

A Neighborhood Network to Support Families and Protect Children

What Does a Network Look Like?

A "network" of neighborhood supports and community resources is comprised of interconnected people, agencies, and institutions that strengthens and upholds families. Network members serve as the "eyes and ears" for the community to provide early outreach to families who need help. The network provides many of the resources that families need by melding together the strengths of families, friends, and informal supports combined with the assets of formal service providers.

The Community Partnerships for Protecting Children are building networks that fulfill the vision of a web of accessible, usable, ready-when-you-need-them support systems. In the Community Partnerships, three broad child safety outcomes act as the "glue" to bind together and focus the work of the network members. These outcomes include:

- Children in the targeted neighborhoods will be less likely to be abused or neglected.
- Children who come to the attention of child protective services will be less likely to be re-abused or neglected.
- Serious injury to children due to abuse and neglect will decrease.

By keeping the focus on these outcomes, network members weave together the right mix of help so that families get what they need, when they need it, to keep children safe in their own homes and communities.

When a retired school bus driver notices her neighbor's eight-year-old son walking around the neighborhood after school, she suggests to his parents that she can watch him a few days a week until one of them is home from work. The parents eagerly accept the offer.

On the days when the neighbor has her own activities and cannot watch the boy, she volunteers to take him from school to the neighborhood Boys and Girls Club to participate in a sports program. Through the Boys and Girls Club, the boy becomes involved in tutoring and mentoring program. His parents are invited to the Boys and Girls Club for a series of

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safekeeping

Neighborhood-based Partnerships in Washington, D.C.

The Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaboratives

The Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaboratives in Washington, D.C. share a vision of professionals and community residents alike joining hands to strengthen families within their own neighborhoods. Community organizers, neighbors,



clergy, family support workers, clinical social workers, teachers, protective services workers, and, in some cases, psychologists and addiction counselors, work together to create a neighborhood-based safety net for children and families. The eight Collaboratives are located in seven of the eight wards of the city and will serve over 1,000 families this year. Funding for the Collaboratives is primarily provided through the District's public child welfare agency, although Collaboratives also seek funding from local and national foundations and other governmental sources like the Weed and Seed Program of the U.S. Department of Justice.

The Columbia Heights-Shaw Family Support Collaborative, as one example, divides its efforts into three areas: family support, family preservation, and community capacity-building. All services are provided in Spanish and English, a reflection of the cultural diversity of the two neighborhoods it serves. The family support work of the Collaborative includes the support of a home-visitation program called Healthy Families D.C., and the development of Parents Anonymous groups. The Collaborative has also partnered with a local theater, The Living Stage, to help parents develop their children's creativity and imagination.

Family group decision-making is a key component of the Collaborative's family preservation work. A recent contract with the District's public child welfare agency will allow the Collaborative to provide family group decision-making conferences to families identified by the child abuse and neglect intake hotline. This will allow for a more comprehensive initial

assessment and encourage extended family involvement to support each child and family member.

The community capacity-building efforts of this Collaborative include broadening the scope, quality, and delivery of services, strengthening the links between partner organizations, and actively working to bring new resources into the community. One example includes an enhanced partnership with For Love of Children (FLOC), a community-based, non-profit social service agency, and a national foundation to provide expanded foster care services to large families. This initiative dramatically changes foster care practice by including family group decision-making, wraparound services, and the use of flexible funds. As it moves into its fourth year of operation, the Collaborative is now expanding its efforts to more directly address issues of youth development, community safety, and access to technology.

The Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaborative Council, the citywide governing body for the eight Collaboratives, provides leadership and direction regarding the development and implementation of a citywide neighborhood-based family support system. The Council meets on a monthly basis to develop policies and standards and to coordinate the work of the Collaboratives. Two representatives from each Collaborative, including one resident representative, sit on the Council. Professionals and residents work together to re-engineer the existing child welfare service delivery system into one that is family-focused, strengths-based, and neighborhood specific. *

Want to know more?

For more information on the Healthy Families Thriving Communities Collaboratives contact:

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Visit us on the Web!

The Center for the Study of Social Policy has a **WEB SITE!** (<http://www.cssp.org>) Visit us and find out about a wonderful resource: **The Clearinghouse on Community Based Approaches to Child Protection.** The Clearinghouse can help you access over 500 documents covering a variety of issues concerning community based approaches to child protection. There are over 30 documents that can be downloaded right from the site! Be sure to explore, and let us know what you think.
<http://www.cssp.org>

Building the Network: Strategies and Lessons

All Community Partnerships had experience with community-based and integrated social service delivery before the Partnerships were initiated. As a result, the sites' network development efforts have been a combination of building on existing assets and launching new strategies. To borrow from a popular phrase, network-building is not "rocket science" - there is no complicated or mysterious formula. But that does not make it quick or easy. All the Community Partnerships agree that it boils down to relationship-building, often starting with two interested people trying to resolve a problem. The primary ingredients are time and persistence.

