

The Four Primary Areas of a Family-Centered, Neighborhood-Based Services Approach to Child Welfare

As a result of the national family-centered, neighborhood-based effort (since 1993), the Casey Foundation identified four primary areas that, when systematically planned for and implemented, have a significant impact on the enhancement of family-centered, neighborhood-based child welfare on the local level. These 4 primary building blocks include:

1. Creating and Sustaining a Local Self-Evaluation Team;
2. Partnering with Neighborhoods;
3. Partnering with Foster Care Givers;
4. Enhancing the Partnership with Public and Private Providers.

These four building blocks ARE ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL in transforming the current service delivery system to be one based on a family-centered, neighborhood-based approach. State agencies assisting in the local effort, and county agencies involved in developing strategic action plans are urged to address these four primary areas.

I. Local Self Evaluation Teams

Agencies are urged to create and sustain a local Self-Evaluation Team as part of their integration effort. The local Self-Evaluation Team exists to assist the agency in collecting, reporting, analyzing and interpreting data for informed decision-making and targeted problem-solving.

The agency should create a local Self-Evaluation Team comprised of at least one Program staff, one Data Staff and one member of the Quality Assurance program (if available). The total Team should not have more than 6-8 professionals. If the agency does not have data or QA experts, it should consider individuals outside of the agency who are trustworthy. That is, they will keep the data within the group and not share outside of the agency unless otherwise stated by the Team; "filling the gaps" that exist as a result of the agency's size and/or structure.

Once the Team members are identified, the following documents should be prepared to assist the Team in orienting to their charge. The orienting materials should include: (1) a Self-Evaluation Team PURPOSE statement; (2) a list of member responsibilities;

and (3) the Team's initial assignments.

Self-Evaluation Team PURPOSE Statement

The purpose of the local Self-Evaluation Team is to:

- (1) gather and analyze local and state generated data;
- (2) report the findings from the Team's analysis to agency staff; and
- (3) work with the staff and community to develop recommendations based on the data findings, regarding agency and community interventions for improved family-centered, neighborhood-based child protection services.

Self-Evaluation Team MEMBERSHIP Responsibilities

The agency Self-Evaluation Team is critical to the health and well-being of the agency. As such, there must be a commitment by each member to attend scheduled meetings, complete assignments and participate actively.

Membership responsibilities should include:

- a. Attending all monthly Self-Evaluation Team Meetings;
- b. Completing committee assignments in a timely manner;
- c. Coming prepared to participate in the meetings;
- d. Acting as a champion of family-centered, neighborhood-based child protection services in the agency and community.

Initial Self-Evaluation Team Assignments

There are many exciting data evaluation assignments that the Team will want to take on as it gains experience with reviewing and discussing data.

A first assignment might be to have the Team gather together all available data reports generated by the state system and the county agency. The fact is that agencies currently generate mountains of data, half of which is used or known by the practitioners across the agency. Identifying current available data is a good beginning point.

The Team will want to pose the following types of questions and secure the necessary data to create a profile for program staff to consider when initiating enhanced family-centered, neighborhood-based child protection services:

- a. What are the geographic areas where most of the children are removed from their homes and what are the geographic areas where most children are placed? Are they the same?
- b. What area has the most licensed foster homes?
- c. What percentage of the children remain in the county as opposed to placed outside of the county?
- d. What is the length of stay for children in county, out-of-county, agency foster homes, contract foster homes?
- e. How many children are in temporary custody (TC) as opposed to permanent custody (PC)?
- f. What % of children in TC are placed with paternal resources? Maternal resources? What do you attribute this to?
- g. Based on the data, is there a correlation with the level of involvement of the birth family in the case planning process, visitation [or lack thereof], etc.
- h. What impact does current practice have on the # of foster homes; length of stay; unplanned re-entries into care; length of time between PC and adoption finalization, etc.?

A second assignment might include deciding the measures or outcomes the Team wants to track for evaluating the agency's success in implementing enhanced family-centered, neighborhood-based child protection services. For example it might want to track and analyze the following type of data as it gains confidence with using data.

Example:

Goal: Develop a network of family foster care that is neighborhood-based, culturally responsive and located primarily in the communities where children live.

