FPS Parent Feedback Group

November 14th, 2014

Tim: “Children's Administration is moving forward with a redesign to improve the flow of information for all those touched by the FPS contract. Can we try to achieve a better process for parents, knowing there is not new money available for the redesign process?”

Kim: “I received FPS services a half dozen times. I’ve been a part of focus groups before, and I’d like to know where the feedback from today is going? Is there a way for the notes to be sent out for feedback?”

Tim: “The notes from this conversation will be sent to regional managers to review and we will use this input to inform the redesign. This information will also impact social worker trainings as we aim to strengthen the role of the social worker and make services more consistent for families. Providers and public defenders have recommended regularly scheduled integrated meetings with the family, FPS worker, & social worker”.

Kim: “Is family voice part of the leadership process/decision-making meetings?”

Tim: “At this time, regional leadership will use the information from focus groups to determine next steps in the redesign.”

Kim: “I see continued value in having family voice be part of the leadership & decision-making process”.

Tim: “I will make that recommendation to my supervisors; though that’s not something I can provide an answer for today”.

**What is helpful about FPS?**

Shrounda: “The money- concrete assistance is a big help for families. The resources and structure also increase sustainability and prevent long term poverty”.

Tim: “There are different strategies to provide the resources amongst FPS providers. We are trying to make services more consistent. What are the areas you would find useful?”

Kim: “We can talk about what's working, though if there aren't concrete funds for families in crisis, these ideas may not be as helpful”.

Alise: “Strengths-based and client-driven services. My social worker did not believe I could change, and my FPS worker provided resources that weren’t a match for my needs. What we really need is someone to believe in us. It wouldn’t have been helpful for me to sit at a table with the social worker & FPS worker who didn’t believe in me. I would also like to see this program restructured to be culturally relevant and strengths-based”.

Breanna: “What’s helpful is she (FPS worker) comes into our home and she doesn't judge us. It makes it an enjoyable experience. I know I can trust her and she can help us - without judgment”.

Kim: “The FPS worker came to me with very specific strategies that would work with *my* child, rather than general parenting classes. What worked is they gently gave me strategies and acknowledged my expertise as a parent. They asked me to be a partner in the strategies and also set aside blame and judgment. They empowered me to focus on my strengths, rather than what was going wrong. What you focus on grows, so over time I could see that progress and write my own story.

Melissa: “I am currently receiving FPS services. What's worked for me? The funding is a great incentive; it helped me to meet my basic needs to care for my children”.

Tim: “We have been working with race & disproportionality groups to make this a racially equitable program. We are also working with staff regarding racial humility. I’d like to hear some concrete examples of what can be done to strengthen family voice in the process?”

**Increasing Family Voice:**

1. “Initial rapport building. We (parents) are already really down on ourselves with guilt and shame, so it would be helpful to incorporate veteran parents into the rapport building process”.

2. “The FPS worker and social worker need to be sure to follow-through with commitments; responsiveness to phone calls and needs increases trust”.

3.” Peer support is a humongous bridging resource - someone to walk alongside you rather than throwing resources at you”.

4. “It would be helpful for the FPS & social workers to say ‘you are part of the process, we trust you to say what your needs are’. This would build confidence”.

5. “My FPS worker told me I was not qualified to raise my children as I didn't share their African American heritage. I wanted an FPS worker that would know me and *my* story/family”.

6. “The relationship is so important, someone to help me, to support me, and she (FPS worker) dropped everything and came when I needed help. I trusted her from the beginning; a complete bond of trust. I could share what was a struggle and knew she was there for support. When I asked for help, I felt respected and not judged”.

7. “FPS worker who follows through. The service was molded to me, based on the family....me and my kids. They focused on what would work to reunite us. My family was unique, different, I needed flexibility”.

8. “I could have used peer mentoring, I couldn't just drop my kids off with someone because of the background check requirements. I could have used support for childcare, so I could take a break and take steps towards my future, attend meetings, etc. Maybe foster aunts or mentors could be incorporated. Anna (FPS worker) is the first person I call because I don’t feel judgment and I know she will help me with strategies to move forward. Any way to work in mentoring & support would be appreciated”.

9.”FPS should focus on how to provide economic stability to families; college, jobs that hire those with criminal records...etc. What I needed was someone to be in my corner to support me. Someone to teach me how to live a different life, how to connect to community supports, how to move forward rather than go back to known habits and lifestyles”.

10. “It's hard for families to access resources if they don’t know the right language to use. A veteran parent or peer could help families access resources.”

**How was FPS introduced to you?**

Breanna: “It was presented to me while I was in inpatient treatment, so it just seemed like another thing I had to do. I already had drug court, counseling, and treatment, so it was overwhelming. My social worker did not give me specific information about the program or how it would be helpful. It almost felt like a prescription. Luckily I trusted my social worker, so that helped me to feel better about starting FPS. For me, it has helped me to become more of an advocate and it's helped me to increase my parent voice. I went to the Incredible Years course and I loved it; it was helpful to meet other families in similar situations”.

Shrounda: “We work in a system where the people we work with have already been bombarded with services. Rather than another system coming in with a list of requirements, it would be helpful to rebrand FPS with support and client driven needs and goals. The client is driving the bus, and the FPS worker is helping to navigate”.

