



Executive Summary

EBBS: ADR Training, Consultation and Collaboration: Measuring Success in the South West MCYS Region

The *EBBS: ADR Training, Consultation and Collaboration: Measuring Success in the South West MCYS Region* project is now complete. This was an ADR (Alternative Dispute Resolution) training project funded by the Child Welfare Secretariat through the EBBS (Eliminating Barriers and Building on Successes) initiative. This 18-month project was led by Community Services Coordination Network (CSCN) and involved seven Children's Aid Societies (Chatham-Kent, Elgin, Huron-Perth, London-Middlesex, Oxford, Sarnia-Lambton and Windsor-Essex) from the South West MCYS region and ADR-LINK, the third-party agency that manages the ADR referrals in the SouthWest Region.

The project included effort in three areas:

- ADR training for child welfare staff
- Consultation provided to child welfare agencies regarding ADR referrals and practice
- Collaboration amongst ADR practitioners

The overall objectives were:

- To increase family voice and participation in the selection of which ADR process will be utilized
- Over time: To increase the use of ADR practices and broaden the application of ADR practices
- To increase understanding of ADR practices
- To better prepare referring workers, legal community, and collaterals
- To foster critical thinking as to how best to incorporate ADR into agency practice

The training consisted of a quick-paced half-day training session delivered at each agency. In total, 35 sessions were delivered to 532 agency staff. The training focused on increasing the general knowledge about Family Group Conferencing and Child Protection Mediation, including how to differentiate between the practices, increasing comfort with the child protection worker's and supervisor's roles in each of the practices and learning about the legislative requirements and referral route.

Research was conducted at the training as well as three months after the training using Survey Monkey to get information about use of ADR, knowledge of ADR and comfort with the role in ADR. Research from the training identified a number of barriers to 'considering ADR' as an option for planning or

resolving disputes. Prior to the training, participants identified 'lack of knowledge' as the #1 reason they didn't consider ADR options. Three months after the training, major barriers identified were 'families not interested in participating' and organizational barriers, such as 'not having enough time'. Research also indicated three months after training that participants still had a good general understanding of ADR options and felt an increased comfort in their role with the processes. Many participants reported 'considering ADR'; they identified having increased discussions with supervisors, legal staff or family members about the possibility of ADR.

Child Protection Workers, supervisors and legal staff are encouraged to consider Alternative Dispute Resolution options (child protection mediation, family group conferencing or aboriginal approaches) with their ongoing work with families. Training was able to create a culture of awareness, increase knowledge and encourage trial with the practice. It is hoped that the actual usage and incorporation of ADR into casework will increase with continued experience. At present, on average, there are 17 referrals to Family Group Conferencing, Child Protection Mediation or Aboriginal Approach each quarter amongst the seven child welfare agencies. Approximately 58% of those are FGC, 40% CPM, and 2% AA. This data was tracked for the six quarters of the project as well as for the five quarters prior to the training.

The consultation process included a trainer from either CSCN or ADR-LINK being assigned to each Children's Aid Society. The consultant worked with child protection workers considering referrals for ADR, and assisted ADR leads, ADR committees and in-house legal staff. Presentations to the legal community or in-house legal staff occurred in most of the communities. Overall, over 80 contacts were made with either individuals or groups.

As for the collaboration process amongst ADR practitioners, there were five teleconferences and two face-to-face meetings to provide the twenty practitioners an opportunity to discuss common relevant issues. The practitioners learned about the other ADR processes and increased their understanding of which situations may require more than one ADR process to resolve. As well, practitioners became more comfortable in moving a situation from one ADR process to another when and if more appropriate. There is interest in continuing these meetings in the future. It is hoped that, in turn, agencies and ultimately families will benefit from this increased collective knowledge.

The research from this project has been shared with the social work community at the King's University College research day, the family group conferencing community at the FGC Provincial PD day as well as presented to the project partners. Detailed reports on the research are available on request.

As part of our commitment to EBBS, the training manual and materials are available by contacting Community Services Coordination Network. Please contact Mary Regan at maryregan@cscn.on.ca.

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