

Community Capacity-Building: **Examining How Alameda County Facilitates the Development of Stronger, Healthier, and More Capable Communities**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In order to understand and better provide services to the community, county governments must work in partnership with community service providers. The goal of this project is to look at how Alameda County develops, fosters and sustains such partnerships. This project explores the collaboration process, as well as the experiences of various individuals in Alameda County.

San Mateo County Human Services Agency is positioned to take advantage of many opportunities because it is transitioning in a new administration. This would be the optimal time to effectuate community building strategies which will enhance and build upon current partnering relationships.

Partnerships

Partnerships between Alameda County and community service providers include:

- The Faith Initiative—county representatives and faith leaders come together with the goal of locating more foster homes for children.
- Associated Community Action Program (ACAP)—provides employment and housing services to low-income people in Alameda County.
- Family Services Agency of the Bay Area—provides comprehensive services to caregivers so that children can be maintained with their families in their communities.

- Special Assistant to the Director—involved with different projects and is the “eyes and ears” for the Director.
- Contracts—provides contract services for the various programs in Alameda County. Key elements for successful partnership include:
 - Being open and willing to share resources;
 - Creating new ways to improve the community that is being focused on;
 - Conducting needs assessments and following through with recommendations; and
 - Having administration and management setting the tone.

Recommendations

Based on this project, recommendations for San Mateo County include the following:

- Develop a base of workers, supervisors, and managers who seek opportunities to work with community partner agencies in creative ways;
- Assist smaller community partners in forming coalitions with one another so that they can collaborate in dealing with funding issues; and
- Facilitate faith-based partnerships in order to locate more foster homes in San Mateo County for children in foster care.

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Introduction

Every county agency is different in its structure and role within the community. County governments alone cannot provide all the needed services for the community; partnering with community agencies is necessary. The goal of this project is to look at how another county is developing relationships and collaborating with its partners to better serve its communities.

My objective for the BASSC internship was to learn how Alameda County is able to develop, foster and sustain positive relationships with its community partners. I wanted to learn more about the collaborative process and sought to interview people in various collaborative roles throughout Alameda County in order to better understand their ideas and to learn from their experiences.

Partnerships

FAITH INITIATIVE

Background. According to Pastor Raymond Lankford, Initiative Administrator, the Faith Initiative was formed out of the increased need for more homes to foster children in Alameda County. He explained that the Director of Social Services of Alameda County, Chet Hewett, and Alameda County Children and Family Services Director, Carol Collins, had approached the faith community. They presented the current crisis facing the county and de-

scribed the lack of local homes for foster children. They asked the faith community to collaborate with the county to keep foster children closer to home and in their familiar communities.

Purpose/Focus. In January 2006, the county launched the Faith Initiative whereby the program was granted \$750,000 for a 3-year period to look for 400 foster homes for children. The goal of the initiative was to conduct presentations to religious leaders from different community churches (all denominations) and to have them present back to their congregation. The presentations are done on Saturday and Sunday evenings.

On February 15, 2007, I attended the Alameda County Faith Initiative Faith Advisory Council meeting. Meetings are held on a monthly basis and at different church locations. Alameda County Children and Family Services Director, Carol Collins and Pastor Raymond Lankford facilitated this meeting. The host of this meeting was Pastor Kendall Guy of Market Street 7th Day Adventist Church on 34th Street in Oakland. This meeting also marked the one-year anniversary of the Faith Initiative. It was great to see a strong attendance from Children and Family Services representatives (from director to manager to line staff in addition to the many different representatives from various churches).

The meeting opened with a prayer that focused on the fact that everyone in the room was there for one purpose, to find foster homes for “our children.”

In addition, there was acknowledgement and recognition of the partnership that the faith community has with Alameda County.

Faith Initiative achievements were presented. Eight presentations were completed since January 2007. Since then, 97 referrals were received, of which 70 were in-county and 27 were out-of-county (as a presentation was completed at a conference in Sacramento). In 2006, a total of 177 referrals were received, of which 157 were in-county and 20 were out-of-county. The out-of-county referrals were redirected to their residing county. At year's end, one full licensure was achieved and six referrals were in the process of completing PRIDE training (foster parent training).

