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# Child Abuse Ongoing Team Summary and Recommendations

## April 2012

### Team Overview

The Child Abuse Ongoing team reviewed the child protective services (CPS) system from the time a case is transferred to an Ongoing unit through conclusion by reunification or an alternative permanency option. Growing backlogs and increasing caseloads have lowered the responsive capabilities of Ongoing units. The team's primary goal was to improve the process in order to return capacity and allow workers the time needed to adequately evaluate and work with families.

The ideas contained within this report would increase capacity by over 22% annually, recapturing nearly 145,400 work hours annually. This time savings estimate is based on the current number of cases Ongoing staff carry between children in in-home and out-of-home care. The changes will positively impact responsiveness and should provide better service to our stakeholders including families, the judicial system, our community partners, and specialized units such as those for adoptions and young adults.

The vital work of the Ongoing unit remains the same, and the expertise and passion of CPS staff and supervisors will greatly help in reducing the redundancy and inefficiencies while improving the end products and services. Each idea is outlined with a synopsis of the current situation, the idea, and the impact to the organization and any identified stakeholders.

## **IDEA 1: Case Plan /Court Report Changes**

**Current Situation:** The current Case Plan and Court Report documents are not only redundant, but also do not provide meaningful information to many of the people they were intended to be used by. During focus groups of CPS staff, attorneys and judges, as well as foster parents and providers, a desire to simplify both documents was a recurring theme. In fact, in some areas of the state, workers are required to include additional paperwork providing a synopsis of the documents that is easier to understand and use.

**The Idea:** The Case Plan needs to be shortened and information captured in such a way that it highlights the most important factors needed to assist the family, courts, and other stakeholders. While documentation of concurrent planning must still occur, a separate document – the Reunification Prognosis Assessment (RPA) – can be eliminated and the target date for case plan completion must be stated in a way that does not give a family false hope.

While not all cases will be court-involved, when needed, the newly condensed Case Plan should then auto-populate into the Court Report.

**Impact:** Hours of work time saved to Ongoing staff who complete these plans multiple times per each case they work. This also would reduce the work time for Investigators who are the first to fill out a Case Plan. Clearer documents for courts, and easier to understand for families.

**Time Savings: 75,000 hours Ongoing staff; 12,000 hours Investigators**

## **IDEA 2: Streamline the Reassessment Process**

**Current Situation:** The current reassessment process requires hours of processing and documentation, even when very little new information is available. The very act of updating the Case Plan, which includes a review of the child's current safety and risk factors, could suffice as the review and assessment of the family and any progress towards their goals. The Child Safety and Risk Assessment (CSRA) format currently being piloted in Investigations has potential to save time in Ongoing with only simple modifications.

**The Idea:** Eliminate the need for the Modification of Services and Supports (MOSS) redundancy. Expand the CSRA for use in Ongoing to include new information Ongoing staff are required to complete once a case is transferred, including reassessment of safety and risk every six months throughout the life of a case.

**Impact:** Hours of work time saved to Ongoing staff who complete the MOSS and reassessments multiple times, per each case they work. Continuity with Investigation Units and easier information sharing

**Total time savings: 60,000 (10,000 MOSS/50,000 CSRA changes)**

### **IDEA 3: Streamline and Automate the Referral Process**

**Current Situation:** In Maricopa County, regions send their referrals to a centralized unit to be processed. The lengthy paper oriented process with virtually no tracking ability has led to many referral requests becoming lost, or sent in without the proper documentation. In addition, multiple signatures are needed from contracted consultants who only work part time and do not have the capacity to review all the cases requesting such services. Delays lead to families unable to access services and children remaining in CPS custody longer.

**The Idea:** Eliminate the need for Assistant Program Manager (APM) and other approving signatures and allow electronically sent referral requests for approval.

**Impact:** This change would not only help Supervisors track their CPS Specialists' referrals and allow them electronic access to the documents, but it should provide speedier services for families.

**Total time savings: Unknown**

### **IDEA 4: Expand the CSRA Use to Include New Reports on Children Already in Ongoing**

**Current Situation:** Each new report that comes in must be investigated, even when the child is already in CPS custody with an Ongoing case manager. These reports can be time consuming and take the same amount of work time as the original investigation.

**The Idea:** Expand the use of the CSRA to include these new reports. This has a proven record of dropping work time, reducing the backlog of reports, and provides consistent documentation with the investigators.

**Impact:** This idea saves time during documentation and also reduces the stress of Ongoing workers who often have a backlog of such reports to work.

**Total time savings: 2,400 hours**

## **IDEA 5: Simplify Specialized Unit Transfers**

**Current Situation:** There are an estimated 2,000 case transfers a year to Adoptions and the Young Adult Program, each requiring an average of 8 hours to prepare the transfer documentation. Finding the time to prepare the case and do a final reassessment holds up the transfer and is a contributor to large caseloads.

**The Idea:** Close and transfer these cases from ongoing without the current reassessment, and have additional windows in CHILDS that auto-populate the needed data to speed up processing time.

