

MEETING THE NEEDS OF A COMMUNITY: SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY'S RUTH E. SMITH TITLE IV-E DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Debra Samples*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BACKGROUND

This report focuses on the collaborative effort between a Human Service Agency, the community, and community-based organizations (CBO's). San Mateo County may benefit by adapting this model to tackle its disproportionate number of African American children in foster care, and at the same time meet the Agency's Strategic Plan goals that focus on prevention and early intervention services to youth/teens.

The Ruth E. Smith Title IV-E Demonstration Project (Project) is a five-year collaborative effort between San Francisco Department of Human Services (DHS) and the community. The Project was formed to address the county's disproportionate number of African American children in foster care. African Americans comprise approximately 12% of the total population in San Francisco, but African American children represented approximately 77% of the foster care population. After many painstaking and emotionally charged community meetings, forums, and focus groups as well as a Title IV-E waiver, the Ruth E. Smith Foster Care Demonstration Project was formed. This report highlights: a) the effects of the collaboration on the community, b) the Project's fiscal structure, c) the Project's assessment, and d) evaluation as well as outcomes.

DESCRIPTION

Community-based organizations (CBO's) are contracted by DHS to provide emergency funds, family and youth mentors, and mentor access via a 24-hour hotline services. DHS trains the CBO service delivery staff, who are hired from the targeted communities, and provides supportive services.

OUTCOMES

The Project partnership between the community and DHS has two preliminary outcomes:

- 1) It has received a favorable response and has changed the perceptions of both DHS staff and the community.
- 2) Because of co-locations, families in the targeted areas are better able to access services.

At the time of this report, 65 children had participated in the study, the control group had 20 and 45 were placed in the experimental group. Two children from the experimental group had been returned to the care of their parents. These data represent only 36% of the total number of children slated to enter the study; therefore no other data analysis on outcomes is available.

CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT

The Project faces many challenges. For example it:

*Debra Samples is a Project Manager of Children & Family Services in San Mateo County Human Services Agency.

- May be more costly than the county had planned
- May not be able to serve the number of targeted number of children
- Will need a DHS Project Administrator
- Needs to determine and monitor outcomes
- Must maintain regular internal Project assessments

RECOMMENDATION FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY

- Use a similar model of collaboration to address the disproportionate number of African Americans in San Mateo County's foster care
- Focus efforts in the City of East Palo Alto
- Set up community forums to solicit community involvement
- Use existing community-based organizations to develop relevant prevention and early intervention services
- Contract with existing community-based organizations to provide information and awareness information and youth/ teen activities
- Explore the use of IV-E funds to financially support projects

The time I spent observing San Francisco County's Ruth E. Smith Demonstration Project was very valuable. It is a very complex program which evolved from a successful community collaboration. Although there are challenges, San Mateo County could benefit from a child welfare population analysis similar to the Project study. Such analysis can guide the Agency in meeting the needs of the foster care populations that we serve.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF A COMMUNITY: SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY'S RUTH E. SMITH TITLE IV-E DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Debra Samples

HISTORY

San Francisco City and County is unique for two reasons, its cultural and ethnic make up and its political structure. San Francisco is on the cutting edge of dealing with many challenging social issues. Unlike other counties in California, San Francisco is both city and county and is managed by the mayor. The board of supervisors manages other county agencies. Because of this unique political structure there is greater access to politicians. In addition city and county agencies as well as community-based organizations compete for the same public dollars when planning programs. Therefore, it is crucial for the human services organizations to maintain amiable relationships with the community and its stakeholders. This report focuses on the San Francisco Department of Human Services (DHS) and the community's collaborative effort in addressing the disproportionate number of African American children in foster care.

San Francisco City and County has a diverse ethnic and racial population. In the mid to late 1990's the population totaled more than 770,000. African Americans represented approximately 12% of the total population; African American children, however, represented 77% of the children in foster care. African Americans were concentrated primarily in three communities, Bayview-Hunter's Point, Potrero Hill and Visitacion Valley.

Between 1996-1997, spearheaded by Ruth E. Smith, a community activist, the community began to challenge DHS with these statistics. The community had many questions:

- Why were African American children over represented in foster care?
- Why was not more being done to maintain children in the community?
- Why were services to the community not easily assessable?
- What was DHS doing to change the statistics?

