

2013 Annual Report for Circuit 14

Reporting Period: January 1, 2013 – December 31, 2013

(While recognizing information for the annual report will be submitted by October 15, 2013, Local Planning Teams are encouraged to include projected activities that will occur in November and December 2013)

Summary of Plan Activities

Please provide a summary of five-year plan activities for the five-year prevention and permanency plan. For each activity, please identify how they support/promote the Protective Factors.

The Circuit 14 Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency plan is focused on a variety of efforts surround prevention, promoting adoption, and supporting adoptive families that support the six Protective factors.

Working with community partners on systemic issues as well as with families is a focus of the plan. Efforts to support and expand parenting programs (Healthy Families of Florida), expand services (211, system of care, identify gaps in service), ensure correct partners, to include families, are at the table making decisions as a team, and including families in helping with our system of care (Circuit 14 Community Alliance For Families) are all areas we have improved on in Circuit 14 that support Nurturing and Attachment, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, and Parental Resilience. Other supports for these Protective Factors has been increased training to professionals on child development, motivational interviewing training by staff, agencies supporting a trauma informed care environment and system, and focusing on strengths.

Our system in Circuit 14 has focused on bringing in nontraditional partners and supports for families, as well. For years, we relied on “professional” connections or supports for families. As we have evolved and recognized the importance of the family developing a genuine versus forced connection we have seen our system change. Extended family members, friends, local child care worker, faith based community, or someone traditionally seen as an outsider to the child welfare community has become part of the team. We now reach to these connections so the parents or families are more comfortable. This supports the Social Connection of the Protective Factors and can be seen during a multi staffing of any kind in our circuit, as well as when we are discussing our system of care and enhancements to be made to it.

As a community we had to come together to address what Concrete Supports for Parents exist. This meant educating ourselves and frontline staff on what truly is available in our community and where gaps need to be filled. Mini trainings for available programs, developing better systems with existing partnerships to remove barriers to information sharing, developing community resource listings, cross training of staff, etc..are just a few ways we have developed this aspect of the plan. Making post adoption services a priority so professionals and families are aware of what is available or have an outlet to contact someone if they need direction has been beneficial. Training staff to listen to families and develop motivational interviewing skills has been key.

Increased knowledge of social and emotional competence by professionals is another effort. Understanding not all multi staffing or decisions made about a family are “cookie cutter” just based on an allegations or situations that brought the family to our attention. Engaging the families correctly to provide a level of support, developing better working relationships with providers (Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida, Inc.) to share information related to a child’s development or competence level, inclusion of families at the table regarding their own families or

our system of care, etc... are a few ways we have enhanced our Social and Emotional Competence of Children

Progress

Please describe your circuit's progress towards achieving each objective outlined in the five-year plan for Prevention, Adoption Promotion, and Support of Adoptive Families. (Please see Planned Objectives and Strategies document) (If your objective focuses on the State Fiscal Year, please report accordingly. If not, report information based on the 2013 calendar year.)

Example: Objective # - Progress achievement response

Prevention: Objective 1:

Circuit 14 will support the statewide efforts to increase the availability and capacity of Healthy Families Florida to provide home visitation for families at high risk of abuse and neglect and in need of parenting education and support in Bay and Gulf Counties over the five-year period from July 2010 – June 2015.

During the time when funding was cut on a statewide level to the Healthy Families programs the Circuit 14 community came together to vocalize our concerns with local legislative delegations. Our community based care lead agency provided funding to help sustain a portion of the program, as well. In July, funding for the Bay County Healthy Families program was increased which resulted in almost doubling staff and availability to families.

Healthy Families Florida in Gulf County is now served under the Department of Health with Franklin and Wakulla Counties.

Prevention: Objective 2:

Circuit 14 will support the statewide efforts to increase the availability and capacity of Healthy Families Florida in Calhoun, Holmes, Jackson and Washington Counties to provide home visitation for families at high risk of abuse and neglect and in need of parenting education and support over the five-year period from July 2010 – June 2015

During the time when funding was cut on a statewide level to the Healthy Families programs the Circuit 14 community came together to vocalize our concerns with local legislative delegations. Healthy Families of Florida has continued to operate in Circuit 14 for Calhoun, Holmes, Jackson, and Washington Counties.

