

**SAN FRANCISCO CITY AND COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES:
PARTNERSHIPS, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND POLITICS**

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INTRODUCTION

A. Interest

My major goal was to look at how one department dealt with pursuing its social service mission while addressing the political and public relations demands of a multiethnic, multiinterest community in a highly politicized county structure.

The San Francisco Department of Social Services (DSS) offered the opportunity to focus on this issue, and accordingly, I undertook my internship under the mentorship of Brian Cahill, Department General Manager and Patricia Reynolds, Assistant General Manager of the Family and Children's Services Division.

My interest in political and public relations issues was based on my belief that the job of the social services executive bordered on the impossible, given the multiple and conflicting demands and pressures. At the same time from my own experience in Santa Clara County, I knew that these executives did survive, prevail and move forward progressive agendas in the best cases.

Interestingly enough, during my early discussions with the General Manager, he introduced me to a book in his library, Impossible Jobs in Public Management by Erwin C. Hargrove and John C. Glidewell. The authors identify four dimensions for classifying jobs in the public sector. Each dimension was a continuum ranging from low to high, and the authors point out that the job of Welfare Director rates low on all four dimensions of "possibility." These dimensions are:

- Legitimacy of clientele (in the public eye)
- Intensity of conflict among the department's constituencies
- Public confidence in the authority of the Director's profession, i.e. social work/public administration
- Strength of the department myth, i.e. the guiding ideal of the mission in the public eye

This book spoke to a major question that I had concerning public social services administration, which was, given the conditions under which the executive operated, how could he or she "succeed" or even define success, and how did he or she get and sustain the needed support.

My major program focus was the evolution of the Family Support and Family Preservation Planning Project, a significant planning effort related to children and families. This study looks at the evolution of this effort in terms of the public relations, collaboration and political issues involved. Although my major focus was the Family Support and Family Preservation Planning Project, I also had the opportunity to observe and discuss with my mentors the political dynamics surrounding other programs and issues as well.

This report is therefore divided into two parts. The first describes the Family Support and Family Preservation Planning Project. The second addresses leadership strategies and philosophy in a political environment.

B. Note

Given the focus of my internship, some of the meetings that I attended and the content of my discussions with the mentors dealt with sensitive issues which in their particulars are not appropriate for publication, although they contributed considerably to my education in my area of interest.

Hopefully I can present the lessons of these meetings and discussions in a generalized way without obvious gaps in this report.

C. Context

To appreciate the significance of the issues addressed in this report and the political dynamics surrounding them, it is important to understand the context in which San Francisco DSS operates.

- San Francisco City and County are one entity, with a population of 739,000. Poverty and unemployment are high. The unemployment rate for example of 7% is higher than surrounding counties. Across the board, 12% of the population was reported to be living in poverty, with rates as high as 51 % in some neighborhoods.
- African-Americans are a particularly disadvantaged group compared to Caucasians, Asians and Latinos in the County: while they represent 10.5% of the population and 15% of children aged 0-19, according to the 1990 census, their percentage of children under 5 living in poverty was 45.6%; of the children in foster care 71% were African-American, and of the children in out of home placement with juvenile probation, 53% were African-American. (See appendix one)
- The General Manager is appointed by the Mayor, in that the Mayor recommends his choice to the Social Services Commission which approves the recommendation. While the General Manager answers to the Mayor, he also answers to the Social Services Commission, a five person body appointed by the Mayor for a four year term. The Commission has the right to hire and fire the General Manager, approve the department budget, and approve broad Department policy.
- Both the Department General Manager and the Assistant General Manager of Family and Children's Services Division are relatively new to their positions, having served at this writing between two and three years. The General Manager hired the Assistant General Manager early in his administration, and they share similar philosophies, including an affinity for working with the community.

- Early in their administrations the General Manager and the Assistant General Manager were faced with three critical issues which were interconnected to some degree. These were: 1. the State mandate to undertake major corrective action to bring the Department into compliance in the child welfare arenas; 2. the reality of service issues to African-American families, such as the vast overrepresentation of African-American children in foster care and the lack of African-American staff in critical positions, etc., and 3. the perception that the Department was authoritarian and insensitive, particularly with regard to people of color. Although neither administrator had a part in the evolution of these conditions or perceptions, both were under considerable pressure to rectify them.

