

## **Ohio's Integration Experience** **Lessons from the Trenches**

### **Background**

In early 1997, the Casey Foundation approached the Public Children Service Association of Ohio (PCSAO) to discuss the possibility of working jointly with the Ohio Department of Human Services to integrate a family-centered, neighborhood-based services approach to child welfare throughout Ohio. PCSAO was the first and only non-profit organization funded by the Casey Foundation to take up the work of statewide integration.

Originally, Casey had agreed to fund PCSAO for one year, beginning April 1997. Three years later, Casey is still funding PCSAO to bring the state of Ohio forward in transforming the traditional child welfare service modalities to that which is family-centered and neighborhood-based.

PCSAO has developed a strategic plan for this work each year it has received funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. (An example of these plans can be reviewed in Addendum D of this document).

What follows is a summary of what is needed and what PCSAO has learned as a result of its work with county child welfare agencies from April 1997 through April 2000. Based on the lessons learned from the nation's pilot states and from requests made by Ohio's child welfare agencies, PCSAO has developed a set of strategies, interventions and technical supports. In doing so, PCSAO has attempted to assist Ohio in its awareness, understanding, appreciation for, and in taking action to transform itself into a more child, family and neighborhood-friendly service delivery system.

### **Partnering with the State Department of Human Services**

Having a healthy working relationship with the state department of human services is important but not critical. In Ohio, PCSAO enjoys a solid working relationship with the Ohio Department of Human Services. Both parties work hard at listening and understanding the other's position and working through differences. However, while the relationship can propel transformation forward, it can be done without support from the state department albeit with difficulty. The preference would be to partner with the state department of human services whenever possible. Having a strong and functioning child welfare association is

a must, if and when, the state department is unable to move forward with this integration effort. There must be a locus point for initiation, organization, coordination and ability to sustain the work for the integration and habituation of this approach with and in the counties.

## **1. *Contributing to the Partnership***

Both parties agreed to partner on the implementation of a statewide effort to integrate a FCNB approach statewide. A formal agreement was entered into by PCSAO and ODHS. This agreement outlined the roles and responsibilities of each party. PCSAO writes an annual strategic plan that is reviewed and discussed jointly with staff from ODHS. ODHS plays a role in the plan based on its availability of resources. The support ODHS has given to this partnership has been largely in the form of xeroxing and mailing copies of FCNB documents to the local child welfare agencies. ODHS has provided limited funding to offset the cost of the annual PCSAO Casey Conference and when ODHS has conducted statewide training, it has presented FCNB materials generated by PCSAO. ODHS staff include PCSAO staff when formulating language for bills and when seeking to promote this approach in the legislature.

Data is a critical cornerstone to becoming family-centered and neighborhood-based (FCNB). While ODHS was able to work with the Casey consultants to generate data for the pilot counties of Hamilton and Cuyahoga, it has not been able to support the PCSAs that have followed. This is the primary regret PCSAO has had with regard to the partnership. PCSAO continues to work with ODHS to identify ways to remove organizational and data system barriers, preventing the distribution of accurate data to assist local agencies in the FCNB transformation process.

Most recently, PCSAO was asked to sit on several state committees composed of representatives from child and family systems across disciplines. These committees have been given the responsibility for developing recommendations for improving the child welfare system in Ohio. As a result of laying the groundwork with ODHS by sharing information and educating a broad cross-section of individuals on FCNB, many of the recommendations on service delivery enhancements will be framed within the context of family-centered, neighborhood-based service delivery modalities.

## **2. *Lessons Learned***

States that are moving forward with the FCNB transformation process should endeavor to enter into a formal agreement between the state department and their Association (or equivalent) that includes clearly defined roles and responsibilities of each party. Regular meetings (at minimum quarterly) should

be held to review the state and local efforts to move integration forward; develop further strategies; and refine existing implementation plans. Requests for support and assistance should be made in writing and followed up on at regular intervals. The local effort should seek support regarding the generation of data needed to conduct targeted problem-solving and decision-making.

## **Partnering with the State Legislature**

Strong working relationships with the state legislature is absolutely critical to system transformation. Helping the legislators and their aides understand the importance of FCNB is necessary to garner political support both at the state and local levels.

PCSAO works hard to maintain effective working relationships with its legislators, congressional representatives and senators. In so doing, PCSAO has partnered at the state and federal levels to craft legislation, usher legislation into law and successfully advocate on behalf of children at-risk of abuse and neglect; vulnerable families and the neighborhoods in which they reside.

