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Interprofessional Collaboration and the Use of Social Work Competencies in Therapeutic Foster Care

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Foster Care

In my field experience with Benchmark Family Services, the professionals that I encountered hold that unique set of skills that are needed to be successful in this agency. They are also a group of professionals that work together, or to collaborate on the specific needs of the clients they serve. According to Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin (2018), "The American Academy of Social Work and Social Welfare mobilized the social work profession around 12 complex social issues which include ensuring healthy development for all youths, closing the health gap, stopping family violence, advancing long and productive lives, eradicating social isolation, ending homelessness, creating social responses to a changing environment, harnessing technology for social good, promoting smart decarceration, building financial capability for all, reducing extreme economic inequality, and achieving equal opportunity and justice" (p. 3). When social work professionals are trying to work through these challenges, it is best to collaborate with other professionals from multiple disciplines to get the best possible outcomes. According to Ambrose-Miller & Ashcroft (2016), "Interprofessional collaboration is increasingly being seen as an important factor in the work of social workers" (para.1). This interprofessional collaboration is best practice but can also be very challenging. According to Newman, Okamoto, Kimiecik, Sohns, Burns & Magier (2019), "A profession with the potential to create change through interprofessional collaborations is certainly the social work profession (para. 1). Based on the EKU MSW Program definition of interprofessional practice, in my practice setting with Benchmark Family Services, we also utilize components such as interdependence, the creation of professional activities, flexibility, ownership of goals and lastly reflection of process (*Master of Social Work Student Handbook 2021–2022*, 2021).

In addition to the use of interprofessional collaboration, social work professionals use a competency-based education framework founded by the Council of Social Work Education (CSWE), that refers to identifying and assessing what students demonstrate in practice (2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, 2015). There are nine social work competencies that are used and each one describes the knowledge, values, skills that make up the competencies at the advanced generalist practice level. This writing will describe each competency, along with a set of behaviors that will be combined to complete each competency. Social work competency will promote human and community well-being. Because social work is such a dynamic and demanding profession, it is critical that professionals are competent and acquire that unique set of skills that will help them be successful in this challenging field. When describing social work competency # 1: Demonstrate ethical and professional behavior, we are describing professionals that understand the importance of the social work foundation and the ethical standards that they follow. Understanding the structure for making ethical decisions is also key, along with how to apply critical thinking to those structures. Some ways that competency # 1 was met in my field placement included attending to professional roles and boundaries by demonstrating professional demeanor in behavior, appearance, and communication. When it comes to professionalism, it is very important not only in our professional lives, but in many aspects of life.

In discussing the population that I served through my field placement; Benchmark Family Services provide stable homes or placements for children in foster care. Therapeutic foster care is very different from regular foster care in that these children have been severely neglected and abused. Benchmark Family Services is a network of professional, therapeutic foster homes that work alongside child welfare agencies to provide stable care to youth by providing or ensuring reasonable opportunities for healthy physical, psychological, and emotional growth (Benchmark

Family Services, 2020). Some of the services that are provided to the children by Benchmark include individual and family therapy, as well as psychiatry services. With the right foster family and the much-needed specialized services, these children can become very stable and hopefully begin to heal their mind and bodies from the past abuse and neglect.

In discussing additional ways that interprofessional collaboration or interdependence is shown in my practice setting, it is important to mention that we had weekly team meetings which allowed each professional colleague to express their opinions on the clients that we serve. Through these weekly team meetings, we come up with or create professional activities that might improve our agency's delivery of service. As far as flexibility goes, this component is certainly a must when working in the foster care community. When looking at goal setting for our clients, we come together as a team to set quality, measurable goals for each of our foster children. SMART goals are used, and SMART is an acronym for "Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timely". These five concepts help to transform an objective into a meaningful goal when used by social work professionals and their clients. These can be applied to an existing client plan to create a clear task for the client. Breaking down the problems for the clients into smaller pieces helps you to get a more specific goal to work toward.

