

THE FUTURES PROJECT: A LABORATORY TO DEVELOP COLLABORATIVE SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

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INTRODUCTION:

This paper will examine San Mateo County's Futures Project, as a valuable example for developing effective collaborative school/community based services for children and families. The Futures model is timely in view of the current movement toward community based child welfare services. This movement has been prompted by increasingly more complex cases requiring effective interagency collaboration, and by the public's demand for greater accountability from tax supported human services institutions.

The paper will also make recommendations relative to the adoption of a Futures-like model by the Santa Clara County Social Services Agency in conjunction with other county programs, in view of the agency's regionalization, and restructuring efforts, and its campaign for greater cultural competency.

BACKGROUND

In 1992, San Mateo County restructured its human services system under one umbrella agency which included four divisions: Housing and Community Services, Income Maintenance, Youth and Family Services and Job Training and Economic Development. This restructuring resulted from San Mateo County's tradition of innovation and in response to factors affecting children and families such as worsening national and California poverty trends, funding crisis at the state

and national levels, spiraling cost of living, changes in family structure and a younger, more vulnerable child population.

In 1992-93 the newly formed Human Services Agency convened community, business, and government leaders to develop a collaborative service delivery plan. Out of this process an strategic plan was developed which came up with a set of "universal" measurable outcomes applying to the entire human services system in San Mateo County.

UNIVERSAL OUTCOMES

The outcomes encompassed three areas, individual self sufficiency, family strength and community health.

"Individual Self Sufficiency: The percent of San Mateo County residents who are self sufficient will increase on a yearly basis.

Self sufficiency is defined as "having self-esteem, a basic education and employment at a wage, or income sufficient to afford suitable housing, quality dependent care, and adequate nutrition, health care and transportation.

More specifically, each of the specific components will be measured as follows:

- **Education:** increase in percent of residents with a high school diploma or equivalent and an abili-

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ty to understand and speak English.

- **Employment/Income:** increase percent of residents with a wage or income at a level sufficient to meet basic needs without public assistance.
- **Housing:** increase in percent of residents with shelter which meets health and housing codes.
- **Dependent Care:** increase in percent of residents with sufficient resources to maintain the health and safety of their dependents who cannot care for themselves.
- **Health Care:** increase in percent of residents who have appropriate access (i.e., routine, versus, only emergency or acute care) to health services.
- **Nutrition:** increase in percent of number of women, individuals or families with the necessary knowledge and resources to feed their children nutritious meals.

Transportation: increase in percent of residents who have access to transportation to meet basic needs, e.g., employment support services.

Family Strength: the percent of San Mateo County families able to support their children's growth and development and the percent of adults moving toward self-sufficiency will improve measured by;

- an decrease in family abuse and neglect, as defined by the incidence of domestic violence, child and elder abuse and runaways;
- an increase in financial support for children, as defined by the percent of children and families achieving self sufficiency;
- a decrease in homelessness, as defined by the incidence of children and families with insufficient housing;
- an increase in the extent of individual family involvement in their children's education.

Community Health: While many community-level outcomes are impacted by forces outside the control of the Human Services system, the success of the plan depends on the accomplishment of the following outcomes:

- increase in education level, job skills and productivity of the total County workforce.
- decrease in the unemployment rate.
- decrease in the drop-out, increase in matriculation rates.
- increase in the supply of affordable housing (including all forms of shelter).
- decrease in the crime rate of San Mateo County residents.
- improvement in health status indicators.
- increase in public transit options and decrease in costs.”

The Futures Project was mainly the product of this restructuring process, and its objectives flow from those set in the Human Services Strategic Plan.

ESTABLISHMENT OF FUTURES PROJECT

The Futures Project was established on August 31, 1992. According to Maureen Borland, Director of the San Mateo County Human Services Agency, “The Futures Project was developed to test a more accessible and interconnected system of services for children and families in San Mateo County with an emphasis on prevention and early intervention.” Given this emphasis, schools were seen as places where low and middle income children and their families could access services. Schools are also places where children demonstrate their functionality and their shortcomings are manifested. Thus, early intervention is made much more possible there.

Both community members and educators were in

favor of locating services in the schools recognizing the increased accessibility and likelihood that individual and family issues interfering with the child's ability to learn would be addressed.

Generally, administrators saw the project as a laboratory for the development of a county-wide prevention and early intervention system that, once developed, would reduce the need of more expensive "crisis-oriented" services such as child protective services and substance abuse treatment.

