

MODULE 6 – THE ASSEMBLY PROCESS

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Prior to earning her doctoral degree, Dr. Hanson was director of the Florida Mental Health Research Institute Research Library here at the University of South Florida. So you may want to play back the area of literature review, because that's her territory. She's excellent at it. Many people, students in some of my other classes, consult her on literature reviews. So probably worth your while to reread that section or play back the narration by Dr. Hanson, because it's a really good section of this lecture.

Thank you, Dr. Levin. Moving on to the assembly process. Problem definition is critical. So in this section we're going to walk through assembling the evidence on an identified public policy issue regarding children and adolescents behavioral health problems. So our problem is going to be transitioning adults in state foster care with behavioral health problems who are in the Florida state foster care system to adult systems of care in Florida.

We're going to establish the magnitude of the problem early on with up-to-date statistics that are not shorthanded and can be fully explained to eliminate confusion or misinterpretation. Knowing how a program was established is important. Here is a description of where we are in the adolescent transitioning to adult process. In 1986 the federal government enacted the Title IV-E Independent Living program to assist young people transitioning out of the child welfare system to live on their own.

In 1999 the Foster Care Independence Act and its amendments created the John Chafee Foster Care Independence program, which expanded eligibility for services. It broadened funding for additional services-- such as housing and food-- in addition to vouchers for post-secondary education and training. It also allowed states to extend Medicaid coverage to former foster youth until age 21. In 2008 the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act amended Title IV-E to extend the Title IV-E eligibility from 18 to 21.

Starting in federal fiscal year 2011, states may claim federal reimbursement for the cost of foster care maintenance payments made on behalf of Title IV-E eligible foster youth until they are 21 years old. This has had great significance for both the states that provide care and for youth that are transitioning out of foster care.

And current statistics are also important. Nationwide, it is estimated that over 60,000 youths aged 16 and 17-- which is 15% of children total in foster care-- were in foster care in 2011, and over 26,000-- which is 11% of the total of children exiting care-- aged out of foster care in the same year. We know this from the AFCARS report provided by the National Reporting Center of the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children's Bureau.

These children face a number of challenges such as increased risk of incarceration, homelessness, and death. So we are looking at two sets of statistics here. Which would you choose? The text in the yellow box? Or the compelling graphic to make your point? Which can you substantiate? Which is accurate based upon the evidence?

We also establish our assumptions when we ask or take a look at assumptions of the problem or questions you may be asked in the perspective of your audience. This helps you to be prepared. Can you tell me the current policy on transition of care into adult behavioral health care systems? What are the demographics of the kids currently in care? Aging out of care? Educational attainment, readiness to work, housing needs, employment opportunities? And many, many more questions.

With the changes you are proposing, how does this affect the current legislative requirements for agencies to meet these children's needs? How will this affect delivery of services? New services? What parts of current legislation may be affected by your proposed changes?

Costs. How much does it cost now? How much will these changes cost? Who is paying for this? How are we paying for this? Are the feds able to help? What are the current and possible funding streams into which we may tap? These are just a sample of the questions we can ask, and we could probably go on for at least another hour with more questions. So be prepared for whatever your audience throws at you.

Next, let's start pulling together statistics, economic analyses proposed in recently failed legislation, state and national level policy discussions, reports from think tanks, public policy institutions, and national foster care and child welfare associations. Break down each question you need to answer into answerable chunks and cite it. Pull together what you know, list what you don't know. Find what you don't know, or make an informed guess.

Describe, describe, and then describe. Document barriers and best practices. Ask experts for what you don't know. Recommend. Note how this will impact the state. Note legislative or regulatory changes. Document as you go. Keep a list of where you searched, how you searched, and what you found. Know where you found the information, and know where you can put your hands on it if you need it. If you can't answer it, then find someone who can.

At the end of the day, you should have a report that has an informative title, states its aim, provides good background information on the issue with recommendations and references. Go back to our first parity report. We found that we were also able to generate a number of briefs from important talking points of the larger policy report from feedback from our stakeholders-- who, by the way, included a state senator, advocates, family members, practitioners, and public and private sector agency personnel.