

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 464 193

UD 034 980

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TITLE Implementing the Values and Strategies of Family to Family.
Family to Family: Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care.
INSTITUTION Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.
PUB DATE 2001-11-00
NOTE 69p.; For other reports in the Family to Family: Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care series, see ED 440 182-188.
AVAILABLE FROM Annie E. Casey Foundation, 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. Tel: 410-547-6600; Fax: 410-547-6624; Web site: <http://www.aecf.org>.
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Welfare; Community Involvement; Cooperative Planning; *Foster Care; *Foster Family; Participative Decision Making; Program Development; Strategic Planning; Teamwork

ABSTRACT

This guide helps child welfare agencies and their partners craft more family-focused and neighborhood-based service systems. It suggests a framework that agencies can use to assess their current policies and practices and develop plans to integrate Family to Family values, principles, and strategies into existing initiatives and activities. Family to Family is a strategic approach to systems change that enlists four strategies for restructuring and strengthening the child welfare system: foster family recruitment and support planning, timely decision making around placement, building community partnerships, and using data to track and improve agency performance. Drawing on the efforts of several early Family to Family sites and the original Family to Family tools, this guide describes site activities and approaches to help agencies begin to change practice and realign their system. Seven appendixes present Family to Family compatibility with the Adoption and Safe Families Act and Child and Family Services reviews; Family to Family strategic planning questions; steps for creating and mapping longitudinal data files; experiences of children entering child welfare custody 1996-2000; Family to Family site coordinator job description; best practices for out-of-home placement (preparing the child); and family group conferencing and team decision making. (SM)

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Family **TO** Family

TOOLS FOR
Rebuilding Foster Care

Implementing the Values and Strategies of *Family to Family*

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

The production of this publication for the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) involved the collaborative efforts of John Mattingly from AECF and many child welfare professionals from *Family to Family* sites across the county. Special acknowledgment goes to the primary author of this report, Betse Thielman, along with Suzanne Barnard and Ursula Krieger, from American Public Human Services Association (APHSA), for their efforts coordinating the production.

Special thanks to *Family to Family* technical assistants, Judith Goodhand, Lynn Usher, Barbara Needell, Daniel Webster, Denise Goodman, Patricia Rideout, Lajean Ray, Patricia Newell, and Michael Sanders whose invaluable information and advice were instrumental to the development of the Implementation Guide.

Additional insight and assistance were supplied by Peter Digre at Maximus, Mark Testa at the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, and Tony Peterson at the State Office of Services to Children and Families, Oregon Department of Human Services.

Finally, thanks to Betsey Rosenbaum, Nancy Stephens, and other APHSA staff for coordination of the final review, editing, and design stages of production

INTRODUCTION TO FAMILY TO FAMILY

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, a founder of United Parcel Service, and his sister and brothers, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms, and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

The grantmaking of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is grounded in two fundamental convictions. First, there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up to be capable adults. Second, the ability of families to raise their children is often inextricably linked to conditions in communities where they live. We believe that community-centered responses can better protect children, support families, and strengthen neighborhoods.

Helping distressed neighborhoods become environments that foster strong, capable families is a complex challenge that will require progress in many areas, including changes in the public systems designed to serve disadvantaged children and their families. In most states these systems:

- are remote from the communities and families they serve;
- focus narrowly on individual problems when families in crisis generally have multiple needs;
- tend to intervene only when problems become so severe that serious and expensive responses are the only options; and
- hold themselves accountable by the quantity of services offered rather than the effectiveness of the help provided.

In states and cities across the country, public child welfare systems are frequently in need of major change in each of these areas.

Background: The Current Challenges of Public Child Welfare

The nation's child welfare system is struggling:

1. The number of children in the care of the child welfare system has continued to grow, from 260,000 children in out-of-home care in the 1980s to more than 500,000 in recent years. This growth was driven by increases in the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect, as well as by the inability of child welfare systems to respond to the significantly higher level of need.
2. As these systems become overloaded, they are unable to safely return children to their families or find permanent homes for them. Children are therefore experiencing much longer stays in temporary settings.
3. Concurrently, the number of foster families nationally has dropped so that fewer than 50 percent of the children needing temporary care are now placed with

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foster families. As a result of this shortage, child welfare agencies in many urban communities have placed large numbers of children in group care or with relatives who may have great difficulty caring for them. An infant coming into care in some of our largest cities has a good chance of being placed in group care and without a permanent family for more than four years.

4. Finally, children of color are strongly overrepresented in this group of children placed in out-of-home care.

The good news is that during the past several years, a number of state and local child welfare systems have been able to reduce the number of children coming into care and to increase the number of children placed for adoption. However, the duration and severity of the challenges facing child welfare makes this an opportune time for states and communities to again challenge themselves to rethink the fundamental role of family foster care and to consider very basic changes.

The Foundation's interest in helping communities and public agencies confront these challenges is built on the belief that smarter and more effective responses are available to prevent child maltreatment and to respond more effectively when there is abuse or neglect. Often families can be helped to safely care for their children in their own communities and their own homes—if appropriate support, guidance and help is provided to them early enough. However, there are emergency situations that require the separation of a child from his or her family. At such times, every effort should be made to have the child live with caring and capable relatives or with another family within the child's own community—rather than in a restrictive institutional setting. Family foster care should be the next best alternative to a child's own home or to kinship care.

National leaders in family foster care and child welfare have come to realize, however, that without major restructuring, the family foster care system in the United States is not in a position to meet the needs of children who must be separated from their families. One indicator of the deterioration of the system has been the steady decline in the pool of available foster families while the number of children coming into care has increased. Furthermore, there has been an alarming increase in the percentage of children in placement who have special and exceptional needs. If the family foster care system is not significantly reconstructed, the combination of these factors may result in more disrupted placements, longer lengths of stay, fewer successful family reunifications, and more damage done to children by the very system the state has put in place to protect them.

