

# ***San Mateo County Family Resource Center: Working Towards Self Sufficiency with Open Hands and Opened Minds***

**MICHELLE LEWIS AND RONDA JOHNSON**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This case study examines the Family Resource Centers as a vehicle to address racial disproportionality and the inequities in the child welfare and educational system. The Family Resource Centers (FRCs) were created as an early prevention and intervention tool to increase parent involvement in their children's education, with the hope of improving the health, safety, and academic, social and emotional success of children and their families. By design, these centers are strategically located on school cam-

pus to partner with schools and other outside non-profit agencies to confront and deal with issues that can debilitate academic performance and destroy the family structure. The FRCs are geared to engage the students and families of the community with education and self-reliance. Having both professional and support staff available provides an environment that proactively serves clients. This case study will explore and define the advantages of having FRCs in communities with the greatest need.

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## **Introduction**

Family Resource Centers (FRC) are often the expression of community need and will, providing comprehensive core values and services as defined by the community. Family Resource Centers strive to become “one-stop” community-based hubs that are designed to improve access to information, direct services and referrals for families. The common attributes of a Family Resource Center, according to Waddell, et al. (2001) are:

- A community or neighborhood focus.
- A high degree of collaboration (local, city, county, state).
- Active inclusion of multiple constituencies (users, providers, schools, elected officials and academics).
- Integrated service and case management.
- An intensive, comprehensive view of children’s needs in the context of family and neighborhood.

This paper will explore the history and development of Family Resource Centers in San Francisco and San Mateo counties, the key elements of the Family Resource Centers in San Mateo counties, the success and challenges in San Mateo county and recommendations for San Francisco county. Recently several county agencies in San Francisco have partnered and announced a “Notice of Funding Availability” for new Family Resource Centers in San Francisco County, which means that the existing Family Resource Centers have to re-apply for funding along with new applicants.

## **The Tale of Two Counties**

The City and County of San Francisco is the fourth most populous city in California and the thirteenth most populous city in the United States. It is the

most densely populated city in the state and the second most densely populated major city in the U.S.

San Mateo County is located in the San Francisco Bay Area. The county covers most of the San Francisco peninsula, just south of San Francisco and north of Santa Clara County. It is among the twenty most affluent counties in the United States in terms of personal, per capita and household income.

According to the United States Census Bureau in 2007, there was an estimated 706,984 people residing in San Mateo county; 65% were White/Caucasian, 3.3% were African American, 2.4% were Asian, 2.3% were Latino, .5% were American Indian, and .4% were Pacific Islander (United States Census Bureau Statistics, 2007).

In San Francisco, United States Census Bureau statistics estimated that in 2007 there were 764,976 people living in San Francisco; 57% were White/Caucasian, 6.9% were African American, 31.6% were Asian, 5% were Pacific Islander, 1.4% were Latino, and 0.5% were American Indian (United States Census Bureau Statistics, 2007).

A report from KIDS DATA.org stated that in 2007, 17.3% of California children lived in poverty. Local child poverty was highest in Alameda County (14%) and lowest in Marin and San Mateo Counties (both at 7.3%). The rate in San Francisco was 12.7%, the second highest Bay Area county. According to the report, African-American children were most likely to live in poverty, followed by Latino children.

San Mateo County had an estimated 11,334 children living in poverty in 2007. According to KIDS DATA.org, in 2007 13.4% of Latino children between the ages of zero to seventeen lived in households earning less than the federal poverty level, followed by Asian children (4.6%), and White/Caucasian

children (3%). The sample size of African-American and multicultural children living in households earning less than the federal poverty level was too small to provide an estimate according to the report. The same report also stated that San Francisco had an estimated 13,567 children living in poverty in 2007. 38.1% of African American children in San Francisco lived in households earning less than the federal poverty level, followed by Latino children (12.9%), Asian children (9.2%), and White/Caucasian children (3.1%).

The majority of Bay Area counties in 2007 had a lower rate of children entering foster care than the state's rate of 2.9 children per 1,000. Still rates varied widely among Bay Area counties, from 0.4 in Marin county to 2.9 in San Francisco. (kidsdata.org, 2007).

