

## Using Information to Build Partnerships, Stay Focused, and Take Action

Information is powerful. The whole consumer education movement is built on gathering and sharing product information so people can make more informed decisions, know what to expect from a product and, if necessary, demand change. We now know how many miles per gallon we can expect from different types of cars. We know the calories and nutritional content of packaged foods. We know the side effects and warnings about medications. The decisions we make and the actions we take as a result of having this information influence laws and regulations, automobile makers, food packagers, the drug industry, and our own health and safety. We have more fuel-efficient cars, more nutritional foods, and safer medical treatments.

This issue of *SafeKeeping* highlights the importance of information in two national initiatives to keep children safe and strengthen child welfare services for children, youth, and families by building partnerships: Community Partnerships for Protecting Children (Community Partnerships) and *Family to Family*.<sup>1</sup> Over the past three years, Community Partnerships and *Family to Family* have worked together and learned from each other to create a solid foundation for reforming child welfare. Both initiatives emphasize self-evaluation as a core responsibility of a true partnership. The information obtained from asking the question, "Are we getting the results we expected?" is used to inform decisions, make changes, and improve results to ensure that children and youth are safe, families are supported, and communities are engaged in achieving these goals.

### EVERYONE PLAYS A ROLE IN COLLECTING AND CONSIDERING INFORMATION

From frontline workers - those who directly help families at any place they come in contact with the service system - to the community decision-making body, everyone

(continued on page 2)

1. *Family to Family*, an initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, focuses on reforming the foster care system by reducing out-of-home placements, increasing community foster care resources for those children that must be placed, and moving children who are placed as quickly as possible into permanent situations either through reunification or into a loving home in their own communities.



### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

<b>Using Data to Drive Reforms: Results and Success Stories Community Partnerships</b>	4
<b>Quality Service Reviews and Child and Family Services Reviews: Going Beyond the Numbers to Obtain Qualitative Data</b>	6
<b>The Power of Information: Automated Data Systems in the Community Partnerships</b>	8
<b>Data from Community Partnerships Have Implications for Program Improvement Plans</b>	10

# Using Information to Build Partnerships, Stay Focused, and Take Action

(continued from page 1)

has a role to play and a responsibility for gathering, sharing and using information. The pyramid in Figure 1 illustrates the kinds of information that should be regularly collected, shared, analyzed, and acted on by a Community Partnership. The importance of information for managers and community decision-making bodies is easily understood. But it is natural to ask, "How do supervisors and frontline staff contribute to the 'information chain'?"

Consider the following story from a child welfare supervisor: When a foster care supervisor began using the Individualized Course of Action (ICA) process and facilitating family team meetings, she selected families that were "languishing" in the system, paying particular attention to families where little movement was being made toward permanency. To her surprise and gratification, unique, creative plans began to emerge from many of these family team meetings, fostering stable, permanent placements (reunifications, adoptions, or relative guardianships) for children. Since these "tough" cases were yielding success, the supervisor encouraged all her workers to use the process for situations that were "stuck," as well as to prevent children from coming into foster care in the first place. In this work unit, seeing real success led to strengthened practice.

Information not only travels up, from the frontline to the community decision-making body, but it also

travels back down. This allows frontline staff to see how their results fit within the larger partnership and it gives managers, supervisors, and workers directions for strengthening, changing, or expanding efforts.

## INFORMATION COMES IN DIFFERENT PACKAGES, FROM DIFFERENT SOURCES

Typically, in child welfare, we think of information as numbers - for example, the number of families reported for child abuse or the number of children reunified with

their families. We get this information from automated information systems in public agencies or, sometimes, simply by keeping a "hand tally" - looking through records and manually counting the characteristics that interest us. (See Data Stories on page 4)

Numbers can be packaged in tables, bar charts, trend lines, or even maps to help tell a story. Such illustrations, while essential, often provide an incomplete picture. Just as valuable are the actual stories behind the numbers that tell us why the lines on the chart are going up or down. Newspapers are full of such stories because journalists seek to make the numbers meaningful to their readers.

To write the stories, they often interview many people.

This approach also works in the self-evaluation process.

