FYSB Family & Youth
Services Bureau
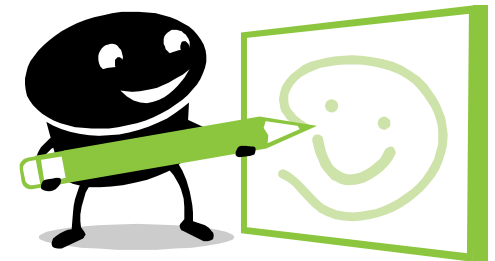
Runaway and Homeless Youth Training & Technical Assistance Center

"If It Isn't Written,
It Didn't Happen"

Tammy L. Hopper

NATIONAL SAFE PLACE
NETWORK

Session objectives

- Discuss common challenges and potential solutions to creating user-friendly files.

- Learn how to be trauma-informed in the way information is documented about youth.

- Review tips on creating files that are more than just paperwork.

- Review examples of file documentation to assess for common errors.

- Share peer to peer tips on what works when there is limited time.

Why is documentation so painful?

File phobia phenomenon

- Time consuming
- Must be checked
- Different skill levels of staff members
- Redundant
- Unsure of what or how much to document
- Fear of the power of the written word
- Hard to correct mistakes
- What else?

Understanding federal expectations

- You must document the eligibility of youth to receive services.
- You must document that each of the required services are offered/provided (as applicable) to the youth seeking assistance from your program(s).
- Document youth/family acceptance/refusal of services.
- Individual and program level documentation is required.
- Services provided are linked to appropriate assessments.
- Any variances must be noted and explained.

Case files from start to finish

- Referral source and eligibility
- Status of referral
- Appropriate notifications
- Agency specific forms (confidentiality, emergency response, and others)
- Intake and assessments
- RHY-HMIS documentation
- Case plan
  - Time
  - Involved parties
  - Needs matched with resources
  - Goals and measurable change (targets and outcomes)
  - Signatures of parties (including the youth)
  - Plans for review and updates

Case files continued

- Services offered and provided (linked to assessments)
- Referrals and results
- Case notes
- Clinical notes as applicable
- Follow-up and aftercare planning (note these are different)
- Ongoing documentation of aftercare services
- Others?

On top of all of the permissions, remember to document confidentiality agreements, parental notifications and other required paperwork.

Core 4 – how are they weaved into case planning?

- Stable housing (include safety)
- Wellbeing
- Permanent Connections
- Education or Employment

Services offered and provided

Remember targeting services toward the Core 4:

- Basic needs
- Health
- Mental health
- Education including McKinney-Vento
- Life skills
- Employment
- Youth involvement
- Leisure and recreation
- Group/ Family life
- Referrals
- Interventions
- Case planning including intake, discharge, and aftercare
- What else?

Services Offered and Provided 2

It isn't sufficient that you offer or provide services –
the requirement is that you DEMONSTRATE through documentation that all
required services **AND** those promised within your approved grant
narrative are:

- Available
- Offered
- Provided
- Tracked
- Evaluated for Improvements
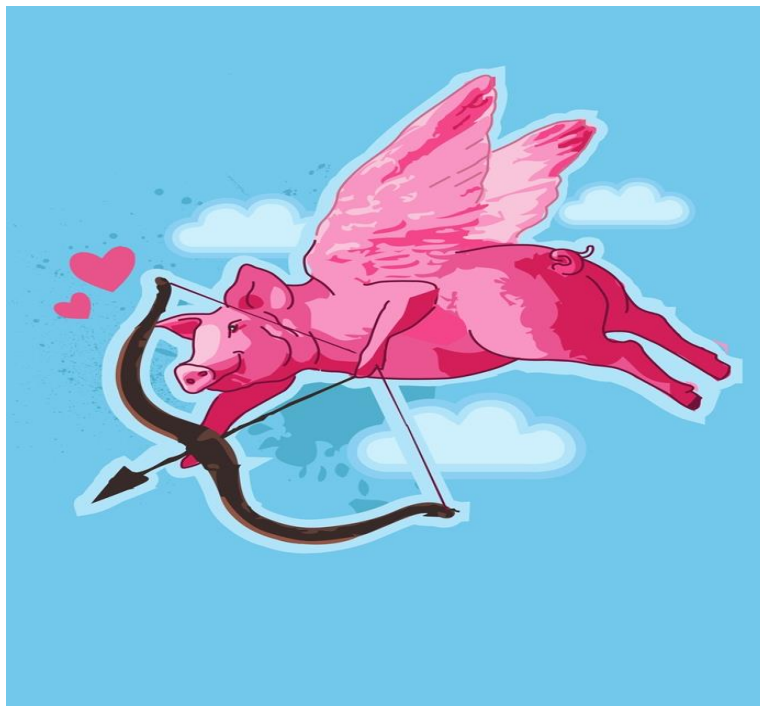
Let's start with some myths about documentation...

My organization maintains a "pass on" or "shift change" electronic file to communicate notes on services provided each day from shift to shift . This file is safely used for "internal" purposes only.

True or False?