### **1. Contributing to the Partnership**

As a result of educating the state legislature on the importance of a family-centered and neighborhood-based approach to child welfare, laws have been passed which support and directly address the need for a more FCNB approach to service delivery. Legislators have held public forums and all day sessions to discuss this approach and to identify ways to support local agencies, kinship care givers and foster care givers in integrating FCNB into daily practice. Funding strategies and incentive-based grants are being developed for the next biennium (2000-2002) to further support this local transformation effort.

### **2. Lessons Learned**

Develop easy to read one and two page information sheets on FCNB. Hand out marketing pieces when meeting with legislators on related and unrelated issues, find ways to ease the conversation towards a discussion (however brief) of FCNB. Work with key legislative aides to set up FCNB focused legislative breakfast and/or luncheon presentations. Invite legislators to attend, during the meal, present a brief presentation (with a variety of easy to read handouts) on FCNB. (see Addendum E for examples).

Write monthly FCNB-focused articles and publish in the organization's newsletter, agency newsletter, etc. **The point is to keep FCNB in the front of the legislature at all times.** Be willing to provide written and oral testimony on

the importance of this approach to service delivery and have numbers and facts with you at all times (cost of out-of-home care placement; where children are removed and placed; location of foster homes in relation to child removals). Be available at a moment's notice to attend key meetings and present at legislative functions.

## **Partnering with Service Providers**

Working with key providers and organizations that represent providers is key to moving the state forward in embracing this approach to service delivery. Because family-centered, neighborhood-based services requires localized services in neighborhoods where there are the highest number of child abuse and neglect referrals and removals, it is imperative that strong working relationships be established and maintained with public and private providers (who often serve the same population). Partnering with providers to establish hours in targeted neighborhoods is critical to the success of neighborhood-based services.

### **1. Contributing to the Partnership**

PCSAO has always enjoyed a working relationship with the Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies (OACCA), the organization that represents treatment foster care and traditional foster care networks in Ohio. As a result of working together, OACCA's constituents are very familiar with FCNB and the work taking place in counties across Ohio. PCSAO has also worked closely with the Ohio Association of Foster Caregivers (OFCA), presenting at their annual Conference for the past 2 years. In addition, PCSAO has met with state agency representatives to discuss how we can work together to bring this approach to the child and family service system across fields.

### **2. Lessons Learned**

It is important to:

- a. identify key organizations and agencies that represent public and private providers;
- b. coordinate open dialogues regarding the primary values of FCNB and the extent to which these are practiced in the state across child and family serving systems;
- c. meet with these organizations regularly to share information and data regarding the population jointly served by local child welfare agencies and other service providers;

- d. contact local planning boards, conduct presentations on FCNB and agree to provide planning services to communities wanting to develop a FCNB plan. Avoid meeting with other systems' mid-managers who do not have the authority to make commitments to set expectations for their systems with regard to planning for a FCNB approach. Instead, identify key leaders within these systems and approach them with the philosophy and the practical application of integrating this approach.
- e. Be prepared to share figures and numbers to make your case. Have families and foster families who have been assisted as a result of this work provide testimonials at key presentations.

## **Partnering with Local Child Welfare Agencies**

### **1. Contributing to the Partnership**

As a membership organization, PCSAO is supported by Ohio's public child welfare agencies. The 88 public child welfare agencies have been approached regarding this work and have been asked individually as to whether or not there is an interest in formally and consciously transforming the way in which they serve children and families. The decision to work with PCSAO is completely voluntary. Based on need and interest, PCSAO works with a county agency in their systems transformation effort.

### **2. Lessons Learned**

Just as we must begin where the client family is at, the PCSAO must begin where the agency is at. Depending on the size, existing resources and level of commitment, PCSAO has worked with the agency to develop county specific FCNB implementation plans, and has provided a continuum of technical assistance and support based on agency and community need.

PCSAO staff did not begin this process with a set structure and core set of products to routinely pass out regardless of need. Instead, all products that have been developed and shared (including guidelines, job descriptions, draft policies and procedures, training sessions, PR materials, etc.,) have been developed as a direct result of requests made by agencies working to integrate a FCNB approach to service delivery.

PCSAO continues to grow and develop in its capacity to respond to county requests. As requests are made, PCSAO either conducts the research and partners with experts to develop and deliver products or contracts with experts to provide the support when it is beyond PCSAO's capacity or ability to do so.

