

LEADING FOR CHANGE THE HOT SPRINGS STORY WINTER 2011

Hot Springs, Arkansas is located 45 minutes due west of Little Rock Arkansas. With a population of approximately 45,000 citizens, the city of Hot Springs is built around Hot Springs National Park which is known for its natural hot water which flows and pools from several natural springs. Former President Bill Clinton, who is a graduate of Hot Springs High School, is one of our more famous citizens.

Hot Springs School District has an enrollment of 3800 students, grades preK-12. Seventy-five percent (75%) of our students qualify for free and reduced meals, our graduation rate is forty-eight percent (48%), and fifty-two percent (52%) of our students are minority students. Academically our district is on the "alert" status for No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

We are a **2008 Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant site** with our first and only (so far) project director, Terry Lawler, starting work on January 1, 2009. Our Core Management Team (CMT) was initially the same four individuals who signed the memorandum of understanding and support when our grant paperwork was submitted. Those individuals were the superintendent of the school district, the juvenile court judge, the city's chief of police, and the clinic director of our cities' largest mental health agency.

In the beginning it was as though the district owned the grant. The PD, whose work experience was entirely within the public school setting, was hired by the superintendent of schools. As work on the infrastructure took place the essential question was "How does this SS/HS grant address the needs of our students?" The logic model and the budget seemed to be the initial answers and the Core Management Team really were only an audience for the project director to report progress on getting approval to proceed with implementing our logic model and budget from our Federal Project Officer.

As we began implementing our Logic Model and spending our budget and putting staff into place, our CMT meetings continued as a time for the project director to brief the four members on the work that she and her staff were doing. The meetings started promptly at 12 noon, they were always a "working lunch", and ended promptly at 1:00. Always held in the school district's boardroom, the project director did almost all the talking as the CMT members listened politely and usually voiced some positive comments about how hard the PD was working.

However, it did not take long for us to realize that while the money and the Logic Model helped us put people and programs in place, in and by themselves they could not empower the project director or our initiative to make the kind of changes we recongnized that we needed to make in order to really help our community. Now we see that the SS/HS grant sets up the opportunity for a community to reinvent how it provides services to its citizens. We discovered that we had to change the way our schools and our agencies were working in isolation so that we could do our business together. We had to form a true partnership- with all members of the CMT being actively thinking and actively involved in the process of changing our own individual organizations so that we could better integrate services for our students, clients, and families.

For us there were three "aha" events:

1st AHA event: Winter of 2010- Leadership for Change Course. Our first professional development experience for our CMT was a series of webinars in which the **Leadership for Change course** was delivered. We had a different group of CMT members every time we met, usually 2 CMT members and the PD. However, all four members attended at least some of the meetings. While we were supposed to be participating in the webinar, we would usually listen for a few minutes and then, prompted by something from one of the webinar presenters, we would begin to have our own side bar discussions. These discussions were our way of responding to what we were each getting from the webinars' content in terms of how that information related to our agency or to our perception of each others' agencies. Hot Springs is a fairly small city and the four members of our CMT have known each other for years. In addition, they each have been the CEO's of their respective organizations for quite some time. They have the same community in common and have thus encountered each other's work for some time as we. Prior to the Leadership for Change work, we thought we knew each other well enough and we thought we knew what we needed to know about each other's agency or organization and we certainly had our own opinions about how we each did our work.

During this series of webinars in small groups of 2-3 people, we began asking good questions of each other and assumptions were challenged. This got a little testy at times. People got defensive and very territorial. The PD became a moderator/mediator for some intense but healthy debates! From our participation in the webinar, deeper conversations took place and we began to see that we needed to have a much better understanding of each other, our organizations, and the work that we were trying to do with our common students/clients.

2nd AHA event: The second "aha" event happened shortly afterwards when we developed our initial **resource mapping exercise**. Beth Freeman, our TAS, was most helpful as she guided us through this process. Using the Prevention Model, each member of our CMT posted our resources applying sticky notes to each of the three areas. When we stepped back to look at our map, problems were evident. There was spotty coverage in our prevention area- some of our schools were doing some prevention work but not all and the other agencies had little going on in the prevention area. There were also gaps in our intervention area. There were some interventions in place in each agency but they were not available to all our students/clients and their families. We also found limited mental health services. As well, other intensive services were being offered to our community but with almost all working in isolation from the other agencies. We also saw some duplication of services because we really had no idea what other agencies were doing in the same areas. We began to see that we had more resources than we thought we did, especially staff members, and the use of these resources were overlapping in some areas with some students/clients/families and non-existent for other students/clients/families.