A Response to the Challenge: The Family to Family Initiative

With the appropriate changes in policy, programs, and the use of resources, family foster care can respond to the challenges of out-of-home placement and be a less expensive and more humane choice for children and youth than institutions or other group settings. Family foster care reform, in and of itself, can yield important benefits for families and children—although such a rebuilding effort is only part of a larger agenda designed to address the overall well-being of children and families currently in need of child protective services.

Family to Family was designed in 1992 and has been field tested in communities across the country, including Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Maryland. Los Angeles County is in the early stages of initiative implementation. New York City has also adopted the neighborhood and family-centered principles of *Family to Family* as an integral part of its reform effort.

The **Family to Family** initiative has been an opportunity for states and communities to reconceptualize, redesign and reconstruct their foster care system to achieve the following new systemwide goals:

1. To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive and located primarily in the communities in which the children live.
2. To assure that scarce family foster-home resources are provided to all those children (but to only those children) who in fact must be removed from their homes.
3. To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs and group homes) by meeting the needs of many more children currently in those settings through relative or family foster care.
4. To increase the number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs.
5. To reunify children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished, based on the family's and children's needs—not simply the system's time frames.
6. To reduce the lengths of stay of children in out-of-home care.
7. To better screen children being considered for removal from the home to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family and to assess the needs of the children.
8. To decrease the overall rate of children coming into out-of-home care.
9. To involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts.

10. To become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes.

The new system envisioned by **Family to Family** is designed to:

- better screen children being considered for removal from home to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family and to assess the needs of the children;
- be targeted to routinely place children with families in their own neighborhoods;
- involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts;
- become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes;
- provide permanent families for children in a timely manner.

The Foundation's role has been to assist states and communities with a portion of the costs involved in both planning and implementing innovations in their service systems for children and families and to make available technical assistance and consultation throughout the process. The Foundation has also provided funds for development and for transitional costs that accelerate system change. States, however, have been expected to maintain the dollar base of their own investment and sustain the changes they implement when Foundation funding comes to an end. The Foundation is also committed to accumulating and disseminating both lessons from states' experiences and information on the achievement of improved outcomes for children. Therefore, it will play a major role in seeing that the results of the **Family to Family** initiative are actively communicated to all states and the federal government.

The Foundation is also committed to accumulating and disseminating both lessons from states' experiences and information on the achievement of improved outcomes for children.

Family to Family is now showing that good foster families can be recruited and supported in the communities from which children are coming into placement.

The states selected to participate in **Family to Family** are being funded to create major innovations in their family foster care system to reconstruct rather than merely supplement current operations. Such changes are certain to have major effects on the broader systems of services for children, including other services within the mental-health, mental retardation/developmental-disabilities, education, and juvenile justice systems, as well as the rest of the child welfare system. In most states, the foster care system serves children who are also the responsibility of other program domains. For the initiative to be successful (to ensure, for example, that children are not inadvertently "bumped" from one system into another), representatives from each of these service systems are expected to be involved in planning and implementation at both the state and local level. These systems are expected to commit to the goals of the initiative, as well as redeploy resources (or priorities in the use of resources) and, if necessary, alter policies and practices within their own systems.

Current Status of Family to Family

At the outset of the initiative in 1992, the accepted wisdom among child welfare professionals was that a continuing decline in the numbers of foster families was unavoidable; that large, centralized, public agencies could not effectively partner with neighborhoods; that communities which have large numbers of children in care could not produce good foster families in any numbers; and that substantial increases in congregate care were inevitable. **Family to Family** is now showing that good foster families can be recruited and supported in the communities from which children are coming into placement. Further, dramatic increases in the overall number of foster families are possible, with corresponding decreases in the numbers of children placed in institutions, as well as in the resources allocated to such placements. Initial evaluation results are now available from the Foundation. Perhaps most important, **Family to Family** is showing that child welfare agencies can effectively partner with disadvantaged communities to provide better care for children who have been abused or neglected. Child welfare practitioners and leaders—along with neighborhood residents and leaders—are beginning to develop models, tools and specific examples (all built from experience) that can be passed on to other neighborhoods and agencies interested in such partnerships.

The Four Key Strategies of Family to Family

There are four core strategies at the heart of *Family to Family*:

- ❑ **Recruitment, Training and Support of Resource Families (Foster and Relative)**—Finding and maintaining local resources that can support children and families in their own neighborhoods by recruiting, training, and supporting foster parents and relative caregivers
- ❑ **Building Community Partnerships**—Partnering with a wide range of community organizations—beyond public and private agencies—in neighborhoods that are the source of high referral rates to work together toward creating an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system and helps to build stronger neighborhoods and stronger families
- ❑ **Team Decisionmaking**—Involving not just foster parents and caseworkers but also birth families and community members in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for the child and the adults who care for them
- ❑ **Self-Evaluation**—Using hard data linked to child and family outcomes to drive decisionmaking and show where change is needed and progress has been made

The Outcomes of Family to Family

States participating in the *Family to Family* initiative are asked to commit themselves to achieving the following outcomes:

1. A reduction in the number/proportion of children served in institutional and congregate care.
2. A shift of resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child- and family-serving systems.
3. A decrease in the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement.
4. An increase in the number/proportion of planned reunifications.
5. A decrease in the number/proportion of re-entries into care.
6. A reduction in the number of placement moves experienced by children in care.
7. An increase in the number/proportion of siblings placed together.
8. A reduction in the total number/rate of children served away from their own families.