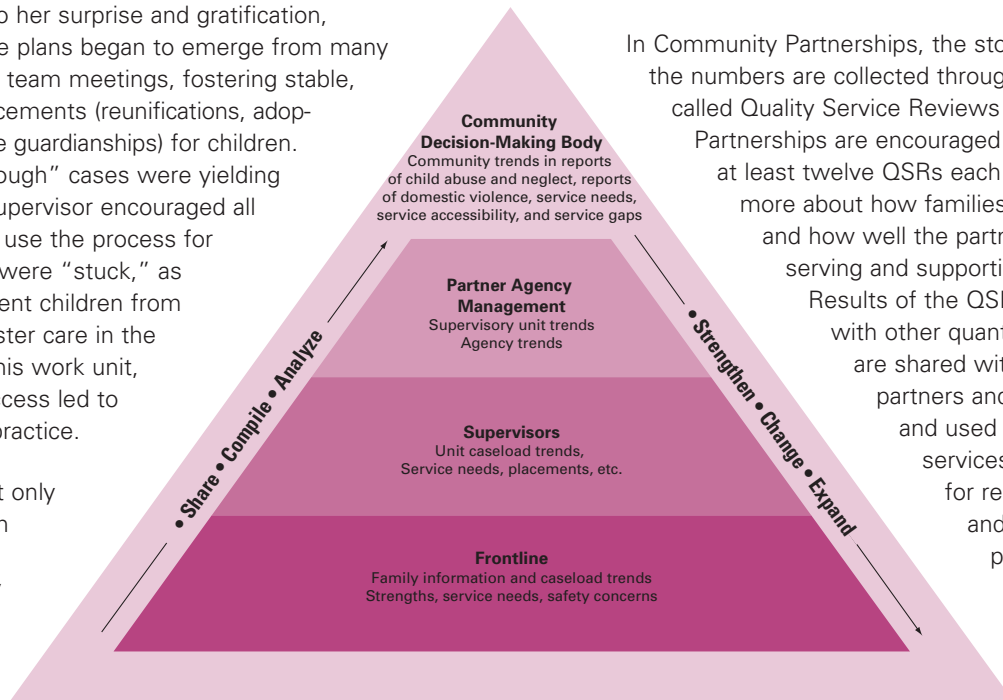


Figure 1: Using Information for Decision-making

In Community Partnerships, the stories behind the numbers are collected through a process called Quality Service Reviews (QSRs).

Partnerships are encouraged to conduct at least twelve QSRs each year to learn more about how families are doing and how well the partnership is serving and supporting families. Results of the QSRs, along with other quantitative data, are shared with community partners and residents and used to improve services, advocate for resources, and change policies. (See QSRs on page 6)

## INFORMATION BUILDS PARTNERSHIPS

Sharing information can be risky. Just like families are often hesitant to share information about themselves, there is a long history of agencies, public and private, not sharing information with each other or the community. But sharing information helps build partnerships with community agencies and residents. It engages them in celebrating success when the information points to good results. Likewise it enables joint problem solving when the information suggests improvement is needed. One community's compelling story

shows how a little data can blossom into a critical partnership among child welfare, law enforcement, and domestic violence and mental health service systems.

Six years ago, the Community Partnership decision-making board in Cedar Rapids wanted to know if an overlap existed between child maltreatment and domestic violence. To find out, data from the child welfare agency and the local police department was gathered and reviewed by the partnership. Through discussion and a close look at the data, they learned that there was a high correlation between child abuse hotline calls and domestic violence complaints to the police. They also discovered that the same neighborhoods - and indeed many of the same families - were involved with both the child welfare agency, around child abuse issues, and with the police, around incidents of domestic violence. The information, depicted on a community map, dramatically illustrated the overlap. The alliance between child welfare and law enforcement expanded to include the local domestic violence shelter and, as a result, domestic violence advocates were stationed within child protection work units to provide advice, consultation, and assistance on cases. Over time, the alliance has expanded further to include counselors and therapists to better understand the dynamics of domestic violence as it intersects with child maltreatment. As a result, counseling sessions for victims, batterers, and affected children have enhanced safety for all family members.

## INFORMATION KEEPS THE FOCUS ON RESULTS

None of us wants to waste time or energy. All of us want to know if we are making a contribution and making progress toward our goals. Collecting information about our activities and results is the only way to answer these questions and make necessary changes when we are not getting the results we want.

Communities implementing *Family to Family* regularly tap into state administrative systems to track out-of-home placement activity, reunifications, foster home growth, and other key measures of *Family to Family's* goals. This information is then fed into recruitment and training efforts, practice improvements and resource development. The good news revealed through data can be a cause for celebration.

## INFORMATION SHOULD SPUR ACTION

In self-evaluation, information is not just collected and stored. As illustrated in Figure 1, it is used to take

action. Actions result from the assessment of progress and from continual learning. Actions can range from totally revamping a strategy, to making changes that strengthen an approach, to developing new resources. Communities implementing *Family to Family* focus attention on specific neighborhoods that have insufficient foster homes yet have a high number of children needing placement, in order to “ramp up” recruitment and retention efforts to create more placement options. When the Community Partnership in St. Louis learned of the high number of sexual abuse reports in its targeted neighborhoods, it formed a workgroup to implement prevention strategies through the school system.