THE FAMILY PRESERVATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT PLANNING PROCESS -- HISTORY AND ISSUES

This planning initiative was a response to the Federal and State mandated Family Preservation and Support Act, which required counties to plan for both family support and family preservation activities. The desired outcome of the planning process was a plan accepted by the State, resulting in new revenue to the County of approximately \$1,227,271 over a five year period to undertake enhanced family preservation and family support activities.

Critical persons in this process were the Assistant General Manager, Patricia Reynolds; who chaired the Family Preservation and Support Planning Committee (FPSPC), and Cheryl Polk, the Planning Coordinator, hired under contract to oversee the development of the plan, and the members of the FPSPC.

Sequence of Events

The sequence of events in the evolution of the final plan are discussed below.

1. The Family Preservation and Support Planning Process began in November, 1993 when a small group of DSS staff and community representatives met to "plan to plan." Over time this initial group expanded to the sixty member FPSPC. Early on the original group recognized the need for greater community involvement and sought Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) funds to support the planning process by hiring a part-time Planning Coordinator and support staff.
2. The Planning Coordinator was hired in April, 1994, and the group held a retreat in May, 1994. All planning committee members as well as interested parents were invited.
3. The committee continued to expand during the period between May, 1994 and November, 1994. During this period several important developments occurred with respect to collaboration and partnership:
 - a. DSS administrators announced to the planning group that the Family Preservation and Support funds would be contracted out to community based agencies (CBO's). This announcement was considered by DSS to be an important demonstration of Department

commitment to community based services and an important event in building trust with others involved in the planning process.

- b. Based on demographic data, it became clear to DSS administrators that addressing the needs of the African-American families on a priority basis was indicated. Nonetheless the Latino and Asian constituencies were also identifying service needs. It was therefore significant that during this period a recognized leader in the Latino community accepted and articulated the position that services to African-American families had to be viewed as a priority concern.
- c. The committee developed consensus around and adopted "guiding principles" to be used in the planning process. Of these principles the ones that related to my focus include:
 - Broad community and consumer involvement
 - Promotion of community and grass roots capacity to provide needed services
 - Change in the philosophy and culture of DSS's Family and Children's Services Division to be more culturally relevant, family centered and multidisciplinary in service delivery resulting in a more effective partnership with the community
 - Creating partnership among City departments/agencies to coordinate and share resources for addressing needs identified by families
 - Family preservation services for the African-American communities as the highest priority

These principles were noteworthy in their staying power. They were stated in one form or another in many varied meetings that I attended and in written materials that I reviewed during my internship.

Regarding the decision to target the African-American communities, the Planning Coordinator observed that the relationships among members had time to develop before this hard decision was made and formalized, thus diffusing what could have been a controversial issue.

- d. The awareness of the openness of the planning process grew and people continued to join the planning efforts at various levels. Those who had initially indicated that they "felt left out" were encouraged to participate. Participants were recruited based on recommendations by public and community agencies and other participants, via focus groups, or through self-recruitment. Specific structures and levels for involvement included the following:
 - The FPSPC -- The 60 member committee representing a broad range of public and private agencies, ethnic groups, community members, educational institutions, advocates, parents, and DSS staff. (See appendix two)
 - Nine administrative and program area subcommittees addressing the issues of *fiscal strategies, employment and training, housing, substance abuse, mental health,*

family resources/support, DSS internal planning, clergy involvement and domestic violence.

- Three community involvement cultural relevance subcommittees representing the *Asian, Latino and African American* communities. (Also referred to in this report as ethnic specific subcommittees)
 - Twenty-five focus groups representing the views of various constituencies. (See appendix three)
- e. Participants came to know each other as individuals, rather than as organizational roles or titles.
- f. The three community involvement cultural relevance subcommittees were allocated approximately \$80,000 between them of the "plan to plan" funds to hire consultants for needs assessment and data collection. This support was empowering to the ethnic communities in that it provided them with resources for data based advocacy. It also served as a further example of DSS's seriousness about supporting the community in self-determination.

