

Waupaca County Birth to 3 Program On-Site Visit Report

A. Purpose of Review

The Birth to 3 Program On-Site Visit, in conjunction with the Self-Assessment Process, is designed to assess each county's implementation of Early Intervention Services according to federal and state regulations found in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Federal regulations (34 CFR 303.501) require that the Department of Health Services (DHS) monitor programs to ensure compliance with federal law, provide technical assistance, and correct deficiencies identified through this review, if applicable.

B. Description of Activities

The Birth to 3 Program On-Site Visit with Waupaca County was conducted on November 11, 2013. State staff participating in the Birth to 3 On-Site Visit included Dana Romary, DHS Birth to 3 Program State Lead, and René Forsythe with the RESource Training and Technical Assistance Project. Participants from Waupaca County's Birth to 3 Program included Kris Olsen, Educator/Service Coordinator; Sarah Cogar, Service Coordinator; Jenni Boelter, Educator/Service Coordinator; Nicole Lauritzen, Program Coordinator/ Educator/Service Coordinator; Shannon Kelly, Family Community Services Manager from Waupaca County; and the following contracted providers: Allison Halada, Speech Therapist, 3H Speech Therapy; Steve Wowzynski, Physical Therapist, Legacy Physical Therapy; Alison Fries, PhD, Child Development Specialist, Northland.

The agenda for the Birth to 3 Program On-Site Visit was developed with suggestions and requests from Waupaca County, ongoing topics directly related to county Birth to 3 Program operation and performance, and the 3 annual focus topics identified by the DHS Birth to 3 Program.

In preparation for the Birth to 3 Program On-Site Visit, the state review team reviewed data from the Program Participation System (PPS) and Data Mart. The state review team also read and responded to Waupaca County's written summary of their file review process which included the program's reflections, celebrations, questions, and identified areas for enhancement.

Waupaca County provided the following documents for review: file review/self assessment summary, a copy of a contract with one of the therapy provider agencies and folder of resources used to support families through the transition process.

C. Summary of Birth to 3 Program On-Site Visit

The review team addressed the following topic areas below during the review.

1. Review of Process/File Review Summary

Waupaca County Birth to 3 Program staff thoroughly reviewed six files in preparation for the On-Site Visit; half of which represented children that completed the transition process. During the On-Site Visit, the county review team described the entire Birth to 3 process from intake through transition and

used some of the situations from these files as specific case examples. Summary statements from this discussion follow:

- Birth to 3 referrals generally come directly to the program coordinator; one other team member has been trained to accept and process referrals in the coordinator's absence. The program is currently in the process of transitioning to the use of one phone number for referrals, however referrals are also received by other methods (e.g., fax).
- While Waupaca County used some of their America Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds to support community outreach/child find, the program is currently trying to capitalize on already existing, natural opportunities for outreach to other agencies within the county. For example, when connecting with area physicians about children referred to the Birth to 3 Program, service coordinators will share about their program's philosophy and approach to serving families.
- Waupaca County Birth to 3 reports, anecdotally, that most referrals to the program come from physicians. Referrals also are received from a wide variety of others including Healthy Beginnings, Early Head Start, social workers, parents, etc.
- A process for ensuring timely Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) has been developed over the course of the last several months. At the time the evaluation/assessment is being scheduled, the Early Intervention (EI) Team Meeting and IFSP Meeting are also being scheduled within the proper timeframes. The use of Outlook to access the entire team's calendars has allowed for this practice. In addition, blocks of time during the week are saved for any needed evaluations to ensure that they can happen in a timely manner.
- Evaluations and assessments happen collaboratively between the team and family. The team sees the family at the same time and works together to complete the various procedures used. Following the evaluation/assessment, the team jointly creates one EI Team Report to be shared and reviewed at the EI Team Meeting.
- Waupaca County's process for determining the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) child outcome entry and exit ratings includes each involved team member accessing the ECO Decision Tree to determine a rating in each of the three outcome areas. The rating and their justification is emailed to the service coordinator to compile and document. If there are any discrepancies, the service initiates an email conversation to help the team come to a consensus. While this process meets the minimum requirements, an opportunity for a team discussion for each rating is considered best practice and most reliable.
- Waupaca County Birth to 3 has taken increased action to communicate with and involve both parents when they are serving families across two households.

2. Administrative Items

This conversation covered topics such as fiscal, contracts, human resources, training, data collection/analysis, and data driven decisions. Some highlights include:

- Once services on the IFSP are identified and initiated, data elements from the child's record are entered into PPS. PPS is then updated following each IFSP review other activity that warrant changes to the record and PPS. Each service coordinator is responsible to enter their own data into PPS.
- When following up on referrals to the program, Waupaca County Birth to 3 has recently established a procedure regarding the number of attempts and methods of communication to happen with families. This has significantly reduced frustration as well as improved us of time and resources. In the end, many families are reported to have taken the extra initiative to connect with the program when interested in pursuing next steps.
- Waupaca County Birth to 3 has a *missed visit policy* that is shared with each family and enforced.
- A social worker has just been added to the Waupaca County team. While it is certain that this individual will provide service coordination services, other roles and responsibilities relating to evaluations/assessments and interventions are yet to be determined. The program reports that their thoughtful transition to a new team member caused no upset to families.
- Waupaca County Birth to 3 recently contracted with Northland to access a child development specialist who will cover some of the program coordinator's duties during her family medical leave as well as continue to support the team during team meetings and joint visits. This child development specialist has a background in infant mental health and brings a new perspective to the team.
- All existing contracts with therapy provider agencies are being reviewed and considered for updates. With plans to implement the Primary Coach Approach to Teaming in 2014, contracts will need to reflect changes.
- One Spanish-speaking interpreter is accessed for all Birth to 3 program needs. This has provided an opportunity for the interpreter to become very familiar with the program and understand existing processes and practices to better communicate with families and Birth to 3 staff.
- While the program has adopted a process for extensively sharing and explaining the parent and child rights, the program believe that family outcome survey results don't reflect their efforts. The program will continue to reflect on existing practices for any needed changes.
- Waupaca County has plans to review existing parental cost share materials and procedures to reflect desired updates to both. Two household families are more common and have caused some challenges with implementing parental cost share.
- Waupaca County has noticed a significant increase in denials from both private and public insurance for billing for therapy services. A plan to investigate the cause(s) further is in place.

