored by Hilda Solis, allows counties the flexible use of State foster care funds to provide eligible children with family-based service alternatives to group home care using wraparound as the service model.

Originally set to expire September 2003, its sunset provision was eliminated and wraparound is currently an authorized program on an ongoing basis.

SB163 allows counties to claim state foster care board and care maintenance payments for wrap-around services provided to eligible children and their families. Children eligible for wraparound services under SB163 are:

- A ward or dependent who is in a group home RCL 10 to 14.
- A child who is voluntarily placed in out-of-home care via 7572.5 (SED), formerly 3632.
- A ward or dependent "at risk" of placement in a group home RCL 10 to 14.

The amount paid follows the rate classification levels (RCL) established for care in a group home and is based on the severity of the child's needs and qualifications of the group home. RCL 13 was established by the state for payments under SB163. RCL monthly rate payments are currently made at the following levels:

- RCL 13 - \$5,994
- RCL 10/11 - \$5,046

Counties are responsible for setting up the flexible fund account and the access to it. Funds accumulate in the flexible fund as payment is claimed under SB163. Expenses to keep the child from out-of-home placement will presumably be less than the amount required to maintain a child in a group home setting.

Funds claimed under SB163 may be used to pay for program costs, staff and overhead and to establish a flexible fund to pay for the needs of the family in maintaining stability for the child as specified and approved in the individual family plan.

The sharing ratio for funding is 40% state and 60% county. There are no federal funds included in the payment. Any savings must be reinvested into a child welfare service.

A primary feature of SB163 is that the flex fund can be used to pay for an almost unlimited array of family support services. Allowable expenditures include:

- Clothing for school
- School shadow
- Family mentor
- Tutor for the child
- GED classes for mom
- Child to attend school football game.

SB163 wraparound system implementation is still in its early stage in the state. To date 20 counties have implemented wraparound services. Other counties have placed an inquiry with the state or are in the active planning stages. There is no conclusive evaluation data at this time to determine if the approach under SB163 is cost effective. Reports

from counties to the legislature are due in the fall.

In researching the assumptions on cost effectiveness, the following comments are quoted from EMQ, a Santa Clara county based non-profit agency under contract with the state to provide consultancy to counties.

- Wraparound never costs more than a Level 13 group home placement.
- A Rate Classification Level 14 placement may require the county to pay a patch. In some cases this could double the initial cost of an RCL 14 placement from \$6,000 to \$12,000 a month. A patch payment is not required under SB163.
- The average length of stay in a wraparound slot is 18 months compared to 24 months in a level 12-14 RCL slot. This could also reduce costs, however, if the wraparound slot remains filled, with new families assigned as other families leave, it is less clear that a cost savings would be realized or if its just a matter of more kids getting the high quality of services envisioned by wraparound. Currently, no tangible information appears to be available to evaluate costs at this level.
- Successful completion of wraparound services usually results in the termination of court cases, thereby saving court costs.
- Finally, one of the collateral benefits of the wrap-around model, since it serves the entire family, is the positive influence on siblings of the child for whom the case is assigned. This is a true prevention of other problems in the family.

By using local services the child remains in their community and dollars spent on services remain in the local economy. Often difficult group home placements must be made in other counties or out-of-state. In a RCL 14 placement costing \$100,000 this is a significant loss to the local economy.

MONTEREY'S WRAPAROUND MODEL

The following is an outline of Monterey's service delivery system.

- Monterey County contracts with Unity Care Group, a Santa Clara based non-profit agency with experience in operating group homes for the target population.
- Monterey also contracts with Hartnell College to provide a 10-week, 60 hour Wraparound Training Institute leading to certification in wraparound services.
- Budget – Planned \$3.545 million over two years.
- Revenue Sources
- Title IV-E Training funds: \$181,000
- ESPDT (Medi-Cal): \$2,012,000
- SB163 Slot funds: \$1,352,000

In order to find a service provider that could deliver the demanding services required to provide the wraparound environment, Monterey County conducted an intense and critical procurement processes. Bidders' proposals were required to demonstrate ability to provide intensive services, manage claiming of funds for both Medi-Cal eligible services and flex funds through SB163 and identify an ongoing network of low-cost resources to assist families engaged in wraparound. The current status of Monterey's project is as follows:

- The contracted service provider has hired and trained staff,
- 21 families are currently participating,
- Flex fund reserves - \$237,405 (2nd Qtr),
- Families are stabilizing and graduating,
- Costs to date: \$9800 per month,
- Cost neutral so far, and
- Evaluation: data not in yet, but appears to be working as intended.

PROPOSAL FOR SONOMA COUNTY

I recommend that the Sonoma County Human Services Department evaluate the feasibility of developing an SB163 wraparound service system. Initial evaluation and planning could be conducted by the committee designated to implement the Empower Support Protect (ESP) multidisciplinary initiative. Added representatives from the juvenile justice system, fiscal, public health and community representatives would provide the input for establishing a wraparound system. The following rationale is offered for using the ESP committee to plan wraparound:

- Wraparound philosophy is in line with the ESP mission
- Wraparound planning can be woven into the ESP timeframe
- Minimal added costs to plan. It is possible that planning could be absorbed by the current planning staff, with some added administrative support, especially from fiscal.

A recommendation for implementation of wrap-around Services in Sonoma County will be developed after research on cost implications and feasibility of the effort with health and probation.

The following issues should be considered in evaluating whether Sonoma County should pursue implementation of wraparound services under SB163.

- Level of local commitment at all levels of the public infrastructure and the community.
- Administrative ability to process claims and provide oversight of flex funds.
- Service delivery system capability to carry out essential services under the wraparound model.
- Level of cooperation among the Sonoma County departments of human services, health services and probation and community based service

providers.

- Previous attempts to maintain a similar model under the federally funded system of care should be evaluated to identify problem areas and to learn what “best practices” could be adapted to an SB163 wraparound system.

If it is decided that it is feasible to pursue a wrap-around system, the following planning outline is proposed:

- Planning goals: Enhance current services
- Services to be provided
- Characteristics of target population
- Timeline: Link with ESP – a probable target for implementation is July 2005
- Budget: planning & implementation costs
- Cost efficiency assumptions, including the county’s current share of foster care group home costs compared with potential savings.
- Staff/client ratio: Target = 1:6 families
- Evaluation: include both the planning process and implementation phases.

Resources needed to consult in planning and implementing SB163 wraparound Services include:

- CDSS Consultants (EMQ)
- CDSS notices and letters
- Websites devoted to wraparound
- Other counties that have implemented wrap-around service systems

Frankie is an attractive, extremely bright young man, is great with computers, good at science and can fix almost anything. As part of the reunification plan to allow him to return to his parents, the Child Family Team has developed an individualized plan to address the domains of family and social/fun. The plan includes one-to-one time with his parents, bonding with his little brother by teaching him about computers, and using fixing things as a metaphor

for problem solving in the family. To address Frankie’s tendency to be sarcastic and rude, he will be coached to think of others as being on their own “planet” and using a “we come in peace” philosophy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Director of Monterey County Social Services Department, Elliot Robinson and his staff, especially Bruce Campbell MSW, wraparound coordinator, and Anne Herendeen, staff development coordinator, for their gracious hospitality in hosting my internship with the County of Monterey. I would also like to thank Ann Shetka, California Department of Social Services, for her invaluable technical assistance and support in my research on SB163 wraparound services.