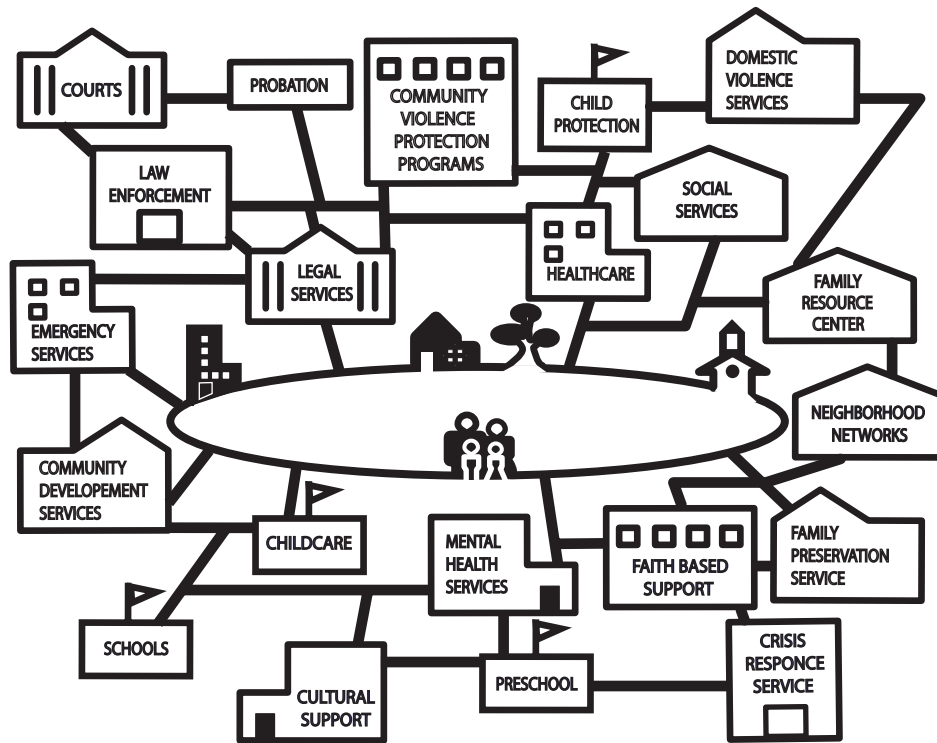




Systems Improvement

Training and Technical Assistance Project

Systems Improvement: A Primer for Creating and Sustaining Systems of Care That Work for Children, Youth and Families



Prepared by the Institute for Educational Leadership with funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice



About IEL

For more than forty years, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL)— a non-profit, nonpartisan organization based in Washington, DC—has worked to achieve better results for children and youth. At the heart of our effectiveness is our unique ability to bring people together to identify and resolve issues across policy, program and sector boundaries. As a natural outgrowth of our work, we have created and continue to nurture diverse networks across the country.

Today, IEL is working to help individuals and institutions increase their capacity to work *together*. We are building and supporting a cadre of diverse leaders, strengthening the capacity of education and related systems, and informing the development and implementation of policies. Our efforts are focused through five programs of work: *Developing Leaders; Strengthening School-Family-Community Connections; Governing; Connecting and Improving Systems that Serve Children and Youth; and Improving Preparation for Work.*

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Please visit our websites: www.sittap.org & www.iel.org

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Background on SITTAP and the Toolkits

The Systems Improvement Training and Technical Assistance Project (SITTAP) reflects the ongoing commitment of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to find better ways of working with states and communities to improve the well-being of children, youth and families by developing comprehensive community-based solutions to a broad range of issues. SITTAP, which is operated by the Institute for Educational Leadership, is designed to develop, expand, and enhance the skills and capacities of key stakeholders in communities to make systemic changes leading to more efficient and integrated systems of care (particularly juvenile justice and child welfare systems) for children, youth and families.

Improving juvenile justice and child welfare systems is a process, not an event. Recent reform efforts reflect a shift from treatment and adjudication to prevention and from centralized service delivery to community-based comprehensive strategies. Participants at every level of the change effort must maintain the vision of a more responsive, collaborative and efficient system and simultaneously implement changes while responding to the day-to day crises inherent in the individual agencies and operations that comprise the ‘system.’ This is perhaps the biggest challenge to achieving better results for children, youth, families and their communities.

The need for more effective strategies to address child abuse and neglect and juvenile delinquency is prevalent in almost every setting in America — large, small, urban, suburban and rural. However, violence prevention and child protection are often most needed in communities that suffer from high rates of poor housing and homelessness, unemployment and underemployment, under resourced schools, poor health care and other social conditions that contribute to social isolation

and widespread hopelessness. These are problems that many of the SITTAP demonstration sites are dealing with at some level. These factors make instilling the value of civic engagement and system-wide change through collaboration challenging.

About this Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to provide ideas and linkages to other resources that will enable demonstration sites to build on their success and sustain effective efforts beyond the life of the grant. It is a practical guide, not a cookbook, which can assist local communities in the difficult process of creating a more responsive system of care for children put at risk. This guide explores four key elements to improving systems:

- 1) Understanding why communities are improving systems
- 2) Understanding how communities are improving systems
- 3) Overcoming resistance to change
- 4) Moving forward and maintaining momentum

Finally, there is a Resource List that includes numerous sources for more specific guidance on collaboration, service integration, and key elements of effective community-based systems reform.

This toolkit is one of several resources (also available online at www.sittap.org) developed to strengthen and sustain the capacity of OJJDP sites served by SITTAP to achieve and sustain their systems reform goals and effectively address the related challenges. Other toolkits address topics such as: Sustainability; Using Data Effectively; Building Community Partnerships; and, Family-Centered, Culturally Competent Partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Systems improvement makes community services work better for children, youth, and families. What does that mean? Think about a real family in a community like yours. Two parents and four children ranging in age from five to 15 live together in two bedrooms, one bathroom, a small kitchen/dining area, and a tiny living room that doubles as a bedroom. The Family is often late with the rent and has been threatened with eviction. This family has strong connections to the neighborhood where they live and to a faith community that helps them with their daily challenges. One parent works three low wage, part-time jobs. The other parent and a young child have serious, chronic health problems and no health insurance. The father has physically assaulted the mother. A neighbor has reported the family to the local child protection agency because young children are sometimes left at home alone while one parent works and the other is at clinic appointments. The family's 14 year old daughter has run away from home several times and has been disciplined at school for fighting and disrupting classes. The 15 year old son wants to be the first in his family to go to college. The family lives in a community where services are available to assist with some of their challenges.

This family is not unique. One in seven children in the United States has a worker in their family but is still poor. One in seven has no health insurance. Every day, 7,883 children are reported abused and neglected. Every one second of the school day, a public high school student is suspended.¹

What happens when services are separated in categories?

Navigating systems to get services becomes one of the family's challenges. The parent and child with health problems may have to go to different clinics or visit the same clinic at different times for adult and pediatric medical care. The young teenage girl may not get any attention until her behavior results in an arrest. The older teenage boy may miss out on being matched with a mentor to help him through the college application process because his parents could not attend the required family orientation session. Neighbors and members of their faith community may want to help but not know how. Eligibility requirements, language barriers, transportation problems, and cultural misunderstandings can create even more obstacles to seeking and getting assistance.

Staff of programs serving one family member may not have any information about the rest of the family or about other services he or she is receiving. Program staff may not know that the children left at home alone have also witnessed domestic violence. Service providers may unintentionally take contradictory approaches, make inconsistent suggestions to family members, or schedule appointments at conflicting times.

What happens when services and supports are organized in a system?

The family's problems will not be automatically solved, but a coordinated system can make it easier for the family to get access to services and to make the most of the family's resources. A care coordinator can help the family set priorities and use their own strengths along with services and supports to meet their goals. The

care coordinator can facilitate the exchange of information among service providers and the family.

Programs can organize convenient appointment schedules and locations. Formal actions by the child protection and juvenile justice systems may be replaced by or linked with community services and supports. Natural helpers in the family's faith community and/or neighborhood can be partners in service delivery.

The experiences of communities around the nation indicate that a system approach can result in:

- Quicker access to services and supports;
- Higher levels of family satisfaction with services; and
- Reductions in out-of-home placements of children and youth, emergency care and hospitalizations for health problems, and related costs.

A Categorical System is:

- ✗ Organized by one problem at a time
- ✗ Reactive to problems and crises;
- ✗ Focused on individuals
- ✗ Driven by funding categories
- ✗ Organized in separate units that don't consistently work together
- ✗ Inflexible
- ✗ Based on a "one size fits all" approach
- ✗ Measured by units of service

A Coordinated System is:

- ✓ Comprehensive
- ✓ Preventive and responsive
- ✓ Family-Centered
- ✓ Integrated
- ✓ Flexible
- ✓ Sensitive to race, language, culture, sexual orientation and disabilities
- ✓ Outcome oriented

How do communities improve systems to make services work better for children, youth, and families?

Improving systems is analogous to building a new network of roads for a community. Existing roads are inadequate but must be included in the new network. Unpaved paths and trails may provide the best information about where to locate new roads, bridges, and interchanges. Construction will require going over, through, or under barriers. Everyone will have to be informed about and get accustomed to new traffic patterns.

