

Dr. Shantrell Charles, DSW, LMSW Director of Social Services

Matilda Saragosa, LCDCI Parent Partner



Erika Ducati, LCSW, PPSC Multi-Disciplinary Representation Coordinator

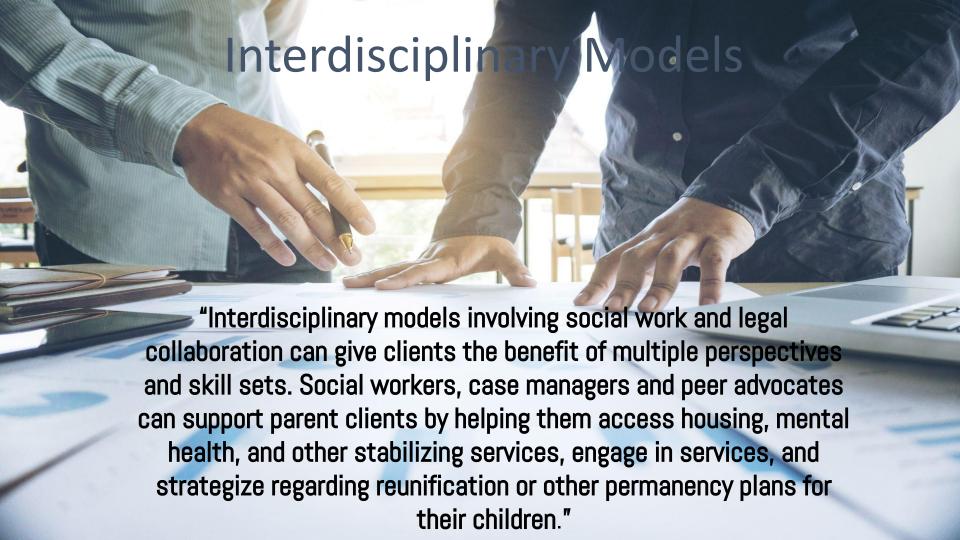
Zabrina Aleguire, JD, CWLS Dependency Representation Program Manager



# By the end of this session you will...

- 1. Hear different ideas for designing and developing an interdisciplinary model
- 2. Understand the distinct skill sets of Peer Advocates and Social Workers
- 3. Explore needs assessment tools and techniques
- 4. Learn tools and techniques for smooth Teamwork and Communication
- 5. See how to track improved outcomes, and practical ways to collect data
- 6. Walk away with practical guides for your own program design or implementation





## Holistic Defense

Holistic defense, also known as "interdisciplinary," is a best practice of client representation whereby attorneys join with social workers or peer advocates on the client's legal team. This team is more equipped to address the individual and systemic causes of the client's case, and is able to bring about improved outcomes to free clients and their families from system involvement.

https://www.risemagazine.org/2020/06/how-holistic-legal-representation-supports-reunification/



## NYC 10 year Interdisciplinary Study

1. Children exited foster care on average about 4 months sooner.

2. Children returned home to their parents 43% faster in the first year after separation.

3. Children went home with relatives more than twice as often (when not with parents).

4. These speedier homecomings were just as safe for children.

In 2018, researchers looked at what had happened for 9,582 families with 18,288 children subjected to New York City's child welfare system starting in 2007. Researchers compared case results for parents who were represented by an attorney in a holistic/interdisciplinary practice to attorneys practicing solo.

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\_interest/child\_law/resources/child\_law\_practiceonline/january---december-2019/providing-parents-multidisciplinary-legal-representation-signifi/

#### Defense Social Workers and Peer Advocates:

## Celebrating and highlighting the strengths and skills of

both professions.

Social workers, especially if they have worked in Child Welfare previously, can easily leverage their experience with caseworkers to advocate for case planning adjustments that better serve a family.

Social workers are trained to clearly assess "safety risks," assess for needs, identify responsive services, and advocate for appropriate case plans and treatment plans.

Peer advocates have the first-hand personal experience of navigating a complicated system, offering a level of understanding, advice, and perspective that is uniquely valuable.

Professional peer advocates may have had formalized training in addition to lived experience, to deliver a client-centered approach and utilize skills like motivational interviewing.

Peers truly understand what is needed to meet families "where they are," can easily demonstrate empathy, and can be a more natural emotional support than other professionals.

#### FOSTER CARE ADVOCACY CENTER

#### **MEET OUR TEAM**



Tara Green
Executive Director & Attorney



**Dani Rosenblum**Supervising Attorney



**Tiffany Cebrun**C.L.A. & Staff Attorney



Celina Recalde
Staff Attorney



Le'Otis Boswell Johnson Staff Attorney



Adam Chaney

Development Director



**Dr. Shantrell Charles**Social Services Director



Matilda Saragosa
Parent Partner



Gladys Molina
Operations Manager



**Diana Grimaldo**Legal Operations Specialist



### Staff Model: Foster Care Advocacy Center (FCAC)



Attract staff aligned with mission and vision of organization.

