COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE:

Path to **Reunification**

The Community of Practice (CoP) series was developed through a partnership with IMPACT WV and the WV Home Visiting Program to help participants exchange technical information and share experiences about serving clients currently experiencing or who have past experiences with substance use and neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS).

The information in this IMPACT WV product was taken from a CoP presentation by Susan Harrison MSW, MPA, LGSW, Executive Director CASA for Children.

Aim

The purpose of this CoP is to:

- Identify and define the stages of parents' feelings
- Learn about family treatment courts
- Review and describe the reunification process
- Learn about CASA

General information

Overall, 50% of cases in WV end in reunification and the other 50% end in adoption, legal guardianship or long term foster care. Reunification starts as the goal in 100% of the cases.

Stages of Parents Feelings

- Knowledge about parental feelings leads to more meaningful contact with parents
- Grief and loss are experienced universally as a series of emotions including:
  - Denial
    - Concerns of child safety and care
  - Anger
    - Loss of appetite, constant eating, sleep schedule disturbed and increased use of substances
    - Angry at neighbors, child, self and others within the community.
  - Sadness
    - Loss of interest, sense of worthlessness or sense of illness.
  - Acceptance
    - Eating and sleeping better again, attending to requirements of court, house, work, family, interested in keeping agreements, visitations with child, making appointments.
- Each of these stages are interchangeable and can be cycled back and forth for families as they work through personal reactions. The court system is time limited, the longer the child is in foster care, and the faster time goes, it is more difficult for families to make it to the stage of acceptance.

General Information (cont.)

Family Treatment Courts (FTC)

A best practice model for working within the child welfare system. A program designed for individuals who are involved in an abuse/neglect case as a result of substance and/or alcohol use. FTC will serve as an improvement period that will help in the recovery process in hopes of leading to reunification of the family. A Child Protective Service (CPS) worker dedicated to the FTC program as well as a supreme court employee, titled the FTC Coordinator, dedicated to help build a treatment team: substance use community, service providers, CASA, etc. who will be involved on a weekly basis.

The following counties in WV follow a family treatment court model: Ohio, Marshall, Wood, Roane, Boone, Fayette, Logan, Kanawha, Randolph, Nicholas and McDowell.

Court is held bi-weekly and will implement incentives and responses for behavior modification. During FTC parents can expect frequent visitation with their child(ren) as long as the safety of the child(ren) is not threatened by inappropriate or unsafe behavior. During the weeks in which court is not held, weekly treatment team meetings are held.

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General Information (cont.)

Are you Ready to Work?

We start from the assumption that you love your children, and you want them to be in a good place, safe and well cared for.

- Do you want to be a parent?
- Do you want your kids to live with you?
- Are you ready to work hard to get them back?

If you love your kids but are not ready to parent, working with the Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to find them the best place. They can be adopted or placed permanently with a relative.

- This can be the most loving thing that you can do if you are honest with yourself and know what that you cannot take care of your kids.

Importance of Attitude

Intentionally adopt a positive attitude

- It can make or break the whole situation
- I can do this. I am doing this. My kids are coming home.

They have got your kids; you want them back.

- Focus on the kids
- Cooperate with everyone
- Advocate for yourself and be strong in a non-angry way.

Everyone's goal is reunifying your family.

Surviving an Improvement Period

Be your own case manager (notebook, calendar)

Have a phone that works, and you can easily be contacted

Two rules:

- Be where you are supposed to be
- Do not lie

Power and authority

- Feels like everyone else has the power
- You are the only one who has the power to get your family back together

Typical Terms of Improvement Periods

- Psychological evaluations
- Parenting assessment/classes
- Adult life skills
- Individual/family counseling
- Drug/alcohol treatment
- Anger management classes
- Random drug tests
- Visitation
- Secure and maintain housing
- Employment (may be a term)
- Attend MDT and court hearings
- Obey all laws
- Do not associate with "inappropriate people"

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General Information (cont.)

Visitation

- Visits can be in a variety of places
- Visits can be supervised by a variety of people
  - Grandma, case aid, CPS worker, etc.
- Some judges have the rule for two negative drug screens before visitation can begin
- They are keeping track of whether you are on time, if you no show, how long you stay, what you say and how you interact.
- Visitation can be difficult for children
  - Sometimes they are angry at you
  - Sometimes they are sad
- There are lots of rules with visits
  - Cannot talk about the case or make promises about when they will come home.
- If there are issues with visitation bring them up with the CPS worker as soon as you can.

The Reunification Process

- Supervised visits
- Unsupervised visits
- Day visits
- Overnight visits
- Trial return home

*Based on how the trial is doing, how they are handling the process, or even how the parent is handling the process. Some barriers may include:

- Lack of providers
- Lack of a transporter
- Distance from parent

CPS and service providers can be elected to remain involved after the reunification ends.

Support Team

- CPS caseworker
- Support groups
- Therapist
  - Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA), parenting groups, domestic violence groups
- Treatment provider
- Service Providers
- Attorney

Helps build relationships with people to remain for the family after the case closes.