A video presentation was shown as there were new members attending this meeting. The video was moving and emotional and appeared to spark the audiences' interest in opening their homes to foster children. Pastor Shaq from another local church spoke about how he is in the process of finalizing his adoption of a youth who will soon turn eighteen, in addition to caring for his godson who is seventeen-years-old. His soon to be adopted son is in the honor society and has gotten a full scholarship to a university while his god son will have a basketball scholarship to pay for college.

This meeting provided not only the opportunity to recruit for more foster parents but the opportunity for community resource networking and a place to voice community needs in other areas. The meeting also included presentations from community members who spoke about their programs and the services offered. For example, Mr. Charles Ransom, Director of SIMBA Incorporated, spoke about his organization providing services to children between the ages of 7-14 years who lack a male role model. Mr. Ransom was at the meeting recruiting mentors for his school sites. Tony Thurman, Director of Beyond Emancipation Teen Health Center, also presented information about his agency and was recruiting people to house emancipated youth. He indicated that half of the homeless population in Alameda County are former foster youth.

Outreach Efforts. On March 18, 2007, I attended the Annual Women's Breakfast at the Hilton Hotel in Oakland. The Faith Initiative was there with Carol Collins to present the video campaign in addition to having a table in the back for advertisements to answer any questions and to accept interest forms.

ASSOCIATED COMMUNITY ACTION PROGRAM

Background. According to Nanette Dillard, Executive Director of the Associated Community Action Program (ACAP), ACAP is one of over 1,000 Community Action Agencies across the United States providing assistance to low-income families and individuals to help them become stable and self-sufficient. Community Action Agencies (CAAs) are non-profit private and public organizations established under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 to fight America's War on Poverty. CAA's have to help themselves in achieving self-sufficiency. ACAP services the greater Alameda County community, except Berkeley and Oakland, as each of these cities has its own community action program.

Structure. ACAP is overseen by a governing board made up of public officials from the Alameda County Board of Supervisors and each of the 12 cities within its jurisdiction. The ACAP organizer includes a Community Action Board (CAB), and a three-part board required under the Equal Opportunity Act of 1964, which advises the governing board of elected officials on matters and funding decisions.

Funding. ACAP operates with the assistance of a variety of public and private funding sources to support various programs and services offered to Alameda County's low-income population. The primary grant is the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), which is administered through the State Department of Community Services and Development.

Purpose/Focus. ACAP's programs reflect its commitment to provide essential services to those living in Alameda County. Every two years, ACAP administers a comprehensive Request for Proposals (RFP) process through which it selects a strong group of programs within the focus areas of employ-

ment and housing assistance to low-income families and individuals throughout the service area.

ACAP's scope of service also includes a powerful group of economic development programs called the Economic Empowerment Initiative (EEI). These programs, which assist low-income and middle-income participants to realize their dream of home or business ownership, include Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) and Individual Development and Empowerment Accounts (IDEA). IDAs are unique accounts that offer qualified participants \$2 for every \$1 they save. These accounts can be used in tandem with IDEAs from the Federal Home Loan Bank which offers \$3 for every \$1 they save. The IDA program is supported by federal Assets for Independence (AFI) funds. Other EEI services include: education, credit seminars, one-on-one credit repair, homeownership, business training, and free bank accounts in partnership with the Citibank.

Collaboration. According to Nanette Dillard, Executive Director of Alameda County ACAP, the City and County of Alameda and ACAP have always had a strong partnership. ACAP is physically located in a county office, so it's easily accessible to clients. In addition, ACAP also receives in-kind services from the county, which can include equipment and office space. Ms. Dillard indicates that ACAP has credibility and a good relationship with the county. She states that ACAP also works well with the One-Stop Center located on the same floor and both the managers of the One-Stop Center and ACAP have the same goal of empowering individuals.

FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY OF THE BAY AREA

Background. Family Services Agency (FSA) of the Bay Area provides respite, family preservation, kinship and mentoring services to Bay Area families. FSA's mission is to "help caregivers nurture their children and keep their families intact."

FSA offers the following services:

- a Family Preservation Program to support families to improve parenting and to address life challenges;
- a kinship program that provides kinship support services to grandparents and other relative caregivers who are raising their grandchildren and other kin children who are not in the care of their biological parents;
- an Oremi mentoring program, which is an intensive and transformative mentoring program for children ages 4-14, who have a parent in the state or federal prison system;
- Another Road to Safety (ARS) program which works with families with children under the age of five that are at risk of becoming involved with the Child Welfare System; and
- Family Reclaim, a program that works with Family Maintenance and Family Reunification families prior to case closure or reunification to provide services or linkage to services so that families will be able to sustain themselves and have support systems in place once they reunify with their child(ren) or when their child welfare case is closed.

Collaboration. According to Donna Moore, FSA has been successful in collaborating with the county. Ms. Moore reported that FSA and the county have a strong relationship due to the fact that the executive directors have been in the community for a long time and are committed to building a stronger community. This is aligned with Alameda County's mission to promote the social and economic well-being of individuals, families, neighborhoods, and communities.

Ms. Moore indicated that the working relationship is a collaborative one, and questions are asked for "clarity" not "blame." In addition, Ms. Moore also mentioned that FSA has a relationship with both Carol Collins, Director of Children and Family Services, and Chet Hewitt, Director of Alameda County Social Services. Ms. Moore reported that FSA also has good relationships with the kinship unit and the county ombudsman. She stated that the key to success between FSA and the county is their shared vision.

- a respite program that provides respite services to birth parents, foster parents, and relative caregivers;

Funding. Along with county funding, FSA also receives funding from other sources, such as from grants and foundations. Since a relationship has already been established between FSA and the county, when FSA seeks outside funding, the county is able to help with letters of support. Ms. Moore reported that from the initial contact with the county, the county has made it clear that FSA has to be self-sufficient. She stated that the county's honesty policy helps in terms of making strategic plans for FSA to find alternative ways to sustain itself. Ms. Moore reported that there are a lot of different sponsorships and grants that FSA receives which helps the agency's sustainability.

SPECIAL ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR

Role/Background. Vince Reyes plays a very important role in Alameda County. As the Special Assistant to the Director, he serves as the "eyes and ears" for the Director. Prior to being in this role, he was the coordinator of multicultural/multilingual services. Mr. Reyes was in charge of the language access service. According to Mr. Reyes, a law suit was filed in the 1970s against Highland Hospital by Community-Based Organizations and Community Health Clinics because the hospital lacked Spanish-speaking staff. In the 1980s, advocates pushed the Board of Supervisors to deal with cultural sensitivity issues. As coordinator of multicultural/multilingual services, Mr. Reyes was charged with developing training programs to address this issue. Mr. Reyes explained that he sorted through all the pending issues and put 30 county department heads through cultural/diversity training. Mr. Reyes reported that since then attitudes have changed, but structurally, things have not changed.

Project/Partnership. Mr. Reyes spoke about how 5-6 years ago, the county developed and planned for the implementation of the language access line. He stated that there were many legal advocates involved in this as they were pressuring the county and making ties with the Board of Supervisors. The county sat down with the legal advocates and had regular monthly meetings with them to discuss how they

can both obtain the outcome that they desired. He reported that bringing the legal advocates to the table and discussing their common goals resulted in training, a language list, and a staff that works on translating forms. This unit is currently working on web-based video conferencing.

Presently, Mr. Reyes is working on the "Emancipation Village" project. The county is joining forces with Fred Finch who owns 5 acres of land to build a "dorm-like" housing project that will house 80 youths with an Independent Living Skills Program (ILSP) and an onsite teen health clinic. This project will cost between \$10-15 million to build. As this project develops, the county will conduct outreach to the surrounding neighborhoods to inform and educate the residents. The county is also working closely with the architect to ensure that the property will blend in with the community.