Observations About Process, Outcomes and Interactions

I reviewed planning documents and attended a number of subcommittee and full committee meetings with attention to processes, outcomes and interactions. Observations that I thought were important are noted below:

1. As the time came closer for submitting the final plan, the competition for the limited resources became more apparent. For example at the full meeting of the FPSPC after the Assistant General Manager reiterated the priority focus on African-American families, the Chair of the Asian community involvement cultural relevance subcommittee made an impassioned statement about the importance of recognizing the work of this subcommittee in identifying critical needs of the Asian community and making commitments to addressing these needs.
2. At the same meeting the issue of whether money should be spread among proposed projects for broad equity reasons, or concentrated to have a demonstrated impact was raised. During the preceding week a similar concern about resources had been raised by foundation officers in response to the needs assessment reports made to them by the three ethnic specific subcommittee chairs.
3. DSS administrators showed good faith efforts in resolving these issues. Both the Assistant General Manager and the Planning Coordinator shared with me their concerns about the reaction of the Asian and Latino committees after this meeting and the importance of addressing their issues.

By the following week and the last meeting of the FPSPC to finalize the plan, DSS administrators developed a funding plan which allocated funds for each community's highest priority item in the first year. Ultimately the final plan was to include a five year schedule of activities and programs to address the identified needs of the Latino, Asian and African-American subcommittees over this time period.

4. DSS administrators continued to maintain their commitment to partnership verbally in meetings, in written policy and in specific actions. For example:
 - a. The final plan designated Family Resource Centers in the neighborhoods as the service delivery model of choice, and addressed the expectation of family and community involvement in the planning of these services.
 - b. DSS administrators repeatedly referred to their actions to make internal "cultural" and "structural" changes to facilitate family preservation and family support strategies. Department strategies included such things as joint CBO/DSS staff training, family focused training, commitment to family focused practice, an ombudsperson's office, multidisciplinary teams, flexible hours, a new voluntary family maintenance unit and overall focus on front end services, e.g. emergency response.

Prospects of Partnership

The history of the Family Preservation and Support planning process suggests that partnerships and collaborations can provide strategies to combat the "impossibility" of the Welfare Director's job in a number of ways:

1. Empowered communities can become co-advocates for resources and as such can enhance the Department's success in obtaining resources for expanded services. Private foundations, for example, were interested in public/private collaborative endeavors and in funding or otherwise supporting them in some manner.
2. Planning structures as broad as the FPSPC can create understandings among groups and individuals who may have been at arm's length from each other. With these understandings come legitimacy in each other's eyes. Institutions and their roles are seen from a more open perspective by clients and community. In like vein client and community perceptions and needs are seen from a more respectful and empathetic perspective by Social Services staff. I specifically observed relationships strengthen between DSS and San Francisco Foster Parents United, the Youth Law Center, members of the clergy and others.

Further, from a political point of view, the energy and power of these kinds of groups can have significant impact on the political decision makers to counter the demise of concern and resources for those in need prevalent in the current "Contract with America" environment.

LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES AND PHILOSOPHY IN A POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

Based on my observations, participation in meetings, and review of files, reports, newspaper articles and the like, I explored various issues with my mentors related to why they took particular actions, how they saw situations and what operating philosophies they found to be useful.

These discussions were as valuable to me in understanding how to do "impossible jobs" as were the actual program developments that I followed.