While each community must find its own specific “how to” answers in its own families and neighborhoods and in the context of its own political, cultural, and legislative environment, there are a number of common elements and principles. In the following pages, readers will find a distillation of the core elements and essential practices of systems reform. This primer highlights some of the lessons learned in OJJDP initiatives and in a broad range of other state, tribal, and community systems improvement efforts to answer the questions:

1. Why are communities improving systems?
2. How are communities going about improving systems?
3. Where are communities encountering sticking points and how are they dealing with them?
4. How do communities maintain momentum and keep making improvements?

Who Should Read *Systems Improvement* and Why

- **Community residents** for ideas on how to get involved and organize your neighbors to make services work better
- **Local, state, tribal, and federal policymakers** to find out about approaches that are working in other places
- **Family and community members, business and faith leaders** participating in new systems improvement collaboratives for information on what you can expect and what collaborative partners who have worked together for a while have learned
- **Participants in established collaboratives** for ideas on strategies to get past “sticking points” and keep moving forward
- **Public agency, non-profit organization leaders and staff** for ideas about ways to work together and involve community members
- **Grant makers** for information on the impact of outside funding on community systems change efforts.

1

WHY ARE COMMUNITIES IMPROVING SYSTEMS?

Replacing Problem-Focused Categories with Family-Focused Systems to Improve Outcomes

Communities are changing systems to make public and community-based services work better for children, youth, and families. Since the 1960s, programs and funding have defined an increasing number of separate service categories. Each time public attention focused on a problem affecting children and youth, a new category of services was created.² This course of action has produced a collection of uncoordinated program categories that target one family member and one problem at a time. Each service category has its own priorities, funding, infrastructure, and procedures. Each has created a discipline of workers with its own philosophy, networks, language, and culture.³

For families, categorical services often result in frustration, escalation of problems to crises, and feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness.

Those characteristics have inadvertently created barriers between program categories. Families must navigate through the categories and around the barriers to get services. They sometimes give up or get lost somewhere between categories.

For families, categorical services often result in frustration, escalation of problems to crises, and feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness. Despite categorical services, problems persist at unacceptably high rates and costs.

For a moment, return to the family described in the introduction of this primer. Services provided by category and the family's own assets may assist one or more family members to deal with one or more challenges. Health care may make chronic conditions more manageable. Child care may provide safe supervision for young children while parents are at work and appointments. A school-based program may help the son apply for college admissions and scholarships. However, if domestic violence or the daughter's behavior problems escalate, a crisis can occur that threatens the gains in other areas. Health clinic staff may have no idea why the parent and child start missing appointments. Young children may express stress through behavior problems at child care. The college bound son may decide to stay home to help the family.

Communities have begun to transform categorical services focused on single problems into service systems focused on families. In these new systems, linkages replace categorical barriers to make services and supports more accessible and effective for families.

The results are positive for families and communities. Around the country, communities are improving systems to:

- Invest in prevention and early intervention to reduce the

need for and costs of crisis and other “deep end” services;

- Reduce the number of days children and youth spend in foster care, treatment, detention, and other out-of home placements;
- Increase the number of placements in or near children’s neighborhoods when placement is necessary;
- Decrease the frequency and severity of repeat juvenile crimes;
- Increase the number of young children who are ready to learn when they enter school; and
- Improve school attendance and achievement.

It is important to note that communities achieve these outcomes over time. It is not possible to shut down categorical service systems while new, coordinated systems are put in place. Even when communities move quickly, time is required for transitions. Moreover, outcomes cannot be expected to change significantly in a short period of time.

Communities are working to set expectations that are both high and realistic because families and communities deserve the best systems can do. Setting short, intermediate, and long term objectives and measuring trends in changes helps to manage change and expectations. Communities are learning that systems improvement is an ongoing process, not an event. Over time, improved systems will reach families sooner to help prevent and respond early to child abuse and neglect, domestic and community violence, mental health and substance abuse problems, delinquency, and other problems.

Coordinated, Family-Centered Service Systems:

- Emphasize *prevention* and *early intervention*;
- Unite categories and reorganize their individual structures and ways of doing business within a *comprehensive spectrum* or *continuum*;
- Incorporate and value *formal services* delivered by agencies and organizers; *processes* carried out by child welfare, juvenile and criminal justice, and other authorities; and *informal supports* provided by natural helpers in neighborhood, cultural, and faith communities;
- Create explicit, easy to use *mechanisms to link those services and supports*;
- Change the narrow focus on the problems to include a broader view of the *strengths of children, youth and families*; and
- Are flexible enough to respond to *multiple and changing needs*.

(Osher, deFur, Nava, Spencer and Toth-Dennis, 1999)

Integrating Systems Improvements and Program Enhancements

To transform problem-focused categories into a family-focused system, communities are working to improve systems and to enhance existing programs. Often, public agency and community organization partners are tempted to try to improve systems only by expanding existing programs or establishing new programs to fill gaps in the services available in the community. Staff of organizations and agencies and residents who use services are accustomed to separate categories and, therefore, comfortable looking for ways to improve prevention efforts and services one

program at a time. Almost all programs can benefit from quality enhancements and many urgently need more resources.

Communities have found, however, that outcomes improve more quickly when they approach improvements systematically. Some examples illustrate the ways communities are integrating systems improvements and program enhancements.

Program Improvements	System Improvements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focus on one program strategy at time. ● Increase the quantity or enhance the quality of services. ● Increase funding from the same source or depend on outside grants. ● Operate independently or through referrals from other programs. ● Require that programs cooperate and sometimes coordinate schedules and activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involve multiple agencies and organizations. ● Change the way services are structured and delivered. ● Change the way services are financed in the community. ● Establish formal policies and linkages between and across programs. ● Require that programs working together share resources, responsibilities, and decision-making.

SafeFutures and the Building Blocks Initiative to reduce disproportionate confinement of youth of color helped launch Seattle’s ongoing Reinvesting in Youth Initiative (RIY), a collaborative effort to shift resources from incarceration to a community-based system of prevention and intervention services and supports for youth and their families. To accomplish this shift, RIY is working to simultaneously:

- Make changes in philosophy, policy, financial structure, programming, coordination and, decision making; and
- Expand cost effective, proven, culturally proficient early intervention services for youth and families.

RIY's community and government leaders have recognized that for systems improvements to effectively reduce incarceration, it is necessary to build the community's capacity for prevention and intervention through training and targeted investments of funds. Conversely, changes in policies, revised formulas for fiscal allocations, and better linkages across systems are required to make prevention and intervention effective.

The El Paso, County Colorado Department of Human Services TANF division has changed its mission to include prevention of child abuse while the Department's child protection division now sees itself as an anti-poverty program. The Department of Human Services found that many families who receive TANF benefits for two or more years have significant challenges similar to those faced by families in the child welfare system, including economic struggles, un/under-employment, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health problems. The two divisions initially began working together with families who were in both the TANF and child welfare systems through coordinated service planning and case management. They then created new ways of delivering services for families who were not in both systems but had similar

Reinvesting In Youth

Reinvesting in Youth is a multi-jurisdictional, public-private effort to transform the juvenile justice and youth service systems in Seattle and King County. The effort grew out of discussions in the late 1990s among area key leaders who were concerned that local youth and juvenile justice services were heavily weighted toward expensive measures of questionable effectiveness. This initiative seeks to shift the juvenile justice system from detention (incarceration) to prevention and intervention.

For more information, contact Jim Street at 206-684-0365

needs. Staff from the two divisions worked together and funds were blended to support voluntary family strengthening services delivered through TANF to minimize the stigma of involvement with the child welfare system, coordinated support for kinship care, and integrated services for teens in foster care. These changes simultaneously changed county policy and resource allocations and increased prevention and early intervention services. To continue moving toward the vision of eradicating poverty and family violence, a cross-agency collaborative receives regular feedback from families and staff and looks for ways to refine systems changes as well as new opportunities to link services.⁴

Each of these communities decided that they could more effectively improve outcomes for children, youth, and families by re-organizing services and supports to improve coordination, management, and delivery rather than by only enhancing individual programs. In the process, programs have also been enhanced.

2

HOW ARE COMMUNITIES IMPROVING SYSTEMS?

The improvements that will most benefit the children, youth, and families of a community will be developed in that community. What works to improve outcomes in one community may not work at all in another community, or may need to take a different form to be effective. Moreover, what works in one community at one point in time may not work years or even months later.

The best improvements are the ones conceived, planned, carried out, and evaluated by those most directly affected by systems: youth and families; staff, managers, administrators, and policymakers of agencies and organizations; and faith, civic, and business leaders in the community.

This section provides information on eight (not necessarily sequential) steps that communities with widely differing characteristics and priorities have found to be essential to making services work better and improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. The steps more closely resembles a spiral or a circle than a straight line (*see Appendix A to view the Steps to Systems Change Spiral*). Communities start work at different places on the spiral and work at different speeds, depending on priorities, resources, and needs.⁵

Start with Children, Youth, and Families

Communities improve systems to benefit children, youth, and families. Partners in systems improvement need accurate and up to date information on and from those populations. Collection and analysis of demographic and indicator data provides some of the information needed to identify and make improvements. Data answers questions, such as:

- Is the population of families changing in size, age, racial/ethnic background, languages spoken, employment status, or income level?
- What percentage of newborns are delivered at healthy weights and by mothers who received prenatal care?
- Are rates of infant mortality, child immunizations, teen pregnancies, injuries from violence, non-intentional injuries, and other health indicators increasing or decreasing?
- Are reports of violent crime, child abuse and neglect, and arrests of youth increasing or decreasing?
- Is school attendance and achievement improving or declining?