Indicators:

1. Children (% , #) placed in the same neighborhoods as their families [new placements];
2. Number of children placed in foster care (1) outside of the neighborhood; (2) outside the county [including networks];
3. Reasons for such placement [age, race, sibling group, special needs, lack of regular beds, etc. - use to guide recruitment];
4. Number of foster homes/beds available in FCNB sites by race/ethnic background [reflecting cultural makeup of the county's child population];

5. Attendance of parents, other family members, social workers, home finders, foster parents, support staff, service providers in meetings [staffings, family team meetings, case planning, SARs, etc.] where decisions about families are made;
6. Parental inclusion in discussion: feelings of being listened to, their strengths recognized and built on, ownership of case plan, satisfaction with services, feelings about foster parent relationship, benefits to children, etc. [interviews, questionnaires].

A third assignment might be to have the Team decide what additional data needs to be gathered to make informed programmatic recommendations. Normally, agencies collect all sorts of data electronically and manually to maximize small group discussions and problem-solving sessions for systematic decision-making. Can the Team identify, based on the type of data it seeks to collect, what data is available and can be gathered regularly for analysis; and identify additional data collection mechanisms needed for targeted problem-solving and decision-making?

With all of this data, the Team will definitely want to educate itself as to the use of different DATA SOURCES. These data sources need to be provided to the Team members and assure the Team is clear about the type of data source it is using and why.

Alternative Data Sources

The Self Evaluation Team has to decide the way in which it will look at/collect its data. Reports can be collected using Entry cohorts or Exit cohorts.

- Snapshots: Profile of the children on a given day [aka: cross-sectional or point in time data].
- Exit Cohorts: Children leaving care during a given period of time.
- Entry cohorts: Children who enter out-of-home care for the very first time during some defined period of time.

Because most agencies have limited resources, becoming self-evaluating is critical in maximizing resources that are available. Providing the Self-Evaluation Team with data-related training, providing the Team with reporting software and a relational data base package (e.g. SPSS, Access) and assisting the Team/agency in becoming data literate is critical for the full, long-term integration of family-centered, neighborhood-based services.

II. Partnering with Neighborhoods

Research indicates that in most cases, children should remain in their neighborhoods when removal from the home is necessary (unless not in the child's best interest). Safely maintaining children in their neighborhoods requires that we see these neighborhoods from an asset-based perspective. Partnering with the county's neighborhoods means new strategies and interventions for building strong partnerships for child protection and family stability.

The following information lays out a set of strategies for beginning the partnership building process with neighborhoods.

A. Defining Community/Neighborhood

First things First! The agency MUST define NEIGHBORHOOD.

Once the agency has defined the term, it can decide which neighborhoods (if not all) to target, so that it may begin the hard work of grass roots community partnership building. It is strongly suggested that the agency begin with one neighborhood site. The neighborhood selected should be based on the highest number of referrals and removals of children at-risk of abuse and neglect.

A community/neighborhood is a geographically contiguous area, which shares a history or culture, schools, resources and churches with common governance. OR HOW ABOUT... **A community/neighborhood is** an association of persons who may or may not live in a contiguous neighborhood but who have formed ties through their shared culture, religion, school district, etc.

An agency may define the county's neighborhoods in any number of ways depending on the layout, history and natural "neighborhoods" that pre-exist. For example, in large cities there exist natural neighborhoods that were formed as immigrants migrated to the area. In other counties, census track data has been used to assist staff in determining population groupings. However, in a rural county people are spread over wide distances, so the agency may define the county's neighborhoods as school districts. Then again, others may use pre-existing neighborhood associations. The Agency must do some simple research to ascertain what neighborhoods already exist and fashion "its" neighborhoods after those which exist (or create them when they are not apparent).

*It takes enormous commitment, time and energy to provide child protection services using a family-centered, neighborhood-based approach. Therefore, once the agency has defined the neighborhoods in the county, it must HONESTLY ask itself if it can service all of the neighborhoods using this approach. **If it cannot, the agency should target those neighborhoods where there is the highest number of active child removals and, if known, where there is strong support from foster parents for working with birth parents.***

Once the agency has: (1) defined its neighborhoods; (2) identified the neighborhoods it will target, and (3) has prepped and trained staff as to the philosophy and intent of family-centered, neighborhood-based child welfare services and how this approach translates into daily practice (see Addendum B for a set of performance based behaviors from Intake through Adoption Services), then it can begin to plan how it will initiate contact and partnership-building with the targeted neighborhoods.