Drawing on site experience and the work of Chapin Hall Center for Children, the initiative's evaluators, this article highlights some of the key strategies used and lessons learned as sites have strived to create networks.

STRATEGIES FOR MAKING FORMAL SERVICES AND RESOURCES WORK BETTER FOR FAMILIES

As Chapin Hall reported, professionals at all the Community Partnership sites "focused considerable energy in developing more effective connections among local service providers in order to reduce the barriers families face in accessing necessary services." Multiple strategies are being used to accomplish this goal. Many strategies are similar across sites. Some are unique to individual sites. Here is a brief overview of some of the key strategies.

■ Locating services together in the neighborhood

From the beginning, even before the formal organization of the Community Partnerships, all of the sites have co-located service providers in neighborhood locations known as "hubs," either schools or community centers. This allows the child protective services worker and domestic violence specialist to work closely together with a family on developing a safety plan for both adults and children, or the child protective services worker to talk directly to family support workers, housing specialists, mental health, and substance abuse counselors. Referrals can be made easily and efficiently among providers who share office space. Chapin Hall's evaluation underscores the importance and potential of this strategy. The evaluators noted that in the two sites where services were located most closely together, there was "strong evidence that co-location in community based settings played a critical role in improving worker collaboration and service coordination (e.g., more informed referral decisions, easier linkage of families to referrals, better communication among workers)." Chapin Hall also cautions, however, that "the physical arrangement is insufficient to ensure these types of positive outcomes ... considerable planning and communication efforts are needed to ensure that these types of physical placements result in productive and sustained change in practice."

■ Making new agreements among providers, both public and private

Co-location provides an opportunity for being clearer about expectations and requirements among partners. This has often led to specific written agreements or service contracts. By contracting with the county substance abuse program to co-locate a case manager in the neighborhood, the Louisville Community Partnership has strengthened the link between all substance abuse providers in the county and provided direct access of neighborhood families to substance abuse assessments. In St. Louis, two private agencies have agreed to be the administrative homes for two family support workers. One does outreach with pregnant and parenting women. The other is dedicated to supporting the child protective services caseload in the neighborhood by working with families who have been repeatedly reported for neglecting their children. However, St. Louis also acknowledges that making formal agreements with providers in the network has not been easy. Community Partnership staff suggest that a number of agencies willing to participate in the network and support its activities have been unwilling or unable to fulfill all the requirements of a prescribed contract and have preferred to keep their participation on a less formal level.

■ Establishing teams, task forces, and committees to work on service delivery and practice challenges

All of the Community Partnerships have formed or strengthened workgroups to address how to better integrate services among service providers. Some of these workgroups focus on individual cases presented by caseworkers seeking assistance. Often called a "case staffing," the workgroups are frequently able to supply the needed resources and referrals a caseworker needs to offer to a family. New resources and greater service integration have emerged out of these efforts. In Cedar Rapids, for example, case consultation for families with domestic violence and child protection concerns has shaped a specialized network of services for children who are witnesses to violence. Other such committees have a county or citywide agenda for responding to sexual abuse that have incorporated law enforcement and hospital representatives to improve the network of available services to child victims.

■ Developing opportunities for sharing information and building skills

"Cross-training" has long been a technique to build a shared knowledge and skill base among individuals from different agencies and different disciplines. In Louisville, this technique has been used to spread solution-based casework methods among front-line staff from a variety of state, county, and private agencies. Other sites have used cross-training to make staff from different agencies better understand what each other does, including "shadowing" each other for a day. Another example

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of information-sharing is the "Coffee Talks" strategy used in St. Louis' Community Partnership. This is a monthly forum used to highlight the work and services of partner agencies (and others) and provides an opportunity for networking. Attendance averages around 25 people each month.

■ Developing and using common tools

The Community Partnerships sites are using common tools that bring agency practices together and reduce confusion families may experience when they are working with several agencies. For example, in St. Louis, a common assessment process has been developed for use by child protective services staff and private agency staff as well. This tool is used to identify family strengths and needs. It is shared with participating agencies and avoids putting families through separate but similar assessments. Likewise, the Louisville Community Partnership has an assessment process that is shared among the co-located service providers. Cedar Rapids family support workers have designed and implemented an assessment tool that they are using to measure a family's progress over time. Jacksonville and Cedar Rapids both have established common assessment procedures and protocols with the domestic violence service providers in their communities. Another tool being used by public and private agencies in all the Community Partnership sites is the family team meeting. [See Fall 1999 *SafeKeeping* issue on ICAs] The family team meeting brings family members and their own personal support system together with service providers to share information and make plans for services and family safety. This meeting helps to coordinate services for families and encourages families to be full participants in the planning process.