Attorneys, Social Worker, Parent Partner, Support Staff



**Extensive Interview Process** 



**Salaried** 

Positions, Benefits, PTO (Attorney, Social Workers, Parent Partner)



Legal Division & Social Services
Division





Training

Executive Director oversight of all programs and administrative process

Supervising Attorney oversight of attorneys, legal interns, case distribution Social Services Director supervise Parent Partner, Social Work Intern Students

## FCAC Model continued...

- 1. Attorneys appointed to parents and children cases.
- 2. Staff every case to determine if interdisciplinary representation is needed.

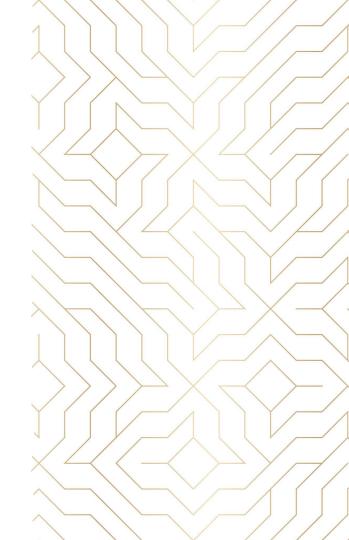
  Based on complex issues such as mental health, substance abuse developmental disability etc.
- 3. Case Assignment to either Social Worker or Parent Partner.
- 4. Plan client visit with attorney/parent partner/social worker.



5. Notify stakeholders of Social Worker/Parent Partner on the case.

## Case referral examples...

- Ms. Mama is trying to reunify, doing minimum work on her case plan, may have cognitive delays causing difficulty in navigating the system and completing her service plan.
- 2. XYZ Children are placed with Aunt in a remote area. All of them are high needs and Aunt is overwhelmed with three IEP's, unmet therapy needs, and the agency caseworker is not returning her calls.



## FCAC Model continued...

Attorney and interdisciplinary staff meet with the client to build rapport, discuss expectations/roles, and complete assessment of client needs, strengths, and goals.

Interdisciplinary staff participates in any client related activities or events.

• Family Visits, Family Group Conferences, Hearings, Mediations, IEP Meetings...

Interdisciplinary staff provide support, education, client empowerment and advocacy.

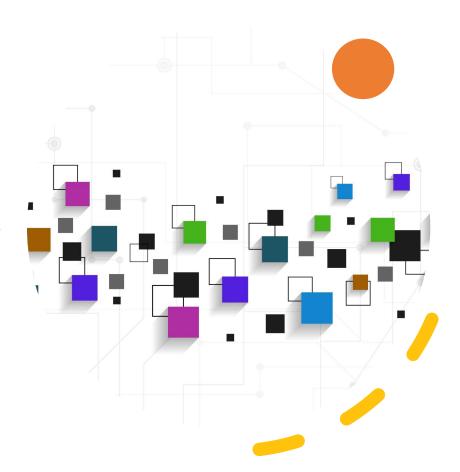
Interdisciplinary staff are protected by attorney client privilege.

• Do NOT testify in court.

Interdisciplinary Staff provide client progress and updates to attorneys, case workers, any other stakeholders the attorney approve.

#### Independent Contractor Model Bar Association of San Francisco

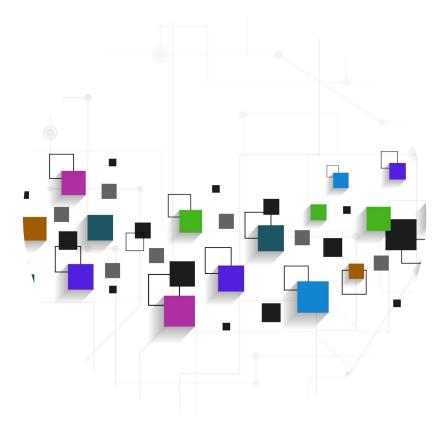
- Attorney assesses the need for a Court Appointed Family Engagement Specialist (CAFES) to assist a client.
- 2. Attorney fills out referral identifying specific needs (See handout).
- 3. Multidisciplinary Program Coordinator reviews, discusses with the attorney and CAFES, identifying the best "fit" for the client.
- 4. The Panel Administrator authorizes the assignment, and the authorization is sent to the court to appoint CAFES to case.



