

Stories of Change Cover Page

My name is Nancy Krueger and I was an MSW student intern at Manitowoc County Human Services with the Coordinated Services Team Initiative (CST) from January 2005 through August 2005. During that time I learned about CST, shadowed facilitators, attended the Collaborative Systems of Change training, participated on team as well as facilitated a team of my own. Nancy Randolph approached me about taking on this “stories of change” project and I welcomed the challenge.

I decided to interview people currently involved with CST. I started by asking facilitators for names of people on their teams that they felt would be interested in participating. I came up with some guiding questions regarding perception of CST, what was working well, what was not, suggestions for change and success stories, however most interviews were full of open dialogue and discussion, therefore most questions were answered or touched on without being asked. I was blessed with the opportunity to openly discuss systems change with the key players involved, social workers, teachers, service providers and family members. It was an enlightening experience for me and hopefully will provide Manitowoc County with insight on where to go from here for continued success in this Collaborative Systems of Change.

Stories of Change: Manitowoc County's Journey into Collaborative Systems of Care

INTRODUCTION:

The Coordinated Services Team Initiative (CST) is a collaborative approach to respond to children with multiple, often serious needs in the least restrictive setting. It is not a specific program or service. Rather, it is a process based on family and community values and is unconditional in its commitment to create services for each child and family. Creative services that are developed by a family team support normalized, community based options for children and families. Services are supported through collaborative efforts of agencies, government and volunteer efforts. Flexible funds are available to support the plan. Outcomes and progress are measured and evaluated often. (Bureau of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services, Sec2, p.2).

Manitowoc County implemented CST in August of 2003. Therefore, it is still in its infancy stages of development. Since CST is in its infancy stages at Manitowoc County setback are to be expected as well as understood. Therefore, evaluation of CST's strengths and shortcomings are imperative to help CST grow stronger. This report captures the testimony of social workers, teachers, service providers, and families on their experiences and observations with the CST process as well as helps identify how the CST philosophy is being received, understood, accepted and implemented within Manitowoc County.

METHOD:

A qualitative descriptive research design was utilized for this project. Participants were interviewed by the researcher. Each interview was tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim by the researcher for the most confidential and accurate results. Participants were identified by service coordinators in Manitowoc's CST. The only qualification for participation was current or past involvement in the CST process as well as interest and willingness to participate. An informed consent which assured confidentiality and gave a description of the project was given to each participant prior to the interview. Each participant then signed the informed consent to show their willingness to participate. The researcher interviewed 10 participants in all including social workers, teachers, service providers and families. The researcher formed categorical themes using the information gathered throughout the interviews. Participant's testimony was taken into account in formulating the categorical themes in order to improve face validity. Each categorical theme is then discussed and compared and suggestions for further research are offered.

RESULTS:

This section is divided into common themes identified through the interviewing process. The results of this research are reported through the participants own words and testimony (*italics*). Although some stories were slightly modified in order to ensure confidentiality; the content, intent or emphasis of any story was never changed. This will give readers a more accurate account of participant's true feelings and perceptions about the CST program.

Meaning:

What does CST mean to you? In your own words, describe CST to me. The researcher felt it was important to get an idea of what CST meant to the participants, in order to better understand the perspective from which they were coming. It was discovered that CST took on a similar meaning to most participants, and that most participants appreciate the philosophy as depicted below:

- *CST is a process the department is starting to use with families, a more productive way to find families needs and wants and working with those in a supportive environment*
- *I believe it is a group of people who come together for a common cause or goal, the primary participants, obviously, are the clients who can be the kids, the kids' parents, and any identified outside supports, providers, family members and they all come together to work on a common goal.*
- *CST to me is a support system that helps maintain my family functioning in all aspect;, emotional, physical help, dealing with everyday stuff.*
- *Well, it is kind of a different way of approaching challenging situations that don't necessarily fit into the classic, here is what we have available, kind of take it or leave it approach. It kind of expands it to what else is needed, what else we can do to make things work better.*
- *CST is available to the consumer and their guardian, parent to teach them how to access services to the community on their own and eventually build in natural supports that will help support that family after formal supports are no longer part of their lives.*
- *CST is a community wide effort that pulls together a team of people involved in a child's life to help improve their situation.*
- *To me it is a program that involves everyone in a child's life to enhance and kind of keep them on the right track*
- *Well, for me it was hope and it was salvation and it got the child home, and out of placement that was so far away from home. If it wouldn't have been for CST I don't know when the child would have been able to come home.*
- *Very simply, it is a team process to better serve the youth and families in our community. A community based approach, a creative approach, to keep kids in our county, and to do what we need to do to keep them in their home or in their foster home.*

Making a Difference:

How is CST different than traditional services? Or different than what you have experienced in the past? The following illustrates a change and/or difference in practice with the CST philosophy.

