

County teams help keep families together

by Ryan Urban
Chronotype staff

Three new Barron County Department of Health and Human Services programs are helping the department function more efficiently and serve troubled families more effectively.

Despite a tight budget and limited staff, the new practices and programs helped improve the department's social services and function under its budget in 2010 while handling the same number of cases as 2009—694.

Budget problems forced the department to cut two of five initial assessment case workers and four of nine ongoing case managers since 2005, said children's service program manager Stacey Frolik.

But the new programs and increased collaboration between the department and outside groups has lowered costs and helped staff communicate with families better and keep families together.

One program, Barron County Coordinated Services Teams, is a collaboration of various county health organizations, law enforcement, school districts, churches, tribes, family and friends who work with troubled families.

Families identify the problems they struggle with and select members for their coordinated services team to help them address those

problems, said Frolik.

"We try to include not only the family but formal and informal supports in the community to make it so the family can be self-sufficient," she said.

Frolik said the program has helped 14 families since 2009 and she expects that number to double in 2011 with the training of 14 new facilitators this month.

Frolik said the program is usually used as a last resort before a child is removed from a home.

She said placing a child in foster care is costly for the department and is usually not the best option for a child either.

"Ninety percent of the time it's best to keep children in their home," said Frolik.

She said removing a child from a home doesn't always solve the problems that caused the removal but rather sweeps issues under the rug only to re-emerge when a child comes back.

Bud Moe, who along with his wife, Jodi, fosters teenage boys with criminal records, said he's noticed the same trend in almost 20 years as a foster care provider.

"Usually their behavior has improved and they're doing well when they leave," said Moe. "It isn't long after that we see their names in the newspapers again."

To help solve this problem, the Moes and the Department of Health and

Human Services developed the Family Intensive Response Support Team.

For the past year and half the Moes have been in contact with six county families, mostly providing support to parents.

"We give them assistance, give advice, someone to listen to and help them through tough situations," said Moe.

He said the goal of the program is to communicate with families and work with them to make a stable home.

"The method is to build a trust relationship with the family," said Moe. "It's less authoritative; more of a friendship, advisory basis."

"We stand between them and the system. We'd be called instead of police or social workers."

Frolik said that same approach is becoming common in the department's work.

"Our intention is to become more of a partner with the families we work with than an authoritarian," said Frolik.

Another way the department has been reaching troubled families is using a social services aide.

The aide, Mary Matthys, works directly with families in their homes on parenting issues.

"We try to identify things that are going well and build on them," said Matthys.

Frolik mentioned money management, nutrition, dis-

cipline, developing routines and having fun as a family as common issues addressed. "It's parenting 101 basically," said Frolik.

Matthys also conducts TLC parenting meetings, which address various child behavior issues.

The meetings are from 6-7 p.m. on the first and third Mondays of the month at the Red Cedar Community Church, 23 W. Eau Claire St., Rice Lake.

For more information on the programs or to refer someone, call 715-537-5691.