

# The Case Closing/Transfer Summary

In this chapter we discuss the last step in both the Family Assessment and Change Process and in record keeping. Depending on the outcome of the case, the final step will either be closing or transferring. The tool used will be the same in either circumstance, but the social work process and how you complete the tool will vary.

## The Social Work behind the Record

Closing a case may conjure up uncomfortable feelings or negative thoughts, as in situations when the client has died or refused services or when the DSS was unable to continue providing services. *A Model for Excellence* offers another perspective. It shows that a case closing can be a positive step in the Family Assessment and Change process. A case closing may mean that all goals stated in the service plan have been met and there is currently no need for additional goals. In this circumstance, *A Model* says that termination of services is a mark of empowerment (p. 42). It reflects the client's and the family's ability to take full responsibility for managing their affairs again. Certainly those are the times that, although you may miss clients

and they may miss you, you are happy to complete the case closing tool.

However, if the circumstances around the case closing or transfer are not as positive, this can be a challenging step. Clients and their families may feel abandoned or angry or sad. You may also have conflicting feelings. It can require your best social work skills to get through this process. It is important to acknowledge the client's and family's feelings and to help them cope. Be sure not to ignore your own feelings either and discuss them with someone else if possible.

The Case Closing/Transfer Summary tool can also be useful in any circumstance when it is necessary to close a case or transfer it to another social worker or unit. The reasons for such a transfer decision are listed on the tool so that you can simply check them off. The tool is very concise. You are only asked to explain what is happening to the case and why.

## Why Is the Case Closing/Transfer Summary Important?

The length of this tool is not a reflection of its importance. Having closure on cases, or transferring them when appropriate, is a key step in the Family Assessment and Change Process. When the goals for the client have been met, and there appears to be no need for additional goals, terminating a case will free up resources for other clients who need them. This was true in the case example. Mrs. Johnson had in-home aide service during her recuperation from a broken arm. During reassessment the social worker found that Mrs. Johnson was again able to complete her own ADLs and IADLs and no longer needed the aide's service. She was managing so well in meeting her goals that she didn't need the case management services that the social worker was providing. After determining this, the social worker met with Mrs. Johnson to discuss and resolve any feelings she might have about services ending, then closed the case. The aide could now be assigned to another client who

needed help, and the social worker's time was also available so that she could accept another case or spend more time with her other clients.

No matter what the reason is for closing or transferring the case, it is valuable for you to complete this tool so that a concise summary is in the record. This provides information on the client and the family that will be useful for future review or if the client contacts the agency again.

A case involving adult protective services presents somewhat special circumstances because of the particular need to safeguard confidential information. The key to an effective transfer is providing essential information for use by the new worker while maintaining the confidentiality of the client and the family. Completing the summary tool is a useful way to provide transitional information. Follow the established process and procedures of your agency.

### **Using the Case Closing/ Transfer Summary**

The tool we recommend has several parts to it. After the identifying information, use the checklist to record what action you are taking on the case and why. List the date of your most recent review and any significant changes since then. There might not have been a recent review in an administrative transfer. In that circumstance, it would be valuable for the current and new social workers to visit the client together or at least to contact each other to review the record and discuss the status of the case. The next two spaces allow room for you to note any social work activities you have recently completed or that are pending and any unresolved concerns you may have. There is a place to record the client and family's feelings about closing or transfer. Finally, there is space for your signature and a date at the bottom of the tool.

Let's take a look at how to complete this tool using Mrs. Johnson as an example. Much of it is very straightforward, such as the identifying information at the top and the reason for closing or transferring the case. After that, the social

worker checked off what action was being taken on the case and the reason. It is very important to include accurate dates as a part of this information. These include the date that the action is effective, the date of the most recent review, and, at the bottom of the tool, the date you complete the tool. Provide any related information about why the case is being closed or transferred. For example, if the case is being closed because the client has died, you may want to write when the client died and how you learned of the death. This information can be put in the section on significant changes since the most recent review.

Mrs. Johnson's social worker decided to close the case right after completing the reassessment, so there were no changes to record in the space for significant changes. This may not always be true. Even if the quarterly review or reassessment was completed recently, there could still be changes in some of the domains. Any significant changes that occur while the case is still open are recorded here.

In the next section on pending or recently completed activities, Mrs. Johnson's social worker had tied up all the loose ends, so there was nothing to record here. However, when closing a case, it is just as likely that there will be one or two tasks you will need to complete or that have just been completed. If the case is being transferred, inform the new social worker what these tasks are by summarizing the information here.