In 2008, there were 7,515 children in foster care across the six Bay Area counties, a 41.9% drop from 12,835 children in foster care in 1998. Bay Area declines over this time ranged from 29.8% in San Mateo county to 65.2% in Marin county (kidsdata.org, 2008).

### **History of Family Resource Centers in San Francisco**

In 1996, there were 3,058 San Francisco children and youth ages zero to seventeen years in foster care. San Francisco's rate of foster care placement, 22.3 per 1,000 children, was the highest rate per capita in the state and significantly higher than the statewide rate of 9.6. In fiscal year 1996/1997, 84% of children and youth from San Francisco in foster care (2,684) had been removed from home because of neglect. Eight percent (251) were removed due to physical abuse, 4% (126) because of sexual abuse and 4% for other reasons. In 1996, almost three-fourths (72%) of San Francisco children and youth in foster care were African-American, white and Latino children and youth each represented 12% of those in foster care, and children and youth of "other" race/ethnicities comprised 4% of the foster care population (Needell, et al., 1997, pp. 103–106).

The Family Resource Centers in San Francisco began in 1997 after the Deputy Director of the De-

partment of Human Services—Family and Children's Division (or Child Welfare/Child Protective Services) began meeting with community members and organizations who were angry about the number of children, particularly African-American, who were being removed from their neighborhoods and placed in foster care. As a result, the Department of Human Services provided funds to local community-based organizations to create Family Resource Centers that would focus on providing early, prevention services to families who were vulnerable to involvement with the Family and Children's Services Division due to parental stress, poverty, social isolation, substance abuse, intra-familial or community violence, un- or under-employment and homelessness, among other circumstances.

San Francisco utilized funds from the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), Child Abuse Prevention Intervention (CAPIT), Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), county Children Trust Fund (CTF) and county general funds in order to finance the FRCs. The mission of the Family Resource Centers was to offer supportive services to families and children to strengthen the ability of parents to care for themselves and their children by promoting resiliency, enhancing parental competencies and improving family functioning.

The Family Resource Centers were targeted in six communities in San Francisco that had experienced a significant number of children at-risk for removal from their home or children who were removed and/or in out-of-home placement in these communities. The targeted communities were: Bayview/Hunter's Point, the Mission District, Chinatown, Potrero Hill, Western Addition and Oceanview/Merced/Ingleside. The following FRCs were created:

- Bayview-Hunter's Point Family Resource Center
- Chicano/Latino Family Resource System
- Asian-Pacific Islander Family Resource Network
- Potrero Hill Family Resource Center
- Western Addition Family Resource Center
- Oceanview/Merced/Ingleside Family Resource Center

- TALK Line Family Support Center
- TALK Line 24-hour Parental Stress Line
- Support for Families for Children with Disabilities (an agency that provides education and support for families with children with disabilities).

Services provided by the FRC's in San Francisco vary by site, but currently the array of services offered for families includes:

- Parenting classes
- Family support groups
- Food pantries
- Pre-employment training classes
- Parent and child counseling
- Home energy assistance
- Crisis intervention
- Supervised visitation for families involved in court-ordered family reunification services

### **History of Family Resource Centers in San Mateo County**

In the early part of the 1990's, the County Manager of San Mateo County, the Superintendent of Schools, and various department directors serving children and families became concerned about trends in child well-being indicators, such as increasing child abuse reports; children staying in long-term placement; juvenile arrests and declining academic achievement. They sought ways to improve the ability of children to learn and to reduce many of the serious problems that children and families face. The Board of Supervisors and the County Manager sought to reorganize and consolidate those services that serve children and families, into one agency thus creating the Human Services Agency. A new director was hired to lead the reorganized Human Services Agency and define its new role in the county.

County leaders recognized that linking human services together at the earliest point in children's lives is critical to impacting children and their families. Schools were seen as the best link to education, service providers and families. Based on this approach, county leaders identified the highest need areas in San Mateo County. The communities were the Bayshore area of Daly City, East San Mateo, East

Palo Alto and the Fair Oaks area of Redwood City. The program planners then asked each of these communities to make a presentation on why it should be the first to receive the pilot project and the ways it would participate in the project. Based on this process, Daly City was chosen to participate as the first pilot project.