In sum, *Family to Family* is not a pilot, nor a fad, nor the latest new “model” for child welfare work. Rather, it is a set of value-driven principles that guide a tested group of strategies that, in turn, are implemented by a practical set of tools for everyday use by administrators, managers, field workers, and families.

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WHY A FAMILY TO FAMILY IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE?

This Implementation Guide has been developed as a practical resource for child welfare agencies and their partners to use in crafting a more family-focused and neighborhood-based service system. It suggests a framework that agencies can use to assess their current policies and practices and develop plans to integrate *Family to Family* values, principles, and strategies into existing initiatives and activities.

Drawing on the efforts and accomplishments of several of the early *Family to Family* sites—as well as the original *Family to Family* tools that provide strategies for meeting *Family to Family* goals—the Implementation Guide describes site activities and approaches that can help agencies begin to change practice and realign their system.

The Implementation Guide is not prescriptive—that is, it allows for variation in design and content of *Family to Family* program development, depending on the mix of site resources and circumstances. However, it centers its work on the four *Family to Family* strategies—foster family recruitment and support planning, timely decision-making around placement, building community partnerships, and using data to track and improve agency performance.

The Implementation Guide also recognizes that implementation is a complex, long-term process that occurs in small increments. In addition, many systems are already engaged in systems reform and have certain building blocks in place—such as community-based service initiatives, strengths and needs based service planning, or family decisionmaking structures. In these cases, the Implementation Guide's framework allows agencies to select or undertake new implementation steps that begin at their own "starting point" and fit the unique characteristics of their child welfare system.

D E T E R M I N I N G A G E N C Y C O M P A T I B I L I T Y

Family to Family is a strategic approach to systems change. Integrating the values and strategies of *Family to Family* often provides the impetus or catalyst for fundamental changes in policy, program management and practice at every level of the system. Designed to build on one another and inform all other aspects of child welfare practice, the *Family to Family* principles and strategies prompt agencies to re-assess and align policy, program management, and practice with the goal of improving outcomes for children and families within their communities.

Family to Family enlists four strategies for restructuring and strengthening the child welfare system. The four major strategies are designed to prompt major changes in four key areas of child welfare. They include:

- strengthening agency use of data to improve program performance and build agency capacity;
- improving the decisionmaking process that ensures safety and guides permanency planning;
- strengthening the available network of foster families through neighborhood recruitment and retention strategies along with redefining the traditional roles of foster parents;
- building community partnerships and neighborhood-based services for children and families.

Self-Evaluation – Data Gathering, Analysis, and Routine Use

Family to Family calls for an investment in the necessary time, energy, and resources to measure results for children and families and to make adjustments in response to them. A key premise of *Family to Family* is that improved data collection and analysis will contribute to effective planning and implementation of needed programmatic and practice changes. Consequently, *Family to Family* calls for each of its sites, as well as their community partners, to make a significant investment in learning more about the children and families they serve (e.g., identifying the characteristics of children entering care, the length and number of placements, and the number of foster and adoptive families) to build a performance baseline to use as a point of departure in each site's effort to assess its own progress. This self-evaluation process provides both an indicator of performance and a mechanism to identify key problems or areas in needing improvement. Conversely, in the absence of a solid self-evaluation process, agency administrators are unable to judge the effectiveness of their programs and target services to better meet the needs of children and families. The following are outcomes that should be tracked and evaluated.

Table 1: Self-Evaluation and Use of Data

Child Welfare Challenges

Older, mainframe-based "legacy" management information systems may not provide a direct flow from intake to assessment and investigation to out-of-home care information.

Management information systems often are "transaction-based," organized around an individual child or provider, e.g., services provided over time to a particular child.

Legacy systems often are designed to track federal and state reporting requirements. Some states and communities have enhanced their existing information systems to track self-evaluation, state and local data and processes.

Management information systems generally do not include the dimensions and scope of data required for tracking outcomes and self-evaluation. Summarizing large numbers of individual reports for a single analysis takes a significant amount of resources.

Information fields frequently lack uniform definitions and usage.

Highly specialized Information Technology professionals usually collect and analyze data for a select audience; reorganization of individual child data into cohorts takes additional time and money.

Agency collects data that meet federal criteria.

Information on a child's needs and the services available to meet those needs are located in a variety of places.

Community and media are challenged to interpret different forms of data on children's needs.

Family to Family Approach

Self-evaluation system extricates and reorganizes existing data extracts to accommodate flexible statistical use.

Self-evaluation systems are "events-based," focusing on an event during a particular date range, e.g., the number of children entering foster care each year for the last five years.

Self-evaluation systems track outcomes-related information pertaining to state, local, or individual manager goals.

Data extracts allow for manipulation and cross-tabulation of data.

Self-evaluation team develops common definitions and terms of usage.

Local managers access data directly.

Self-evaluation teams identify specific program goals at the state and/or local level by which to measure the effect of services.

The self-evaluation system integrates extensive information on children's demographic information, including special needs, sibling groups, placement in proximity to home, etc.

Community and media witness graphical data about where children are placed and what they need to remain in their own community.

The Outcomes of Family to Family

1. Reduce the number/proportion of children served in institutional and congregate care.
2. Shift resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child- and family-serving systems.
3. Decrease the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement.
4. Increase the number/proportion of planned reunifications.
5. Decrease the number/proportion of re-entries into care.
6. Reduce the number of placement moves experienced by children in care.
7. Increase the number/proportion of siblings placed together.
8. Reduce the total number/rate of children served away from their own families.