After many painstaking and emotionally charged community meetings, forums, and focus groups, DHS and the community developed the Ruth E. Smith Foster Care Demonstration Project (Project) under the direction of former Deputy Director Bill Bettencourt.

At about the same time as DHS was forming the Ruth E. Smith Project, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) was applying for a federal waiver that would allow the State flexibility and creativity in spending Title IV-E funds. Because California is a "county-managed" state, once the waiver was awarded CDSS sent out a Request for Proposals (RFP). Counties interested in developing innovative projects had to apply for participation.

The objectives of the State's Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Project were to: a) promote permanence, b) prevent dependency, and to c) reduce the number of dependent children. The waiver's guidelines allowed for innovation and flexibility, cost neutrality, and participation in research and evaluation. The State contracted this service with California Social Services Research at UC-Berkeley (CSSR) for research and evaluation.

San Francisco was among the several counties that

applied for participation. Many counties became disinterested and withdrew after learning of the restrictions of the study. San Francisco's DHS is one of six county agencies participating in this demonstration project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project is a five-year collaborative effort between the DHS Family and Children Services Division and the Southeast Collaborative. The Project began in 1998 and is scheduled to conclude in 2003. The Southeast Collaborative, formed especially for this project is comprised of three community-based service providers: 1) San Francisco League of Urban Gardeners, (S.L.U.G.), which is the fiscal operating provider, 2) Together United Recommitted Forever (T.U.R.F), and 3) Potrero Hill Neighborhood House. Whitney Young Child Development Center initially was involved, but has dropped from the collaborative.

The Project's objectives are to: 1) prevent placement of children in foster care, 2) reduce the amount of time children remain in care, 3) stabilize the placement of children in long-term care, and 4) support parents and strengthen families. The major components of this community-based project are family mentoring, family conferencing, youth mentoring, the availability of family emergency funds and 24-hour response for families via a 24-hour staffed hotline.

The Project is comprised of three teams. The child welfare team, the support team, and the collaborative team. The child welfare team is comprised of DHS child welfare workers and the family conferencing coordinator. The support team has five members: a community outreach worker, a public health nurse, a psychologist, a substance abuse specialist,

and a project manager. Each Project member has a contract with DHS to provide services for this Project. The collaborative team is comprised of: a project coordinator, 3 mentor supervisors, 15 family and youth mentors, and 7 hotline clerks. The Southeast Collaborative hires the collaborative team from the three targeted communities with the belief that the mentors know the neighborhood and the people being served, and that all team members have a vested interest in improving the lives of families and children in the community.

The mentors support and guide the families who are involved with child welfare services to help strengthen family systems and meet DHS requirements. Mentors are available to families 24 hours a day. Youth mentors work with youth ages 12 and older on issues such as stabilizing their living situation, assisting with educational needs and decreasing the risk of abuse and neglect. The 24-hour response allows mentors to support families and children during crisis when help is needed most. Emergency funds are available to families on an "as needed" basis to assist in achieving the overall goals of the Project.

PREPARING FOR THE PROJECT

The design of the Project embraces the concepts of community and collaboration. In addition to adding a regional office that provides all child welfare services in one of the three target communities, DHS supports three physical locations for the Ruth E. Smith Project. One Project facility is housed in each of the target communities. Because most of the individuals hired by the Collaborative did not have formal social welfare education or training, DHS provided them with extensive training. The training included, but was not limited to, topics such as: child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, domestic

violence, customer service, anger management, sexual harassment, computer training, and mandated reporting. One training was a “ropes course” designed for team building. This course was significant in that the groups involved were people with a history of mistrust and preconceived ideas about each other. The ropes course was designed to build trust so that the Collaborative and DHS staff could successfully work together. The positive outcome of this training course was immediately apparent in the faces of the participants as they were captured in before and after photos. See list of training in (Appendix A).

DESCRIPTION

Families qualify to participate in the Project if they are recipients of child welfare services and reside in one of the targeted areas. They must qualify for one of three groups. Group One are families with children who are identified as at risk of removal. These may include, but are not limited to: a) families who had temporary emergency placements without a petition being filed, b) families who had petition dismissed, c) if the family situation is marginal, with strong removal potential, and the primary factor is not sexual abuse or severe physical abuse, or d) regular family preservation has already or may potentially fail. Group Two are families participating in reunification services or families needing services to expedite adoption, legal guardianship or long term foster care if these services will reduce the length of time in foster care. Group Three are youth in relative care placements who are identified as unstable. Issues of instability include, but are not limited to: need for therapy, child’s “acting out” behavior, educational deficiency that requires tutoring, caregiver instability, and/or the child’s need for a mentor such as big brother/big sister.

