



A Vision for Children and Families: *Investment in Pennsylvania's Communities*

Community collaborative efforts have been under way in Pennsylvania for several years, working to respond to the ever-changing needs of children, families, and communities. Efforts like FSSR have engaged the public systems in developing and enhancing service delivery strategies that are more coordinated and effectively integrated. However, having the local leadership of these systems at the same table is not enough. To be successful with these collaborative efforts on a community level and make the type of systemic change necessary to support and empower families, it is vital to link with community residents, community-based organizations, and business entities.

Within the past five years, FSSR collaborative partnerships have studied how they deliver services to children and families in their communities. Borrowing concepts from business regarding customer service, marketing, and service operations, collaboratives are viewing individuals served through the systems as “customers” who expect quality services that are flexible, affordable and meet their needs. By engaging parents and consumers in service delivery and resource allocation decisions, services are tailored and implemented to meet their needs. A strong, active voice of parents and consumers in the collaborative process has led to an increase in community leadership and neighborhood improvement activism.

Public systems of education, child welfare, juvenile justice, health, mental health, and workforce development are responsible for managing millions of dollars in public funds. This large public investment continues to put pressure on systems to work more effectively and produce better results. By investing FSSR funds through community collaboratives, Pennsylvania has begun to see the redeployment of traditional system funds into proven, research-based community strategies that support families. This initiative has prompted investments from other non-governmental

community sources. This “pooling” of traditional and non-traditional funds has resulted in the implementation of financing strategies that are broad-based and community-focused.

The need continues to exist for systems to focus on accountability. Policy makers at the state level want to see improved child and family outcomes, requiring community collaboratives to move from “process” to “outcome” accountability through the use of community-wide outcome measures. Through the FSSR initiative, Pennsylvania has implemented an outcomes framework enabling community collaboratives to guide their cross-system efforts in improving child and family outcomes at the program level, the community level, and the system level. Using local data, collaboratives are selecting child and family indicators, establishing tracking processes, refining their strategies, and targeting their investments.

Over time, collaboratives will be able to measure their outcome efforts effectively, guide staff development and training opportunities, and evaluate whether their strategies are making a difference.

“Practitioners know that effective programs are characterized by flexibility, comprehensiveness, responsiveness, front-line discretion, high standards of quality and management, a family and neighborhood focus, community rootedness, a clear mission and respectful and trusting relationships. Those practitioners’ insights are now supported by a convergent body of research and front line experience in many different disciplines”¹³

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To develop strategies that respond to the needs of children, families, and communities, local leaders working together are in the best position to determine what needs to be done and how best to do it. State government has recognized that to be successful at improving the lives of its citizens across the state, they must continue to be an investor in local communities, not just a funder.

FSSR collaboratives have accomplished many things over the past 10 years. One important accomplishment has been the building of a collaborative infrastructure framework on which to broaden and deepen their work. Collaboratives are finding creative solutions, but need financial and technical resources from state government and more time to achieve long-term goals. Continued state investment is needed if collaboratives can be expected to reach their full potential. By making wise investments in communities that are committed to achieving Pennsylvania's vision for children and families, the Commonwealth will benefit from a stable work force, strong economic development, and safe and vibrant communities — results that make the collaborative investment worthwhile.