In 1992, the Human Service Agency began working collaboratively with local public-private partnerships in the northern region of the county to develop the first school-based Family Resource Center. The Bayshore Elementary School District, the Jefferson Elementary School District, the city of Daly City and the Jefferson Union High School District successfully applied for and received the first Healthy Start grant from the State of California, thus providing the initial seed money to launch the FUTURES school-based pilot program. The FUTURES pilot program design was to provide proactive intensive prevention and early intervention services for children and their families at the school site.

Identifying services that were to be provided was done collaboratively with the FRC partners. The services identified were to be client-driven, outcome-based and early intervention-oriented. Examples of the initial services provided were: financial assistance, adult education, parenting, homework assistance, and tutoring.

To achieve the outcomes of improved school attendance, increased positive peer and familial relationships, increased parental involvement in the children's education, and increased participation in positive activities, the Human Services Agency (HSA), The Health Services Department, and the Office of Education contributed staff to the pilot project. HSA provided social workers and benefits analysts; Health Services provided public health nurses and mental health counselors and contracted staff provided alcohol and substance abuse services. HSA also provided social work supervisors to the project, while the Office of Education provided a project director for the first three years for overall coordination, community partnerships and policy development.

## Key Elements of San Mateo County FRC

These are components of the FRC that are on the sites of twelve school campuses:

- Collaboration of FRC, outside agencies and school staff
- A psychiatric social worker
- A benefit analyst /eligibility worker
- Ability to apply for county services—cash aid, Food Stamps, Medi-Cal, and CalWORKS
- Differential Response
- Bilingual services
- Food distribution to school families and community members
- Support groups and leadership training
- Teachers, administrators and school staff having access to providers
- Student and family activities
- Outreach

Currently, there are a total of fourteen FRCs in San Mateo County, with most centers located in the identified communities of need. The FRC's have expanded to include the coast side regions of the county. The FRCs are currently located in East Palo Alto, Redwood City, Daly City, Half Moon Bay, Menlo Park, Pescadero, and San Mateo.

Given that the FRC's mission in San Mateo County is to provide prevention and early intervention services to children and families, eight of the FRCs are located in elementary schools, two are located in middle schools, and two serve the local elementary, middle, and high school populations.

San Mateo County made a commitment to provide supportive services to community schools through FRCs, because the county believed in the philosophy of community schools, i.e., school and community partnerships benefit children and families. By providing school-site services with collaboration between the school, community and county partnerships, a school can experience an increase in parental involvement in their children's education, which could lead to a student's increased motivation for school, attendance, academic achievement and connectedness, as is stated in the article, "Partnering with Community to Promote Student Success: A

Review of the Research, (Susan Erbstein and Elizabeth Miller, 2008).

In addition to twelve FRCs which are connected to schools, two are located at community-based agencies, Samaritan House, which is in the City of San Mateo and at the Puente Family Center, which is in the City of Pescadero.

The Human Service Agency provides a total staff of fourteen Psychiatric Social Worker positions. The Psychiatric Social Workers (PSW) are at each FRC. Some of the activities of the Psychiatric Social Workers (or PSWs) are:

- Providing individual, family and group counseling/therapy
- Facilitating support groups for women and social skills groups for elementary school children
- Teaching parenting education classes
- Consulting with school staff

The advantages of having a PSW on site is that they can handle crises that occur in the classroom and in the home with immediate crisis intervention. The monthly caseload reports from the FRC Community-Based Psychiatric Social Workers provide examples of who is being served by the FRC. From October, 2008 to March, 2009 there were 1,313 referrals to the PSWs. Of these referrals, 89% were Latino, 1.9% were African American, 6.9% were Caucasian, 1.2% were Asian, and 1.8% were other (meaning Native-American, Filipino, Pacific Islander or multi-racial).