When looking at certain roles in the agency, case workers specifically meet periodically with our agency Treatment Director to ensure quality goal setting for our clients. Our weekly team meetings also give us opportunities to reflect on the process that we are using in our agency. In the agency, we can identify problems of our foster youth through such things as referrals, admission assessments and client contacts. As an interprofessional team, we identify specific problems for the youth in care, and collectively set goals and objectives that best benefit problems that were identified. When naming types of members of our interprofessional team at

our agency, we can include regional director, treatment team director, psychiatrist, therapists, case workers and even DCBS workers. By using interprofessional collaboration in our agency, it helps us to achieve the best possible outcomes for our youth in care. According to Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin (2018), "Debates often occur about the importance of having a thorough grounding in one's own profession and wondering if it furthers interprofessional collaboration or keep collaboration from occurring" (p. 28). My opinion of this is that regardless of how far one is grounded in their profession, interprofessional collaboration improves client outcomes.

Engaging Diversity and Being Culturally Responsive

When describing social work competency # 2: Engage diversity and difference in practice, we are describing social work professionals that engage diversity and difference in practice. According to Thyer (2010), "The profession of social work has a long and admirable history of attending to issues related to diversity" (p. 3). When social workers engage diversity and difference in practice, they respect and appreciate each person's differences. The profession of social work seeks to serve diverse populations. Part of being or engaging in diversity includes being culturally competent and responsive and being able to understand cultural differences in people. Because social workers often encounter different beliefs and traditions, it is very important to embrace cultural competence and be responsive so that desired outcomes can be met. Social workers pledge to follow the Code of Ethics that was adopted by the NASW, put together to uphold the respectful treatment of all people (Code of Ethics, 2021).

Engaging in diversity and being culturally responsive and competent are very important for social work professionals. Increasing our knowledge as professionals can only benefit the individuals that we serve. Understanding the importance of diversity at each of the levels is also key. At the micro level, I feel like allowing people to be an authority or expert when talking

about their own experiences is very important. When it comes to a mezzo-level, I think education is the most important thing because knowledge is key when caring for groups of people. For mezzo-level social workers to meet the needs of certain groups, they must first understand the problems at hand. When engaging diverse populations at the macro-level, social workers are focusing on a much larger "picture" of a population's problems. According to Netting, Kettner, McMurtry & Thomas (2017), "In order for the social worker to be effective in bringing about macro-level change, they must begin with becoming knowledgeable about the population, the problem or need and the locality where the change will take place" (p. 59). Our Macro textbook mentioned using a framework when engaging population groups. The framework specifies that professionals should begin where the population is, along with assessing the impacts and searching for professional knowledge and lastly to develop the needed strategies to work on the problem (Netting et al., 2017).

When thinking about other ways that social workers can be responsive to diversity and difference with clients is to acknowledge or attend to a client's differences as well as their strengths. When discussing ways my practicum agency can be responsive to diversity and difference is to make sure one's own personal biases do not interfere with the care for the clients. Respecting other team members' opinions on diversity are also ways that a client's diversity can be respected. Some ways that diversity and difference can be manifested in our interprofessional team includes being sensitive to the cultural beliefs and values of the foster children that is served in the agency. Some ways that the agency is culturally sensitive include placing children with families that have the same beliefs and values as the children that they place. The agency also requires the foster families to do cultural activities with the children that have been placed in their homes. Being culturally responsive and competent is also certainly crucial in the profession

of social work. It allows the social worker to work effectively with all individuals. Because professionals encounter diverse clients with a wide range of backgrounds, being culturally competent can ensure a successful client/social worker relationship.