Fortunately, federal efforts to establish reporting standards through Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System(s) (AFCARS) and enhance child welfare information systems under Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System(s) (SACWIS) creates an environment receptive to and supportive of *Family to Family's* emphasis on self-evaluation (see Appendix I). Many sites are fine-tuning existing data to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the service system, as well as collecting new data that captures more precisely the experiences of children in care. Sites are finding ways to use both sorts of data to measure progress toward their identified child and family outcomes.¹

Self-evaluation impacts each of the other *Family to Family* strategies. Self-evaluation supports community involvement by enabling the child welfare system to communicate crucial information to a lay audience in a way they can understand and use. For

instance, geographical information systems (also described as "desktop mapping") graphically depicts that children placed in neighborhood foster care remain within the community, whereas children placed in group or treatment care are often far from the community.

Use of data also allows agencies to target foster home recruitment by profiling the communities from which children enter care, as well as the communities where current resource families are located and their characteristics and capacity to serve the child welfare population. Current *Family to Family* sites are hopeful that future data will track the process of recruiting and retaining resource families from the first phone call to their dropping out by finding out who is leaving and why, and then addressing the "why."

Finally, data supports team decisionmaking by showing how many children are entering care and from which communities. Using this information, agencies then are able to hire a sufficient number of facilitators, locate sites to hold meetings, and develop contracts with community agencies from the "high placement" communities to ensure their representation at team decisionmaking meetings.

Team Decisionmaking

Although child safety assessments are made continuously throughout the life of a child welfare case, some of the most crucial decisions are made during the earliest intake and investigation phases. In this regard, *Family to Family* complements the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). ASFA sends a clear message that safety should be the paramount consideration in all placement and permanency decisions and also reaffirms the importance of reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families. In addition, ASFA's shortened time frames make comprehensive assessment and early service planning even more critical.

Self-evaluation impacts each of the other Family to Family strategies.

Table 2: Team Decisionmaking

Child Welfare Challenges

Child protective services worker and supervisor make placement decision and are accountable for the outcome.

Placement planning and intervention begin after the child is placed.

Family of origin is not always involved in helping to create safety and permanency plan for the child.

Caseworker obtains case information through various sources that may not be well-coordinated; involved parties have no forum for response or for working together.

Supports and services for the child and/or family are sought out according to the worker's knowledge of resources. Services, therefore, may be located far from the community and difficult for the parents to access. Supports and services may unwittingly duplicate work or allow gaps.

Foster parents are not usually involved with the birth parents.

Family to Family Approach

A team makes the placement decision and is jointly accountable for the outcome.

Placement planning and intervention (ideally) occur before the child is placed and emphasize safety planning and elimination of placement disruption.

Family of origin (including extended family) involved immediately to develop a safety and placement plan based on the best interests of the child.

All parties are present at the same table to address the child's safety and permanency issues, present their opinions, and identify resources that could be employed immediately in support of the child and family.

Designated community members from the family's home neighborhood attend the team decisionmaking meeting to provide support and coordinate accessible, local, wraparound services to the child and family.

Foster parents are present and available to support child's connection to birth family and reunification efforts.

Family to Family addresses similar issues of safety and early permanency planning by restructuring placement decisionmaking on a team decisionmaking model. Team decisionmaking meetings are held to make all critical placement-related decisions, including prior to actual removal of the child or the shelter care hearing, other placement changes, and reunification or other permanent moves. When a critical placement event is planned, the lead social worker convenes family members, foster parents (if the child already

is in care), prospective service providers, professional child welfare staff, and designated community members from the family's home neighborhood to decide whether placement of the child will occur. By involving a team of diverse representatives and stakeholders in placement-related decisions, team decisionmaking meetings play a gatekeeping role by ensuring consistency of and accountability within the decisionmaking process.

While team decisionmaking meetings are primarily focused on making the best decision about removal, placement moves, reunifica-

tion, or other permanent plans, the inclusive team approach accomplishes important secondary goals as well. Team decisionmaking:

- ❑ improves the identification of family safety and risk factors;
- ❑ engages community resources to support the family;
- ❑ facilitates the family's understanding of what it needs to do to address the child's safety and permanency needs;
- ❑ initiates the concurrent planning process, when appropriate;
- ❑ involves a sharing of all information about the family that pertains to the safety, permanency, and well-being needs of the child, as well as mitigating family strengths and needs;
- ❑ improves safety assessments, promotes consensus about permanency plans, and results in more appropriate design of in-home or out-of-home interventions and supports;
- ❑ offers immediate access to services that ensure safety without placement.

All of these activities meet the reasonable efforts standards set forth by law. Team decisionmaking also meets the Child and Family Services Review criteria for jointly developing with parents written case plans for each child.

Team decisionmaking also serves as an effective permanency strategy in those cases where children must be placed outside the home. For these children, foster homes—preferably neighborhood-based foster homes—must be found. Once children are in care, foster parents become essential members of the team decisionmaking process. Including foster parents on the team enables them to learn from the birth parent about the child's needs and support the birth parent's efforts to achieve reunification. This

cooperation also improves the likelihood that the first placement will be the child's only placement.

Recruitment, Retention, and Support of Foster Families

Family to Family uses neighborhood-based foster care as a bridge to permanence. Recognizing the need to nurture strong emotional bonds between parent and child, *Family to Family* builds a network of family foster care that is neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and places children primarily in the communities in which they live.

Using this approach, and consistent with ASFA guidelines, foster care is viewed as a temporary extension of the child's family, not a replacement for it.

Family to Family partners treat foster families as professional members of the child's team. Foster families receive enhanced training and support to care for the often complex needs of their foster children. They participate in the team decisionmaking meetings and therefore shape the critical decisions made on behalf of the children for whom they care. Foster families also are trained to become a resource for and partners with birth parents—working to assure birth families remain connected with their children and, where possible, are prepared for a safe reunification. Since the foster families reside in the same communities from which the children come, they have firsthand knowledge of indigenous community resources to support the child's and family's needs.

