

San Mateo County Family Resource Centers (FRC's) **Strengthening and Preserving FRC's** **During Times of Financial Hardship**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study looked at the Family Resource Centers (FRC) in San Mateo County. The nine FRC's are all co-located with full-service community schools. FRC's play an important role in early child abuse prevention and intervention, family engagement and family support. Child abuse prevention is not the sole responsibility of child welfare agencies; therefore, partnerships need to exist with community-based organizations that share the goals and vision of child safety and wellness. Unfortunately, the current economic situation creates challenges in preserving services that are not mandated by state or federal laws, such as the FRC's. This case study will explore practices and approaches for strengthening FRC's during times of financial hardship.

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Introduction

With the current budget crisis that many counties are facing, how does one support or justify expenses for services that are not mandated? The focus of this project was to look at how an already-existing Family Resource Center (FRC) can be strengthened and preserved during this time of financial hardship. At this time, Santa Clara County's FRC's are undergoing changes in structure and services. The goal of this project was to learn from the success of San Mateo County's FRC's and determine what strategies or approaches could be implemented in Santa Clara County to strengthen and preserve FRC's. Santa Clara County and San Mateo County have invested in their FRC's and yet, given the economic crisis, both counties have been forced to make budget cuts that place the future of the FRC's at risk.

Background: FRC Models and Locations

FRC's operated by Departments of Family and Children Services (DFCS) have traditionally focused on child abuse prevention and early intervention programs. They are strategically located in neighborhoods or communities identified as "high need" and they often follow a one-stop shop model. All of the nine FRC's in San Mateo County, which are part of the Human Services Agency (HSA), Department of Children and Family Services are located in full-service community schools. A full-service community school is a holistic approach. It promotes student success and integrates important aspects of a child's family and community life. The full-service community school approach provides a platform of supports

and services while fostering parent and community participation. Full-service community schools have a strong focus on supports that promote academic success. In addition, this approach seeks to serve the "whole child" by ensuring their academic, social, emotional and physical needs are met.

Since the early 1990's, San Mateo County DCFS has partnered with community schools to support families and children in being healthy and successful. The belief is that a coordinated, multidisciplinary response is necessary to address multifaceted child and family needs. The Family Resource Centers are a child abuse prevention and early intervention strategy that is consistent with least restrictive interventions and best practices. It is also in line with Annie E. Casey's Family to Family model. Four basic principles of Family to Family are: child safety is paramount; children belong in families; families need strong communities; and, public child welfare systems need partnerships with community and other systems to achieve strong outcomes for children.¹ Annie E. Casey's Family Services support a continuum of services, including Family Resource Centers.²

Unfortunately, Family Resource Center services are not funded by state or federal funds; therefore, any cost that the county contributes comes from county general funds. This is a difficult discussion because while there are supporters who believe in

¹ Family to family: Our Work Flyer. Retrieved March 2, 2011, from www.aecf.org/upload/publicationfiles/outcomes_goals.pdf.

² The Annie E. Case Foundation. Casey Family Service. Retrieved March 2, 2011, from <http://www.aecf.org/ourwork/childwelfare/permanence/caseyfamilyservices.aspx>.

the work of the FRC's, county officials are faced with the challenging task of determining where to make budget cuts. San Mateo County HSA alone is facing a \$10 million cut for the next fiscal year. While important, FRC's are vulnerable because they rely solely on county funds. According to Linda Holman, San Mateo County DCFS, HSA and the Board of Supervisors share the belief that, while not mandated by state or federal laws, FRC's have high priority (personal communication, March 11, 2011). As a result of that belief and support, FRC's have continued to be successful thus far.

Key Elements/Collaboration

Active and intentional coordination is critical to avoid service gaps, fragmentation and duplication of services. Full-service community schools become a "system of care" where a team develops an individualized support plan for students. San Mateo County FRC's collaborative efforts include:

- Blended budgets with cities and school districts to accomplish goals (e.g., HSA partners with the Redwood City School District and the City of Redwood City to fund the FRC Coordinator and FRC Administrative Assistant positions that are managed by the Redwood City School District)
- In-kind staffing resources
- Grants applied for through the School District and HSA
- Use of interns

The partnerships between San Mateo County FRC's and the school districts are impressive. This partnership not only strengthens the full-service community school's "holistic" approach, but it is the driving force of the San Mateo County FRC's Prevention and Early Intervention strategy. Additionally, FRC's co-location at schools makes the services accessible to the community. After all, as Linda Holman (Manager for has) and Jana Kiser (Community School Coordinator at Hoover Community School) state, school is the only place that is mandatory for parents with children (Personal communication, March 14, 2011). FRC's that are co-located in neigh-

borhood schools are more approachable and less intimidating than traditional governmental offices and offer a much warmer environment than a principal's office. FRC and community school partnerships include:

- Project Director/Community School Coordinator is an anchor position
- Family Engagement Specialist engages families in their community
- Administrative Assistant The face of the Center.
- DCFS Psychiatric Social Worker provides counseling, support, education and case management services
- An out-posted Benefits Analyst or Eligibility Worker for HSA Cash Aid, Food Stamps, and Medi-Cal
- Parks and Recreation Department
- Differential Response provides voluntary case management services to DCFS families when allegations of child abuse were not substantiated, but the family could benefit from case management services provided by a trained community worker
- Second Harvest/Food Distribution
- Boys and Girls Club develops leadership groups and activities for youth

Although the community school approach is focused on academic success, DCFS and the community school staff have identified a shared vision and shared goals. Jana Kiser, Community School Coordinator at Hoover Community School, described seven lessons that have been learned through their model:

- 1 Leadership is vital to success. The full-service community school approach allows for shared leadership among principals, the community school coordinator and key service providers.
- 2 Tracking data is important to prove effectiveness.
- 3 Establishing a full-service community school takes time and intentionality.
- 4 Connecting the regular school day and extended day activities is critical.
- 5 Culture matters.

