

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE AND COUNTY SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

There are many challenges facing social services now and in the future. There has been a steady increase in long term categorical programs that serve a very small population. There is a future of decreased and restructured funding in the form of block grants. The challenge to decision makers will be not only how to distribute services, but also what is most needed and what will be most utilized.

In recent years there has been little or no local input into the design of mandated categorical services. The onset of block grants will focus on community design and control of services. Will counties and communities be ready for the task and prepared for the responsibility?

Contra Costa County has started a process of local governance in several unincorporated communities. In two communities County services are located in the community and working directly with the local governance body.

For my internship, I studied the local governance process and its relationship to county services. I visited the Bay Point and North Richmond Service Integration Sites and conducted part of the County's evaluation by interviewing six community leaders in each community. I first asked questions that were compiled by Kathy Armstrong, the consultant hired by Contra Costa to organize and implement the SIT

process. I also asked the same persons questions about the MAC and its relationship to SIT. I spoke with workers and supervisors at each SIT site, MAC members as well as administrators from Social Services and the County Administration.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND AND HISTORY

In 1983 the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors adopted a policy and guidelines for the establishment of Municipal Advisory Councils(MAC) in the unincorporated areas of Contra Costa County. The resolution framed the factors to be considered when a request to form a MAC was made. The factors included description of proposed MAC boundaries, statement of how the area has a "community interest", statement of community problems as they relate to the provision of local government services, changes in the community that affect physical economic and social characteristics, potential for consolidating local public agencies under the MAC, a list of specific matters on which the Mac will advise the board of supervisors, and a clear expression of interest by the residents. The main function of the MAC is provide a forum for community residents to discuss and formulate recommendations on matters related to the provision of local government service to their community. The resolution also identified MAC functions that promoted citizen and community development such as facilitating citizen participation in formation of local opinion on public problems, train community leaders in local government, stimulate civic participation and volunteer services, provide the community a sense of identity and settle community conflict.

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Although the resolution was adopted in 1983, many communities were not ready or responsive to the resolution. The North Richmond MAC was formed following an organized citizens presentation at a Board of Supervisors meeting following a weekend in 1992 when four murders occurred in their community of 2,500 residents.

The duties and powers of the North Richmond MAC included advising the Board on services that are or may be provided in the North Richmond area by the County or local governmental agencies. They also advise the board on the feasibility of organizing special districts serving the community in order to more efficiently provide public services.

The County Administrator appointed a liaison to the MAC. There are nine communities with functioning MAC. The liaison was a budget analyst with the community development department. In North Richmond he went door to door promoting the concept of the MAC and handed out applications. There were responses from ten qualified applicants. All were appointed by the Board of Supervisors. Establishing the MAC has been a shift from single issue commissions to a grass root effort to address all community issues. He recommends training for members early in the process and on an ongoing basis. Training should include procedures, running effective meetings, the Brown Act, etc. The work of the MAC is evolving and everyone, MAC, County Administration and County Departments are learning together.

The North Richmond MAC has been the recipient of grants from the Zellerbach Fund, Van Loben Sels Foundation and Office of Child Abuse Prevention. They currently manage a yearly budget of \$100,000. They have developed an action plan that focuses on jobs creation and economic development, public safety, health care, housing, child/youth/senior services, physical environment and cultural awareness and communication. SIT

The concept of service integration evolved in Contra Costa County due to interagency collaboration and commitment from the County Board of Supervisors and Youth Services Board. Community based, family centered collaborative services were important to the Board of Supervisors who were concerned about the fragmented services many families received from multiple agencies. The Board of Supervisors hired a consultant to lead the county on its task of building a new service delivery model. The two sites were opened in January 1994.

The MAC were advised of the County work and were asked for help in designing the focus of service and the location of the center.

CURRENT ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND SUCCESSES

SIT workers, MAC members and community members all agree that each are learning, that the process is exciting and rewarding. It is hard work, mistakes have been made and many lessons have been learned.

From the interviews with community leaders, I learned that all felt very positive about the concept of the service integration teams but most felt they didn't have a clear understanding of how the program was evolving nor how services were impacting the community. In each of the

communities one or two workers were mentioned by name and described as effective embodiment of what the program should be. One principal stated she didn't know any staff of the SIT as they didn't come to the school site. One person in each community suggested community events should be sponsored to bring the different agencies and their workers together to get to know each other and their services. Some members of the MAC were not aware of the full range of services provided by the SIT They were knowledgeable about the work of the SIT staff who attend their meetings.