In addition, the Human Service Agency provides eleven benefit analysts who are also co-located at the FRCs. The role of the benefit analyst includes (but is no limited to):

- Assisting parents with applying for county assistance programs such as cash aid, food stamps, Medi-Cal and CalWORKS
- Following up after their initial intake
- Participating in advocacy activities (for example, working with the Second Harvest Food Bank to provide food for the FRC food pantry)
- Helping facilitate support groups with the PSW
- Engaging in outreach to school staff or to the community informing about the services offered by the FRC.

Differential Response (DR) provided by FRCs is a different approach that is crucial in the evaluation of cases reported to Child Protective Services and how they are handled. If substantiated, a case may be referred to CPS; if the case is not substantiated, the FRC and community handles it and provides support and services to the family. This process offers a different approach to allegations and helps prevent families from becoming part of the system, thereby decreasing cases referred to CPS.

A few of the other services provided by the FRCs are: budgeting classes, adult education classes, youth development programs, the Second Harvest Food Bank food pantries, parental involvement activities, home visiting and crisis intervention. HSA shares leadership responsibilities and operational oversight duties with FRC site-specific coordinators, supervisors and managers. The total operating cost for the FRCs in San Mateo county is \$4.2 million, which includes staffing expenditures, contracts/MOUs with community-based agencies, school districts and other county agencies and other operating expenditures.

### **Successes and Challenges of San Mateo County Family Resource Centers**

With the development of Family Resource Centers in the county, the Human Services Agency of San Mateo County, has been successful in creating and working collaboratively with different systems and with different community partners. When interviewing county and outside staff of the FRCs, the word "collaboration" came up with each staff interviewed, thus attesting to the FRC program's success in this area. Collaboration has been crucial for ensuring that clients are referred without duplication and assists them in their efforts towards self-sufficiency. Furthermore, collaboration aids staff's efforts to identify successes and failures, promotes communication and opens different options/opportunities for helping clients. The collaboration between organizations in the FRC also inadvertently shows clients how to collaborate, a skill that can assist families to achieve self-sufficiency.

A family who comes to a FRC in San Mateo County can apply for Food Stamps, receive food from the food pantry, meet with their child's therapist, take a budgeting class and attend a support group, all at the same center; which is located in their neighborhood or at their child's school. Because the centers are community or school-based, a family does not have to take two or three buses to get assistance, wait in long lines to meet with a worker, be concerned that there will be someone available at an office to provide support that is needed or wait for someone who speaks their primary language, nor do they have to get crisis services from a complete stranger. Because the center is community or school-based, it is possible that a parent has seen the Psychiatric Social Worker in the yard after school and has received a bag of groceries from the food pantry from the case manager who teaches the money management class.

A challenge for San Mateo County, along with other counties, is the budget crisis in the state of California. Budget cut-backs mean there are less opportunities for the expansion of services. Family Resource Center partners who provided funding to the centers in the past are now not able to because of the budget crisis. For example, a school district that previously provided funds to pay for a staff position now must use the funds for another needed service at the school and can no longer commit their funds to staff the FRC position.

Another challenge that can be traced to the budget crisis and decrease in funding is that collaboration between agencies can become more difficult as agencies begin to worry about their continued ability to survive and provide services with less money. This causes agencies to shift their focus away from the community and more towards the maintenance and continued existence of their own agency.

### **FRC Alignment in San Francisco**

Currently, the San Francisco Human Service Agency, the Department of Children, Youth and their Families, and First 5 San Francisco have stated that they have undertaken an intentional planning process to

align the Family Resource Centers that they fund. The focus of the alignment is to pool funding strategies for the FRCs and to provide consistent program model expectations. Together, the three city departments have released the “Notice of Funding Availability” (NOFA) for the establishment of neighborhood-based and population-focused family resource centers. The total amount that will be awarded is \$8,820,505. First 5 San Francisco will serve as the lead agency for the purposes of managing and implementing the NOFA. This is a significant change as in the past the Human Service Agency has been the lead agency. A critical component of the new “FRC Alignment” process is that the City and County of San Francisco wants to ensure that city and county dollars are being invested to serve the neediest families and children and that there is equitable distribution of funding.

