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ISSUE 3

Building capacity within Ohio's communities to identify and prioritize critical community issues and manage the investment of resources to achieve positive outcomes for children, youth and families.



FIRST LADY STRICKLAND SPEAKS

Our economy, with its roots in the automobile industry, is facing sobering budget shortfalls with no clear indication of when we might expect to get the worst of it behind us and start to rebuild. An economist warned people to beware of any predictions about when the economy will recover or even the best course of action in the interim. The truth, he said, is that our country has never been in this situation before and everything that has worked in the past has already been done. So, no one really knows the sure path to take with predictions representing nothing more than best guesses and corrective actions are initiated more with hope than with certainty.

Ruby Dee, a well-known actress who is now in her 80's said recently that she lived through the depression but is not seeing what she did then. She mentioned long bread lines, people living in the streets, and families farming their children out to anyone who would or could take care of them. If our social service agencies had the opportunity to talk with her, they probably could tell her of several families in those situations today—she just doesn't see them.

It's true, though, that we have a safety net today that was not available during the depression—a safety net that gets its life through Social Services agencies. Also, bank accounts are insured in ways that were not true before the depression. Without these two protections against personal devastation, the United States could very well look like it did during the depression.

Unfortunately, too many decision makers do not understand the interconnectedness of people development with community development. As Former Secretary of HEW, John Gardner says, "We have all seen those gleaming projections of the society of the future that feature an endless array of technological marvels and never mention human talent and energy."

He talked about "people developers" and compared the process of development to the process used by farmers in their role as growers. "Growers have to accept that the main ingredients and processes with which they work are not under their own control. They are in a patient partnership with nature, with an eye to the weather and a feeling for cultivation. A recognition that seeds sometimes fall on barren ground, a willingness to keep trying, a concern for the growing thing, patience—such are the virtues of the grower."

The Cabinet realizes and respects the position the local councils are in since there is so much that is not in their control at both levels. For example, workers are asked to reassure those in distress that a caring community is there to help them. At the same time, staggering budget problems threaten the stability of the system they work for. But the important thing now is the attitude we have about the work we do. FCFCs must keep a clear focus of shared responsibility for the well-being of their communities and work together in trusting relationships to collaborate, coordinate, and align the resources available to them. In addition, we must do more than survive the changing times, we must, when necessary, seek change.

The Cabinet is keeping faith with the FCFCs through their regular attendance at our monthly meetings and is paying serious attention to the concerns brought to them through our county and regional meetings. Further, their designated deputy directors also meet on a monthly basis around the concerns raised from local councils.

Judging by the impressive participants in our last round of regional meetings, we have the local leadership needed to deal with the problems facing Ohioans. But we can only manage the magnitude of demand by working together. The Cabinet is grateful for all that the local FCFCs do and are committed to stand with them as they take on the challenges—both known and unknown.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE FIELD

Sandusky County Family and Children First Council Response to Challenging Economic Times

The Sandusky County Family and Children First Council (SCFCFC) is built on solid partnerships and a system of care that is getting results. However, the current economic situation is affecting the need for services and potentially resulting in a reduction in funding and services. Although all services in the county are important, the SCFCFC members determined that given the current circumstances, it was necessary to decide where to concentrate their efforts as a group. The challenge was to consider the balance between the economic realities and not undoing all that has been built, between each organization's needs and the larger community's needs, and between meeting safety net services and prevention services that may curtail the demand for crisis and safety net services.

In April 2009, with the help of the PFS Academy, the SCFCFC members determined the top priorities for action. The process began with a pre-survey to voting members that asked what their organization's top priorities would be based on both funding risk and need as well as what they viewed the top community priorities would be over the next 12 months. Members identified over 50 programs, strategies and activities. An all day session was held to prioritize activities by ranking activities based on need, impact if eliminated, evidence of impact, cost/benefit, and the Council's ability to address the strategy.

It was determined that maintaining the SCFCFC structure was the top priority as it provides the collaborative foundation for working toward maintaining the other programs and strategies. As part of this structure it was also determined that the health assessment that is completed under Sandusky County's "Health Partners" group was also crucial as it provides the data that helps determine community need, progress, and information to potential funders. The SCFCFC is currently working on a number of SCFCFC and Health Partners action steps aimed at increasing membership, promoting community awareness and finding new and alternative funding sources in addition to state funding such as federal grants, foundations, and community groups. Next, the SCFCFC members felt that it was important to educate the public and policy makers about the importance of maintaining critical safety net programs such as Children Services and important support programs such as mental health services. The entire SCFCFC worked on an action plan, and individual SCFCFC members and committees have taken the lead on each action step to encourage collaborative leadership.