Foster parents serve primarily as partners in reunification by supporting and maintaining the child's connection to the birth family. However, statistics indicate that foster families are also the primary adoptive resource when reunification cannot occur.

Family to Family encourages combined recruitment and training of prospective foster and adoptive families. For this reason, some

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The family-focused, community-based practice advocated by Family to Family also complements and supports federal mandates.

sites are exploring concurrent licensing of foster homes to include adoption requirements, in the event the child eventually requires a permanent home away from family of origin.² This approach ensures that the child's first placement is the only placement.

Family to Family uses foster parents from the community as recruiters and ensures that recruitment is community-owned, culturally sensitive, and reflective of the children entering care. The agency enlists foster families as the primary recruiters of other foster families, which meets another statutory child welfare mandate. The Multi-Ethnic Placement Act requires child welfare agencies to diligently recruit foster and adoptive parents who reflect the ethnic and racial makeup of children in the state in need of out-of-home care.

Family to Family encourages the use of nontraditional recruitment efforts to support the increase of foster homes able to meet the needs of children requiring out-of-home care. This broadens eligibility requirements, shortens length of time for home studies, and increases response time to adoption and foster home inquiries.

Family to Family encourages community supports for all families caring for children in agency custody, including kinship families. *Family to Family* also places a strong emphasis on empowering extended family members to care for related children as a means to lessen the likelihood of long-term system involvement for children in care.

Accessing Support Within the Community: Actively Involving the Community

No one agency has the resources or expertise to provide a comprehensive response to the needs of families coming to the attention of the child welfare system. Likewise, poverty, substance abuse, domestic violence, mental health issues, and other

complex social problems affect us all—whether we live in communities where these issues are endemic, provide a service to address an issue or pay taxes to ensure social supports exist. Child welfare agencies need help to protect and support families and communities, from which children come into care, have that help available.

Community partnership is an essential element of *Family to Family* and a strategy designed to enlist neighborhood resources on behalf of families who live in and around those neighborhoods. This strategy connects many of the community's resources to further assist public agency efforts to meet another of ASFA's mandates—the use of reasonable efforts to prevent placement and reunite families when possible. Promoting multiple partnerships with private agencies, neighborhood groups, and neighborhood members facilitates the placement of children as frequently as possible within their own communities. Extended families and caring community members have much to offer children and families who come to the attention of child welfare agencies. Children benefit because they remain in their neighborhoods and schools, stay in foster care for shorter periods, and have more contact with their birth families while in care.

The family focused, community-based practice advocated by *Family to Family* also complements and supports federal mandates. For instance, it corresponds with the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program reauthorized under ASFA by promoting a focus on family strengths and community resources and supports. The program requires states to devote significant portions of program funds for community-based family support services, family preservation services, time-limited reunification services, and adoption promotion services. In addition, *Family to Family's* partnership with the community meets the Child and Family Services Review

Table 3: Foster Parent Recruitment and Retention

Child Welfare Challenges

Recruitment and retention of resource families belongs to a specific agency staff person.

Children are matched to the "right" foster parents.

Potential applicants for foster or adoptive parenting may not receive clear information about the needs of waiting children.

Foster family and adoptive family recruitment generally are done separately, although states and communities are beginning to implement combined recruitment.

General recruitment strategy uses TV spots, general literature, and generic marketing methods.

Candidates who are not ready to foster or adopt, or who are legally ineligible, have few options to support foster children and families.

Agency staff train foster parents.

After training, foster parents receive inconsistent follow-up and support besides required ongoing in-service training.

Foster parents are uninvolved in case decisionmaking.

Foster parents frequently lack information on their foster child's needs or services available to meet those needs.

No standard exists for facilitating or maintaining contact between foster parents and the child's family of origin.

Family to Family Approach

Recruitment and retention are every staff members' job.

Nurturing families are coached, trained, and supported in developing the skills required to meet children's needs.

Family to Family sites explain children's needs and identify and target individuals, groups, neighborhoods, and communities capable of meeting those needs.

Foster and adoptive family recruitment are done as a unified effort since a significant proportion of foster parents ultimately adopt legally free children for whom they have cared.

Targeted recruitment strategy locates families from the same communities from which children come into care.

Candidates who are not ready to foster or adopt, or who are legally ineligible, are recruited to provide other supportive child welfare activities such as respite care.

Foster youth, birth parents, adoptive and veteran foster parents assist in training new foster parents.

Foster parents receive regular phone calls, notes, invitations to participate in agency program and policy decisions, etc., so that the potential for placement disruptions is minimized.

Foster parents are key partners in team decisionmaking meetings where the case plan is developed and monitored.

Foster parents receive extensive information, training, and supports to meet their child's needs.

Foster parents are trained as partners in preserving children's connections to birth families and coaching birth parents toward reunification.

Table 4: Community Partnership

Child Welfare Challenges

Unique family needs and community resource availability are not linked.

Child welfare agency retains all child protective services responsibilities and may not involve community or other "external" participants.

Agency staff harbor a "bunker mentality" in response to sometimes unfair criticism of child welfare practices and lack of knowledge of the community and its resources.

Placement, program, and policy decisions usually occur in small, structured meetings dominated by professionals.

Partnerships are limited to traditional service providers and other governmental agencies that offer a standard set of services and supports.

Credentialed professionals are in charge and decide what types of help are available, i.e., therapy, evaluation, treatment, aftercare.

Categorical funding limits service provision to specific issues.

Organization-focused agenda.

Agency retains ultimate responsibility for making placement decisions. Community rarely participates.

Agency retains sole responsibility and accountability for marshaling resources for children and families at risk of abuse and/or neglect.