It is necessary to analyze data by time period, geographic area, race/ethnicity, and other factors to get more and better information about the children, youth, and families to be served. Even then, data does not provide all the answers. Data is not always available to directly answer specific questions about children, youth, and families. The way data is collected or

analyzed may answer one part of a question but not another part. The incidence of problems may be under-reported. A new practice or program may influence changes in data reporting. For example, new procedures may increase or decrease child abuse reports. A change in the number of arrests of youth may be the result of new law enforcement policies rather than a change in delinquent behavior.

Communities have obtained some of the most meaningful information for improving systems directly from youth and families. It is necessary to test assumptions based on demographic and indicator data by asking youth and families whether the assumptions match their real experiences. The American Indian Tribes participating in Safe Kids/Safe Streets and SafeFutures, the Sault Sainte Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians of Michigan and the Fort Belknap Indian Community in Montana respectively, collected data on problems affecting youth and families and presented it to youth, adults, and elders through a series of community meetings. Participants agreed that high rates of substance abuse, school drop-out and expulsion, and delinquency were serious problems. However, community members of all ages identified high unemployment and loss of cultural identity and traditions as the root causes of those problems and the highest priorities for systems change.

As a result, the Sault Tribe's Safe Kids/Safe Streets initiative facilitated and supported a community healing process focused on preventing child abuse and strengthening families by reclaiming cultural ways. Fort Belknap SafeFutures integrated cultural

traditions and teaching in prevention, intervention, and treatment services and linked human services with job training.

Involve Families in Meaningful, Appropriate Ways

When organizing to improve systems, there is a lot of discussion and value placed on involving youth and families in the change. After all, as the consumers of the systems, it makes sense that they would have a big stake in determining what changes need to be made and how. Yet, including youth and families in decision making is one of the more challenging aspects of systems improvement work.

There are many benefits to including youth and families in the change process from planning through implementation. First, as consumers of the services, they know what aspects of the systems help them, and which do harm. They also know what the broader community's perceptions of systems are. Additionally, as stakeholders their buy-in can help ease transitions as they occur, because they can help shape community norms, beliefs and attitudes that influence system utilization.

The realities of including youth and families in meaningful ways is often much harder than it sounds. A lot of time and resources are spent in preparing youth and adult consumers to participate in the change process. Unfortunately, very little time is usually spent preparing agencies and professional staff to be ready for their input. Lucas County/Toledo Safe Kids/Safe Streets has taken a leadership role in preparing agency and organization

representatives to work with parents. Professional staff and families who are partners in a range of community collaborative efforts to improve systems will participate in Family Support America's "Making Room at the Table" training.

Involving youth and families in meaningful ways will change the way the system fundamentally works. If done well, it will change where you meet, and when. It will influence your agenda, your priorities, and your decision-making processes. It will also make your system stronger, more flexible, more accountable and better.

Communities that have embraced youth and families as part of the decision-making process have included them in all decisions from general operations to fiscal and policy decisions. They have made room to value the expertise and experiences of youth and families as a unique skill set that is equal in importance to those who implement the services, oversee the budgets, and manage operations. Consequently, both groups have benefitted—community representatives have access to power brokers, knowledge and systems that traditionally have shut them out, and systems have a deepened understanding on what supports families need to become independent, a better sense of where resources can have the most impact, and strengthened relationships with those they serve.

Kansas City KidSafe, the jurisdiction's Safe Kids/Safe Street's initiative, involved neighborhood residents in decisions about

allocating funds for community programs. Residents set priorities, assisted in developing requests for proposals, evaluated funding applications, selected projects for funding, and reviewed results of and reports on funded projects.

In Santa Barbara, California the Pro Youth Coalition came together to reduce youth gang violence. Law enforcement, city government, schools, community-based organizations and families involved in the child welfare and juvenile and criminal justice systems collaborated to identify strategies that would tend to the root causes of gang violence.

Once these strategies were identified, the Coalition re-granted money to groups of organizations that implemented programming in the community. Young people and their families were involved in all aspects of this process. They researched the strategies that work along with community-based organizations and public agencies, they reviewed the proposals that were submitted, and in some cases, they applied for and received the grants. They met with other young people to recognize and honor the contributions they made to their community. They planned activities with law enforcement to help reduce mistrust between law enforcement

Pro-Youth Coalition

The Santa Barbara Pro-Youth Coalition's violence prevention initiative focuses on reducing gang violence among the youth of South Santa Barbara County. Pro-Youth Coalition (PYC) supports a pro-youth agenda by funding community-based organizations to implement strategies that promote the healthy development of youth and families through public education and by effecting systems change. The Coalition's comprehensive approach has led to a 53 percent decrease in gang-related violence.

For more information:
<http://www.proyouthcoalition.org/>

and gang members. They wrote up their recommendations for youth activities and presented them to the Mayor's Youth Council.

In Spartanburg, South Carolina, Stop the Violence (STV) worked in two high crime communities. They allowed the community residents to identify issues that were most important

Stop the Violence

The "Stop the Violence" Collaboration (STV) began its neighborhood approach to preventing community violence in 1996 by adopting two communities in Spartanburg, South Carolina. STV works to prevent violence by strengthening and empowering families, communities, and neighborhoods and encouraging community pride and involvement through education, community organizing development, and revitalization.

***For more information email: stv@teleplex.net
or visit their webpage: www.teleplex.net/stv***

to them. Initially, community residents focused on housing codes and physical improvements to their neighborhood. Once they started cleaning up, STV leveraged relationships it had with City and County officials to make broader change. They brought residents to DPW and Housing department meetings and they spoke about their needs and desires. This led to a change in the way the housing codes were enforced, and also led to a redistribution of resources from the County level into this under-represented community.

Set Outcome Goals

The purpose of improving systems is to make services work better for children, youth, and families. How will communities know if services and systems are working better? Systems have improved when outcomes for children, youth, and families improve. Put another way, systems are working when fewer families enter systems in crisis and when families who use services are better off when they leave services than when they entered. Data on and information from families is the basis for setting outcome goals. Communities reorganize services, processes, and supports in systems to improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Systems improvements work better and faster when outcome goals are stated in plain English (and Spanish, Vietnamese, Russian, and other languages spoken and read in the community) and clearly express what the system will change and how the community will be able to tell if that change has been accomplished.⁶ Examples of outcome goals and related measures include statements such as increase the high school graduation rate from 60% to 80%; increase the percentage of healthy births from 75% to 95%; or reduce the number of families reliant on cash public assistance by 20% annually for three years. There are, however, difficulties in setting outcome goals. Service providers are more familiar and comfortable with counting units of service provided, such as counseling sessions, health clinic encounters, and treatment bed days, than they are with setting results-based goals. They may resist an outcomes approach

because it requires new record keeping procedures. They may be concerned that factors outside their control can make it impossible to achieve desired outcomes, or that increased awareness of child abuse, youth violence, or another problem may result in increases in reports when the incidence of the problem is stable or even declining.

Practical problems pose difficulties, such as these two examples. Communities participating in OJJDP's Safe Start initiative want to reduce the impact of exposure to violence on children but lack baseline data on the number of children now affected by violence in their homes and communities. To get baseline data on school graduation rates, decisions must be made about whether to rely on school district reports on the percentage of drop outs, to analyze data on the number of students who entered high school in one year and the number who graduated four years later, or to try to make changes in truancy and other risk factors for dropping out.

Families play important roles in getting past attitudinal and practical difficulties of setting outcome goals. For example, families in San Francisco helped policy makers and service providers set outcome goals for a system of care for children and youth at risk for out of home placement. Families said they wanted to reduce out of home placements in the three neighborhoods with the highest placement rates. That input helped to set a specific outcome goal. They said they would know the goal had been reached if children and youth spent fewer days in foster care,

detention, psychiatric hospitals, and residential treatment centers and more days in school. Those ideas helped planners to identify sources for the data needed to measure progress.

Assess the Availability and Effectiveness of Existing, Formal Services

List all the services that must be involved to achieve outcome goals. This task may sound more straightforward than it usually turns out to be. When public agency staff make the list, it usually starts with government programs and services provided through contracts with community organizations. Staff of community organizations start with other programs in their neighborhoods or disciplines. Youth and families are more likely to start with the service providers with whom they have the most regular contact, including day care centers, home child care providers, neighborhood sports leagues, and community food pantries. It is important to include all these types of services in a community inventory.

Assessing the effectiveness of current services is a significantly more difficult task. Definitions of and perspectives on effectiveness often vary widely. Many government and community-based programs still lack the capacity to consistently measure and monitor service outcomes. Meaningful analysis of the quality and effectiveness of existing services requires a constructive framework and clear criteria for assessment.

First, clearly articulate the purpose(s) of the assessment. For example, Flint, Michigan's Neighborhood Initiative Project brought together residents and formal and informal service providers to clarify who provides services to whom and based on that information found ways to streamline access to services, consolidate duplicative programs, and strengthen programs facing challenges.

Second, identify assessment questions, such as:

- Does the service address a community outcome goal?
- Does the service reach the intended priority population?
- Are services developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate?
- Do services have sufficient capacity, i.e. are there waiting lists?
- Are consumers satisfied with services? Are they involved in planning, delivering and evaluating the program?
- Are there linkages between the service and other programs? Do the linkages work for consumers?
- Is there evidence of service effectiveness?