- Birth to 3 service coordinators along with the program coordinator, therapists, and community services manager review their Program in Partnership Plan (PIPP) on a quarterly basis to reflect progress and plan for any next steps.

3. County Birth to 3 Program-Driven Topics

Waupaca County identified a few topics for discussion during the On-Site Visit. These included discussions of implementation of primary coach approach to teaming as it relates to the selection of the primary coach, staff training, contract revisions, and messaging to the community; interagency agreements; outreach and child find efforts and program related fiscal questions.

4. Three Focus Topics

Indicator 8: *Percent of children exiting who received timely transition planning to support child's transition to preschool and other services.*

- Waupaca County Birth to 3 meets annually with the school districts in the county to discuss transition practices and update interagency agreements.
- LEA notification at 2 years, 3 months is completed by one team member at the middle of each month.
- Since the program has changed their method for explaining the LEA notification process, fewer families have opted out of that process. Currently, very few families opt out which is more consistent with the rest of the state and with what should be expected.
- The Waupaca Birth to 3 Program has a process in place to begin planning for transition during intake and revisit the transition process throughout the families' participation in the program. Service coordinators ask the family to consider where they see their child at age three and the transition plan is developed accordingly.
- Each family transitioning from the Waupaca County Birth to 3 program receives a transition resource packet to help support, prepare, and empower them throughout the transition process.
- Service coordinators in Waupaca County spend a considerable amount of time collaborating with the parent to prepare and plan for the TPC. Parents have a say in the location of the TPC and often times have generated questions for LEAs in advance. Other community agencies are included when appropriate.
- The determination for a child's potential eligibility for services through the LEA happens at varied times, but most commonly when the child reaches 2 years, 6 months of age to allow for the timely scheduling of a transition planning conference (TPC).

Indicator 9: *General supervision system identifies and corrects noncompliance as soon as possible but in no case later than one year from identification*

The Waupaca County Birth to 3 Program was reminded of the requirement to correct any issued findings of non-compliance within 12 months of issuance as well as described the recent changes to the process. Waupaca County did not, however, have any non-compliances issued in December 2012. Findings of non-compliance for federal fiscal year 2012-13 will be issued later this month.

Primary Coach Approach to Teaming

- Waupaca County Birth to 3 has piloted the primary coach approach to teaming with a small portion of their families. While questions still remain as to how this approach will be implemented within the full program, the goal is to implement with all families in spring of 2014. Team training and additional planning is to take place in March prior to full implementation. Program administration is onboard with this plan and supports the process.
- Waupaca County has laid a solid foundation in recent years regarding the use of evidence based practices. Twice a month team meetings are in place along with a strong sense of team, solid communication, and block scheduling. Much collaboration around supporting families already happens.
- The Waupaca County Birth to 3 Program has used video tape review as a method to support the increase of each team member's ability to use coaching as an interaction style as well as truly access natural learning contexts with families. There are plans in place to begin using video tape review with families to increase their engagement and follow through.
- Intervention visits are reported to be happening more often within the community following the implementation of the Routines Based Interview™ and the use of coaching as an interaction style.
- Waupaca County reports that families are clear on the vision of their birth to 3 program from intake through transition; to empower and build the confidence and competence of families.

5. IFSP Review

The IFSP review portion of the On-Site Visit was incorporated into discussions around the Birth to 3 process and while looking at examples of IFSPs.

Discoveries include:

- As the IFSP process was described, it is apparent that families are very engaged in each step along the way; a family-centered approach is used.
- IFSP outcomes are generally derived from the Routines Based Interview™ and the *tell us about your family* page in the IFSP.
- While written prior notice for services identified on the IFSP met minimal requirements, best practice would suggest including more detail to reflect true conversations with families about the decisions being made.
- Waupaca County's *service page* within the IFSP is in need of updates to reflect the changes made to the part c regulations. The needed changes were discussed during the On-Site Visit.

- From discussions at the On-Site Visit including several service providers, it is apparent that all members of the IFSP team fully participate in and understand the process. It is also reported that there is much consistency with the practices among the different service coordinators.
- Once IFSP outcomes have been developed, the team takes various measures to keep the outcomes in the forefront of conversations. For example, some interventionists write the outcomes on each visit note and the outcomes are often referred to during team meetings.

6. Data Verification

Documentation from two children's records was compared to data entered into PPS. The specific data verified correlated to federal compliance indicators or other key pieces of the Birth to 3 process. While a most of the data elements matched exactly, one of the records had aspects of the IFSP services noted differently. The program plans to submit related case notes for further review.

D. Findings of Noncompliance

The State review team is pleased to report that Waupaca County does not have any Findings of Non-Compliance at this time.

E. PIPP Development and Next Steps

As referenced above, any Findings of Non-Compliance identified as a result of the On-Site Visit are required to be addressed on the PIPP. Other outcomes identified on the PIPP will be seen as enhancements to the program. All outcomes on the PIPP will help guide the technical assistance provided by the regional RESource facilitator. RESource will contact the county Birth to 3 Program coordinator to schedule the PIPP update to happen upon their return in March, 2014.