When we work with youth in our agency, we encourage foster families to participate in cultural activities with their foster children. According to Levin-Keini & Shlomo (2017), "From its very inception social work as a profession has adopted a perspective that views a person as part of a broad social and cultural fabric" (pg. 349). Being culturally responsive also means having cultural humility, which means as professionals we must understand and be more aware and sensitive to clients' cultural issues. This plays a huge role in being culturally competent as a professional social worker. This is also a huge acknowledgement of one's biases. According to Mcintyre (2019), "Cultural humility is about the willingness to suspend what we know, or assume we know, about people different than us and being open to new ideas, perspectives, and other cultures, while still being true to yourself and with the willingness to be a learner about someone else's culture, experiences and knowledge" (para. 7).

Some additional ways that our agency practices being culturally responsive to intersecting statuses associated with factors such as race, ethnicity and gender include getting a very thorough admission assessment on the youth that is coming into care. These admission assessments include information such as reasons for youth being in care, biological family information, demographic information, presenting strengths and resources, cultural, religious, and spiritual backgrounds, family life and home environment, youth information, abuse history and educational information. Obtaining all this information on the youth allows the interprofessional team to identify and deliver culturally relevant services and resources. By being more culturally responsive, the agency embraces more equal and nondiscriminatory practices

that will meet the needs of the families and children that they serve. This allows the agency to also bring about changes that can hopefully reduce disparity and disproportionality in the agency's services and the youth and family outcomes. According to Lee & Zaharlick (2013), "All too often, social workers, as helping professionals, are called upon to solve problems involving ethnic and other minority groups interacting with the majority culture and its agencies (para. 2). Therefore, cultural competence and responsiveness is crucial for an agency or collaborative team and their interprofessional collaboration enhances the team's ability to respond in a culturally competent and responsive manner. The ways that this is shown include perceiving the client's experiences through their personal view. The collaborative team is also responsible for learning about other cultures and becoming aware of the influence of the specific culture. This will then allow the team to adapt or alter skills and interventions accordingly. Another huge part of cultural competence is recognizing ethnic, cultural, and racial differences and being aware of certain group dynamics. This will allow team members to anticipate how group members will be affected by racial issues and help to provide great frameworks to help lead multi-racial groups (Zastrow (2015).

Additional ways to be culturally responsive as a social worker includes social work competency # 3: Advance Human Rights and Social, Economic and Environmental Justice. According to Mapp, McPherson, Androff & Gabel (2019), "Speaking up for the rights of individuals and communities has been an integral part of social work practice since the emergence of the profession at the turn of the 20th century" (p. 267). When social workers advance human rights, they are ensuring every individual has basic rights such as freedom, safety, privacy, adequate standards of living, health care, and even education (CSWE, 2015). Understanding strategies that will help promote social and economic justice and human rights are

certainly crucial for social workers to help eliminate any barriers that might prevent an individual's human rights. According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "We must learn practice skills so that we might apply the values and knowledge to advocate for human rights, and advance social and economic justice" (p. 33).

During my field practicum with Benchmark Family Services, some ways to apply the understanding of social, economic, and environmental justice includes to review and discuss agency policies or guidelines that would address discrimination or oppression with the foster care population. All the things that the social workers do for foster youth in care, in some way, work to advance social, economic, and environmental justice. Making yourself familiar with agency policies is key to making sure that this population gets fair treatment and allows you to work on any barriers that may exist for this population. According to Steen, Mann, Mastivo, Mazany & Chapple (2017), "Most literature regarding the social worker's role in human rights presents human rights practice as taking the form of advocacy" (p. 10). Social workers can engage in practices that help advance social, economic, and environmental justice in many ways. A very important way that professionals can promote change includes empowering people and even communities to push social policies that will give equal access to opportunities. Working with communities to advocate for change can help them to meet basic needs and to flourish. Things such as attending rallies, supporting organizations, and even contacting elected officials could help to advocate for change in oppressed populations. According to Forde & Lynch (2014), "Social workers are "change agents" for individuals as well as communities, that consistently endeavor to assert the relevance of community work approaches to social work practice" (p. 3).

