

***Testimony on House Bill 119
Before the House Human Services Subcommittee
4/10/2007
Presented by Richard E Barthel
139 N. State St.
Westerville, OH 43081
1-614-899-9942
rbarthel@columbus.rr.com***

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Human Services Subcommittee, my name is Ric Barthel. I am very honored to be here today to testify in support of the Access to Better Care Initiative that funds programs like Multi Systemic Therapy and to share with you how important the MST program has been to my family and families throughout Ohio.

My wife Debbie and I have been married 32 years, and we have been foster parents for the last 15 years. Over the last 15 years, we have cared for 59 children in our home and adopted 4 of them. Three of our four adopted children have special needs. We also have one birth child and a granddaughter.

Caring for such a large number of children in our home has come with unique needs and challenges. My wife and I have tried many things to help each one of the kids in each area they needed help, and have utilized a lot of programs that were not home based and, sometimes, not very effective.

Our 14 year old son Sevin started to show behavior problems when he was in elementary school. We had him tested and found that he had Attention Deficit Disorder as well as Oppositional Defiant Disorder. Sevin started counseling and also started medications. We have tried so many different medications that the list we have not tried is shorter than the ones we have tried. Counseling has been once a week for the last 7 years. In the last two years, Sevin as been charged with assault, disruption of school, taking a weapon to school and disorderly conduct. This year alone, he as been suspended from school almost weekly. Clearly, what we had been doing to help Sevin was not working.

Sevin's counselor then talked to us about the MST program and thought Sevin might benefit from family based treatment program. In short, the MST program is designed for serious juvenile offenders. It is a home-based intervention program that is family driven rather than therapist driven. The ultimate goal of the MST program is to empower families to build an environment that promotes health. The typical duration of home-based MST services is approximately 4 months, with multiple therapist-family contacts occurring each week.

I have to be honest. At first, I was dead set against using this program. I had tried more programs than I cared to count and did not want some therapist coming into my house and telling me what I was doing wrong. All of this changed after Sevin and I went to

court. I was at the end of my rope. I spoke with Sevin's probation officer and his Counselor and gave the ok to put M.S.T in touch with us.

I was open minded the first time our M.S.T therapist came into our home and WOW was I shocked to find out that this program is designed to work with the whole family and 80% with the parents. Our therapist was not in our home to tell us what to do, but he was here to support us by showing that we were rewarding the wrong behaviors. A home based program can give the therapist an opportunity to see the big picture. He/she can see the dynamics of the child's life. Our therapist attends all school meetings, doctor appointments, court dates and, by doing this, he also gives us a positive way to look at the problem and ways to think outside of the box. It is very refreshing to have the extra help. Our therapist is part of the extended family. Unlike in the past, when we only saw a counselor once a week for one hour, our therapist is in my home three times a week. When we started this program, my son was out of school on an average of three and one half days a week. Now with the help of the M.S.T program, my son has been in school every day for the last six weeks. This is a huge success.

This program has not only been successful for Sevin. We also have had successes with the other seven children in our home. Posted throughout our home are behaviors that address profanity, hitting, wetting, throwing things, going to bed on time, down to eating before school. My wife and I have learned that we are not bad parents, just parents that needed some help to get back to the correct path and the M.S.T program helped us do this. In all of this, I have found two faults; the first one is that I did not try this program sooner and the second is that it is not a longer program.

I know we have a lot of young people making wrong choices today but with the Access to Better Care Initiative and Multi Systemic Therapy, things can change. Moms and dads across Ohio can get the help they need to make important changes in the leaders of tomorrow. This program works and deserves continued state funding. I thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my support for the MST program. I urge you to continue to fund the Access to Better Care Initiative and the Multi Systemic Therapy program. I would be happy to answer any question you may have.

Thank you.