B. Preparing the Agency For Neighborhood Work

In preparation for getting started in the neighborhoods, the following lessons have been developed as a result of the integration effort in Cuyahoga and Hamilton counties in Ohio.

These are broad-based but CRITICAL points to remember:

1. Look inward

There must be a heart-to-heart discussion with staff and board members regarding what it takes to shift current practice to be more family-centered, neighborhood-based. It takes enormous energy and a long-term commitment. Therefore, to succeed the agency's Board of directors and staff MUST look inward, asking and honestly answering the tough questions. For example, "Are we really ready to step outside our current paradigm and work in new, more creative, more flexible ways and in ways that challenge old methods of practice?" "Are we ready to give and take rather than tell?" "Are we ready to support our staff in less traditional ways to support successful community building?" "Are we willing to face the successes and also the failures of our CPS system, accept our culpability and admit that the agency does not protect children - rather, it works with others to make sure children are protected?"

2. Listen

If the agency really wants to partner with community folk it needs to actively listen, be prepared for what it hears, and be ready to respond. If the agency must respond by

saying "we can't do that, its outside of our authority" -that's O.K.! Somehow our system has arrived at a place where it too believes that it can be all things to all people when, in fact, it knows that it not only can't - it shouldn't. Regardless of how the agency addresses concerns - its about listening and responding, if the agency wants to establish a base of trust!

3. Be open, flexible, and seek common ground

When the neighborhood group and agency staff can identify common ground, things will fall into place. Having a dialogue as to what you both share in common (protecting kids and stabilizing families) will begin to establish this common ground. Review the mission of the agency and the hopes of the community, then decide who can do what best.

4. Equip staff to do the hard work

Educating staff about the family-centered, neighborhood-based CPS philosophy is a must but it is not enough. Staff needs good communication skills to conduct and participate in community-based activities (e.g., skills such as active listening, problem-solving; managing conflict, running meetings, etc.). Staff also needs to be supported in the field, making sure they have tools to provide for their safety [car phone, pagers]. Participating in this approach will be a departure from the previous manner in which services were delivered. Therefore, staff should be supported when they make mistakes, and when they need to flex their schedules to accommodate a neighborhood (e.g., a meeting ran over or a weekend/evening function in the neighborhood required their presence).

5. Watch the POWER thing

Bureaucracies tend to think their way is the only way. Communities are sick of hearing or feeling that the "fat cat bureaucratic" has all the answers - it doesn't. Be careful not to come off as all knowing. The agency must be willing to humble itself and, as a result, humanize the agency and staff. Doing this means acknowledging the past sins; what the agency hasn't done well. It also means taking pride in what the agency has and is doing well. LEAVE THE ARROGANCE AT HOME - there's no place for it if the agency wants to build strong partnerships!

6. Be involved with the targeted communities

Letters and memos, faxes and notices are important tools of communication but community partnerships require FACE TIME. Staff must be seen in the community and

supervisors must be involved as well. Agency staff at all levels must learn, be involved with, and then advocate on behalf of the community.

7. *Establish committees within the agency* to help with the hard work. To the extent the agency is ready, involve community folks, foster parents and clients on the committees; committees may include, but not be limited to the following:

- a) Data Evaluation committee reviews local and state data to track where the agency is with regards to the FCNB outcomes;
- b) Foster Care Recruitment committee looks at specific neighborhoods, community needs and meets with neighborhood folk to solicit their support in developing a plan for recruitment of homes to keep children local when removal is eminent;
- c) Case Assignment Committee reviews how cases are assigned and researches the viability of geographical case assignment and equity in case assignment to compliment the neighborhoods the agency has defined;
- d) Roles and Responsibilities committee clarifies the responsibilities of the case worker, supervisor, foster family, neighborhood support system, etc., to assist with healthy relationship development (its about clarifying accountability);
- e) Family Team Meeting (FTM) committee establishes the protocols and policies for conducting Family Team Meetings (see Addendum C for FTM structure).

8. *Family-Centered Neighborhood-Based CPS is a work in progress*

Know and understand that practicing family-centered neighborhood-based CPS is ongoing and ever evolving. It should be approached as, and considered, "a work in progress" and never finished!