Evaluating Evidence

According to Vinjamuri, Warde & Kolb (2017), "There has been substantial discussion internationally about the need for social work students to integrate research into practice and as mandated by the Council on Social Work Education in the USA, research proficiency is one of the core competencies that students are expected to demonstrate in their practice" (para. 1). When describing social work competency # 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice, we are describing social work professionals that understand research methods that deal with statistics as well as ones that collect data to test hypothesis. These research methods are known as quantitative and qualitative. The social work professional must understand the importance of the research that is used to advance our social work practice. It is important that with research, social workers understand the foundation of certain research and why it is done and why we are looking into the research. We must also understand that the multisource findings from the research help us have effective practice.

The client population that my practicum agency serves includes abused and neglected children in the foster care system. The truth is that most foster homes fail to provide even minimum standards of safety. Looking at current conditions in foster care homes, there are several things that research points out about this client population. This is where social work competency # 4: Engage in Practice-informed Research and Research-informed Practice, comes into play. According to Font & Gershoff (2020), "Despite numerous large-scale federal policy reforms over the past several decades, substantial concerns remain about the experiences and outcomes of children in the foster care system" (para. 1). The most recent efforts were in 2018, with the Family First Services Act and the push was to reduce the use of foster care, but also increase the quality (Font & Gershoff, 2020). The question remains, as a nation, have we made improvements in the foster care system. According to Garstka, Lieberman, Thompson & Levi

(2014), "Children and youth in foster care, often traumatized by the circumstances that brought them into the system, require that the institutions with which they interact enable them to feel supported and safe and one place of refuge and structure for these children is often their school (para. 2). A child's success at school can be a critical component for a child in foster care. Something very interesting that I have been doing in my field practicum with the agencies LCSW, is helping the youth that come in for a session by giving them the ACE Quiz. According to Ports, Tang, Treves-Kagan & Rostad (2021), "Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0–17 years), such as experiencing abuse or neglect, witnessing violence, or experiencing discrimination" (para. 7). One of the questions in this quiz asks if the child had experiences in their home with adults drinking or using drugs. Using this ACE quiz would be a great start to initial research on factors that influence childhood abuse and neglect.

Research will be used as the best approach to interprofessional teamwork on working with children that suffer from abuse and neglect in the foster care system in a way that will bring the group of professionals together to better the population. The research that has been obtained can be used in such things as focus groups, training sessions and even foster parent and child interviews. By understanding what supports are helpful, it will provide strategies to improve implementation of strengths-based practice and lead to more effective engagement in the foster care system.

Applying Practice Theories and Skills

The skills and knowledge that are necessary for effective collaboration are included in a theoretical model (Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin, 2018). Effective collaboration is made up of

several very important components. When social workers or other professionals understand what guides or enhances effective collaboration, it can help us as professionals to enhance or maximize our abilities to allow the best possible collaborative teamwork. By following these specific guidelines or models, it certainly helps to give the best possible interventions to the client population that we serve. According to Iachini, Brostein & Mellin, (2018), "The five constructs that constitute interprofessional collaboration are interdependence, newly created professional activities, flexibility, collective ownership of goals, and reflection on process (p. 24). In our agency, as a collaborative team, some things we do on a weekly basis for personal activities include a weekly team meeting. We are also trying to remain very flexible when working or collaborating with team members. As professionals we can certainly have effective professional collaboration, but we can also have variables that may weaken professional collaboration. Some of these variables that might weaken professional collaboration on practice includes professional role, structural and personal characteristics, as well as the history of the professional collaboration (Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin, 2018).

If professional social workers keep these components in mind and try to use them in daily practice, it will help them to have more effective and positive interprofessional collaboration. When having effective interprofessional collaboration, it allows professionals to best serve or provide adequate interventions for the clients they serve.