WHAT HAVE THESE EFFORTS ACHIEVED?

These efforts seem to be paying off in all sites according to information collected by Chapin Hall. In a survey of managers

who work in agencies considered to be part of the networks, Chapin Hall learned about the relationship among agencies in the respective networks and how the managers viewed coordination and collaboration. According to the results, "almost 75 percent of the managers reported an increased level of coordinated activity with other agencies during the past two years." Furthermore, analyzing the Network development in two of the four sites, Chapin Hall noted, "While the Networks of service providers are not new in these sites, the modes of coordinating and organizing their collaborative operations are now undergoing fundamental change." However, there was also a sense among many survey respondents that we have not yet reached the full operations of a network as it is envisioned by the initiative. Just over half of the managers felt additional emphasis on collaboration was needed in order to advance the Community Partnerships' objectives.

STRATEGIES FOR IDENTIFYING AND INCLUDING INFORMAL SUPPORTS

The previously described strategies, designed to make the formal system of providers work better for families, have counterparts in communities all over the country. However, in making sure the networks fully support families, the Community Partnerships are looking beyond formal service providers to family support systems and community resources. This was new work for the sites – there was very little groundwork in the communities or models from around the nation to follow. This has also been hard work. The Community Partnerships have developed a number of creative strategies that are having some modest success. These strategies include:

■ Recognizing neighborhood assets

A key value of the Community Partnership approach is the recognition that all neighborhoods have assets, particularly human assets, that are already providing support to families or have something valuable to offer their neighbors. To identify these assets, all the Community Partnerships have conducted some form of community survey. Each Partnership recruited residents or students to go door-to-door, visiting with families, informing them about the Partnership, and asking what ideas they had for improving their neighborhoods as well as what they had to offer. The act of collecting the information was in itself valuable. The surveys helped to increase general awareness of the Community Partnerships and begin the necessary relationship-building in the neighborhoods. But the Community Partnerships have thus far done little with the survey results. Plans for resource directories and "banks" are still in the design phase. A variation on this approach in St. Louis was a "Neighbor Helping Neighbor" raffle. Residents were asked to tell how they had helped a neighbor and several responses were randomly drawn at a Community Partnership meeting with the winners receiving gift certificates to local businesses.

■ Sponsoring community celebrations

Everybody loves a party! Community celebrations are used to highlight neighborhood assets and build awareness of child safety – making child protection “everyone’s business.” In the beginning, Community Partnership and agency staff bore much of the responsibility for planning and executing these celebrations. Not any more. Now, more often than not, the events are suggested, planned, and run by neighborhood residents themselves. Examples of celebrations include family picnics both at the beginning and end of the school year. Resident groups have also asked for funds to support health fairs where the Community Partnerships have booths with information about child safety. Both Jacksonville and St. Louis have sponsored “blue ribbon” events in April to advertise Child Abuse Prevention Month. In addition to making and distributing blue ribbon lapel pins, Jacksonville has laid claim to the “largest ever human blue ribbon formation,” and St. Louis can rattle off the amount of blue ribbon distributed to school and neighborhood groups who have taken the message to the streets by wrapping trees, fences, and light posts with blue ribbons.

■ Funding “Great Ideas”

A strategy to provide a small amount of “seed money” to support resident proposals has unleashed community creativity and added network links in Jacksonville and Louisville. Resident and neighborhood groups have suggested a range of ideas to help keep families and children safe or increase awareness of community child protection. For example, in Jacksonville, a resident wanted to make her home a “safe house” for women who needed to leave an abusive partner. For a modest sum of approximately \$200, she was able to make adjustments to her apartment that would allow her to accommodate an additional family in an emergency situation. In Louisville, a local minister received \$2,100 to organize a program for children whose parents are struggling with substance abuse. These Community Partnerships have demonstrated that a small amount of funding can be stretched a long way.

■ Recruiting neighborhood leaders to be “links” in the network

The Community Partnerships have looked to the natural neighborhood leaders to help spread the child safety message and connect families in need of assistance with available resources. These natural leaders include people who serve as “block links,” - volunteers who welcome new families to the neighborhood, organize residents on the block to be alert to crime, and help families find the services they need. Natural leaders have also been designated “neighborhood helpers” – individuals who provide some direct assistance to families such as transportation, meals, or child care. In some Community Partnerships, like Louisville and Cedar Rapids, these neighborhood helpers receive a modest stipend for committing 10 to 15 hours a month to the Community

Partnership. They meet regularly to discuss their work and act as a support group for one another, sharing information about local resources and reinforcing the good work each does. Louisville uses its Community Resource Teams strategy to structure and organize family members and hub staff into “fluid” teams that respond to family needs. A community liaison whose activities include assessing, intervening, and providing services to at-risk families in the neighborhood spearheads these teams.