From the General Manager

1. The executive's role is to understand that (s)he must focus on the interconnection of services, policy and politics in the real world. Attention must be given to all three. In our discussions he described instances where human services executives in San Francisco and other jurisdictions did not attend all three areas and were thereby unable to maintain their position as executives.
2. Money compels policy; it provides incentives and disincentives. He noted, for example how county foster care placement rates went down when counties had to assume 60% of the non-federal share of costs, and how local program directions are shaped by the directives and parameters of available funding sources.
3. "Things happen" when there are "moons of enlightened self-interest" in alignment. It is important to align your interests with those of others who are key to your achieving your objectives. He noted that because the current Mayor campaigned on a neighborhood participation and empowerment theme, he packages his proposals to the Mayor in terms of neighborhood language whenever possible. More recently in budget discussions with the Mayor he was able to show the Mayor why he (the Mayor) should take specific actions related to GA, IHSS and drug abuse funding and be recognized for his leadership in these areas. The actions in question were policy actions favored by the General Manager, but he was able to show the Mayor how he would benefit politically from these actions.
4. Nothing is done without partnership. As indicated above this was a recurrent theme with DSS executives. One example of partnership that stood out was the partnership that developed between the General Manager and the relatively new Director of the Public Health Department. In a recent meeting with the Mayor's budget committee, they proposed to the Mayor that foster care savings be used to support substance abuse treatment services which were jeopardized by the current and future city budget deficits. Their collective reasoning was that substance abuse treatment for parents was essential to family preservation efforts and that a commitment to maintaining these programs had to be made on an ongoing basis. Although the money would come from the DSS budget, the General Manager saw the connection between children's and adult services, and that a strategy of collaboration was essential for providing drug abuse services for parents who, without these services, might otherwise lose their children.
5. It is important to own the need to change what is wrong with the system. Both the General Manager and the Assistant General Manager have demonstrated their commitment to

system change and significant system change is being planned within the Family and Children Services Division. These changes have been widely shared with the FPFSC, other interested or concerned groups, and the wider community.

6. It is important to your well being and effectiveness to have thick skin and to be prepared to leave the job. I have observed the General Manager to be frankly confrontive as well as facilitating in his verbal and written styles. He stressed the importance of being seen by others as strong as well as reasonable. In response to my inquiries about his relationship with the Mayor he indicated that he had cultivated a relationship of trust and mutual respect with the Mayor, but that he did argue against the Mayor's direction when he felt that that direction might be unsound from a policy or principle point of view. In part he attributed his success to being able to educate and inform the Mayor on issues and deliver on those things important to the Mayor when he could do so in good faith. He also described how he uses controversy on issues to educate political decision makers on policy questions. One such instance was an editorial attack by a County Supervisor in the San Francisco Chronicle on April 16, 1995 in which she criticized the Department for proposing that there be no GA cost of living increase for this fiscal year. The General Manager countered with a letter to the editor correcting a misstatement of fact. He saw this as an opportunity to educate the public about GA issues, but understood that he could expect more opposition from the Supervisor for taking this stand. As it turned out the proposal to hold the line on the GA cost of living increase was approved by the Board of Supervisors on an 8 to 3 vote.
7. Executives must demonstrate leadership and educate the community on issues. Reflective of this philosophy the General Manager developed and updated written material for general distribution which dramatically illustrated the impact of welfare reform. Similarly he organized an informational presentation to the Social Services Commission on the potential impact of welfare reform, which included verbal presentations to the Commission by Federal and State staff and legislative representatives as well as local interest groups. This presentation, which I attended, was well received by the Commission.

From the Assistant General Manager

1. Continuous emphasis on intent is essential for success. Her continuous repetition of "yes we can" and "yes we will" and her mobilizing of tools, training, and resources were critical in energizing staff to develop and implement a viable corrective action plan. This plan considerably enhanced the credibility of the Department with the State, the County and the community.
2. The important stakeholders and constituencies are continuously shifting. Treat everyone as important and understand that you cannot do it alone.
3. The process of building consensus and creating "win-win" solutions is intuitive as well as conscious. A predisposition to consensus building prepares you to use your intuitive capacity and take advantage of opportunities when they arise.

4. Continually find opportunities to educate for support and understanding. Address direct attacks with correct information when possible. Sometimes it is not prudent to do so in a public setting, particularly when the attack comes from political figures. In these instances, less public ways should be found to address the issues if it is important to do so.
5. Relationships and trust develop over time. It is important for an administrator to create and take advantage of opportunities for that to happen. Administrators must take the time to develop one-on-one relationships. From her own experience she noted the importance of the time factor in developing relationships with individuals and groups since she assumed her position.

From the Family Preservation and Support Planning Coordinator

Clients and community tend to assume that social services administrators and staff will disrespect them. By their actions administrators and staff must constantly challenge this assumption. She stressed that in her work it was essential that parents and community were respected and believed that they were respected. This principle at work was illustrated in the response of DSS leadership to the expressed concerns of the Asian community and others during the Family Preservation and Family Support Planning process.