Engaging in Policy Practice

According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "Policies guide our work and our decisions, so in a broad sense, social welfare policy includes the laws and regulations that determine how resources are distributed and what opportunities are made available, and this is why social workers need to be knowledgeable about social welfare policy" (p. 20). To be effective and

competent social work professionals, it is key that we remain up to date on the laws and regulations that determine what actions we must take. Competency # 5 requires social workers to understand human rights and social justice, as well as social welfare and services, mediated by policy and its implementation at the federal, state, and local levels (CSWE, 2015). This competency also tells us that it is important to know how certain policies were developed and to be familiar with the types of services that they might deliver. Not only do we need to know about the structure of polices, but we also need how to use the policies in each of the levels we may practice in.

In the foster care system, understanding the Family First Act is crucial. This policy allows for federal funding to ensure foster children in care are placed with families and to make sure they receive the critical support they need such as mental health, substance abuse treatment and even parent skilled based programs. Benchmark Family Services work with DCBS workers to ensure that youth re-uniting with families receive all the services that they need to achieve permanency. Engaging in policy practice to effect change is certainly key in a professional social work role.

Exercising Social Work Values and Ethics

When it comes to values and ethics, Benchmark Family Services team members are also expected to use a professional set of standards that are somewhat compared to the NASW Code. The NASW Code of Ethics is a set of standards that are used to guide the professional conduct of a social worker (NASW, 2021). The agency also uses principles such as helping youth in need, they challenge injustice of neglected children, they respect the dignity of the clients they serve, they value the relationships of the youth they serve and lastly, they practice in a trustworthy and

competent manner. These are all principles that professional social workers follow in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2021).

When thinking about ethical dilemmas and decision-making, there are many different types of ethical dilemmas that might arise in foster care. The types of dilemmas that come to mind include confidentiality, professionalism, and even mandated reporting of child abuse. Competence can also be considered as an ethical issue if the person was not fully qualified or competent to care for children in foster youth. When discussing mandated reporting of child abuse, foster care workers and clinicians should have a good working knowledge about their state's mandated reporting laws. According to Marriott (2018), "It is especially imperative that a mental health clinician treating youth in foster care is aware of the mandated reporting laws, as many youths in foster care have experienced abuse" (para. 29). Regardless of the situation, the team of interprofessional members use ethical decision making to make the right decisions for the youth that they serve.

When thinking about ways this agency makes ethical decisions, the two ethical models that I am familiar with include Reamer's Seven Step Model and the ETHIC Model. Out of these two models, I would prefer to use Reamer's Seven Step Model when resolving an ethical dilemma. According to Reamer, (2018), "For decades, teachers and practitioners have turned to Frederic G. Reamer's Social Work Values and Ethics as the leading introduction to ethical decision making, dilemmas, and professional conduct in practice" (para. 1). Some of the ways that the agency makes ethical decisions includes using models like Reamers. In cases of extreme emergencies with our youth, seeking emergency care would be the only rational decision to make. When trying to place these children in the correct homes based on their behaviors, a model such as Reamers might be used.

When there is an important ethical decision that needs to be made in the practicum agency that I am currently in, the group of professionals seem to pull together to make the best decisions for the youth they serve. This agency uses team members such as case managers, therapists, treatment director and even the regional director to make important decisions on these children. Another important role in this agency includes the DCBS worker. They are the legal guardians for these children and are also a very important person in making important, ethical decisions for these children in need. All these professionals work together to make sure the most ethical decision is made for these children and their families.