■ Providing community education

All of the Community Partnerships have taken community awareness of child maltreatment a step further. They are equipping residents and families with the knowledge of how to prevent and respond to maltreatment through an array of educational opportunities. The Louisville Community Partnership developed “Talk Shops” as a means to involve parents in a range of trainings and discussions on topics chosen by residents. All of the Community Partnerships have offered residents the opportunity to become involved in the Front Porch Project® developed by the American Humane Association. This training



program offers participants insights about the causes of child maltreatment and simple strategies they can use to identify and respond to situations where children are at risk. Parents Anonymous groups have taken root in some of the Community Partnerships. These provide parents with support for good parenting behaviors as well as increase their self-awareness and knowledge of child maltreatment. Louisville has organized “Families Helping Families” conferences. These one-day events highlight good parenting practices and connect families with resource information.

■ Using “Community Support Agreements”

The Department of Children and Family Services in Jacksonville pioneered Community Support Agreements before the start of

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the Community Partnership, but their use has grown over the last few years. A Community Support Agreement is an understanding among the Department, a community volunteer, and a child and his family. The purpose of the agreement is to encourage and foster creative community involvement with children and families in need of services. It also provides the community volunteer with an outline of the "limitations both legally and morally" necessary to protect the best interest of the child and family. This agreement is intended to increase the responsibility of a team of people, including the parent or



guardian, and to ensure the on-going safety of the child with support from the community. These agreements have been used to link and strengthen ties between families and their relatives, friends, ministers, teachers, and neighbors.

■ Reaching out to the "grassroots"

In addition to the traditional nonprofit service providers, every community has service and support organizations "nested" within others. For example, churches and schools sponsor Boy and Girl Scout troops or other after-school activities. Many blocks have family day care homes that are individually licensed, but not necessarily connected to any agency or formal provider. The same may be said about small, independent health clinics. The Jacksonville Community Partnership, for one, is tapping into these existing "grassroots" networks through a variety of means. For example, the Resident Services Coordinators at the neighborhood housing complexes help families become involved in the housing community as well as the Community Partnership as a whole. They help connect families to all of the organizations and services offered within

the community, including Head Start, health care providers, and Scouts. Through their efforts, the Jacksonville Community Partnership is able to bring already existing community resources into the larger network and increase the number of supports, consumers of supports, and people aware of the good work of the Community Partnership. In addition, the Community Partnership currently hosts a regular meeting of these organizations to share information and encourage further network development.

■ Designating staff to "beat the bushes"

All Community Partnerships have hired staff to bolster the development of community resources as well as enhance the link between the community supports and formal agency providers. These individuals have become deeply involved in the communities, and they use their knowledge of needs to help fill service gaps on a variety of levels. In one Community Partnership, for instance, residents recognized a need for a recreation program in the community and, with the help of the community support staff, were able to organize a program in local parks that served over 80 children in a summer day camp. These individuals spend much of their time finding informal and formal resources to add to the network by going to churches, block parties, parent-teacher meetings, and other community events. They have learned that word of mouth and personal connection are the best advertisements for the Community Partnerships.

WHAT RESULTS CAN WE POINT TO?

As noted, intentionally incorporating and supporting the informal community residents is a very new way of working in all the Community Partnership sites. Each site can point to modest success at the individual family level. More and more, sites are seeing increasing amounts of in-depth support to families provided by their own support systems. Family team meetings have included families and friends who promise support and have sustained that support. However, it does not appear that the child welfare agencies have completely integrated this new way of collaborating with families and communities. According to the results of Chapin Hall's agency manager survey: "In general, agencies were least likely to be involved with the community resources (neighborhood groups/associations, residents serving as informal supports, business/trade groups, and, to a lesser extent, hubs/neighborhood places). They were somewhat more likely to be involved with institutional resources (police, courts), and most likely to be involved with the schools and specialized social services ..."

Rather than being discouraged by this finding, the Community Partnerships are doubling their efforts. They recognize that new strategies will take time. ✨

The Front Porch Project®

Giving People the Tools and Confidence to Help Their Neighbors

The Children's Services of the American Humane Association (AHA) believes that it is everyone's responsibility to protect children. The Front Porch Project® was created to evoke memories of a time when front porches were the places where neighbors gathered to catch up, offer advice, or to assist other neighbors when necessary. It recognizes that today such citizen participation is still necessary to create a support system for children and families in neighborhoods. But often people do not know how to provide support or do not feel confident that they can help. The Front Porch Project® is designed to help citizens learn what actions they can take to more safely, confidently, appropriately, and frequently intervene when they encounter a situation in which the treatment a child makes them uncomfortable. Through a training program and follow-up technical assistance, they learn that even small gestures can make a difference, such as:

- offering to baby-sit to give a stressed parent a needed break,
- talking quietly to an adult on the verge of losing control with a child,
- advocating for after-school programs, or
- getting involved in neighborhood programs.

