#### **OWRA Webinar: The Ups and *Potential* Downs of Comprehensive**

#### **Assessment: Addressing Secondary Trauma**

#### **Question and Answer Session**

April 18, 2017

**Q:** *Is it possible to receive the presentation via email so that we can print it?*

**A:** All the materials from today's webinar including the slide deck, transcript, and recordings will be available on the OWRA website after this webinar at https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/owra.

**Q:** *What is LLI?*

**A:** Lifelong Learning Initiative in Ramsey County

**Q:** *Talk more specifically about Peer Pairs and how it is used in your department.*

**A:** Michelle Belitz, Ramsey County: Through the rapid cycle learning we involved our staff in the process of change. I know that change can be really hard for people. We recognized early on that as we were implementing a goal-setting framework through our coaching mindset that peers offering support to one another was really crucial. Peer pairs have been intentionally paired up because we had some turnover during this period. We had some newer staff that were coming on board and we paired them with more seasoned staff, such as people who were more natural in their coaching approach and were more experienced with that practice. Peer pairs can do any number of activities with one another. They can observe each other’s appointments and provide feedback, or they might review each other’s case files. One peer pair was instrumental in helping someone new to the county learn about all the resources available to families. We gave peer pairs the opportunity to talk about difficult cases and do case consultation with one another. Pairing people up reduces isolation and allows people to hear a different perspective or approach to a situation that they might be working with a family on. One of the things that we just recently created was a self-reflection tool where people can take time to reflect upon what they learned from their peer, what they might do differently, and what they might need additional supports around. That tool could be something an employee shares with their supervisor during their monthly one-on-one meeting.

**Q:** *Can you provide more info regarding your pilot project re: stress management approach for clients and how long did it take to complete the analysis of the impact of the pilot project? What were your findings through piloting the project? What did you find was more effective vs. non-effective approach?*

**A:** Larry Timmerman, Ramsey County: In the rapid cycle process that we went through we spent about one month with each pilot cohort of employment counselors. Each group had from 4-10 counselors. The first group was smaller and then cohorts two and three were larger. For the analysis, each time we went through a similar process but we did tweak it each time. Each month we were analyzing the activity of the cohort to advise the next one. They were spread out about six weeks apart. We would be monitoring for about a month, then take a couple of weeks to analyze the information and lessons learned from the rapid cycle process to make changes to the Life Long Learning pilot project. Counselors were involved by giving their feedback and supervisors were observing what was happening, including observing sessions with participants. Then we brought all of the affected counselors together for training as a group.

As far as outcomes, we are currently working on an implementation evaluation with one of our national partners. Conducting an evaluation from the outside will give us a better sense of how well we have implemented Life Long Learning. This summer we will have a full evaluation plan in place for evaluating the participants in that program. We are also always doing ongoing quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis, but the qualitative part is mostly focus groups. We have had a number of reasons to bring participants in for focus groups, and we have discussed conducting more focus groups with our staff. Secondary trauma is going to be part of those conversations. It’s good to give secondary trauma a name, and to give it recognition that this is something we have been experiencing for years. The time has arrived for us to better understand secondary trauma and to serve our staff better as a result.

**Q:** *Regarding the Wellness to Work Techniques, I am interested in learning more about the Stress Reduction piece and integrating that into a work environment. Also, when will your county implement this?*

**A:** Michelle Belitz, Ramsey County: We have a cohort model right now that a few of our staff members are running that we call the Pathways Project. That is for individuals who have a criminal record in their background that is preventing them from obtaining employment. We have been looking for ways to implement more cohort models, because we find that people can be a support and a resource to one another. We had some simple stretching exercises and breathing techniques that we were teaching to that cohort. We haven’t assessed or evaluated that cohort yet, but we are getting some feedback from program participants on how they are applying those techniques to their daily lives and how staff are applying them to their work as well. We are looking at potentially introducing other techniques, but I’m not sure what they will be since we are working with a partner on that. Those techniques could include mindfulness, breathing, or stretching in an effort to get people to learn self-regulation. When families experience high levels of toxic stress in their lives sometimes they can take that to their jobs. As an employment program we need to keep in mind that stress can impact employment retention, so teaching people simple things they can apply in a stressful situation can help.

**Q:** *Are the laughter yoga sessions conducted at the workplace?*

**A:** Jessie Hancox, Boulder County: We do them at team meetings and team retreats, and we also do them at one of our offsite locations. They can be held anywhere. They do get a little loud and people wonder what is going on because laughter is contagious.