9. *Don't Give Up - Persevere!!*

This is a long-term commitment. If your agency has a history of losing steam on projects... don't get started because, if you start in with community relationship building and lose steam, it will undermine your credibility for a long time. It takes anywhere from 5-10 years to see the fruit of your labor - don't give up...the results and outcomes for children and families are worth it, so persevere!

10. *Guard against...*

Arrogance: Both the agency and the community can suffer from arrogance. Beware of this pitfall and avoid it at all costs - it will undermine your goal to build strong partnerships for the protection of children and stability of families in the targeted communities.

Ignorance: The community has preconceived notions about the agency which staff must dispel through formal meetings and regular contact. The community must also work to dispel unwarranted beliefs staff hold of community folk.

Fear: Both the agency and the community will be fearful when getting started. Be aware of these fears and work through them, otherwise the effort will be thwarted.

C. Preparing Staff for Neighborhood Work

There is a lot of "advance work" to be initiated as part of getting started with developing neighborhood partnerships. Consider the following elements:

1. Geographic Assignments

Decide whether or not the agency is able and willing to reorganize its case assignment process to be neighborhood-based.

Initiate a discussion with staff and the board as to the viability of realigning cases to support the family-centered, neighborhood-based approach you have committed to embracing. Building trust and mutual understanding is best (or more readily) created when people can identify a name and face with the agency. Attaching social workers to specific geographic areas helps build the bridge for true collaboration and will ease the way for establishing strong partnerships.

If the agency chooses to go this route, consider developing a systematic plan for realigning staff and for case transfers. Depending on the size of the agency a phased-in approach may be preferred. *Phase 1:* assign new cases geographically; *Phase 2:* reassign court-involved cases geographically; *Phase 3:* reassign open cases geographically, so that within 3-6 months all of the current and new cases are attached to geographic areas.

Once the plan is set make sure you COMMUNICATE IT TO STAFF AND THE TARGETED NEIGHBORHOODS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS. Provide supervisor and caseworker names and contact numbers as well as how you plan to make the shift.

COMMUNICATION is absolutely essential - too often we assume "they know" or "don't need to know", etc. This is a sign of arrogance and contradicts trust-building behavior both with staff and neighborhoods.

2. *Conduct Case Analysis*

Analyze the cases in the targeted neighborhoods.

Do your homework before moving out into the targeted neighborhoods. Review and assess the types of cases that you are serving in the targeted communities. Are they largely neglect, abuse or dependency cases or a combination? What is the number of child removals in these neighborhoods over the past three years, what is the percentage of reunifications, kinship homes, foster homes, etc. as compared to the rest of the county? Where are the children from these communities being placed, how far away, in what school districts? What is the potential loss of income to the school district for each child removed and placed elsewhere?

3. *Community Liaisons*

Identify Staff who can act as Community Liaisons.

There are many things to consider and do when getting started, prior to actually contacting community members and scheduling the first meeting. The agency should identify, if it has the resources, an agency liaison whose primary job is grass roots neighborhood work for each targeted neighborhood. Community partnership building is labor intensive!

4. *Scope out the Community*

Take time to prepare for the journey.

There are many, many formal and informal service providers, local social groups, formal neighborhood groups and existing collaboratives, etc., which exist in the neighborhoods. Do your homework! Find out what services are available (both formal and informal); what potential sites may be available for on-site visitation, staff meetings, other functions. Get a sense of the types of services and programs the community has wished for but has not been forthcoming. **Ask staff who live in these communities, colleagues, and others that you might know from local committees and boards, etc., to help you gather this information.**

5. *Approach Existing Groups*

Make contact with the neighborhood leaders and groups.

Once you have data available and have identified the existing informal and formal service providers, local social groups, formal neighborhood groups, and existing collaboratives, make contact with them.

Have staff that is most comfortable in approaching individuals in the communities request an invitation to their meetings. Be prepared to discuss your services, mandates, and bring data and information on family-centered, neighborhood-based services and on the cases, etc. Explain what you hope to do with the communities' support. Explain that you will be scheduling a meeting and inviting them as well as others in the community to learn more about child abuse and neglect in their area and about family-centered, neighborhood-based services. Be prepared to hear resentful, angry messages - don't react, thank them for their input and respond by graciously accepting their feedback. Invite these groups to the first neighborhood-based meeting that you schedule.

