



ABC: Beyond the Budget

The Biennial Budget has been passed by the General Assembly, and signed by Governor Taft. Amazingly, despite the many cuts and flat funded items, state policy

makers unquestionably supported a proposal to transform mental health and substance abuse services for children and youth. And even more incredibly, they made a new investment of state resources to kick it off. It is a modest investment, but

consider the context: Other critical services such as Medicaid coverage for the working parents of Ohio's children was cut.

Under the leadership, dedication and commitment of PCSAO Legislative Director Gayle Channing Tenenbaum, The Access to Better Care Initiative was conceived, nurtured and now the policy has been delivered. All the rest of us have to do is to implement it! Change is hard, but with change comes opportunity.

An informal leadership group at the state level has already been meeting to develop a plan for explaining the ABC Initiative to you and other community partners, as well as to ensure that each community has assistance to consider how to evolve its behavioral health services for children and youth. As a member of that group, here is my first effort.



By Crystal Ward Allen

PCSAO
EXECUTIVE
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What is Access to Better Care?

- ABC is an initiative to transform behavioral health services (mental health and substance abuse services) for children and youth, particularly those at risk of involvement with the child welfare or juvenile justice systems.

- Components of ABC include prevention, assessment and early intervention, and treatment services.

- The package consists of \$26 million and \$27 million dollars in each year of the 2006-2007 State Fiscal Years. About \$12 million each year are new dollars; others are repackaged and re-prioritized (such as \$4 million HB 484, General Revenue Funds each year in funding for substance abuse assessment and treatment for families with children at a safety risk). The various funds come from a wide variety of state and federal funding sources.

A summary of ABC Components:

Treatment Components

- \$4.5 million and \$5.5 million new state general revenue funds are provided for treatment, respectively, in 2006 and 2007. These funds can be used for any behavioral health purpose. They can match federal funds, pay for residential costs; provide startup funds for intensive home-based

treatment services, and more. Half of these funds will be allocated (by formula) directly to the behavioral health boards early in the state fiscal year, the other half will be available (by formula) upon approval of a community's transformational plan. These funds will also support the former cluster population with

behavioral health needs (previously served with about \$.7 million per year).

- FAST, (Family And Systems Team) community-based behavioral health services to prevent out-of-home placement, will continue. Funding consists of Title IV-B and state GRF totaling \$4.2 million, and is allocated to the behavioral health care boards. The Ohio Department of Mental Health has indicated that FAST will have a

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more flexible fiscal mechanism to access the funds for these children and youth.

- The Parent Advocate Connection (PAC), to support parents in their active participation in service planning will continue, ensuring family engagement.
- There will be \$1 million set aside each year for juvenile justice pilot programs. Of particular interest is the intent to develop alternative mechanisms for female youth involved in the juvenile justice system, as presently the one Department of Youth Services institution serving these youth is struggling for quality services.
- \$.5 million per year will be allocated to Family and Children First Councils for services to former cluster children with non-behavioral health needs.

Assessment and Early Intervention Services Components

- Several strategies will be employed to better identify young children at-risk for behavioral health problems and provide linkages to early intervention services. Help Me Grow providers, child care providers and mental health early intervention specialists will be trained in use of evidence based screening tools.
- School and Community Partnership professional development and technical assistance to improve school climate and address early assessment and intervention with non academic barriers to school success, will be funded with federal education and Temporary Assistance to Needy Family funds, including support for the development of Care Teams.
- The Ohio Department of Mental Health will support additional counties as they initiate adolescent Suicide Prevention coalitions.

Prevention Components

- Preparing parents and child care providers for positive parenting techniques, even with challenging behaviors.

Statewide "train the trainer" sessions for Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) and the Incredible Years evidenced based curriculums and parent education programs would be offered.

- Identifying Maternal Depression symptoms and providing linkages to service for at-risk families will be done through the Help Me Grow program.

What is meant by "Transformational Plans?"

ABC is not a package to hand each county, uniformly. While the basic treatment and FAST funds will be allocated by formula statewide, many of the other strategies will be targeted initially to some counties, but not immediately to others. Some counties already have early childhood mental health consultants, so the funds available for that strategy will go to communities that don't already have these specialists. The Care teams will be targeted to high risk and low performance school buildings. The "train the trainer" Positive Parenting and Incredible Years curriculum will be targeted to those communities and providers that identify themselves as wanting to embrace these evidence based programs. Many of the opportunities are about capacity building. Some of the programs are limited to a population, just by virtue of their funding source. For instance, TANF funded programs will only serve low income families.

As you read this, plans are being developed to lay out a grid of potential ABC resources available to each community. Knowing that the resources will be framed by the amount of funds, source of funds, building capacity to meet unmet needs, and other frameworks, you are probably realizing that the logical plan for your own community (given what resources exist, what you think you are ready to embrace and develop, and what you aren't yet ready for), will be different from another community's plan. The end goal is to enhance, build upon your current services and "transform" your community's ability to better serve children and youth.

How will we "transform" services? Sounds complex.

- Plan with your Family and Children First Council partners. While most of the new funds go to the behavioral health boards, not all do, and to access the full year's money, a community plan has to be developed and approved.
- Prepare for a community needs and assets analysis. If you are currently a Partnerships for Success (Pfs) county, great. If not,

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MSW Scholarship Winner

Bess Burmeister received the Ohio State University Nancy Fitzgivens Scholarship award at a luncheon on May 25. Bess is a graduating BSW student at Ohio State University, and she just completed an undergraduate internship with Franklin County Children Services. Bess will enter the Master of Social Work Program at OSU this summer. Congratulations to Bess, and thanks again to the Annie E. Casey Foundation for seeding this scholarship, in honor of Nancy Fitzgivens, the Franklin County caseworker who was murdered in the fall of 2001. If you would like to make a personal contribution to this scholarship fund for master level students interested in the field of child welfare, contact Crystal Allen at pcsaocrystal@sbcglobal.net or Jennifer Heller at heller.4@osu.edu.



