

**Getting Started: Lessons from the Field**  
**CRITICAL TRANSFORMATION CONSIDERATIONS**  
**THE USE OF DATA**

Data is a critical and key cornerstone to planning for, and developing a plan for transforming the system through the systematic integration of family-centered, neighborhood-based services. Without data the agency is, and will remain at a clear disadvantage. If it is unable to electronically, or if necessary, manually gather, retrieve, and report on its service delivery system, the agency will compromise its ability to conduct targeted problem solving and data driven decision-making.

***Data Presents Clear Evidence of the Problem***

In the beginning of the implementation effort, data showing where children entered care from and where they were placed is crucial in approaching the community's informal and formal leaders and showing the need for change. For example, if you do not know where the children are being removed from, it is impossible to decide where to begin the effort and whether or not additional foster care resources are needed. Data is also used in the initial implementation phase to justify requests for additional resources.

***1. Use Data to Engage Managers***

Data provides a "roadmap" for managers showing where to begin the reform effort and how to gauge success. Managers must be encouraged to begin to evaluate practice on the basis of outcomes, and to use data to shape policy and procedures.

***2. Use Data to Sell The Reform Effort***

Simple presentation materials should be developed to share with a wide variety of audiences in promoting family-centered, neighborhood-based (FCNB) services. Information can also be built into presentations or training on related programs to show the linkage between this approach and other reform efforts. For example, Welfare Reform is a statewide effort across the nation and is a natural compliment with and links to FCNB (see Addendum A for marketing pieces that show linkages).

***3. Use Data to Enhance Budget Requests***

The case for building a family-centered, neighborhood-based services approach into the overall budget structure needs to occur in the initial implementation

phase to ensure the future sustainability of the effort. In many sites, using data to enhance budget requests was successful in getting additional staff and funding for the effort in the later phases of the transformation process. However, even when resources are limited, there are transformational strategies that can be implemented to improve and enhance the family-centered, neighborhood-based service delivery system of child welfare organizations.

#### ***4. Use Data to Facilitate Work with Partner Agencies***

Many states and counties that have done this work have developed data teams that include a representative from partner agencies, such as juvenile justice, education, and mental health. Developing the capacity to track placements across systems and to compare outcome data resulted in better communication, which facilitated other collaborative efforts.