

INTEGRATING FAMILY SERVICES Newsletter

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A Word from the Integrating Family Services Management Team

WHY

This issue of the IFS newsletter is focused on the question of **WHY** IFS. Integrating is a messy business. It means changing the way we think about a system that was set up in silos, with separate funding streams and eligibility requirements, with so many levels of reporting that sometimes we feel buried in paper.

This is not an easy task and one that has at different times had all of us wondering **WHY** we are doing this. Why not just allow things to remain as they are? Why are we experiencing frustration and adding challenges to an already complicated system? **WHY?** Because of the families and children who need help. The difficulties we are facing while we try to shift the system into a more user-friendly and flexible manner is nothing compared to the challenges families face when trying to access a complicated system that often has multiple contact people and constraints around accessing services. A direct quote and suggestion from a consumer of agency services who has been in touch with IFS to offer suggestions sums up our imperative:

“When it comes to coordinating services, each family should be assigned one case manager, a central person or clearinghouse to simplify the process of qualifying for eligible programs and other processes that are "required" in order to receive financial supports and related services.”

This family and others like them is the reason we need to come to work every day and figure out how we move our system into the place where families can focus their energy on themselves and their children, and not navigating a complicated system.

**In partnership,
Carol, Cheryle and Susan
IFS Management Team**

Family Voice

The Act 264 Board is a governor-appointed board that is made up of nine members—three family members, three advocates and three service providers. As the IFS Director, it has been a privilege to be invited to the monthly board meetings and be able to collaborate together to improve the system of care. These monthly meetings continually set clearly in the forefront **WHY** we continue to be dedicated to IFS at the state and local level. The board is made up of passionate, committed individuals who hold the voice of family at the highest level. IFS appreciates having this board as close partners in this effort.

Each year, as part of their statutory responsibility, the board provides recommendations on priorities for Vermont's interagency System of Care for children and adolescents with any of the fourteen disabilities specified in special education law, and their families. The co-chair of the board, Gillian Eaton, states: *The Act 264 Advisory Board (with the support of the Children, Adolescent and Family Unit Standing Committee) is in strong support of the creation of the Agency of Human Services' Integrating Family Services (IFS) initiative. In fact, we consider the successful implementation of IFS to be the single most important effort we can undertake to effectively serve Vermont's children and families. Furthermore, we are in strong support of health care payment reform to move away from "fee for service" payment frameworks to "per patient" funding.*

To view the entire report with the board's recommendations please [click here](#).

Practice Highlight



IFS in the News! On Friday, February 5th the St. Albans Messenger had an article entitled, *Going to School on Truancy*, which highlights the partnership between the Franklin Supervisory Union, Family Services, State's Attorney and the IFS grantee in Franklin/Grand Isle, Northwestern Counseling and Support Services (NCSS) to support children and youth experiencing truancy.

As Todd Bauman, NCSS Children's Director states, *"The NCSS Truancy Specialist referenced is funded through IFS. This was a grant funded position which ended about 18 months ago. We chose to prioritize this project and used IFS funds to replace the grant dollars and shifted the position into IFS. It's a great example of local leaders coming together, identifying a need, and developing a model to improve our community."* To read the entire article [click here](#).

IFS Milestones



The Strengthening Families Approach has been accepted as one of the guiding principles of IFS. The adoption of this approach came about after dialogue that started several years ago when IFS was in its infancy. **WHY** is this framework important? Because each of us in our lives, focusing on our protective factors and supports is what can get us through the most difficult of times. The Vermont Agency of Human Services (AHS) is leading efforts to sustain the Strengthening Families™ (SF) framework in all child and family services systems in Vermont. This past fall, IFS and the Department for Children and Families, Child Development Division convened meetings with the State's first Strengthening Families Leadership Team. The Team is engaged in advancing a vision for adoption and implementation of SF. The Vermont SF Leadership Team members represent a variety of organizations within Vermont's service system.

What is Strengthening Families? SF is a research-informed approach to increase family strengths, enhance child development and reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect. The approach is based on engaging families, programs and communities in building five protective factors:

- Parental resilience
- Social connections
- Knowledge of parenting and child development
- Concrete support in times of need
- Social and emotional competence of children

Using the Strengthening Families™ (SF) framework, 30+ states are shifting policy and practice to help programs that work with children and families focus on protective factors. States apply the SF approach in child and family-serving systems including early childhood, child welfare, child abuse prevention and others.

Nationally, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) coordinates Strengthening Families and works with over a dozen national partners to create a new vision in which communities, families, institutions, service systems and organizations:

- Focus on protective and promotive factors
- Recognize and support parents as decision-makers and leaders
- Value the culture and unique assets of each family
- Are mutually responsible for better outcomes for children, youth and families

For more information, visit www.strengtheningfamilies.net

New IFS Website Coming Soon!

We are excited to announce we will be launching our new Integrating Family Services website. The new website uses the template also used by most AHS departments. Aside from being aesthetically pleasing, the new website will be more agile, interactive, and is easier read and navigate.