The Front Porch Project® was first piloted in Tacoma, Washington. The second pilot was in Arapahoe County, Colorado. It is now available to communities around the country. To date, project participants have represented a cross-section of their communities and include retired citizens, community volunteers, professionals, college students, homemakers, day care providers, etc.

Comments from people who have been trained demonstrate the effect such an opportunity can provide. They now feel like they are better able to step-in and handle a situation effectively and comfortably.

To learn more about AHA's Front Porch Project®, contact:

American Humane Association, Children's Services
63 Inverness Drive East
Englewood, Colorado, 80112-5117
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Fax: (303)792-5333
Website: www.americanhumane.org
Email: children@americanhumane.org

Chapin Hall Center for Children:

Evaluating Community Partnerships for Protecting Children

The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation has awarded grants to the Chapin Hall Center for Children to evaluate the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children initiative. For the last few years, Chapin Hall researchers have been assessing the four sites' initial implementation progress through surveys, interviews, analysis of site documentation, and observation. The following work products are available through The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation:

PARTNER SURVEY REPORT

This report contains the results of a 1998 survey of initiative partners (residents and organizational leaders) to document the different views of those involved in Community Partnership governance or those aware of the initiative's local efforts. Each site reports provides information about who was involved in the Community Partnership, the nature of their involvement, and their views of their own involvement, local Community Partnership governance and decision-making, and progress in implementation.

INDICATORS OF PROGRESS REPORT

This report summarizes the evidence available to Chapin Hall regarding the degree to which sites achieved an expected level of implementation by October 1999. It also articulates critical lessons for future planning.

NETWORK AGENCY MANAGERS SURVEY REPORT

This report documents the perception of agency managers regarding the nature and strength of interagency collaboration and coordination found within Community Partnership networks. Of 102 managers targeted for the survey, 77 responded. Those responding reported on the levels and types of network actions, the quality of local service provision, and the changes in the level and quality of activities over time. Chapin Hall plans to repeat this survey in the next two years to assess changes.

PHASE I FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

This report summarizes findings from Chapin Hall's evaluation of the initial implementation phase, primarily the activities between July 1998 and October 1999. It draws on the key findings of the earlier reports mentioned above.

All of these reports offer constructive insight for the Community Partnerships, and they have used this information to improve their strategies. The next phase of the evaluation will focus more on outcomes – are the Community Partnerships making a difference – but it will also continue to assess and document implementation process for the valuable lessons it yields. ✨

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potluck suppers where parents and school counselors talk about the needs of growing children and share parenting practices that work.

In this instance, the parents needed to look no further than their neighbor's house to find a doorway to readily accessible supports linked together to help them strengthen their family and protect and nurture their child. The supports and resources needed to create an effective network like the one described above are available in any given community and include:



- **Informal family supports** – These are the relatives and friends that are part of a family's everyday circle. Research, as well as common sense, tells us that families turn first to this support system when either major or minor problems arise.
- **Community resources** – These are the neighborhood or community's own unique organizations and groups that are often well known for the help they can provide. These include faith communities, family resource or community centers, support groups, or food pantries. These resources offer help to any family coming through their doors. The help may come in the form of recreational activities, after-school care, parenting programs, food or shelter, self-help groups, or other types of assistance.
- **Institutional resources** – These are the schools, hospitals, police, etc., that are found in every community. Not only do they provide direct services to families and communities, but they also play vital roles in linking families to other supportive resources. Examples include the police

providing critical referrals to domestic violence shelters, hospitals linking new families to home-visiting programs, and schools housing after-school programs.

- **Social Services** – These are the services and supports provided by more formal service providers that are designed to address specific problems that children and families face. These include services to address child abuse and/or neglect, domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health issues, and other concerns.

In reality, these services and supports are rarely organized into a cohesive system. They often operate independently of one another and are weakly linked. The incomplete or fragile connections become more evident when a family is in crisis. Organized social services alone are often believed or expected to be the "answer" to a family's problems; rarely is the family's own circle of support recognized for the role it can play.

For example, child protection workers, domestic violence service providers, and others are often frustrated when they try to help families get the full array of services they need from other formal service providers. They are confronted with conflicting policies, eligibility requirements, and waiting lists. In addition, workers often do not have the experience and training necessary to locate and use a family's own support system or community-based resources. In short, the families are not connected to services and supports because the variety of assistance they require cannot be assembled in time and in a fashion that actually meets their needs.