Answers to these and similar questions can strengthen linkages across services and programs, and help guide resource allocations and community building efforts. It is also important to map services, both geographically and along a continuum of prevention, early intervention, community-based treatment, and institutional treatment.

Identify and Incorporate Neighborhood, Cultural, and Faith Supports

Every community has informal networks of neighborhood, cultural, and faith supports.

Depending on location, demographics, and economics, there may be block clubs; cultural societies and social clubs; neighborhood and faith-based youth, women's and men's groups; business and civic groups; tenants and homeowners associations; farm and fishing

cooperatives; support groups; faith congregations; professional associations; union locals; and many others. These groups can play vital roles in systems. They can:

- Be reliable sources and providers of information;
- Be influential leaders;
- Provide services;
- Reach youth and families who distrust formal service providers; and
- Serve as a bridge between communities isolated by economic, cultural, or language factors and service providers.

Neighborhood Violence Prevention Collaborative

The Flint, Michigan Neighborhood Violence Prevention Collaborative (NVPC) provided mini-grants and technical assistance to neighborhood groups interested in starting violence prevention activities; trained residents to serve as technical assistance providers; developed partnerships among the existing violence prevention initiatives, community-based organizations, local agencies and municipal services; and increased public awareness of violence through a media campaign. NVPC institutionalized their activities and became a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Youth Violence Prevention and Research Center in July 2001.

Systems efforts in several communities have made it a priority to build the capacity of community, cultural, and faith supports. For example, Flint Michigan’s Neighborhood Violence Prevention Collaborative and the Safe Kids/Safe Streets initiatives in Burlington, Vermont and Kansas City, Missouri re-grant funds and provide technical assistance to help local groups develop as service providers.

Involve Decision Makers with Responsibility for Policy Making and Resource Allocations

In many communities, direct service staff and managers have made informal agreements and arrangements to make services work better for children, youth, and families. In some cases, they believe that higher level decision makers will slow down or resist changes that they can make on their own. In other cases, they follow the proverb “it is easier to get forgiveness than permission.”

Their motives are understandable and informal approaches often do work—for a time. However, the success of those efforts is usually dependent on individuals who may change jobs. Moreover, informal agreements among workers cannot change job descriptions or classifications, training standards, formal regulations, or resource allocations. Sustained systemic change requires decisions made not only by individuals like department directors and organization executive directors but also by mayors, tribal and city council members, board of directors members, county commissioners and members of boards of supervisors,

commissioners and secretaries who head state agencies, and sometimes state legislators and governors.

Sometimes key decision makers are outside of local government. For example, in Huntsville, Alabama, a Safe Kids/ Safe Streets site, identifying and involving the commander of a local military base was important because the general makes policy and resource decisions with significant impact on community residents and resources.

In many communities, multiple initiatives to change systems and other pressing policy and fiscal issues compete for the attention of high level decision makers. To work effectively with them:

- ✓ *Set clear priorities* and avoid involving tangential issues that distract from priorities.
- ✓ *Limit the list of priority decisions* to a small number (no more than 5).
- ✓ *Identify the highest level decision makers* with responsibility and authority in priority areas.
- ✓ *Identify collaborative partners and, if necessary, other allies who have relationships with decision makers* and ask them to approach decision makers.
- ✓ *Arrange meetings with the highest level decision makers on specific systems improvements only when you are fully ready* with recommendations and proposals supported by strong evidence (data-based and anecdotal) organized in a visual presentation.
- ✓ *Follow up promptly and consistently* on questions, commitments, and action steps.

Strengthen and Create Linkages

The mechanisms to link prevention strategies, services, supports, and processes are probably the most important and certainly the most challenging components of community systems. Creating linkages is analogous to building a new network of roads for a community. Existing roads are inadequate but must be included in the new network. Unpaved paths and trails may provide the best information about where to locate new roads, bridges, and interchanges. Construction will require going over, through, or under barriers. Everyone will have to be informed about and get accustomed to new traffic patterns.

Communities have identified four elements necessary to make a system work effectively. These are policies, memoranda of agreement, and other mechanisms to facilitate and support:

- ① Easy access to services and supports
- ② Information sharing
- ③ Sharing resources
- ④ Solving problems with and improving linkages

- ① **Access:** Communities have established diverse “entry points” to make it easier for children, youth, and families to get access to services and supports. Family resource centers or community service centers located at schools, neighborhood centers, faith institutions, and other locations that residents regularly visit can be

focal points for services. Some systems use a “no wrong door” approach, informing staff and volunteers in all systems components about a broad range of services and supports and training them to help families get where they need to go.

② **Information sharing:** In many communities, agreements formalized in policies and memoranda of understanding guide the way systems share information while respecting the rights and interests of children, youth, and families. These agreements delineate why to share information; which information to share; and what information to protect, why, and how, in the context of relevant laws and regulations.⁷ Training and team building support the implementation of agreements on information sharing.

③ **Resources:** Creation of linkages typically requires resources for new or upgraded locations and communications systems, staff to coordinate services and supports, training, and community education materials. Communities re-allocate funds, tap new funding sources, and share other resources to support linkages. A neighborhood service center may combine:

- A location provided by a school district or community center
- Existing staff from agencies and organization re-assigned to work together as a team
- Computer equipment relocated from agencies or organizations or purchased with funds from their technology budgets
- Public education materials produced by a community arts project

- ➔ **Problem solving improvements:** New linkages sometimes do not work immediately and need to be refined. Problems with new policies and procedures may have to be addressed or families and staff may come up with better ideas over time. An implementation problem does not necessarily mean a linkage will not work. It means more work is needed to get it right. The way linkages work must also change to respond to changes in families, services, and supports.

**FAIRFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA'S DEPARTMENT OF SYSTEMS
MANAGEMENT FOR HUMAN SERVICES COORDINATES
LINKAGES AT SEVERAL DIFFERENT LEVELS.**

- ▣ Helps families handle emergency situations by simplifying access to services. A staff team is the link to all public and private services. Coordinators assess family situations, over the phone or in person, and help families get connected with services to meet their immediate needs. Based on what they learn from working with families in emergencies, coordinators work with service providers on prevention and early intervention strategies.
- ▣ Coordinates public, private, and community-based service providers to improve the quality, capacity, and integration of services. Regional staff bring together residents and providers to learn about issues and programs and to collaborate on problem solving.
- ▣ Provides cross-agency and system-wide support to promote access, service integration, and community involvement. Staff assist with strategic planning, process improvement, and research.
- ▣ Manages information on available services. Staff collect and maintain the information contained in an internet-based database of public and non-profit services. This resource guide makes service information available to residents and service providers 24 hours a day/seven days a week.

Refine and Continuously Improve Systems

It is worth restating that systems improvement is an ongoing process, and not an event. Communities working to improve systems need regular opportunities to critically review the impact of systems improvements and plan new improvements, as well as opportunities to celebrate milestones and successes.

The following questions can help guide continuous improvements:

- ▣ Is there progress toward outcome goals?
- ▣ Have the ways families get access to and use services changed?
- ▣ Are families in one program getting connected with services in other programs?
- ▣ Are service providers sharing information and using that information?
- ▣ Are families satisfied with services?
- ▣ Are staff satisfied with their work?
- ▣ What recommendations do families have for further improvements?
- ▣ What recommendations do staff have for further improvements?

Additional questions to help guide continuous improvements:

- Are youth and families participating in planning, delivering, and evaluating services?
- Are inter-agency/organization structures in place for decision making and service delivery?
- Have the way services are delivered changed?
- Have policies been developed or changed to formalize system operations?
- Are service providers from different disciplines, agencies, and organizations participating in cross-training?
- Are multiple agencies and organizations pooling staffing and funds for planning and services?
- Are data systems designed to track services and outcomes?
- Is the distribution of services and resources for prevention, intervention, and “deep end” services like out of home placements more balanced?

3

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Starting the Change Process

Resistance to re-organizing services in systems is sometimes overt. A policymaker may state that s/he does not think a planned improvement is necessary. A public employee association may formally object to a change in workers' job responsibilities. An advocacy group may make its case in the media or the courts. More often, subtle resistance undermines changes. An administrator has schedule conflicts with collaborative meetings. There are delays in getting data. A new policy repeatedly requires additional administrative or legal review. Workers do not complain but also do not consistently use new procedures.

Systems improvements encounter these and other forms of resistance even when there is general agreement that the current way of doing business is not working and when new ways are supported in the community and by research. This section describes some of the strategies that systems efforts have used to overcome resistance to change and promote continuous improvements:

- 1. Buy-in from influential stakeholders**
- 2. Open dialogue and communication**
- 3. Shared decision making driven by data**
- 4. Training and support**
- 5. Information for consumers**

① Buy-in from influential stakeholders: Changes occur more easily when support for them comes from multiple places. The most effective systems efforts have the investment of key leaders in government, neighborhoods, and the business and faith communities and from consumers and other community members, and from managers and line staff respected by their peers.

The Art and Science of Community Problem Solving Project's Strategy Tool Kit on how (and how not) to engage stakeholders identifies strategic questions and decision issues that communities must address to work effectively with diverse stake holders:⁸

② Open dialogue and communication: When systems efforts take the time to provide forums and mechanisms for everyone involved to ask questions and express concerns, some of the fears about, and resistance to, change are reduced. Moreover, dialog and communication produces new and sometimes better ideas and ways to solve problems.