The project manager identifies qualified families. Families are informed about the Project and that they could be a candidate in the experimental group or the control group. They are asked to sign a consent form if they wish to participate in the research study. Once consent is received, the form is faxed to CSSR where the family is randomly assigned into the experimental or the control group. Families assigned into the experimental group receive services provided by the Project. The control group receives services available to any other child welfare recipient.

Based on the number of children receiving title IV-E funds as determined by CDSS, the Project was to study 180 children, 60% in the experimental group and 40% in the control group. The outcomes for these groups are included with data from the five other Project counties and analyzed. California Social Services Research reports the outcomes of the total number of children across and between counties.

OUTCOMES

No internal outcomes are being measured by the Project counties in addition to those captured by CSSR. At the time of this report, 65 children had participated in the study. The control group had 20 children and 43 were in the experimental group. Two children from the experimental group had been returned to the care of parents. CSSR is measuring the effectiveness of the IV-E waiver across counties in preventing dependency, reducing the length of time in foster care, and reducing the number of dependent children that report problems. According to CSSR criteria, current data set is too small to measure outcomes for San Francisco. Problems include the low number of children in the study and difficulty working within the constraints of the study.

Informally collected verbal feedback from employees of the collaborative and DHS is positive. When interviewed, collaborative staff reports that they now believe that there are people in DHS who really do care about the people in their community. They also reported having a better understanding of child welfare issues and the regulations guiding decisions made by child welfare workers. Child welfare staff testify about the benefit of having the mentors consistently available to families during crisis.

Additional feedback about the program from DHS staff and mentors was collected during a Project celebration. During the celebration luncheon, individuals acknowledged the work of the Project and the effect that it has had on them personally and the community as a whole. Speakers' testimonies highlighted changes in the perception that the community has about Department of Human Services and visa versa. One mentor reported that her own impression about the social workers has changed. She stated that before she began working with the Project she felt social workers did not care about the community. She now believes that most of the social workers really do care about the families in her community. One DHS child welfare worker spoke of the work that the mentors achieved with a family whose home had burned in the early hours one morning. By the time the social worker received notice that the family had been victims of a fire, the mentors had already intervened. They had helped the family through the immediate crisis, assisted the family in making living arrangements, and were able to keep the family together. The response and the action of the mentors reduced the work of the social worker, but more importantly, they helped the family.

San Francisco's approach to addressing the disproportionate number of African American children in

out-of-home care is complex and challenging. They have achieved two major accomplishments through the Project. First, they provided critical services in the communities despite high crime. Second, there has been teamwork between the Collaborative staff and DHS staff. Moreover, the mentors educated social workers about the neighborhood and accompanied them during home visits when necessary.

CHALLENGES OF THE PROJECT

The Ruth E. Smith Project is an excellent model of community collaboration and integration of services; however, there are some significant challenges that place the Project's continuation at risk. The most significant of these has been the fiscal challenge. From its inception, there has been a disconnect between program activities and the fiscal manager. Because of the way funds are released and the critical element of cost neutrality, it is crucial that Project members have regular communication with the fiscal manager about expenditures and claiming of programmatic activities. In addition, the Project was targeted to study 180 children but has only entered 36% of that number in the study. Expenditures are the same regardless of the number of children served. Increasing the population of children in the study can assist in meeting the fiscal challenge. Changing the Project's management so that DHS administers the Project might improve recruitment efforts as well as monitoring outcomes. It will also reduce confusion between CSSR, CDSS, and DHS about the Project. CSSR is recording the only outcomes of the Project. However, maintaining regular assessments of program outcomes can assist DHS in directing programmatic changes. In addition, a customer survey from the families being served, as well as Project staff, about the impact on the community could be very beneficial for budgetary planning. Project staff feel they are limited

in serving more people. Individuals who come to the site and want assistance are referred to other community resources because the Project is only set up to provide intensive services to families who are in the experimental group.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY

San Mateo County has done a tremendous job in being the forerunner for services to families who receive or need financial assistance. Much work has been done in assessing who the target population is and how best to reach them. This type of assessment can be useful in child welfare services. Like San Francisco, San Mateo has an over representation of African American children in the foster care system. African Americans in San Mateo County comprise about 5.5% of the county's total population but approximately 33% of African American children are represented in the County's foster care population. San Francisco's model is a collaborative approach that includes the targeted community, community-based organizations and the DHS. San Mateo County might focus efforts in the City of East Palo Alto, which has the County's largest concentration of African Americans.