Mr. Reyes stated that with this project, the county is bringing in the political, public and private sectors. Mr. Reyes is on a working committee, comprised of providers who serve the youth population, such as ILSP and Foster Youth Alliance.

Mr. Reyes has been working in the community for many years and has worked with many community-based organizations that serve immigrant populations and focus on civil rights issues. He was also a Director for Workforce Development and had lots of contracts at that time. Based on his experience, Mr. Reyes stated that collaborations are built on relationships, trust, and having a plan. According to Mr. Reyes, Alameda County assigns different staff to different projects based on their expertise.

One other thing that Mr. Reyes made sure to show me was photographs of people from Alameda County. The county conducted a photograph contest amongst its county employees, and selected photos served as wall-hangings at various Alameda County offices. Many photographs are of children and families. The goal of this photography contest was to obtain photographs that reflect people from the community. Mr. Reyes explained that there were two purposes to this project: (i) to show employees that the county cares about them and wants to dis-

play photographs reflecting their lives, and (2) to display the diversity of Alameda's client population.

CONTRACTS

Background. Martin Torrow, the Administrator of Contracts for Alameda County, reported that a contracts unit did not exist before 2001. The Executive Team decided to create a centralized contracts unit in 2001 as each program was managing its own contracts with or without purchase orders. In addition, there was no database system to track contracts.

Mr. Torrow stated that the first three years were spent rebuilding relationships with different departments as all the departments and programs did not like the idea of handing their contracts over to the unit to manage. In addition, there was a need to better communicate so that the contracts unit would know and understand the needs of each program and to assist in the development of each contract. Mr. Torrow stated that many departments were hiring consultants when it was not necessary, and there were no policies and procedures to help set guidelines for contract development.

How Changes Occur. According to Mr. Torrow, Chet Hewett, the Director, supported the changes that were taking place. The message that Mr. Hewett sent down the chain helped the contracts unit rebuild relationships with different departments. In Mr. Torrow's opinion, relationships are better formed when department heads are assisting in the development and facilitation of relationship building.

Mr. Torrow also reported that Alameda County did a study which examined who the county contracts with, and, interestingly, the county is moving towards contracting with smaller local vendors reflecting the community's diversity.

Partnership. In terms of collaborating with community-based organizations (CBOs), Mr. Torrow reported that contract unit staff and program staff meet with CBOs to discuss expectations, such as how records should be kept for auditing purposes. In addition, for the larger, more involved contracts, the county program staff meet with the provider on

a monthly basis, and this year the plan is for on-site visits to be completed as well.

Overall, Mr. Torrow stated that he believes that the contracts unit has a good relationship with many departments and that the relationship is dependent on individuals building, educating and working with the organizations. He explained that in a true partnership, both the county and the CBOs would have to participate in educating each other. He observed that contractual relationships often occur at a higher level, so that communication regarding the contractual terms does not always filter down to staff members.

Key Elements for Successful Partnership

Successful partnerships rely on openness, willingness, participation, understanding, and follow-through of the purpose/goal of each collaborative partners. The Faith Initiative in Alameda County has been successful because there is a willingness to come together, educate, and understand the need for the initiative to be in place. At each monthly meeting, both county staff members and church members come together with the common goal of finding more foster homes for children. As a result of its focus and follow through, the Faith Initiative has been very successful in reaching out to the faith community to locate more foster homes.

Often, organizations tend to be reactive, responding to specific crises rather than taking the time to develop a process and plan ahead. In order to succeed, there is a need for people working together to be open and willing to share resources and to create new ways to improve the community.

We should also move beyond simply talking about working together to actually sharing knowledge and resources and formulating strategies to solicit and stabilize funding. These can include tapping into resources within the private sector, involving the faith-based communities and other funding sources. In addition, having department heads assist and model in the development and facilitation of relationship-building sets the tone for successful partnerships.

Recommendations

Community collaboration has a significant impact on the community as well as outcomes for children and families. The theme encountered again and again during this project was the value of relationship-building. Most important to note is that when relationships are built at the top level, it sets the tone for the creation of other relationships at other levels.