The Safe Kids/Safe Streets initiatives in Burlington, Vermont and the six communities participating in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Greenbook Initiative have found that time and a shared knowledge base were both essential to supporting open dialogue and communication between domestic violence service providers and child protection workers. Differences in history, philosophy, and perspectives have divided the fields of domestic violence advocacy and child protection. Advocates for battered women and child welfare workers have

Strategic Questions	Decision Issues
<p>Why should we engage stakeholders?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we looking to define a broad issue agenda? • To set strategies for action on a pre-defined set of issues? • To design a specific project given strategies in place?
<p>Who should be involved and in what roles?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the primary stakeholders? • Who else should be consulted or educated? • Who should organize and sponsor planning events? • Who should facilitate them? • Who should make decisions?
<p>What is the scope of our process?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does our work require broad boundaries so new issues and interests can constantly be put forward? • Are we to generate advice for decision makers or make decisions? • How do we relate to those who make daily (routine) decisions?
<p>How should we put our participation strategy to work?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How should we identify, organize and convene stakeholders? • Build a common knowledge base around the issues we will address? • Present information and get feedback? • Improve deliberations and shared decision making?

been in conflict over what is best for children who witness domestic violence. They also disagree over how the child welfare system treats battered mothers. Initial meetings in most communities were tense with more statements and silence than dialogue.

Planners confronted the tension with informational presentations on how domestic violence services work with children and how child protection agencies respond to domestic violence. Over time, question and answer sessions led to conversations, deliberation, and clarification of points of agreement and disagreement in the meetings.

In addition these sessions led to changes in how both groups work with families independently and together.

San Francisco Safe Start has used a similar but more structured approach to fostering productive dialogue. First, representatives of the battered women's services, batterer intervention programs, child welfare, family resource center, court, law enforcement, probation, and health systems made informational presentations and answered questions on their work with families affected by

Greenbook Initiative

The Greenbook Initiative is a project initiated by the Family Violence Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). The project is supported by the U.S. Departments of Justice and Health & Human Services. It is designed to improve the quality of services provided by local jurisdictions to families facing both domestic violence and child maltreatment. NCJFCJ coordinates ongoing technical support for the Initiative, which has funded demonstration sites in six counties around the country. The sites are working to implement the guidelines outlined in NCJFCJ's publication, "Effective Intervention in Domestic & Child Maltreatment Cases: Guidelines for Policy and Practice," commonly referred to as the "Greenbook."

For more information:
<http://www.thegreenbook.info/>

violence. With that information as a basis for working together, the representatives then agreed to participate in structured discussions on how each system works and could improve their work in areas, including policies, cross-system linkages, and sustainability of prevention strategies and services for children exposed to violence.

③ Shared decision making driven by data: Resistance to change is more likely when change decisions are made by a single individual or organization than when decision makers from the community, agencies, and organizations work together. Carefully collected and thoroughly analyzed data helps make the case for change. This strategy is only effective when data is organized and presented in user-friendly ways that inform stakeholders and avoid making them feel technically incompetent. Presenting too much data too quickly can cause resistance.

The Sitka Tribe of Alaska’s Safe Start Initiative is working toward systems improvements as part of the Tribe’s overall strategic planning process. Families, Tribal leaders, and service providers are involved through re-analysis of indicator data to break the information down by race, a needs assessment survey, focus groups, and public meetings. Technical assistance is helping Tribal staff identify the most useful and accessible ways to organize and present data to inform priorities and strategies.

④ Training and support: Staff directly responsible for new ways of delivering services and supports and their supervisors need training and support to make changes. College and

university programs do not yet consistently prepare their students to work in systems environments. In fact most professional education and on the job training is organized by service category and reinforces turf boundaries. Cross-training for staff and managers is necessary to introduce new concepts, support new approaches, and solve problems.

Several programs in two Chicago neighborhoods provide training for different categories of individuals who come in contact with families affected by violence, including community workers, child welfare staff, police officers, hospital personnel, and faith and other community leaders. The Safe Start initiative in Chicago is organizing these staff development and community education resources in a cross-training institute.

⑤ Information for consumers: Youth and families can be as accustomed to the ways services and supports have been delivered as staff are. They do not automatically expect that changes will be good for them, especially if they have had negative experiences with services or processes. Some youth and families will be directly involved in making changes. Others will need information before systems changes are implemented and during transition stages. They may not have used services for a while and expect that the old procedures still apply. They need information after improvements have been in place to reduce confusion, anxiety and frustration.

Common Sticking Points and Getting Past Them

Communities run into practical obstacles to systems improvement at a variety of places and times in the process. A few sticking points affect many communities, regardless of where they are located or how they are approaching systems improvements. This section discusses common sticking points and how communities get past them:

1. **Disagreements among partners**
2. **Trust issues**
3. **Changes in key leadership positions**
4. **Requirements and expectations of outside funding**
5. **Infrastructure problems**

① **Disagreements among partners** should not be surprising when individuals and organizations have different perspectives, experiences, and interests. Divergent points of view can slow down or even stop systems improvements or they can be resolved in a way that leads to more and better improvements. The result depends on how collaborative bodies prepare for and deal with conflict. Disagreements have negative effects when collaborative bodies avoid conflict or decide that disagreements cannot be resolved. When disagreements are avoided, conflict can manifest in the subtle forms of resistance discussed above. A decision that a disagreement cannot be solved threatens to stop improvements.

The process of resolving conflicts strengthen systems improvements when partners:

- Assume there will be some disagreements
- Believe conflicts can be resolved
- Keep the focus on improving outcomes for children, youth, and families
- Agree on how decisions will be made and, as necessary, revisited
- Use respectful language to express disagreements (“*I disagree because*”... rather than “*That’s wrong!*”)
- Involve all partners in resolving conflict, not only the disagreeing parties
- Refuse to walk away from conflict

Collaborative leaders and other members can help to settle disagreements and make conflict resolution productive when they do the following:

- Frame divergent points of view in the context of improving outcomes for children, youth, and families
- Restate conflicting positions in more neutral terms
- Ask questions to clarify positions of persons in conflict and get the points of view of other partners
- Recognize differences between disagreements and misunderstandings; suggest solutions; and remind everyone that conflict is a part of change and growth
- Involve facilitators from outside the community to help resolve conflicts

② **Trust issues** can make or break partnerships to organize services in new ways. Exercises to help partners get to know each other and build personal trust will not necessarily build the kind of trust necessary to work together to improve systems. That requires addressing key trust questions directly related to re-organizing services:

- Do partners know and trust one another's (organizational and personal) motives?
- Do they trust one another's (organizational and personal) competence?
- Do they trust that their partners will treat them with collegial respect?
- Do they trust one another's dependability?⁹

It is natural for partners to have questions about one another's intent and ability to deliver. There are real risks involved in community partnerships, including the risk of issues important to a partner getting lost in the process and the risk of entrusting promising ideas to partners who are unwilling or unequipped to carry them out. Moreover, mistrust is often based on complicated pasts and lack of mutual respect.¹⁰

Trust is built in stages as partners:

- Identify mutual interests strong enough to justify proceeding
- Deliberate and compromise on priorities,
- Initiate joint activities
- Define specific aims and commitments
- Solve problems together¹¹

③ Changes in key leadership and staff positions in a community can delay or derail systems improvements. During the second funding year of OJJDP’s SafeFutures initiative, five of the six participating communities experienced significant turnover in

Involving business, civic, faith, and other leaders helps give systems efforts credibility with and helps influence newly elected and appointed officials. Formalizing systems changes in policies, procedures, and memoranda of agreement has helped keep reform efforts on track.

elected officials, corresponding changes in appointed policy maker positions, and related shifts in the influence of informal community leaders.

Similar and smaller scale changes in many communities affect the progress of systems reform. Newly elected and appointed officials may have new priorities or be reluctant to support systems efforts identified by their predecessors. Political and administrative changes may shift energy and focus to new

areas. Communities have used a range of strategies to get past this sticking point. In some communities, building a base of resident support for systems efforts has assured that those efforts are high on the agendas of newly elected and appointed officials.

Involving business, civic, faith, and other leaders helps give systems efforts credibility with and helps influence newly elected and appointed officials. Formalizing systems changes in policies, procedures, and memoranda of agreement has helped keep reform efforts on track. Educating nominees and officials during and immediately after election campaigns assists in securing their support. Involving partners in hiring for key administrative

positions and asking interview questions about systems has also been helpful.

At this writing, San Francisco Safe Start is preparing to work with a new mayor who will be elected in an upcoming runoff election. The new official will replace a powerful mayor who is leaving office after eight years because of term limits. To lay the groundwork for working with the new mayor, Safe Start partners have:

- Educated influential citizen groups about the effects on children of exposure to violence;
- Provided informational materials for all candidates; and
- Planned a visible role for the new mayor in the kick off of a public awareness campaign early in the new official's term.

In another example, an agreement among community groups, law enforcement, and the Missouri Department of Family Services, Kansas City office, to create a child advocacy center to serve victims of child sexual abuse unraveled when a new local child protection director was unfamiliar and uncomfortable with the concept. Kansas City KidSafe is educating the new director and utilizing the influence of other committed local leaders and officials to get the project back on track.

④ Requirements and expectations of outside funding can enhance or detract from community systems improvements. Many federal and foundation initiatives are specifically designed to explore and pilot systems reforms, especially when those improvements have not previously occurred, but there is some

interest and receptivity. Grants should not be the impetus for systems improvement but should support and advance systems efforts. Ideally, grants provide resources to test ideas and build capacity.¹¹ There is, however, some risk of grants becoming the impetus for community systems change.