HOW DOES AN EFFECTIVE NETWORK OF NEIGHBORHOOD SUPPORTS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES WORK?

In the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children, connections among the different kinds of neighborhood and more traditional supports are strengthened and used effectively to respond to family needs. There are two overarching principles that can be applied to the development of this network.

- First, long-term resources for helping families prevent child abuse can be found in the communities where families live.
- Second, the four major categories of support and resources mentioned earlier must interact effectively to help families thrive and to safeguard the most vulnerable children.

The following example illustrates these principles.

A mother is reported to child protective services for physically abusing her 4-year-old daughter. While the physical injuries to the child are not serious, the child protection services worker notes that the mother is overwhelmed by her work schedule (working the night shift and trying to care for her child during the day). While the maternal grandmother is helpful and takes

Figure 1

- Child protective services
- Schools
- Domestic violence services
- Substance abuse treatment services
- Child care centers
- Health care providers
- Police
- Family preservation services
- Faith communities
- Mental health services
- Family courts
- Housing services
- Adult corrections services
- Local businesses
- Family support and other preventive services
- Resident volunteers
- Volunteer-based organizations:
 - Boy/girl scouts
 - Neighborhood associations
 - Parent/Teacher associations
 - Support groups

care of the child at night, the grandmother's own work schedule prevents her from caring for the child during the day so the mother can rest. The child protective services worker helps the mother get her little girl into a Head Start program, which she attends every day. Head Start meets at a family resource center located a few blocks from the mother's apartment. The family resource center also offers job placement services. The mother meets with an employment counselor who helps her find a day-time job with better pay and benefits. The mother now has time and energy to explore more effective ways of disciplining her child. The child protective services worker calls upon a trained volunteer through a local church to work one-on-one with the mother around behavior issues with her daughter. Before closing the child protective services case, the worker, mother, maternal grandmother, trained volunteer, and Head Start teacher meet to develop a behavior plan for the little girl.

In this example, services and supports from across the network are brought to bear on the identified problem of child abuse and, before the case is closed to formal services, an action strategy is in effect to use informal and neighborhood-based resources to strengthen the family and keep the daughter safe.

KEY NETWORK-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

Building, enhancing, and broadening networks is a fundamental responsibility of Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. From the start, there was an expectation that certain

organizations and individuals were essential to an effective network of supports and resources for families. Over time, as the Community Partnerships have gained more experience and learned more about family strengths and needs, a number of additions have been made. Some are unique to the communities, others are not. Current thinking suggests the list shown in Figure 1 is reasonably comprehensive. All of the Community Partnerships have or are striving to integrate these organizations or individuals, linking each one to the other. They have been forming these links and building network capacity through:

- **Creating and deploying neighborhood teams**
These teams are comprised of child protective and other professionals and neighborhood residents who work together to develop and implement family action and safety plans.
- **Engaging community and neighborhood leaders and other residents**
For the neighborhood teams to be complete and effective, community volunteers are being recruited, trained, supported, and recognized to provide a safe environment for children.
- **Enlisting key service providers to assure more timely connections for families**
Working agreements and joint service delivery with domestic violence services, substance abuse treatment, and mental health providers have been a focus of network building.
- **Developing family places, or "hubs," in neighborhoods**
These are locations that are accessible and welcoming to



families, house the professional/resident teams, and provide needed family support activities;

All of the Community Partnerships have solid achievements to show for their efforts. Pages 3-6 provide more description of these and other network-building activities. None, however, would claim that they have a complete or perfectly functioning

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network. There are still too many gaps and weak links. Targeted outreach to vulnerable families has lacked focus, but more efforts are under way. Resident engagement has been a central activity for all Community Partnerships, and it is beginning to pay off with more neighbors stepping in to help each other.

In addition, not all of the organizations and individuals listed in Figure 1 are equally involved or committed to building stronger ties. Connections between child protective and domestic violence service providers have been easier to forge in some communities than others. Likewise, the schools and faith communities are more involved in some Community



Partnerships than others. These circumstances underscore that network-building is hard, intentional, and on-going work.

