



The Annie E. Casey Foundation

FAMILY TO FAMILY

THE FACILITATOR

A National Newsletter for TDM Facilitators and Supervisors

**Fall/Winter 2007
Issue 2**

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TDMnewsletter@bex.net

A Time to Reflect...

Happy holidays!

We're happy to bring you the second edition of our national TDM facilitators' newsletter.

For many, this is a season of reflection as well as celebration; it can be a time to reconnect with our deepest beliefs. Even in our work, it can provide an opportunity to step away from the requirements and protocols and policies that preoccupy us so often.

In that vein, we offer a quick, partial, but meaningful revisiting of the bedrock values that underlie Team Decision-making: A voice for families. A chance to slow down and reflect before acting. Respect for the 'collective

genius' of diverse groups. A meaningful opportunity to share our work with neighbors and community. The dignity afforded by direct and honest conversation about the toughest of topics. Concern for equity in our assessments of risk and safety. Transparency and openness about our terribly challenging work. And always, a commitment to the safety of children and the importance of their lives within families.

The work you do matters. Take pride in it during this season of reflection!

Warmest Regards,
Pat Rideout and the AECF F2F
TDM Technical Assistant Team

Gretchen Test Departs

A fond farewell goes out to our invaluable partner at AECF, Gretchen Test. Gretchen served as Program Associate to John Mattingly and Wanda Mial for the past 5 years, and in that capacity she supported TDM and its TA and site partners in innumerable ways. Always a booster of TDM, Gretchen helped us to strengthen the strategy on the front lines, as a site team leader and member, and in the background, through her work inside the Foundation. We will miss her terribly, but wish her well in her new role as Senior Associate for the Casey Strategic Consulting Group. (You can find her on the 3d floor at Casey's Charles Street office in Baltimore, should you ever visit!)

Denver Hosts National Facilitators Conference

For the first time the annual TDM Facilitators' national conference was held in a city other than Baltimore (AECF's home base.) Approximately 100 facilitators representing both anchor and network sites attended the 5th annual conference, at the Renaissance Hotel near downtown Denver.

As always, the national conference offers TDM facilitators the opportunity to network with peers, for purposes of expanding learning, sharing ideas and brainstorming solutions in an atmosphere of fellowship and camaraderie. The

opening keynote speaker, Melody M. Brown, Director of Community Based Programs at the Denver Children's Home, urged facilitators to be "vessels of hope," and to celebrate the good work that they do.

Participants chose from over 25 workshop topics and discussion groups facilitated by TDM TAs and partners from our sites. Topics included engagement skills, supervision and management, DV and LGBTQ issues, data collection, racial disproportionality and disparity, youth at the table, permanency

TDMs, family meeting integration and many more.

The ever popular "buddy match" was again featured. Participants were matched with a peer from another site; they met over lunch for conversation and new friendships were forged. Another highlight was the terrific mariachi band who entertained us at a wine and cheese reception. New this year was a gift basket exchange -- each site brought items representative of their geographic area, and as a conference closer, we held a drawing to award the bas-

kets. Facilitator creativity was evident, and even non-winners enjoyed the activity.

A record three quarters of conference participants completed workshop evaluations. Overall results indicated that the conference was a huge success! In many areas including goal attainment, quality of information presented, networking, and relevance for the future, ratings averaged between 4 and 5 (on a scale of 1-5.) The evaluations also provided some good ideas for the TA team as we look forward to next year.

TDM Is Headed for the Big Screen

Or to a “movie” poster anyway. San Diego, California (one of our network sites) is having a poster contest to raise awareness about the critical importance of using the TDM process to make “live” decisions. To capture this idea, each participant in a TDM meeting will be represented in an individual poster, with the title “I was included in the decision.” The plan is to include a brief quote by the individual in the photograph about how TDM participation made a difference to them. As of this writing, a fos-

ter parent, a dad, and a youth have been identified. In addition, a group poster will be created representing all participants, with a title reading “We made a decision together.”

