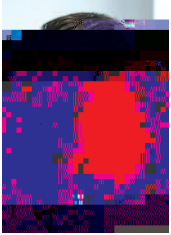


A recent federal study confirms that child abuse and neglect is a widespread problem in the United States. The national incidence study of child abuse and neglect relies on community professionals who typically encounter children and families in the course of their professional activities of child maltreatment. While the study includes children who were in estimated child protective service agencies, it also includes data on other children who were not reported to or who were screened out by the agency in estimation. These additional children were classified as maltreated by community professionals. The study also measures the clear standard and the mandatory standard. The clear standard is relatively stringent in that it requires demonstrable harm in order to be classified as abuse or neglect. The mandatory standard includes all children who meet the clear standard but adds others as well. Since the clear standard, an estimated 1.5 million children experienced maltreatment during the most recent study year, this estimate corresponds to one child in every 100 in the United States. Finally, maltreatment according to the more inclusive mandatory standard, nearly 10 million children experienced maltreatment, which corresponds to one child in every 10 in the United States.

# Lessons in Child Welfare Reform from Cuyahoga County and Beyond The Annie Casey Foundation's Family to Family Initiative



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## THE FAMILY TO FAMILY INITIATIVE ("FAMILY TO FAMILY")

The Annie Casey Foundation's Family to Family Initiative is a multi-million dollar national program to improve outcomes for children and families in the child welfare system by promoting core service system reform. Family to Family is based on four key principles:

- 1 A child's safety is paramount.
- 2 Children belong in families.
- 3 Families need strong communities and
- 4 Public child welfare systems need partners inside the community and other systems to achieve strong outcomes for children.

Community-based organizations in states are family to family sees to build partnerships between neighborhoods and public child welfare agencies as part of an effort to reform the child welfare system. Family to family relies on the following four strategies:

- 1 **Recruitment, Development and Support of Resource Families:** identify and support relative caregivers or foster families in the neighborhoods where children live to reduce the distance between families. Most children are placed in foster care and the foster families and strengthen neighborhood ties.
- 2 **Building Community Partnerships:** value communities' unique strengths and traditions and the longstanding credibility of some neighborhood groups as collaborative partners who can assist in recruiting local foster families and providing

other kinds of supports thereby increasing the public agencies' community connection and the community's influence in child protection matters.

- 3 **Team Decision Making:** promote the engagement of families and communities (i.e. caregivers, service providers and other community representatives) in decision-making about the welfare of children in their community.
- 4 **Self Evaluation:** child welfare agencies and community partners to gather relevant data and track trends in child welfare outcomes in order to improve and adjust service provision to meet the needs of children.

## EVALUATING FAMILY TO FAMILY: SYSTEM AND CHILD LEVEL IMPACTS

The Casey Foundation made a commitment to strengthen family to family in selected urban and/or sites nationwide including Cuyahoga County, Ohio. In partnership with the University of North Carolina and the University of California Berkeley as part of a national research team, we are evaluating the family to family initiative on both a systems level and child level in these sites. A major goal of the evaluation was to determine whether the four key strategies were implemented as intended and whether the strategies led to better outcomes for children and families. This is a social science inquiry in communities in child welfare and protection. Research is particularly informed by the evaluation of the building community partnerships strategy. The underlying assumption of this study



## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Assessing the rich history of the settlement house movement in the nineteenth century to a family to family initiatives reliance on community partners is and neither overlooked a road to support vulnerable families is not necessarily a family to family is unique in its efforts to use a community based approach to transform public systems as an ambitious undertaking.

A major hurdle to encourage and sustain child welfare reform is the strict federal funding mechanisms under title IV-E of the Social Security Act where the majority of federal funds pay for foster care and adoption services. Sustaining such a smaller pool of dollars that pay for child and family support services. One states including Ohio participate in a title IV-E demonstration project and a lesson on the role of funding for services such as in-home family strengthening activities improve outcomes for children and families.<sup>1</sup>

Availability of more flexible local level funds to supplement federal funding is another fiscal policy challenge.

Despite efforts to improve community based child welfare practices such as home visits to be done if communities and families are to become truly involved in efforts to protect vulnerable children, it is strong director level leaders in some of the elements identified in the family to family evaluation for building successful community partners is key. Adopted through local child welfare system policy changes include development of an infrastructure in the public child welfare agency for community partners in creating a shared vision for the overall safety and well-being of children in care, and institution for all mechanisms such as contracts with community based organizations to provide a significant part of child welfare staff training activities such as family visitation and consultation in the community and

utilize in parent advocates to support systems involved parents to be engaged and successful.

Mandatory reorientation of child maltreatment has led to qualitative and quantitative changes in the reorientation of child maltreatment and in the services offered by child welfare agencies. Approaches to mandatory child welfare services tend to focus on the individual or family level specifically considering the roles of the relatively few children who are victims of serious abuse. While the protection of these children is imperative advocates and researchers are increasingly calling for approaches that also address the environmental stressors such as social inequality that influence child maltreatment. Addressing approaches to reorient children families child welfare agencies and the community are the potential to provide more holistic culturally appropriate services and to serve the needs of a larger number of children.

<sup>1</sup> Sedlak, A.J., Mettenberg, J., Basena, M., Petta, L., McPherson, K., Greene, A., and Li, S. (2010). *Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4): Report to Congress*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.

<sup>2</sup> Hussey, J. M., Chang, J. J., & Kotch, J.B. 2006. Child Maltreatment in the United States: Prevalence, Risk Factors, and Adolescent Health Consequences. *Pediatrics*, 118(3):933-942.

<sup>3</sup> Usher, L., Wildfire, J., Webster, D., Crampton, D. (2010). Evaluation of the Anchor-Site Phase of Family to Family. Baltimore, MD: the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Retrieved from: <http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/Family%20to%20Family/EvaluationoftheAnchorSitePhaseofFamilytoFamily/anchoreval.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation. Major Initiatives: Family to Family. Retrieved from: <http://www.aecf.org/MajorInitiatives/Family%20to%20Family.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> Wildfire, J.; Rideout, P. & Crampton, D. (2010). Transforming Child Welfare, One Team Decisionmaking Meeting at a Time. *Protecting Children*, 25(2): 40-50.

<sup>6</sup> Public Children Service Association of Ohio: "Protect Ohio-Flexible Funding Title IV-E Waiver Enhances Child Outcomes" summarized by Crystal Allen. Retrieved from: <http://www.pcsao.org/InTheNews/2010/ProtectOhio.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Pennell, J., & Crampton, D. S. (in press). Parents and child maltreatment: Integrating strategies. In J. W. White, M. P. Koss, & A. E. Kazdin (Eds.), *Violence against women and children: Consensus, critical analyses, and emergent priorities: Vol. II. Navigating solutions*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

\* Other anchor sites included Denver, Colorado; Guilford County (Greensboro), North Carolina; Jefferson County (Louisville), Kentucky; Maricopa County (Phoenix), Arizona; Wake County (Raleigh), North Carolina; and Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange and San Francisco counties in California.