

Wraparound Implementation in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties

HEATHER DAVIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

San Francisco's Wraparound program is approaching its fifth year and currently examining the possibility of new contracts. This study examines best practices from two Bay Area counties that began wraparound programs over ten years ago: Alameda and Santa Clara.

Enabled by the use of Title IV-E Waiver savings instead of SBI63 funding, Alameda County's Project Permanence stabilizes placements with identified permanent family for youth in any placement type. Alameda County's program was redesigned, based on evaluation of prior experiences, and began in 2008. Alameda County cited the diversity and experience of its providers' staff, clear delineations of county and provider staff roles and responsibilities, a twelve-month limit on enrollment, and ongoing communication, as some of the beneficial foundations of its current program.

Santa Clara County has used its experience to expand, diversify, and refine its Wraparound pro-

gram over time. Santa Clara has a capacity to serve 318 youth in or at-risk of entry into group care using the SBI63 funding mechanism. As a result, the program can engage sub-populations like African American youth, dependent adolescents engaging in high-risk behaviors, and adopted youth. Santa Clara has also developed forums for increasing communication and understanding between county and provider staff, including case plan review meetings, quarterly meetings with individual providers, and Wraparound conferences for county and provider staff.

I recommend that San Francisco County implement measures to immediately bolster current practices and to provide incentives for provider staff diversity and cultural competence. Over subsequent months, San Francisco should also increase its monitoring, its communication, and the opportunities for improving understanding across county and provider staff. Furthermore, it should develop programs for sub-populations.

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Introduction

Youth in the child welfare system experience an enormous amount of disruption and trauma that often includes many moves and separation from family and loved ones. Wraparound seeks to help youth transition out of, and avoid entry into, congregate care by wrapping services around them so they can live with a family (e.g., with biological parents, relatives, extended family members, or foster family homes in a community). It also helps families learn to meet the unique needs of the youth in their home. This all happens within a program structure that maintains certain Wraparound values and principles, such as family voice and choice.¹ Wraparound convenes child and family teams (which include the youth, family members, and others important to the family) and provider and county staff to assess, develop, and carry out plans that meet the youth's needs.

San Francisco began its Wraparound program in September 2006. It reached 116 enrollments in June 2009, and has seen fairly steady referrals and enrollments ever since.² As Fiscal Year 2009–2010 draws to a close, San Francisco will soon enter into a new contract, and may also add new providers to its program. As such, now is an advantageous time to learn about the best practices of Wraparound implementation in other counties. I was fortunate to be able to learn about Santa Clara and Alameda Counties' experiences because they are two of the earliest implementers of Wraparound in California. Santa Clara County began Wraparound in the mid-1990s under

AB 2297 and Alameda County began another type of Wraparound in the late-1990s under the Child Welfare Title IV-E Waiver Demonstration Project. In 1998, SB 163 expanded the use of Santa Clara's funding mechanism to counties across California.

Case Study # 1—Alameda Wraparound

Alameda drew from its prior Wraparound program experiences to conceptualize the backbone of its most recent iteration, Project Permanence, which ramped up in the spring of 2008.

Alameda is a Title IV-E Waiver county and has Title IV-E Waiver savings available; as a result, it does not rely upon the SB 163 funding mechanism, and it has been able to define a unique target population that meets its needs. In 2005, Alameda implemented StepUp, a family-finding and engagement program for youth in group care. Sometimes, StepUp's assistance resulted in youth moving to live with their newly found family; this, in turn, created a need for an aftercare program to support these new placements. For youth to be eligible for the program, the youth must have an identified permanent family that they already are living with, or will soon live with, but whose permanent placement stability is at risk. Although Project Permanence was originally only for youth in group homes, it is now open to youth in any placement type.³

Project Permanence is for dependents and Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) youth: approximately 87 percent of program participants are dependents. The program began with the capacity to serve 50 youth, but as growing interest created waitlists,

¹ ACIN 1-28-99 distributed California's Wraparound Standards to county agencies and potential providers.

² During FY 2008–09, 75 percent of enrollees were dependents, 7 percent were in the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP), 15 percent were wards, and 3 percent had AB3632 status.

³ As of January 2010, only approximately 20 percent of enrollees were enrolled while in or at imminent risk of placement in a Rate Classification Level (RCL) 10 or higher group home.