3rd AHA event: The third "aha" event took place during the **evaluation of our first year's work** together. Our CMT used the **Levels of Implementation tool** as the center of an in-depth discussion. Focusing on Domain 7-Leadership we conducted our self assessment asking these questions, "Where were we in terms of full implementation?" And "**What was it going to take** to get us to full implementation?" "

All three "aha" events resulted in our CMT beginning to change the way we and our agencies/organizations worked with each other.

Some of the **changes:**

1. We **re-organized our CMT**. We added five new members to our CMT in order to better reflect the diversity in our community and to bring into our group the leaders of other organizations/agencies who were working on some of the same issues we were AND were having some success OR who could have some real positive influence on our success. These new members included:

A. Supervisor of our Garland County **Juvenile Detention Center**. Sixty percent of her detainees are students in the Hot Springs School District. Also, this person has put some interventions into place in the JDC that were helping those students be successful after they left the JDC. We recognized that those interventions could be used as preventions IF we implemented them in our schools and in our community before the juvenile got into trouble.

B. Founder of a local non-profit who has developed a small but successful volunteer **mentoring** program.

C. **Director of Children's Services in the Department of Behavioral Health Division of the Arkansas Department of Human Services**. Her knowledge and experience of policy plus her connection to state funding has proven to be a great addition to our CMT.

D. The school district's Director of Federal Programs. This person is over all the **Title I monies** and programs in the district and has staff in place both in the schools as well as connections to parent involvement programs and supplemental educational services.

E. The Supervisor of our **county's DHS/DCFS office**. This agency was working in complete isolation from the rest of our CMT agencies and we knew that our staffs could be more effective if we could **work in collaboration** with this agency.

2. We **changed where we held our meetings and who facilitated** those meetings. We met on a rotating basis at each other's agency with the CMT of that agency facilitating our meeting. We started each of these meetings with the CMT member providing an overview of their agency, its programs, staff, goals, challenges, and strategic plans. This helps us not only understand each other better but really educated us on how this agency worked within our community and fit with each of our own organizations.

3. We **added 30 minutes to each of our meetings** and set the first Friday of each month as our **regular meeting time** so that all our CMT members could set that time aside on a regular basis.

4. One other piece of work that we focused on during this integration process was how to use our **leadership roles within our own organization/agency to change how our staffs worked together**. We realized that not only did we as CMT members have to learn to work together but so did our staffs. We focused on leadership that makes a difference though how our staffs worked together. To accomplish this we:

1. Held joint information meetings and joint evaluation meetings facilitated by the CMT member of the agency/organizations' facility that hosted the meeting
2. Provided **shared professional development**
3. Assigned **liaisons** and contact partners between agencies/organizations
4. Organized **weekly meetings and staffings that included representatives from each of these agency/organizations**

Now that these cross-agency teams have been established, we look at which agency's staff member(s) is the best person to coordinate services for that child/youth/family and that agency takes the lead on managing those services.

EXAMPLES of RESULTS

1. **Truancy Court:** Prior- High Absentee Rates at all our schools. FINS were being filed by the schools with the Garland County Juvenile Judge but from the school's perspective there was not enough being done by the court to change this problem. The school wanted the juvenile judge to be harsher with the students/families. From the court's perspective the school was waiting too late to file the FINS. The juvenile judge wanted to have time to intervene and try to help students/families change BEFORE applying harsh fines and sentences/consequences. After- Our school district rewrote all their attendance policies to be able to identify and refer students with attendance problems to the court earlier. Our Juvenile Judge established a separate truancy court to divert FINS filed on attendance issues. Our judge and school administrators worked on policy changes and our school-court liaisons worked on the details of how they would carry out those policies in each school. Now- Student attendance in all schools had improved. Also, Truancy Court staff members are collaborating with parents, students, and schools to address attendance problems and come up with a plan of action for each student that outlines progression of consequences for the student not attending school. Schools and Juvenile Court have a much better working relationship with their respective liaisons meet weekly to discuss students with attendance problems. School and court continue to work together on policy changes to identify students with attendance problems early and to address the individual student/family at the most appropriate point of service.