- *I think it is very different than how I practiced in the past. In the past we always told people what they needed to do; we listened to their problems, and then decided what "WE" thought they needed. We did not really ask for their input, I*

- think the CST process asks the family what they need and incorporates that, which I think makes is a more supportive process for the family.*
- *You mean more of our traditional practices? Because I do try to implement CST practices with all my clients. I think the biggest thing is the emphasis really is everyone coming together, and that really being an emphasis and a commitment on everyone's part.*
 - *Well, I guess the other things I have had in the past; I mainly had a social worker and a parent-aide. Now I think it is different because now there are more people involved and it brings everyone together at one table.*
 - *What I think is different about CST is that we spend a lot more time on the planning and development stage compared to my experiences with other agencies, what they tend to do is have a child move and then as problems arise, find ways to fix them, not that there is anything wrong with that, but the time I have spent in CST anticipating problems that may occur and possible solutions is unique and it's a time commitment that other agencies are unwilling to take. Also, I think CST encourages family involvement from the get go, which is positive because they feel part of the decision.*
 - *CST is different in that the decisions for a particular client are based on all members of the team, not just based on just one person's feelings or thoughts. So, the decision making power is very different.*
 - *It is more of a team approach and everyone is on the same page. I actually get to learn what is going on in other aspects of the child's life now, which helps me as a teacher when I am working with them. It kind of gives reason behind the behavior.*
 - *Probably the biggest difference is you know that you will be heard and you know that you have specific contacts to call. You just don't feel like you are out there on your own, you feel part of a group and you have some support.*
 - *CST was able to help more, more services etc.*

Evidence of Acceptance:

Change is always hard and CST is a systems change that will take time to develop. Acceptance of the change is noticeable; however resistance is still evident as well.

- *Yeah, I think people are starting to accept CST; however I think that it is more evident in some units than in others. It seems to depend on the creativity of the person and how much they want outside people involved, such as natural supports, sometimes I think confidentiality, it gets to be a personal issue for people, they are concerned about sharing all kinds of information with a bunch of different people. Slowly there is acceptance overall, people are starting to utilize it more or at least question it.*
- *Yeah, oh Yeah. However, I think that not everybody is as informed as to what the CST model is. In some ways it is unfortunate, but it tends to be viewed as a program, unless people have an identified family involved, CST does not really apply, when in reality it does. But I think some workers do try to implement CST practices and beliefs, just at varying levels. I don't think that it is a fully adopted model here, but I think it is coming along.*

- *The staff at our facility tend to deal with the behaviors that our children pose on a daily basis, and those behaviors tend to be fairly significant, and I think some of them have trouble believing that these behaviors can be addressed in a setting that doesn't have quite as much structure or supervision, so I point out to them well, but those settings have not had the structure or supervision because no one has put that into place, that does not mean it cannot be done. So, with that information then people expand how they think, like I guess if there was a place that was willing to provide this, it would work. Then people are more receptive. Initially, I think people are stuck into thinking about the grocery list of services.*
- *For the teams that I am on, I have not observed anyone being unsupportive. . Actually, I think case managers welcome the input of all the team members, because now the decision does not totally rely on them. However, I also feel that anything unknown is difficult for people, I know sometimes that I struggle with the process, but for the most part I think there is wonderful participation and acceptance, which is great, because I work with adults as well, who often do not have any supports in their life. SO, hopefully these principles can be adopted into the adult system.*
- *I would say that change is hard. I also think that some teachers are scared to learn everything about the child's life. It is not that they don't want to know, but they feel overwhelmed with all the information and feel like they do not know what to do with it. Overall though, I think people are accepting it will just take some adjustment and perhaps more training.*
- *The people I know who are involved think it is a very useful and helpful process.*
- *I think my answer would be yes and no. I think there are a lot of people who are open to the idea and that have been involved with that now, and have seen some positive things happen, who would like to see it continue, who do agree with the concept of bringing everyone together. But, I also think there are those who are fighting it and don't want it, because they feel that it is extra work.*

Strengths:

For a new process that is just in its infancy stages, there are a lot of things going right!