Alameda County approved expansion to 75 youth.⁴ The program is run under a contract with Alameda County Behavioral Health Care Services (BHCS) and is primarily funded with Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) funds covering mental health services. The Social Services Agency also uses Title IV-E Waiver savings⁵ to pay for non-mental health services. Additionally, Mental Health Services Act funds supported start-up costs during the first several months of the program.

Alameda County staff named several reasons they believe Project Permanence works well. Enrollment is limited to one year (extensions of six months are possible, but rarely used) and there is a “no reject/no eject” policy. Also, compared to prior programs, there is clarity around roles and responsibilities for county child welfare and provider staff. To increase their understanding of and ability to collaborate with the Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS), Project Permanence hired a former DFCS manager to train their staff and facilitate the county-provider partnership. Provider caseloads are small enough that staff can devote time to meeting each families’ needs, but not so small that staff become easily enmeshed with families. For similar reasons, provider staff are never assigned as a youth’s or family’s individual therapist.

Alameda DFCS staff strongly believe that the diversity, life and professional experiences of Project Permanence staff make a big difference in providing culturally competent, compassionate, and strengths-based services to their youth and families. They believe that diversity decreases the chance that racism will influence decisions and increase the disproportionate share of children of color in care. In addition, provider staff teams include a counselor (one of whom is an emancipated foster youth), who supports the youth, and a family advocate who supports the caregivers. Family advocates must either have experience raising a child who is not their own biological

child or have had successful contact with the child welfare system. Additionally, family advocates must be familiar with the dynamics of a public service system so they can teach caregivers how to access resources in the community, eliminating the need for one-time/short-term flexible funds.

Good communication between department and Project Permanence staff has been essential for continually learning from mistakes and successes. Discussion begins between the provider staff and child welfare workers on child and family teams. If concerns about a case’s progress arise or if staff have complaints, the issues are brought to the monthly Cross Operations committee meetings by provider or county staff. The committee consists of the child welfare supervisor serving as the liaison to Project Permanence, a supervisor who oversees the StepUp program, and up to four Project Permanence staff. This committee also reviews and passes along to the Steering Committee concerns that cannot be resolved at the lower level, such as requests for extension of services beyond 12 months. The Steering Committee is composed of a DFCS program director, a Mental Health director, and leadership from Project Permanence. These levels of case and program monitoring keep the program moving forward.

Wraparound is one of several programs Alameda County has implemented to try to reduce foster care and group home caseloads. Although it is impossible to know the effect of a single program in this, or most, child welfare environments, the county goes beyond simple tracking utilization and placements during enrollment. BHCS and the Steering Committee developed and have revised four goals for Project Permanence, each with multiple measures. Revisions to the first goal came after Title IV-E Waiver funds began to support it. The Alameda Social Services Agency (SSA) and the provider share data to address the first goal, and the provider measures the other three goals. Measures are taken at consistent intervals, including six months after exit from the Wraparound program, to try to understand how youth and families fare after the program is over. The four identified goals are:

⁴ As of October 2009, Alameda had 2,012 dependents in out of home care, of whom 171 (8.5%) were in group care (CSSR: CWS/CMS)

⁵ Under this waiver, savings from lower foster care placement expenditures can be used to pay for operating expenditures such as services for youth and families.

- 1 The successful transition of youth out of group home care or other non-permanent placements into a stable placement with an adult committed to maintaining a permanent relationship, (measured 6 and 12 months after intake, and 6 months post-exit)
- 2 An increase in access to formal and informal supports for participating families, (measured through caregiver self-report and activity involvement at exit and 6 months post-exit)
- 3 Program adherence to Wraparound Fidelity Indicators, (measured by provider quarterly)
- 4 The development and delivery of culturally sensitive services, (as indicated through youth self-report at exit and 6 months post-exit)

Case Study # 2—Santa Clara Wraparound

Santa Clara has used its experience to expand, diversify, and refine its Wraparound program over time. Santa Clara utilizes six programs, serves three main categories of target populations, and has the total capacity to serve 318 youth at any time.⁶ Provider staff reflect the diversity of Santa Clara's child welfare population, and their cultural sensitivity and language skills are appreciated by the county. Since Santa Clara funds Wraparound using the SB 163 funding mechanism (as well as EPSDT funds), youth must be in or at-risk of placement in an RCL 10 or higher group home to be eligible. Youth in group care must also have a plan to step down to a family within thirty days of referral. The majority of enrollees are referred by DFCS; approximately 30 percent have AB3632 status and a smaller percentage are referred through Juvenile Probation.

