

fare children and families

- Individuals conducting assessments have specialized knowledge and skills to provide accurate analysis and specific recommendations
- The results of all assessments be shared with treatment providers and clarified thoughtfully with children and caregivers to achieve a successful outcome of improved well-being and safety.

B. *Clinical assessment of child welfare child and caregivers:*

- Protective services observation and charges
- Social history of child and caregiver
- Risk assessment
- Caregiver Wish List
- PECFAS/CAFAS functional assessment
- Measurable psychological developmental and intellectual, emotional and behavioral functioning, academic abilities and serious emotional disturbance eligibility
- Caregiver substance use/abuse
- Caregiver mental health
- Caregiver ability to care and supervise
- Youth strengths, needs and relationships
- Caregiver strengths, needs and supports.

Many viable standardized psychometric assessment and outcome measurement tools are available. Demographic data, educational development and progress, caregiver engagement in service provision, random drug screening of caregivers, front end assessment tools are used together to engage and measure outcomes unique in child and family environments and mental health. The following can be used effectively for pre-assessment, utilization review and post-assessment as outcome measurements of best practice service interventions:

- Juvenile Inventory for Functioning (JIFF): youth and caregiver
- PECFAS and CAFAS
- Caregiver Wish List.

Measurements are effective not only for mental health triage; they also help determine whether a more intensive evaluation is needed for access to mental health services. They assist the utilization review of progress on targeted goals and achievement of outcomes in order to justify transition to less intensive and less costly services. All measures allow information sharing with caregivers and children, thereby encouraging inclusive planning and goal setting to promote successful transitions and caregiver awareness of progress achieved.

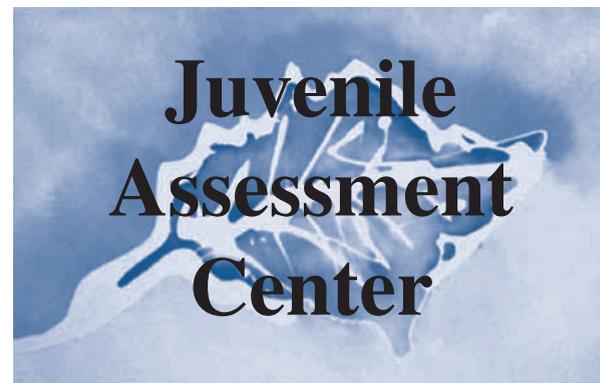
### **Encouraging Multi-Disciplinary Information Management**

Multi-disciplinary activities and shared participation in information, measurement and goal achievement during delivery of services must be continuous. They may occur between and during provision of varied levels of care to assure child safety, well-being and timely treatment provision. When assessed as needed, critical aspects of accountability are able to provide responsive services to address immediately any changes in risk and needs of the child. Goals must be quantified and measurable, as service provision occurs, so that all participants are able to have input and knowledge regarding where transitions to less intensive services should occur.

### **Summary**

Assessment, quality assurance and utilization review can support the process of safe, caring relationships by using available tools to establish careful goal setting, guide decisions, measure service provision, timelines and individualized supports.

Careful understanding of child relationships and preparation for transitions must be part of planning and processing to support children who come to child welfare systems with limited nurturing and caring relationships. Understanding the professional's role and client relationship is part of multi-disciplinary coordination and communication. Child transitions that occur professionally and thoughtfully will support the safe and full development of each child involved. ■



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## **Building on Successes, Correcting Weaknesses A Multi-Disciplinary Process**

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### **Introduction**

Wayne County's JAC/CMO system shares a collegial expectation of continuous improvement of levels of performance by all providers within funding parameters. By consistently and uniformly administering a provider-wide process of ongoing utilization review, the system is able to build on its successes and correct its weaknesses. It expands expectations of higher minimum standards of service delivery, treatment options and client satisfaction. Not only is the market for services identified more appropriately, it is able to take advantage of more effective, less costly interventions to achieve the desired result: *strengthening the importance and quality of family life for more children, youth and parents.*

This monograph outlines the key tools intended to identify and assure continuous improvement of best practices: utilization review and quality assurance.