WHY are we doing this? The new display and organization will make it easier and faster to find information.

We are also excited to announce the launch of our events calendar which will allow all of our partners to see upcoming meetings and events. We anticipate the go-live date for the website will be the week of March 7th. As always, we welcome your feedback and opinions on how we can continue to improve the quality and display of our site.

March Stakeholder Meeting - March 7th from 9:30-3:30
Sally Fox Conference Center, Waterbury

We're excited to spend an energizing day with our IFS stakeholders. **PLEASE NOTE:** The original plan to use the afternoon for professional development about Appreciative Inquiry has been changed. Instead, we'll take advantage of a diverse and large group of people coming together to discuss the extensive work that has occurred over the past year and is continuing – by over 70 people participating in five different work groups, and in other forums both regionally and within AHS. This includes an opportunity for dialogue about governance, payment reform, and accountability. We will hear from teams in the two existing IFS regions about their experiences and we'll have an opportunity to ask those teams questions.

We will also discuss where IFS is headed and use this discussion to inform the next year of priorities for the IFS work plan.

We welcome anyone who is currently involved in an IFS work group, IFS regional implementation, other IFS related efforts (in other words, pretty much everyone!) and those who are in “pre-IFS” regions and want to explore how they can help implement in their community.

IFS Efforts Supporting Integration

Teaming Initiative-Providing Integrated Services for Families with Complex Needs

How do we ensure services and supports are coordinated for families that have complex needs and require true coordination across service providers? This is not a new question and yet there is a lot of progress to be made to unify services—right now a family involved with multiple agencies could have separate plans for DCF, Probation, Reach Up, Children's Integrated Services and Mental Health. IFS is exploring how to bring these and other professionals together to figure out:

- The best way for the Agency to maximize its resources to support families who are receiving services from multiple divisions of the agency and our community partners;
- How we can support these families who are most vulnerable; and
- How we can work as an Agency of One rather than separate divisions and departments.

Our plan is to solicit feedback on the concept before rolling out in a community. Stay tuned for updates in the April newsletter.

Autism Supports and Services

How do we use our collective resources to move autism services forward for children and their families in Vermont?

This is the question a new work group is focusing on which is being co-led by IFS and DAIL (Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living). At the first work group meeting in November, 2015 a diverse group of state, community and family members came together to discuss the history and context of autism supports and services, what services and supports were successful and where we experienced gaps. You can view full meeting minutes [here](#) on the IFS website.

At our next meeting on March 15th from 9:30-11:30 at the Waterbury State Office Complex this group will be looking at prioritizing action steps to address the gaps in services ([see agenda here](#)). If you would like to see a summary of the priority areas we will be going over you can [go here](#).

Turn the Curve on the number of Children and Youth in Residential Settings

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one. ~ Jane Howard, "Families"

We (the Agency and partners) continue to move forward with "Turning the Curve" on the increasing number of children youth in residential settings. What this means is we want to see more children and youth in family settings and when that is not possible, for increased family engagement for children/youth who are placed in a residential setting to work towards improving caregiver readiness for their return.

WHY are we focusing on this issue? We know children and youth do best when they are supported by family and have supports around them. To that end, our group has been holding focus groups to ensure that as we move forward we are hearing the voices of those who work to support families and youth on a day to day basis. The advisory committee will also be working with the Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and the Act 264 Board to figure out how we ensure we hear the voices of family and youth as well.

If you have questions or would like to be more involved in this effort please feel free to reach out to any member of the advisory committee: Karen Vastine (DCF), Barb Joyal (FSD), Laurel Omland (DMH), Charlie Biss (DMH), Dana Robson (DMH), Kate Dearth (IFS) or Cheryle Bilodeau (IFS).

Work Group Updates

Leadership and Governance, *Co-chaired by Carol Maloney, Terri Edgerton and Mary Moulton*

This group has been working on two fronts: a) clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each component of the IFS infrastructure – on the state level and in the regions; and b) improving communication pathways between and among community stakeholders and state partners. The work group and IFS Senior Leadership Team participated in three lengthy joint meetings last fall and those have helped build more trust and open communication among the diverse stakeholders. To see full meeting minutes from all three of these meetings please [click here](#). The work group will complete its recommendations regarding a governance framework this month, and begin tackling the critical and vexing issue of how to assure sustainable, meaningful youth and family engagement in IFS service delivery and decision making. The IFS guiding principle #4: Ensure that youth and families' voices inform processes, plans and policies will be front and center in these discussions.

State and Local Service Delivery, *Co-chaired by Belinda Bessette and Cheryle Bilodeau*

This work group continues to focus on informing the service delivery framework for IFS regions. This group has been thinking about how we have consistency in IFS regions while ensuring there is room in all communities for innovation

and creativity. **WHY** is this important? Because in Vermont we know there are differences in communities that are key to their make-up and infrastructure AND families should have access to supports and services regardless of where they reside in Vermont.

