

CHILD CARE SERVICES

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The opportunity to observe organizational systems, management styles, the culture of an agency and the relationship between County government and community agencies was an experience from which I expected to learn a great deal. The ability to ask hard questions, to observe the process of meetings and dynamics of politics without being a part of the system was a challenge I embraced.

My topic of observation was child care. Ellen Ortiz, Child Care Manager in Santa Cruz was my mentor and liaison for the child care system and Human Services Agency. I was also very interested in observing management styles, and issues of organizational change. To accomplish this I spent time shadowing Will Lightbourne and others in management positions in Santa Cruz County.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

Child-focused programs include (1) preschool, Head Start and pre-kindergarten, and (2) child care programs. Preschool, Head Start and prekindergarten programs are typically part-day and part-year programs that bring groups of children together in centers or school settings. Some offer primarily an educational program; others also provide health and developmental screenings, parent involvement, and social service assistance. Most preschool programs have been designed to promote child development and improve school readiness to succeed in school. Publicly funded preschool programs typically serve children from disadvantaged families, while private preschool programs supported by parent fees serve children from all backgrounds.

In contrast, child care programs typically offer care on a full-day basis to children from birth to school age. Such care can be provided either in a center or in a caregiver's home. Most child care programs seek both to promote child development and to free parents from their child care responsibilities so they can work. Child care services are purchased by parents from a wide array of non-profit and for-profit providers. Public funds support subsidies that help some low-income parents pay for care while they work or attend school or training.

Child care for children in child welfare and families involved in employment services in Santa Cruz are administered through the County. Santa Cruz has a separate information and referral agency which provides no financial support. Another agency handles child care for working poor and other benefited child care programs.

San Mateo is structured with two programs providing child care services. The Child Care Coordinating Council, which provides information and referral for the County and financial support for the working poor and other entitlement programs and the County which administers child care for child welfare and the work entitlement programs.

STATE AND FEDERAL FUNDING SOURCES

There are several child care funding streams:

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- *TCC (Transitional Child Care)* is a program that is available to parents who have been on AFDC and who have gone off the programs due to employment.
- *SCC (Supplemental Child Care)* is a program that is available to parents who are on AFDC, who are working and who need help supplementing their child care costs.
- *NET (Non-GAIN Education and Training Program)* is a program for AFDC recipients who are in approved educational or training programs, but not eligible for GAIN. Clients must meet specific conditions.
- *Alternative Payment Child Care Program* is a program for recipients of the County's Child Protective Services Program. Child care is determined by the social worker handling the case.

The County also receives Federal Block Grant funds to serve specific target populations. The populations to be served are determined by each County's local Planning Council. The County also has a small number of IV-A "At Risk" child care slots. A family who is "at risk" of welfare dependency may qualify.

CURRENT ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

Santa Cruz and San Mateo counties currently struggle with several philosophical and service delivery issues:

- limited child care dollars
- welfare reform and the major increased need of child care resources
- licensed care vs. non-licensed care
- child development opportunities vs. "babysitting"
- child care for the working poor vs. child care for AFDC recipients
- providing a continuum of child care/child development 0-12 years

The challenges are overwhelming, particularly when we are focusing on high risk families. The need to collaborate and develop a coordinated service delivery system and advocacy is essential. Developing strong partnerships with the State, Foundations, County Departments and communities. child care providers is necessary to ensure that all children have a safe and nurturing environment to thrive, while supporting parents in achieving self sufficiency,

A seamless system of child care is important, to both the infant/child and the family. Current surveys of San Mateo County benefit analysts and focus groups conducted with AFDC recipients indicated that there is a great deal of difficulty transitioning from GAIN, to TCC or SCC or to other subsidize child care.

We know that a consistent person who the infant/child knows and trusts is an important factor in their development. It is also important to the family to have a child care provider who is accessible and reliable. If a parent has underlining concerns about the child while at work or has to continually look for back up caretakers, or is not able to afford the present care because of changes in their financial situation, it results in a decrease in productivity and employee reliability.

Santa Cruz County's service delivery system is different than San Mateo County. San Mateo consolidated the information and referral services and the ability to provide financial assistance for child care to low income families, together to form the Child Care Coordinating Council. San Cruz County has separate agencies providing services, resulting in three main child care entities; the County, The Child Development Resource Center, and Child Care Licensing.

Santa Cruz County has a very high obligation to be responsive to the community. There exists a strong partnership between the County and community agencies and citizens. The opportunity to explore various aspects of child care in Santa Cruz County did not reveal any new ways of service delivery that would seem to enhance San Mateo County. Observing the functioning of the Children's Network and the Children's Commission was helpful in understanding communications systems, advocacy and relationships between the County and community. Spending time in Santa Cruz did provide me an environment to explore outside research and to ask individuals what they thought would be helpful in meeting the needs of our young children.

San Mateo County as part of welfare reform has developed a Child Care Design Team, with representatives from various agencies concerned with meeting the needs of young children. The Design Team provides the opportunity to explore how the County can meet the challenges previously outlined.