In the planning process, and based on solicited school district presentations, it was decided to locate the pilot project in the Bayshore area of Daly City, one of the highest need areas of the county showing high use of county services and poor social and health outcomes. Jefferson High School and its feeder schools were selected. This included three school districts including eight school sites. The school population speaks nineteen different languages, and 75% of the children are eligible for free or reduced lunches. A typical school is Kennedy Middle with an enrollment of 1067, out of which 240 are foreign born, 207 of these from Spanish-speaking countries.

PROGRAM DESIGN

A collaborative was convened which included:

- "the various divisions of the newly-reorganized Human Services Agency
- other county departments such as Probation, Mental Health, Public Health.
- the County Office of Education and the three separate school districts-Jefferson Elementary, Bayshore and Jefferson High School-which together had jurisdiction over Jefferson High School and its feeder schools, and
- city representative and numerous community-

based service providers and advisory groups."

The initial plan called for four interdisciplinary teams of "family advocates" working out of four Futures Centers. The teams were to include Public Health Nurses, Mental Health Counselors, Child Welfare Workers, Benefit Analysts and Drug and Alcohol Abuse Counselors. The County committed \$1.5 million to the project which amounted to 25 positions out of the regular operation budget. The project also received moneys from the Peninsula Community Foundation, an SB 620 Healthy Start operational grant, and an additional \$100,000 for remodeling, renovation and program evaluation.

These "Family Advocacy Teams" began to operate mainly providing free information and referrals, case management, direct services and links to other resources. Early in this process issues arose among some of the members relative to their differing professional points of view, roles and expectations. There was also the issue of team members not having access to daily supervision, as there was only one project coordinator and the teams were to function independently.

These issues were addressed with the participation of top agency administrators and staff. Roles were clarified, a greater understanding of the different professions' approaches was acquired, and a more practical understanding of teamwork was developed. Benefits Analysts were provided additional training to help them function better in their new roles. Some of the topics addressed in the team building process were:

- cross training about each others' professional perspective and skills.
- joint decision making
- office design and basic procedures.
- facilitation

- goal setting
- group development
- group process for case management
- program planning and implementation
- school and community relations

The project also had to deal with the educational systems bureaucratic exigencies and the issues involved in operating in someone else's system. Trainings were conducted to address these challenges. Another challenge addressed was what it meant to "move out into the community", which included issues such as seeing clients as partners, ability to learn from and utilize the skills of others, how to be inclusive, how to be a team member and still relate to your home agency and professional identity.

THE FAMILY ADVOCATE

Family Advocates, as the Futures team members are called, possess a series of special skills and attributes. The statement of Responsibilities and Expectations for Family Service Advocate states,

"The most desirable attribute is the willingness and capacity to effectively advocate for families and children in gaining access and service delivery of the range of services needed to improve self-sufficiency of the family unit. The family advocate must be capable of relating to families and children from various cultural backgrounds, particularly those who traditionally have experienced difficulty accessing public service agencies. The Family Advocate must be able to nurture a sense of trust and confidence in themselves and the FUTURES PROJECT. Excellent observation and active listening skills, together with the ability to clarify issues and alternatives, are very desirable interpersonal skills in this position. Ability to be comfortable with

client in their own environment and to work well in team situations are key indicators of the desired traits of flexibility and acceptance of others' needs and expectations."

Additionally, community organizer, promoter, broker and bilingual skills are highly valued by the project.

PROJECT'S GOALS AND SERVICES

As mentioned above, The goals of the Futures Project flow from those of the Strategic Plan, and meet its requirement of measurability.

1. Improve the educational success of children and youth.
2. Improve the physical and mental health of children, youth and their families.
3. Improve the strength and success of families.
4. Foster a school climate which encourages the success of children, youth and families.
5. Foster a broader community environment that encourages the success of children, youth and families.
6. Affect changes in agency, school and community systems toward greater collaboration.

As pointed out, services are multidisciplinary and collaborative with a focus on prevention. These services are planned together with school staff, parents, students, and other providers. Services can be provided to individuals, families, groups, using classroom presentations, after school activities, etc. Some of the services include: Life Skills, Teaching Peace, Kindergarten Readiness, Teen Mom Support services, Tutoring, Homework Assistance, Alternative suspension, African American retention, Latino Parents, Chinese Parents' Network. The outcomes of these services are:

1. Improvement in reading and math grades.
2. Improved school attendance.
3. Increased positive behavior in the classroom, family and community.
4. Increased positive peer and family relations.
5. Increased participation in positive activities.
6. Increased parental involvement in child's education.