At the state level, data on the impact of implementation efforts triggered an expansion of Community Partnerships. A few years ago, in Florida, there was an explosion in the number of reports of child abuse and neglect. When state leaders looked at these worrisome numbers, they noticed a small area of the state where the trends for increased reports were “flat” - that is, not increasing. Looking behind the trend, state leaders learned about the Community Partnership approach implemented in two high-risk zip codes in Jacksonville. A closer look suggested that the strategies embraced in these neighborhoods resulted in fewer reports to the child abuse hotline and a bucking of the trend for increased foster care placements. The result? The governor and child protective services administrators provided funds to expand the Community Partnership approach to eleven additional communities across the state.

## THE FEAR FACTOR

The primary barrier to effective self-evaluation is fear: fear of the unknown, fear of how to get the right information, fear of getting bad news from the information, and fear of the “gotcha.” These are all legitimate concerns. But, they should not be allowed to paralyze a self-evaluation effort.

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*If we don't ask the questions, how do we know when to celebrate?*

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When we get news we don't want to hear, it is important to ask ourselves, “How can we use the information to emphasize effective action instead of playing the ‘blame game?’” An essential prerequisite to self-evaluation is a learning environment where both good news and bad news are used to strengthen case practices, program strategies, agency management, and network performance. If such an environment exists, get started and continually improve your efforts.

(continued on page 9)

# Using Data to Drive Reforms:

## Results and Success Stories from Community Partnerships

Child welfare agencies across the country are using data to drive their system reform efforts. This often conjures up images of data hounds sitting behind computers crunching numbers, poring over spread sheets late into the night, and then giving a trend analysis to the person in charge. But sometimes changes to a system can occur with curiosity, the right questions, and perseverance.

### USING DATA TO PROMOTE THE USE OF FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS IN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN

“Are families that are involved with child protective services, participate in family team meetings (FTMs) and receive individualized services doing any better than families who receive traditional child protective services?” This question was posed about a year ago to Theresa Pringle of the Department of Children and Families in Jacksonville, Florida. A member of the Community Partnership was curious about whether or not the family-centered practice approach was really working for families.

Initially, Ms. Pringle wondered if she would be able to collect the needed data; then she worried that it might not demonstrate the positive effects that she felt were occurring as a result of this innovative practice. Ms. Pringle reports: “In my heart I believed in FTMs and knew that it was making a difference! I just didn’t have the data to support my belief.” Ms. Pringle firmly believed that FTMs did lead to better outcomes for children and families. But how could she demonstrate that? After some thinking, Ms. Pringle decided to focus on repeat reports of child abuse and neglect for those families who participated in FTMs.

Using the FTM referral forms, 114 families who had participated in the FTM process over a nine-month period were

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**Results From Community Partnerships:**  
*Rates of repeat child abuse and neglect reports were almost 30% lower for families who had a FTM through the Jacksonville Community Partnership.*

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identified. This information was then cross-referenced manually against the log of hotline calls. The process was labor-intensive with much of the work requiring hand tallying. Nevertheless, Ms. Pringle worked on collecting the data in between her other duties. Two weeks later, the findings were in. Ms. Pringle states: “It was worth the effort! The results showed great success.” One

hundred families, over 85% of the sample, had not been re-reported for abuse or neglect - either because the children were safe at home or in foster or kinship care. The data were so compelling that she asked a quality manager to help her look at a longer time frame. They discovered that the rates of repeat reports were almost 30% lower for families who had FTMs over a fifteen-month period through the Community Partnership than for those receiving traditional CPS interventions.

Once Ms. Pringle had the data to support her belief that the FTM process works, she used the information in several ways:

- **To encourage workers to use the FTM process.** Using the data to back her up, Ms. Pringle intensified her efforts to get all of the frontline workers under her supervision to fully integrate the FTM process and individualized services into their practice.
- **To boost morale in those units already embracing the FTM process.** With the demands of high caseloads, frontline workers often go unrecognized for jobs well done. The results of the data analysis provided a great opportunity to acknowledge the hard work of staff that utilize family team meetings.
- **To help engage families in FTMs.** Frontline workers are now using this data to promote the FTM process with families.
- **To lobby support for this new way of doing business with state and local leaders** and administrators to encourage broader reform efforts.

### USING DATA TO CELEBRATE REDUCED RELIANCE ON TRADITIONAL FOSTER CARE

In Louisville, Kentucky, Marsha Roberts-Blethen, the child welfare manager heading up the Community Partnership’s out-stationed CPS teams, began collecting foster care placement data to see if their work was getting the desired results. The data revealed that traditional foster care placements rates have been reduced significantly from 1999 to 2003. The largest change was found in the neighborhood where the first Community Partnership in Louisville was established – Neighborhood Place Ujima. Traditional, non-familial foster care placement rates diminished by 70%. While definitive causality is difficult to establish, local leaders credit the Louisville Community Partnership, changes in management and supervisory practices, and the introduction of *Family to Family* for this precipitous drop.

