

Family to Family in Monterey County: **A Team Approach to Child Welfare Practice**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Family to Family Initiative was developed by the Casey Foundation in 1992 and is in operation today in many state and local child welfare systems throughout the country. One premise behind this initiative is that community involvement at many levels is necessary to maintain children who are at risk of removal from their primary caretaker in their own communities.

There are four core strategies at the heart of Family to Family:

- 1 recruitment, training and support of resource families (foster and relative);
- 2 building community partnerships;
- 3 family team decision making; and
- 4 self-evaluation.

In 2004 Monterey County enacted each of the four core strategies. The following case study outlines the key aspects of Family to Family, briefly describes the Annie E. Casey Foundation's role in bringing this initiative to state and local child welfare practice, and describes the key goals, strategies, tools, and outcomes of the Family to Family Initiative.

To date, Monterey County has convened 151 Team Decision Making meetings involving over 214 children. As a result, Monterey has been able to maintain many children in their own homes, often without the need for protective custody and subse-

quent court action. Additionally, community collaboration assists families with accessing local resources to address concerns that initially brought the family to the attention of child welfare. When removal is unavoidable, children are being maintained in their own communities with the aid of foster and relative resource families.

Recommendations for Santa Cruz County

This is an exciting time for Santa Cruz County. With the award of two large grants, Santa Cruz is hiring many new staff and implementing two new programs to improve service delivery to our clients, Differential Response and Primeros Pasos. Similar to a component of Family to Family, Differential Response will involve offering clients preventive services to child welfare involvement and, as such, presents a substantial change in current practice. Primeros Pasos will focus efforts on working with drug addicted pregnant women in the Latino community.

With the energy directed at implementing these programs, it may not be feasible at this time to adopt Family to Family as well. However, as described in this case study, several of the components of Family to Family's four core strategies are already in place in Santa Cruz County and could, with some fine-tuning, lead to Santa Cruz becoming a fully functioning Family to Family county.

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Introduction

As part of my participation in the Bay Area Social Services Consortium (BASSC) Executive Management Program, I spent time at the Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services (DSES). While at DSES, I learned about their planning, development and implementation processes for bringing Family to Family into practice. Monterey County spent four years in the preparation process before the inception of Family to Family in May 2004. Although the implementation of this initiative is relatively new to Monterey County, they have experienced many successes and understandably continue to face some challenges.

For this case study, I chose to outline some of the key aspects of Family to Family. I will briefly describe the Annie E. Casey Foundation's role in bringing this initiative to state and local child welfare agencies and list the goals, strategies, tools, and outcomes of Family to Family. I will discuss Monterey County's process in implementation of this initiative and its approach to the four core strategies of Family to Family. Finally, I will look at program outcomes and discuss implications for implementation of the Family to Family initiative in Santa Cruz County.

Family to Family Background

In 1948, Jim Casey, a founder of United Parcel Service, along with his siblings, established the Annie E. Casey Foundation in honor of their mother. The foundation's main mission is to "foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families." (www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/overview/)

Over the last decade many social service agencies have followed the traditional foster care placement trends set forth by the state. While the number of children placed in foster care due to abuse or neglect has more than doubled, there has been a steady decline in families willing to become licensed foster parents. A number of factors are attributed to this, including higher costs of housing, two working parent families, children with a higher level of needs, and increased concerns of liability.

Due, in part, to these dynamics, children entering the foster care system are experiencing multiple placement disruptions and being placed in a higher level of care facility, for example, a group home, when not all children's needs rise to this level of care.

Recognizing this disturbing trend, the Casey Foundation sought to assist state and local child welfare systems to find alternatives to meet these challenges through the fundamental belief that

"...smarter and more effective responses are available to prevent child maltreatment and to respond more effectively when there is abuse or neglect. Often families can be helped to safely care for their children in their own communities and in their own homes—if appropriate support, guidance, and help is provided to them early enough." (www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/overview/)

While the Casey Foundation recognizes there are emergency situations that warrant removal of a child from their home, the foundation strongly believes these children can most often benefit from being cared for by relatives or another family within their own community. The Family to Family Initiative was designed in 1992 and is currently in practice in many child welfare systems throughout the country. This initiative seeks to aid child welfare systems

in redesigning their current practices to better serve children and families in their community.

FAMILY TO FAMILY SYSTEM-WIDE GOALS

As taken from the Annie E. Casey Foundation's website, the Family to Family Initiative has the following goals:

- To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities in which children live.
- To assure that scarce family foster home resources are provided to all those children (but to only those children) who, in fact, must be removed from their homes.
- To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (in shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs, and group homes) by meeting the needs of children currently in those settings through relative or family foster care.
- To increase the number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs.
- To reunify children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished based on the family's and children's needs—not simply the system's time frames.
- To reduce the lengths of stay of children in out-of-home care.
- To better screen children being considered for removal from home, and to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family.
- To decrease the overall number of children entering out-of-home care.
- To involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts.
- To become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes.

