

Family-Centered, Neighborhood-Based Services Is Firmly Planted in Ohio

On March 24-26, 1998 the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Ohio Department of Human Services, the Public, Children Services Association of Ohio and the Ohio Child Welfare Training Program sponsored a three-day Conference for Ohio's Phase 2 Family to Family counties. In addition to human services and child welfare administrators, social workers and foster parents from metropolitan; large; medium; and small counties, private providers and organizations including the African American Leadership Council and the Ohio Association of Child Caring Organizations were in attendance. In all, there were more than 125 professionals who turned out to participate in an intensive three days of workshops and meetings involving the national Family-to-Family Casey consultants. It was powerful and inspiring to say the least!

The Conference began with a pre-conference session for Rural counties seeking to integrate a more family-centered, neighborhood-based approach to service delivery. Experts from Georgia provided an inspiring five-hour session on the challenges and victories of working to integrate this approach in rural areas. While difficult because of a lack in resources, funding and the wide expanse of territory physically separating neighbors from one another and services from people in need, the rewards are immeasurable. The Georgia folk reported "working together anything is possible". They reported that while nirvana may not be achievable, minimizing turf issues amongst public systems; increasing the number of licensed foster homes; reducing length of stay in out-of-home care; keeping children in-county and creating bridges between foster and biological families is not only possible its probable with the right attitude, sustained effort and a planful and inclusive approach to child protection and family stabilization. The Georgia group agreed to return to Ohio in June to conduct a statewide videoconference for agencies interested in continuing the conversation regarding integration of family-centered, neighborhood-based services in rural Ohio.

On June 25-26, 1998 phase 2 counties had the privilege of working with the Casey consultants on a range of topics including: Tools to Engage Organizations in Large Scale Change Efforts; Building Worker Resilience; Strategies for Building Partnerships; Between the Publics and Privates; Team Decision Making in CPS; Supporting Relative Caregivers; Strategies to Keep Children from Stuck in Care for Long Periods; Strategies for Substance Abuse Treatment in Public Child Welfare Settings; Tools to Link CPS Agencies with the Correctional System to Support Family Resilience and Using Data to Inform and Problem Solve in Effective and Meaningful Ways!.

Conference participants also heard from Ms. Diane Klingshirm, foster parent and her social worker Ms. Debbie Gregory and Ms. Ida Magee, foster parent and her social worker Ms. Shawn Lewis all from Trumbull county and Reverend Robert Wiseman and Shirley Wiseman, foster parents from Richland county. All spoke of the importance and gratification of employing a family-centered, neighborhood-based approach to service delivery. Their presentation were heart felt and moving and underscored the importance of partnering for the health and well being of children, families and communities!

Ohio is serious about family-centered, neighborhood-base services. As a result of this 3 day conference, 20 of our 88 counties are more prepared to transform the way in which we currently approach our work and partner with communities, other providers of service and with each other in making a difference in the lives of children at-risk of abuse and neglect and their vulnerable families.

For more information regarding family-centered, neighborhood-based services and to get the services transformation ball rolling in your neck of the woods, contact Stacey A. Saunders at PCSAO (614) 221-1042. ■