Once this data were available, Ms. Roberts-Blethen created colorful bar charts showing how the traditional foster care rates had dropped at all Neighborhood Places. She made

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### **Results From Community Partnerships:**

*Traditional, non-familial foster care placements rates dropped by 70% at the Louisville, KY Community Partnership.*

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the charts more festive by putting stickers of happy faces and seasonal characters on them. The data were shared at staff meetings and with the steering committee to celebrate this progress. At first, workers and committee members laughed at the stickers but they were effectively drawn into taking a closer look at the

numbers. In addition to being a cause for celebration, the data reinforced for workers that practice changes can make a real difference for children and families.

### **USING DATA TO ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY IN FAMILY TO FAMILY**

Child welfare agencies implementing *Family to Family*, a reform initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, have found that sharing foster care data with the community can reap great benefits. Terri Ali of Family to Family states: "If you really have a partnership, then the neighborhood asks the questions and guides what data need to be shared. Residents soon realize that the data represent the children from their neighborhood - our children - and they begin to ask for more data and have more questions." Ms. Ali warns: "It will be testy at first. They don't think you will actually do something with the information." The data, however, can be used to draw out common interests, concerns, and areas for action between the agency and the community. Once the agency and the community build a relationship, the agency can ask "What are some of your ideas to help support these families and children - what can you do and what can we do?"

In Cuyahoga County, Ohio, one resident took the call to action to heart. She had been recruited as a "data link" to share foster care data with other residents and leaders in her neighborhood in order to get them more involved. She went to the school superintendent with data about the community and the number of children in out-of-home care. The superintendent dismissed her with an "I know what you mean, but I'm really busy right now." Undeterred, she asked the superintendent, "How much state allotment does the school receive per student?" She then multiplied this amount by 350 - the number of children that had been

taken out of the community and placed in out-of-home care. This astonishing number was enough for the superintendent to assign someone to attend all upcoming data-sharing meetings. After attending several meetings, the school district began sending out letters to parents asking them to consider becoming foster parents.

She also met with the local hospital and shared data indicating that all medically fragile children needing placement were being placed far away from home and the community. The hospital immediately agreed to train foster parents to support medically fragile children. Terri Ali truly believes that data can be a powerful tool. "Rather than remaining a powerless community person, this 'data link' became very powerful and was able to empower community partners to make a change." \*

## **A New Partnership with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice**

The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare is pleased to announce a new partnership with the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice. The Resource Center will make information on the Community Partnership approach available to states as part of a larger communications packet. State administrators who want technical assistance in implementing Community Partnerships will be able to make these requests through their regional U.S. Department of Health and Human Services offices. The Resource Center will then work with the Center for Community Partnerships to create the best technical assistance team with staff from one or both organizations, depending upon the nature of each request. For more information, please contact Elena Cohen at (202) 742-5340 or look online at <http://www.cwresource.org/services.htm>.

# Quality Service Reviews and Child and Family Services Reviews:

## Going Beyond the Numbers to Obtain Qualitative Data

**Q**uality Service Reviews (QSRs) are used to assess the effectiveness of child welfare practices and the implementation of Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. QSRs provide an in-depth look into how well families are being served by the partnerships, including the child welfare agency. These reviews, which have been used in nearly 20 states, move far beyond counting the number of services provided and instead take an intensive look at what is working well and the areas needing improvement. The variety of perspectives collected in a QSR come from the caregivers, the informal supports, children, formal service providers, and the primary case manager. The family is the most important component of the review.

These intensive reviews usually occur in a short time frame to provide a “snapshot” of how the family and the network supporting them are doing. Each review examines the degree to which individualized planning that genuinely includes the family is occurring.

### HOW ARE THE QSR DATA USED?

QSRs are an important learning tool, yielding information that is useful not only to track partnership progress. QSR data can also be used (1) as a supervisory tool,<sup>2</sup> (2) to engage key stakeholders and the community, and (3) to increase collaboration between the child welfare agency and other service providers - both public and private.

QSRs are not designed to replace quantitative data. Rather they complement the quantitative data historically used by child welfare administrators and supervisors. Sandy Lint, of the Iowa Community Partnership, characterizes the QSRs in this way: “Our most important ‘lesson learned’ is that the starting place for statewide reform is with the QSR. It motivates people, shifts the system from compliance to outcomes, and provides an excellent teaching opportunity on the frontline. Once you have experienced the QSR, there’s no going back. It provides an in-depth look at the system to help build on strengths and strategize about needs.”

QSR results can be used in many ways to accelerate broad system reform. Community Partnerships sites and other states have successfully used the QSRs to:

- lobby state legislatures for additional resources and policy changes;
- educate the community and increase community support for the child protection agency and the partnership;
- make adjustments to the network including reducing duplication of services and plugging service gaps;
- plan for technical assistance and training; and
- increase formal collaboration between agencies.

A member of the steering committee of the Louisville Community Partnership recently commented, “Reading the QSRs finally helped me understand the barriers we put up for families and that our job is to reorganize the system to reduce the barriers for them.”

### CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEWS

For the past three years, state child welfare agencies have been engaged with the federal Children’s Bureau in implementing a new approach to accountability of state child welfare systems known as Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs). This new approach begins with statewide assessments using quantitative data on outcomes that agencies are trying to achieve for their client families and children. The assessment is followed by intensive on-site reviews that involve in-person examination of a sample of cases and interviews with an array of stakeholders - much like the QSRs. The information produced during each review is used by the state to develop and implement a Program Improvement Plan (PIP).

The CFSR is more like a diagnostic screening than a final exam. They reveal areas of strengths, where state agencies have met or exceeded national standards, and point to areas needing improvement, where states fall below those standards. But determining the problem without developing and carrying out an aggressive plan to find a solution is a waste of resources. Not just a document to comply with federal regulations, states are finding the PIP is a meaningful way to use the information from the review. PIPs can provide the roadmap for that action. They offer both substantive and political leverage to focus serious, sustained attention on a reform agenda.

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<sup>2</sup> Also see “Quality Service Reviews: A Tool for Supervision” in *SafeKeeping*, vol. 7, no. 1, Winter 2003.

To gain federal approval of their PIPs, states must set targets that will demonstrate improvement on each of the performance measures for which they are not in substantial conformity to national standards. These targets must move the state closer to the national standards within a two-year time frame. During the two year program improvement period, each state must provide reports to the appropriate federal regional office and may renegotiate targets or elements of their plan. At the end of the two years, a second CFSR will be conducted to determine whether the state has accomplished the improvements outlined in its PIP. Although financial penalties can be assessed if the state's outcomes and performance measures fall below its targeted performance level, the Children's Bureau has been clear from the outset that the most important purpose of the CFSR-PIP endeavor is to initiate a process of continuous program improvement.

The following chart highlights the opportunities in the new accountability approach in CFSRs and PIPs compared to the old compliance to federal requirements in previous federal monitoring and oversight.

PIPs can transform a general intention to do better into a concrete set of results-oriented, highly focused strategies aimed at changing the way agencies, their partners, and the most affected communities are able to meet the challenges of safety, permanence, and well-being for children and families.

Of course, there is no guarantee that states will use their PIPs as guides toward reform. Sustained political will and state level commitment are crucial to whether states grasp that this is an historic opportunity to achieve reform in child welfare. \*

### Old and New Accountability Practices for Child Welfare Services<sup>3</sup>

OLD ACCOUNTABILITY - COMPLIANCE	NEW ACCOUNTABILITY - CFSRs & PIPs
Adherence to federal requirements	Strategic change
Penalty avoidance	Achievement of improvement targets
Vertical responsibility (to federal funding agency)	Horizontal responsibility (to families, community, state citizens)
Emphasis on "passing" the review	Emphasis on defining areas in need of improvement
Federal reviewers, with closely held decision-making about findings	Federal-state-peer review teams, with open discussion of findings
Paper-based review	Person-to-person and group interviews as input to reviews
Data is collected for reports to funding sources	Data is used by supervisors and workers to spotlight opportunities to improve practice
Data as evidence of compliance - noncompliance	Data as basis for forming questions about adequacy of practice
Agency alone held accountable	Agency shares responsibility with stakeholders and community
Sanctioning poor performance	Empowering program improvement
Litigation	Shared problem-solving

<sup>3</sup> "Improving the Performance and Outcomes of Child Welfare through State Program Improvement Plans (PIPs): The Real Opportunity of the Child and Family Services Review." The Center for the Study of Social Policy. (May 2003).

# The Power of Information:

## Automated Data Systems in the Community Partnerships

In Louisville, Kentucky, an automated system enables staff in the Hotline Unit to enter data into a computer while they are on the telephone taking a report of child abuse or neglect. In Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Family Support Workers (FSWs) visit families with a laptop, which is used interactively with the family as an integral part of a Quarterly Well-being Survey. These are two ways that the Community Partnerships are using automated data systems to improve data collection and ongoing self-evaluation, as well as to help in the service delivery process.

For the past several years, Metis Associates has been providing technical assistance to the Community Partnerships in the area of technology, specifically data collection and automated reporting systems. The objective of developing automated record-keeping tools has been to provide easy access to the multitude of information that sites collect and to use that information in meaningful ways.

Prior to implementation of the automated hotline system, workers in the Louisville Hotline Unit had no way of easily accessing information from the many reports of alleged child abuse or neglect that are telephoned into the unit on a daily basis. All the record keeping at that time was manual, and many time-consuming, labor-intensive hours were spent pulling together even the most basic information. In order to address this issue, an automated hotline system was developed that collects, stores, and reports information on all child abuse/neglect calls. Hotline workers record information directly into a user-friendly computer system while they are on the telephone with the caller. The system enables the worker to know immediately if a call came in previously on the same child, and questions about any call can be addressed instantly.