Agency staff are centrally located, often far from the communities they serve. Staff work a 9 AM – 5 PM business day. As a result, they may have incomplete information about the community and its resources.

Family to Family Approach

Recognizes and builds on community and family strengths to meet the child's needs.

Child welfare agency retains legally mandated child protection responsibilities but shares family preservation and support activities with community partners.

Staff feel safe in neighborhoods where they are familiar with the geography and the community members.

Placement, program, and some policy decisions occur in open, inclusive meetings that allow for flexibility and various agenda items.

Partnerships combining traditional providers, government agencies, and nontraditional resources offer a diverse set of services, supports, and outcomes to meet the unique needs of families in the community.

Paraprofessionals and the community have key responsibilities for making program and case decisions and provide "natural help," i.e., advocacy, moral and spiritual guidance, community organization.

Wraparound funding allows for flexible, seamless services to support more family needs.

Agency shares its own agenda, requests help in recruiting foster families, and mutually supports birth and foster families with community partners.

Community participates in making placement decisions, including when not to remove. Agency retains ultimate authority to make a placement decision if the group cannot reach consensus.

The agency contributes resources to the neighborhoods that assist in expanding the services, support, and resources for neighborhood families.

Child welfare staff are present in the community where they sometimes are co-located with neighborhood services and receive geographically assigned cases.

criterion for engaging in consultation, coordination, and progress reviews with individuals and organizations in the service delivery system.

Family to Family's focus on developing neighborhood support systems is linked to its other strategies for change. Once the child welfare agency has a sense of family needs, based on the demographic profile and service system analysis it has undertaken, it can use this information to approach the community for assistance. The community may respond by offering additional information on resources unknown to the traditional child welfare system or determine ways to marshal resources to support at-risk families so their children do not need placement. If provided with resources, the community also may create needed services based on what the child welfare agency's data has identified as missing.³

Foster family recruitment and retention focuses on the neighborhood. Foster families find it easier to maintain the child's connection to the birth family—and continuity of supports such as medical services and education—when the foster family lives only a few blocks away. And, as mentioned above,

community members are involved in decisions related to placement, removal, or reunification by virtue of being part of the team decisionmaking meeting process.

Community participation in these meetings enables family members to have an ally there, as well as a link to indigenous community resources.

Implementing *Family to Family* will most likely mean a shift in philosophy, practice, policy, and legislation. Due to the importance and complexity of such changes, there is no one *Family to Family* site that has yet mastered every strategy nor accomplished all goals for improving the lot of its children and families. What sites have discovered, however, is that their reformed practices positively impact—and are affected by—the broader environment supporting the child welfare system. Later, this Implementation Guide discusses institutionalizing *Family to Family* at the highest levels, including changing the child welfare system's infrastructure to sustain the program, evaluating policies to make them more congruent with practice, amending child protection laws to support best practice, and marketing agency successes. More directly, however, the Implementation Guide addresses the immediate steps a new site can undertake to initiate *Family to Family*.

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PUTTING FAMILY TO FAMILY PRINCIPLES TO WORK

Public child welfare administrators, as well as their community partners, have encouraged the codification of the important steps to implementing *Family to Family*. The steps outlined below summarize some of the tactics listed in the original *Family to Family* tools. To minimize repetition—and acknowledge that a summary cannot do justice to the depth of content of those original tools—this Implementation Guide primarily concentrates on providing additional strategies that “veteran” *Family to Family* sites have learned are critical to successful implementation. New sites should keep in mind that these steps may occur simultaneously and must be tailored to fit the individual community and its child welfare system.

Take the lead

The evaluation of *Family to Family*'s implementation in the original sites found that a common element, which predicted success, was the presence of a strong child welfare leader who initiated and championed *Family to Family*⁴ reforms. *Family to Family* leaders are integral to the process of moving the child welfare system toward reform, both within the child welfare agency and in the larger community. Strong, committed, and active leadership is essential to develop the vision of what *Family to Family* will accomplish for children and families. Strong leadership will also:

- lead the planning process;
- bring staff on board with *Family to Family* values and principles;
- engage and develop champions within the agency;
- ensure that policy, program, and field operations work in concert to implement the program;
- engage community partners and;
- move the agency toward using data to evaluate outcomes for families and agency services.

Establish a steering committee

Once the child welfare leader has a clear idea of how *Family to Family* can promote improved outcomes for children and families in the state, a steering committee should be established. The steering committee consists of child welfare agency administrative and line staff, Information Technology staff, other agency partners, foster parents, community leaders, tribal leaders, and other constituents who have a stake in the success or failure of the child welfare system.

- The leader outlines the scope of work the steering committee will address as part of the *Family to Family* reform, as well as which decisions are strictly the responsibility of the agency.⁵ The steering committee's initial charge is to determine whether the agency is suited to becoming a *Family to Family* site.

- ❑ The steering committee assesses the unique context of the site's child welfare system, including current partners, ongoing reforms, and specific experiences of successes and challenges in implementing best practices. The steering committee then determines which parts of the organizational structure best support immediate implementation of *Family to Family*.
- ❑ The steering committee will then present it's assessment and make recommendations to the agency leadership regarding how the child welfare agency can successfully implement *Family to Family*.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation site visit

The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) provides consultation and technical assistance to selected sites implementing *Family to Family*. To maximize the knowledge and guidance provided by the *Family to Family* technical assistance team, sites undertake a number of steps to prepare for and participate in on-site consultation. Four to six *Family to Family* staff—including a site team leader—usually participate in a site visit, which takes between 1 to 3 days. While all site visits call for some preparation, the first visit requires a comprehensive analysis of a potential site's capacity to successfully implement *Family to Family*.