Partners in systems efforts sometimes pursue funding from grant programs with goals and emphases that do not match the community's objectives and priorities, hoping to get the funds and then make them fit. In other cases, community priorities shift over time, away from funders' priorities.

Difficulties occur when funding requirements and expectations conflict with a community's priorities and process for systems reform. Funding may require that grantees use a model for collaborative decision making or service delivery different from the approach community partners believe will work best. Grants and communities may work on different time lines. In some cases, communities must balance time and resources spent on program improvements supported by grant funding with time and resources for systems reform.

Communities and funders can each take steps to utilize outside grants to strengthen community systems efforts. It is unrealistic to think that communities will only apply for and accept grants with objectives that precisely match those of the community, or that funders will provide open-ended grants with no restrictions.

Communities can, however:

- Conduct research to target applications for grants that best match local priorities.
- Use applications and site visits to fully and accurately inform potential funders about local priorities and processes.
- Get complete information about requirements and restrictions to inform decisions about grant applications.
- Communicate with funders about questions, issues and concerns early and as often as necessary.
- Sometimes say “no”.

Funders can:

- Set out clear objectives and progress measures.
- Learn about and understand the community context.
- Before grants are awarded, be specific about requirements and expectations, and the consequences of not meeting them.
- Be as clear and flexible as possible about models and time lines.
- Learn from grantees and make adjustments based on what is learned.
- Sometimes say “no”.

⑤ **Infrastructure problems** frequently impede systems improvements. Reorganization of services usually requires changes in fiscal, and human resources, information management, and other infrastructure aspects. If a local or tribal government decides to implement performance based budgeting and contracting, new fiscal policies and procedures are required. Human resources departments may have to change job

descriptions and hiring processes to reflect new, multi-disciplinary approaches to services delivery. Finance departments may have to change accounting and disbursement procedures. It may be necessary to link or replace separate information systems designed for different agencies and organizations. Streamlining of procedures for hiring, contracting, and purchasing may be needed. Infrastructure problems can be serious sticking points unless staff who are responsible for fiscal, human resources, information technology, and other elements of systems infrastructure are involved in planning systems improvements. When they understand the rationale for and design of systems changes, infrastructure better supports reform.

Community organizations often face challenges related to a lack of infrastructure. Precarious finances, and related insufficient administration, staff, and technology affect implementation and sustainability of systems improvements. Many community organizations have not had the resources to put systems in place to track their progress against indicators of progress and measure outcomes. New investments in community organizations must address these areas as well as services and supports.

These infrastructure issues are particularly challenging to efforts to link services provided by public agencies and large non-profit organizations with community supports provided by small community, cultural, and faith organizations. These organizations often need capacity building assistance to understand and navigate the fiscal infrastructure of governments and other large

organizations, but they can also provide useful suggestions for streamlining infrastructure processes.

Issues That Won't (and Shouldn't) Go Away

Issues related to race, culture, class, and gender underlie the need to improve systems and affect the process of changing systems. Public systems in the United States have not historically treated people of color, low income people, and women with fairness and respect. There are two common ways that these issues negatively affect efforts to improve systems. Some communities try

There are no simple ways to deal with the complexities of race, culture, class, and gender in any community. Communities are learning about what works and what doesn't.

to avoid the issues and then find race, culture, class, and gender keep coming up in ways that block progress to improve systems. In other communities, individuals and organizations resistant to change may label a problem an unsolvable race, culture, class, or gender issue in an effort to disrupt or even stop the process of change.

The Building Blocks Initiative to reduce disproportionate confinement of youth of color in the juvenile justice system has used an approach that can be applied in other systems and across systems. Diverse partners gather and analyze data about what happens at each decision point in the system, e.g., arrest, detention,

charging, and disposition to identify places where youth of color are treated differently than white youth. Partners then identify changes in policies, procedures, and programs to address discriminatory practices.

What works?

- Involving individuals with diverse racial, cultural, and class backgrounds in collaborative partnerships and leadership
- Paying attention to cross-cultural communication issues
- Acknowledging that the issues exist and affect systems;
- Breaking down data by race, income, and gender
- Addressing race, culture, class, and gender issues as they affect all aspects of systems improvement

What doesn't work?

- **Avoiding the issues**
- **Thinking people will or should "get over" historical abuses**
- **Using training as the only approach to addressing the issues**
- **Creating a special committee or project separate from the overall systems improvement effort to deal with the issues**

4

MOVING FORWARD AND MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Community efforts to make services work better for children, youth, and families encounter periodic plateaus. In some communities, systems improvement efforts begin in response to a crisis or tragedy such as the death of a child in foster care or the suicide of a youth in a detention center. When attention shifts away from the crisis, progress on systems improvements slows down. Other communities encounter plateaus even, and perhaps especially, when systems improvements are making progress. Other problems and priorities start to demand more attention from community partners. It appears that systems improvements are working and can run themselves. Outside funding focuses on a new area and shifts attention there. Systems efforts also plateau when some community partners decide they have made as many changes as they are comfortable making.

English grammar and usage may suggest systems reform is a noun, a group of persons, places, and things. In practice, it is a verb, a series of ongoing actions.

In reality, systems must keep changing to work. Even if some day, in some community a system improves all possible outcomes to optimum levels, the system will have to keep improving to maintain outcomes at those levels. English grammar and usage may suggest systems reform is a noun, a group of persons,

places, and things. In practice, it is a verb, a series of ongoing actions. This section discusses conditions that are necessary for systems efforts to keep moving forward, including:

Environments that support risk taking and change
Expectations that successful pilot projects will be replicated or taken to scale
Regular opportunities to evaluate progress, re-vision and plan new action steps

Environments that support risk taking and change
--

Risks are inherent in systems improvements. Changes will attract critics and saboteurs even sometimes when results are proven. The freedom to try approaches that appear to have reasonable chances to improve outcomes is essential to achieving and building on improvements. Trying out new ideas provides the creative energy needed for systems to work and keep working toward results.

This does not mean that systems efforts should experiment with and maintain any and all ideas. An environment supports change and risk taking when clear outcomes set standards for progress and when methods are defined for measuring progress. In this way, systems efforts resemble laboratory experiments. Systems efforts need to carefully and thoughtfully focus on results.

Community partnerships need overall information on results and information that indicates which aspects of systems improvements contribute to which results. Then systems efforts can nurture and support environments conducive to ongoing learning and improvement.

Expectations that successful pilot projects will be replicated or taken to scale

When a pilot systems project focused on a small group of children, youth, and/or families or one geographic area of a community works to improve outcomes, a next logical step is to apply the approach used more widely. Replicating pilots and making pilot approaches the general way of doing business, sometimes referred to as mainstreaming, is challenging. In some cases, systems strategies developed for a specific population or neighborhood work because of features particular to that group or area. Replication or going to scale requires identifying the operating principles that make the approach work and finding ways to implement those principles in other environments.

Some pilots work because their small scale and experimental status allow them to circumvent the bureaucratic problems that arise when the scale of pilots is expanded. To mainstream, pilots may have to comply with or make the case to change procedures and restrictions that did not apply in the pilot phase. A large scale replication or mainstreaming effort requires more infrastructure support than a smaller pilot. The infrastructure needs discussed in

Section Three, such as changes in fiscal and human resources policies and new space and equipment, must be addressed. The staff who effectively managed a pilot may not have the skills or interest in managing a large scale replication.

The collaborative partnerships that started an effort and saw it through the pilot phase can and should play key roles in going to scale. Partners should oversee and identify replication and mainstreaming to assure that elements essential to the success of the effort are preserved.

Two very different communities, San Francisco and Imperial County, California have found the effort needed to take pilots to scale to be worthwhile, despite the challenges.

San Francisco's Family Mosaic Project started as a small pilot serving a limited number of families with children at risk for out of home placement. The pilot quickly showed positive results, reducing days and costs of out of home placement and improving school attendance and achievement. The decision was made to mainstream the Family Mosaic approach and apply it to a larger population of families with children at risk for placement. The transition was difficult. Key staff left because they did not want to work in the bureaucracy of the parent public agency. It was harder to track and capture savings attained by avoiding out of home placements and to be sure those savings went back into services and supports for families at risk. The energy required for mainstreaming took energy away from innovative service

approaches. For a period, positive results declined. Despite these problems, community partners remained committed to using the pilot project's care coordination and flexible funding approaches because they worked. Public agencies adjusted procedures and restrictions. Savings from avoiding placements covered costs for new infrastructure. Individuals, organizations, and agencies made changes in how they did their work. Today, the Family Mosaic approach serves many more families, offers more services, including health care, and most importantly, produces increasingly positive outcomes.

Imperial County, California used funds from OJJDP's Safe Futures initiative to pilot a family resource center staffed by a multi-disciplinary team in one isolated, under-served area of the county. When the pilot showed positive results, policymakers decided to use it as a model for reorganizing and coordinating services and supports for children, youth, and families. That decision left open the following questions: who was going to start up and run family resource centers in additional communities? How was the original center going to be sustained when grant funds ended and new centers paid for? Where would new centers be located? What would ensure that centers followed and built on the success of the model?