TDM representatives will participate in an actual photo shoot, coordinated by San Diego County’s media department. They plan to distribute the posters to all of their 15 child welfare offices and to community partners as well.

Hollywood here we come!

Anne Arundel County Hits 500!

On October 17th our **Anne Arundel County**, Maryland site celebrated their 500th TDM Meeting. The party took place at their new supervised visitation house. Anne Arundel staff wrote that TDM has been a strategic initiative since Jan. 2006 and “the initiative has helped us completely change our business

practices and the way we deliver services to families and children who are touched by our child welfare System. We are so proud of our staff and our colleagues throughout the community for joining us in thinking outside the box!”

We all look forward to AADSS’ 1000th TDM celebration!

Benefits of Foster Parents at TDM Table

One of F2F’s strongest values is that child welfare agencies must treat resource families, who care for children when their own birth families are unable to do so, as vital and valuable partners. For most foster and kinship families, this partnership begins with an “icebreaker” meeting, shortly after a child’s placement in their home. But TDM, too, is a critical venue for resource families to participate in the work of family support, reunification, and child permanency.

contrast, when foster parents did not come to the table for change of placement TDMs, only 30% of those meetings resulted in a plan to maintain the placement.

When Foster Parents participate in TDM, agencies have an opportunity to hear what support is needed to strengthen a child’s placement, and can immediately respond. In this way, potential conflict is managed, disruption is prevented, and precious resource parent resources are retained. If birth parents are also at the table, continuing opportunities for birth-foster parent interaction and mutual support are enhanced, which improves the likelihood and speed of reunification.

One of the TDM data elements that all anchor sites are required to track and self evaluate is resource family participation at placement change and permanency TDM meetings. This expectation reflects our deep belief in principles of inclusion and respect, but it is also an illustration of our well-founded conclusion that resource parent participation adds great value to the TDM process. While most initial removal TDM meetings occur too early to have caregiver participation with much frequency, placement change TDMs do demonstrate the significant impact on children’s lives of having their resource parent(s) at the table. One F2F anchor site’s statistics reflect that when foster parents participate in these TDM meetings, the ultimate recommendation to maintain the placement occurs over 53% of the time. In

It is well known that resource parents’ most common complaint about their job in our system is not related to payment, as many believe, but to respect and fair treatment. Resource parents need support: someone to answer their phone call, someone to talk through their questions about child management and offer ideas and additional supports. Providing a welcoming seat at the TDM table, and sending a clear message that resource parents are expected to participate in all TDMs involving the children in their care, are key steps in full implementation of TDM.

How is your agency doing at achieving 100% of resource parent participation at TDM?



Spotlight on a FAQ

What are the key aspects of a TDM review or appeal?

Not every TDM results in a full team consensus decision, or even a decision that all agency staff can support. Reviews (or “appeals”) of TDM decisions are requested by agency staff participating in the TDM who believe the decision will place a child at risk of serious harm or that it violates laws or agency policy. What are the defining elements of a TDM review/appeal?

--After it’s been established that: a) The entire group cannot reach consensus about a final recommendation; and b) the agency staff who are present also cannot agree, the Facilitator asks the assigned worker to make the decision regarding placement.

--The Facilitator checks with agency staff at the table to determine if they are all willing to support the worker’s decision and plan. It is at this time, before anyone leaves the room, that an agency staff person who wishes to seek a review must announce his/her intention to do so.

--Before the group separates, the Facilitator contacts a pre-designated agency administrator (someone at the highest possible level), who is on

call to lead any requested reviews/appeals.

--Everyone who attended the original TDM is invited to stay and participate in the review process. The Facilitator assists the administrator in leading a discussion, highlighting the key issues from the original meeting and the reason for the review.

--Once the administrator reviews all of the information with the team, he or she then makes the agency’s final decision. From this point on, the agency’s staff are expected to fully support the decision and implement it fully.

