



INDIANA CONSORTIUM FOR MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES RESEARCH
DAWN PROJECT EVALUATION STUDY, PUBLIC BRIEFING, SEPTEMBER 2005

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

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Since 1997, The Dawn Project has provided an interagency system of care for youth with emotional and behavioral challenges and their families in Marion County. Dawn is responsible for creating and maintaining a coordinated, community-based system of services, as well as developing new and natural supports for children and youth with the most serious emotional and behavioral challenges and additionally, putting families at the center of decision-making in the provision of services. A grant was awarded to Marion County by the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration in 1999. The grant provided six years of funding to enhance the Dawn Project and to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the model and expanded service programs. The grant provided technical assistance to Dawn and training and allowed Dawn to serve new populations, enhance its cultural competence, improve its social marketing, and increase family involvement in program planning, implementation, and evaluation. Additionally, the grant provided support for the family advocacy and support network called Families Reaching for Rainbows. The grant also supported the development and implementation of the Dawn Project Evaluation Study (DPES), which integrated the requirements of a national evaluation effort with local interests and needs for data.

The Dawn Project Evaluation Study (DPES) was originally conceived by a multidisciplinary team of researchers that included individuals from Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) and Indiana University (IU), to provide an outside, independent evaluation. DPES was designed in collaboration with parents; representatives from child welfare, probation, corrections, mental health, and education; and academics from a wide range of disciplines, including education, sociology, nursing, economics, psychology, and psychiatry. An evaluation advisory board was established to include representation from the many stakeholders, including Choices, Inc., the Division of Mental Health and Addiction, The Indiana Department of Correction, Marion County Department of Child Services, Indianapolis Public Schools, Marion Superior Court Juvenile Division, Marion County Mental Health Association, and family members from Families Reaching for Rainbows support group. This board, which was known locally as the “Evaluation Team” or “E-Team,” was instrumental in the initial design process and has continued to meet to monitor the research team’s work over the full six years of the demonstration. The E-team completed the evaluation planning activities in the spring of 2000, and the study protocol and data collection were implemented in the fall of 2000.

Overview of the Data Sources and Data Collection Methods

Data for these evaluation areas were collected from both quantitative and qualitative sources. Most of the data analyzed for this report come from three primary sources:

1) **The Clinical Manager (TCM)** -- the Dawn Project's management information system. TCM provided us with basic information on the demographic and clinical background, services utilized and paid for by the Dawn Project, as well as qualitative information on the clinical progress and treatment planning process maintained in case notes by the service coordinators. TCM provides a census of all children served through the Dawn Project, and we use these data in a number of reports to highlight broad trends and patterns for the entire cohort of children who have experienced the Dawn Project.

2) **In-depth Interviews with the Youth and their Primary Caregiver.** Part of the requirements of the federal grant included conducting in-depth interviews with the youth and their primary caregivers at the time of enrollment and at six-month intervals for the thirty-six months following their admission into the program. While the federally mandated questions were extensive, we modified the protocol to the extent allowed and included a few additional questions designed to answer key questions raised by local stakeholders during the initial evaluation planning process. Both the youth and primary caregiver interviews were conducted as face-to-face interviews by thoroughly trained, professional interviewers. All interviews were conducted at times and places that were convenient for the subjects. At the beginning of each interview, the subjects were informed that their participation in the evaluation was completely voluntary and that their decision to participate or not participate would have no effect on the services they received from the Dawn Project. We also explained that any information collected during the interview would be treated as confidential and not shared with anyone outside of the research team, including Dawn Project staff or the agencies comprising the Dawn Consortium. The youth interview took on average an hour to complete; the primary caregiver interview protocol was slightly longer on average at one hour and thirty minutes. Both the youth and primary caregiver received a financial incentive, in the form of a gift card from a local store, for their participation at the conclusion of each interview. Because the resources of the grant did not permit us to do adequate follow-up with all families who enrolled in the evaluation for the full 36 months, we focused our efforts and analysis on the two-year follow-up data. For the baseline interviews, 81.4% of the families approached about the evaluation agreed to participate. The follow-up rates for 6, 12, 18, and 24-month interviews are 78.5%, 68.8%, 64.9%, and 62.7% respectively.