Document Monitoring

Any organizational document, including electronic communications, can be examined during monitoring and licensing visits and such "internal" documents are often subpoenaed during court actions. These documents should be:

- Objective
- Factual
- Mirror individual Case Notes - Consistent
- Used as a support – not foundation of communication

Not every youth is in the program long enough to receive all of the required services, and some of them don't need certain resources, so we should only document the services actually provided without referencing other elements.

True or False? 2

Your files must document that you have assessed the needs of each youth. If there is no need or insufficient time (remember aftercare) to provide required services, this must be documented. You must also document if youth and/or families refuse certain services if such refusal occurs.

Document Needs

We no longer need to maintain paper copies of youth files as we maintain all case notes via a computerized system.

True or False? 3

Requirements

Each state license may differ in requiring hard copy or electronic files. FYSB requirements include retaining files for a minimum of the full project period though electronic or paper files is not specified as a preference. Remember, though not as streamlined, looking at an individual file leaves less room for error than an outside party reviewing a computerized system.

Youth and families have a right to review their files.

Read the sentences on the next slides and decide which of the options would be the most effective documentation sentence.

Be prepared to discuss why ☺!

It is all in what you say -

___ A   Judy had a good day today which may have something to do with mom actually showing up for visitation.

___ B   Judy completed all assigned tasks as requested and participated in group.

___ C   Judy completed life skills group activities on cooking and menu planning and also completed assigned tasks as requested.

Sentence 1

___ A   Billy continues to act out aggressively toward male peers and seeks out confrontation with staff.

___ B   Billy exhibited 3 separate incidences of behavior (hit wall, threw pencil and kicked trash can) after he lost at a game of basketball with male peers.

___ C   Billy should be removed from the shelter before this staff quits.

Sentence 2

___ A   Javier has been warned for inappropriate sexual contact and knows that his parents will be informed of his behavior.

___ B   This staff observed Javier holding hands with female peer. Javier was reminded of community guidelines and consequences. TLH 2/19

___ C   Javier continues to flirt with Jessica even though staff has warned them both repeatedly.

Sentence 3

_____ A   Mark and his family met with staff to discuss discharge. Plans in place for referrals as needed.

_____ B   Mark's family came to take him home and knows they can contact the shelter if he acts up again.

_____ C   Mark, his father, and Mark's 12 year old sister met with this staff to discuss discharge. Referrals for counseling and mentoring were offered though Mark and his father agreed to try it at home for a couple of weeks prior to initiating additional services.

Sentence 4

How do we document? What are the benefits/challenges associated with each?

- Case files
- Log books
- Electronic files
- Policies and procedures
- Statistical records and other databases
- RHY-HMIS
- Personnel files
- Group notes
- Tablets
- White boards
- What else?

Keys to tracking data/services

- Must be consistent in the way you track information.
- Services provided to an individual must be tracked in each file.
- Be specific. "Life skills" is o.k. – "cooking, budgeting or cleaning" is better.
- Clinical updates should reflect milieu management tips and be available to youth careworkers.
- Consistent data across all sources.
- Initialed, dated and timed.
- Multiple parties involved – same purpose but different voices.
- What else?

Why is documentation language so important?

- May be the only way to tell the story.

- It should communicate facts and information relevant to the case.

- Represents the voice of staff and or youth who are no longer available to confirm information.

- Used to support organizational decisions regarding the youth's case.

- Provides evidence that funder expectations are being met.

- Provides support for increased resources based on unmet need.

How can language be detrimental? When used ineffectively, language may…

- Convey bias/stereotypes
- Come across as judgmental
- Demonstrate warning signs were ignored
- Highlight organizational chaos and confusion
- Provide evidence of noncompliance
- Leave room for interpretation
- Be difficult to defend after the fact
- Breach confidentiality

What other thoughts do you have?

So, how do we prepare staff?

- Staff at all levels need to have an opportunity to review files for mistakes and good practice.
- Writing skills should be assessed and addressed.
- Staff meetings should be used to address inconsistencies in data.

Steps for addressing documentation needs

- Review all grants/contracts etc. and make master list of all documentation requirements.

- Identify all services that must be addressed (SOP, TLP, MGH, and BCP).

- Create/utilize charts that allow for checklists of topics and notes for individualization.

- Create or Implement log notes that address required elements of service .

- Use team approach to addressing needs – How can youth help?

Remember

- Check your approved grants. Do you have a way to document everything?

- Do your policies and procedures reflect all required services? How? When? Who? Where? and What?

- Personnel files (required training, background checks, and, performance evaluations, etc.)

- Seeking TA/Training from RHYTTAC

- Consult with colleagues about their documentation procedures.

- What else can you do?

What questions or comments do you have?

Last quiz

This training helped me:

A – Think about what I want to have for dinner.

B – Remember that I should review files at some point.

C – Write a documentation haiku.

D – Learn or remember tips and do the best that I can to show that we are making a difference in our agency.

Yes, documentation haiku is possible

The word is a tool,

Use with care and gentle thought

The truth will be clear.

Thanks for your participation and your efforts on behalf of youth and families!

Tammy L. Hopper

National Safe Place Network/Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Center

This is
my
thank you
dance!

Ciao5.com

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