

November 10, 2009

George Ford, Executive Director
Harris County Protective Services
Principal Investigator
6300 Chimney Rock Road
Houston, Texas 77081

Dear Mr. Ford,

Enclosed is the Center for Mental Health Services, Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch report of the federal site visit to the Harris County Systems of Hope (SOH) in September, 2009. We trust that it accurately and fairly represents the project.

We want to thank you and all the others from Harris County who participated as part of the site visit. We recognize the hard work that goes into planning such a meeting. The site team appreciates the openness with which they were met and the cooperation and enthusiasm shown by all of the System of Care partners.

This site visit helped provide clarity about the challenges you face in implementing the cooperative agreement as well as the tremendous dedication and passion of staff, system partners, families and community advocates.

Key Considerations

As Systems of Hope (SOH) moves into the fifth year of the CMHS Cooperative Agreement the site visit team notes excellent progress in many areas and some new challenges. This report will highlight the many accomplishments of SOH during the past two years as well as point out areas of challenge. Many of the recommendations encourage SOH leadership and the Governing Board to focus on strategies to sustain SOH. The site visit team has been impressed with the impact that SOH has had on the development of innovative programs and the enhancement of system of care philosophy and values in child-serving agencies in Harris County. The challenge is to maintain this constructive impact beyond federal funding.

A new area of challenge was noted by the site visit team regarding wraparound services and documentation in the service records. Since the last site visit SOH leadership described significant turnover of care team staff as a result of reorganization of the service delivery system. Although the reorganization will reap benefits in the long run, the immediate repercussion has created a need to train a new set of Care Coordinators and Parent Partners in wraparound philosophy and skill sets.

Priority recommendations

Complete a SOH Strategic/Sustainability Plan using an inclusive process

Although SOH leadership has moved forward in actualizing many of the goals of the cooperative agreement this process has been staff driven and not the product of an inclusive process from which an overarching strategic plan has been developed. The process of developing a strategic plan is important because it creates ownership and buy-in from stakeholders including family and youth, the community, and interagency partners. The resulting strategic plan becomes a blueprint that all can follow and participate in.

The site visit team continues to recommend that SOH leadership develop an inclusive process that results in a strategic/sustainability plan. System partners are encouraged to review the many accomplishments of the first four years of the cooperative agreement and to prioritize issues yet to be addressed. Integrate this planning effort with the excellent logic model and the Joint City/County Commission on Children (JC4) Strategic Plan. Enlist the Technical Assistance Coordinator to help facilitate this process.

Focus on preserving the core structure of SOH at the same time as planning for sustainability

SOH leadership and the Governing Board are encouraged to think of maintaining the current SOH structure as well as service components when planning for sustainability. Without a centralized unit that focuses on fostering system of care values and principles in Harris County it will be difficult to sustain the gains made in transforming how business is conducted in Harris County. The work of the Cultural and Linguistic Competency Coordinator is an example of how SOH staff have impacted agency and community partners.

Complete a governance organizational chart

The site visit team recognizes SOH leadership and the Governing Board for the constructive changes made in the governance structure. The site visit team recommends that SOH leadership codify the changes made by developing a governance organizational chart that identifies the components of the governance structure with lines of communication articulated.

Modify the role of the Governing Board

The site review team encourages SOH leadership to review the purpose and function of the Governing Board and to consider modifications. At the time of the last site visit the Governing Board was very involved in decision making on many SOH issues. Since then the Role of the Governing Board has been significantly reduced and the majority of decisions are made by the Administrative Team. The site visit team recommends that SOH leadership and the governing Board consider moving toward a more balanced role between the two groups. It would be helpful to outline the types of decisions that would be best made by the Governing Board. Setting direction and commitment around sustainability efforts, for example, should be the domain of the Governing Board.

Consider consulting with the Technical Assistance Partnership expert on organization structure in efforts to fine-tune the SOH governance structure.

Establish a representative work group to address training needs of Care Teams and modification of service records.

Although families and youth spoke positively about services they had difficulty articulating what about the process had been helpful. Families were vague in describing the wraparound process and mainly focused on feeling supported and helped in accessing resources. The significant turnover of wraparound staff during the recent reorganization seems to have impacted the quality of services delivered. Service records review indicated challenges regarding service plan development, transition planning, care team membership, and integration of mental health concerns. (See Section XI for more detailed discussion)

The site review team recommends that SOH leadership establish a representative work group to review the concerns outlined in this section and section XI. Develop strategies to address the training needs of Care Coordinators and Parent Partners as well as possible modifications to the service record. Consult with the Technical Assistance Coordinator regarding any resources needed to facilitate this process.