3) **Field observations, in-depth qualitative interviews with stakeholders, and focus groups with families and stakeholders.** Since the beginning of the project, the research team has made an effort to compile qualitative observational and interview data to better understand system level processes and the local social context in which the Dawn Project operated. These types of data were critically important for the research to better understand some of the complex trends in the quantitative data, and these insights are reflected in many of the reports that follow. We also used these data as a formal assessment tool to document the changes observed both in the Families Reaching for Rainbows organization as well as in the local Dawn system of care more generally.

Consistent with the professional and ethical regulations governing academic research, the information collected during this evaluation is held in strict confidence and known only to the principal investigators and project staff. No references are made to the identification of individual respondents, either verbally or in writing. Results of this study are presented to Dawn

Project personnel, consortium and family members, personnel from the federal grantors office and their designee, and other interested parties, solely in a manner that guarantees the anonymity of all study participants. As required by the federal grant, some of the data gathered for this study has been shared with ORC Macro International, the national evaluator working under contract with the Center for Mental Health Services. These data, however, have been reported without identifying information.

Guiding Research Questions

During the evaluation planning process, the E-team identified six research areas or sets of research questions to guide the study. While extensive protocol allows us to answer many questions about the youth and families served in the program, we used these areas to organize and focus our analysis on questions of most significant concern to the community.

Research Area I: Profile and Outcomes of Dawn Project Participants. This area examined questions such as what is the clinical profile of the youth and families being served by Dawn. How do profiles change over time? Data are collected as youth and families enter Dawn, including the types of experiences that they had prior to entering Dawn, demographic information, and information about functioning in the home, community, and school. The purpose is to understand who is it that Dawn serves well and whether there is a difference between this group and clients who are not successful in Dawn.

Research Area II: Patterns of Service Use. This area explored the configuration of services used by participants in the Dawn Project and examines the operating costs of Dawn. Documenting the cost structure, how costs vary with treatment decisions and Dawn's use of managed care differs from more traditional types of programs for this population of children and youth. Additionally, understanding Dawn's ability to use funding flexibly is particularly important.

Research Area III: Dynamics of Service Coordination Teams. A central component of the Dawn Project is the service coordination team. Service coordination teams include a variety of professionals, lay people, family members, and the child or youth, all of whom work together to assess strengths and needs, develop treatment plans, and monitor success. Because service coordination teams are at the heart of the intervention and, in many, will condition the effectiveness of the services actually provided, a key focus of the evaluation is assessing how well the service coordination teams work together. Thus, this component specifically aims to document the structure of the teams and how team structures change over time.

Research Area IV: Effectiveness. This evaluation area has evolved out of the other areas of the evaluation and provides a summary of the evidence of Dawn's effectiveness in improving outcomes for children and youth and their families.

Research Area V: Families Reaching for Rainbows. This evaluation area, which was conducted during the first several years of the DPES, focused on the Families Reaching for Rainbows support and advocacy organization, a local chapter of the national Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. Using an assessment of issues germane to family

advocacy, an evaluator with expertise and experience in qualitative evaluation conducted a focused ethnographic of Families Reaching for Rainbows.

Research Area VI: System level Functioning. The purpose of this evaluation component was to understand how well the Dawn Project adheres to the guiding principles established for systems of care for children and their families, including service coordination, family centeredness, cultural competence, and community-based treatment. A system-level study was conducted to examine the impact that the Dawn Project had on the wider children's social services system in Marion County.

Together, the analyses presented in this report, represent our effort to answer these critical questions. Our overall objective here is to provide a clear overview of critical patterns to help the community evaluate the impact of the Dawn Project on the youth and families it served as well as its impact on the wider community. For the past several years, we have disseminated preliminary findings in response to these questions in prior Community Briefings and at local and national professional conferences. In this regard, the outcomes of this research and the Dawn Project experience have already contributed to national, state, and local discussions about the effectiveness of interagency collaboration for children and youth who have needs that involve multiple service providers and their families. While this document represents the final formal community report from regarding the DPES, we will continue to work with these data even beyond the federal grant period, to the extent resources allow, to refine our analyses and develop manuscripts for publication in the professional journals.

As always, we welcome your questions and comments.