

Arizona Department of Child Safety Arizona Families F.I.R.S.T.

CONCLUSION: Pursuant to Laws 2016, Ch. 123, §7, the Office of the Auditor General has completed a special report of the Arizona Department of Child Safety's (Department) substance abuse treatment program known as Arizona Families F.I.R.S.T. (Families in Recovery Succeeding Together), or the AFF program. The AFF program provides a continuum of community-based substance abuse treatment and supportive services through contracted providers (contractors) to parents, guardians, or custodians of a child named in a child maltreatment report where substance abuse is a significant barrier to preserving or reunifying the family. As administered by the Department, the AFF program incorporates best practices for substance abuse treatment and addressing the needs of families with co-occurring substance abuse and child maltreatment. In addition, the Department has established oversight controls such as monthly progress reports and invoices from the contractors, and contractor site visits conducted by department staff, to help ensure that its contractors adhere to contract requirements. However, the Department reported that the invoice payment process does not include a review of underlying documentation to ensure that invoiced services are supported, and the Department should carry out its plans to review this documentation.

AFF program background

AFF program statutorily required—The AFF program was established by Laws 2000, Ch. 382, §2, and its purpose is to provide a continuum of community-based substance abuse treatment services and supportive services to parents, guardians, or custodians of a child named in a child maltreatment report where substance abuse is a significant barrier to preserving or reunifying the family. Clients are referred to the program by the Department's DCS specialists (caseworkers), and their participation in the program is voluntary. According to the Department, a client's participation is not contingent on having an open child welfare case with the Department or having a child removed from the home.

Statute specifies how the AFF program should be administered, including provisions for contracting for program services. The Department contracts with three contractors who provide or subcontract for outpatient services and subcontract for residential treatment services. These contractors cover different areas of the State, and their contracts expire on July 31, 2018. The AFF program encompasses multiple phases that include referral to the program, outreach and engagement with clients, screening and funding coordination, an assessment for substance abuse issues and service planning, treatment, and recovery maintenance to help prevent relapse occurrences.

Statute requires annual AFF program evaluations—Arizona Revised Statutes (A.R.S.) §8-884 requires the Department to contract for annual evaluations of the AFF program. The most recently completed annual evaluation is for fiscal year 2016.¹ According to the evaluation report, 12,261 individuals received a referral to the AFF program that fiscal year, of which 8,795 accepted participation in the program.² Of these, 8,248 completed a substance abuse assessment, of which 7,474 were identified as needing treatment. About 71 percent of clients who received substance abuse treatment began in outpatient services, about 22 percent began in intensive outpatient services, and 7 percent did not have a level of care identified. Of the 7,474 clients, about 19 percent successfully finished treatment, 51 percent were still in treatment, and 30 percent closed out of the program before completing treatment as of the end of the fiscal year. According to the evaluator's analysis of data on AFF program referrals between April 30, 2011 through June 30, 2016, about 57 percent of clients who successfully completed the program had no subsequent child maltreatment reports made to the Department. For children associated with a referral to the program, about 59 percent had achieved permanency by the end of fiscal year 2016.

Various funding sources are used to pay for clients' AFF program services—These include department funding, Medicaid (through the Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System, or AHCCCS), private insurance, tribal

¹ The fiscal year 2017 annual evaluation was due in November 2017 but will not likely be released until April 2018. According to the Department, it asked the evaluator to delay publication of the evaluation in order to improve the data presented in the report.

² The 12,261 referred individuals include 4,130 individuals who were referred to the AFF program prior to the start of the fiscal year and continued to receive services during fiscal year 2016. Additionally, individuals may receive more than one referral.

funding, federal funding for veterans, and Medicare. A.R.S. §8-812 requires Medicaid or private insurance to be used, if available, prior to using department funding, and the contractors are required to screen clients to determine the availability of alternative funding sources before using department funding. According to the Department and AHCCCS, sufficient funding was available through these sources to pay for all clients' AFF program services and no potential clients would be turned away or waitlisted because of funding constraints. All three contractors also indicated that there are no waitlists for clients to receive services.

AFF program design incorporates best practices

The AFF program incorporates best practices for substance abuse treatment and addressing the needs of families with co-occurring substance abuse and child maltreatment that we identified in literature. Use of these best practices is generally included in the AFF program contracts. For example, consistent with recommended practice, the AFF program is a collaboration between the Department, its contractors, and the Regional Behavioral Health Authority (RBHA) provider network.³ In addition, the AFF program provides for timely outreach and engagement of clients and for family-centered treatment services rather than treating only the individual substance abuser. The AFF program also allows for the use of peer recovery coaches—which the contracts define as former clients who have successfully completed the program—to provide support and encouragement to clients. Additionally, AFF program requirements direct the contractors to train their employees in motivational interviewing, a method of nonjudgmentally encouraging clients to engage in treatment by easing their resistance to change, which is a best practice for treating substance abuse. Further, the AFF program contracts require the Department to make incentive payments to the contractors when clients achieve specific milestones during recovery maintenance, such as maintaining continuous employment for 3 months or achieving reunification with children placed in out-of-home care. The contractors reported that they pass on a portion of the incentive payments to clients. Finally, the AFF program provides clients with various supportive services to help clients with their needs and remove treatment barriers. These services include, but are not limited to, drug screening, parenting classes, employment assistance, transportation, child care, car repair, utility assistance, housing assistance, clothing/uniform vouchers, food boxes, and cellphone minutes.

Department has implemented AFF program oversight

The Department has established various controls to oversee the AFF program contracts and help ensure that the contractors adhere to contract requirements. These include requiring contractors to:

- Send monthly progress reports to each client's department caseworker, which allows the caseworker to assess the client's evolving needs and progress toward child safety goals.
- Submit monthly invoices for client services, which are billed to the responsible party (e.g., to the Department or insurance). For invoices submitted to the Department, department staff review the invoices against specific contractual requirements. However, this process does not include a review of underlying documentation to ensure that invoiced services are supported, and the Department should carry out its plans to periodically perform this type of review.
- Conduct quarterly collaborative meetings—involving the contractors, treatment providers, and other stakeholders—to facilitate communication, identify and develop strategies to address barriers to service delivery, and provide training and technical assistance on the AFF program. The contractors are required to submit meeting minutes to the Department, and department staff may also attend the meetings.

Finally, the Department conducts semiannual site visits at each of its contractors. During these site visits, department staff review 9 to 12 case files using a standardized fidelity monitoring tool to assess the contractors' compliance with contract requirements and quality of services provided through the AFF program. If there are noted deficiencies, department staff discuss them with the contractors, who explain their commitment to improve those practices by listing their action goals. According to the site visit process, department staff then follow up on those action goals during the next site visit.

Recommendation

The Department should carry out its plans to conduct periodic reviews, on a sample basis, of documentation supporting invoiced services to ensure these services are supported.

³ RBHAs are state-contracted agencies that operate as managed care organizations within a specific geographic service region of Arizona.