KEY STRATEGIES OF FAMILY TO FAMILY

Four core strategies guide the Family to Family program. These strategies are:

- *Recruitment, Training, and Support of Resource Families (foster and relative):* Finding and maintaining local resources who can support children and families in their own neighborhoods by recruiting, training, and supporting foster parents and relative caregivers.
- *Building Community Partnerships:* Partnering with a wide range of community organizations beyond public and private agencies—in neighborhoods which are the source of high referral rates, to work together toward creating an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system and thereby helps to build stronger families.
- *Family Team Decision-Making:* Involving not just foster parents and caseworkers, but also birth families and community members in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for the child and the adults who care for them.
- *Self Evaluation:* Using hard data linked to child and family outcomes to drive program decision making, and to show where change is needed and where progress has been made.

FAMILY TO FAMILY TOOLS

In the beginning phases of Family to Family practice it became clear that new principles, new policies, and new organizational structures were not enough to both create and then sustain real change in public child welfare services. In implementing such change it would be necessary to find new ways of practicing child protection efforts from the frontline. To support that effort, therefore, the Foundation and its grantees together developed a set of tools they believed would help others build neighborhood-based family foster care systems. The tools are as follows:

- Successful strategies to recruit, train, and retain foster families.
- A decision-making model for placement in child protection.
- New approaches to tracking and analyzing outcome data.
- A self evaluation tool.

- Tools to engage large organizations in change efforts.
- Tools to build partnerships with neighborhoods and local communities.
- New approaches to engaging and serving drug affected families.
- Tools to promote resilience among front line workers and to promote worker safety.
- Proven models which move children home or to other permanent families in a timely manner.
- Communications planning in a public child protection environment.
- A model for building partnerships between public and private child welfare agencies.

THE OUTCOMES OF FAMILY TO FAMILY

The Casey Foundation asks that child welfare agencies who participate in the Family to Family initiative commit to achieving the following outcomes:

- 1 A reduction in the number of children served in institutionalized and congregate care.
- 2 A shift of resources from congregate and institutionalized care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child and family-serving systems.
- 3 A decrease in the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement.
- 4 An increase in the number of planned reunifications.
- 5 A decrease in the number of entries or re-entries into care.
- 6 A reduction in the number of placement moves experienced by children in care.
- 7 An increase in the number of siblings placed together.
- 8 A reduction in the total number of children served away from their own families.

Family to Family in Monterey County

First steps in Monterey County's planning process involved forming a collaborative partnership with the Charitable Council of Monterey County, now known as the Action Council, and with the Social Services Commission. With the Charitable Council

as lead, the coalition was awarded \$63,000 in funding from the California Endowment, the Community Foundation for Monterey County, and the Monterey County Children and Families Commission. Next steps involved developing recommendations for a new system of emergency foster care that would be flexible and responsive to the needs of local children and families.

The following components were involved in the planning and implementation process of the Cherish Center (CHERISH is an acronym for the CHildren's EmeRgency Intake and Shelter project.), Monterey County's 23 hour receiving center.

- Data Collection: an analysis of existing data on children who have been through emergency placement;
- Focus Groups: Foster care staff, foster parents, foster children, and community service providers met to determine a vision for Monterey County's emergency foster care system; and
- Research: conducted in California and nationwide on best practice and program models.

Once the Center was up and running, Monterey County began to look at implementing the Family to Family initiative and all of its components into their practice. Using some of the initial funding for the Cherish Center, the county held a "What is Family to Family Day." Affiliates from the Casey Foundation, department staff, community-based organizations, and county government officials were all in attendance. Through this process, the Family to Family Steering Committee was formed.

In January 2001 the steering committee decided to "roll out" Family to Family in those areas of the county where the most referrals were generated and where the most children were in out-of-home care. In 2003, after much planning and preparation, Family to Family rolled out first in Marina, and, over several years, in Seaside, East Salinas, King City and two additional zip codes in Salinas.

The Family to Family initiative in Monterey County falls under the supervision of Program Manager, Anne Herendeen, who oversees the Placement Support Unit where Family to Family is housed.

Monterey County has allocated the following staff positions: a full-time, non-case carrying social worker to facilitate Team Decision Making (TDM) and a full-time Family to Family social worker. This position is currently vacant.

Monterey County's approach to the four core strategies of Family to Family includes:

Recruitment, Training, and Support of Resource Families (foster and relative).