Preparation

- ❑ The child welfare administrator identifies the point person. This person represents the steering committee's perspective and is responsible for carrying out the *Family to Family* planning, assessment, proposal development, and implementation.
- ❑ When preparing staff and community partners for the first site visit, the agency's leadership reinforces that the goal of the visit is mutual assessment. The Casey

Foundation assesses the site's capacity for implementation of *Family to Family*, while the site assesses the *Family to Family* philosophy for a "fit" with its own goals and values.

- ❑ Agency leaders ensure that preliminary data that might be used for later self-evaluation is collected and reviewed as part of the assessment. During the actual site visit, both *Family to Family* team members and agency staff include representatives familiar with data and self-evaluation strategies for measuring agency progress toward *Family to Family* goals.
- ❑ All agency staff involved in the site visit read the appropriate *Family to Family* tools prior to the meeting.
- ❑ The agency organizes focus groups. Agency leadership invites community partners and other crucial stakeholders to attend a large meeting with AECF staff and then participate in stakeholder focus groups.

Participation

When the AECF technical assistance team comes to the state for its first consultation, it learns about the agency's capacity to become a *Family to Family* site.

- ❑ AECF holds a preparatory meeting. The AECF team meets with agency leaders to explain the process of becoming a *Family to Family* site and to outline the challenges which *Family to Family* will present.
- ❑ Agency leaders coordinate a meeting of site staff and stakeholders with the AECF team. At this meeting, the AECF team and agency leaders explain the vision of *Family to Family*, address broad questions, and reinforce the concept of ongoing mutual assessment. Part of this ongoing assessment takes into account who shows up at the inaugural meeting—foster parents? private agencies? community people?

The Annie E. Casey Foundation provides consultation and technical assistance to selected sites implementing Family to Family.

These focus groups provide input to the AECF team regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the child welfare system.

the judiciary? legal representatives of child welfare clients? youth in care? parents? parent advocates? Is there broad representation of all stakeholders at different levels of the system? Who is missing?

- Agency leaders identify and coordinate focus groups of agency staff at all levels—especially front-line staff—as well as groups that include parents private providers, foster parents, and other stakeholders. These focus groups provide input to the AECF team regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the child welfare system. Ideally, focus group participants previously will have attended the large stakeholder meeting on **Family to Family**. The AECF team will have at least two assessment staff at each focus group, as well as someone who can answer questions about data and self-evaluation.
- The AECF team facilitates the focus groups. Participants are asked to identify and evaluate the key functions of the agency and how they work together. Crucial questions include the following:
 - How do you screen intake calls?
 - How do you initiate investigations?
 - What does your risk and safety assessment entail?
 - Where are children placed when they are removed and how are the police involved?
 - How does the handoff from the investigator to the ongoing worker go?
 - How does the ongoing worker interact with the community?
 - How do you develop and support placement resources?
 - What do foster and kinship families say are the strengths and weaknesses of their agency support system?
 - How is the recruitment, training, and licensing process organized?

- Following the focus groups, the AECF team regroups and arrives at a tentative assessment of the “fit” between **Family to Family** and the agency
- The AECF team then convenes an exit meeting. This meeting allows agency leaders and the team to present and discuss the preliminary assessment and to outline next steps.

Toward a Partnership

After the site visit and the mutual assessment process, the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the agency jointly determine whether to pursue **Family to Family** implementation. The process usually includes the following steps:

- AECF sends the child welfare leader a letter outlining the operational and other actions the agency needs to consider if it chooses to become a site. If the agency and its partners elect to join **Family to Family**, the child welfare leader responds with a letter committing to a course of action.
- Next, site staff conduct a peer visit to another **Family to Family** site that is successfully implementing the four strategies.
- Following this “peer review” visit, the new site collaborates with AECF to develop its proposal for implementing **Family to Family**.
- After AECF reviews and approves the proposal, a letter of agreement is sent in response to the site proposal. The Foundation and the site hold a technical assistance planning session where they take a targeted look at the **Family to Family** plans and outline related technical assistance needs for six months or a year.
- The AECF team responds to ongoing requests for consultation and assistance on an as-needed basis and will make quarterly

site visits to assess progress with the site's implementation plan (see below). The *Family to Family* team also holds periodic consultation and assessment meetings to discuss strategies and progress.

Develop the implementation plan

The steering committee oversees the development and implementation of the plan for executing *Family to Family*. This plan incorporates the four *Family to Family* strategies and assesses the continuum of child welfare services offered in the state or locality, as well as which services the site would like to improve or add. It also considers how the agency might adapt current operations in light of the four *Family to Family* strategies.⁶ To initiate their planning process, veteran *Family to Family* sites addressed a number of questions, which are included below.

Family to Family Strategic Planning Questions

- What should the site's child welfare effort look like five years from now?
- What are our goals for the *Family to Family* program in our state/community? How do these goals fit into our vision for how child welfare should look in five years? How do they incorporate the four *Family to Family* strategies? How do they fit with current reform initiatives? What other goals do we want to address?
- How should service design and delivery look? What currently happens to a case as it moves through the system, versus how we would like it to proceed?
- Who are our current partners? Who else needs to be involved to implement *Family to Family*?

- What training do staff and our partners require to implement new methods?⁷
- How do we revise policy to reflect these changes?⁸
- What barriers—including outmoded programs and practices—do we need to overcome to achieve these goals? How do we plan to address these barriers?
- On which strengths in our child welfare system do we want to build to achieve these goals?
- What data do we have about where we are in achieving these goals? What additional data do we need to assess progress?
- What are the principles that will guide our work? How do we communicate them in a concrete way to staff, community partners, families, foster parents, the media, and other stakeholders?