Supervisors also use information from the hotline system as a management tool to compare individual staff performance in a unit. Data such as the number of calls taken and pending calls by worker is especially useful when looked at over a period of time. Additionally, quarterly reports for self-evaluation purposes are produced directly by the system including data on the number of calls reported by zip code and the number of families referred to the Community Partnership for services and support. Information from the system is even used in partnering with the community. The supervisor of the Hotline Unit uses a printout report from the system in her regular meetings

with the public schools, and the report, which shows how many calls of abuse or neglect are coming from the schools, "helps to cement relations" and educate the community.

Cedar Rapids has implemented the family support worker laptop system. This system's groundbreaking features are designed so that FSWs are able to visit families with laptops in hand, and then together with families, review and assess progress using the computer as a tool. The FSWs' portable printers allow for printouts of progress graphs to be shared with families at the time of the visit. By bringing this type of interactive technology to the family's home, the family becomes an integral part of the process. In addition to dramatic service delivery implications, this system is a rich source of information for self-evaluation for the Community Partnership - quarterly reports are produced and reviewed by the steering committee. The project coordinator in Cedar Rapids told us that one family telephoned the FSW wanting to know if a visit would be taking place soon because they found it so helpful to do the assessment on the computer and immediately see the progress graph. \*

For more information, or a demonstration of these systems, you are invited to contact Rosalind Stevenson at Metis Associates, 212-425-8833, or email her at [rstevenson@metisassoc.com](mailto:rstevenson@metisassoc.com).

*In looking back over a triumphant race and a record-tying fifth consecutive Tour de France championship, Lance Armstrong captured the notion of self-evaluation well when he commented: "I'll be back, but I don't plan on being this vulnerable next year. I won't make the same mistakes again. The things I can't control, I hope to avoid next year. I'll try to evaluate the things that went wrong and try to change them."*



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(continued from page 3)

Another important prerequisite is a dedicated data analyst or “learning partner” to help with the technical aspects of data collection, analysis, and presentation. The four original Community Partnership sites have had staff analysts, interns and social work practicum students, and contracts with local universities and research organizations to conduct specific evaluations, analyze administrative data,

and write reports. *Family to Family* also encourages sites to develop partnerships when in-house technical assistance is not available. The University of California at Berkeley, for example, supports the self-evaluation efforts of the California counties implementing *Family to Family*.

## THE BOTTOM LINE

Are you asking questions about your progress? Are you getting answers? Are you sharing them? Are the answers triggering more questions? Are you celebrating success? Are you making necessary changes? Information is only powerful if it is used. Information left on the shelf or kept within a small workgroup cannot produce change effectively. Collect it. Share it. Use it wisely. \*

## Tips On Using Data as a Communications Tool to Build Partnerships

### CREATE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Review the data and determine:

- Who can use the information?
- Who are the target audiences?
- What are the messages to convey to each of these audiences?

### SUMMARIZE THE INFORMATION

Create a two-to-three page summary and/or a PowerPoint™ presentation of the findings. The decision-making group is the best avenue to partners and the community at large, so use their expertise to craft the messages. They can also help make sure the information is explained in clear, concise, and compelling language.

### COMMUNICATE WITH THE AUDIENCES

Here are some suggestions on audience-specific ways to use the information:

- Put the evaluation summary on the website.
- Create “messenger” to spread the word and give them tools such as talking points and presentations. Decision-making committees and neighborhood networks are an excellent source of messengers.
- Make presentations to key administrators, policymakers, funders and community leaders. Handouts with visuals such as charts and graphs will reinforce your message. Three things to remember in making a presentation to leaders:

1. Give the right information to the right people.
2. Do your research - how do the data reinforce the value of the partnership to their programs and goals?
3. Be sure the information is clear and easy to understand.

- Explore ways to use the data to get media attention. If the findings are not strong enough for a stand-alone media release, use the data in conjunction with other events to create a “hook” for the media. The following events present great opportunities to get the media (and the community) interested in the children and families served by the partnership:

- a local public figure discusses child maltreatment in a speech;
- an abused or neglected child becomes the focus of a news story;
- the release of a movie or a television show about child abuse and neglect;
- the opening of a new service in the community; or
- events around Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Month.

“Sharing evaluation data increases credibility and makes others want to help the partnership achieve its goals!”

