

My Experience with Group Decision-Making

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Group Decision Making was something we kept hearing about as we implemented Differential Response (DR), but weren't sure it would work for us. As a new supervisor in January 2013, I had a lot of ideas and this concept of sharing the process of making decisions and empowering caseworkers to make decisions was something that I thought couldn't be bad. We shadowed an agency that was larger than ours and spoke with other counties that implemented Group Decision Making when we started the DR process and found it was difficult to transfer their group process to our small/medium agency. Many of the agencies met twice a day to account for the volume of referrals they received. We did not have the same volume and could see their schedule would not work for us. After some time and with the coaching that was provided by Russ Rowenhorst from Minnesota through ODJFS, Madison County made the decision to give it a try. Russ is from a county that was just about our size and he talked about their process and that was the spark we needed to develop or plan.

We started with defining the mission and purpose of Madison County's Group Decision Making process. We discussed rules and guidelines for the group, and identified the participants for a successful meeting. Once a process was developed, we decided to "pilot" it for 30 days with an opportunity to review and make changes to the process as we felt necessary. During the pilot period, we met and focused on the reports that were more difficult to decide as well as discussed the cases that were screened in since the last meeting. After 30 days, as a group we decided that we would meet to discuss the reports that needed a decision made. We don't meet daily and although today our process looks different than it did in the beginning, I believe Group Decision-Making allows caseworkers to feel more comfortable with making independent decisions and helps our agency make consistent decisions in the area of screening no matter if it is on-call or during the course of their job day-to-day. The most important part of our process is flexibility.