2. **School Based CSH) Wrap-Around Teams:** Prior- Mental Health Agency could not get buy-in from all parties. There was lack of participation by key members of the student/family wrap team, and lack of ability to follow-up. From the school' perspective, they did not have the time or manpower to do wrap-around for students. These issues resulted in many students being removed from regular schools and placed in ALE's. After- As a result of joint staff meetings and training with all agencies represented the Wrap-Around meetings were held at the school site with the mental health agency staff setting up the meetings, providing the facilitation, and the school staff providing the follow-up. As a result fewer students are being referred to ALE as well as to residential placements.

3. **Community/School Based Intervention Groups:** Prior: The schools were not providing social skills training or Tier II interventions to their students. As a result too many students were being referred to mental health. After: PBIS/Coordinated School Health Teams were established in each school with representatives for the school, mental health, and social services participating together. The schools began teaching social skills to all students through the PBIS "Cool Tools" model. Each school was assigned an Intervention Specialist who serves as a case manager and works with school staffs and community volunteers and other agencies to provide Tier II interventions. These interventions include; mentoring, tutoring, behavior contracts, daily check-in and check-out, and small social skills groups. The results are that more students are receiving those level two types of interventions and thus we are better identifying those students who do need referrals to mental health.

4. **SBMH Policy Manual:** Prior: School based mental health consisted of a therapist and/or case worker coming in and out of our schools with little or no connection to the school staff. After: With the assistance of our local mental health agencies and our school district administrators and school board attorney, we were able to develop a SBMH Policy Manual for our schools. As a result, teams consisting of a therapist and a case manager were placed in each of our schools on a full-time basis. Referral forms were developed and each agency was able to establish enough of a case load to provide 70% billable services and 30% non-billable services to our schools. Non-billable services include; staffing meetings and trainings with school staff members, some pro-bono services to students and families, and attendance at some of our SS/HS trainings.

These are some examples of the positive results we are getting from re-inventing how our CMT and their respective agencies collaborate together to solve community problems. Working together, we can better serve children/youth/families which goes far in helping us put together a successful sustainability plan.

Lessons learned:

1. **Make sure you have the right members on your Core Management Team.**
 - Reflect your community diversity
 - Include people who can make the decisions and put those decisions into actions at their agency, school district, or organization
 - If an agency leader sends a proxy- make sure that proxy has the authority to make decisions
 - Identify others in your community (like leaders in non-profits or faith based community) who are working with the same children/youth/families or the same type issues that are addressed in your logic model
2. **Take time to learn** everything you can about the other CMT members-especially how their agency works. Set aside any pre-conceived opinions.
3. **Be willing to be transparent.** Point your finger at yourself and/or your own agency when looking at ways to improve coordination of services.
4. **Be honest.** When answering questions, reflect on what you really think, see, feel and not what you think the other CMT members and the Project Director want to hear. Be professionally honest and don't worry about being politically correct.
5. **Listen.** Ask questions and listen again and follow-up with the "why" and "how" and "what if" kinds of questions that get to a deeper level of communication.
6. **Be willing to say in the work.** Changing CMT members means that you have to start all over. Missing CMT members at your meetings is like driving a car with only 3 wheels- you seriously drag.
7. **Don't give up when stress happens.** Stress means you're working through the process of change and if managed well, stress can be healthy and helpful to your CMT.

8. **Start with issues that are identified as important to the children, youth, and families** whom are the students/clients of the multiple agencies represented on your CMT. Get input from these students/clients. Make changes even if in small steps and make sure your broadcast any success.

9. We have learned that **were the child is IS the point of service**. That helps us decide which agency takes the lead and/or the case management.

10. **Sharing resources** (especially staff) can be a great way to begin this coordination as well as get more from our resources.

Coordination of services will change the way our agencies work together. Coordination of services leads to systems change and systems change leads to integration of agencies/organizations/and schools. From our experiences we believe that systems integration is the work that best ensures the sustainability of our Safe Schools/Healthy Students Initiative.

Thank you for letting me shares some of our Hot Springs story with you.