The Imperial County Office of Education, the lead agency for SafeFutures, took on the responsibility for starting up new centers located at school sites and then assisted local school districts to assume leadership and management responsibilities. The Imperial

County Interagency Steering Committee decided where to locate centers in communities where data indicated the needs were greatest and where access to services was most limited. Outside grant funds from various federal and state sources

Sustainability Resources
Visit SITTAP online (www.sittap.org) for a direct link to our Sustainability Toolkit and other resources.

helped finance start up phases. A package of re-directed resources and funds from Medi-Cal (California's Medicaid) program supports sustainability. The Imperial County Office of Education continues to provide training, technical assistance, and a management information system for the expanding network of family resource centers to assure consistency of basic approaches and continued learning. Today, the network consists of seven family resource centers- and counting.

Regular opportunities to evaluate progress, re-vision and plan new action steps

Ongoing dialogue and discussion among community partners is necessary for systems to keep improving. Continued planning must address the overall systems vision as well as guiding concepts and practical functions. This planning must be accomplished explicitly and intentionally or it may get lost in the press of implementation tasks.

To move forward, community partners need planning information about:

- Progress toward outcome goals
- Changes in the community
- Best practices used in other communities
- New systems efforts in their community
- Satisfaction of consumers and providers

They need opportunities with sufficient time, structure, and flexibility to reflect and re-vision and to set new priorities and action steps. The perspective of new community partners can help keep the collaborative perspective fresh or move it in a new direction. The involvement of youth and families brings practical ideas and helps keep policy makers and professionals from becoming complacent.

Ongoing planning asks:

- What have we done?
- What does it mean?
- What do we need to keep, improve, and change?
- What next, immediately and for the long term?

5

CONCLUSION

The information provided here on the experiences of communities with systems improvement can inform and guide other communities, but it won't make systems improvement easy or smooth. Most efforts to improve systems serving children, youth, and families will encounter some of the challenges described in the preceding sections—and probably some others too.

Communities that succeed in making services work better recognize the differences between “growing pains” and “fatal flaws.”¹² Partners decide over and over again to keep working together through risks, conflicts, and barriers because of what is at stake.

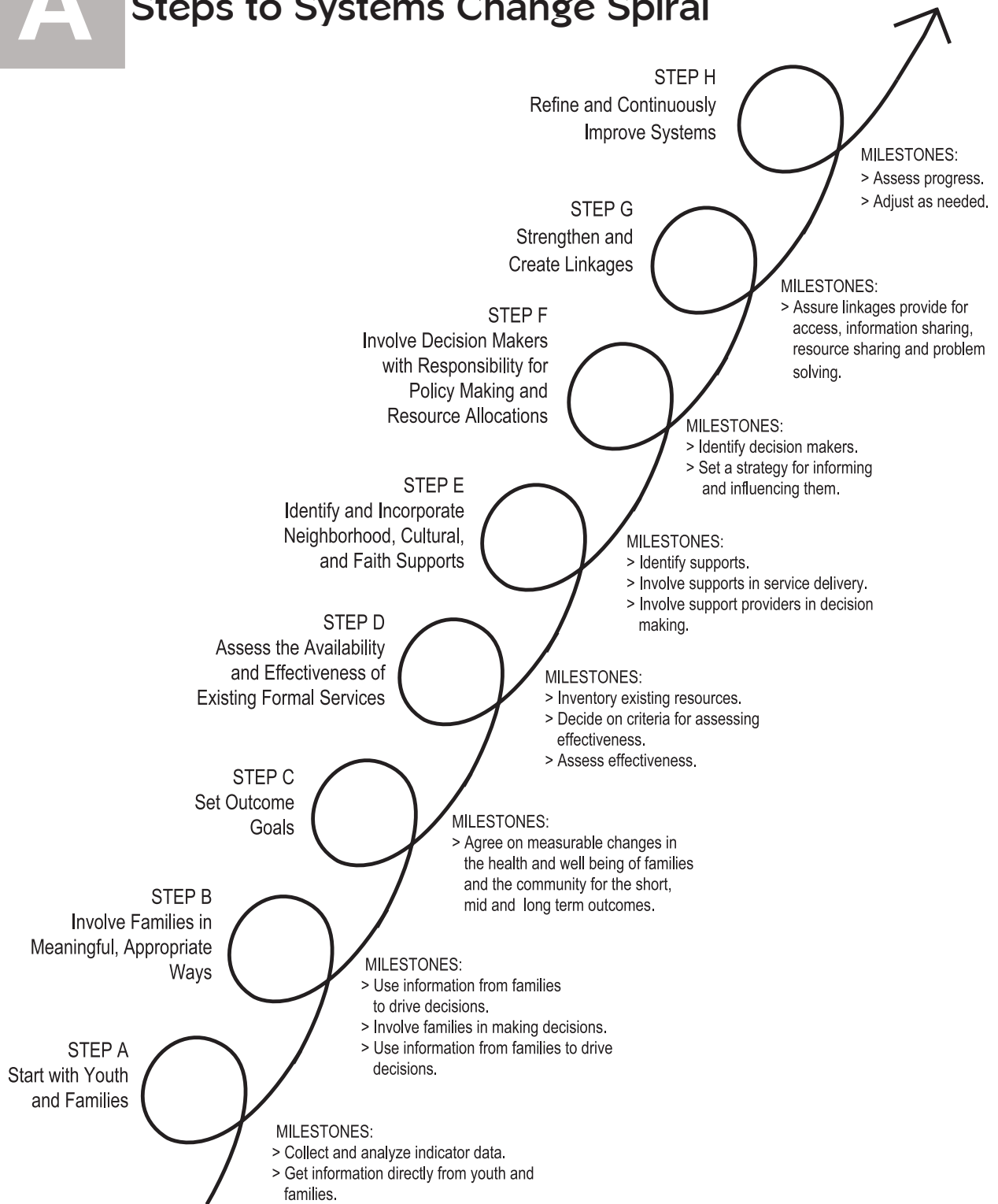
What is at stake is the health, safety, and future of the children, youth, and families who are the community. Think again about the family introduced at the beginning of this primer. That family and every family deserve to be a partner in improving systems and deserve the time, patience, willingness to take risks and to compromise, strategic thinking and alliances, and insistence on results necessary to make systems improvements.

Community partnerships to improve systems, in fact, become stronger and achieve more when they persevere in the face of opposition, conflict, scarce resources, and entrenched problems.

They overcome and learn from setbacks and efforts that fail. Over time, partners see enough evidence of results to keep going; or when outcomes do not change in a reasonable period of time, they change direction. They keep the focus on children, youth, and families.

A

APPENDIX A: Steps to Systems Change Spiral



B

APPENDIX B: Resource List

Annie E. Casey Foundation

The primary mission of The Annie E. Casey Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that better meet the needs of vulnerable families. The foundation's goal in child welfare is to help neighborhoods build effective responses to families and children at risk of abuse or neglect. The foundation believes that these community-centered responses can better protect children, support families, and strengthen communities.

www.aecf.org/

The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives

The Roundtable on Comprehensive Community Initiatives was established in 1992 as a forum in which people engaged in the field of comprehensive community initiatives (CCIs)- including foundation sponsors, directors, technical assistance providers, evaluators, and public sector officials- could meet to discuss the lessons that are being learned by initiatives across the country and to work on common problems they are facing. The site contains publications, working papers and project reports.

www.aspeninstitute.org/Programt3.asp?i=83

Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice

The Center for Effective Collaboration and Practice works to support and promote a reoriented national preparedness to foster the development and the adjustment of children with or at risk of developing serious emotional disturbance. To achieve their mission, the Center is dedicated to a policy of collaboration at Federal, state, and local levels that contributes to and facilitates the production, exchange, and use of knowledge about effective practices.

www.air.org/cecp/cultural/default.htm

Center for the Study of Social Policy

A nonprofit organization located in Washington, DC, CSSP assists federal, state, and local governments to improve human services for populations who are disadvantaged. The Center promotes systems reform in human services related to financing, administration and service delivery.

www.cssp.org

Chapin Hall Center for Children

The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago was established in 1985 as a research and development center dedicated to bringing sound information, rigorous analyses, innovative ideas, and an independent perspective to the ongoing public debate about the needs of children and the ways those needs can best be met. Chapin Hall is a research and development center focusing on policies, practices, and programs affecting children and the families and communities in which they live. The Center focuses its work on all children, while devoting particular attention to children facing special risks or challenges, such as poverty, abuse and neglect, and mental and physical illness.

www.chapin.uchicago.edu/index.html

Child and Family Policy Center

The Child and Family Policy Center is working to develop more outcome-based approaches to address child and family needs, with a particular focus on community-building efforts within disinvested neighborhoods. The Center provides technical assistance to many Iowa communities to develop more seamless and preventive responses to children and families. On a national level, the Center operates the publication clearinghouse and technical assistance resource network of the National Center for Service Integration (NCSI) and provides technical assistance and support for those constructing more comprehensive, community-based systems of support to families and children.

www.cfpciowa.org

Children, Youth, and Family Consortium

The Children, Youth, and Family Consortium was established during the Fall of 1991 to bring together the varied competencies of the University of Minnesota and the vital resources of Minnesota's communities to enhance the ability of individuals and organizations to address critical health, education, and social policy concerns in ways that improve the well-being of Minnesota's children, youth, and families.

