

**A MODEL COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE SAN MATEO COUNTY  
HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY AND  
THE PENINSULA PARTNERSHIP FOR YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**

**Donna Thoreson\***  
**Executive Summary**

## **INTRODUCTION**

During the past decade the Department of Children and Family Services has centered its work around high risk intervention in public child welfare. In February 2001, the Director of the Children and Family Services Bureau of the Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department convened a cross section of professionals and others interested in child well-being in Contra Costa County. It provided an opportunity for a network of interested parties to build relationships that could change the way Contra Costa County addresses the needs of its most vulnerable population and their families in the years to come. As resources shrink and agencies tighten their belts, we are reminded that we share a common goal.

San Mateo County Human Services Department and the Peninsula Partnership for Youth, Families and Children have joined together in a model program to form community-initiated activities that support children in their local communities. San Mateo Human Services department also directed PPYFC to act as the fiscal agent and distribute the FPFS grant in 1993-1997 as well as the funds received in 1998-2000 to these programs.

In their Children's Report 2002, they emphasize that they have shifted their focus from fixing social and family problems to focusing on youth development. Their statement of purpose:

"Promoting youth development allows the entire community, including family, schools, businesses, places of worship and service-providing agencies to participate in creating a strong foundation for healthy youth."

## **HISTORY**

Primary in the work of the PPYFC was to identify and overcome systems barriers as well as improve and increase working relationships between agencies, schools, cities and communities. These community collaboratives were provided with funding, technical support and in-kind contributions.

San Mateo County through the PPCYF identified three goals to improve child wellbeing and youth development. They were: 1) community capacity building, 2) Kindergarten readiness and 3) academic achievement by the third grade. The eight grants awarded in 1999-2000 ranged from approximately \$54,000 to \$64,000. This study looks at the Kindergarten Readiness program offered at the Daly City and Pacifica sites.

The San Mateo County Children's Report 2002 identified outcomes that demonstrate improvement in child well-being in the county. Some of the successes from that report that are linked to public child welfare are listed below:

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- *By 2000, the number of substantiated child abuse referrals has decreased over the past three years.*
- *Even though there was a slight increase in domestic violence reports to law enforcement, their rates are still lower than the state rate.*
- *Birth rates to teens between the ages of 15 and 19 has decreased by more than 25% since 1996.*
- *The number of children placed in foster care is less than half the state rate, although nearly one out of five children in foster care is placed outside the county. The median length of stay in foster care was only 4 months compared to 19 months statewide.*

### **KEYS TO SUCCESS:**

San Mateo County, in collaboration with the Peninsula Partnership for Youth, Families and Children, and the local city collaborations have succeeded in bringing together large organizations, cities, schools, parks and recreation, non-profits and communities. The three key elements are:

- shift in focus (early intervention, youth development, inclusive of all stakeholders).
- participation and support of the leaders of the various stakeholders groups.
- openness and willingness to share resources to create new ways to improve child well-being.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS/GOALS**

- We must continue to focus on early intervention and outreach activities.
- We must move our systems from talking about working together to actually sharing of leadership, funding, resources and the workload. We must formulate strategies to solicit and stabilize funding from not only government and foundations, but the business and faith communities as well.
- In this time of limited government funding, we must keep our eyes and resources fixed on the long-term goal of having healthier and happier children in our community. We must not sacrifice these important objectives as we plan for how to survive the shorter term difficulties.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

During the past decade the Department of Children and Family Services has centered its work around high risk intervention in public child welfare. In February 2001, the Director of the Children and Family Services Bureau of the Contra Costa County Employment and Human

Services Department convened a cross section of professionals and others interested in child well being in Contra Costa County. The purpose of this Child Welfare Redesign Summit was to bring together ideas and individuals for discussion on changing the focus of public child welfare services in Contra Costa County. It provided an opportunity for a network of interested parties to build relationships that could change the way Contra Costa County addresses the needs of its most vulnerable population and their families in the years to come. While many agencies, organizations and community groups focus on improving the lives of children and their families, most work within their own organizational mandates. From the countywide community to the local neighborhoods, we share the hope of improving these children's lives and opportunities for success and well-being. As resources shrink and agencies tighten their belts, we are reminded that we share a common goal.

For my BASSC project, I looked at the collaboration in San Mateo County between the Human Services Department and the Peninsula Partnership for Youth, Families and Children. I visited two of the collaboration sites that have been created within specific communities to improve the well-being of children in the neediest areas of San Mateo County. I was able to meet with the coordinators of these collaborations and visit the sites to see children participating in an innovative program called Kindergarten Readiness. What San Mateo has seemed to achieve, or at least be well on the way to accomplishing, is a vision that is inclusive of all agencies, businesses and community members for whom child well-being is central to their mission. They have worked on forming collaborations that not only meet together to seek out community-initiated programs, but have also arranged to have the PPYFC act as the fiscal agent for the financing of the community based collaboratives.