## Where do we find experienced contractors for part-time work?

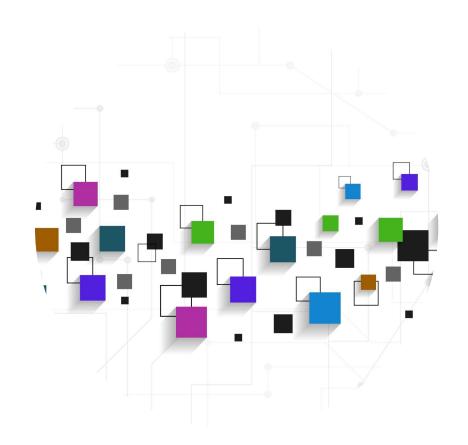
We recruit a diverse set of contractors with experience to coach, advocate for, and support, youth and children:

- Former Child Welfare workers who are retired or left the department and like the idea of assisting attorneys in defense work;
- Parents and youth with lived experience who have completed training in peer advocacy and are looking for part-time opportunities; and
- Professionals who are employed with other agencies working in case-management or a related field.



# Independent Contractor Arrangement

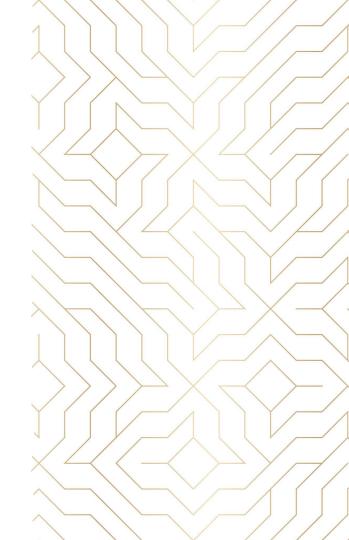
- Contractors are AGENTS of the attorney, working at the direction of the attorney.
- Contractors are NOT mandated reporters, as agents of the attorney.
- Contractor is bound to the same duties as attorneys:
  - Maintain client confidentiality;
  - Duty of undivided loyalty; and
  - Communication is privileged.
- Contractors GATHER information from client, family, providers, etc. to help attorneys and their clients.





## Case referral examples...

- **1. Mr. Papa** just found out he is the father of a child he did not know about, is non-offending, but agency has worries that he is "not ready" to care for child despite lack of safety risks.
- **2. Aging-out teen** is at risk of losing services, is depressed and not engaging with assigned PSW, who insists they have tried everything to get child to go to school or gain employment. In six months FCS support will be terminated.



## Goal-setting examples

Assist with client-attorney and client-department communication

Family time / Visitationadvocating for less restrictive/face to face Housing- locating programs for client to apply / walking them through it

Incarcerated parentencouraging participation and contact

Advocacy for transportation to necessary appointments and visits

Child welfare system navigation and explaining the court process

Assist attorneys in highlighting lack of reasonable efforts

Substance
Treatment-encourage client
to engage in treatment/
assist in finding alternative
placements

Natural supports-assist family members in finding and engaging family, friends, and community to create a strong support network Assist attorneys in assessing competency/cognitive level of client, and confidentially identifying any unaddressed mental health issues

## Short-term interdisciplinary support

See "Building Core Capabilities for Life" article by Harvard's Center on the Developing Child:

https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/building-core-capabilities-for-life/

Interdisciplinary support on the legal team is designed to be short term, not to increase system dependence but instead to promote client's own system navigation abilities. Focus is on assisting clients with discrete goals, teaching self-advocacy skills, modeling effective communication, and coaching them in their practice of those skills.

Triaging immediate needs may involve reducing certain stressors in client's life to increase their capacity to manage their case. We do warm hand-off referrals.

We are looking for natural supports, community-based providers, family finding, and encouraging the growth and strengthening of the family's circles of support.

## Levels of intervention- Case Classification

Social Services Assessment is completed to determine client strengths, needs, protective capacities, supports, and goals. This assessment determines the level of intervention.

- Level 4 Requires weekly face to face contact in the home. Participation and attendance to court hearings, DFPS meetings, and other case related services are required.
   Observation of at least one family visits per month is required.
- Level 3 Requires biweekly face to face contact in the home. Participation and attendance to court hearings, DFPS meetings, and other case related services are required. Observation of at least one family visits per month is required.
- Level 2- Requires monthly face to face contacts in the home. Participation and attendance to court hearings, DFPS meetings, and other case related services are recommended as needed. Observation of at least one family visits is required.
- Level 1 Requires at least one home visit. Participation and attendance to court hearings,
   DFPS meetings, and other case related services are recommended as needed.
   Observation of at least one family visits is required.