NETWORK MEMBERSHIP: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

There are different network membership entry points, both formal and informal, for organizations and individuals. As a result, the notions of "membership" and the "role of members" have generally been very broadly defined in the Community Partnerships. Some members focus on providing support to one family. For example, neighbors who are part of one family's support team and provide respite care for that family are considered part of the network even if they do not see themselves in the larger context of "the network." Other network members participate more or less regularly in a work group or hub. The president of a neighborhood association who is active in planning hub activities is an example of this level of participation. Another example is the front-line caseworker who participates on a task force to improve the integration of domestic violence and child protective services. Most involved are organizations and individuals who willingly share resources, implement new front-line practice with families, provide support for network efforts, or are actively involved in cooperative decision-making and creative community problem-solving. This includes resident leaders and residents who are becoming leaders as a result of the training and knowledge they have received from the Community Partnerships. These individuals identify families needing more assistance than the neighborhood resources alone can offer, and they help them connect with the appropriate service provider. They respond with assistance when a formal provider is helping a family to build its own, individual web of support. This category also includes agency staff that embrace new roles and responsibilities such as working with informal supports and becoming involved

in neighborhood events. Finally, it includes organizations that respond to the Community Partnership's invitation to develop new resources, use existing resources more creatively, and sustain work to date.

SUSTAINING THE NETWORK

The broad definition of membership has allowed flexibility for people and organizations to contribute as they can. This has been a useful approach to reach many people, agencies, and organizations with the message of improved services for child protection. Creating a tighter web of support and sustaining it, however, will require many of those who have limited involvement now to become more engaged and committed. That is why the Community Partnerships will never consider "network-building" a completed task. They are continually reaching out and nurturing new relationships with persistence and positive results for children and families. When the network functions well on behalf of a child, the positive results are natural building blocks for improved cooperation and coordination among all network members. This is an on-going building process, making networks fluid and evolving. What these networks look like today will likely change by next month and certainly by next year. ✨

New on the web:

Community Partnerships for Protecting Children web sites:

St. Louis: <http://stlouis.missouri.org/501c/slnn/>

Louisville: <http://cfc.state.ky.us/kipda/pg04.html>

New in print:

"Citizen Power for Stronger Families" by Andrew White

"Strengthening Communities: A Family-Centered Strategy in Jacksonville, Florida" by Andrew White
(Article in *Best Practice Next Practice* was adapted from "Citizen Power for Stronger Families")

Getting Started on Community Child Protection

The Center for the Study of Social Policy has moved! Please make note of our new location:

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Community Engagement – Linking Families to the Network

Improving connections across agencies is a challenging task for each of the four Community Partnership communities. Even more difficult, however, is engaging neighborhood residents to participate in a community child protection agenda. Nonetheless, to have a full network of supports for vulnerable children and families, both agencies and informal helpers must be available.

Early in each Community Partnership's development, leaders asked themselves, "Will residents be interested in joining our partnership?" "What can we offer them?" "What can they offer to their neighbors?" Sites struggled to answer these questions. Ultimately, each site realized that hiring a staff person dedicated to community outreach is critical to full inclusion of community members in a wide range of Community Partnership activities – from serving on governing boards to preparing for community celebrations to providing one-on-one help to children and families who are struggling.

Lesson 1: Pay attention to issues that worry residents.

A neighborhood coordinator for Jacksonville's Community Partnership meets often with parents and residents, learning about their concerns and finding ways to address them. One important lesson for recruiting residents as partners is learning to pay attention to issues that worry them. Only then will the Community Partnership gain the trust of community members. The neighborhood coordinator recently said: "We had a meeting where a resident voiced concern about the safety of unsupervised children in her neighborhood. In response, we approached an agency that is part of our network and asked for its help. The agency began an after-school program right in the apartment complex where the kids live. It's a great program for a lot of reasons – it grew out of a plea for help, we know the kids there are safe, and we use the program to share information about the work of the Community Partnership by sending fliers home with kids that showcase upcoming activities."

Lesson 2: Build on early successes.

In Louisville, Deborah Turner is one of the community specialists supported by the Community Partnership. Armed with resident input, years as a child protective services staff member, and an amazing reserve of energy, Deborah developed "Talk Shops" – designed to engage residents and answer their questions about the services and supports that are available to them. At the first Talk Shop, a young mother complained that she was being required to attend substance abuse treatment before having her children returned to her. Says Turner: "Finally I just asked her, 'what do you want to do to help yourself?' Her answer startled me... she wanted to meet with a mental health specialist at Neighborhood Place Ujima – an option that had not been offered to her. We arranged for her to meet with the counselor, and she used her time with him to prepare for treatment – which was successful. She has her kids back home now." Talk Shops have now become a regular part of Deborah's work. Each series runs for eight weeks on topics such as parenting, relationships, and stress management. The sessions last for two

hours, with half of that time spent mingling, eating, and getting to know one another. About 10 to 15 adults and their children attend. Recently, a volunteer offered to teach the children karate while their parents participate in the Talk Shops program.

Lesson 3: Help comes from unexpected places.