— Mary Hoffman, FowlerHoffman LLC

# Data from Community Partnerships Have Implications for Program Improvement Plans

*“From the results of the first 32 Child and Family Services Reviews, we know that all states will need to address basic case planning issues, engagement of families in that process, improving the work with fathers, achieving permanency for children in foster care more appropriately and more timely, and providing a more accessible array of services especially in areas such as mental health and substance abuse. Attempting to address only one of these areas will not work since we work in an interrelated system, where changes or the lack of change in one has a direct effect on the other parts. We can only achieve the results we are seeking by directing our efforts at the system as a whole.”*

**Jerry Milner, Children’s Bureau**

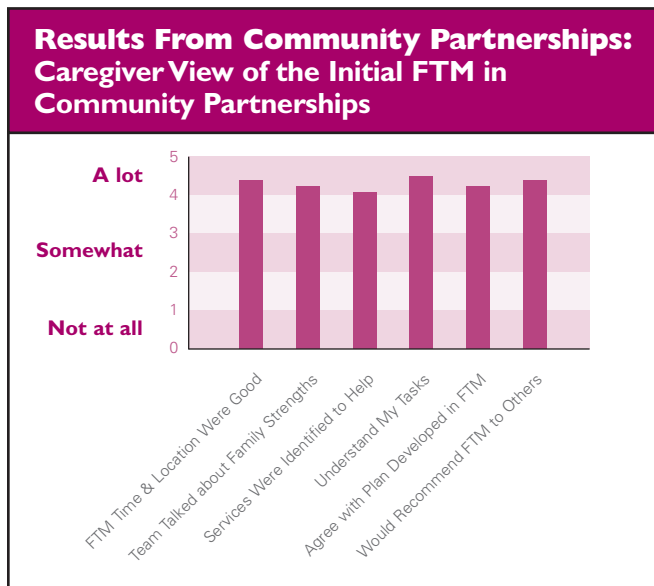
January 29, 2003 Annual Meeting of States and Tribes

The Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) results have also revealed these direct correlations:

- The CFSR indicator, **“developing case plans jointly with parents,”** was determined to be a strength for only six of the 32 states reviewed.
- States where this indicator was a strength had a significantly higher percentage of cases rated **“substantially achieved”** for Permanency Outcome 1, and all three Well-Being Outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

**National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice**

April 3, 2003 National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect



ICA Participant Study: Initial Findings from Parents and Caregivers. The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

### Self Evaluation and Data Resources

- The Community Partnerships’ Self Evaluation Guidelines
- Quality Service Reviews
- “The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice.” The Annie E. Casey Foundation’s *Family to Family*. (July 2001)
- “Improving the Performance and Outcomes of Child Welfare through State Program Improvement Plans: The Real Opportunity of the Child and Family Services Review.” The Center for the Study of Social Policy. (May 2003)

Do you want copies of these resources or to know more? Contact CSSP’s Clearinghouse on Community Based Approaches to Child Protection at 202-371-1565 or 212-979-2369.

The family team meeting process (FTM) used in the Community Partnerships can help address these areas and issues identified in the CFSR. Additionally, FTMs are designed to ensure that parents and families participate in the development of a case plan. Nearly 400 caregivers in the Community Partnership sites were interviewed after they participated in an initial FTM. Their views of the meeting are highlighted in the below chart.

States are beginning to incorporate the Community Partnership strategies into their Program Improvement Plan. For example, Iowa will mandate localities that are “out of compliance” in areas such as maintaining family connections, developing informal supports and involving parents in case-planning activities to use family team meetings throughout the life of a case. Kentucky is also planning to include family team meetings as a statewide practice improvement in its PIP. It is anticipated that other states will also include family team meetings in their Program Improvement Plans.\*

**4 Permanency Outcome:** 1. Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

**Well-being Outcomes:** 1. Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.  
 2. Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.  
 3. Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

# Making Us Want to Know More: Creative Ideas for Presenting Information

**N**umbers can be “just numbers” to many of us. If evaluation and analysis is not our calling, we often do not understand the numbers that we are seeing. We need visual aides. Bar charts, pie charts, and graphs are good ways to display numbers. Many of us remember a bar that is higher than any others or a pie piece that is twice the size of another even if we don’t remember the exact numbers. But even charts can be confusing and easily forgotten if they are trying to cover too much information.

Combining charts with symbols or pictures can help make the point. USA Today<sup>(d)</sup>, a national newspaper, is famous for its simple, eye-catching, front-page graphic displays of data from surveys and research. These graphics turn dollar bills into pie charts when the subject is the economy, or baseballs are used to show homerun production among players. They help us really “get” the point of the numbers.

Creative displays and presentations not only help us understand the information that is being presented, they often make us want to know more. Two ideas from the St. Louis Neighborhood Network (SLNN) might trigger your thinking about how to share information and whet appetites for more!

## EVERYBODY TALKS ABOUT THE WEATHER

The SLNN practice development and self-evaluation workgroup reviewed the information the Chapin Hall Center for Children obtained from interviewing 80 St. Louis families. These families had recently participated in a family support team meeting and started work on an individualized course of action. This evaluation information is rich with insights for practice and network support. In a presentation to the full SLNN Council, the workgroup used a strength-based approach to share key information using a weather report format.