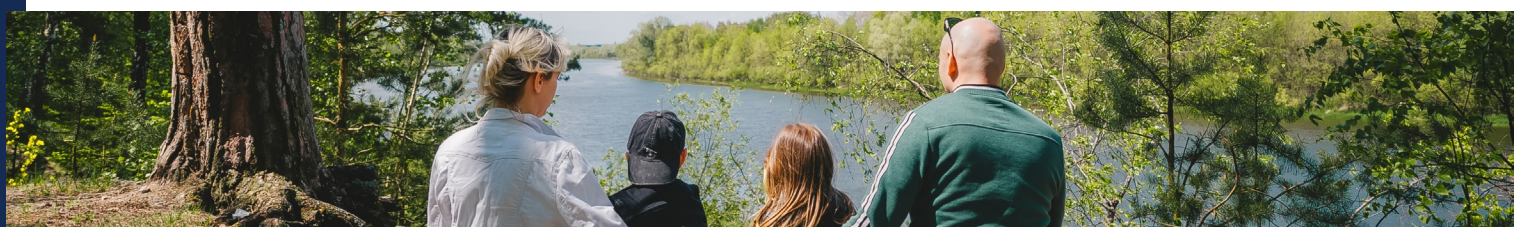
Alternative Dispositions

Termination of Parental Rights

May be voluntary, or the court may find an individual to be an abusive or neglectful parent and terminate parental rights.

Children will achieve permanency either by:

- Adoption
  - Foster families, relative placements, etc.
- Legal guardianship
  - Foster families, relative placements, etc.
- Disposition 5 or Alt 5
  - Kids placed in legal guardianship home, and parental rights stay intact
  - Family comes back in a year
  - Occurs within a relative placement
  - Needs more time to achieve independence



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General Information (cont.)

The CASA Mission

- The CASA program recruits, trains and supports volunteers to advocate for the best interests of children who have been removed from their home due to abuse and neglect.
- CASA's are typically appointed to a case from the onset of judicial proceedings and remain on the case until the child is placed in a safe, nurturing and PERMANENT home.
- The CASA volunteers meet with, parents, relatives, teachers, social workers, foster parents and others involved in the child's life. They then provide written information and recommendations to the judge as to the child's best interest.
- Since CASA volunteers are only assigned to one case at a time, they can provide accurate, detailed and thorough reports.

How You Can Help:

- Report suspected child abuse to the authorities. If you have any suspicions do not hesitate.
- If an investigation turns out to be unsubstantiated, that is OK. It is better than the alternative of remaining silent and putting a child at risk of abuse.
- Early intervention at the time abuse and neglect is reported is the most effective way to ease the pain of these child victims.
- Spread the word about CASA and the need for CASA volunteers (neighbors, church members, friends, business acquaintances) encourage them to contact the CASA office.
- Become a powerful voice in a child's - become a CASA volunteer

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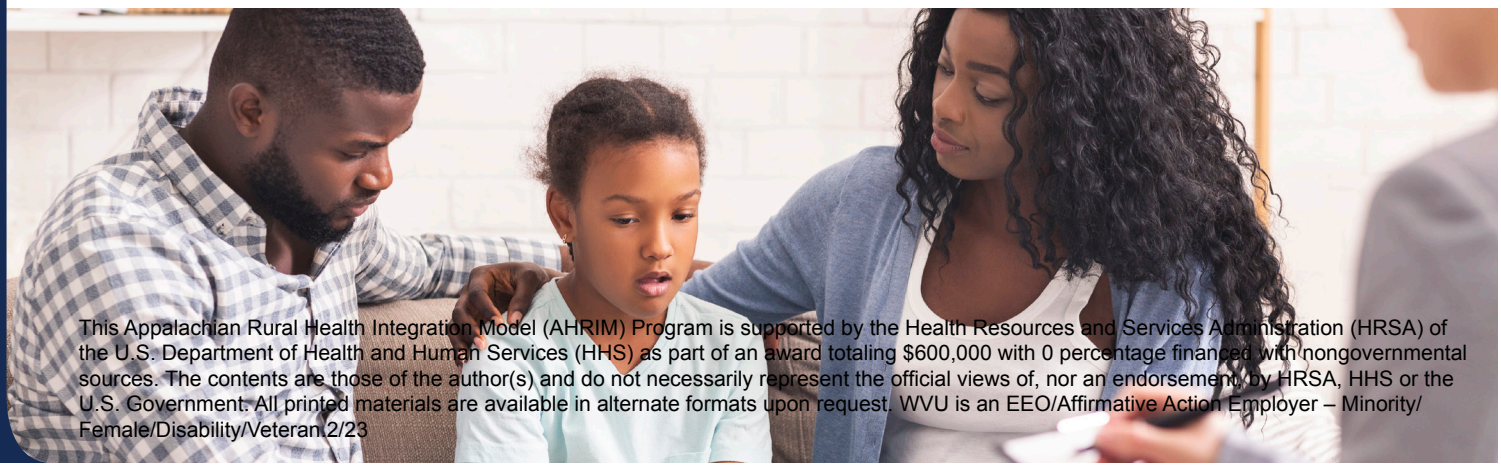
TIPS:

- Understand that improvement periods do take work.
- Be your own best support.
- Intentionally adopt a positive attitude.

Resources

- WV CASA
  https://www.wvcasa.org/
- Family Treatment Court Best Practice Standards:
  https://www.nadcp.org/standards/family-treatment-court-best-practice-standards/
- The Time is Now:
  http://www.courtswv.gov/court-administration/CIP/time-is-now.html
- Parent's Get Real Guide to Getting Your Kids Back:
  https://www.amazon.com/Parents-Real-Guide-Getting-Your-ebook/dp/B006T68FTW



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