

United Way and Tabor Services, Inc.

Carrie Uhl 23 January 2013

In November 2010, an affiliation agreement between Tabor Services Inc. and Baptist Children's Services (BCS) was made official, three years after BCS representatives first met with the Tabor executive committee to discuss potential merger conditions and budget realignments needed for consideration. As nonprofit children's services agencies, both Tabor and BCS decided on an affiliation in order to seek greater cost-effective strategies for building organizational capacity; recruit, train and retain a quality workforce; and reduce competition and duplication of services while staying true to their core values and missions. The affiliation provides a continuum of purpose and mission through the services offered by both human services organizations and lays the foundation for a new infrastructure within which the two organizations can effectively work together as one.

Under the terms of the affiliation agreement, Tabor assumed administrative oversight of BCS's social services department and client records to ensure consistency and success in service delivery and evaluation outcomes identified by the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. BCS also consented to Tabor's managing all of its

administrative services, including program operations, fiscal, human resources, facilities management and quality assurance as it relates to the operations of group homes and emergency shelters operated by BCS.

Both Tabor and BCS have long-standing histories as children's services organizations. BCS, founded in 1879, operates a network of group homes and emergency shelters for adjudicated dependent and neglected youth, providing care for nearly 500 youths annually. Tabor was founded in 1907 as a residential home for orphaned and needy children and now specializes in in-home services for children and families, foster care, special needs adoption, parenting education and adolescent services. Both agencies are fully licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare. Tabor is also accredited by the Council on Accreditation (COA).

Achieving COA accreditation is the number one priority of the affiliation between Tabor and BCS. COA accreditation is an objective and reliable verification that helps organizations to qualify for the confidence and support of consumers and the general public. The COA accreditation process involves a detailed review and analysis of both an organization's administrative operations—including financial practices—and its service delivery practices. All are measured against international standards of best practice. These standards emphasize services that are accessible, appropriate, based in the community, coordinated, culturally competent, evidence-based,

individualized, outcomes-oriented, provided by a skilled and supported workforce, respectful of individual rights, strengths-based, supportive of partnership and child- and family-focused and that treat all people with dignity, involve family and provider collaboration and address child outcomes.

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The benefits to an organization of becoming accredited by COA are numerous. COA accreditation offers national and external validation of performance; helps to focus, track and package good service and management practices that an organization uses to operate daily; builds infrastructure to support excellence in performance; expresses concept standards and encourages work in measurable program output language; has positive impact on the workforce and on accountability; builds accountability in management by using a qualitative self-study process; demonstrates evidence-based practices; provides measurement tools in the form of administrative and service standards; establishes credibility that the organization is effective and professionally sound; demonstrates accountability in management of resources; supports positive outcomes; builds staff morale; supports federal measures and provides evidence-based documentation for consent decrees; sets standardized best practice thresholds for service and administration; and creates a framework for ongoing performance quality

improvement.

BCS was awarded funding from UWSEPA to develop a policies and procedures manual in order to provide staff with as much guidance as possible through written policies and procedures to ensure best practice in the treatment of the youth. BCS had very little in the way of codified policies and procedures that described the manner in which youth were to be cared for and helped to achieve their stated goals. Although much is contained in the regulations and performance standards generated by state and local government, the particular details that are typically left to the discretion of the provider agency had not been collected and codified at BCS. The development of a client-centered policies and procedures manual strategically positioned BCS to achieve COA accreditation.

Tabor is currently in the process of being reaccredited by COA, and as an affiliate, BCS is included in this process. The BCS policies and procedures manual has been finalized, and BCS and Tabor are now developing a process for amending policy and communicating changes. New and current staff will be trained in the finalized policies and procedures beginning in January 2013. A quality assurance process is also being developed to measure the extent of implementation of policies and inform a training process to reinforce problematic practices where needed.

The self-study materials including all policies and procedures for both Tabor and BCS will be sent to COA by February 4, 2013. The site visit is scheduled for April 15, 2013.

The lack of written policies and procedures was one of several challenges faced during the process of finalizing an affiliation between Tabor and BCS. Other challenges included improving the quality of care in the group homes; the financial instability of BCS; improving the training process for direct service staff; and eliminating duplication of effort between the two agencies. For every challenge, however, there has been a success. The financial position of BCS has greatly stabilized, largely from the elimination of poor fiscal practices. Facilities were consolidated; BCS now offices in Tabor's Philadelphia building, which also cut costs. The staff training process has been streamlined and improved, and the addition of the written policies and procedures manual has improved practice overall.

Author Bio

Carrie Uhl is a grant writer for Tabor Children's Services Inc. She also assists with quality assurance. She earned a master's in social work from Marywood University in 2003 and has been in the social work field since 2000, previously working in foster care and special needs adoption.