**Impact:** Cases will be transferred in a more timely manner, and staff will have more time to concentrate on cases that still need resolution.

**Total time savings: 8,000**

## **IDEA 6: Eliminate ICWA and In-Home as Separate Units**

**Current Situation:** In some Ongoing sections in urban areas of the state, there are separate Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and In-home units that take cases that are thought to require specialized processing. However, since the conception of these units, the volume of cases qualifying for specialized processing has outgrown the capacity to keep up and they have capped the number of cases they can handle. The overflow of these specialty cases are currently handled by Ongoing staff as part of their regular caseloads in urban areas, as well as fully handled by staff in rural areas who do not have any specialty units.

**The Idea:** The Ongoing units already handling these specialized cases have proven that all Ongoing staff can acquire the ability to process these cases. By eliminating these specialized units and making them general Ongoing Units, we increase the capacity of Ongoing staff as a whole and maximize the knowledge base of staff.

**Impact:** It is thought the influx of generalists into the Ongoing pool would help manage caseloads, but a specific time savings could not be identified. The team suggests this option be explored if leadership is open to the idea of eliminating these specialized units.

**Total time savings: Unknown**

### **IDEA 7: Technology Improvements**

**Current Situation:** Ongoing workers spend a lot of time waiting and can be more productive if the right tools were provided. Time between appointments, and waiting for court hearings are just two examples of when an employee could be filing assessments or responding to other needs.

In addition, the current technology does not allow supervisors editing capabilities and requires the assistance of an Information Technology specialist to make simple edits in the system.

**The Idea:** Expand the use of mobile computing, Allow supervisors editing capabilities, and allow electronic referrals and disclosures.

**Impact:** These changes are predicted to increase productivity by 260-400 hours per worker, per year.

**Total time savings: TBD**

### **IDEA 8: Complete Thorough Background Checks Prior to Placements**

**Current Situation:** Failure to complete a timely background check of a placement can cause disruptions to the child and adds stress to an already traumatic experience. When placements are found to be unsuitable due to criminal activity for example, a new placement must be found causing rework and may place a child at risk.

**The Idea:** Rule out placements with a thorough background check in the beginning of the process. Until the placement has been cleared by a thorough background check, the placement should be considered temporary. If a placement is ruled out due to a failed background check then immediate action would be necessary to locate a new safe placement for the child.

**Impact:** Less stress to the child, the placement family, and the child's family. Prevents less trauma to child(ren) from being moved after being in the same placement for a lengthy period.

**Total time savings: Unknown**

### **IDEA 9: Place Court Reports Online**

**Current Situation:** Well over 70% of court hearings begin without one of the parties having seen the Court Report. This leads to delays as Ongoing staff are often blamed for not providing the documents in a timely manner, even when the reports have already been transmitted.

**The Idea:** Place Court Reports on a secure website

**Impact:** As soon as reports are complete they will be available to the Courts, eliminating any doubt when they were completed. Improved access and accountability.

**Total time savings: Unknown**

### **IDEA 10: Place Children Closer to their Homes**

**Current Situation:** In 2011 just under 60% of children were placed over an hour from their home. This makes parent visits and services difficult and contributes to Ongoing staff driving more hours and spending more time away from their other cases.

**The Idea:** Improve recruitment efforts and work to create new partnerships enabling children to be placed closer to their home.

**Impact:** This is widely out of Ongoing's control, however cutting the distance in half for the 60% could save an estimated 27,000 hours of driving time per year.

**Total time savings: Potentially 27,000 hours**

### **IDEA 11: Shorten Core Training**

**Current Situation:** The current CPS Core Training program keeps potential employees away from their work area for too long, teaches material that is not region specific enough to be relevant, and does not allow trainers the ability to work with each employee individually. Also, many new employees complete Core, and then decide they do not like the work when they arrive in their offices.

**The Idea:** Shorten and split up Core to allow workers a chance to see what work is like in the regions, job shadow, and be mentored. Expand the use of online courses, and allow for smaller class sizes. New CPS staff can also serve as support workers for existing staff during their shadow and mentorship experience. This requires work with Supervisors to ensure learning transfer and accountability.

**Impact:** This idea is designed to help better train and retain employees

**Total time savings: Unknown**

### **IDEA 12: Increase Mileage Reimbursements**

**Current Situation:** With limited state-owned vehicles available for staff use and rising gas prices, the current mileage reimbursement serves as a point of dissatisfaction for many employees.

**The Idea:** Raise the reimbursement rate to match the federal standard.

**Impact:** Happier employees and improved retention

**Total time savings: None**

### **Conclusion**

The ideas contained in this summary save a total estimate of 145,400 hours of work time for Ongoing workers. These hours represent building increased capacity for the Ongoing staff and helps provide support for the current workload.

If approved these recommendations should improve response time and the handoff between Investigations and Ongoing, and Ongoing to the specialized units, as well as improved coordination between partner entities such as the courts and Ongoing staff.

These ideas are submitted for your review and the team is available to discuss any of the recommendations at your convenience.