Explore Accessing Interagency Funding Streams for Sustainability

Although a number of potential funding sources (IV-B, IV-E, TANF, IDEA, etc) have been identified, specific strategies have not been put in place to access these funds. The site visit team recommends that SOH leadership focus on exploring how other agencies' funding streams might be used to help sustain SOH. Of particular importance in this area is the need to engage Child Protective Services at the state level. Providing data about the cost effectiveness of SOH services to other child serving agencies would be key in this effort. Additional information is described in the Evaluation Section of the report. Use the Technical Assistance Coordinator (TAC) to engage consultants knowledgeable about the creative use of various funding streams.

Put in place the elements necessary for successful implementation of Medicaid billing

Successful billing of Medicaid requires careful attention to detail, staff training, and administrative support. SOH leadership is strongly encouraged to become knowledgeable about the rigors of Medicaid billing and to put in place the necessary components so that billing efforts will be successful in 2011. Use the TAC to access the resources necessary to make this exciting option a reality.

Develop strategies to maintain the Cultural and Linguistic Competence Coordinator position beyond federal funding

The CLC Coordinator and CLC Work Team have done an excellent job of implementing the recommendations from the last site visit. The CLC Strategic Plan outlines ongoing goals and objectives and the Work Team is effectively overseeing the progress toward these goals. CLC activities are having an impact on the broader Harris County community in a variety of important ways. The challenge will be to maintain this valuable effort as federal funding diminishes and ends. SOH leadership is encouraged to

develop strategies to sustain the CLC Coordinator position beyond cooperative agreement funding. Work with the Governing Board on ways to make this happen.

Continue to evolve family participation toward a “Family Driven” System with additional recruitment and training efforts.

Although representation of families receiving SOH services in the governance structure has increased there is a continued need to expand their membership. Several family members serve on multiple Work Teams. The site visit team recommends that the Family Coordinator use the model employed by the Youth Coordinator in developing the Youth Advisory Council. Set an initial goal of involving nine caregiver/parents who have received SOH services in Parent Empowerment Group (PEG). Develop and implement a training program for these individuals in effective leadership skills. The site review team encourages SOH leadership to engage a consultant with expertise in developing a “family driven” system. Use the TAC to help with this effort.

Develop strategies to sustain “youth voice and choice” beyond federal funding

The Youth Coordinator and members of Youth Advisory Council are to be commended for their excellent work in developing “youth voice and choice” within SOH and in fostering these values in the broader context of Harris County. The challenge as described by the Youth Coordinator and YAC members will be to continue this effort beyond federal funding. SOH leadership and the Governing Board are encouraged to collaborate with the Youth Coordinator and YAC members to develop strategies so that this valuable effort will continue and be able to expand. Work with the TAC to see what successful strategies other federally funded sites have used to sustain youth involvement.

Focus social marketing efforts on audiences and messages relevant to sustainability

The current social marketing plan focuses on strategies that impact several audiences. As the cooperative agreement enters its final years of federal funding, the Social Marketing Coordinator is encouraged to consider focusing on audiences and strategies that are central to sustaining SOH beyond current funding. Continued collaboration with the Evaluation Team in developing materials on sustainability will be important in this effort.

Prioritize SOH cost/benefit analysis to facilitate sustainability

For several reasons the Evaluation Team has been unable to gather data regarding the cost benefit of involvement in SOH services. As issues of sustainability become of key importance the Evaluation Advisory Work Team (EAWT) is encouraged to prioritize a SOH cost benefit analysis. Partner agencies (Juvenile Probation, Child Welfare, and Education) are strongly encouraged to share their cost data so that a comparison to SOH costs can be made. The Evaluation Team and EAWT are encouraged to develop a work plan for this effort and to engage the active support of the Governing Board. Consult with the Technical Assistance Coordinator regarding successful strategies used by other sites in developing a cost benefit analysis around sustainability efforts.

Establish a work group to review the composition of service records. Records should tell the family’s story and qualify for Medicaid reimbursement.