Susan O'Tool has worked as the community outreach specialist in Cedar Rapids. One important part of her job is to recruit, train, and nurture volunteers, called "neighborhood partners." To date, there are 23 neighborhood partners who provide outreach to families living within their own neighborhoods, offering a friendly ear or advice about where to find helpful resources. Neighborhood partners meet regularly to discuss their work. They act as a support group and resource network for one another. Says O'Tool: "We really try and get out into the community. We move our meeting locations so that different restaurants and small businesses in our neighborhoods know about us. We recently held a neighborhood partner meeting in a new coffee shop and met the owner. She was delighted to hear about our work and wants to get involved. In the early days of the Partnership, leaders might have asked themselves, 'how can the owner of a coffee shop be a part of our network?' Now, we know – help comes from many places. Perhaps the coffee shop owner will offer employment to untrained young moms or neighborhood teens. Maybe she'll donate food for community celebrations, or perhaps she'll volunteer to mentor a young family who lives nearby."

Lesson 4: Never underestimate the power of a committed volunteer.

Nikki Weinstein is one of two community support coordinators for St. Louis. Her job keeps her closely connected to residents, hubs (neighborhood places with services and supports for families), and provider agencies. Says Weinstein: "The best thing about my job is the networking part – helping parent volunteers make a really good idea blossom." Weinstein offers this example. "Martha is a resident who has been coming to meetings at one of our hubs. For months, the group has talked about starting a Parents Anonymous program there. But real planning never got under way. Finally, Martha said to me... 'I'm going to make it happen!'...And she did! She met with the program manager for the Parents Anonymous organization, became trained as a parent co-facilitator for the meetings, found a professional to help facilitate meetings, and took fliers about the program door-to-door throughout the neighborhoods. Parents Anonymous meetings began at the Dutchtown Hub this fall as a direct result of Martha's hard work."

Each outreach coordinator has been able to provide us with a valuable lesson on what it means to connect with residents. There are many other lessons to be shared. Perhaps most important are the words of one outreach staff member who offers: "Never give up...even when you try something and it doesn't work, pick yourself up and try again. As residents begin to recognize the Partnership as a new promise for them and for their children, more and more people will get on board!" ✨

Outlook

Looking for Structure That Will Produce Results.

Community Partnerships for Protecting Children is an ambitious initiative that attempts to institutionalize many changes across systems, within neighborhoods, and inside the hearts and souls of vulnerable families and their natural helping resources. The child welfare field is the focus of numerous reform efforts at this time, and the direction these reforms take will depend upon the evidence of their successes. Multi-faceted changes, such as those required through this initiative, offer unique challenges to evaluators as we attempt to assess implementation of activities that comprise "community child protection." Initiative leaders know that to spread the community child protection movement, there must be evidence that the designed strategies can be put into place – and, once in place, that they are making a difference to the supported children and families.

Since the early days of the initiative, leaders at The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation consulted with national evaluation experts to identify how best to assess the initiative's impact in the four cities embarking on this project. Since 1998, the Chapin Hall Center for Children has been evaluating the community child protection approach.

While the Chapin Hall evaluation team looked at all strategies, I'd like to highlight some of the important findings related to the development of neighborhood networks. (These findings were presented in the multi-site report, "Indicators of Site Progress" which assessed performance through September 1999.) In looking at the involvement of key agency and organizational partners, all sites successfully engaged the vast majority of partners viewed as critical to a successful partnership. These entities include the local child protective services agency, schools, domestic violence service providers, substance abuse treatment providers, child care centers, health care providers, police, family preservation services, faith communities, mental health service providers, and family support or abuse preven-

tion services. We also studied how sites engaged residents to provide support to individual families. While site progress varied, all received at least acceptable ratings, and two sites exceeded expectations by offering local residents many opportunities to support vulnerable families.

All sites have at least one "hub" – a neighborhood place offering services and supports from multiple agencies. Overall, we found that the initiative supported hub development at each site by, at a minimum, contributing staff to increase service capacity and/or providing funding for materials to make hubs more family friendly and attractive. We reviewed the development of more integrated links among service providers and noted that staff at all sites focused considerable energy in developing more effective connections among these providers. These strategies included the development of common assessment procedures, the creation of an intake process that allows families to access a wide range of services regardless of where the initial entry into the system occurred, and a more coordinated approach to cross-system training. In summary, while there is room for improvement in strengthening the neighborhood network at all sites, the breadth and depth of the initial work has been impressive and noteworthy.

As we look ahead to evaluating site progress during the next phase of the initiative, we will spend our efforts looking at outcomes for children and families that are occurring as a result of implementing these strategies. These outcomes address child safety and parental functioning, including their ability to access formal and informal services and supports. We at Chapin Hall look forward to a research design that is flexible enough to respect site variations, while providing a common message about the initiative as a whole. Stay tuned for more updates on evaluation findings about this important initiative!
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