Tim: “I’d like to talk about the concrete assistance funds and bring some clarity there. All social workers can approve up to $200 if they see a need. If the family has additional needs, the social worker can request additional funds from their supervisors. The money is still available, though there are some additional checks and balances in place. Are there any questions about that”?

Ben: “I have some concerns. Our FPS counselor is what the social worker should be, though now it seems like social workers are there to reduce liability for the department. Also, the amount of required services limits my ability to get a job. If I have 12 hours of required services a week, how am I going to find someone to hire me? That $500 is necessary. I don’t feel like I can tell things to a social worker - if I bring up financial concerns, the social worker tries to change the subject as soon as possible, so I worry having to go through the social worker to access additional money. There are so many other required services that are not as helpful as FPS. I'm worried when I hear ‘remodeling’; I worry that means more perimeters and more hoops. We need to empower this service, not add parameters”.

Tim: “The reason we are looking at a redesign is because there are a variety of services being provided...some are great and others are not. We want to add some definition to the contract; not parameters and limits, but here are the good things that have to happen in each intervention. How can we better prepare families to get their kids back? How do we improve solution-based case planning? How can we reduce barriers to housing, school, finances?”

Tim: “Something came up today that I don’t think we've considered before and that's how services are introduced by the social worker – we need to do a better job of introducing the services”.

Alise: “It would be helpful for FPS providers to be educated about and discuss tangible outcomes...resources, childcare, education, finances. This would increase buy-in. Not just saying "go call this number", but helping to make the connections”.

Melissa: “I agree that services are prescribed even though they might not meet the family’s true needs. As a PCIT provider, I get families referred to me and if I report to the social worker that the service isn’t the right fit for the family, the social worker will send the family to another program on their list. Sometimes I will go ahead and move forward with PCIT because I don’t want the family to have to spend more time at another service. The social workers don't really seem to listen to the family needs”.

**What makes a good FPS worker?**

1. “She is invested in our family and our joys. When we got our kids back, she cried.”

2. “Investment. My son attended counseling individually, and I didn't get to be a part of that. Luckily my son talked to my FPS worker about his concerns and then she was able to bridge the communication between us. She communicated with us, rather than writing reports. She was there in the moment and she discussed things right away, she would say "this is what I saw, what can we do differently moving forward?"

3. “The most helpful thing for me was the bond with the FPS worker. They really work with you and establish a relationship”.

4. “FPS worker was a great listener, though she focused more on organization and her ideas, rather than our true needs. Workers should listen to what parents need, be more empowering so they can believe in themselves and not define themselves by the mistakes they have made. CPS closes cases where parents have no self-esteem and don't know what to do with their kids, they don’t know how to move forward, and they’re scared of making mistakes”. “I had been using since I was 13 years old. I had and infant and two older kids who fought every day and had emotional issues. I wanted to give up. What made the difference for me was God. Alise also recommended that I seek out trauma therapy and work through that rather than having to use (substances) to cover the trauma.”

5. “The FPS workers that were great realized that my struggle wasn't my identity. They believed in me. They gave me resources, not phone numbers. They made phone calls *with* me. Everyone's wellness looks different, so blanket services aren't helpful. She had the relationship with me, so she could say things to me that I needed to hear. She equipped me with tools to feel more successful as a family. Someone engaged with me and I trusted them to try their suggestions. She held my hope for me when I didn't have it for myself.”

**Safety Monitoring:**

Linda: “Safety monitoring is a part of the program, so how can providers work with families to do that respectfully and honestly? One proposal is for the therapist, veteran parent, or intern to perform the safety checks”.

Kim: “The safety checks should be done through a trauma informed lens. Not – “what are you doing wrong?” but "What happened?". Be transparent; I would rather have someone be honest with me about their concerns. Acknowledge that parents are the experts and empower them. Safety and crisis plans tell families "you don't know how to be safe and you’re always in crisis" and they don’t convey the best of the family. Safety & crisis plans highlight what is going wrong, they highlight the ‘ugly’ of the family, and you don’t want to display that on your fridge. Throughout the process, we started using a wellness plan instead: What does a good day look like? How do you keep things moving forward? What can you do to distract yourself?”.

Aubrey: “It’s important for those doing the safety checks not to make assumptions. During a phone call with a caseworker, they overheard me call someone “honey” in the background, and they assumed that I was talking to my ex. They assumed I was having contact with my ex again when I wasn’t”.

Alise: “Veteran parents have the ability to build rapport, so utilizing them in the safety checks could be helpful. They could use this information to move forward; almost add a case management piece to the safety check. It’s also important to ensure that people are working within their own competencies”.

Tim: “The current proposal is to have safety visits be required for those with the highest risk. The visits would be geared towards preventing placement”.

**Highlights & Take Aways:**

1. “Please include parent voice at all decision making points”.
2. “Incorporate veteran parents into the services”.
3. “Thank you for taking the time to listen - it makes me feel important, like I matter, and like I'm a part of something”.
4. “Try to keep things flexible and reduce parameters. It helps providers to have flexibility to meet families' needs”.

Tim: “We need to move towards a Family Wellness Plan”. “Can I reach out to you for follow-up questions and feedback?”