Some community members viewed the MAC as "political" and in discord. Some were not aware of the accomplishments of the MAC.

MAC members were concerned with the low level of community awareness of their work and were interested in bringing more community residents into the decision making process.

From interviews with staff, I learned that not all SIT staff were aware of the community leaders and what they provided in the community. Also not all staff were aware of the functions of the MAC nor did they see themselves as working in conjunction with the MAC.

Both SIT staff are working to build their multidisciplinary team approach that often includes the family in its case management meetings. They focus on developing family strengths while building the community supports. The teams received initial team building training from the YSB consultant. The two teams differ in their level of team functioning. One seems to be fairly effective. The other has contracted with another consultant to provide on going team development. During my visits I observed that in one office not all team members were aware of the names of everyone in the office. One worker stated other workers would ask her advice about issues on their cases. She felt she couldn't help because she had her own caseload and didn't have time to be a resource to other workers.

SIT workers have successfully recruited voluntary caseloads from the categorical programs that they represent. They are seen as a positive entity in the community. They are beginning to offer some services in prevention and early intervention in the community.

MAC in North Richmond has obtained sidewalks, mailboxes, street lights and trash receptacles for their community. They have successfully negotiated the building of a community health clinic as part of the settlement from a toxic gas cloud incident. They have developed first source hiring agreements with prospective employers coming into the community. They have held several community celebrations and made small grants to special projects in the community. They also attend to inclusion to ensure representation of all components of the community.

LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR HOST COUNTY

Contra Costa County has two innovative programs that can eventually work collaboratively and effectively together. My recommendation is that efforts continue to bring the SIT staff more into the community. This can be accomplished by workers serving on planning committees, task forces, etc. that are taking place in the community. Workers can outreach to providers of other services to make them not only aware of SIT services but also to develop personal relationships

with other providers. Workers can provide services at school sites and other community locations beside their own office. Workers can also develop a working relationship with MAC. Possibly this needs to happen at a higher level than the line worker in order to facilitate a working relationship that promotes understanding and a foundation for collaborative planning. There would have to be some distancing for line workers from the political ups and downs of the MAC.

MAC in North Richmond has some issues around decision making that will need addressing if they are to maximize their effectiveness. For example, the program manager resigned because she hadn't been paid for two months. Another member refused to make copies of a document because she had not been reimbursed for previous expenses. In spite of disagreements and seeming immobility, the North Richmond MAC has accomplished a lot in its two year history.

Currently there is no community advisory group for the SIT program. The MAC has the function to advise the county agencies on services to be provided in their community. A process could be established to develop this capacity within the MAC members or with a designated sub committee. This would strength the relationship the Board of Supervisors sought between the SIT and MAC.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SAN MATEO COUNTY

San Mateo County Human Services Agency has spent the past five years on a path of restructuring, reorganization and growth.

The strategic plan of the agency focuses on coordinated seamless service for recipients. The Youth and Family Service division has a community based multidisciplinary approach to integrated client services. The Human Service Agency is committed to planning with community in order to ensure effective design and use of services.

The creation of the MAC is a powerful process in community development. Contra Costa County has empowered MAC in the unincorporated communities. The main lesson I have learned is that the County can take an important role in the support and creation of the community governance process.

San Mateo County has few populated unincorporated areas. Most of the communities in which citizen governance would make a difference are in cities or towns with elected city councils. This is a greater challenge for citizen participation. The foundation for support for citizen governance would come from the city as well as the county. Elected city and county officials, as well as city and county staff would have to be in agreement with the concept and supportive of the process. The readiness for citizen involvement would be determined locally. The county would serve as the catalyst and technical support in local communities. By placing county service providers in local communities, workers can be part of a communities' assets or resources available in developing community readiness.

Contra Costa County' use of along term consultant enabled the staff responsible for designing and implementing the SIT and MAC to have technical assistance in planning, training,

evaluation and coaching. This role is a necessary support during the creation of a new way of doing business.

Another key point is the division of labor between county staff responsible for the SIT and MAC. The division allows the lead person to devote adequate time to the needs of the program and to develop and abilities to do the job well.

The process of developing community governance presents many challenges. It raises many questions.

However, it is a necessary step for the future of communities and human services. Collaborative planning between communities and counties ensures that communities needs are identified and met and that county services will have the most impact as they are understood, shared and utilized by the community.