

Lessons Learned From The National Roundtable on Innovative Community-Based Partnerships

I recently attended the 2nd Annual **National** Roundtable on Innovative Community-Based Partnerships with Ms. Cynthia Mason, Family To Family Coordinator of Trumbull County CSB and Mr. Michael Johnson, Neighborhood Liaison of the Hamilton County DHS. We attended the Roundtable to gather new information, enhance our skills and gain additional insights into the work of neighborhood collaborative. Our participation was well worth it. The following ideas are being shared as "food for thought" as your local agencies seek additional ways to enlist the support and participation of neighborhood stakeholders in the development of neighborhood collaborative. In addition, we are providing you with program ideas and approaches that have been successful in other areas of the country. **We all became certain from our involvement with the Roundtable that the Lessons learned from our very own Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties during their Family To Family pilots regarding neighborhood collaborative holds true for systems around the country.** These lessons were written up in easy step-by-step activities to help neighborhood collaborative get started. To receive specific information on how to get started with neighborhood collaborative, see PCSAO's publication: FCNB Cliffnotes #1 (PCSAO can furnish you with a copy: contact Jennie Orlowski at 614- 224-5802).

From the Roundtable

Food For Thought...Setting The Stage

When we think of the role of child protection, we can no longer afford to think of it in terms of one system or multiple systems. Family-centered, neighborhood-based services requires that we, as a society, and all the neighborhoods that comprise our society embrace our collective obligation as adults is to take responsibility for reducing and removing the political, economic, social, educational and structural inadequacies, inconsistencies and injustices that cause the misappropriation of a child's gift. The acceptance of this obligation and forthcoming action must begin with each of us and each of the public and private child and family serving systems and there is no more time to waste. We must begin to cooperatively engage members of our neighborhoods, climbing over the suspicions we have of one another and forcibly removing the spirit of competition and turfism that interferes with innovation in the spirit of cooperation. We cannot do this successfully if we invite our neighborhoods to a table that is already set. Instead, we must invite them in to the kitchen to cook. And we must do this however uncomfortable it may be. We must begin to affirm the authenticity of neighborhood stakeholders and join with them to solve the problems we all share that create an environment rich for child abuse and neglect (Taken from the opening speech by Reverend Gunn).

How and Where Do We Begin...

- Every time an agency decides to create a policy or set of procedures, a birth parent and foster parent is invited to the table to fully participate.

- When developing a neighborhood collaborative, include on the membership roster a birth parent who has been successful in achieving child safety and family stability.
- Consider renaming your Safety Plans. Call these Community Support Agreements and make sure that each time a removal is necessary the community is invited in (schools, mental health, juvenile justice, human services, religious leader of the church in the area the client lives). By calling this plan Community Support Agreements - we begin to infiltrate the psyche of our collective conscience. By inviting the community stakeholders to these meetings, we begin to SHARE in the responsibility.
- Use the Collaboration checklist to check the level of collaboration with existing community groups (contact PCSAO for a copy of this checklist).

Share the following ideas with the newly formed collaborative to give them a sense of what they could do to impact C/AN. Often times newly formed groups don't know where to begin. They have the energy, commitment and drive but aren't sure, and often do not trust the agency who approached them. It is important NOT to tell them but to show them as they get started addressing C/AN issues in their neighborhood. Present the following ideas that have been developed by other collaborative, allowing them to direct themselves as to where they will begin:

- Create a resource directory for the neighborhood, identifying formal and informal services;
- The creation of an Adopt-A-Family program in targeted neighborhoods, have the agency develop it in house or use existing state funds to contract for the service. Call on the neighborhood churches and civic organizations to adopt a family in need of support where no natural supports exist. Develop an application, screening, participation criteria training process to prepare these entities to adopt a family in need (program materials on this program are housed at PCSAO).
- Establish a COMMUNITY DAY once or twice a year [solicit providers to come and share their wares, provide free demonstrations and services, e.g., blood pressure checks, etc, charge a fee to off-set the cost of the day, have hot dogs and things for families to do, etc.];
- Develop a foster parent and respite provider recruitment plan;
- Seek out Art groups who can initiate a community-wide Arts project [painting a wall in the town square, etc.];
- Seek out University or academic-types who are interested in the neighborhood-based philosophy, see if they can find academic dollars to provide after school mentoring and enrichment programs in the targeted neighborhoods;

- In RURAL communities, engage the local veterinary clinic - if a family is abusing their animals they might be abusing their kids; enlist the 4-H Club and small churches of non-mainstream religions to assist in the family-centered, neighborhood-based approach to service delivery;

- Develop parenting classes with parents needing this support - be flexible in your approach [Hamilton County contracted with a neighborhood center for parenting classes. The Center developed the sessions around the interests and training needs as identified by the parents.

- Hold neighborhood breakfasts on Saturday mornings at a local Center or Church. Provide childcare. Conduct presentation at the breakfast on a specific aspect of agency business (hot line, how to refer, when CPS gets involved, why children are removed, etc.].

We can reduce and remove the political, economic, social, educational and structural inadequacies, inconsistencies and injustices that cause the misappropriation of a child's gift but it takes ALL of us working together and a real willingness to change. How willing are we...how willing are you?

For more information on establishing neighborhood collaboratives and the collaboration process, contact Stacey A. Saunders at PCSAO: (614) 224-5802. ■