



# WASHOE COUNTY

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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
Children's Services

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## **Testimony for the Legislative Committee on Health Care Meeting on July 10, 2012**

Testimony provided by Joseph Haas, Ph.D., Psychologist/Administrator, Washoe County Departments of Juvenile and Social Services, testifying on behalf of Kevin Schiller, Director, Washoe County Department of Social Services.

Good Morning, Chairperson Mastroluca, and members of the Committee, for the record my name is Dr. Joe Haas, Psychologist/Administrator with Washoe County Departments of Juvenile and Social Services, testifying today on behalf of Kevin Schiller, Director of Washoe County Department of Social Services.

My testimony today will focus on the direction that Washoe County Department of Social Services is taking in regards to planning efforts designed to better meet the complex needs of children with Mental Health Conditions in the County's Child Welfare System.

### **Assessment**

Washoe County Department of Social Services devotes considerable efforts to provide mental health assessment to high risk youth in our Kids Kottage Shelter. These assessments form the basis of referral to outpatient services, rehabilitation services, treatment homes and residential treatment centers. Foster parents and social workers are trained and encouraged to identify mental health concerns and make appropriate referrals to services.

Washoe County Department of Social Services recognizes that youth in the Child Welfare System present with higher rates of mental health concerns, many of which are silent in nature and may escape the notice of social workers, shelter staff, and foster parents. As resources become available our plan is to institute a more formal evidence-based mental health screening process for all youth entering custody. This screening would be integrated into the Medicaid EPSDT health exam.

### **Outpatient Treatment**

Washoe County Department of Social Services has developed a network of community mental health providers funded by both Medicaid and County General Fund. In the last fiscal year, the County spent 1.1 million dollars to provide outpatient mental health services to children and families at various points in the system. Two full time clinical staff positions are dedicated to provide in home mental health services to children and

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families and two additional clinical staff positions are dedicated to provide specialized training to foster parents who are caring for youth with high risk mental health conditions. The agency works collaboratively with the Division of Child and Family Services Wraparound in Nevada Program to insure that the array of services that children are receiving are provided in a coordinated, family centered manner according to an evidenced-based service coordination model.

Although there are trained providers for some evidenced-based mental health treatments, usage and consistency of access can be a challenge. The plan for future development in the area of outpatient services is to consistently refer youth to evidence-based treatments. This is likely to entail a community effort to increase trained providers of evidence-based practice models. In addition, as the screening and assessment process is strengthened, the assessment process can more fully become an organized access point for evidence-based treatment that meets the identified needs of children.

### **Care Management**

Washoe County Department of Social Services currently has over 125 youth placed in community-based specialized treatment settings. These children present with the most serious mental health needs in our system and are placed with private providers of treatment foster or group home care, funded by Medicaid. This higher level of care system has been the cause for recent concern about quality of care and placement disruption. As a means of enhancing the oversight of higher level of care services, Washoe County Department of Social Services has established a Care Management Unit staffed by a full time supervisor and two licensed mental health clinicians. This unit oversees placement in higher level of care and provides oversight and monitoring of youth facing the most severe mental health challenges. The Care Management Unit also provides supervision and support for two social workers who act as the Persons Legally Responsible for approving the use of psychotropic medications for youth in foster care.

We are currently providing care management to our highest priority youth in higher levels of care. We hope to expand care management to all children in higher level of care as well as high need children placed in foster care.

### **Improvement Efforts for the Higher Level of Care Therapeutic Foster Care/Group Home System**

As discussed earlier, Washoe County Department of Social Services places a number of youth in Therapeutic Foster Care/Group Home placements. The bulk of these youth are placed with private providers who receive reimbursement from Medicaid. Demand for placements often exceeds available beds, which has lead the County to develop a small group treatment program at our Kids Kottage facility, funded largely by the general fund and some Medicaid reimbursement.

Washoe County Department of Social Services is also participating with the Divisions of Child and Family Services in the development of a Pilot program for the improvement of the Therapeutic Foster Care /Group Home System. The focus areas for improvement to the system are as follows:

- Creation of a Quality Assurance and Care Management System that identifies measurable child welfare and treatment outcomes, tracks progress towards clinical goals, and provides monitoring of critical incidents.
- Enhanced case management and treatment that aggressively promotes the achievement of the placement of children with a permanent family as soon as is practical and safe.
- The development of a uniform assessment procedure to identify youth who are likely to benefit from placement in a Therapeutic Foster Care/Group Home Setting.
- Improved access to evidence-based behavioral management and clinical treatment approaches.
- A reworking of the current fiscal structure for funding Therapeutic Foster Care/Group Home Services to better promote permanency and clinical outcomes.
- A focus on providing key clinical reforms to the existing agency-based care structure as well as developing a clinical support system to provide treatment to high needs youth placed in traditional foster care.

Washoe County Department of Social Services has already engaged in program development to support the elements of the proposed pilot.

- A Care Management Unit has been created.
- Together Facing the Challenge, an evidence-based behavioral management system, is on track for implementation by a number of providers.
- A new fiscal rate structure has been developed and proposed by Washoe County fiscal staff.
- County staff participated in a Division of Child and Family Service work group that developed a proposed Report Card to monitor clinical progress for youth and identified key components in an ideal Therapeutic Foster Care product.

The reform of the mental health treatment delivery system for youth in Child Welfare is ambitious to say the least, but is critical for us to insure a high quality of life for our most vulnerable children. However, the concept of a "pilot" implies the roll out of a well developed product with the hope of immediate superior outcomes. It is the position of Washoe County Department of Social Services that a phased roll out of the key elements discussed above, starting with the development of a quality assurance system, would best lead to sustainable system change. In this way, a true measure of system effectiveness could be conducted first and the impact of subsequent system changes could be assessed as they are added. The Pilot would function as a study of the effectiveness of changes to key system elements and culminate with recommendations for the reform of the larger Higher Level of Care System.

This concludes the presentation for today. Thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing. I would be happy to address any questions or concerns you might have.