

Department of Public Social Services Adult Protective Services

Background

In March 1984, the Riverside County Board of Supervisors declared the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to be the Elder Abuse Protection Agency for Riverside County because mandated reporting of dependent and elder abuse went into effect on January 1, 1984. As the Elder Abuse Protection Agency, DPSS is responsible for accepting and responding to all reports of dependent and elder abuse.

Goal-oriented services are provided to help public assistance, Social Security and Supplemental Security Income recipients, as well as low income citizens, improve their social and economic well being. The purpose of these services is to prevent dependency, institutionalization and maintain independence. Services for adults in need of protection are provided without regard to income.

The Department of Public Social Services is responsible for many programs including Child Protective Services and Greater Avenues for Independence. The services this report is focused on are Adult Protective Services (APS) and In-Home Social Services (IHSS).

Adult Protective Services

APS is oriented toward the goal of protecting adults (age eighteen and older) from neglect, exploitation and physical abuse. The program provides services to persons unable to protect their own interests and may be subject to harm or threat of harm as a result of action or inaction taken by another person, or through their own action due to incompetence or poor health. APS receives approximately 3,000 new referrals each year. APS programs include Agency Representative Payee Services for persons with chronic money-management problems. There are approximately seventy persons currently receiving this payee service.

In-Home Supportive Services

IHSS program's goal continues to be the improvement of self-sufficiency to enable aged, blind or disabled persons to remain safely in independent living as long as possible. Program activities include assessment, counseling and authorization for service when needed by eligible recipients.

Recipients receiving IHSS are assessed to be in need of domestic care and related activities, which include house cleaning, meal preparation, shopping and transportation.

Riverside County social workers identify the service needs of each client and make plans with agreed-upon goals. Family members and others are involved, when appropriate, with the agreement of the client.

An integral part of the service program includes APS and IHSS working with agencies such as the Office on Aging, Public Guardian, Health Services Agency, law enforcement, the courts and volunteer organizations. These agencies can also make referrals when necessary.

Findings

1. Staffing shortages, 20 percent vacancies at the time of this writing, are causing slow response time. Solutions for the referred client's problems are targeted to be in place within thirty days. Presently, thirty days may go by before the first visit. This causes undue harm to the elderly in need or cause their health to deteriorate.

2. Personnel evaluations are reported to be long past due causing distrust between supervisors and workers. Some workers feel there may be negative information in personnel folders that is no longer applicable. Evaluation reports are a valuable asset for promotional consideration.

3. Staff meetings, in some offices, are held monthly but are reported to be unsatisfactory for some. The misunderstandings between supervisors, screeners and investigators have been ongoing with no resolution. The lack of two-way communications

between supervisors and employees has created a situation of one-sided meetings and consequent distrust.

4. All job functions are understaffed, most specifically the availability of nurses and doctors for evaluation and follow-up of clients' needs. This causes needless delays in providing necessary care for the clients.

5. Computers and programs without instruction manuals are not compatible within the same office. This creates time loss by the necessity of downloading referrals to a disk, then uploading them to another computer within the department.

Computer downtime is increased and consequently work hours wasted by not having a technician available or trouble shooter on-site to clear up operation problems.

Some locations are operating with few or no computers, relying on an inadequate paper world.

Referrals are delayed unnecessarily by this archaic process within this department as well as other agencies involved in this volatile situation.

6. Shortages of staff and delays in referrals are causing many clients to be removed from their homes unnecessarily. The goal of this program is to keep the people in the home if possible, with the help of IHSS and the Public Guardian's office. County costs increase appreciably when clients are supported in care facilities rather than in the home.

Recommendations

Director of Department of Public Social Services:

1. Start the hiring process as soon as notified of changes in personnel. Consider using other county departments' personnel as a fill-in. Follow-up visits could be done by fill-in personnel in some cases.
2. Complete personnel evaluations on all employees in a timely manner, in accordance with the current policy, or sooner if needed. Personnel folders should be reviewed with the employee at that time.
3. Hold staff meetings weekly rather than monthly. Weekly meetings of short duration with all persons having time for input may be more beneficial. An open door policy between supervisors and employees may remove the negative feelings now present.
4. Contact Public Health and Public Mental Health Departments to arrange for doctors and nurses on an "as needed" basis.
5. Work with Information Technology to purchase commercial software and computers that are compatible with all job functions within this department as well as the ability to link with other appropriate agencies.
6. Fill staff shortages and expedite the referral process to better serve the client as well as save an unnecessary expense for the county's support of the client in other facilities.