In 1993, the Children's Executive Council in San Mateo County came together and decided to shift its direction regarding programs for children. Less than 10 years later, in their Children's **Report** 2002, they emphasize that they have shifted their focus from fixing problems, such as teen pregnancy, domestic violence or child abuse (to name a few), to "youth development". This means they build on strengths rather than deficits and on the development of healthy children instead of remediation of specific social difficulties. In the San Mateo County Children's Report 2002, they state "Promoting youth development allows the entire community, including family, schools, businesses, places of worship and serviceproviding agencies to participate in creating a strong foundation for healthy youth."

## **HISTORY**

In 1993, San Mateo County received a \$400,000 Family Support/Family Preservation grant. The Human Services Director directed this grant to the Peninsula Partnership for Children, Youth and Families (PPCYF) to do the oversight and planning. The PPCYF is a project of the Peninsula Community Foundation. It was their task to help build community involvement and collaboration at the local level. The Peninsula Partnership Council was designated as the governing board. It was made up of a combination of county officials, city officials, school personnel, nonprofit community-based agencies and the community at large. Later, its membership was increased to include representatives of the formed city collaboratives that evolved and the business community.

Primary in its work was to identify and overcome systems barriers as well as to improve and increase working relationships between agencies, schools, cities and communities. During its first five years, six sites were established. In 1997, two new sites were added and funding was continued through a combination of federal Family Support/Family Preservation dollars and private funding. These community collaboratives were provided with funding, technical support and in-kind contributions. As it has developed, additional funding has been received from cities, schools and private business. Each collaborative has hired a coordinator to work with the local program and the PPCYF.

In the early stages of forming this partnership, the Human Services Department and the Peninsula Community Foundation looked at every city to compare figures on important social issues such as juvenile crime, child abuse, children's health and teen pregnancy. In the six cities with the highest numbers, they invited the school superintendent and the mayor (or the representatives of the city council and the school board) to a meeting to discuss the issues and how best to collaborate. During the early years, city collaboratives were provided with funding, technical support and assistance. These groups met monthly and worked to involve other community members. One goal was to build community capacity to address the specific needs of each community. During the third year of the collaborations, they began to ask for outcomes and assisted with designing ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the local programs.

San Mateo County through the PPCYF identified three goals to improve child wellbeing and youth development. These were: 1) community capacity building, 2) Kindergarten readiness and 3) academic achievement by the third grade. Local communities joined with the Peninsula Partnership for Youth, Families and Children and established programs which focused on areas such as literacy, enrichment, tutoring, family resource centers, community involvement and reading.

The first collaboratives were funded through the Family Support/Family Preservation grant (\$400,000) for five years. Initially, there were four cities who joined the effort. Two more were added later during the five year grant. In 1997, the six already funded sites were renewed, and two new sites were added. Funding from the federal Reauthorization was made available in 1997. By that time, additional support funding had been added from private sources and cities that supported the efforts towards building stronger communities and improving the lives of younger children.

Grants in 1999 and 2000 were awarded to specific collaboratives in the following cities: Daly City, East Palo Alto, Half Moon Bay, Menlo Park, Pacifica, Redwood City, San Mateo and South San Francisco. These grants ranged in amounts from approximately \$54,000 to \$64,000. Schools have provided classroom space and materials.

## **KINDERGARTEN READINESS**

The Daly City Peninsula Partnership Collaborative program began in 1995, by partnering with the Jefferson School District, the City of Daly City, the FUTURES program and Bayshore Child Care. In 1996/97, they hired teachers and began offering Kindergarten Readiness at one school. They also offered three tutoring classes and one enrichment class. In 1997/98, they added

another school for Kindergarten Readiness and hired support staff in homework assistance, tutoring and enrichment classes. In 1998/99, they hired a full time coordinator. Kindergarten Readiness increased to seven schools. By 2000, Kindergarten Readiness was implemented at 10 schools and by 2002, they have achieved full implementation of Kindergarten Readiness to all 16 schools in the city.

This is in addition to increasing tutoring, homework assistance and enrichment classes. It has been an exciting journey for this collaborative, as they have seen the parents, teachers, and students become involved in the development, implementation and evaluation of these programs. It should also be noted that agency officials from city parks and schools now work in partnership with each other when they are planning for youth activities.

In Daly City and Pacifica, they started a Kindergarten Readiness program to serve children who had not had a structured preschool experience. In the past decade, the number of children who participate in a structured preschool program has increased. These children learn basic social skills which enable them to start kindergarten prepared to focus on learning. For children who have not had such an experience, the first few months of kindergarten can be scary. Teachers indicate that classes slow the learning pace to allow for these children to catch up with the other kids. Knowing basic social skills, such as how to sit in a circle with other children, walk in line, listen to the teacher and follow basic directions, before they enter on the first day of school can help ease this adjustment to a new environment and children are able to move ahead to learn other academic and social skills.

