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Collaborative Assessment Program

CHINS and First Offenders Diversion Proposal

Goal

The goal of the CHINS Diversion Program is to divert youth with a serious emotional disturbed (SED) diagnosis from the court system with the intent of stabilizing the situation with a variety of mental health services or supports. This intervention will reduce the number of inappropriate CHINS commitments to DSS, keep the court system from having to be involved in cases of this nature, and help families and children access important mental health services at the time they are reaching out for help. CAP is proposing to pilot this program in the Middlesex County Juvenile Court – Framingham site.

Sponsorship

The Collaborative Assessment Program is uniquely qualified to deliver and supervise this service. CAP has a proven track record working in the Metro Region since 1997 having provided assessment stabilization for over 300 families with an SED child or children. CAP has been a pioneer in utilizing the CASSP system of care principles that are needed to successfully intervene with children with severe emotional needs. Over the seven years of operation, CAP has developed an array of traditional and non-traditional services that can address this population. CAP also has the ability to utilize an impressive parent support network that is attached to the program. Many times, the most successful intervention is having a parent partner who understands the family and parents from a first hand perspective.

Principles of the Service

- Family focused (not isolating the child as the problem)
- Strength-based
- Empowerment driven
- Culturally competent
- Community problem solving (local resources)
- Non-judgmental

Philosophy/Rational

The act of filing a CHINS petition or having a child before the court on a first time delinquency charge indicates that the family system is under a great deal of stress and thus open for change. Therefore, it is essential that intervention be quick and intensive in order to capitalize on this crisis of opportunity. Currently, the effectiveness and focus of the CHINS law is being reviewed with several proposals for change. Our proposal is

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very much in line with the CHINS reform which is being promoted by the Children's League of Massachusetts and the Parent/Professional Advocacy League. One of the primary problems which they cite in their blueprint for reform is the failure to recognize and address the mental health issues of the children in the CHINS process. In addition, the CAP proposal would clearly address the significant issues which have been recognized in four different commissions: inclusion of the family in the process, completion of a family based assessment and ongoing support for the family and child during the CHINS process through the connection with a family partner.

A comprehensive assessment would address one of the major problems with the law which is that juveniles are brought before the court for certain prescribed behaviors without any real understanding of the etiology of that behavior. Therefore, it becomes a hit or miss process of whether the child and family get an appropriate service and/or the right level of intervention. For example, a child with a significant anxiety issue who is not able to make it to school will not respond to any amount of court pressure. DSS placement will not solve this issue as the child needs mental health treatment and special education services including medication, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and possibly a therapeutic school. In other cases, family conflict, substance abuse, or domestic violence may be the cause of school truancy – all of which demand different strategies of intervention which are family focus rather than child specific. Getting a quick but accurate assessment done will allow more appropriate clinical intervention as well as provide systems with more useful information to formulate their treatment options. The result of this improved knowledge base should be less restrictive interventions and better clinical interventions.

In addition, CAP is proposing to include a family partner as part of the service. We have found that this service is critical if we are to engage families that may be embarrassed about seeking help or are skeptical or fearful of the government and social agencies.

Objectives:

1. To complete an assessment of the youth and family to determine the most appropriate services and system for the child and family.
2. To provide a variety of wraparound services at the time of the referral to prevent out-of-home placement and stabilize the family environment.
3. To coordinate and integrate the CAP services with the Juvenile Court services including the court clinic, the probation department, and other legal services including GAL's and attorneys.

Eligibility:

- Youth has a CAFAS Score of 80, has a major mental illness (SED), and the duration of the problem has or is expected to continue for a year. .
- Youth is currently not involved with DSS and/or DMH.

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- Youth has a valid CHINS petition filed by a parent/guardian or school system or is before the court on a delinquency charge that is a first offense and a non-violent crime.

(This eligibility criteria has modified significantly from the current CAP eligibility as way to allow us to intervene earlier with these children and families.)

Process:

- CAP worker reviews the CHINS petitions that are filed with the court in collaboration with the clerk magistrate and/or probation officer.
- Cases are then screened by the CAP worker in coordination with the CAP Director to determine eligibility.
- Based on the presenting needs, the case will be triaged to a community agency, given an expedited assessment by CAP court worker, or assigned for a 30-day full CAP assessment.
- The CAP worker completes the expedited assessment within two weeks with the goal of stabilization of the crisis through community services and wraparound services.
- Final recommendations for disposition of the CHINS petition or delinquency charge will be presented to the court for approval at the end of the assessment process.
- Transfer to either DSS or DMH, if necessary will happen as it does for other CAP cases. However, it is anticipated that most of the cases will be diverted from state agencies.

Staffing

The CAP Director will supervise the one assessment worker even though the person will be out posted to the court. This worker will be expected to carry a case load of 8-10 expedited assessments **(50-60 assessments a year)** as well as be part of the screening and triage team who identify youth having mental health needs. The CAP Director will assign any case needing a full CAP assessment to the one of the regular CAP assessment workers. By just focusing on expedited assessments, it will give the worker the ability and flexibility to respond to a much larger number of cases. Also, the court culture requires a prompt and flexible response to situations and therefore, triage and stabilization must be emphasized over the length and depth of a full assessment.

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Cost – Budget

The CAP CHINS Diversion program has already received funding commitments from the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Social Services for flexible funds to provide wraparound services. However, the program is still seeking support to fund a full time assessment worker, a parent partner, and consultation support from a child psychologist and a child psychiatrist. Because the impact of this service should be an important support to the entire system, all of the agencies should be involved in sharing the responsibility of space, staffing, wraparound funding, and support costs.

Staff

One MSW assessment worker	\$50,000
One parent partner	\$35,000
Fringe (20%)	\$15,00
Consultation (psychiatry, psychology)	\$10,000
Total	\$110,000
In-Kind contribution	
Wraparound	
DSS	\$20,000
DMH	\$20,000
CAP	\$20,000
Total	\$60,000
Office Space, supplies, phone, etc. (DSS)	\$10,000
Total cost	\$180,000

Location

- CAP is recommending the Framingham Court as it has a large number of CHINS petitions, has a good working relationship with the DSS Framingham Office, and has a supportive Juvenile Judge and probation staff.
- The CAP worker will be located at the court for some part of each week for the purposes of collaboration and coordination.

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- **The CAP Director and worker will be part of the local human service network and part of the Interagency Network group. The group works on the issues of service coordination and integration between the state agencies and the towns in the Metro West catchment area. Acceptance from the special Ed staff in these towns is essential for the program to succeed.**
- **The CHINS diversion worker will be part of the CAP Metro team and will be attached to that unit for support, supervision, and administrative accounting purposes.**
- **CAP will seek to develop an affiliation agreements with court clinic, the DSS court liaison, and the other appropriate court personnel including attorneys, Gal's, and the local human service agencies.**