- *That all decisions do not fall on one person, I like that best about CST. When you are a case manager, you sit behind your desk and make all these decisions, and everything falls back on you. It is either the family doing what they need to do and you are following up or you are the one designated to do everything. With CST it divides up the job and everyone is a partner in the decision making process, the family ultimately gets to decide as well, it is not just your plan, but it is the family's plan.*
- *Um, I think what I like best is how you can see how it brings everyone together, and how it empowers everyone individually as well as a team, what I found is a real sense of community evolves, people become really invested, whether it is the school, counselor or neighbor, whoever, everybody really gets into the fact that they are valued, their input is valued and their role is valued. Everybody may have their designated responsibility, but it is really the investment in the team that makes everything move forward.*

- *That CST has eliminated the daily and life stressors, not all of them, but most of them, such as bills, rent etc. This gives me the opportunity to re-bond with my child and connect and build a relationship. You know figure out his wants/likes/moods. Now that my basic needs are met, I can concentrate on that, and I really appreciate that.*
- *I would say the approach that no idea is an invaluable idea, it is an open forum. There are things we have talked about that in the past people would have thought that there is no way we can do that, and reality may turn out that it is not possible, but needs and possibilities are not automatically dismissed without being explored. I like the openness, it is not about making a judgment to start, and it has been refreshing.*
- *What I like about it is that you get a group of people together, people brainstorm creative ideas that may have never been thought of before, and the team is open to that, to me that is a very rewarding and creative process to be a part of.*
- *I would have to say the team approach; everyone is working together and is on the same page, it alleviates duplication of service and triangulation.*
- *I think the group effort and that you are not dealing with the child all on your own. You have support. Plus the fact that it is helping the child. I think it also gives leverage, because the child knows that everyone is on the same page.*
- *I like their way of thinking, it is not just in a box, it doesn't have to be a certain way, you are able to explore and open up into different areas.*
- *Um, I think the neutral person running the meetings who can also bring fresh ideas to the table.*
- *From a practice standpoint it makes a lot of sense, it also really facilitates positive working relationships with communities and providers. I think it helps clarify things because everyone is hearing the same information, it eliminates gaps and triangulation.*

Concerns/Suggestions for change:

As with any new change, CST is not without its limitations or challenges.

- *I think CST seems to have a high concern that there may be too much emotion, but emotion is what this job is all about, you know, and if they can't do that here where it is safe and structured, what message are we sending them and then what are we sending them out to do. That is my biggest challenge.*
- *The difference between CST and other staffings with clients is that the meetings seem very rigid to me. I feel like every time we go into a meeting there has to be set agenda and we have to stick to that agenda, so we hurry through important issues because time does not permit more than a certain amount of time for the agenda item.*
- *Um, I don't think there is anything I would change about the process, but maybe the practice. Not sure that we have nailed down the whole process of figuring out goals. And, you know formalizing those with the whole group, you know writing goals, who is working on what. I think awesome notes are being taken by coordinators, but not necessarily a plan of action or a plan of care. I think that is the only thing I would change.*

- *It would be great for it to become more preventative. However, right now I think cases are more high selected, due to a high need or out of home placement. I think it is effective the way it is currently implemented, our county is really in a process of really implementing CST, as stated before, in some instances it is known as a program, because you make a referral and the family is either accepted or not, which is sort of a hang up for me, because CST really should be about the philosophy. Part of the process of how change occurs in the system is slow, but CST is moving forward. I haven't heard any complaints about it either, so that is good.*
- *I don't know, I don't think I would change anything except to maybe serve more people, more facilitators to serve the needs of Manitowoc County.*
- *That is tough. I don't know that I would change anything; I would just hope that it is given the opportunity to grow and develop. I think historically, they system in general, you try things and they don't work as planned or as quickly so people are quick to say, "well that didn't work." My experience tells me that this will work, and I feel that if it works, even marginally, for the kids in my care, it will work for most kids. I say that because the kids that are placed in with us come from extreme settings because they have not done well in any other situation, so ideally CST can put me out of a job, and then I can work for CST.*
- *Sometimes I think that CST teams meet too often. And it takes up a lot of time to meet on such a regular basis. Maybe whole teams could meet monthly, and if sections needed to break off to accomplish a task in the mean time and report to the team, that would be good, because to meet weekly or bi-monthly is a lot. If there is as major pressing issue, I can see the importance of the whole team meeting and being on the same page but if there are just certain things that need to be addressed at a certain time such as a school issue or the start of a crisis plan, subgroups or key players can get together, but then report back to the whole team, so the whole team is on the same page.*
- *I am embarrassed to even admit this, but it just is the case, but CST can be too time consuming at times. However the facilitators have worked very well with me and communicated well with me, as I cannot always attend every meeting, or I am guilty of coming just to discuss educational topics then leave the meeting.*
- *Somehow, parental responsibility in the whole thing needs to be jacked up, to put it bluntly, you told me to be honest. The focus on the child is excellent, but unless we focus on the environment in which the child lives, my feeling is that we are not going to see a lot of change. This is a good process, don't get me wrong, but there is definitely a gap. Because we are taking these kids and trying to initiate change, we need the parents/guardians on board not just saying they will, but actually doing it. I don't have the answers of how to change; I just know that is a limitation. The kids need that support at home.*
- *As far as I am concerned, I would not change anything, I think what they do is great.*
- *I think the conflict resolution piece needs to be changed. My feeling is if a team is asking for conflict resolution, they need to be offered the opportunity to share some emotion because there is a conflict. Somebody is mad at someone else, we*