Preparing, Engaging and Assessing

According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "Engagement focuses on establishing a professional relationship between the worker and the client system, which is an absolute requisite for a successful practice" (p. 177). Recognizing the importance of this relationship is certainly key when trying to achieve specific client goals. Competency # 6: Engage with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities, requires social work professionals to understand that engagement is an ongoing component of the interactive process with individuals, families, groups, organizations and even communities (CSWE, 2015). Promoting effective engagement includes utilizing a set of important skills that helps us as professionals to build relationships that will help us to practice effectively. Not only do social work professionals need to value the importance of human relationships, but they also need to understand theories of human behavior and the social environment, along with strategies on how to engage diverse clients (CSWE, 2015). During my time with Benchmark Family Services, I have been able to observe a group of professionals engage with foster children, their families and even with other professionals and organizations. Engagement is a critical component when wanting to have

effective relationships with these children and their families. Part of being effective during engagement includes determining strengths and challenges, identifying areas of comfort and discomfort, and empathizing with the use of appropriate interpersonal skills. All these things can help the social worker with relationship building needed to have effective rapport with the foster youth and their families. Engagement skills used with families such as clarifying, and reflection are also very important. Using active listening skills and using empathic responses when appropriate are also important. Some other effective engagement skills that we used to help us in building effective relationships included demonstrating the use of effective empathy. According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "Empathy is a second basic characteristic that has been found to enhance a worker-client relationship and is crucial for the helping process to be effective" (p. 66). When we have empathy for our clients, we understand their emotions and convey to them our understanding. It is us as professionals, showing them, we understand their situations. Ethical behavior and professional boundaries were also used in conversations anytime meetings were accessible. According to Bruce & Flynn (2013), "Sustaining professional standards of practice throughout your social work career, is at the heart of ensuring the provision of high-quality services to those individuals who may need care, support or protection in our society" (p. 7).

When describing social work competency # 7: Assess individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities, we are describing professionals that understand the assessment phase or component is a continuing process in the field of social work. As professionals support individuals, families, organizations, or communities, it is crucial that they understand human behavior theories and even theories of social environment. Applying the learned knowledge as they work with clients. An example of a theory that might help us to understand behaviors would include Maslow's hierarchy of needs. According to Hoffman (2020), "Maslow's conceptualized

human needs as a five-level pyramid that includes psychological, safety, belongingness, esteem and self-actualization" (para. 4). Understanding this theory helps us to understand some of the behaviors of our foster care population. Understanding the process of assessment is also key and being able to apply this process with diverse clients is also an important aspect of the process. Collecting and organizing data is extremely important during the assessment process. According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "It is important to keep in mind that the assessment process begins when we meet the client, whether it is an individual, family, group, or larger system and it's an internal process through which the social worker begins to put together the pieces of the puzzle, with a goal of understanding the person in the environment" (p. 180). When discussing assessments of foster youth that come into care with Benchmark Family Services, there are a couple of different kinds of assessments that are done by Benchmark. The Treatment Director at the agency completes the initial admission assessment with the child and a CANS assessment. The admission assessment includes things such as the child's date of birth, educational level, past foster homes, or any residential facilities the child may have attended, the child's diagnosis, their medications and even their past risk behaviors. The admission assessment also goes into the types of abuse and neglect the child suffered. Lastly the admission assessment has the child's biological information concerning their parents. Lastly, the CANS assessment, or Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment, is a trauma-informed behavioral health evaluation that is completed by the treatment director. This assessment is meant to help to identify placement and treatment needs for the youth in care.

When looking at the preparation that goes into family visits, there are many things that must be considered. The case worker must set up a time to come into the home for a visit with the foster youth as well as the foster parents. Many documents are often prepared for the foster

parents and foster children to sign at each visit. A review of youth histories and medications are also very helpful before each family visit to ensure effective engagement with the foster youth, as well as the foster parents. engagement skills with residents such as clarifying and reflection. I tried to use active listening skills and use empathic responses when appropriate.