Community Based Prevention and Promotion, *Co-chaired by Carol Maloney and Charlie Biss*

This group is spending each meeting reviewing the implications each of the **Strengthening Families** protective factors – one at a time. By May this group will be prepared to offer suggestions and principles about how to embed these protective factors in the IFS regions and how to support them at the state level. The most recent discussion focused on the protective factor called: Concrete Supports in Times of Need. One of the discussion points was around the role IFS can play creating opportunities for people to identify what they need – and figure out how to try to get that need met. Creating work cultures that are trauma informed, respectful and help people maintain their dignity when they ask for help was at the core of the discussion; and the group recognized that this applies to both employees of the state and partner organizations, and for people who come to us for help.

Finance and Payment Reform, *Co-chaired by Heather McLain and Susan Bartlett*

WHY MESS WITH THE MONEY?

A part of IFS is changing how money flows to our community providers, or payment reform. For those of us who deal with money all the time, it seems obvious that payment reform needs to be a part of the overall changes we are working to create in our systems. It may not be quite so obvious for our folks who actually deliver the services to Vermonters. So here's **WHY**;

Currently money goes to our community partners in many different “streams” and each of those streams has their own requirements, rules and regulations. That is what has helped to build those siloes we all talk about. So a key to payment reform is figuring out how to merge those streams into more of a nice, smooth flowing river. And it sure is easier said than done. But what we have learned so far from our wonderful and creative folks in our pilots, is that by creating some flexibility with the money, a great deal of flexibility is created in the programs. It has become easier to address the needs of the consumer in a direct manner and not have to “fit” them into a program.

We continue to work on payment reform to create as much flexibility as possibility for our community partners. The goal is to allow providers to spend their time addressing the needs of Vermonters, not struggling to figure out which stream pays for the service or which stream has some money.

Hand in hand with payment reform is the process of developing the performance measures that will let us all know how we are doing and if Vermonters are better off. It all ties together with the end goal being better services for Vermonters.

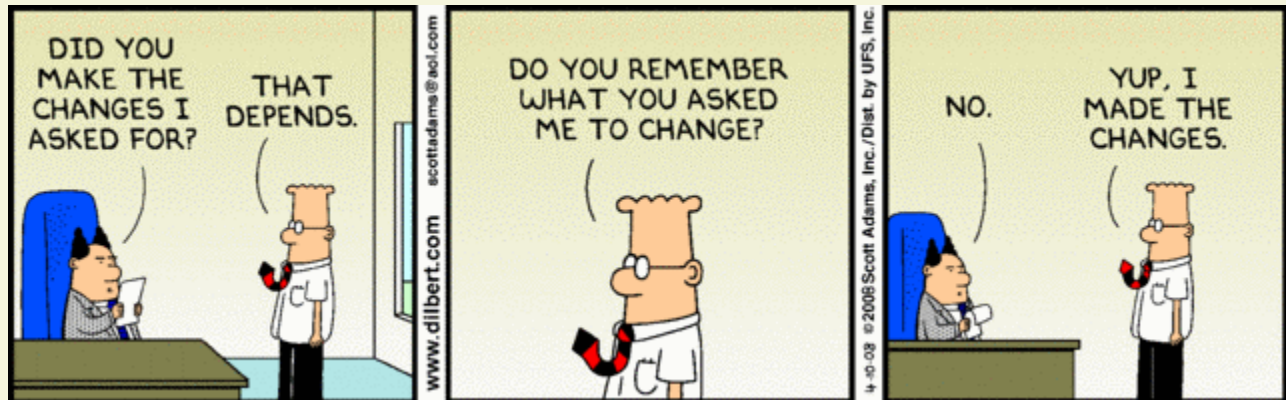
Accountability and Oversight, *Chaired by Cheryle Bilodeau and Keith Grier*

December concluded the incredible work this group has done on identifying the Population Indicators that will be most appropriate to inform IFS regions about how they want to target supports and services in their area. We have now launched into determining performance measures for IFS regions. **WHY** do we care about data so much? Because it tells us how we are doing and focuses us on the question of, “*Is what we are doing helping children, youth and families to be better off?*”

Time after Time: Reflections on Forty Years of Collaboration and Service Integration by Sid Gardner, 2007.

Collaboration is the managerial and leadership challenge of the 21st century. Not only in health and human services, but in all important public tasks—foreign policy, national security, law enforcement, fighting the diseases that cripple and destroy us—the paramount human task is putting disconnected pieces of programs and remedies together so they help people better than if they remained fragmented. **No single agency with a mission involving humans can accomplish important tasks by itself for all of its clients. Autonomy in organizational leadership is an obsolete concept, since autonomy only gets you isolation, and to be isolated in a fragmented world is to lack the resources you need to accomplish your mission.** [Keep reading for the entire article.](#) This isolation is **WHY** IFS is so important to keep moving forward. We want to bring all of our resources together to provide the best supports and services for families.

WHY? Because laughter really is the best medicine.



For general questions about IFS, contact any of the IFS Management Team members:

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OR

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