### Neighborhood-Based FRCs

For Neighborhood-Based FRCs, San Francisco County expects a broad range of prevention and intervention services to support families in the community. Additionally, these FRCs should have services that respond to community needs and address the developmental needs of families as their children grow from birth to age five and onto school age and the teen years.

The continuum of services provided by Neighborhood-Based FRCs have been organized in tiers representing an increasing intensity of services. Service Level Tier 1 is Basic FRC services, Tier 2 is Comprehensive FRC services, and Tier 3 is Intensive FRC services.

Basic FRC services are described as parent/peer support groups, workshops on wellness, anger management, pre-employment, budgeting and life skills, early literacy activities, interactive groups for parents and their children and parental advocacy and linkage services.

Comprehensive FRC services are described as including the same services as Basic FRC, but also include a curriculum-based parenting education series, basic needs assistance and linkages to child

welfare services, including differential response services and advocacy, participation in Team-Decision Making meetings and supervised visitation. Intensive FRC services are described as being the same as Comprehensive FRC services, but with a greater intensity and volume of services than that of a Comprehensive FRC.

Funding for the Neighborhood-Based FRCs will be distributed across three categories of neighborhood need. The Department of Children, Youth and Families utilized the “DCYF Neighborhood Index of Need” of 2005 to determine the neighborhood need categories. Neighborhoods in category 1 are: Bayview-Hunters Point, the Mission, Visitacion Valley and Oceanside/Mission/Ingleside (or OMI). Category 2 neighborhoods are: the Western Addition, the Tenderloin, South of Market, the Sunset, Potrero Hill, the Excelsior, P ortola and Chinatown. The only category 3 neighborhood is the Richmond district. Examples of data that was used to determine neighborhood needs were: child welfare referrals including substantiated referrals, Medi-Cal applications, Cal-Works cases, percent of adults and children living below the poverty level, infant mortality rates, teen birth rates, and First 5/SFUSD Kindergarten Readiness Profiles.

Targeted annual funding for these FRCs are as follows: \$150,000 to \$300,000 for Tier 1 services, \$300,000 to \$500,000 for Tier 2 services, and \$500,000 to \$700,000 for Tier 3 services.

### Population-Focused FRCs

In addition to Neighborhood-Based FRCs, the Human Service Agency, First 5, and the Department of Child, Youth and Families are also proposing to fund Population-Focused FRCs. The designated populations are:

- Homeless/under-housed children and families and families residing in single room occupancies
- Immigrant families with children
- Pregnant teenagers/teen parents
- Families with children with special needs



- Families with young children exposed to violence
- Lesbian/gay/transgender parents and their children

Funding for these FRCs will range from \$150,000 to \$450,000. Funders expect the Population-Focused FRCs to have services that address the needs of the target population(s) listed above and to have the capacity to serve the population(s) throughout the city, not concentrating on a particular neighborhood. Similar to the Neighborhood-Based FRCs, the Population-Focused FRCs must provide a curriculum based parenting series, support groups, parent/child interactive activities, linkages for school-aged children and teens and outreach to the community.

## Conclusion

In visiting eleven of the FRCs in San Mateo County, a feeling of camaraderie was noticeable among the FRC staff, the schools, parents and students, who all were on a first-name basis. Some of the FRC staff knew older siblings of students and generations of families. This promotes an attitude of acceptance and cooperation by the staff and toward the clients and a willingness to strive for success. Many of the families are without support or structure to step out and become self sufficient or independent. The FRCs offer support that brings out resilience, competency and self-worth by providing a nurturing environment. By working so closely with families and dealing with such intimate services, they are like family, linked to help but personally involved. There is an unspoken trust that exists between the clients and staff. Collaboration practiced at monthly meetings of the PSWs, site managers, supervisors and county managers to produce a better quality of service for the clients is quite impressive and works to keep the mission of the FRC in focus along with the key elements and components that keep the FRCs functional. San Mateo County should be commended and recognized for their determined efforts to make the FRCs a place where families can be properly served and respected.