- 6 Parent engagement can make a big difference.
- 7 The heart of a full-service community school is in the collaboration.

FRC Challenges

- As of the date of this writing, San Mateo County faces a \$5.2 million deficit. The Board of Supervisors held Budget hearings in March where they heard first-hand from department directors and members of the community advocating for county-funded departments and programs. The budget to run 9 FRC's in FY 2010–2011 is approximately \$2.5 million, while the overall HSA budget is \$196 million. San Mateo County has already notified staff of potential layoffs, instituted a hiring freeze over two years ago, deleted vacant positions, and realized service reductions.
- Organizational structure can result in a challenge when roles are not clearly defined. San Mateo County DCFS staff out-stationed at the FRC's at community schools have found it works well to be supervised by a DCFS Supervisor, while also being accountable to the Community School Coordinator.
- Defining shared purposes and shared responsibility can present challenges for groups with multiple missions and backgrounds.³
- Appearance and disappearance of services as community providers lose funding creates higher costs for HSA to continue its services levels.³
- The lack of shared Data Management Systems
- Evaluation. Research and controlled experimentation cannot be easily applied in many FRC settings.⁴
- A challenge that arose with locating FRC's at school sites was that schools had to secure their campus so that community members would not just walk onto school grounds when attempting to access FRC services.

³ Council on Accreditation Service Narrative: Public Agency, Counseling Support and Education.

⁴ Family Resource Center's Website (2000). "Family Resource Centers" Vehicles for Change, The California FRC Learning Circle retrieved April 9, 2011, from http://www.familyresourcecenters.net/assets/library/9_vehicles3.pdf.

- Co-locating on school campuses raises the issue of relying on the school calendar for visitors. The foot traffic lessens considerably during school holidays and summer breaks, raising challenges related to staff workload and safety.

Challenges: An Opportunity for Creativity

Budget cuts are an opportunity to take a good look at what's working and what's not working. It is also an opportunity for growth. Pooling new resources together and forming new partnerships are the only means available for keeping non-mandated public services from being eliminated entirely during times of financial hardship. One example is to bring private businesses to the table to assist with job placement of FRC clients or with providing training or information-sharing to clients on topics such as literacy or creating budgets. Another example is to bring community activism and initiatives that exist in the community into the FRC's, such as the Promotoras. *Promotoras* are Hispanic community health workers who work within their communities to educate target audiences about health issues affecting those communities. Promotoras live in the communities in which they work, so they have an understanding of the neighborhood and individual health and social issues affecting the community, as well as unmet health and social.⁴

Examples of creative approaches implemented by other FRC's to strengthen their sites include: starting a side business, consolidating and bundling services and resources, and using volunteers from the business sector as consultants or facilitators.

Recommendations

Based on my observations of the San Mateo County FRC structure, my recommendations for Santa Clara County include the following strategies to strengthen the current San Jose FRC:

- Santa Clara County should continue to provide voluntary case management services to families and move the Informal Supervision Services

⁵ Promotoras. Retrieved April 10, 2011, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Promotoras>.

Program to the FRC as a means of providing the least restrictive alternative at the more accessible community level.

- Santa Clara County has already merged three FRC's under one roof; however, more intentional collaboration would include finding ways to further co-locate with established partnerships and existing service contracts (e.g. County Mental Health, Friends Outside, Catholic Charities, Victim Witness).
- Currently, Santa Clara County is responsible for 100% of the cost of the FRC operation. Until the lease expires, inviting CBO's to co-locate with the FRC would bring more services to the FRC and strengthen the services and existence of the FRC.
- Santa Clara County should lower operating costs. When the lease expires, Santa Clara County can replicate San Mateo County's FRC approach to funding FRC's by inviting School Districts and cities to become partners by sharing locations and the cost of FRC operations.
- Santa Clara County should build collaborations with non-traditional organizations, such as the MI and faith communities.
- Santa Clara County should develop partnerships with the private business sector.
- Santa Clara County should conduct a formal cost benefit analysis of these prevention and early intervention programs and services.
- Santa Clara County should conduct research on grant sources, how to secure grants, and available foundation money.

Conclusion

This case study revealed that intentional and organized collaboration is key to making FRC's succeed during critical financial cutbacks. Community partnerships at all levels are important to the success of FRC's, including parent engagement, community support, and public and private agency participation. Santa Clara County has an existing FRC with a strong foundation that can be strengthened even more by replicating many of the strategies currently in use by San Mateo County FRC's.

Acknowledgements

I would like Linda Holman, Human Services Manager with San Mateo County Human Services Agency for her hospitality, support and guidance. I wish to thank all of the Family Resource Center staff, Administrative Assistants, Coordinators and Clinical Social Workers alike, for their time and orientation. The following individuals also assisted me with important information for this project:

- Jana Kiser, Community School Coordinator, Hoover Community School
- Carlos Nolasco, Community School Coordinator, Kennedy Middle School
- Patricia Merlos-Lopez, Mental Health Specialist, County of San Mateo
- Pravin Patel, Human Services Manager, County of San Mateo
- Sandra Portacio, Director of School-Community Partnerships, Redwood City School District