### **Part I: Utilizing Review and Its Many Features**

Utilization review is a methodology designed to assure the quality and efficacy of services by measuring timelines, outcomes, costs and products. It is an essential part of Wayne County's juvenile justice system used to perform multiple functions.

### **Monitor Standards of Service**

For the Juvenile Assessment Center (JAC), utilization review is used to identify that an accepted standard of service is being provided to specific clients. It is important for social services to know what transpires in each case, whether an authorized treatment plan is properly implemented. Results are achieved by reviewing documentation, case planning, timelines and

approved pathways for every child and caregiver in the service network.

The JAC is contracted to monitor the following tasks of Wayne County's juvenile justice service network:

- Conduct initial assessments by JAC clinical staff within 14 days of referral or court order
- Assure development of treatment plans by the Care Management Organizations (CMO) within fourteen days from receipt of the assessment
- Authorize treatment services resulting from individualized plans based on the court order
- Match and implement a rate band appropriate to the assigned security level and service need
- Review all rate bands, documentation, case notes and updated plans every six months to determine if service interventions are focused to achieve specified goals
- Identify recidivist events such as new charges or felony convictions
- Analyze data involving assessments, service contacts, service intensity and lengths of stay, recidivism, escalation events and technical violations which cause more secure levels of care than defined by the offense risk.

### **Determine Contract Compliance**

For the Wayne County Department of Children and Family Services (CAFS), utilization review initiates accountability at the front end of the delivery system. It is necessary to assure (1) individual and community safety for the youth and family, (2) timely implementation and provision of treatment rather than detainment or postponement, (3) proper safeguards for managing dollars, projecting aggregate costs and operating within approved budgets, and (4) every ju-

venile justice youth is accounted for with timely, appropriate interventions.

Such accountability assurances enable and support providers' capacity to develop a treatment model with appropriate pathways and have a self-efficacy plan to monitor it and measure any service gaps.

By having a focused, neutral, knowledgeable party perform and coordinate utilization review of all required services, the county is able to assure that contracted services are focused more intensely on specific clients and their individual treatment needs. Customization is especially important when services are mandated for special populations. Mandates must not only monitor financial cost, but also necessitate the ability to readily know each client's plan and status.

### Measure Performance

For the Care Management Organizations (CMO) and their providers, utilization review means being held accountable for contracted services and outcomes. It provides direction and value and encourages CMOs to innovate in order to stay competitive. It also challenges them to seek and apply best practices, which assures that services include not only proper credentialing of professional staff, but also continuous expansion of their competencies and evaluation of field practices.

Because the ongoing agenda for the JAC, CAFS and the CMO is built on accountability rather than blame, utilization review continually redefines and supports the agenda by asking, "How do we keep getting better?" By providing the tools and data necessary to compel increased individual and organizational competency, it produces evidence-supported rather than anecdotal information to identify, copy and compel practices that improve consequences and lead to positive outcomes.

### Target and Predict Services

Utilization review helps organizations become gateways to better, more targeted necessary services by:

- Showing them how to improve their customer service network
- Providing insight to subcontractor accountability and credibility
- Developing new leaders who have internalized the system's advanced practices, competencies and skills

- Thriving in highly competitive, accountable, cost-challenged service markets
- Encouraging best practice models, including research and training designed to increase staff knowledge, growth and capacity to provide effective services.

