

Data as a Means Toward Excellence In Service

Data, what a blessed thing! For so many decades we would guesstimate, use anecdotal information or painstakingly gather information manually (we often still do) to decide a course of action, attempt to solve problems, fill service gaps and respond to the needs of vulnerable children and families in our communities. Because family centered, neighborhood based services requires data, and because data, in general, for all our service areas are critical to our success, chasing reliable and valid data has always been a challenge that we have taken seriously. Now, as a result of technology, and our computer savvy public service professionals we are better positioned to quantitatively gather data for targeted problem solving and decision-making.

At the Pickaway County Department of Job and Family Services great data gathering efforts are under way to pin point gaps in services for vulnerable adults without children. This focus is part of the agency's Strategic Plan and is creating excitement and renewed energy for successful problem solving. This is definitely a community-based effort!

Pickaway County DJFS is a triple combined agency (child welfare, human services and child support). As such, many of the clients served by the agency are often served by multiple program areas. Staff have been very concerned that vulnerable individuals might be slipping through the cracks as a result of their "ineligibility" for many services because they are single adults without children. Staff decided to design and implement a tracking system to (1) alert staff throughout the agency of the initial assessment outcome (eligible/not eligible); how many individuals were referred to what programs in the agency and who these individuals are, what services the individuals were in need of that were not available through the department, how often the unmet need was "hit," and whether they could be referred to another agency in the area.

The agency is in the process of collecting this data on a daily basis and are incrementally reviewing it. Early reports indicate that there is a high need area in health care services, health care and transportation.

The long term goal of staff is three fold (1) identify ways the department can respond to unmet needs of vulnerable individuals; (2) share the data with stakeholders in the community for community problem solving and decision making; (3) create a more responsive community for Pickaway's vulnerable neighbors.

This program is an example of an agency using technology to identify service areas that require enhancement or development by the DJFS or the community at large. While a statewide system for a similar purpose is underway, counties such as the PCDJFS are taking up the charge for creating system excellence now - waiting for these staff is not an option.

If you would like more information on this program please contact the two Lead Worker's tracking and reporting on this strategic data activity: Ms. Connie Knapp or Ms. Margaret Brown at the Pickaway County DJFS. Good luck with your data collection efforts! Upward and onward! ■