



### The Whole Family Approach in a Community Corrections Setting

Juvenile probation in Dakota County has traditionally focused efforts on individual clients, targeting only *their* behaviors and needs. The clients we work alongside are often part of families experiencing housing crises, job layoffs, health issues, and financial problems. There is disarray, even chaos, surrounding many of our clients. We know these factors have an impact on them, but our practice was to attend almost exclusively to a client's behaviors and needs.

An emerging body of research demonstrates how intentional work with both an individual *and* their family leads to improved outcomes across the spectrum of social determinants of health and wellness: education, health and well-being, employment, and financial stability for our clients.

A Whole Family Approach requires systems- schools, mental and physical health care, employers, law enforcement, social service and faith organizations- to collaborate with each other and partner with the youth and his or her family. While Community Corrections' works with clients to reduce risk to commit new crimes, we now actively partner with others to ensure the strength and health of the entire family as our most impactful intervention.

The core principles of a Whole Family Approach include:

- View the family as a whole system and understanding how action and change in one part of the system impacts others.
- Work from a strengths perspective, allowing the client and family to identify their "gold standard" for healthy living.
- Provide honest and genuine feedback to families.
- Ensure services are intentional, directed toward the goals clients and their families identify; and specifically address their case plan.
- Community and divisional partnerships serve as vehicles for much of the service delivery, are initiated by the family and coordinated by the community corrections case manager.

The Community Corrections Department began preparation for a pilot at the New Chance Day Treatment Program last July, 2017. A key part of Whole Family was the development of the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment. Now, as soon as New Chance staff determine an effective alliance has formed with the youth/family, staff introduces the Whole Family Approach by helping the entire family (including the youth, siblings, significant others) see how setting its own goals and describing its own “gold standard” of living, they are planning for success. New Chance then uses the Family Strength and Needs Assessment to help the youth/family identify its own strengths and needs, as well as action steps. The process is facilitated by a New Chance case manager and a program therapist.

Following completion of the assessment, the case manager and program therapist help the family facilitate connections with Dakota County staff from other departments and with community resources. These connections are not just phone numbers and referrals, but are, instead, active hand-offs, followed by ongoing coaching to help the family access the resources.

New Chance staff members significantly increased their contact with parents and are conducting planned, intentional home visits involving entire families. Though the Whole Family Approach is still fairly new, data show:

- New Chance staff conducted four times the total number of home visits in 2017 (67) compared to 2016 (16).
- Staff increased the number of structured family events in 2017 to six, up from two in 2016. The events included family picnics, as well as black history and Cinco De Mayo celebrations. Family attendance at these events in 2017 increased 25% from the year before.
- Staff reported seeing increased engagement from parents in the day to day activities of the youth. New Chance teachers also reported seeing more participation from parents than ever before. As an example, the school has invited parents to attend fall conferences in the past with little to no success. This past fall, there were six New Chance parents who participated compared to zero in 2016. New Chance staff has seen an increase in program attendance as well as a reduction in oppositional behaviors. As of April 2017, New Chance clients have experienced a 10% reduction in out of home placements as a result of technical probation violations. School attendance has increased 8.6% from the year prior and 35% of clients saw a reduction in their risk assessment scores.
- New Chance staff established strong connections with Community Services Division partners by doing direct observation and consultation so their Whole Family practice now includes active screening, referral, and as needed, walking a family through the process of accessing services. One recent example was in the case of a family experiencing financial hardship – frozen pipes, no heat, no water – which New Chance learned of through deliberate need exploration. A New Chance staff member worked with the parent through the complicated process of getting emergency cash assistance. Within a day, the family received funds to remedy the issues.

A whole family approach has never before been implemented in a Community Corrections setting. There was not a road map or guidebook for implementation. The success of the pilot relied heavily on the dedication of staff and their commitment to improved outcomes.

In May 2018, The National Association of Counties (NACo) recognized Dakota County and the Whole Family implementation at New Chance as “best in category” for innovation in Criminal Justice and Public Safety. NACo recognized 615 entries from 116 counties in 29 states but only 18 of those entries were recognized as “best in category”. Congratulations to the New Chance team on a well-deserved award.