**Q:** For Jessie with Boulder County: *Regarding the items listed in the Training Support for CM Staff, are you able to share this curriculum or provide us contact information?*

**A:** We have staff attend a Motivational Interviewing training through an outside organization, Human Services Network of Colorado. This is presented and led by Avani G. Dilger who is awesome. I would suggest for this training, agencies research the experts in MI and reach out to them to support training. It is well worth the investment. This is also who facilitates MI for Supervisors.

Strengths Based Case Management is done in house and is a mandatory training for all front line case management staff that was designed by our very own Family and Children Services Staff and is led by peers that carry forth this practice within our agency. Strengths Based Supervision is a mandatory training for supervisors who receive their Supervisor certificates and is supported by Mountain States, a professional training agency supported by our Human Resources as continued development for our staff.

Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Positive Intelligence (PQ) were also done through an outside agency, again, I would encourage folks to research who in their community can support this. You can also go online and take a free test on EQ through Talent Smart (http://www.emotionalintelligence.net/products/?gclid=CKbe7-yV7dMCFYy2wAodRZ4JRQ). My staff have done this and really felt that they received a lot from it.

**Q:** *Who put together the list (Outcomes and Takeaways) in Ramsey County - was it an employee focus group or was it management giving input on what the expected outcome was supposed to be? What has been the success rate of such an endeavor in your county? What are turnover rates of employees in your employment services agency?*

**A:** Michelle Belitz, Ramsey County: Some of these items were things that came up in focus groups or workgroups with staff. These are the things they have said would be helpful to them in the future. A lot of it comes from my personal experience as a supervisor as well.

**Q:** *With the shared planning and shared services, how do workers from different agencies and departments stay connected and current with client needs?* For our county, one of the challenge is internal communication between departments, which adds additional work and stress to the workers.

**A:** Jessie Hancox with Boulder County: That additional stress was a huge concern for all of our frontline staff that were involved in the initial startup of coordinated case management. It helps to recognize that when a client is involved with Family and Children’s Services there are a lot of requirements, such as family therapy, group therapy, individual therapy, court, being in touch with a guardian or foster parent, etc. There are a lot of people involved. What we like to do is acknowledge that and say that we don’t necessarily need a 50 page report, but what does their week look like? How many therapy sessions do they have to attend? How many times do they have to go to court? When is their visitation with their children? If they have a full week, then my case managers putting in a goal of needing to get employment or get enrolled in workshops won’t make sense and it is setting the family up for failure. Communication is a concern, but it can make everyone’s work easier if employees opt for a five minute phone call or quick email instead of an hour long update meeting.

**Q:** *What is the average caseload size in your county, and can you repeat the Rode, Bud, and Thorns, thing?*

**A:** Jessie Hancox with Boulder County: Our average caseload is between 55-65 cases per employee, which puts us at the lower end of the larger counties in Colorado. When we are down a case manager we can have up to 90 cases per employee. Rose is what are you really happy about, bud is what are you excited about, and thorn is what are you worried about or what is getting in the way.

**Q:** *Has the Colorado Model been considered for use in other parts of the country?*

**A:** Jessie Hancox with Boulder County: Yes, Boulder County reaches out and connects with other counties that are doing like-minded processes. Our Executive Director is working with Ramsey County as well. The model is looking at recognizing that we all work together. The historic model of TANF is that eligibility does their thing and case management does their own separate thing. How do we recognize that we all have a common goal related to the families that we serve? We need to create permission that says that this is how we can talk to each other to maintain confidentiality while keeping clients bought into feeling supported in the program so they can move toward a successful exit.

**Q:** For Jessie with Boulder County: *Can you provide information on the regular training (core training) support for case management staff? Who provides the training and how often is it given?*

**A:** This is supported by my department. Case management and Community outreach is designed to keep staff connected and informed of new process, program changes and other resources in the community. We connected with community partners that we work with on a daily basis and once a month we come together in person to discuss a topic of interest for all staff working with families. Topics have included: upcoming summer programs, domestic violence, employment trainings, available workforce workshops, emotional intelligence, and coaching. There is an annual calendar that is sent to our list serve to provide updates as to what topics will be covered and invite agencies to attend.