Prevention: Objective 3:

By 30 June 2015, Circuit 14 will have implemented a faith-based prevention initiative that would provide for either universal or targeted efforts in which the faith community is engaged to provide family and community supports that would build the protective factors identified in the Family Strengthening Initiative.

The Circuit 14 Faith Network was established by the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, local pastors, and faith based organizations. The Department of Children and Families and our community based care partners, as well as other community partners have joined in the efforts. We have been fortunate to have statewide leaders with expertise in engaging the faith community meet with child welfare leadership, frontline staff, volunteers, and foster parents over the past year.

Prevention: Objective 4:

By 30 June 2015, Circuit 14 will have year round public awareness efforts with an emphasis in April that provides information to the general population on child development, positive parenting practices and community action.

Public awareness and prevention efforts had historically been done on a fragmented level within the community. The Gulf Coast Children's Advocacy Center in Circuit 14 began calling partners together to ensure the effort was organized and done more as a community several years ago. Social media, print and television media, as well as year round proclamations regarding child abuse prevention, domestic violence, mental health, human trafficking, etc... have been embraced by our city and county governments.

Prevention: Objective 5:

Circuit 14 will support families caring for children in crisis.

Stronger partnership with all providers in the Circuit 14 community has been an effort over the last several years. Ensuring the right partners are at the table to develop processes on assisting mutual families or working with partners and families to achieve better outcomes has been a focus. 211 is now a part of Circuit 14 so our families are able to receive information and access to services 24/7. Additionally, the community has come together to establish a Community Alliance For Families (CAFF) which will focus on our system of care. Families and youth involved in the dependency system and delinquency system are part of the CAFF, as well.

Promotion of Adoption: Objective 1:

Create and maintain a positive community climate that will foster interest in adoption.

Public awareness via the Heart Gallery, adoption celebrations across the circuit, appearances and media campaigns have provided a positive climate in our community for adoption.

Promotion of Adoption: Objective 2:

Ensure that individuals who are interesting in becoming adoptive or foster-to-adopt parents have access to appropriate and timely information about eligibility requirements, pre-service training and the process for becoming a licensed foster-to-adopt home or an adoptive family.

Our community based care agencies in Circuit 14 have developed processes to ensure timely follow up is provided to potential foster and/or adoptive parents. These include: establishment of a toll free number for potential foster and/or adoptive parents, tracking of all inquiries into foster parenting and/or adoption, an annual calendar with dates/times for orientation and training for foster and/or adoptive parents, media campaigns specific to recruitment, and follow up requirements.

Promotion of Adoption: Objective 3:

Develop focused recruitment for high need populations (i.e., developmental disability/disruptive behavior; teen SED, sibling groups).

The Adoption and Licensing Recruitment Team in Circuit 14, Adoption Specialist, and the Adoption HomeFinder work to recruit for specific groups.

Promotion of Adoption: Objective 4:
Conduct targeted recruitment of homes for specific high need children.

The Adoption and Licensing Recruitment Team in Circuit 14, Adoption Specialist, and the Adoption HomeFinder work to recruit for specific groups. Pipeline is used to track children with an identified home and individualized recruitment plans are developed for each child. Personalized buttons, the Heart Gallery, and newsletters are used for specific high need children.

Support of Adoptive Families: Objective 1:
Training/Education opportunities for Adoptive Parents.

Adoption Competency training as been conducted on multiple occasions in Circuit 14 for Adoption Specialist, case managers, mental health providers, and others. A Post Adoptive Specialist was hired by the community based care agency.

Support of Adoptive Families: Objective 2:
Circuit 14 will participate in training of mental health professionals in the Adoption Competent Mental Health Certification process.

Adoption Competency training as been conducted on multiple occasions in Circuit 14 for Adoption Specialist, case managers, mental health providers, and others. A

Support of Adoptive Families: Objective 3:
Adoptive Parent and Teen support groups will be established.

A support group for adoptive parents has been established.

Please identify the percentage of achievement of the five-year prevention plan you think your circuit has achieved, and describe why.

