



## YFS Collaboration FAQ January 2012

### What is ZFive?

ZFive is a team of clinicians, researchers, program managers and parents in Mecklenburg County who are dedicated to improving the lives of children, ages birth through five, with social and emotional health issues and their families. The ZFive group has been in existence since 2007 to raise awareness, build resources and enhance the quality of developmental services provided to young children. More than 25 organizations are represented in the ZFive group, including Youth and Family Services (YFS), a division of Mecklenburg County's Department of Social Services (DSS).

### Why is a collaboration between ZFive and YFS important?

According to the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, all early experiences, both positive and negative, have an impact on the developing brain of an infant. "From the prenatal period through the first years of life, the brain undergoes its most rapid development and early experiences determine whether its architecture is sturdy or fragile." Persistent fear and chronic stress that is generated from abuse, neglect, domestic violence, caregiver incapacity, chaotic homes, and violent neighborhoods have a negative impact on the brain of a developing child and can lead to future mental and physical health difficulties, developmental delays, as well as challenging behaviors. Chronic stress often leads to infants and young children remaining in a state of constant anxiety and fear which triggers prolonged activation of the body's stress response system. Young children who have a history of trauma and/or chronic anxiety often show stress via dis-regulated behaviors including, aggressiveness, increased activity levels, impulsivity, disrupted sleep, lethargy, clinginess, increased frequency of tantrums, and conduct problems. Due to their young age, they are not able to tell adults what is wrong and their caregivers are often unaware of the impact that adverse environmental conditions are having on the child.

### What exactly is this collaboration?

*The target for this collaboration is:* children younger than age 5 involved with YFS with a case designated as 1) substantiated abuse or neglect OR 2) in need of services.

*The goal for this collaboration is:* improvement in child and family access to developmentally appropriate services that support children's educational, social and emotional well-being.

*The resources for this collaboration include:* Children's Developmental Services (also known as the Watkins Center) has hired 4 licensed mental health clinicians and 4 service coordinators (and supported by one supervisor) to be co-located within each geo-district to support YFS social workers in meeting the well-being needs of young children.

The mental health clinician and service coordinator will work together on referrals from YFS social workers. They will contact families directly, keeping in mind that their services are an option for kids not in custody. They will arrange to see the family in their home or other mutually agreed upon location. If the parents are amenable, they'll do evaluations or screenings for all children under 5 in the household. That information will be used to enroll the child in services or to refer to the appropriate service provider.

### **How will it work?**

1. The YFS investigator/family assessor is responsible for making the referral to Watkins Center for cases that are going to Family Intervention or Permanency Planning (child in custody) within 72 hours of case decision.
2. All referrals to the Watkins Center will be securely e-mailed to a specially identified e-mailbox. The case will be assigned to the mental health clinician or service coordinator assigned to that geo-district. Incomplete referrals will be returned to YFS social worker.
3. The service coordinator or mental health clinician will make the initial contact with the family to schedule a time for the initial evaluation or screening. The developmental screening will be completed within 21 days of the date of referral. Results will be sent to the assigned YFS social worker to be copied and pasted into case narratives. Screening results will be available for the initial CFT case planning meeting.

### **How will we know if the collaboration is effective?**

Bob Herman-Smith, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Social Work at UNC Charlotte, is leading the evaluation of this initiative. He will be tracking a variety of indicators that pertain to how YFS and the CDSA are working together, i.e., adhering to the processes agreed to by the parties on behalf of the target population. He is also working on the design for evaluation of outcomes for the children and families.

### **When is the launch?**

February 1, 2012.

### **How is it being paid for?**

Medicaid receipts earned by Children's Developmental Services.

### **Where do I go if I have questions?**

See your geodistrict manager or supervisor, or contact Jennifer Graham, Supervisor, at [Jennifer.Graham@mecklenburgcountync.gov](mailto:Jennifer.Graham@mecklenburgcountync.gov).