Here’s a great example of an appeal process that occurred in Washtenaw County, MI in July of this year:

When the team was not able to agree on a plan to place the child with relatives, the County Director met with agency staff, the child, and the mother, and made a home visit to the relatives. She decided to place the child with the relatives with some contingencies and a safety plan in place. The Director used the opportunity to coach new staff on how to assess safety threats and balance them against the often harmful impact of foster care. Everyone, including the family, felt heard and fully understood how and why the decision was made.

In November 2001, I was hired as one of the first Family to Family Facilitators in the State of Michigan. My former supervisor showed me the job posting. She knew of my commitment to community service and my ideas regarding child welfare reform, and she thought it would be the perfect career move for me. When I was granted an interview, I printed all the material from the AECF website regarding Family to Family. The more I read, the more I knew that this would be the beginning of something

phenomenal. Yet, to be truthful, I wasn't quite sure if leaving kids who have entered the foster care system in their own neighborhoods could work. Would the parents kidnap them or harass the foster parents? Looking back on these questions, I'm sure they have probably been asked thousands of times by people who are first introduced to Family to Family. Since that time, I have grown in my understanding of all that is right about keeping children safe and happy in familiar surroundings.

I have learned numerous lessons throughout the six years that I have been a facilitator. Some of them, as your mama would say, have been "hard lessons." I have learned how it feels to disagree in a TDM with someone who might be sitting across the desk from me when I seek a promotion. I have observed the good, the bad, and the ugly of families, co-workers and private agencies. I have become frustrated at the lack of services available to assist families. While I have planted the seeds for change,

change hasn't always happened as swiftly as I may have hoped. But I have met wonderful people who have an unwavering commitment to change the system for the better. And I have encountered kids who are wise beyond their years.

The best advice that I can give is to stay focused. That has not always been easy for me. I try to remember that the TDM process is only one component of Family to Family, and I work to keep a holistic view of all of

(Darah continued on page 4)

Fast Facts Match

What is our data telling us about national trends?

(The data for these facts were pulled from 2007, Q1 (quarter 1) and Q2 (quarter 2) site reports. There were 10 sites represented. Please note that the data is not inclusive of all sites for both quarters as 2 sites only had data for the first quarter of 2007. These stats are from Initial Removal TDMs only, and they represent averages across all the sites.)

Can you match the data with the TDM FACT?

Initial Removal TDM Stats (median across 10 sites)

15%	13%	36%
72%	42%	34%

- A. ___ the % of TDMs attended by Mothers.
- B. ___ the % of TDMs attended by Fathers.
- C. ___ the % of TDMs attended by community representative (agency invited).
- D. ___ the % of TDMs attended by support persons (family invited).
- E. ___ the % of TDMs where decision is to remove children.
- F. ___ the % of TDMs where decision is for children to remain in own home with or without court involvement.

Answers — A. 72%, B. 34%, C. 15%, D. 13%, E. 36%, F. 42%

Tip Exchange From Facilitator to Facilitator

1. Print your site's TDM Ground Rules on the back of name tents. If you laminate the name tents too, and have participants use dry erase pens to write their names, you can erase and reuse the tents. Laminated paper folds easily into a tent and keeps its shape.
2. Enlarge and laminate the TDM Meeting Structure form found in your Facilitator Training Manual. Post the Meeting Structure in your TDM rooms to provide a visual reminder to staff and participants of what will be happening in the meeting—and why you as the facilitator are conducting the meeting in the way you are!
3. If a family or community member is participating in a TDM meeting via telephone, position the phone in the center of the meeting table and place a name tent on top of it. This is a great visual reminder to the facilitator to check in often with that participant.
4. Post a Quality Placement Decision Guide in your TDM meeting room. The Guide is simply a large chart inscribed with the following three phrases: 1. Safe, 2. Least Restrictive, Least Intrusive, 3. Consistent with Laws and Policies. You can use the Guide during the Reaching a Decision phase of the meeting as a reminder to participants of

the basic tenets of quality decisions.