Circuit 14 has achieved 85% of the five year prevention plan. Over the last several years, Healthy Families on a statewide level has experienced significant impacts and funding loss. This has impacted our community. The lead agency for community based care in our circuit has provided support during this time and some restructuring of oversight has occurred, as well. This July, Healthy Families Bay County received funding to support expansion of the program by double its normal size. This has allowed for additional slots for families and community partners to make more referrals to this program.

The Circuit 14 Faith Network was formed by the Department of Juvenile Justice and local pastors and faith based organizations. This group brought together nontraditional partners to assess the gaps in services and needs within the community to support prevention efforts not just for delinquency but for dependency and all families within the community. Faith partnerships have strengthened over the last several years in Circuit 14.

The Circuit 14 Prevention efforts have become second nature to all involved. The Gulf Coast Children's Advocacy Center has taken the lead on this project with the support of the Department of Children and Families, community based care, and other prevention programs. Social media, print and television media, as well as year round proclamations regarding child abuse prevention, domestic violence, mental health, human trafficking, etc.. have been embraced by our city and county governments. Instead of these efforts being conducted independently by multiple organizations we have taken a community, year round approach over the last several years.

Please identify the percentage of achievement of the five-year permanency plan you think your circuit has achieved, and describe why.

Circuit 14 has achieved 75% of the five year permanency plan. Since implementation of the plan great progress has been made to enhance permanency efforts in our area. A Recruitment and Retention Specialist for foster parents has been established via our community based care agency. This has allowed for dedicated professionals to support potential and current foster parents. Each year this position has been developed even more to the needs of the community. Tracking of potential foster parents and structured scheduling of orientations and classes to license or support foster parents have increased. The Quality Parenting Initiative supported by the Youth Law Center has evolved from activities to engage professionals, volunteers, foster parents, and community partners to education efforts, networking, recognition, and supporting efforts. Currently, the National Center is working with our community based care agencies on additional recruitment efforts to obtain foster parents in our area.

Efforts surrounding adoption and post adoptive services have been a strong focus in our area for a long time. Since the plan was implemented, a Post Adoption Specialist was hired to support our adoptive parents and bring an increased awareness regarding post adoptive services, Adoption Competency training for professionals has been held on multiple occasions, and focused efforts on targeted recruitment of adoptive parents has been a focus. A Heart Gallery has been established in our area, as well.

Do you think your circuit is on target to accomplishing your four target goals by June 2015? Why or why not?

Yes, our circuit is on target to accomplish the goals in the plan by June 2015. The community and partners have made these goals a priority and although we have not formally met over the last year or two the goals have continued as priority for each group. As we work to re-establish the members and focus of the plan this will only improve our efforts to achieve the goals outlined.

Highlights and Accomplishments

Please describe any highlights and accomplishments connected to your circuit's five-year plan.

When our team met in September 2013 it was the first time we had met in quite some time. As we discussed what our original goals of the plan were we quickly realized how our focus and efforts had maintained despite routine meetings. This means our goals were on target with our community needs and the agencies and individuals at the table were committed to the successful outcome of the plan.

Obtaining additional funding or redistributing funding to support efforts is difficult in child welfare. Simply put: there is never "enough" funding for all of the dreams a child welfare advocate has. However, our circuit has been successful in locating resources to develop new positions and/or support programs to ensure our families are taken care of. This is owed largely in part to our community based care agencies setting priorities and seeing them through. Additionally, recognizing the partnership we have created between the Department of Children and Families, community based care, and our Early Learning Coalition of Northwest Florida, Inc. (ELC) has been another highlight. This partnership has allowed for additional sharing of information, supports for each program, and relationships where our ELC is truly part of our child welfare team.

Many of the efforts in the plan are part of how our system of care works in Circuit 14. They are just daily practice by a community that has come together for the families we serve.

Next Steps

Please identify what your circuit's proposed next steps are for 2014 related to the five-year plan.

Kathy Donofro, Permanency Specialist with Big Bend Community Based Care, has agreed to serve as Co Chair of the Circuit 14 Child Abuse Prevention and Permanency team. The team is currently recruiting new members and another Co Chair. The team will continue efforts to implement the goals outlined in the plan and fill any gaps identified.