The largest category of Wraparound programs, composing approximately 80 percent of the capacity, includes: UPLIFT and Compadres, for dependents, wards, and AB3632 youth; Odyssey, a program specifically for African American dependents and wards that the county created to combat disproportional-

ity; and Seneca Wrap, an out-of-county program for dependents graduating from placement at Seneca Oak Grove.

The second category of Wraparound is a program called Matrix which has a capacity of up to 48 dependent adolescents engaging in high-risk behaviors such as prostitution, gang involvement, or extensive drug use. Matrix is unique in offering a Professional Parent Program where youth can be placed in a FFA foster home that has a no eject/no reject policy for up to six months while a more permanent placement is found. Also, because this population is generally difficult to serve and coordination of their mental health services is particularly important, Matrix staff can best provide therapy to youth in the Matrix program.

The third category, a program called AFTER, provides services to up to 15 AAP youth and their families. Unlike the other Wraparound programs, the AAP Wraparound program is approved and monitored within the DFCS Post Adoptions Unit. The basic criteria for enrollment are the same as the other programs, but the referral, enrollment, and monitoring process is more collaborative because adoptive parents are legally in control of their own and the youth's participation. Staff believed that a separate program for AAP youth was important because AAP youth and families experience a unique array of challenges and feelings. This program has helped county staff learn more about what adoptive families and children experience.

Santa Clara County staff described a few challenges within their program, but also highlighted many strengths. Foremost amongst the challenges has been the declining referrals since early 2009. Although the causes are unknown, they may be related to the decreasing number of dependency cases. To bolster enrollment, the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) promotes the program internally, and, on the positive side, referrals come in from all types of units in DFCS. To share the impact of the low referrals equitably between providers, enrollments are shared proportionately between programs (with the exception of the Odyssey, Matrix, Seneca Wrap, and AFTER programs).

⁶ As of October 2009, Santa Clara had 1,359 dependents in placement, of whom 11.8 percent were in group care (CSSR: CWS/CMS)

To improve the working relationships between DFCS social workers and Wraparound facilitators, Santa Clara implemented a collaborative training series within the last year. The trainings are mandatory for Wrap provider staff, and recommended for DFCS staff. Conference-style trainings are held three to four times per year. Topics are selected based on staff requests and cover specific topics, such as stabilization and crisis, understanding roles and responsibilities, conflict resolution, and the DFCS legal processes. The sessions include time for feedback and discussion, allowing attendees to ask questions related to actual cases and to bring issues and concerns to light.

All the staff I interviewed in Santa Clara County discussed the need to assess the processes of implementing Wraparound and to keep up communication with providers on an ongoing basis. It has been difficult to keep fidelity with, and have consistent shared understandings of, the Wraparound values and standards across all of the partners over time; however, in general, the county regards Wraparound as a beneficial and successful program for its clients. The county has developed multiple venues for communication and feedback about Wraparound that begin at referral. Referral approval is required by representatives from DFCS, mental health, and probation departments at the Resources and Intensive Services Committee (RISC) meeting, which creates a system of checks and balances and provides a well-rounded assessment of the youth. Then, the Wraparound family and child team creates a plan that must address areas, such as the court plan, respite, any use of flexible funds, and safety. DFCS, mental health, and probation representatives meet monthly to verify that each plan meets the minimum requirements;⁷ additionally, they may also review these plans every six months until exit at around the 18th month of service.

⁷ All programs except Matrix and AFTER are presented and reviewed at one meeting. A second meeting that also includes representatives of children's attorneys, CASA, and the Department of Alcohol and Drug Abuse hears and reviews only Matrix cases. AAP Wraparound case plans are reviewed quarterly by the Post Adoptions Supervisors, case worker and provider staff.

The majority of disagreements between child welfare workers and provider staff are worked out in the child and family team meetings. They can also be brought to the attention of a RISC coordinator or DFCS program director. Additional layers of coordination and oversight occur at monthly multi-agency Community Team Meetings that look at Wraparound from a systems perspective and at quarterly meetings DFCS has with individual providers. The county sends DFCS supervisors and management to the quarterly provider meetings to share their experience: these meetings have helped some providers improve their practices. The Post Adoptions Supervisor also periodically discusses AAP Wraparound cases with the director of the AFTER program. These reviews are places where the natural tension between the county and the providers can be discussed, and where the county can hold providers accountable to working with the county and maintaining a shared responsibility for children and families. Through this communication, all parties become stronger.