are providing this safe place for the person to express that, so we need to actually allow for some of that, and I don't think the current process allows for that.

DISCUSSION:

Qualitative descriptive research is an effective method to utilize for evaluation. It is effective in that it invites the people most directly involved to voice their opinions. However, this research is not without its limitations. First, although the researcher tried to remain objective, she is not without bias, as she is a student intern with the CST initiative. Second, because she is associated with the CST initiative, participants may not have been totally forthcoming with their stories. Time was also a limitation, as the researcher had to complete this study in a limited time period, because her time at the agency was limited. Lack of experience on the part of the researcher may also be a limitation to how participants responded. Finally, the sample used was a convenience sample and may not reflect the thoughts and feelings of all those involved with the CST process.

Implementation of CST is a system change that will take years to fully develop. In the two years that Manitowoc County has been involved in the CST process significant gains have been made. Children, who were in placement for years, have successfully been moved out of placement back to their homes or at least hometowns and maintained within the community. As evidenced by the results, social workers, service providers, teachers, families and community members are starting realize the importance and value of a true team approach. Those most closely involved with the CST process are challenging co-workers to learn about the process and be open-minded about change.

However, with every new change comes growing pains, therefore it is important for the concerns and suggestions given by the participants to be heard and taken into consideration. These concerns and suggestions are articulated well through the participant's testimony above. In the same retrospect, many strengths were identified by the participants as well. All of these, the strengths, concerns and suggestions, need to be taken into consideration as CST continues to grow.

Recommendations for the future:

The researcher's recommendations for the future are simplistic but require a commitment to the growth of the CST process. The researcher observed this commitment from all participants throughout the study and is excited about the potential for true systems change in Manitowoc County.

The researcher's first recommendation is for ongoing evaluation and research on the CST process. As stated before CST in Manitowoc County is in its infancy stages and ongoing evaluation is imperative for its growth and success.

The second recommendation is that the concerns and suggestions for change be seriously taken into consideration. Perhaps focus groups/work groups can be formed to explore these more in depth and come up with workable solutions.

The third recommendation is that the strengths be focused on and used to help strengthen the process. This study unveiled the many successes and strengths that CST in Manitowoc already embodies, and using these and building on these will only help the process grow.

Finally, the researcher recommends that ongoing education be provided to teams, agencies and community members. Get the word out, as shown by this study, CST is a process that is valued and achieves great outcomes. However, as also discovered, change is hard, so the education needs to continue. As one participant suggested:

- *I think sharing stories, success stories is a good way to go about educating. It gives real meaning to the process and shows how it really works.*

Therefore, the researcher will take the advice of the participant and end this project by educating through “success stories”. I leave you with a collection of “success stories” obtained throughout this study.

Success Stories:

- *I have a family that I worked with for probably 6 months prior to CST and um, and I don't think they felt those 6 months were helpful in any way, shape or form. Just having one person to go to and only one support person, and I couldn't give them all the answers that they wanted so I don't think they found me very helpful or supportive. With CST there is more people, there is neighbors, coworkers, school personnel and it is a very dynamic group, so everyday they have someone supporting them. From somewhere, at work, at home at school, they have someone supporting them, so they feel better about that. I think families are often given one worker and sometimes personalities can clash and you may just not feel comfortable with that person, and if that is your only support person, that doesn't work very well. But having an entire team of people that the family picked themselves, I think they are feeling much better about that and more supported. And then getting the same answer from more than one person is helpful as well. I think it is human nature that if you get an answer from one person that you do not like, you go to someone else, but if you keep getting the same answer from the whole team, that is helpful. Then everybody on the team is there to support them in their grief of hearing what they didn't want to hear, which is good. So I think that helped the relationship between the department and that family. And then I think there are good changes within the family itself, we brought on really good service providers that have worked wonderfully with the family, they have done a great job, the family really enjoys meeting with them. And that has played a big part in it as well. As well as the CST process, they bring education to the whole group. So we have had a lot of progress as a group. There are days when at the end of the meeting I am like “YES, Finally it took nine months but we are there!”*