D. Working with Existing NEIGHBORHOOD CENTERS

Once the targeted neighborhood is identified:

- a. Identify the neighborhood center(s) that has(have) clout in the community. Call them and briefly explain what you are trying to accomplish and that you would like to meet with their staff to talk about shared values, shared missions, shared outcomes, the purpose of FCNB, what the agency wants to accomplish, what the Center is looking to accomplish and how you can work more effectively together. Set up a meeting and confirm via a letter that includes some easy-to-read information (including charts, graphs, etc.);
- b. Invite staff who hold cases in the target neighborhood to attend;
- c. At the initial meeting, conduct a presentation...get feedback (don't become defensive - no pain/no gain); make sure the presentation materials speak to them (have statistics to show the loss of revenue for a school district where children are removed and placed elsewhere, have data to show the impact of separation on family reunification, show the number of children removed from the community and the number placed locally, etc.);
- d. Tell them the agency wants to establish healthier working partnerships, ask for their help - seek tentative agreement;
- e. Set up a second meeting.

At the next meeting with the Neighborhood Center:

- a. Develop an agenda in advance - have the Center Director review it;
- b. Each agency reviews their mandates, mission, funding streams, programs;
- c. Agency staff from both agencies identify myths and stereotypes they hold of the other agency;
- d. Both agencies have a general discussion about the surfaced stereotypes;
- e. Staff flip chart commonalities (based on the missions of both agencies) and identify who does what best;
- f. Staff draft goals and objectives for working with each other differently (explore space, visitation monitors, possible contracts, parenting classes, how to access existing but untapped resources, etc.);
- g. Staff identify next steps;
- h. Invite the neighborhood center to the neighborhood-wide meeting that you schedule (see below).

The purpose of starting with the neighborhood center is to establish an ally in the community that is trusted by neighborhood folk. Always bring refreshments with you - let the Center know you are doing so.

E. Working with NEIGHBORHOOD FOLK

Once the targeted neighborhood is identified:

- a. Identify who the "movers and shakers" are in the neighborhood. The agency can do this by speaking with staff who live in the neighborhood, contacting neighborhood council members, asking agency social workers who they know in the target community, asking staff and colleagues who is "in the know" through local committee groups, etc.;
- b. Contact the informal and formal leaders, tell them what you are trying to do and send them some easy-to-read information (including charts, graphs, etc.). Contact them a week later to invite them to a meeting in their area;
- c. Follow-up with a phone call. Ask to have lunch with one or two of the prime formal/informal leaders. Try to gain a tentative commitment, asking them if they would be willing to sponsor the first meeting (the agency will provide the paper, envelopes, and do the mailing). You want them to call the meeting because they are trusted - you might not be.
- d. Invite a cross-section of community folk: formal leaders, informal leaders, foster parents, adoptive parents, make sure staff who carry cases in the neighborhood are present, pastors, small business owners, public housing managers, etc.;

- e. Develop the agenda, run it by the meeting "sponsor(s)". Assure that s/he and the agency play an equal role (the "sponsor" can do the introductions, perhaps provide the backdrop and present the agency staff).
- f. The agency can provide an overview of mandates and services, identify historical perceptions, provide easy-to-read information (including charts, graphs, etc. on rate of child removals; trauma to the child, placement whereabouts - in neighborhood as opposed to outside of same, amount of lost school revenues, etc.) Share what you want to accomplish, humble yourself, asking for their guidance and support vis-à-vis a Community Collaborative;
- g. Tentatively schedule a next meeting.

At the next meeting with the Neighborhood Folk:

- a. Allow time for meeting and greeting;
- b. Review agency program and funding streams BRIEFLY (as you did at the initial meeting);
- c. Allow for an "airing" of myths and stereotypes (things the community believes about the agency, things the agency believes about the community) and time for a general discussion;
- d. Flip chart what the community needs are, what their frustrations have been, what they would like to see of the agency. The agency should be prepared to address the issues that surface - discussing what it can/cannot do, will and won't be able to do;
- e. Flip chart what the community knows best and what the agency knows best and what the agency can do to support the community's "know-how";
- f. Discuss the agency goals and seek interest in forming sub-groups of the Collaborative: (a) Services in the Neighborhood; (b) Foster Care Recruitment; (c) C/AN Prevention Efforts;
- g. Agree to work together to respond and address their concerns with them.