ONGOING ISSUES

Based on my discussion with DSS administrators there are issues that DSS will continue to address to sustain their successes. Specifically:

1. The partnerships that emerged from the Family Preservation and Support planning process and other DSS collaborative activities must be nourished and sustained.
2. As a particular instance of this, involvement of parents and clients may need special attention especially regarding participation in planning activities and participation in service delivery. In the first instance the issue is the comfort of clients and parents with the typical planning processes. In the latter case the issue is the legal authority of the social worker versus the concerns, desires, confusion and perceived rights of the parents.
3. The corrective action and Family Preservation and Support planning initiatives and goals require that staff remain open and receptive to collaborative ways of relating to families, community members, CBO's and other significant entities in the child welfare arena. An issue for San Francisco, and other like-minded public agencies, therefore is how to support and reinforce the attitudinal and behavioral change required on an ongoing basis. This speaks to the reality that the passion and vision of executives does not automatically trickle down to lower level without focused attention directed to this outcome. '

CONCLUSION

My experience with San Francisco Department of Social Services was a unique learning opportunity in that it afforded a live versus academic study in policy, philosophy, politics, public relations and action.

It was particularly rewarding to see that there could be congruence among these areas.

Perhaps what stood out most for me was the importance of collaboration and coalition building skills for the social services executive.

Based on my experiences there I could clearly see that individuals and individual styles could make a difference, and individual commitment and determination on the part of the General Manager and Assistant General Manager has made a difference in an "impossible environment."

RELEVANCE FOR SANTA CLARA COUNTY

Based on my experience, there are two initiatives worthy of consideration by Santa Clara County Social Services Agency Executive Team.

1. Partnership and collaboration emphasis. There are currently a number of successful public and private collaborative efforts and activities in existence in Santa Clara County.

There may be some merit, however for the reasons discussed in the body of this report, to elevate the discussion and awareness of collaboration as a political -strategy in today's environment.

2. Mentorships, seminars, and workshops on the politics of management and leadership in the Agency. An essential element would be that the "mentee" or participant would focus on "real" political issues under the leadership of one of the members of the Executive Team.

This political education would serve to ground aspiring managers in the political aspects of the social services executive position and increase their confidence in this arena.

APPENDIX ONE

The Health and Well-Being of Children in San Francisco 1994 Report

INDICATOR	African-American	Asian	Latino	Caucasian	Other
1990 Census 0 –19 years old	15.7%	37.9% + Others	20.8%	25.6%	
Poverty					
Children living in Poverty in S.F. Under Age 18					
1980 Census	35.5%	.14.9%	21.1%	13.4%	19.4%
1990 Census	40.7%	15.7%	20.2%	10.5%	22.9% (Native Am. -13.4% -
Under Age 5 - S.F. - 1990 Census	45.6%	14.5%	19.7%	8.8%	21.6% (Native Am. - 16.4%
Homeless Youth	25 %	8 %	22 %	40 %	5
Mortality					
Infant Death Rates per 1000 Live Births 1989-92 - Avera Rates	16	6.2	4.7	6.1	7.1
Child Deaths - per 100,000 children 1986 - 92					
Ages I-14 ears	39	23	21	32	All - 27.
Ages 15-19 years	128	58	58	52	All - 65

1994 Child Health Report Summary. Page 1 (11/28/94)

Gary Frveauf	Department of Social Services Sr. Supervisor	H. William Taetuch, M.D.	SF General Hospital Pediatrics
Jimmie Gilyard	Department of Social Services Prop Manager, F&CS	Elsa Ten-E3roeck	SFSU Dept. of Social Work Education
Carl ine Grayson	Department of Social Services Child Welfare Worker	Evelyn Trowel) _ -	Grand Parents Who Care
Carol Goss	The Stuart Foundations	Lark Thomas	Teat Age Parenting Program
Evelyn Hannah	Foster Parent	Joanna Uribe	Famiv Mosaic Project
Martha Henderson	Community Substance	Jacky Spencer-Days	Bay Area Women's