Through a contract with the local community college and other funding sources, Monterey County has hired foster parents as peer-recruiters. These foster parents reach out to their communities through various social organizations and attend community functions where they recruit and provide support to qualified foster families and respite providers.

In each of the communities where Family to Family has been rolled out, Monterey County works with a community liaison employed by a lead community-based agency. This person offers expertise in knowledge of resources within the community and assists the agency with recruiting foster families.

Building Community Partnerships

From the inception of the Cherish Center, Monterey County has reached out to its local community providers and invited them to partner with the agency in the planning and implementation of the Family to Family initiative. There are currently four lead agencies that supervise community liaisons. Catholic Charities serves the community of Marina. Community Human Services serves both South Monterey County and the Monterey Peninsula cities of Seaside, Monterey, Pacific Grove, Del Rey Oaks and Sand City. Alisal Community Healthy Start serves East Salinas, and Sun Street Center serves the remainder of Salinas.

Each community liaison leads a coalition of service providers in their area and works closely with agency staff. They are required to attend and complete training in child welfare core courses. In addition to these responsibilities, a community liaison's primary function is to assist with recruitment and support of foster families and respite providers. They also meet

with and assist families with accessing the necessary resources to avoid removal of their child/ren from their care, or to help them to reunify in cases where their children have already been removed.

In efforts to build community partnerships, recruit foster families, and bring child welfare into community focus, Monterey County has worked closely with their local television network and developed five minute "Eye Opener" public service announcements.

Family Team Decision Making (TDM)

In May, 2004, Monterey County began holding a TDM meeting on every child who had been removed from care or was being considered for removal, in the communities where Family to Family had been rolled out. A social worker will call the office and schedule a time for the TDM meeting and provide the family with a pamphlet outlining what a TDM meeting is, who attends, what occurs, why a TDM meeting is held, and what the goals are. In addition to the parents, and, in some cases, the children, persons who are important in the family's life, such as clergy, friends, relatives, teachers, other resource personnel and the community liaison also attend the TDM meeting and are able to speak to concerns and to the family's strengths in support of a plan to assist the family.

The main goal of a TDM meeting is to discuss the concerns that brought a family to the attention of the agency and to discuss placement options. One of the challenges Monterey County and many other counties face are training agency staff that a TDM meeting is not a Family Conference. Once a child is the subject of a TDM, they remain a TDM child for the life of the case. For any placement change, including returning home, a TDM meeting is convened. To date, Monterey County has held 151 TDMs on 214 children.

Self Evaluation

With the use of the TDM database provided by UC Berkeley, Monterey County is able to input data and extract a myriad of reports with regard to various TDM measures, such as number of meetings held for

children involved in Emergency Placement vs. Imminent Risk. They have taken their data measurement efforts to the next level and have been experimenting with ways to cross reference the TDM database with the Child Welfare System case Management System (CWS/CMS) data base to enable them to come up with success outcome measures. This task has proven to be a challenging one as data errors in CWS/CMS have to be fixed before accurate reports can be obtained. Cross reference efforts continue to be a work in progress. However, Monterey County has been recognized as a leader in TDM data collection and recently led a presentation of their information-gathering methods at a Family to Family Data Convening.

Recommendations for Santa Cruz County

As sister counties, Monterey and Santa Cruz utilize similar methods of service delivery and have at their disposal many of the same community resources. Given this fact, Santa Cruz County could follow Monterey County's model in implementing Family to Family.

Currently, Santa Cruz is in the process of allocating a staff position for facilitation of TDM meetings. While this is a positive step towards improving service delivery, it does not incorporate the Family to Family initiative in its entirety and therefore, is not likely to be as effective or community inclusive as adopting the initiative as a whole.

This writer makes the following recommendations:

- Contact Jana Rickerson, Technical Assistant with the Casey Foundation and obtain information on funding and on incorporating Family to Family strategies within Santa Cruz County's current structure.
- Continue to utilize our contract with Cabrillo College and our foster parent peer recruiters to reach out to the community. Assist peer recruiters to broaden their recruitment efforts to involve community-based organizations.
- In implementing Differential Response and reaching out to various service providers, explore

funding and appointing a liaison in each community in Santa Cruz County to aid families in accessing resources, assist with recruitment efforts, and sit in on TDM meetings for their community.

- Consider increasing the Crossroads shelter's capacity to nine beds and changing its license to accommodate children ages 0-18. Implement a fast-track system whereby children entering Crossroads are evaluated within 24 hours, a TDM meeting is held, and they are moved to an appropriate placement. Only those children who need further assessment or stabilization with medication would remain at Crossroads for the full 90 days.

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Resources

Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care.
www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily/