A missing element in the design team is the San Mateo County Health Department. Currently, they see many of our families in the clinics, or on home visits and support families with issues of child development. With the Health Department's proposed services for families with children from 0–3 on Medi-cal it is essential that they are a part of the seamless system of providing services. The new 0–3 program will provide home visits to all infants from 0–3 on Medi-cal, addressing issues of child development and family systems. The closer this project could be connected to welfare reform, and the concern that all children have a supportive nurturing environment to flourish it would be of benefit to all families in San Mateo County.

LESSONS LEARNED/IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTY

Longitudinal studies (Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber, 1986) consistently identify the following three factors as associated with risk of future delinquency: poverty, being a single parent or without aid of a co-parent; and youthfulness. Any woman with one or more of these characteristics is at significantly higher-risk of being an ineffective or abusive parent than one without (Farrington, 1994). Additional factors associated with later antisocial behavior on the part of the child include parental substance abuse, mental health problems, or criminality; birth complication; and child abuse and neglect (Sampson, 1995).

Given a pregnancy on the part of any woman with one or more of these characteristics, it can be argued that the community has an interest in helping her overcome potential problems that are likely to interfere with the healthy development of her child. During the past two decades a number of experimental programs have demonstrated the value of home visits and early childhood education -in reducing a range of problem behaviors (Farrington, 1994; Yoshikawa, 1994).

There are various studies (Perry Preschool, Larson, 1980; Houston Parent-Child Development Center, Brooks-Gunn, 1993; Currie and Thomas, 1994) whose outcomes indicate consistently similar results: reduced abuse and neglect, higher cognitive scores, increase educational attainment, reduction in arrests in juvenile and adult life, achieving better scores in school, increase employability.

As we try to balance welfare reform and the mandatory movement to self sufficiency for low income families, we must consider the impact on the children and family. The challenge of containing the costs of child care, providing enough safe child care slots for those who need it and creating an environment that promotes child development and supports families in developing effective parenting skills is not an easy task.

Suggestion

All families on AFDC will be given a complete psycho-social assessment indicating the level of risk of each family. Based on the assessment a care plan will be developed. The families with middle to high risk factors will receive home visits. The home visits will be provided to support the family as they transition from welfare to self-sufficiency; addressing issues of stress, parent guidance, child development and others.

"It takes a whole village to raise a child" with an increased number of women entering the workforce through welfare reforms efforts and the number of families who economically are classified as the working poor we will need to explore all the options available. It will be important for the community to work together to:

- Train child care providers (family care, neighborhood home care, preschools, center care,)in health care, child development, nutrition and safety.
- Increase access to "Trustline" and follow-up on results.
- Change legislation to increase allocations for various child care options. Example: Legislation AB 2184:
- Promote immediate and long term policy and administrative changes necessary to implement a seamless child care delivery system
- Inform and educate local R & Rs to help them navigate the existing and emerging child care delivery system.
- Work with Foundations and philanthropic organizations to promote child development and parent support activities; home visits, parent guidance classes, support groups etc.

Currently, in San Mateo County there are four elements I know of that may be of assistance in meeting the continuum of child care needs of families.

Ongoing cooperation, coordination and collaboration

- The San Mateo County Perinatal Council has provided a forum for networking and collaboration around many issues impacting women, girls, and families. Over 70 various community agencies are involved with the Council and may be of ongoing support to the needs of families.

- Child Care Coordinating Council has provided the leadership to address issues of child care in San Mateo County.
- Child Care Design Team was developed to address issues of child care and welfare reform.

Parent Services Project

The goal of the project is to raise the parent's sense of importance, diminish feelings of isolation, increase their parenting skills and help them secure the resources they need. Child care agencies in a supportive and cooperative environment respond to the parents needs through joint activities, services and events.

San Mateo County's Health Department's 0–3 program.

This program will be providing home visits to every Medi-cal birth in San Mateo County. All AFDC recipients are eligible for Medi-cal. It will be an important community resource for all AFDC recipients to be connected to and receive services.

Peninsula Partnership

These partnerships are school based collaborations with school and city government. Through these partnerships perhaps the continuum of needs of children can be met.

Strategic planning is a defined disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it. At its best it involves broad scale information gathering, and exploration of alternatives, and an emphasis on the future implications of present decisions. It can facilitate communication and participation, accommodate divergent interests and values, and foster orderly decision making and successful implementation.

On a small scale the project for my internship with Santa Cruz County had many of the elements of strategic planning. It provided me the opportunity to explore a topic for which I had only a basic understanding. I was able to assess the needs of various agencies and individuals, and conduct some limited research on the topic. I was able to explore various options in an attempt to meet the challenges of providing quality child care. There is a great deal of work being done on both a local level and on a State and Federal level to increase the availability and quality of child care/child development services to meet the needs in San Mateo County.

Funding is one major barrier in meeting the child care/ child development needs in the County. The Center for the Future of Children's next publication will be on "Financing Child Care", The Centers publications are very comprehensive and should be of great value in providing some direction in expanding the funding for child care.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION

Lastly, a great deal of the information I gained from my internship in Santa Cruz was not directly related to the topic of child care. There were many pearls of advice or components of programs

which I believe would benefit San Mateo County. I think it would be beneficial for my three colleagues, Judy Davila, Besty Zobell, Jamie Buckmaster, and myself to explore ways of sharing other insights, thoughts and experiences we gained in our internships with Human Services.