Applying Practice Theories and Skills

The skills and knowledge that are necessary for effective collaboration are included in a theoretical model (Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin, 2018). Effective collaboration is made up of several very important components. When social workers or other professionals understand what guides or enhances effective collaboration, it can help us as professionals to enhance or maximize our abilities to allow the best possible collaborative teamwork. By following these specific guidelines or models, it certainly helps to give the best possible interventions to the client population that we serve. According to Iachini, Brostein & Mellin, (2018), "The five constructs that constitute interprofessional collaboration are interdependence, newly created professional activities, flexibility, collective ownership of goals, and reflection on process (p. 24). In our agency, as a collaborative team, some things we do on a weekly basis for personal activities include a weekly team meeting. We are also trying to remain very flexible when working or collaborating with team members. As professionals we can certainly have effective professional collaboration, but we can also have variables that may weaken professional collaboration. Some of these variables that might weaken professional collaboration on practice includes professional role, structural and personal characteristics, as well as the history of the professional collaboration (Iachini, Bronstein, & Mellin, 2018).

If professional social workers keep these components in mind and try to use them in daily practice, it will help them to have more effective and positive interprofessional collaboration.

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Interventions

When describing social work competency # 8: Intervene with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations and Communities, the use of appropriate intervention strategies will be discussed. In the social work profession, interventions are strategies that focus on change which help to decrease risk factors, along with reducing harm. The primary purpose of social work interventions is to work with clients to alleviate their problems. It is also important to remember that this process is a continuous one that allows the social workers to choose interventions that will effectively achieve goals. The importance of understanding theories of human behavior and our social environment is also key when deciding on appropriate strategies. According to Kirst-Ashman &Hull (2018), "Together with the client, you need to identify and assess various strategies to achieve the major goals related to the specified problems" (p.229). Some things that may help us as professionals choose the appropriate strategies include emphasizing client's strengths and evaluate pros and cons with each strategy (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2018). The effective amount of teamwork and communication with your clients will hopefully bring about the desired outcomes.

While working with Benchmark Family Services, I have been able to witness a hardworking team of social work professionals provide effective interventions for their foster youth and their families. We have chosen to use interventions that will lead up to the goal of a successful discharge or re-unification of foster children and their biological family members. Because therapeutic foster children can have several presenting issues that are a direct result from their past, they often require intensive care and support. Some of our interventions that we

use for the children we serve include providing extensive therapy and psychiatric services. Additional support that is provided includes on-going training, on-call availability, and a professional support staff. This team of social worker professionals certainly do a great job when preparing the foster youth to go home to be with family. The staff continually assesses the progress to goal attainment and revises or adjusts the intervention plans accordingly. According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "You should use the client's definition of a successful intervention" (p. 495).

Evaluating, Ending and Documenting

When describing social work competency # 9: Evaluate Practice with Individuals, Families, Groups, Organizations, and Communities, we are describing that social work professionals understand the evaluation process is also continual and it requires constant interactions with families, groups, organizations and even communities. Social work professionals are aware of the importance of the evaluation process, and they use appropriate processes to evaluate those outcomes. Proper evaluation of outcomes will promise effective service delivery of clients. According to Kirst-Ashman & Hull (2018), "To be an effective social worker, you must know whether the interventions you employ are working, so during the evaluation process, we must always be alert to whether or not the goals we hoped to reach are being achieved" (p. 308).

While completing practicum hours at Benchmark Family Services, I have witnessed these professionals properly evaluate outcomes for their population of foster care youth. Some ways that youth outcomes are properly assessed are by having youth treatment team meetings which allows the treatment team to evaluate the youth's progress and outcomes. This allows the team to evaluate for additional services, a continual process for out-of-home care. Weekly contacts with

youth also allow for evaluation of interventions. These are just a couple of ways that the treatment team evaluates outcomes in this organization.

Some factors that might influence client or youth outcomes in the agency includes the relationship between the youth in care and the interprofessional team that serves the youth. Other things or factors that influence youth outcomes in the foster agency are things such as stability of the foster youth in the foster care home. Things such as familial connections with family, reducing barriers and successful therapy are also things that are important for youth outcomes in the foster care agency. The success that the interprofessional team desires for the youth in care includes for the client to return to parent in a loving and caring home.

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