In the third space for unresolved concerns, Mrs. Johnson's social worker noted that Mrs. J. is still having some difficulty adjusting to her new diet. Nevertheless, other ongoing issues were being managed well by the client and her family. Often you will still have concerns about a case when you are transferring or closing it. The concern might be a problem that you or the client are unable to resolve. It could be an ongoing issue in the client's life. For example, the client may be mildly forgetful but currently functioning well at home. From experience you

know that it is possible her forgetfulness will worsen, but there is nothing further you can do at this time. You could write something like this on Mrs. J.'s Case Closing/Transfer tool if you thought there might be more to her forgetfulness than the depression, which seems to have resolved.

A situation that you have recorded as an unresolved concern may deteriorate, and the client and family may ask you to reopen the case in the future. For example, the client may be managing adequately at home and then need services again. Another example might be an APS referral that is substantiated, but the client has capacity to consent and refuses services. Later, the client may change her mind and request services.

The best way to complete the section on unresolved concerns is to record anything that you are still feeling uneasy about or that feels incomplete, particularly if it might cause the client to contact the agency again.

The last section provides the social worker with space in which to note the client/family's response to the case closing or transfer. As discussed previously, this is an important area for the social worker to cover with the client and family. Summarizing these issues on the tool can be helpful information for the current social worker and any new social workers in helping the client and family.

Finally, the social worker signed and dated the tool.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Question: The tool asks for significant changes since the most recent review. What is "significant"?*

*Answer:* Let's say that you made a reassessment or quarterly review of the client's status about a month ago. Since that time, the client has had a series of small strokes and realizes that placement is the best option. You, however, are not the

placement worker, so you are transferring the case. The client's strokes and your subsequent interaction with him, his family, and physician are all recorded on your Contact Log. When you get ready to hand the case over to the placement worker, you would write a summary of the information on the Contact Log (just as you would for a Quarterly Review) in this space.

The rule of thumb might be, "If it is a contributing factor in the transfer or closing and not recorded anywhere but in your contact log, write it here, too."

*Question: If a case is being transferred, how important is it to write detailed information on this tool?*

*Answer:* The intent is to provide the new social worker with a brief snapshot of the client and family's situation. In the cases where you've recently completed a quarterly review or reassessment, you might write a very short description of the major things you think it would be helpful for the new worker to know to continue working successfully with the client, and you can put cross-references to other parts of the case record to show where very important information is located (for example, you might write: "About Mrs. J.'s relationship with her sister, see Assessment, items I.C.4 and III.E, and Quarterly 8/95)."

The point isn't to write *War and Peace*, but to get the new worker oriented quickly and to give her the benefit of your valuable knowledge and professional judgment about this client.

*Question: I don't understand the space for recording unresolved concerns. How could you close a case where there are unresolved issues?*

*Answer:* There are many different reasons you might be closing a case about which you have unresolved concerns. The cli-

ent may refuse services or request termination of services. In those situations you will probably have several unresolved concerns, since you have recommended services. We also know that not every problem can be solved, by clients, their families, or by social workers. Sometimes the goal is to help the client and family cope with an ongoing problem or potentially recurring problem rather than to fix it. In that situation, you might close the case knowing that the problem is not solved, but the client and their family are now better able to manage it.

### **Key Points**

- Having closure on a case through either termination or transfer is an important step in the record-keeping process as well as the Family Assessment and Change process. A case is not complete until the record keeping is finished.
- You can use the same tool whether you are transferring or closing a case. It is the social work process and the way you complete the tool that will vary.

# Case Closing/Transfer Summary

Client Name Mary Foster Johnson Date 2/6/96

Case # 95-10019 ID # 18937485368

Case is being . . .  closed/withdrawn  transferred to \_\_\_\_\_ Effective 3/1/96

If closed, reason for closing:

- client refused services
- client requested termination of services
- client moved out of county
- client cannot be located
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- client died
- DSS unable to continue services
- goals met/no services needed

If transferred, reason for transfer:

- Redistribution of cases for administrative purposes
- Revised service plan calls for other worker/unit
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of most recent review or (re)assessment 2/5/96

Significant changes since most recent review None

Pending or recently completed social work activities on client's/family's behalf since the most recent review

None

Unresolved concerns Client has so far had some problems adjusting her diet to control her high blood pressure.

Client's/family's response to case closing or transfer See the summary from the Reassessment; client and family both said they have been very satisfied with services from DSS, expressed some sadness at closing. I invited them to call me in about a month to say how things were going and said to get in touch again if they need information or if things change substantially.

Social worker's signature Virginia White