The service records contained many computer-generated, checklist forms that seemed to be duplicated many times in each record. At the same time the site visit team had difficulty locating narratives that described the child and family's unique story and progress. The site review team notes that the current service records would not qualify for Medicaid reimbursement. The site visit team recommends that SOH leadership develop a work group tasked to review the composition of the service record forms and to establish narratives that clearly document the child and family's story and progress. Service records should be reviewed with an eye toward qualifying for Medicaid reimbursement. Use the expertise of the TAC in helping with this effort.

Summary

SOH has made great progress since the last site visit two years ago. Steps have been taken to implement many of the recommendations from the first site visit. The governance structure has been modified and family and youth receiving SOH services have been added to the Governing Board. To continue the evolution from a "family and youth involved" system to a "family-driven" and "youth-guided" system, continued recruitment especially of family members is encouraged. Training of family and youth on how to be effective members of the Governing Board will be an important next step for SOH.

During the last two years SOH leadership has effectively collaborated with interagency partners on a number of exciting, innovative service ventures. These efforts greatly expand the reach of SOH and seed system of care philosophy and values in the broader Harris County community. Excellent work has been done in the areas of cultural and linguistic competency, evaluation, and youth involvement.

Challenges remain including the need to develop a strategic/sustainability plan to guide the work of SOH as federal funding diminishes. Finally, the site visit team noted new challenges in the delivery of wraparound services and documentation in the service records. The site visit team continues to be impressed with the dedication and commitment of SOH leadership and staff. Although challenges remain the site visit team is confident that SOH leadership will successfully resolve these issues and continue to move forward.

Sincerely,

Gary M. Blau, Ph.D.
Chief,
Child, Adolescent and Family Branch

Michele Herman
Project Officer

Attachment

cc: Randy Joiner, Interim Project Director
Tammy Foster, Family Coordinator
Regina Hicks, TA Partnership
National Evaluation Team
Technical Assistance Partnership
National Social Marketing Team

Action Plan Chart

Report Section	Person Responsible	Target Completion Date	
Report Section I – System of Care Planning			
<p>Complete a SOH Strategic/Sustainability Plan using an inclusive process.</p> <p>Focus on preserving the core SOH structure in sustainability planning.</p>			
Report Section II – System of Care Structure			
<p>Complete a governance organization chart.</p> <p>Consider modifying the role of the Governing Board.</p> <p>Recruit more SOH families as participants in the governing structure and provide families with leadership training.</p>			
Report Section III – Population of Focus			
<p>Eliminate IQ as an eligibility criterion for SOH services.</p>			
Report Section IV – System of Care Services and Supports.			
<p>Establish a representative work group to address training needs of Care Teams and modification of service records.</p>			
Report Section V – Fiscal Management			
<p>Explore Accessing Interagency funding streams for sustainability.</p> <p>Put in place the elements necessary for successful implementation of Medicaid billing.</p>			
Report Section VI – Cultural and Linguistic Competency			
<p>Develop strategies to maintain the CLC Coordinator position beyond federal funding.</p>			

<p>Report Section VII – Family Driven Care</p>			
<p>Develop strategies to increase the access of the Family Coordinator to the service system and SOH families.</p> <p>Continue to evolve family participation toward a “Family Driven” System with additional recruitment and training efforts.</p>			
<p>Report Section VIII – Youth Guided Care</p>			
<p>Develop strategies to sustain youth voice and choice beyond federal funding</p>			
<p>Report Section IX– Social Marketing</p>			
<p>Assure that SOH contact information is on all social marketing materials.</p> <p>Use the SOH website and Evaluation newsletter to promote social marketing goals.</p> <p>Focus social marketing efforts on audiences and messages relevant to sustainability.</p>			
<p>Report Section X - Evaluation</p>			
<p>Increase the number of families enrolled in the National Evaluation.</p> <p>Prioritize SOH cost/benefit analysis to facilitate sustainability.</p>			
<p>Report Section XI—Service Records</p>			
<p>Develop strategies to address the mental health needs of families receiving SOH wraparound services and document in the service record.</p> <p>Improve care team skills regarding plan development and structure service records to reflect this expertise.</p> <p>Review wraparound team membership with an eye toward increasing informal and formal membership on care teams. Document in service record.</p> <p>Develop transition plans for families and document in the service record.</p> <p>Establish a work group to review the composition of service records. Records should tell the family’s story and qualify for Medicaid reimbursement.</p>			