Services could be developed that focus on preventive and early intervention services. These services could include improving community awareness of the effects of child abuse and neglect, poor parenting, lack of stability, domestic violence, and substance abuse on children. This information could include parent discipline classes, family planning, teen and youth awareness of pregnancy prevention, increasing the accessibility and availability of youth activity programs, and substance abuse awareness using public awareness campaigns, bulletins and "giveaways." In addition, more work can be done with existing community-based organizations to provide no-or low-cost treatment programs

to families (e.g. short-term therapy, substance abuse treatment, and parent support), before child welfare is involved, to prevent placement of children. These programs could be developed using existing community-based organizations and community involvement in determining the community needs. These recommendations are in keeping with Strategic Direction #3 of the Human Services Agency's Strategic Plan. The potential benefits are that community collaboration can have a significant impact on community relations and outcomes for children. The impact of these efforts could be measured by the percentage of African American children represented in out-of-home care over time and the numbers being placed in out-of-home care. The fiscal impact could be minimal if we support activities with existing organizations. Some Title IV-E funds might be used to support these programs, which would minimize the fiscal impact on the county. One challenge to the Project might come from the Latino community. East Palo Alto has a very large population of Mexican Americans who may challenge programs targeting African Americans.

SUMMARY

The time I spent observing San Francisco County's Ruth E. Smith Demonstration Project was very valuable. I had the opportunity to analyze a complex program and see many of the issues covered in the BASSC training such as: 1) working with community-based organizations, 2) the importance of monitoring outcomes, 3) the importance of fiscal knowledge of a program, and 4) the value of good community relations. Performing an in-county population analysis is important. Such an analysis can guide the type and geographic location of services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank BASSC for the invaluable opportunity to be a student in an arena of such knowledge. Also I'd like to thank all the folks from San Francisco County and collaterals, who shared their time and information with me for the production of this paper. Big thanks and appreciation to Tracy Burris who maintained contact with me to make sure that I had access to also the people needed for information.

Appendix A

Trainings as of 2/10/00:

Team Building 1 and 2
Child Neglect
Physical Abuse
Substance Abuse 1 and 2
Domestic Violence 1 and 2
Boundaries and Countertransference
Personal Safety
Legal Services for Children
CHDP & Public Health
DHS Consultants Overview
Ethics
Mandated Reporting
General Resources
Environmental Respite
Nutrition/Food Security
Confidentiality
CPR Certification
Teen Pregnancy 1
Time Management
Housing Authority Overview
Customer Service
Financial Management
Professionalism 101
Kinship Care
Conflict Resolution/Active Listening 1
Child Welfare Continuum
Child Crisis and Mental Health
Welfare and Institution Codes
Advocating for Clients
Family Mosaic
Juvenile Probation
Adult Probation
Cal Works 101
Sex Trauma Unit Tour (SFGH)
Operation Dream
Writing Workshop 1
Children's Environmental Health
Training Overview w/role-plays
Pre-Paid Legal Services
Computer Testing and Assessment
Intro to Keyboard, PC, and Mac (Word, Windows)
General Documentation
SLUG Literacy Program
Family Conferencing Roleplays
Gen'l SLUG Overview & Resources
Conflict Resolution II
Anger Management
Flexible Fund Challenge
Parenting Workshop I
American Lung Association Wkshp

Edgewood Field Trip
Drug Affected Children & Adolescents
Environmental Justice Slide Show &
Toxic Tour
Values Clarification
Sexual Harassment
GCEPT & Composting Workshop
Community Supported Agriculture Film
and Training
Relapse Prevention
Females Against Violence (FAV) training
Neighborhood Emergency Response
Team (NERT) training
Effective Black Parenting
Computer Training
Family Conferencing Training II