## Recommendations for FRCs in San Francisco County

San Mateo County FRCs' key elements were a crucial part of their successes and could be replicated for a model in the reorganization of FRCs in San Francisco. The following are recommendations for San Francisco County:

- Consult with the Disproportionality Task Group that was formed specifically to bridge the gap of disparities in education and the child welfare system of African-American and Latino children in San Francisco and to examine and resolve the overrepresentation of these populations in the child welfare system and inequities in the educational system.
- Locate FRCs on school campuses in targeted areas where the children are in most need. This can work to improve the students' academic achievement, increase parental involvement and provide emotional support in communities that suffer from violence, poverty and isolation.
- City and County of SF officials should meet and discuss the possible integration of County Services and FRCs on school campuses: Representatives from, HSA, FRC Program, Children Youth and Their Families, Family and Children Services, First 5, San Francisco Unified School District, Board Of Education, Board of Supervisors, Community Based Organizations (CBO). These departments and agencies are obvious choices due to the fact that these are the agencies that offer the services, provide the funding and make the decisions. They work in partnership to run FRCs and are "Joint FRC Funders." The other departments serve as good resources to work collaboratively in the anticipated operations of the new FRC Initiative.
- Create a committee that examines and seeks out schools that have students with high rates of truancy, Child Protection Services (CPS) reports, children entering the child welfare systems, below basic school test scores, behavioral problem and families that are underserved without access

or knowledge of services that can assist and aid with their needs.

- Establish a pilot program in a school, preferably an elementary school, with intermediate problems. A school with intermediate or average issues is a better choice than a school with severe or no issues as those schools with too much or too little service required will have difficulties in implementation, nothing to report, or too many complications to get started. If possible, the pilot program should be housed where a public preschool or pre-kindergarten is part of the campus. Another consideration is partnering with a neighborhood school, particularly a school that is in one of the Category 1 neighborhoods listed in the new NOFA for FRCs. The 2007 Academic Plan for Bret Harte Elementary School (which is located in the Bayview-Hunters Point area in San Francisco) stated that “. . . the lack of adequate resources to address the social/emotional needs of students is a barrier to improvements in students’ academic achievement . . . [and] . . . Although the school provides a safe community for students, the surrounding neighborhood has experienced a high rate of violence that, at many times, impacts our students and families. In addition to mental health services, there continues to be a need to improve student attendance. Difficulty still remains in making parents/guardians aware of the importance of students attending school daily and on-time.” (p. 3). Similarly, the 2007 Academic Plan for Visitacion Valley Elementary School stated, “. . . the school as a whole must provide more support to under-achieving students who begin their education with deficits in experience, vocabulary, and study behavior in order to accelerate our students’ readiness to learn and motivate them to sustain a high level of academic performance . . . [and] . . . the school, district and community must work together to provide more effective, sustained, and comprehensive emotional and social support to students and their families affected by the challenges of a

lower socio-economic status and its attendant problems.” (p. 4).

- Have San Francisco agencies applying for funds to become an FRC seek monies from the Notice of Funds for the FRC Initiative, which are recently available, for the restructuring of the San Francisco FRCs. Consider channeling funds directed to neighborhoods with Basic, Comprehensive and Intensive FRCs to the schools in same neighborhoods rather than in centers in which they already exist.
- Have a San Francisco Unified School District representative on staff to address the issues of a complex lottery system. The Latino and African-American families often miss important school or school program application deadlines and do not understand the application process and hardly receive their choice schools. Many parents cannot speak English and or have problems of literacy. School staff should be at the elementary schools that house pre-kindergarten or preschoolers. This would introduce this complex process to the parents early to prevent confusion and chaos when admitting children in school for the first time. Having school district services available to all parents and people of community year around provides informational and easy access to community needs.
- Train all staff in areas of cultural competency, biases and disproportionality. Make trainings ongoing and mandatory. Offer workshops and trainings throughout the City and County of San Francisco for all employees.
- Provide multilingual services to populations who speak many different languages so that they do not get confused by the educational and county systems.

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