www.cyfc.umn.edu/

The Child Welfare League of America

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) is an association of more than 1,100 public and nonprofit agencies devoted to improving life for more than 3.5 million at-risk children and youths and their families. Member agencies are involved with prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect, and they provide various services in addition to child protection—kinship care, family foster care, adoption, positive

youth development programs, residential group care, child care, family-centered practice, and programs for pregnant and parenting teenagers. For all these areas, CWLA has program experts who consult, train, and otherwise assist agencies to advance their practice.

www.cwla.org

Community Building Institute

Located in the Washington, DC metro area, the Community Building Institute (CBI) helps communities improve the way they conduct public business to be more inclusive, more collaborative, and more effective. CBI works directly with communities as well as with federal and state agencies and national foundations with efforts that serve multiple communities.

www.communitytools.net/cbi/

Community Building Resource Exchange

The Aspen Institute on Comprehensive Initiatives for Children and Families has assembled resources for community building. The site is targeted to those who are interested in the emerging field of comprehensive, community building approaches to neighborhood development. Neighborhood leaders and organizers, community development professionals, public and private service-providers, intermediary organizations, researchers, funders, and policy makers will all find interesting and useful information here. This site offers a variety of resources, including articles from academic journals, reports, evaluations, case studies, and links to other Internet sites offering related resources.

www.commbuild.org/html_pages/ccilist.htm

Community Partnerships for Children, Youth, and Families

Community Partnerships for Children, Youth, and Families, formerly known as Systems Reform, began over a decade ago in an effort to change the way services were provided to children and families in their communities. Local Management Boards (LMBs) identify priorities and target resources for a jurisdiction's communities. The major focus is to increase local authority to plan, implement, and monitor children and family services.

www.ocyf.state.md.us/

Forum for Youth Investment

The Forum for Youth Investment (the Forum) is dedicated to *increasing the quality and quantity of youth investment and youth involvement by promoting a "big picture" approach* to planning, research, advocacy and policy development among the broad range of organizations that

help constituents and communities invest in children, youth and families. The Forum is committed to building connections, increasing capacity and tackling persistent challenges across the allied youth fields.

www.forumforyouthinvestment.org/

Institute for Community Peace

Located in Washington, DC, the Institute for Community Peace (*formerly the National Funding Collaborative on Violence Prevention*) is a partnership among public and private funders, experts in violence prevention and other disciplines and community collaborations. It was developed to address violence and its related problems in a coordinated way, and to nurture a national violence prevention movement through advocacy, action, public awareness and a focus on prevention. By pooling resources from foundations, corporations, the federal government, community organizations and private donors—and linking these resources to local efforts—the Institute is raising public awareness that violence is preventable and empowering citizens to tackle violence in their communities.

www.peacebeyondviolence.org

Institute for Educational Leadership

Located in Washington, DC, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) is a non-profit organization committed to preparing diverse leaders and helping organizations make better decisions to improve the well-being of children and youth. IEL provides an independent voice on issues such as demographics; local school boards and K-12 education reform; preparing young people for the work world; connecting schools, families and communities; leadership for the 21st century; and community-based systems reform and improvement.

www.iel.org

National Child Welfare Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues

Funded by the Children's Bureau, the Center is a part of the American Bar Association Center on Children and the Law. Through technical assistance, training, and the development of training manuals, the Center has sought to improve the quality of legal representation to child welfare agencies, juvenile court rules and procedures, relationships between courts and child welfare agencies, reasonable efforts determinations, skills of social workers in dealing with the legal system, risk management by child welfare agencies, and state child welfare laws. These services have been enriched with support from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families with a grant to support the Resource Center.

www.abanet.org/child/rclji/home.html

National Civic League

The National Civic League promotes a civic agenda to help communities help all citizens succeed. The League promotes inclusion, collaborative problem solving and consensus building through the delivery of technical assistance, publications, and research.

www.ncl.org

National Housing Institute

The National Housing Institute (NHI) is a 28-year old independent nonprofit organization that examines the issues causing the crisis in housing and community in America. NHI examines the key issues affecting affordable housing and community development practitioners and their supporters. These issues include housing, jobs, safety, and education, with an emphasis on housing and economic development, as well as poverty and racism, disinvestment and lack of employment, and breakdown of the social fabric. NHI searches for what does and does not work in community building. NHI searches for innovative strategies, unique partnerships, and effective ways to organize low-income communities. They communicate their findings in an objective, journalistic style in *Shelterforce*, their bi-monthly magazine.

www.nhi.org/online/issues/ccis.html

National Resource Center for Information Technology in Child Welfare

Through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Child Welfare League of America operates the National Resource Center for Information Technology in Child Welfare. The mission of the Center is to assist state, local, and tribal child welfare agencies and the courts in improving outcomes for children and families through the use of information technology. The Resource Center assists frontline workers, supervisors, and administrators in child welfare, as well as judges and court administrative personnel in using technology and information to inform policy and practice in child welfare.

www.nrcitcw.org

National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health

The National Technical Assistance Center for Children's Mental Health is part of the Georgetown University Child Development Center, a division of the G.U. Medical Center. The Center is supported by a cooperative agreement with the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families, U.S. Department of

Health and Human Services, and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Since 1984, the Center has served as a national resource for policy and technical assistance to improve service delivery and outcomes for children and adolescents with, or at-risk of serious emotional disturbance and their families. Its mission is to assist states and communities in building systems of care that are child- and family-centered, culturally competent, coordinated, and community-based. Special areas of emphasis and expertise include system planning, interagency coordination and collaboration across the major child-serving systems, financing, managed care, service development and integration, human resource development, family involvement, cultural competence, early intervention, and service issues for special populations of children and youth.

www.gucdc.georgetown.edu/cassp.html

The National Child Welfare Resource

The National Child Welfare Resource Center strengthens and supports organizations committed to the welfare of children, youth and families through research, training, technical assistance and evaluation. The Center's work improves management and operations, bolsters organizational capacity and promotes service integration, resulting in improved outcomes for children and families.

www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/index.html

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice is a service of the Children's Bureau. The Resource Center seeks to enhance the capacity of State and Tribal child welfare agencies to plan, implement, and evaluate family-centered services for children and families. The Center is a project of the Learning Systems Group.

www.esilsg.org/

The Research Forum

The Research Forum, an initiative of the National Center for Children in Poverty at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, was created in January 1997 to facilitate the development of rigorous, policy relevant research about the effects of the new federalism on poor and vulnerable populations. The Research Forum encourages collaborative research and informed policy on welfare reform, child and family well-being, and community/neighborhood issues. Their web site, updated daily, features a searchable database of summaries of large- and small-scale research projects, key topics pages, resources pages, and lists of recent publications.

www.researchforum.org/cfm/home.cfm

Search Institute

The Search Institute conducts research and publishes resources that help communities promote positive child and youth development.

www.search-institute.org/

The Social Development Research Group

This interdisciplinary team of researchers carries out efforts directed toward understanding and promoting healthy behaviors and positive social development among children, adolescents, and young adults. They conduct research on factors that influence development; test the effectiveness of interventions; study service systems and work to improve them; present science-based solutions to health and behavior problems; and disseminate knowledge produced by this research.

www.staff.washington.edu/sdrg/

St. Louis Children's Agenda

The St. Louis Children's Agenda is a broad-based collaborative initiative pursuing strategic, coordinated community action to promote the well-being of all St. Louis metropolitan area children. Currently, more than 700 representatives of some 300 area businesses, agencies, and community organizations are active participants. The work of the Children's Agenda is data-driven, research-based and outcome-oriented. The status and needs of young people are assessed systematically to identify problems and opportunities not adequately addressed. Within that framework, specific "best practice" strategies to improve the well-being of children are developed and implemented through collaborative community action. Outcome goals are established to measure the community's progress in improving the lives of children and youth.

www.visionforchildren.org/slca/index.html

Additional Resources

Comprehensive Community Initiatives:

Evaluating Multi-Level Collaboration for Systems Change

The North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (NCRCRD), located at Iowa State University, is one of four regional centers coordinating rural development research and education throughout the United States. It is supported by land-grant universities of the North Central region, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and grants and contracts from private foundations. This document from *Rural Development News* is available online at:

www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/newsletter/Vol26No3-2003/index.htm

**Measuring Community Success and Sustainability:
An Interactive Workbook**

The Workbook describes a process to help communities learn how to measure the local or regional impacts of economic and community development processes that enhance rural community sustainability. The entire process is anchored in research that determined the ways in which communities define success in their local development efforts. The workbook provides guidance to communities, nonprofit organizations and agency personnel who want to get a better idea of the possible ways to gather information that details progress toward community-established outcomes. The Workbook is available online from the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development. For more information visit:

www.ncrcrd.iastate.edu/pubs/contents/180.htm

National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts

This report/literature review is available online at:

www.aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/protective01/index.htm

**Revisiting the Critical Elements of Comprehensive
Community Initiatives**

This is a study conducted by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

www.aspe.os.dhhs.gov/hsp/cci.htm

**System Change Through State Challenge Activities:
Approaches and Products**

This March 2000 OJJDP Bulletin describes how the Challenge activities, including basic system services, access to counsel, community-based alternatives, facilities for violent juvenile offenders, gender-specific policies and programs, State ombudsman, deinstitutionalization of status offenders, alternatives to suspension and expulsion, aftercare services, and State agency coordination and case review, relate to systems change. Examples of effective approaches to achieving systems change and a compendium of resources are also provided.

www.ncjrs.org/html/ojjdp/jjbul2000_03_3/contents.html

End Notes

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