I am very excited about what has happened, and I wasn't able to say that for a long time. I am just happy now that they are in CST and everything seems to be coming together and everybody is on the same page about it. That helps out a lot that they are no longer hearing different stories from different people. Yeah, there has been a huge change in the family. Definitely an improved relationship between the family the agency as well, because I think they feel like they are finally getting something. They know CST is a process, but since the facilitator and social worker come from the agency, they feel like they are getting better service. I don't think they felt that way the first 6 months, but now it has been more focused and productive.

- *Um, before CST started I was living with a roommate who was like very messy. It was a crappy living situation. I was living in a bedroom. I was working at one point, then I got laid off. Now I am running and maintaining a home on my own. My lifestyle has changed, before I was living by myself, for myself and now I am living with my child here in the house. Now I have someone else that I need to be responsible for. I have come across a lot of hurdles, obstacles and challenges, but its working. I think things happen for a reason, and I guess I couldn't ask for anything better. My needs are being met and my child's needs are being met, sure there are things we go without, but CST has taken away the stress and the worries of the major things. CST is helping me get on track too, because I have never paid a bill on time in my life, they are helping me learn these skills. My child really likes the mentor. They do activities that my child may not be able to typically do. I have never experienced anything like this before.*
- *One parent I can think of in particular, I probably saw her on three occasion in a two to three year periods. But since CST has started, I have seen her more than that in the short time we have participated in the process, which has been only about 5 months. I don't know what the attitude change is, but the commitment and willingness to participate is different than what we were able to get prior to CST. In the other case, I currently have the parents were always very involved and wanted to participate in things, but I am not sure there was necessarily always the opportunity. So I have experienced both ends of the spectrum, one was unwilling and is more willing and the other ones that were always willing but never really had the opportunity until now. They are really enjoying that they are being asked the questions, and they feel they have more control now. Instead of here is what we are doing what do you think about it, they are being asked what do you think we should do, they really appreciate that.*
- *Plus, they were able to bring my child home. The child was in placement 3 hours away for approximately 1.5 years and we wanted the child home, and CST provided us with the opportunity and resources to bring the child home.*
- *CST has allowed us to be creative more financially with this family, to provide more financial opportunities for this family, like fun things, that would have been difficult without CST. Which I know makes it sound like CST is being used for their money, but for this particular family that has made a difference because we have been able to use gift certificates and gift cards as reward systems, which has proved to be very effective. Plus in maintains the child in their home and prevents out of home placement.*

- *I started with the case in November 2003, and it was a case that was already in existence since June 2002 (CHIPS). The plan when I got the case was reunification, although it did not seem promising at the time. The use of CST philosophy was helpful to get things to move ahead and get the child home and the child has been home since Sept. 2004 and in August the court order will expire and we will be done. And the family is still connected with the therapist. Initially we had a hostile mom who really hated the department and was sick of the department, I think she felt like she was expected not to be successful. Whether that is her own misperception or true, I don't know, it was neat to see her turnaround, and I feel the CST process really facilitated or was able to make those changes possible. More trusting, to really get the family to believe that this is about them and for them. And to realize that the people on the team really do want them to be successful. It was a neat progress and neat way to provide organization in a framework to kind of a messy case. It has really facilitated nice community connections, and nice working relationships for our county, with other agencies. It was neat to see the philosophy used and how it can play out even with a non CST case. Ideally, that is how it will be, I hope so.*

CONCLUSION:

This study is a first step towards examining the strengths and limitations of systems change in Manitowoc County. It explored and evaluated the perceptions of social workers, teachers, service providers and families. The data gathered from participants' testimony will be useful in further developing the CST process. Systems change and the CST process are in their infancy stages. However, a clear commitment on behalf of Manitowoc County has allowed the program to make remarkable strides in a short period of time.

Respectfully Submitted by,

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