5. Hang a 1 inch by 3 inch strip of wood horizontally on your meeting room wall. Affix short pegs to the strip at intervals that correspond to the holes on top of your flipcharts. You can then hang your flipcharts directly on the wall by placing the chart's holes over the pegs. When a TDM meeting is over, simply tear off the paper used and you're ready for your next meeting.

Send your favorite facilitating tip or suggestion to share with fellow TDM practitioners to TDMnewsletter@bex.net

Supervisors Build Effective Teams

Great supervisors wear many hats: coach, mentor, teacher, cheerleader. Supervising TDM facilitators demands all of these skills, and more. And because the TDM facilitator position didn't exist until a few years ago, we are still learning what techniques of supervision are most effective to support the people who play this unique role in a child welfare agency. Obviously, the basics are consistent with other supervisory roles, but here are a few brief tips, specific to TDM staff, to maximize your supervisory effectiveness:

Observe/Coach/Give Feedback: Routinely attend TDM meetings to observe the facilitator and provide feedback, using the TDM Facilitator Coaching tool. You should observe each facilitator at least a few times every month. Provide regular feedback in scheduled supervisory meetings, and build it into per-

formance improvement plans.

Build your Team: Meet with the facilitators and other TDM staff as a group on a very regular basis. Use your time together to discuss TDM situations, gather info on trends of concern to share with upper management, and ensure peer support.

Become a TDM Data Champion: Know your TDM data and discuss it at every team meeting with your facilitators. Look for trends, make adjustments, self evaluate! (Don't forget to observe individual facilitator trends that may be reflected in data too.) Highlight issues with upper management and community partners, and work closely with your Self Evaluation Team and data analysts to deepen understanding of the data.

Practice these tips and celebrate having a strong, solid TDM team!

Training Corner

Could you use a little 'tune-up' of your TDM facilitation skills? Would you like to revisit some of the information presented in the 5 day facilitator training?

In 2008 the TA team is concentrating on the development of mini-trainings, designed to encourage facilitators and their supervisors to examine and strengthen their current practice. Each "refresher" curricula is brief, interactive, and intended to provide the tools for continuing coaching of facilitators by their own supervisors. We hope these offerings will refresh, enhance and advance your TDM knowledge and competence. Our first mini-training focuses on the facilitator's role in effectively leading the 6 stages of the TDM process.

Talk to your TDM TA, who will be able to provide more details about the refreshers and how to schedule for your site.

3 Pigs...or Why Careful Consideration Of The Stages Means So Much

You know the story of the pig brothers. There were three of them, right? Three little pigs.

All three of them built homes but only one house withstood the challenges of time (and big bad wolves.) What we learn as children is “do it once, do it right, and never have to do it again.” In the case of the two brothers with weak houses — well, at least they had the third brother to crash with. In TDM meetings, if we don’t build it right, the child’s safety and the outcomes for the family can be detrimentally compromised — without a safety net like Brother Pig #3 to turn to.

So, when we consider why it’s so important that each of the six stages of the TDM process includes each of the components (its bricks and mortar) that it does, we only need to consider the story of the three little pigs.

At times colleagues challenge the notion that all 6 stages are

needed to build a good TDM process. They want to truncate stages, usually to save time. However, if you break down the stages and really look at each of them, one builds on the other like bricks in the foundation of a home. These stages are the strong base upon which good decisions are made.

Let’s quickly review the stages and the role of each:

INTRODUCTION: Establishes a respectful tone; encourages participation and collaboration; sets up opportunities for families to show their strengths; provides process preview.

IDENTIFY THE SITUATION: Surfaces the concern that resulted in this TDM; provides a descriptive, valid and verifiable reason for the meeting; sets the safety/risk scene.

ASSESS THE SITUATION: Gets to the underlying reasons behind the identified situation;

examines the magnitude and nature of the concerns; uses safety and risk assessment information to frame the discussion; determines the available relevant strengths and supports.