Every six months, contractors are required to report on several measures of utilization, including: enrollment, demographic information, exits and the conditions of exits, and the use of flexible funds by Wraparound domain. The Wraparound providers with longer histories also are required to provide additional mental health information and Wraparound Fidelity Index measures. The county perceives that Wraparound has increased resources available to families, has reduced a reliance on group home placements, and has created a less intrusive way for reaching out to resistant family members. On a larger level, it is also seen as having shifted the child welfare system from an institution- and non-family-based system in the late 1980s, to a whole-child serving system.

Recommendations

After having the privilege of learning about Wraparound programs in Alameda and Santa Clara Counties, I present the following four recommendations to the City and County of San Francisco:

In upcoming contract negotiations, bolster written agreements, reports, and evaluations.

- 1 Include clear expectations for Wraparound program timelines, child welfare staff responsibilities, provider responsibilities, and conflict resolution steps as new contracts and MOUs are drafted;
- 2 Include youth race/ethnicity and SBI63 RCL Level in the utilization reports distributed at the weekly Multi Agency Screening Team (MAST) meeting.
- 3 Report on the average, median, and range of enrollment for current and exited youth every six months.
- 4 Report on the types of flexible funds expenditures, total spent, and the number of youth served, in the same report.
- 5 Collaborate with SF-HSA Planning to report on the placements of youth at designated points in time such during enrollment, at exit, and at least 6 months after exit.
- 6 Look at the above data, but group placements into the following categories to see higher-level trends: permanent family, non-permanent family, group home, emancipated, or other.
- 7 Continue to report on other measures that county agencies and providers are also interested in, including reasons for discharge.⁸

Incentivize diversity and cultural competence of provider teams in the new contracts.

- 1 Include the development and delivery of culturally sensitive services and an ability to meet clients' language needs as contract/MOU performance measures.
- 2 Seek providers with histories of hiring diverse staff.
- 3 Be open to the possibility that hiring a more diverse and experienced staff may require providers to pay staff higher salaries, which could be paid with Wraparound Reinvestment funds.

Increase communication about and monitoring of the Wraparound program.

- 1 Continue recently re-instituted monthly meetings to review "hot" and exiting cases every month. Also, include cases where providers provide individual therapy.
- 2 Set a program duration threshold of at least 18 months, allowing for extensions if approved at MAST. Of all cases closed in FY 2008–09, the average length of enrollment was 10 months but the range was from 1 to 29 months.
- 3 Survey or interview line staff about their experiences using Wraparound to learn about perceptions of how the program works on the ground.
- 4 Develop co-trainings for county and provider staff to build understanding of county and provider staff roles and responsibilities and to reinforce the importance of collaboration and communication at the child and family team level.
- 5 If San Francisco County begins to work with multiple providers, institute quarterly meetings with each individual provider as a forum to discuss implementation.
- 6 Within the next 12 months, consider implementing a systems-level review of Wraparound in San Francisco (for example, in a workgroup).
- 7 If time allows, also consider designating project or program manager-level staff time to review and approve all child and family team plans at the beginning of and at certain points during the life of each case. Based on Santa Clara County's experience, this could take approximately 15 hours per month (between meeting and prep time) for the FCS manager.

Develop specific expectations and/or programs to best serve unique populations such as AAP, or youth engaging in high-risk behaviors.

- 1 Adoptions staff should assist in developing a Wraparound guide for working with AAP youth and should also be included in any reviews of AAP Wraparound cases.
- 2 Adolescents engaging in high-risk behaviors may benefit from a program tailored to their needs,

⁸ CDSS is looking at putting various reasons for discharge into CWS/CMS reporting this measure will become easier in the future.

including more frequent reviews at the MAST or a similar level.

Conclusion

I am grateful to Alameda and Santa Clara County who shared a wealth of information about their Wraparound programs with me. Similarities between the programs included the provision of culturally competent services and attempts to foster communication and understanding between county agencies and providers. On the other hand, the programs' sizes, target populations, and funding streams were quite different. There are several aspects of both counties' programs that could be implemented in San Francisco, both immediately and over the next several months. Given Alameda and Santa Clara Counties' experiences with Wraparound programs improving over time, it is clear that, more than anything, a commitment to ongoing communication is essential to moving a program forward.

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