TYPES AND PROCESS OF REFERRALS

According to Judith Davila, Site Manager at the Kennedy and Pollicita/Colma Family Centers, referrals to the project can be initiated by the client, school, parent, CBO, CPS or other agencies. After the client makes contact, a multidisciplinary assessment takes place looking at basic needs (food, clothing, shelter), family or individual functioning, physical and mental health, legal issues, substance abuse and education. A planning phase follows where the team develops an strategy for services in which the client participates. Thereafter, the intervention takes place in the form of service needed. This whole process proceeds from a strengths based philosophy that builds on the client's and systems' capabilities in order to overcome the challenges at hand.

Referrals range from a child "failing in 1 subject and no grades better than a C", to gang involvement or abuse and neglect which may require court intervention.

PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

In 1996, the last time the program was evaluated as a prevention effort, a number of "major accomplishments" were reported in six areas: 1) Kids and Families, 2) School, 3) Community, 4) Service Delivery, 5) Collaboration and 6) Cost Avoidance.

For **kids and families**, the project reported "major strides in immunization, health and dental screenings, eye care, housing, behavior problems, domestic violence and drop-out prevention. The schools reported up to 100% increase in parent involvement in particular among immigrant parents. There were also two English as a Second Language classes set up which provided childcare and family advocacy services.

In the **schools**, the project had the impact of helping schools expand their vision to include community and local providers. Joint "staff development took place with teachers, principals and providers to promote the 'whole child approach'". The project's alternative suspension program had a 91% success rate, with one school "site reporting a suspension decrease from 16 the first year to a mere 2 in the second year." School administrators reported an almost 25% administrative time savings as a result of the centers.

Accomplishments in the **community** included the facilitation of a variety of partnerships consistent with the vision of the program, grant funds, on-site access to Medical, AFDC assistance and "site assisted access to food, clothing and shelter."

In terms of **service delivery**, the project reported accomplishing a reduction on the mandated case-loads for Public Assistance, the creation of an automated system for information sharing and serving "as pilot for the County's strategic plan of reorganization."

In the area of **collaboration** the project was able to develop a "collaborative governing committee of top level County Administrators," a local collaborative to implement Family Support and Preservation Funds, and secured a County five year commitment

to the centers with out major budget cuts.

The project was able to show significant **cost avoidance** in several areas. It avoided approximately 20 out-of-home placements per year at a savings of \$40K per year. It reduced or eliminated the need for public assistance for about 10 families per year, saving \$60K per year; assisted in approximately 15 healthy births per year, at a value of \$60K per year, and reduced special education placements for 20 students per year at a savings of \$96K yearly. Total savings per year amounted to \$256, 000.

THE FUTURE OF FUTURES

Futures continues to demonstrate its viability, effectiveness and usefulness as a laboratory for developing further a community based approach. There are proposals to further expand the project. One of the areas that needs additional adjustment is how to best address the continuum of cases from those needing simple interventions to those requiring court services intervention. Given the history of innovation and creative problem solving at HSA, Futures will meet the challenge. What appeared clear is that Futures has been and will continue to be successful as long as it has leadership and staff that are creative, flexible, patient, community oriented, and very dedicated to the vision and its goals.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO SANTA CLARA COUNTY SSA

In view of the current efforts of Santa Clara County Social Services Agency to regionalism its Department of Family and Children's Services, to restructure its Income Maintenance operation and to increase organizational cultural competence, it

would be very useful to consider the Futures Project's experiences in service redesign. Other County departments like Public Health, Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Services have or are in the process of regionalizing and reconfiguring their service delivery.

In this situation successful models of service need to be considered, specifically:

1. DFCS Regional Managers and the Regionalization Committee should become aware of the Futures Project and discuss its possible applicability in the new regions. This, also in view that the regions are drawn along school district lines.
2. Introduce the Futures model for consideration in the current Department of Employment and Benefits restructuring meetings, with the possibility of future talks between representatives of DFCS Regionalization DEBS Restructuring.
3. Discuss this matter at the Program Manager's meetings headed by Deputy County Executive George Newell. This committee includes representatives of all the County health and social services agencies, plus Probation. The School Linked Services Project is often discussed there. This project could provide the basic core to be expanded into a Futures type model.
4. Present matter to the County Board of Supervisors' Children and Families Committee.
5. Plan discussions with community and school partners.

CONCLUSION

The FUTURES Project had provided a valuable laboratory for the development of the type of collaborative, multidisciplinary, community/school based models of service delivery that can address cases of

higher complexity and provide the accountability desired by the public from tax funded human services.

Santa Clara County Social Services Agency and other county and community based programs could benefit from the experience of FUTURES, particularly in view of the efforts to regionalize children and family services, restructure income maintenance and improve service coordination.