Other prioritized programs included Help Me Grow services for infants and toddlers, Substance Abuse Prevention, Wraparound Service Coordination, and Teen Pregnancy Prevention. Action steps for these priorities are being pursued through committees. For example, the Early Childhood Coordinating Committee member organizations are working together to continue as many services for young children and their parents as possible by educating state and local policy makers and looking at existing local funds while pursuing state and federal grants. Sandusky County Prevention Partnership (substance abuse prevention) has recently applied for a number of state and federal grants with the Sandusky County Health Department as lead and with multiple Sandusky County partners and is working with neighboring counties on joint applications. Local businesses have also supported many substance abuse prevention activities. The Sandusky County Family and Children First Council determined that between competing for the limited funding available and working together, the chances of success are greatly increased by maintaining and expanding partnerships and being creative problem solvers as a group.

Contact: Cathy Glassford, Sandusky County Family and Children First Council Director
419-332-9296 ext. 188
fcfccoordinator@sanduskycountydjfs.org



Union County Builds Data Capacity to Make Data Informed Decisions

The Council for Union County Families is in their first year of the PfS initiative. Upon mobilizing the community around this planning process, professionals from eighteen family-serving agencies agreed to participate in PfS workgroups around continued mobilization strategies, assessment activities, gaps analysis and implementation.

The assessment committee, which began its work in January of this year, stepped up to the challenge of building our community's ability to gather and analyze data. Through the process of reviewing indicators around the six commitments and choosing those that best helped us to measure the conditions of the community, our assessment committee realized little local data existed around youth choosing healthy behaviors and youth transitioning into adulthood. With the cooperation of the three major school districts in Union County and assistance from the PfS Academy and Dr. Jerry Bean, the committee developed and distributed a survey to over 900 freshmen and junior high school students in Union County. The survey was scanned and analyzed locally by the Council Director and assigned data steward. Due to the great cooperation from our schools and PfS support staff, our assessment committee was able to complete this process within a two-month time frame. The result being that we have at our disposal a set of primary data around youth behaviors, including substance use, sexual behaviors, self-harming behaviors and a depression index. Already, several organizations have requested this data to use for planning purposes.

The Partnerships for Success initiative encourages community leaders to use data-informed decision making to create or evaluate programs or services to improve the well-being of children and families in Union County. We understand this is especially important during tough economic times. How the current economic turmoil will play out is unclear. What is clear is that family-serving agencies must continue their vital missions as families struggle even more to meet basic needs. These are times that beckon us to focus on the impact our programs have on families and the community at-large. It is critical that we take the time to look at the short, intermediate and long term goals our programs are meeting. Using data to evaluate and improve upon existing programs and services is needed now more than ever. We are fortunate to be using the PfS model at this time to improve the well being of our community and to look for cost-efficient ways to effectively serve the families in Union County.

Contact: Brenda Rock, Union County Family and Children First Council Director
937-642-8990
brock@co.union.oh.us

Preble County Working to Build Capacity Across Systems

Preble County Family & Children First Council has been involved in efforts to build cross-system data capacity by participating in centralized training offered by the Partnerships for Success Academy and by receiving technical assistance from Dr. Jerry Bean with re-tooling the data collection and management system for service coordination and offering local training on data management.

The Council maintains a SurveyMonkey.com subscription for use by member agencies when collecting cross-system data. Child abuse and neglect, social service utilization and housing surveys have been conducted. A homelessness survey took place during the 2008 Preble County Fair. Council on Aging volunteers assisted with data entry. The results were utilized by the Continuum of Care Committee for developing the 10-year plan to end homelessness in Preble County.

As budget cuts become reality, it will be more important than ever to consult data when making painful decisions about utilization of scarce resources. It is hoped that the capacity building efforts undertaken thus far will be useful as these decisions are made by county partners.

Contact: Jewel Bartels, Preble County Family and Children First Council Administrator
937-472-4089
jewel@preblecountyhealth.org

Fulton County Works Together to Maximize Resources

As the result of strategic planning in 2006, the Fulton County Family & Children First Council created a community coalition, Partnership for a Drug-Free Fulton County, to decrease underage alcohol consumption and improve the well-being of youth and families. Our coalition provides a vehicle to implement environmental strategies to change our community so it is a healthier place for youth and families.

Partnership for a Drug Free Fulton County brings together concerned citizens and professionals. Initiatives that were previously done in isolation and without measurable outcomes have been transformed into collaborative work that is data informed, targeted and evidence-based. Existing resources, such as time and money, are being extended as partners work together and enhance each others' capacities.

We have been able to achieve a measurable difference in our community in a short period of time. Binge drinking rates, or drinking to get drunk, have decreased for our youth as well as overall drinking rates.

Percentage of youth drinking to get drunk at least once per month

Year	Under 13	14-16 Year Olds	17-18 Year Olds
2005	8%	21%	35%
2008	4%	9%	22%

Overall underage drinking declined in our youth, ages 12-18, from 29% in 2005 to 18% in 2008.

In an effort to continue our work, we have worked together as a team and applied for a federal grant, the Drug Free Communities Grant. This grant supports community coalitions such as ours and provides a maximum of 1.2 million dollars over a ten year period.

