



Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities

An Introduction

Pennsylvania must continue to ensure that children are healthy and educated, and their families are stable and self-sufficient. Families with strong support systems and adequate finances can often acquire the help and resources they need to be successful either within their extended family or within the community. But for families with limited supports and resources, finding appropriate help on their own can be difficult, leading to increased reliance on the services and supports of public systems. Therefore, public systems must work collaboratively, so that the services they deliver are locally accessible, family focused, consumer-friendly, voluntary, culturally sensitive and accountable.

If the Commonwealth is to be successful in meeting the needs of its citizenry, building upon the strengths and resources of communities is fundamental. Community decision makers working collaboratively are in the best position to assess local needs, implement cross system strategies that build service delivery continuums, and set measurable goals that guide public policies and determine the use of public funds. These “system reform” efforts set a common vision and purpose within counties and communities, and begin to create new processes which require systems and programs to align service activity and justify funding requests based upon their contributions in achieving specific outcome goals.

There is growing recognition that investing in community collaborative partnerships fosters collective accountability among systems and service providers, promoting investment into proven research-based practices and data-driven decision making. Collaboratives have begun addressing

specific child and family needs by putting service programs in place that research findings indicate are “proven successful.” Many of these programs emphasize prevention and include creative and innovative outreach, which incorporate home visiting and center-based support services that engage families.

As research-based programs and practices are aligned with other traditional service strategies, emphasis is being placed on outcome measures for accountability purposes. By advocating the review of community wide data, community collaboratives are moving in the direction of routinely evaluating the effectiveness of multiple programs and services that must work together to achieve designated community outcomes.

In 1995, Pennsylvania, through the Department of Public Welfare, Office of Children, Youth and Families initiated the Family Service System Reform (FSSR) initiative. This initiative was designed to support community collaborative efforts to reform public systems serving children and their families. By identifying local needs, engaging community leaders and setting program, system, and community-level outcomes FSSR collaboratives work to integrate programs and services to improve child and family well being.

In the 2001-02 fiscal year, forty counties received funding under the FSSR Initiative. Grant funds were awarded in competitive three year grants and renewed annually, to support FSSR collaborative efforts. County governments are eligible recipients of the FSSR grant funds. Each awarded grant requires an annual local cash match. The cash match

requirement ranges from 5% the first year to 40% the third year, and is based upon the amount of grant funds awarded to each grantee. During fiscal year 2000-01, the start of a second cycle of three year grants, state funds ranged from approximately \$54,000 to \$113,000, with the average site receiving \$98,000.

This publication is a comprehensive assessment of the activities and achievements of FSSR funded collaboratives in Pennsylvania. The purpose of this assessment was to do the following:

- provide information to the Commonwealth on the range of achievements and impacts FSSR has produced;
- describe how FSSR collaboratives have connected with other local community partnership efforts that have similar goals;
- identify the effect FSSR collaboratives have on leveraging resources at the community level;
- provide county specific FSSR collaborative profiles to highlight significant activity and potential marketing information for local use; and
- indicate the support needed to further enhance community collaboration and achieve better outcomes for children and their families.

Assessment Approach: Methodology

Information for this publication was obtained by surveying the 39 grantees/40 counties participating in the FSSR Initiative in Spring 2002. The survey was carried out in conjunction with the fiscal year 2002-03 grant renewal application, released through the Department of Public Welfare, and is the first comprehensive assessment of the FSSR Initiative. Submission of survey information was required in order to award funds to the county grantees. The survey enabled collaboratives to provide information on their operating and organizational structure, indicating if mission and vision statements were in place, what key community leaders were involved and what linkages were formed with other community efforts. Collaborative achievements, financing strategies and system change activities were other areas about which collaboratives were asked to provide details. Since improving outcomes for children is the ultimate goal of FSSR, the survey contained several areas requesting information on measurable outcomes being addressed by collaboratives. This information included current establishment of baseline data and current progress status on each outcome goal.

Key elements of a collaborative infrastructure provided a framework for focused strategic planning among collaborative members. This framework allowed local partnerships to outline the action steps they will undertake. Issues related to the strategic plan were derived from a collaborative assessment process completed a short time before the survey was released.