During spring registration for fall kindergarten classes, children who have not had a structured preschool experience are referred to a summer class called Kindergarten Readiness. This class is four weeks long (36 hours) and is taught at the school that the child will be attending in the Fall. It is taught by a credentialed teacher and parents of the children are asked to volunteer in the classroom. In the Daly City program, these volunteer parents provide the in-class support to the teacher. In Pacifica, teachers aides are also hired to assist the teacher. A side benefit to parents working in the classroom is that they also become more comfortable with their role and relationship with the teacher and the school. Along with basic social skills, such as these mentioned above, the children have the chance to learn colors, numbers, and the alphabet. They are also given books to take home and share for reading time with their parents.

In 2000-2002, an evaluation of the Daly City program was completed. This was done both for accountability to the funding source and to provide data on improvement of services. The results were that children who attended this program were more prepared for kindergarten. A survey of kindergarten teachers was completed, and they noted that the students who participated in the KR programs adjusted more quickly and were much more likely to succeed in the classroom. Teachers strongly support this program as a way of increasing the likelihood of academic success for the children. Individual interviews with kindergarten teachers clearly showed that teachers strongly approved of the program and found it helped students relax and enjoy school.

In Daly City, the Collaborative is now formulating a three year plan that is outcome based and measures the effectiveness of each of their programs. An important part of this plan is to move towards program sustainability. A workshop was recently sponsored by the Peninsula

Partnership and the County to provide support and technical assistance. They are looking to find businesses and corporations who will support them over the long-term. To be successful over the long-term will require continued buy-in from cities, schools and the community and financial support.

At this time, a major goal for the Daly City Collaborative is to manage the success of their programs. This means a shift from government funding to diversified funding. The Coordinator indicated how important it is to seek out financial support and funding when the programs are successful and not delay seeking funding until the government assistance is decreased.

The focus of the programs offered by the local collaboratives has been child wellness, safety and educational preparedness. Programs have included kindergarten readiness, tutoring, enrichment, homework assistance, literacy, reading programs, afterschool child care, literacy and family resource centers. As a result of these opportunities, children in the neediest communities in San Mateo County have benefited.

## **OUTCOMES**

The San Mateo County Children's Report 2002 was published this year. It identified five major outcomes for San Mateo County Children. The five questions identified in their report are:

- Are children safe?
- Are children healthy?
- Are children nurtured in a stable, caring environment?
- Are children succeeding in school?
- Do systems support children?

*I have highlighted some of the successes from that report that are linked to public child welfare:*

- By 2000, the number of substantiated child abuse referrals has decreased over the past three years. They are well below the state rate and rank as the second lowest county in the state.
- Even though there was a slight increase in domestic violence reports to law enforcement, their rates are still lower than the state rate.
- Birth rates to teens between the ages of 15 and 19 has decreased by more than 25% since 1996.
- Although the number of adults who are homeless has increased, the number of homeless children have decreased since 1998. The number of children placed in foster care is less than half the state rate, although nearly one out of five children in foster care is placed outside the county. The median length of stay in foster care was only 4 months compared to 19 months statewide. System supports have improved in the past two years. There are more homework centers, fewer latch key children after school, more support services personnel in local schools and increased use of libraries by children.

## **KEYS TO SUCCESS:**

San Mateo County, in collaboration with the Peninsula Partnership for Youth, Families and Children and the local city collaborations, has succeeded in bringing together large organizations, cities, schools, parks and recreation, nonprofits and communities with a goal of improving child wellbeing in San Mateo County. In the effort that I looked at through my BASSC experience they have been able to accomplish several important objectives. Instead of agencies working in isolation and reacting to social problems, they have moved towards finding resources and new models of cooperation and communication so that the children and youth of San Mateo County benefit from their shared efforts. This has come about through three key elements:

- shift in focus (early intervention, youth development, inclusive of all stakeholders).
- participation and support of the leaders of the various stakeholders groups.
- openness and willingness to share resources to create new ways to improve child well-being.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS/GOALS**

- As the Contra Costa County Child Welfare Redesign continues, we must work hard to bring together not only other county agencies, nonprofits and community, but also involve schools, cities and the local communities members.
- We must continue to focus on early intervention and outreach activities that include parents, extended family members and non-related community supporters. These activities must reflect our willingness to "think outside the box" and be creative and open to new and innovative ideas, as well as to those that have proven effective in the past.
- We must move our systems from talking about working together to actually sharing of leadership, funding, resources and the workload. We must formulate strategies to solicit and stabilize funding from not only government and foundations, but the business and faith communities, as well.
- Currently through the Child Welfare Redesign and the Family to Family program, three specific communities have been identified from whom a disproportionate number of children are in the formal Child Protection System. We need to empower the community members and their leaders to develop and provide services to their children, while we give them technical support and funding.
- In this time of limited government funding, we must keep our eyes and resources fixed on the long term goal of having healthier and happier children in our community. We must not sacrifice these important objectives as we plan for how to survive the shorter term difficulties.

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