Complex issues affecting youth and families, such as substance abuse or underage drinking, require families and professionals in the community and schools to work together to bring positive change. When this occurs in combination with data informed decision-making and measurable, evidenced-based strategies, limited resources are maximized and creative solutions can be realized.

Contact: Lou Moody, Fulton County Family and Children First Council Director
419-337-0915
Lou.moody@odh.ohio.gov



Stark County Surviving, Striving, and Thriving Through Engagement, Empowerment and Education

We know that in order to make informed decisions, having good data is important. By having the evidence, both qualitative and quantitative, we can effectively make decisions and trust that our decisions have sound backing. However, in the midst of our current economic times and our goal to ensure that we provide a

quality education for all students so they are prepared to meet the challenges of this 21st Century global economy, Stark County residents have had to look from within, to refine our own processes and partnerships, and to become educationally innovative to ensure the success of our youth. In doing so, we are not only meeting Governor Strickland's request of "building our education system anew", but more importantly, we are coordinating our resources and moving forward to meet the needs of our children, families and community.

Over the past fifteen years, Stark County has been committed to helping students achieve not only academic success, but life-long success through Ohio's Stark County CARE Team Initiative (iCARE). iCARE is a cost effective model that brings together families, schools, local government, county agencies and community.

By effectively utilizing our data and realigning our current relationships and resources, we believe that through opening the schoolhouse doors we will be able to move from a system of operating in silos to a coordinated system focused on engaging, empowering and educating our students, families and community. Through our investment in the iCARE Information Management System (IMS), schools can assess their individual and building level academic and non-academic data and compare this with our county-wide social service (mental health, family engagement, drug and alcohol and juvenile justice) data. By having access to such county-wide data, our schools can use this information to personalize the education experience of all their students. Additionally, through the iCARE IMS, schools will be able to effectively promote a positive school climate and culture, engage parents and families and analyze their collection of data for overall school improvement. Likewise, our county-wide social service agencies will be better equipped to target and improve their services to our schools, families and the community.

Ultimately, through our data and relationally driven system, the iCARE IMS will serve as cost saving mechanism for Stark County because our schools and county-wide social service agencies will not only be able to make informed decisions, but they can also collectively and strategically work together to meet the needs of our students, families and Stark County community. As we continue to refine the iCARE IMS, we plan to incorporate additional data components (i.e., family council wraparound services) so that we can truly meet our students and families where they are and continue to work together as a county in planning and implementing services in one voice. Over the long term we believe that our investment will lead to not just monetary savings for our county, but more importantly it will produce our next generation of civic-minded and responsible citizens that will be prepared to meet the challenges of their 21st Century global economy.

Contact: Carol Lichtenwalter, Stark County Family and Children First Council Director
330-455-1225

carol@starkfamilycouncil.org

Krista Allison, Ohio's Stark County CARE Team Director
330-492-8136 ext. 409

krista.allison@email.sparcc.org

PFS NEWS

Building Data Capacity Project



Local communities are faced with huge challenges regarding services due to shrinking resources. Utilizing data to make informed decisions about critical needs in communities as well as evaluating the effectiveness of existing programs assists communities in making wise investments during good economic times and more importantly during tough economic times. Data informed decision-making is a cornerstone of the planning-implementation-evaluation process. The PfS manual suggests that 'successful use of the PfS Model is based on an unwavering commitment to data-informed decisions' and the PfS Academy training and coaching support underscores this critical model component. This commitment to data informed decision-making notwithstanding, the realities of locating, analyzing, and using actual data is a significant challenge for many Councils. Data from local, state, and federal administrative systems often

require manipulation and modification to be useful. If available at all, data from locally administered or state-

sponsored surveys are often designed for specific issues and populations and may, therefore, be of limited use.

Given the importance of data to make informed decisions, PfS Academy staff decided to focus specific attention on increasing the data capacities of interested Councils. Four regional training sessions were conducted, the focus of which was the nuts-and-bolts of data analysis – understanding how to get data into a analyzable format, how to use dedicated statistical software to examine and report results, and how to use scanning software to support the collection of data specific to Council needs. For many attendees, this material was completely new but most discovered that the technical skills required to become a competent data analyst are not that unrealistically difficult. Follow-up conversations with Councils indicated that they were using workshop skills to address critical local data needs.

Contact: Jerry Bean, CLEX Data Capacity Consultant
614-848-5134 or 614-570-0458
JerryBean@columbus.rr.com

FREE RESOURCES

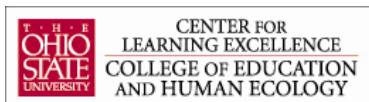
Grantwriting Resources- The Governor's Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives has compiled information, guidelines and tips for those organizations writing grants
<http://governor.ohio.gov/fbci/Resources/GrantWriting/tabid/226/Default.aspx>

Grants.gov- receive notifications of new grant opportunity postings and updates
http://www.grants.gov/applicants/email_subscription.jsp

The Grantsmanship Center News and Magazine Archives- articles related to proposal writing and grantseeking
<http://www.tqci.com/magazine/proposal.shtml>



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