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you may use an alternative method for a gap analysis or plan to apply for new PFS funds.

Suggested Timeline

July and August

Attend the Family and Children First Regional meetings.

Early fall

Review the ABC Guidance to be issued.

September

Attend regional meetings explaining the ABC Guidance (criteria) for developing local transformational plans.

Access special technical assistance on the ABC items your community is interested in – more information will be provided at the September meetings.

October and November

Attend ABC Technical Assistance Seminars.

November

Submit your local Transformational plan to the state.

December

State review teams to review plans, and approve based on addressing the proper criteria in each plan.

January

Existing treatment funds will be made available to each community.

Change is not easy. We have our jobs cut out for us, but improving access to mental health services and substance abuse treatment for our children and youth is critical. For years, we in child welfare have complained about not getting access to effective services. The Child and Family Services Review findings clearly showed our kids need treatment and they need effective treatment. This is our opportunity to help shape the future. ♥

Getting to Know SACWIS

In June, we attended a briefing on Ohio's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). The briefing was a comprehensive look at the SACWIS Project, giving an overview of the entire project from its history and mission to how the system will benefit counties. The briefing included presentations on requirements and design, conversion, system testing and user acceptance testing, change management, pilot implementation, statewide implementation, and communications. The most fascinating portion of the briefing was the demonstration of the system.



BY JESSICA SCHNEIDER, COMMUNICATIONS SPECIALIST, AND GREG KAPCAR, ASSISTANT LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR

We were very impressed with how user-friendly the new system appears to be. We were awed by the amount of work that has gone into making this a comprehensive and accessible system to meet caseworkers' and supervisors' needs on the job, with the ultimate goal of serving children and families in Ohio more effectively and efficiently.

What stood out most for us was how much potential this system really has for improving service delivery and practice for the safety, permanency and well-being of children. For example, there is a "tickler" feature that reminds workers and supervisors about important deadlines and due dates (i.e., case plans, SARs, etc.). There is going to be a high level of accountability with this tickler system and it should prove to be extremely beneficial for managing cases. In addition, because the system is web-based, workers and supervisors will be able to gain electronic access to case plans and other paperwork which will significantly reduce copying and faxing time for workers.

Sitting in the briefing and talking afterwards, we realize how this is going to be a huge adjustment for everyone working in the system of child welfare. As with any change in life, there are good and bad things that come with that change. We could see where caseworkers, who are comfortable with the way things are done now by paper, would have a hard time adjusting to this – especially if they do not like computers. In general, it will probably be easier for new workers to adjust to the system because they have nothing to compare it to, while it will be more difficult for experienced workers who are used to the way things have been done in the past. With that being said, we were still very impressed with the potential this system has for making caseworkers' and supervisors' jobs easier.

According to ODJFS, there are several things workers can do to become familiar with SACWIS. The SACWIS Website has project presentations including an interactive presentation called "Mini Bites." We recommend attending a briefing or live demonstration. Seeing is believing! The next demo is in Montgomery County on October 13th with plans to schedule more briefings around the state.

Worried about the changes? Can't make a demo? Agencies can send representatives to Change Management Training. These representatives will become Change Agents and help spread the word about the changes that will occur in home agencies. Change Agent training will begin later this summer.

As a SACWIS user, you will be offered training within 30 days of your county's rollout. Classroom training includes interactive "hands-on," scenario-based training and a practice database. You can practice using SACWIS! In case you still want help, agency "Super Users" will be there to provide over-the-shoulder assistance.

This has got to be one of the largest, most sweeping changes child welfare has ever seen. And the potential for improved service delivery to children and families is very exciting!

Questions about SACWIS can be directed to SACWIS@odjfs.state.oh.us and answers will be provided within 24-48 hours. ♥

Directors, Kinship Navigators: Start Planning for Grandrally at the Statehouse!

Ohio has nearly 193,000 children living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. In many of these households, grandparents and other relatives are the primary caregivers (“kinship caregivers”) for children whose parents cannot or will not care for them due to substance abuse, illness and death, abuse and neglect, economic hardship, incarceration, divorce, domestic violence, and other family and community crises.

In response to the growing numbers of these kinship care families, state legislatures, public and private agencies, and grassroots coalitions in Ohio and across the country have begun to expand services and supports for children living with kin inside and outside of the foster care system.

In conjunction with the National Grandrally in Washington on September 14, 2005, Children’s Defense Fund-Ohio, AARP, the Ohio Grandparent/Kinship Coalition and Cuyahoga County Department of Senior and Adult Services will be sponsoring a Grandrally at the Ohio Statehouse. The purpose of the Grandrally is for Grandparents and other relative caregivers to step forward to serve as a strong voice for America’s children.

The agenda of the Grandrally in Columbus is as follows:

- 11:00 am** Training to become more effective advocates.
- 1:00 pm** Grandparents, other relative caregivers and legislators to provide testimony and speeches.
- 2:00 pm** Legislative visits.

Arrangements are being made to provide transportation from various parts of the state to and from the Grandrally, and lunch during the advocacy training. County organizers will be identified, prior to the Grandrally, to provide information to caregivers and interested individuals about attending the Grandrally.

For information about the Grandrally, contact Barbara Turpin or Shaun Tucker at CDF – Ohio (614) 221-2244. ♥



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