

DSS-DJJ MOA

For Children in Foster Care Committed to the Department of Juvenile Justice

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Purpose of the MOA

- In 2015 a small workgroup of stakeholders were tasked by the Children's Cabinet :
 - To address “ an identified gap in the continuum of services for juvenile in foster care who are committed to DJJ...”
- Stakeholders included:
 - Virginia Department of Social Services
 - Local Departments of Social Services
 - Department of Criminal Justice Services
 - Department of Juvenile Justice
 - Office of Children's Services
 - Court Improvement Program

Gap in the continuum of services

- For DSS:
 - Lack of clarity around role after commitment
 - Lack of funding to continue work with family
 - Inability to effect meaningful progress towards permanency
 - Inadequate time to plan for re-entry placements for hard to place youth exiting commitment
- For DJJ:
 - Lack of clarity around parental authority
 - Difficulty obtaining basic information about youth
 - Concerns about youth's contact with family members
 - Difficulties in engaging DSS in effective discharge planning

Solutions identified

- To identify roles and responsibilities of DJJ and the LDSS to serve the best interests of juveniles in foster care who are committed to DJJ
- To provide instructions and guidance for DJJ to implement and for DSS to include in its model policies issued to the LDSS for case supervision and management purposes for this population related to § 16.1-293 of the Code of Virginia which requires DJJ and the LDSS to “work cooperatively through the duration of the person’s commitment.”

MOA elements

DSS and DJJ responsibilities:

- Prior to commitment
 - Day of commitment
 - Immediately following Commitment
 - During commitment
 - For Release Planning
 - Upon release
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- <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/family/fc/index.cgi>
- Guidance Manuals, Other Foster Care Guidance Manuals
- [DSS-DJJ MOA Joint Guidance](#) (PDF)
 - [Signed MOA Between VA DSS and DJJ](#) (PDF)

Population subject to the MOA

- Initially, the population was limited to those youth in foster care committed to DJJ who were anticipated to be discharged prior to their 18th birthdays
 - These youth return to the custody of the LDSS at that time
- Now the population includes those foster care youth committed to DJJ who are anticipated to be discharges prior to turning 21
 - These youth are eligible for Fostering Futures and can therefore re-enter foster care between the ages of 18 and 21
- The MOA is being updated to reflect inclusion of Fostering Futures population
- Other significant change is the decreasing length of commitments

Fostering Futures Summary

- Virginia 2016 Appropriations Act extended foster care to youth who attain age 18 in foster care.
 - Defines population
 - Youth in foster care placement who attain age 18 on or after July 1, 2016
 - Youth who were in foster care placement immediately prior to commitment to DJJ who attain age 18 after July 1, 2016 and are not yet 21
 - Excludes placement in group homes or residential programs
 - Permits placements in foster homes, IL apartment programs, or own their own with a maintenance payment to assist with housing costs (IL arrangement)

Continuing Eligibility Criteria

- Participants must meet at least one of these five criteria to continue to be eligible for the program:
 1. Completing secondary education or in a GED program
 2. Enrolled in college or a vocational program
 3. Attending classes to promote employment or remove barriers to employment
 4. Working at least 80 hours per month, or
 5. Unable to meet one of the four conditions above due to a documented medical reason

Primary DSS responsibilities

- Prior to commitment
 - Share information as much as possible
- Immediately following commitment
 - Facilitate a Family Partnership meeting within 5 days
 - Involve the family/ potential permanent caregivers in discussion about visitation at the JCC
 - Assess ongoing service needs for potential permanent caregiver(s)

Primary DSS responsibilities (con't)

- For release planning
 - Continual communication and collaboration with DJJ/CSU
 - Family Partnership Meeting six months prior
 - (For youth committed for 6 months or less, this FPM won't be required)
 - Family Partnership Meeting 90 days prior
 - Conference call 30 days prior

Primary DSS responsibilities

- During commitment
 - Have regular contact with the juvenile
 - Face to face every other month
 - Video or phone call other month
 - Funding is available to support casework activity
 - BL 866, Em Parente is the point of contact
 - Facilitate family visitation and engagement; refer to services as needed
 - Funding is now available through CSA with FAPT approval- this is a prevention case
 - Goal is to continue to work towards permanency

Primary DJJ responsibilities

- Include provision in the commitment order to return custody to DSS upon the juvenile's release
 - Eliminates the need to schedule court hearings at the of release
- DJJ notifies DSS in writing of initial staffing
- Social History Reports shared with DSS
 - If recommendation Commitment , share report with DSS 72 hours prior to hearing

Primary DJJ responsibilities (con't)

- DJJ provides overview of commitment process and importance of family engagement at FPMs
- Provide DSS with policies/ procedures for JCC visits
- Share all JCC progress reports with DSS
- Inform DSS of anticipated release date and facilitate scheduling of FPM
- Invite DSS to participate in all release planning, mental health services transition planning, school reenrollment, comprehensive re-entry case plans

Family Engagement Values

- All families have strengths
- Families are experts on themselves
- Families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect
- Families can make well-informed decisions about keeping their children safe when supported
- Outcomes improve when families are involved in decision making
- A team is more capable of creative and high quality decision making than an individual

Effective Family Engagement

- Founded upon open-communication, mutual respect, and honesty in every contact
- Characterized by ongoing dialogue with the family focused on the family's strengths and the difficulties they are facing, rather than pathology
- Checks in with the family about satisfaction with services being provided; asks for input from family before changing or modifying services
- Discusses with the family what information will be shared with others before sharing it
- Is sensitive and responsive to cultural differences/ issues
- Empowers the family to take responsibility for themselves by inviting them to routinely make decisions throughout the duration of the case

Family Partnership Meetings

- Parents are full partners in the decision-making process
- Extended family members and other supportive individuals are available to the family during the meeting
- Family members are empowered to share their views and offer suggestions
- Positive working relationships develop between the agency and the family
- Positive working relationships develop between the agency and the community

Results

- Families who are treated with respect can contribute more concretely to the identification of their family and children's needs. When families and extended families are part of the decision making process, they are more likely to participate in services to keep their family together or to complete tasks in order to have their children safely returned
- Instead of being excluded from the process, the family, private service providers and community representatives can participate in a discussion and partnership designed to keep the community's children safe
- Children are protected through the development of a child-specific plan developed and committed to by a team of people who care about them

Family Partnership meeting exercise

Challenges to implementation for LDSS

- Commitments don't happen very often
 - Each time may be or seem "new"
 - Regional Foster Care consultants are providing TA
 - Each time the relationships have to be developed from step one
 - Short time frames, commitment may be unexpected
 - Kids seem to have "burned their bridges"

Challenges to implementation for DJJ

Shift in Culture/ Re-entry process

Working proactively with DSS

FPMs with open dialogue

Expanding definition of families

Questions?