Turning to San Mateo County, I would like to recommend not only building relationships at the director's level but also at the managers' level. I would like to recommend that San Mateo County charge its managers with the task of building relationships with partners in specific areas that they are interested in and are passionate about. We are a "human services agency", and most are here because we are passionate about the work that we do. We all have areas of strength. The idea is to build upon the strengths of each individual, tapping into their areas of interests and to give each individual the opportunity to develop relationships and partnerships with people in their area of interest. In order to achieve this, I recommend:

- Using the leadership development tools of our Human Resource Department to assess each individual's strengths.
- Developing a base of workers, supervisors, and managers who understand the philosophy of the outreach efforts and who are willing to seek opportunities to work in different and creative ways with community partner agencies. This is especially important as we look at succession planning.

San Mateo County has a model that brings together Child Welfare Services, Employment services, CBOs, and other county departments. These partnerships and relationships, however, can be enhanced at the supervisor and line-staff level. One way to do this is to have monthly meetings to educate supervisors about different programs and its partnerships, including contractual relationships. These meetings would enhance internal partnerships and collaboration among the different programs within the agency.

San Mateo has a reputation of a "can do" county and has been at the forefront of many state-wide changes. San Mateo County already partners with community agencies in all program areas and departments. San Mateo County also works collaboratively with the community college system to enhance the knowledge and education for staff who are looking to better themselves educationally, such as the Family Development Program.

We also have the Family Resource Center (FRC), which consists of multidisciplinary teams located at school sites. In Child Welfare, we already have many partnerships with mental health, Pre-to-3, Edgewood, Youth Family Enrichment Services (YFES), and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD), just to name a few.

San Mateo County has many established partnerships, and it would not be difficult to evaluate the partnerships and see if we can do a better job at working together. In addition, we should also look into the type of partnerships we have with the partnering agencies to see whether it is a "true" partnership, or if it is one where community agencies are merely relying on us for financial support.

Recognizing that sometimes smaller community agencies do not have the ability to venture out on their own to find other funding sources, San Mateo County could assist these smaller agencies by serving as a link between the small agencies. Our agency could assist smaller community partners to form coalitions to work with one another so that they can collaborate and speak in a collective voice, especially when it comes to leveraging funding. In times when the funding atmosphere is difficult, partnering among smaller agencies is a great way to work together to help each organization sustain itself. In doing so, it will save the county time and money, and it will be able to better support the partnering agencies rather than for them to view the county as a funding agent.

I would like to also recommend that San Mateo County identify other community-based organizations that are not currently working with the county and explore the possibility of expanding service options and contracts for our clients. I recommend:

- exploring our system of contract management and assessing how contracts are followed through, fiscally and programmatically, and
- building incentives into contracts for community partners to either meet or exceed outcome measure targets.

One very important recommendation that I have is for San Mateo County to help facilitate a faith initiative since the faith-based community is very cohesive, and when they are able to come together and work with our county collaboratively, the lives of many children and families will improve immensely. I like the idea of bringing the faith-based community together to help the county find more foster homes for children in foster care.

San Mateo County Human Services Agency is poised to take advantage of many opportunities with its new administration. This would be an optimal time to model community-building strategies which enhance and build upon our partnering relationships.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank San Mateo County for providing me with the invaluable opportunity to learn about community building, as well as my program manager, Jerry Lindner, for his support.

Many thanks also go to Sylvia Soublet who acted as my facilitator for this project and put me in contact with all the wonderful people in Alameda County and in the community.

I also thank Augustus Yiu, who organized a terrific orientation and made me feel very welcomed in Alameda County.

I am also very appreciative of everyone who took the time to educate me and share information:

- Pastor Raymond Lankford with the Faith Initiative;
- Donna Moore with Family Services Agency of the Bay Area;
- Nannette Dillard of Alameda County ACAP;
- Martin Torrow of the Contracts unit in Alameda County; and
- Vince Reyes, Special Assistant to the Director.

Finally, I would like to thank all the staff members who took time to stop by and speak with me during my visits with Alameda County.