Identifying specific emerging trends and determining their urgency and proportionality is an essential tool in maintaining the ability to respond to new needs as they become clear. Since its inception in 2000, for example, the Wayne County juvenile justice system has identified and added services to treat:

- Enhanced and specialized gender specific services for girls
- Youth entering juvenile justice system with abuse and neglect service histories
- Trauma focused services
- Educational issues due to a lack of school attendance
- Community-based transitions for sex offending, severe emotional disturbance, anger management, family conflict, home-based counseling, wraparound supports
- Enhanced and expanded cognitive impairment awareness and supports
- Community-based and specialized care for mental health issues related to seriously emotionally disturbed youth
- Specialized substance abuse treatment by qualified staff, buttressed with actual and frequent tests to identify specific drugs
- Coordination of care between out of home and community
- Local facilities for youth requiring more secure care that allows family engagement and community transition.

### Summary

Utilization review is knowledge-based decision-making. It follows critical pathways based on new trends and stronger norms developed to assure more intense, effective interventions. It forms the foundation for social services to be addressed as health issues that affect a client's quality of life. Quality of life, the common denominator for the new partnerships that have developed, focuses on humane interventions that value the individual in such a way that he or she internalizes his or her own worth.

## Part II: Quality Assurance and Best Practices

The term "best practices" refers to methods that have been shown to work when applied in the same fashion across populations within a service modality. Multiple research instruments are used to evaluate the promise and efficacy of specific evidence-based practices.

To determine when an array of intervention methods is promising, pre and post measurements that correlate to the desired targeted outcomes are necessary. Using psychometric methods and mathematical analysis to compare the results of measurements, it is possible to assure that a particular outcome or goal is occurring successfully and within the desired timelines. The net result is uniform, measurable quality assurance.

### Factors Guiding Quality Assurance

To account for the significant issues that guide treatment services and promote family well-being and reunification when child removal has occurred, assessment in child welfare must be comprehensive. Taken together, quality assurance and utilization review are two sides of one coin. They inform and support accountability for child and family outcomes as well as cost effectiveness within the realities of limited resources. They are designed to assure accountability, appropriate measurement and service value.

Pre-dispositional and pre-placement assessment requires comprehensive data and information collected in uniform and easily measurable formats that can be used (1) to guide case direction, disposition and decision making for safety and determination of level of care and (2) to compare at pre-determined intervals progress review, service value and targeted outcomes.

Qualitative and quantitative assessment is critical to planning for service process and fit, planning costs and targeting timelines. Standardized assessment tools for effective and efficient data collection will promote:

- Objectivity
- Careful decision-making
- Prioritizing of child and family needs
- Access to blended funding resources
- Measurable outcome evaluation throughout the service process.

Assessment and quality assurance-based utilization management must be guided by the ethical use of:

- Reliable and valid standardized instruments
- Multiple assessment tools to promote understanding of complex needs
- Multiple data sources in assessment.

Consideration of cultural, faith-based, person-centered interviews should be part of assessment and evaluation. Assessment reports should identify limitations related to the process, including sources of information, psychometric properties and evaluation conditions. Because assessment is a dynamic rather than static process, it is important to pay attention to changes occurring during services as well as over time. Lastly, assessing professionals should be skilled in using measurement tools and evaluated on their expertise in the instruments used.

## Part III: Risk Assessment, Quality Assurance and Utilization Review in Child Welfare

Significant issues related to the child and family as well as factors that may result in the unsafe youth's removal from a caregiver's supervision requires systematic evaluation. Primary areas of assessment include:

- Age appropriate development
- Mental health
- Substance abuse/use
- Environmental health
- Medical health
- Personal trauma
- Caregiver parenting abilities
- Educational achievement
- Access to and understanding of necessary resources
- Safety and risk for harm.

### Enabling Best Practices

Specific measurement and evaluation tools exist to enable comparative evaluation of the safety of the child and the skill development of the caretaker. Measurement tools appropriate to evaluate the child and family and establish priorities can be compared and matched after the provision of services. They help determine the degree to which identified, assessed goals were attained. The process enables best practices specific to:

- A. Pre-dispositional and pre-placement decisions:
- Comprehensive pre-dispositional and pre-placement assessments be completed for all child wel-