Agenda

- BTG- Northern Virginia Initiative
- What does it mean to “bridge the gap”?
- Icebreakers
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Private/Public Collaboration
- Evaluation Component
- Panel
- Questions
Public/Private Collaboration In Northern Virginia

Adolescent & Family Growth Center, Inc.
Arlington County Dept. of Human Services
Braley & Thompson
Children’s Services of Virginia
City of Alexandria Dept. of Human Services
Fairfax County Dept. of Family Services
Family Advocacy Services of Virginia
First Home Care, Inc.
For Children’s Sake
Northern Virginia Family Services
Phillips Programs
Prince William County Dept. of Social Services
Residential Care, Inc.
UMFS
BTG in Northern Virginia

- collaboration of 4 public/10 private child placing agencies
- self-driven, bottoms-up effort
- 6 days of consultation/support through NRCFCPPP
Why use a public/private and cross-jurisdictional approach?

- Public and private agencies serve the same clients
- Private agency foster parents care for children
- from multiple public agencies
- Unified vision of best child welfare practice
Essential Components of the Process

- generation of interest of multiple agencies
- buy-in of all agencies’ administration
- steering committee for initiative, including FP
- internal steering committees in each agency
- administrative support
- sub-committees for specific tasks.
What is Bridging the Gap?

Bridging the Gap is the process of building and maintaining relationships and communication between birth and foster families involved in a youth’s life, or between the foster and adoptive families, with the goal of supporting family reunification or another permanency plan.
Common Benefits of BTG

Child’s Perspective

- Opportunity to preserve sense of identity and history.
- Bonding and attachment to family of origin are preserved.
- Enhances self-esteem.
- Reduced feelings of divided loyalties to two families. Child’s two worlds are connected.
Common Benefits of BTG

Birth Parent’s Perspective

- Bonding and attachment to child are preserved.
- Feeling of being respected. Parent can share their expertise about the child.
- Anxiety reduced from knowing with whom the child is living.
- Better communication and information sharing.
Common Benefits of BTG

Foster Parent’s Perspective

- Foster parents have more accurate information to help them in caring for child.
- Reduced discord between the families.
- Easier transition home or to another permanent placement. (opportunity to maintain contact with child).
- Can lessen the incidence of allegations against the foster parents.
Common Benefits of BTG

Social Worker’s Perspective

- Good communication and collaboration reduces tension.
- Visitation runs more smoothly.
- Better communication that makes job easier.
- Foster parent can serve as a mentor/role model for birth parent.
- Morale booster when parties are working together.
Common Challenges of BTG

- Foster parents may feel reluctant; it’s a role change.
- Social workers may feel the same; perception of more work.
- Foster parents may have fears that must be addressed.
BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN BIRTH PARENTS AND FOSTER PARENTS
A CONTINUUM OF CONTACT

**Supporting The Child's Family**
- Exchange letters with child's family via SW
- Call child's parents on phone
- Request pictures of child's family to display in child's room
- Share copies of home and report cards with family
- Have positive view of child's family
- Talk openly with child about family
- Send snack/activity for visit
- Encourage parent's progress
- Dress child up for visits

**Helping The Child's Family**
- Transport child to visit
- Talk with parent at visit
- Encourage parent to phone child
- Meet child's family at placement
- Non-threatening attitude
- Refer to child as "your child" to BP
- Share parenting information
- Attend staffings, reviews
- Help BP find community resources
- Encourage/reassure reunification
- Share child's lifebook with parents
- Attend training to learn how to work

**Teaching The Child's Family**
- Take/pick up child to/at parent's home
- Serve as parent's mentor
- Review child's visits with parent
- Give parents verbal progress reports
- Ask parents to come to appts.
- FP transports BP to meetings
- Invite child's family to attend school programs
- Assist in planning child's return to birth home

**Participating With the Family**
- Welcome parents into your own home
- Attend parenting class with parents
- Arrange family visits with parents
- Serve as a support to family followup
- Foster parent provides respite care
- Include BP in farewell activities
The Birth Parent-Foster Parent Relationship

Begins with small steps. Safety is paramount!
ICEBREAKER MEETINGS

The First Meeting Between Birth Parents and Foster Parents
Icebreaker Protocols

- Facilitated, child-focused meeting which provides an opportunity for birth parents and foster parents to meet each other and share information about the needs of the child.

- Scheduled by child’s social worker.

- Takes place within 7 days of placement.

- Lasts about 30 minutes.

- Children may attend as appropriate.
WHY IS A PROTOCOL IMPORTANT?

- Consistency and training for staff.
- Social workers are given tools to support their role in conducting icebreakers.
- Helps social workers think through challenging situations.
- Allows for measuring outcomes.
Important for sustaining the communication and relationship for all parties involved through the case process.

BTG Roles and Responsibilities
THE BTG STEERING COMMITTEE and SUBCOMMITTEES GOT THE JOB DONE!

- Self-education process for buy-in and sense of ownership
- Common vision and commitment to consistency in practice
- Acceptance of a definition and rationale for BTG
- Identification of products to develop
- Clarification of roles and responsibilities of players
- Cross-agency training for staff and foster parents
- Enhanced partnerships between all agencies
Rolling Out BTG in Northern Virginia

- Use a “Train the Trainers” model
- Modeled collaboration with agency partnerships
- Public & Private agencies served as co-trainers
- Public & Private agencies both hosted trainings
- Agency Administrators & Supervisors trained 1st
- Staff and Foster Parents cross-trained when possible
Critical Component: EVALUATION

- Conducted across all 14 agencies as of 9/1/08
- Surveying of foster parents, birth parents & social workers immediately after icebreaker and then 6 months later
- To extend for two years, only.
FOCUS OF THE EVALUATION

- Are doing what we said we would do?
- Icebreaker meetings being held?
- What barriers to scheduling?
- Types of ongoing contact & communication after icebreaker meeting
The Experts Speak!
QUESTIONS?
Thank You