At subsequent Meetings:

- a. If community folk think its a good idea - recruit members for each sub-group;
- b. Discuss future meetings, where they should be held, how often the sub-groups should meet, the Collaborative should meet, etc.

Whatever needs the neighborhood surfaces as a result of your meetings, anticipate having to meet the neighborhood's needs prior to the agency's needs being met.

F. Additional activities to consider when working with targeted neighborhoods

1. Develop a community-wide steering committee composed of different community leaders, providers, church leaders, politicians, foster parents, etc., to assist in making family-centered, neighborhood-based services work throughout the county;
2. Hold periodic Unit meetings in the neighborhood - at neighborhood centers;
3. Create a resource directory for the neighborhood with the neighborhood, identifying formal and informal services;
4. Interview local folks - ask them how things are going, the services they would like to see, how they might be able to assist with neighborhood-based C/AN prevention efforts;
5. Hold monthly Business Card Swaps - invite community providers to come and share what they do, how they do it, etc., and swap business cards at a community center or church;
6. Attend existing local meetings on a regular basis;
7. With the Neighborhood Collaborative, 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.);
8. Conduct Quarterly All Staff meetings with other key neighborhood providers, clarify roles and responsibilities, hold joint problem-solving sessions;
9. Engage existing foster parents and other neighborhood folk to develop a foster care recruitment plan;
10. Seek out groups who can initiate a community-wide ARTS project [painting a wall in the town square, etc.];
11. Conduct the same type of "myths and misconceptions" meeting with foster parents as you do with the neighborhoods;
12. 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;

13. 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;
14. Institute the Family Case Conference to bring all stakeholders that touch the life of the family together for joint problem-solving and case planning. If you cannot afford to hire a case staffing specialist, consider training a retired professional from the targeted community to facilitate case staffings - go through your local United Way to identify the individual, have them sign a two-three year commitment form and a confidentiality form as part of the agreement;
15. 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).
16. 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.).

G. Using the Power of County Collaboratives

Depending on your state and the county make-up, county collaboratives such as Ohio's Family and Children First Councils may be a good way to get the word out on family-centered, neighborhood-based child welfare. Doing so allows for an opportunity to articulate the needs of the targeted communities to garner support and assistance from other children and family service providers (public and private) and politicians.

Develop a one-page summary on agency out-of-home placement statistics. Include in the one page summary the number and type of local and out-of-county services used by children and families during the month (or quarter depending on how often you provide the summary update to Council). Include statistics of the targeted communities - number of children removed from homes, where they were placed, etc. Identify the types of services the communities have asked for based on your meeting with them. Lead a discussion as to the type of support that is needed and how Council and Council members can help.

III. Partnering with Family Foster Care Givers

Agency and network family foster caregivers are the primary source of out-of-home care placements for children who are removed from their homes. Agencies have struggled to recruit, license, and maintain a trained and prepared cadre of family foster homes. Agencies can improve their efforts by partnering with existing foster caregivers and the target neighborhoods to plan for the recruitment, licensing and maintenance of neighborhood-based family foster homes.

Research indicates that:

1. It is possible to find good, local foster care homes for the majority of children who need out of home care;
2. Biological and foster families should have contact and work in partnership on behalf of children in care; and
3. Communities under economic and social stress can be relied on to find, develop and sustain human capital necessary to protect their children and support their families.

A. Moving the System: The Family-Centered, Neighborhood-Based Challenge

When trying to re-engineer the current foster care system, the agency must be careful and measured in its approach. Staff buy-in is absolutely critical as is buy-in with existing foster families. When approaching existing families, some will be eager and have an "its about time you get on board" attitude, because many foster families have been "doing" family-centered, neighborhood-based care long before the system was ready to support it. Others might be leery and resistant. While there are casualties as a result of systems transformation (both with staff and foster parents), the agency should nonetheless strive to bring everyone along.

Some lessons learned by Ohio's pilot sites

Staff Buy-In

1. Buy-in from staff must begin at the administrative and supervisory levels. If supervisors don't support this shift in philosophy, systems transformation will go nowhere fast.

2. The administration must set out performance expectations that foster care retention and recruitment is everyone's concern.