## Teamwork and Communication (FCAC)

#### Constant and frequent communication take place. All cases are staffed with entire FCAC team.

- Interdisciplinary meetings with attorneys/social services staff weekly or as needed.
- Social Services team staffings
  - Discuss processes and procedures
  - Discuss issues or barriers
- Legal Team Staffings
  - Discuss legal strategies, coverage etc
  - Discuss issues or barriers
- Case Consultation
  - Discuss specific case issues.
- Documentation is completed in Legal Server Data Management system.
- FCAC team members are copied on all electronic communications pertaining to assigned clients.
- Text thread is created between client attorney and social services team member.
- Client cases are reviewed quarterly to determine the levels of intervention and next steps.

#### FOSTER CARE ADVOCACY CENTER

#### BY THE NUMBERS

4,000 Harris County has
approximately 4,000 children
in foster care

**2X** 

Kids with disabilities are two times as likely to remain in foster care until adulthood

76% of Harris County children removed by CPS are Black or Latinx

900

Harris County children spend an average of 900 days in foster care

22%

Only 22% of Harris County foster kids are ever reunified with their families

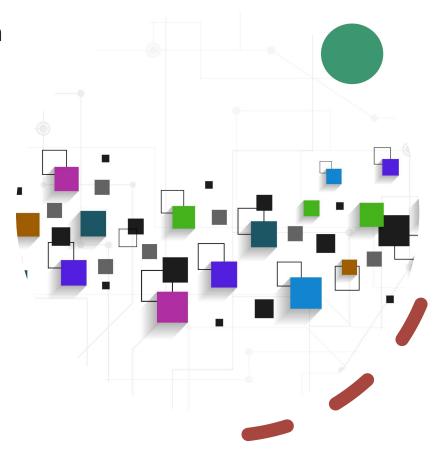
80%

80% of Harris County children in long-term foster care are Black and Latinx



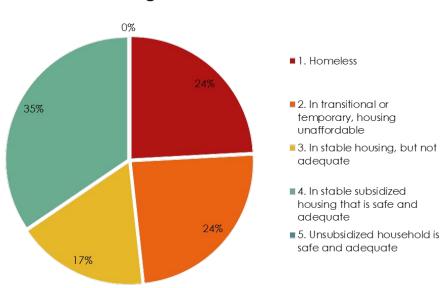
#### Improved Outcomes Documentation

- 1. An interdisciplinary case ends when goals are met, the case is closed by the attorney, the case is transferred to a new attorney who does not request that CAFES assignment be transferred, or client no longer wants support from a CAFES
- 2. CAFES fills out a closure survey on every case (handout), that is a tracking tool to collect data.
- 3. We compare each client's situation at the start of their CAFES involvement with where they are at closure.

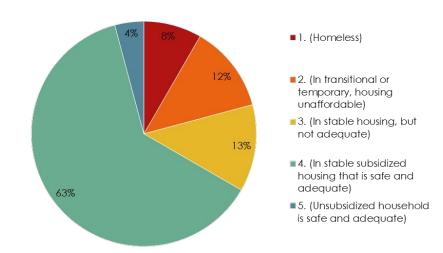


## Examples of Data!

#### **Housing Status Before CAFES**

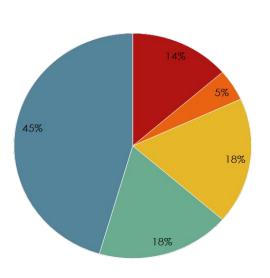


#### **Housing Status After CAFES**



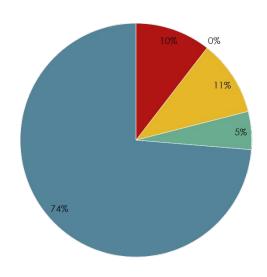
#### Substance Use Data

#### **Before CAFES**



- 1. Meets criteria for severe abuse/dependence; needs hospitalization or residential
- 2. Meets criteria for dependence; preoccupation with use/obtaining drugs
- 3. Use within last 6 months, evidence of occupational, emotional or physical issues persist
- 4. Client has used during last six month but no evidence of recurrent dangerous use
- 5. No drug use/alcohol abuse in the last six months

#### After CAFES



- 1. (Meets criteria for severe abuse/dependence; needs hospitalization or residential)
- 2. (Meets criteria for dependence; preoccupation with use/obtaining drugs)
- 3. (Use within last 6 months, evidence of occupational, emotional or physical issues persist)
- 4. (Client has used during last six month but no evidence of recurrent dangerous use)
- 5. (No drug use/alcohol abuse in the last six months)

# Discussion/ questions of how you can implement or improve your interdisciplinary program

- Please share your thoughts about your two ideas from earlier!
- Please share some helpful tips with the group about what is working well in your current program!
- Please share a take-away that you learned from our short time together!

# In closing...What is one thing you will do to take care of yourself this conference?

IN FOUR WORDS OR LESS...

# Thanks

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