DEVELOP IDEAS: Encourages every participant’s creativity and inventiveness; ensures that ideas address where the child/youth can be safe; how the safe environment will be produced/maintained; what needs to be done to reduce future risk and support placement stability. Creates basis for the identification of a course of action (so that it can be considered and evaluated in the next stage.)

REACH A DECISION: Weighs various options proposed in the prior stage to identify the best plan for child safety and family well-being.

RECAP/EVALUATE/CLOSE: Facilitator verbally and in writing summarizes the team’s

decision, checks for understanding, and assesses the team (and especially the agency’s staff’s) commitment to support the plan and carry out its elements.

Each stage accomplishes a step in the TDM process that can’t be skipped without weakening the outcome, just as you cannot build a home on a faulty foundation or by using weak materials. Try it and you are likely to encounter longer meetings (oops—need to go back and cover that area we jumped over earlier...) or final plans and recommendations that are ill-founded and potentially harmful.

The next time you are pressured to truncate, urged to skip over or hurry the process along — remember the pig brothers and repeat after me:

“You Can Huff And You Can Puff
But Less Than Six Stages Is Never Enough!

DARAH Continued From Page 3

the strategies we are building, and all the outcomes that we strive for in our work. It’s critical to build relationships with co-workers and the communities our families live in.

One of the most successful tools that I utilize as a facilitator is the post-meeting. It doesn’t have to be anything fancy, just a couple of minutes to ask a co-worker, how did the meeting go for you? Is there anything that I could have done differ-

ently? This allows the colleague a chance to tell me how they experienced the meeting (which can provide an opportunity to improve my skills) and sometimes, it becomes a teachable moment in which I can share information on TDM protocols or policy. Many times during the post-meeting, information is shared that should have been made available during the meeting. In that case, I can have a conversation and express that the TDM and its outcome is only as good as the

information that is shared. Another lesson that I have learned is to tap into the resources that are located in the communities that we serve. I’ve been surprised at how willing folks are to help, but if we don’t ask, families can not receive. In my county, the community has stepped up to the plate and welcomed us to have meetings at their facilities. They have volunteered their time to attend TDM meetings without asking for gas money, lunch or anything else, all to support fami-

lies involved in the child welfare system. In response, we must remember to be good partners, show up when our communities host events, and attend foster parent support group meetings.

Be committed to your role as a facilitator — because you truly have the opportunity to be a change agent.

Darah Davis is a TDM Facilitator in Wayne County, MI



Naming the Newsletter

A few of you took us up on our request for name suggestions for this newsletter.

- Patty Liles from San Bernardino County, CA sent her idea of “AT THE TABLE” SHARING TDM PRACTICES AND CONCERNS.
- TDM facilitator’ Anna Hackler, Kern County, CA submitted “TATOR”-TALK.
- Jenny Vaughn, El Paso Co., CO inspired by the Denver Facilitator Conference keynote speaker, Melody Brown, offered “VESSELS OF HOPE.”

Now we need to hear from you, our newsletter readers. What should we call this publication?

Let us know your favorite by sending the number or name to TDMnewsletter@bex.net (one vote per email address, please).

1. “AT THE TABLE” SHARING TDM PRACTICES AND CONCERNS
2. “TATOR”-TALK
3. VESSELS OF HOPE
4. THE FACILITATOR

We will announce our new name in the masthead of our next issue.

We Want to Hear From You

Be part of the next newsletter!

Participate by sending your questions, ideas, site news, tips, TDM-related articles, etc. Articles offered for publication should reflect good TDM practice and not exceed 300 words. Publication choices are based upon relevance to TDM Facilitators and Supervisors. Contributions may be edited for brevity or clarity.

Deadline for submission is 4.1.08. Contact us at:

TDMnewsletter@bex.net

See what’s new (or review what’s old but still good) at the AECF website: www.aecf.org

The website has been updated—after you enter major initiatives, click on Family to Family, under the resources heading look for TDM material below Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare.

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