



The Expert

This is a newsletter dedicated to helping individuals and agencies work within a world that the average person can easily view with anxiety, feelings of intimidation and confusion

News Letter

Witness

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Group Homes, Obsolete?

A number of events have taken place that raise a question as to the viability of group homes in California. It is well a well-known fact that a number of high quality group homes have closed their doors in the last few years.

This is largely due to numerous factors:

1. The cost of operating group homes has increased with inflation, the cost of new regulations, salary pressures, insurance premiums, workers compensation costs and many others.
2. State reimbursement has never kept up with the rising costs and is not likely to.
3. Outcomes for children in group care are generally poor compared to other modalities such as wraparound services and intensive treatment foster care.
4. A growing sense that group home environments are bad for children.
5. A recent court injunction: see www.danmarble.com, click on "news" and then click on other. The case is **Katie A. v Bonta**.
6. The federal approval of a Title IV-E waiver this year, which will allow 20 counties to become more creative in treatment decisions for children.

According to a recent "Monday Morning" volume 3 #16 put out by the California Alliance of Child and Family Services (CACFS), Child Welfare and Probation, group home placements in California declined by 453, from 11,185 to 10,732 in the nine months between January 1, 2005 and October 1, 2005 according to figures recently released by the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR), University of California, Berkeley. See the website:

<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports>. If we look at the cost of group care in California, it is easy to see that the State of California would like to see more reductions in caseloads. If we pick a conservative average figure of \$4500 per child per month we arrive at an annual cost to the taxpayer of over 579 million dollars per year for group home



Disincentive

To

Increase

Rates?

Funding Changes on the Way

Title IV-E Waiver

Up until recently, funding stream limitations in Title IV-E prevented counties from paying for placement options other than the traditional ones. Recently, the Federal Government granted the State of California a "Title IV-E Waiver". This will allow 20 counties to apply for a block grant type of funding for foster care that will give them much greater flexibility in their treatment decisions for children. In addition, any savings will have to stay with foster care and cannot be shifted into other areas. This will have a major impact on the treatment of children within our state.

Medicaid Funding

Many states are using Medicaid funding to pay for treatment services such as Intensive Treatment Foster Care and Wraparound Services. There are more than 80,000 children in foster care in California. Studies find that from 70% to 84% of them experience a mental health problem. The most severely damaged children are (4500) are placed in high level group care (level 13/14). With flexible funding, and on the basis of medical necessity determined by a psychiatrist, these children could conceivably be treated in their own community in a family environment.

Katie A. v Bonta

On March 14, 2006, the federal district court in Los Angeles ordered the State of California to provide mental health services that will enable tens of thousands of foster children to avoid institutional care.

The order came in a three-year-old class action lawsuit known as Katie A. v. Bonta, which challenges the longstanding practice of confining abused and neglected children in costly hospitals and large group homes instead of providing mental health services that would enable them to stay in their own homes and communities. (Protection and Advocacy, Inc bulletin)
The court set a 120-day time frame for the state to comply with its order.

It takes little imagination to see what the possible impact of this order will be on group home care.

Medical

Necessity

Could determine

treatment

alternatives!



Important

If you would like more information, a training for your staff, or coaching for an upcoming lawsuit, you may contact me at the contacts below. If you are going to be testifying, talk to your attorney before you call me.

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