

Success stories

An intensive investigation was initiated as a follow-up to numerous reports and complaints against a Department of Juvenile Justice facility. Since three of the individuals named in the reports were also clients of the Department of Children and Families, the LAC formed a sub-committee to monitor continued reports. Members went unannounced to the facility, were granted admission but not allowed to be anywhere in the facility or speak with any resident without the presence of designated staff. The council continues to monitor reports and maintain concerns about the human rights of the residents of the facility. The LAC oversight has communicated that there is another measure of accountability for the treatment of DCF clients in this facility, and monitoring will continue.

A child in a runaway shelter expressed concern to a LAC member because she needed to attend summer school in order to be promoted. Due to family situation, the child had 40 absences during the school year and would not be promoted unless she attended summer school that was not being offered in the county where she was sheltered. The LAC member contacted the child's home school, explained the problem and obtained permission to give the child worksheets each week. After the work was completed, the LAC member sent a letter of recommendation ensuring promotion to the next grade.

The LAC in one Service Area discovered a child living in an emergency shelter for five to six weeks who had no visits from anyone and had not been assigned a courtesy caseworker. The LAC contacted the Foster Care Supervisor and requested that a worker be assigned to the child. This action was taken, and the LAC continues to monitor the case to ensure that the child's needs are being addressed.

A LAC received a complaint from a client that a mental health facility had not provided appropriate medical attention in a timely manner. As a result, the client was suffering. After the council's intervention, adequate medical care was provided and the problem resolved.

A complaint received by a Developmental Disabilities LAC resulted in the removal of a court appointed guardian who is now being investigated for exploitation. The complainant alleged that the client seldom had food, begged from neighbors and that utilities had been disconnected due to non-payment of the bill. The LAC member assigned to the case worked closely with the protective investigator and confirmed the allegations that the guardian was not properly handling the client's resources. Due to the council's intervention, a new guardian was appointed and the State Attorney's office is investigating the previous guardian. Through periodic visits, the LAC member has verified that the new guardian is providing adequately for the individual, and the client is satisfied.

While responding to a complaint from a resident of an Adult Living Facility, a Mental Health LAC member found deficiencies in supervision, security of medications and housekeeping. As a result of the LAC investigation, the facility was cited and sold to a new owner. Subsequent monitoring by the LAC has found improved conditions.

In one service area, the Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities LACs combined efforts to assist the Department of Children and Families, Department of Juvenile Justice and Department of Health in the development of appropriate services and placement for a teenager who had been diagnosed as having mental retardation, mental illness and a life threatening illness. The case came to the attention of the LACs when a Baker Act facility was going to release her since she did not meet their criteria. The LACs pulled together the involved state agencies to staff the case, and as a result, interim services were initiated until placement in an appropriate facility could be arranged. Each agency participated in the plan and funding.

When an LAC became concerned about the problems arising from the process of reporting missing foster children, the council reviewed the procedures and arranged a meeting of the parties involved. It was learned that the agency routinely filed a pick-up order which was being treated by law enforcement as a non-criminal warrant which meant that if the child happened to be picked up (for some other reason), law enforcement would learn of the warrant and attempt to return the child to the agency. Unfortunately, this usually did not happen during DCF office hours and there was no one available to come for the child. After the meeting, DCF and DJJ provided law enforcement agencies with lists of after hours on-call staff, and it was also agreed that a missing child report should be filed in case the child had left the immediate area.

When the LAC in one service area became aware of a child who had resided in an emergency shelter for about a year, parental rights were being terminated. The child was demonstrating behavior problems and mental health deterioration. The LAC arranged for a Guardian ad Litem, for the child to receive therapy and for a staffing in which the child was deemed appropriate for therapeutic foster care. The child now lives in a therapeutic foster home, receives therapy and the Guardian ad Litem has reported significant progress.

In one area, due to concerns about mental health clients who end up in the criminal justice system, the Mental Health LAC lobbied the local Safety Council, local law enforcement and other agencies to establish a mental health court in the area. As a result, the court has been established and a positive working relationship among involved entities has developed. A three-day training seminar on how to treat mentally ill persons in crisis was well attended by law enforcement. The continued involvement by the LAC was instrumental in ensuring better treatment and sensitivity being available to mental health individuals who are involved in the criminal justice system.

One LAC intervened in a situation to assist a client in resolving management errors and personality conflicts between the client and the assigned caseworker. The council recommended the appointment of a new and objective caseworker. This has resulted in an improved attitude for the client and has been beneficial to the family unit.

A member of a Developmental Disabilities LAC initiated a process that made it possible for a client to return to a residence that had previously been his home for many years. The group home had refused to let the individual return because of a lack of understanding of the required nursing care. The LAC member determined that the client's due process rights were being violated as the termination process had not been followed. The LAC member not only initiated the process and was successful in getting the client back into the home, but also encouraged the Department of Children and Families to ensure that staff and providers be trained in the process.

A Multi Program LAC member in one area discovered a child who had been in an emergency shelter for almost a year. Parental rights had been terminated and there were no plans for the child who was becoming very depressed and beginning to act out. Since a Guardian ad Litem was not available, the LAC member obtained a Big Brother for the child. Through this, the child has enjoyed trips to Disney World, scuba diving and other outings. The child was subsequently placed in a foster home in another county, but the Big Brother has continued to be a part of his life.

During the routine investigation of a client injury, a Developmental Disabilities LAC member discovered that the home where the individual lived was improperly licensed and that the state agency was funding services that the home was not licensed to provide. The LAC member assisted the providers in obtaining the appropriate license and helped them make changes in the facility's operation to ensure client safety.

A Mental Health LAC was contacted by an individual from a hospital emergency room because attempts were being made to inappropriately Baker Act him. The individual explained to the LAC member that he suffered from a neurological disorder and not a mental illness. The LAC member contacted the person's neurologist, verified the disorder and contacted the hospital to provide accurate information for treating the individual. Due to the intervention of the LAC, the individual was not Baker Acted.