**Q:** *Could you provide additional information on financial costs to agency, including any longitudinal studies, regarding addressing or not addressing secondary trauma?*

**A:** Larry Timmerman, Ramsey County: I can speak only to Ramsey County. In terms of human resources we have turnover rates and training costs. Specific to our employment services program we haven’t measured those costs, but we are looking at conducting some cost-benefit analyses of our programs in a way that we hadn’t previously. One aspect of that could include looking at turnover. We are pretty early in that discussion, so I can’t give you any information about what costs have been historically.

**Q:** *For Larry and Michelle with Ramsey County: Regarding focus groups led by management about stressors on the job, how were you able to ensure honest responses?*

**A:** Focus groups are not facilitated by management, they are facilitated either by a contracted internal evaluator or external evaluators. We have made it a point to keep management out of the development and implementation of our focus group sessions to ensure anonymity and honesty.

**Q:** *Will we be notified when the slide show and recording are available online?*

**A:** We will email all participants with the link once it is posted.

**Q:** For any presenter: *Being sensitive as case managers and still operating a program within the constraints of regulations and WPR, how do you programmatically bridge those two trains of thought?*

**A:** From Ramsey County: As a program, we took a look at two of our outcome measures the WPR and MN Self-Support Index and what we found is that success within WPR does not directly correlate with family self-sufficiency or stabilization. We also found that majority of WPR comes from people being employed so we want to focus on helping families gain employment and retain jobs. WPR does provide structure for staff to report participant activities as a way of measuring progress toward goals, but MN provides for a broader spectrum of activities beyond core WPR activities allowing staff to be more holistic in coaching families toward stability. Through coaching, we are asking staff to meet families where they are at and through the goal achievement process we are looking for an increase in overall engagement with our programs to include more meaningful and impactful activities that we expect will lead to an increase in earnings and therefore stability. The way we have bridged most directly is to include staff in the development of the coaching model of employment services.

**Q:** For any presenter:

* *When implementing any of the models/strategies, did you get any resistance from upper management/administrator/director, etc.?*
* *If so, how did you convince them to allow you to implement such programs, which may conflict with existing personnel rules?*

**A:** Ramsey County: No, there has always been a belief by staff that there is a better way of working with TANF families and upper management has looked to the research and evidence to identify potential program improvements and brings those strategies to staff to develop and implement them. Upper management has offered many professional development opportunities and support.

**Q:** Are there any secondary trauma resources that you can recommend?

**A:** Winston Bell, Everybody Can Win Consulting: If the organization is really valuing their workers, then they will find outward opportunities for them. It’s really hit and miss. One of the things that I like to explain to folks who take the trauma home to their families is that it’s almost like being a construction worker. If I’m a construction worker and I come home and I’m not even thinking about what I’d like for dinner because I’m dog tired most people would understand that I’m tired physically. It’s really hard to explain when a person is tired mentally. Although I don’t have a lot of resources, being able to explain your level of mental fatigue is paramount to staying away from that burnout.

**Q:** *What advice do you have for a worker who may be regularly triggered by a customer’s trauma story or a specific topic, such as domestic violence?*

**A:** Winston Bell, Everybody Can Win Consulting: The first thing may be if they are continuing to be triggered to find a partner in the organization to hand that case off to. That is the most dynamic way to avoid some of that stress. It is also helpful to remember that we are the helpers, and many people come in with crises that we will never be able to fix. A lot of them are lifelong crises. Being in the helping profession, if you are overwhelmed by one or two crises, then how can you effectively work on three or four? Ultimately, those are their crises and not our crises.

**Q:** What recommendations do you have for workers who continue to struggle to balance being compassionate towards customers but not allowing the stories to consume them or be carried with them outside of work?

**A:** Winston Bell, Everybody Can Win Consulting: Another part of that is we must have our own outlets. I cannot stress enough how those outlets are paramount in us keeping our mental health and our sanity. I work for an organization here called Catholic Community Services, and a lot of the folks who have been working in the field for 20-30 years would ask me how I am able to avoid burnout. By the time I leave a family in crisis, when I touch my car door I’m thinking about what else I’m going to be doing. What are my outlets? My friends. I don’t have a lot of friends who are in the same profession, so maybe that helps. I can just veg out and think about other things that are going on in my day to day life. Having really effective hobbies helps. I do a little competition in sports, so I’m able to go out and yell and scream at folks. They don’t know I’m releasing additional stress from my job; they just think I’m really passionate about the sport. Being able to get some of those stressors off your plate, and to go out and really get a good sweat has been able to help me and my colleagues.