**Things families think the SLNN is doing well.**



**Things that got mixed reviews from families.**



**Things families think the SLNN is not doing well.**

Using an approach like weather report symbols helps make the information more understandable and more memorable. It helps focus on the accomplishments - sunny days. It also effectively draws attention to areas of work needing improvement - the stormy weather. Unlike the weatherman, however, the SLNN can make changes that create more and more sunny days!

## TESTING THE TEACHERS

The St. Louis Neighborhood Network annually contracts with the St. Louis-based Institute for Applied Research (IAR) to provide an analysis of the state’s child protective services administrative data from the SLNN’s targeted zip codes. In May 2002, IAR produced a comprehensive report that provided valuable in-depth information about sexual abuse incidents and families who have had repeated reports to the Missouri Child Abuse Hotline. However, the report was nearly 40 pages - too long to fit into many busy schedules.

The leadership of the Sigel School Hub, where a Children’s Division (CD) unit is outstationed, thought the information about neighborhood families and child safety issues was too valuable not to share with the Sigel teachers. But how?

Turning the tables on the teachers, the Hub leadership created a simple 10-question, true-false test from the IAR report. Examples of questions include: “The Sigel CD unit receives over 100 hotline reports every month - Fact or Fiction,” and “63118 has the highest reported incidents of sexual abuse compared to other zip codes in St. Louis City - Fact or Fiction.” What better way to engage teachers than with a strategy that is all too familiar to them?

The teachers were given their “exam” at one of the regularly scheduled meetings with the public and private agency staff co-located at Sigel. It was a success. The teachers were anxious to know what they got right and wrong. They welcomed learning the information, and they wanted to know more - more about the children and families and more about how they could help.

These simple approaches will work with many different audiences and they are just two of the many creative ideas to “test” elsewhere. \*

# Outlook

## Counting for Change

Change does not occur easily. Service systems reach a standard way of operating and are resistant to change. Change takes vision, persistence, a willingness to test new ideas and evidence of the need for a different approach. As efforts are made all over this country to change the way families and children are served, we need to demonstrate that different approaches provide better results. By documenting the results of our efforts, we can move toward institutionalizing change in practice and public policy.

This has been an era of accountability for child welfare and other human services. The demand for accountability has increased. The Congress has required all federally funded programs to report on the result of their efforts. As a result child welfare policy now requires a focus on the outcomes for children. Measures have been developed to document system performance in the areas of safety, permanency and well being of children in foster care. Each of the states has developed automated systems for collection of data. At a time in which there is consensus that there is a need for reform, we must answer the “so what” question: What difference does our work make in the lives of children and families? Beyond that, we need to be able to describe what we have done to achieve improved results so that successful efforts can be replicated and used to shape policy and the allocation of resources.

Information is power. Information can help challenge the status quo. Information is important in making a case for adopting successful strategies. Information can change the way we provide services, the level of support we get from our partners, our relationship with communities, and the policies that govern what we do. In the absence of information on the nature and results of practice changes, we will either continue to operate in the same way or modify our practices without a clear rationale. Organizations serving children should be engaged in ongoing self-evaluation, which allows the documentation of successes and what needs improvement. Self-evaluation provides the opportunity to make changes and track their impact at the program, unit and worker levels.

In order to use data for change, we need to be willing to answer hard questions:

- What are the characteristics, needs and strengths of our clients?
- What are the program goals?
- Are we delivering services in the way they are intended?
- To what extent have we achieved the goals?

- What barriers have been encountered?
- What actions can we take to improve the results for children and families?

Once we are able to answer these questions, we should actively engage in the analysis of the issues and problem-solving to develop strategies to improve the results. To the extent we are inclusive of other stakeholders in this process, we will be able to strengthen the constituencies that will support future reform strategies. Including others allows us to benefit from multiple perspectives and expertise. As a field, we are very good at including the perspectives of other service providers and systems. However, there are voices that are rarely heard in our effort — those of the clients we serve. As we attempt to improve the results for families and children, it is important to have their perspective on the meaning of data, how they experience services and their recommendations for change.

Data and the inclusive analysis of issues and problem-solving can strengthen our reform efforts. Through the process of planned scrutiny and review, we can continue to improve the quality and effectiveness of our work. Data can help us move reform efforts to scale. \*

*Carol W. Spigner, Ph.D., Kenneth L. Prey Professor  
University of Pennsylvania, School of Social Work*

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**Editor:** *Clare Anderson*

**Guest Editor:** *Aman D’Mello*

**Design:** *Xanthus Design, Washington DC*

**Contact Us for More Information**

**Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare**  
700 Broadway  
Suite 301  
New York, NY 10003  
phone: (212) 979-2369  
fax: (212) 995-8756

**Center for the Study of Social Policy Welfare**  
1575 Eye Street, N.W.  
Suite 500  
Washington DC 20005  
phone: (202) 371-1565  
fax: (202) 371-1472

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