	Abuse Services, Perinatal and Youth Svs.		Resource Center
Mai Mai Ho	SP General Hospital, Asian Perinatal Advocates	Reverend Judy Wellington	Bay Area Native American Ministrv
James Howard	Department of Social Services Supervisor	Joanna Chestnut	Project Director, Epiphany Center for Families in Recovery
Dorothy Ingram	City Collage of San Francisco	Norman Yee	Wu Yoe Children's Center
Alma Jackson	Sojourner Truth Foster Family Care Agency	Sylvia Yee	Evelyn & Walter Tlaas, Jr. Fund
Reverend Calvin Jones	Providence Baptist Church	Minister Christropher X	Nation of Islam
Patsy Jones	TALK Line		
Cyndia Kahn	Department of Social Services Child Welfare Worker		'

APPENDIX TWO

COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO FAMILY PRESERVATION AND SUPPORT PLANNING COMMITTEE .

Staff Planning Coordinator. Cheryl Polk, PhD

Name	Organization	Name	Organization
Abby Abinanti	Superior Court	Linnea Klee, PhD	Children's Council
Deborah Alvarez-Rodriguez	Office of Intergovernmental and School-Linked Services	Laurel Y.loomok	High Risk Infant Interagency Council
Gaynell Armstrong	Board of Supervisors	Anja Koot	Council Homelessness
Sharron Treskunoff-Bailey	Homeless Advocate	Natalie Lopes	The Family School
Kathy Baxter	S.F. Child Abuse Council	Jesus Barragan	Department of Social Services Child Welfare Supervisor
Cheyenne Bell	Juvenile Probation Department	Eric McDonald	Audrey L. Smith Development Center
Cynthia Black	SF Housing Authority	Lora Ellen-McKinney, PhD	UCSF Div. of Behavioral Developmental Pediatrics
Abner Boles	SF Health Department Director of Planning for Children, Youth & Families	John Nichens, Ph.D.	Progress Foundation
Reverend Edgar E. Boyd	Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church	Ferris Page,.PhD	Alternative Family Services
Aurora Brown	Parent	Reverend Chequita Parker	Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Wayne Burton	Parent	Amy Rassen	Jewish Family and Children Services
Brian Cahill	Department of Social Sernces, General Manager	Datrell Reece	Parent
Linda Asato	SF Unified School Distnct	Liz Resner, Ph.D.	Homeless Program, Policy Specialist
Ramon Calubaqib	Asian Youth Substance Abuse Project	Pat Reynolds	Assist General Manager, SFDSS Family 8c Children's Services
Sai-Ling Char Sew	Dit•iston of Mental Ileslth-Children's Services	Richey Rice-Gore	Employment and Training Consultant
Hedy Chang	California Tomorrow	Martha Roditti	SFSLI School of Social Work Child Welfare Training
Eula Chriss	Foster Parent	Michele Rutherford	Department of Social Services Program Manager
Mary Clan;	Parent	Mary Rybka	Department of Social Services Child Welfare Worker
Patrick Duterte	Employment and Training, DSS Program Manager	Sheila Rltatigan	Mayor's Office of Children Youth, and Their Families
Juno 1?uenas	Support for Families of Children with Disabilities	Karen Sechser	Department of Social Services Senior Supervisor
Sue Erlich	Slate Dc. •partment of Soctal Sen-ices	Cynthia Selmar	SF Health Department, South Fast Health Cu.
Esperarua F.chavam	Mission Children,	Valentine Selot	Parent

	Adolescents and Family Scnice Center		
Lou Fox	Family Support Services of the13av Area	Virginia Smyly	SF Health Department Perinatal Services Director
Mary Louise Frenchman	Saint Paulus Lutheran <i>Chuch</i>	<i>Concha</i> Saucodo	Instituto de la IZv-r

APPENDIX THREE

**COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO
FAMILY PRESERVATION AND SUPPORT PLANNING
FOCUS GROUPS**

Children
Teen Parents
Parents
Religious Leaders
Housing Agencies
Substance Abuse Treatment
Mental Health Providers
Foster Parents
Relative Caregivers/Grandparents
Foster Family Agencies
Child Advocates
Child Care
Attorney/Juvenile Justice
Legislators/Staff
Media
Education
Funders
Family Support/Resource Agencies
Employment and Training
Public Health Providers
Domestic Violence
DSS Workers
Parent Educators
Parent Advocates