What are the principles that will guide our work?

FIELD NOTES: Use What You've Got

Oregon's State Office for Services to Children and Families (SCF) discovered that many of its current operations are congruent with *Family to Family* and readily accommodate its implementation. For instance, SCF has developed county-based reports on agency progress toward the six ASFA outcomes and plans to use this process to monitor *Family to Family* progress as well. SCF also uses its existing needs-based service planning committees, which are located in each branch, to serve as *Family to Family* advisory committees.

Political leaders can be instrumental in educating the media and others on Family to Family.

**FIELD NOTES:
Best Practice
Prevents Litigation**

A legal advocate involved with a number of *Family to Family* sites notes that most of the lawsuits and consent decrees in place in child welfare agencies occur because of failure to develop and maintain safe, nurturing placements for children in need of out-of-home care. She contends that overuse of shelters, placement disruption, discontinuity of education and medical care, and parental failure to visit can be countered with *Family to Family's* goal of placing children in their own communities of origin.

**FIELD NOTES:
Building Alliances
with Private Providers**

In Cuyahoga County, the agency administrator met biweekly with private providers to discuss the core values that drove service delivery. When the group identified that placing children in least-restrictive settings was a shared value, she asked for their assistance in reducing reliance on residential treatment care. Likewise, Detroit's child welfare system places 80% of its foster children in contracted care. The agency and providers agreed to a list of 10 principles about best practices for children and families, and the agency attached the list as a contract addendum to maintain the mutual focus of "stepping down" placements.

- What is the time frame for implementation?
- How will we maintain our focus on the planning and implementation of *Family to Family*, especially as change or crises occur?
- What types of consultation, resources, and other assistance do we need?
- What is our budget for accomplishing *Family to Family* reforms? How will this effort be financed once the Annie E. Casey Foundation funds are used? What is our contingency plan in the event of a budget shortfall?

Once the steering committee and administrator have determined that the agency will pursue becoming a *Family to Family* site, they contact the Annie E. Casey Foundation to share their implementation plan.

Identify critical stakeholders to involve in *Family to Family* implementation.

In addition to the main participants in the initial Annie E. Casey Foundation site visit, the steering committee and agency leadership need to focus marketing and involvement strategies on other key political and administrative constituents.

- Educate and involve middle managers in the child welfare agency immediately and repeatedly because of their line authority over field staff and resources.
- Obtain support from political and opinion leaders such as county commissioners, legislators, and the Governor's office. The steering committee can begin by discussing *Family to Family* principles, even if a strategic plan is not yet in place. Political leaders can be instrumental in educating the media and others on *Family to Family*.
- Identify the different leaders in the community who can assist in implementing *Family to Family*, e.g., foster/adoptive

parents, community partners, service providers, judges, children's and parents' attorneys, clergy, biological families, former foster kids, and PTA representatives.

- ❑ Ensure that other critical public human service systems are involved in the planning stages especially mental health and drug and alcohol agencies.
- ❑ In some states and counties, private agencies that provide foster and/or group care are not family- or neighborhood-based due to their specialized services. Some providers also may fear that *Family to Family* will undermine their role and economic interests, however providers have important knowledge and connections—via board representation, advocacy networks, and specialized services—that can be parlayed into a new role. For instance, some sites contracted with private providers to develop respite and childcare services for foster parents. Private providers have a lot of expertise and are often committed to better outcomes for children and families.

Build support among staff

Educating staff about *Family to Family*'s principles, philosophy, and strategies is an important element in successfully implementing and sustaining systemic change. Many administrators of the original sites said they did not spend enough time obtaining staff buy-in to the reform. *Family to Family* asks staff to do child welfare work in a very different way—including working effectively with families, neighborhoods and communities and sharing “decisionmaking” around placement. “While some staff will not share the values that *Family to Family* represents, most do want to see changes in the agency that will help them do their jobs better. However, there is likely to be a fair amount of skepticism, particularly on the part of those who have seen other change efforts fall

short of expectations.”⁹ Veteran sites suggest the following steps for overcoming skepticism and mobilizing staff to try out new ways of doing the work of child protection:

Develop Champions at All Levels of the Organization

- ❑ Use the experience and survival skills of “veteran” staff. Assign them a leadership role or ask them to consult on managing change.
- ❑ Familiarize middle managers and line staff with the initiative by articulating a clear vision of what *Family to Family* will look like in the community. Relentlessly tie the values and outcomes of *Family to Family* to the agency's stated mission. To emphasize this point, the original *Family to Family* site leaders state that, if they were to start again, they would dedicate more time early in the process to building middle managers' commitment to the principles of *Family to Family*. As reported in the Lessons Learned tool, “Leaders cannot accomplish all of the work; those in the middle are key to successful changes in front-line practice.”¹⁰
- ❑ Find and assign champions to promote each of the four key strategies.¹¹ These champions can be instigators for building in-house support and expertise.

Expect Action

- ❑ Agency leadership meets regularly with program managers about progress and next steps. Work groups stay focused on meeting short-term objectives. Meeting minutes are distributed.
- ❑ Link performance measures, promotion criteria, and development opportunities to *Family to Family* objectives.¹² Likewise, use turnover to bring in staff supportive of community work.¹³

Relentlessly tie the values and outcomes of Family to Family to the agency's stated mission.

Communicate how Family to Family builds on the agency's strengths and relates to what staff are already doing.

FIELD NOTES:

**Data Morphs
from Nemesis to Friend**

A child welfare administrator in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, promised that data gathering and analysis would help staff plan and provide improved services. Staff grumbled about this new expectation until the data helped them realize children were indeed moving through the system. When staff discovered that information they were able to see data as a useful tool to inform day to day practice.

FIELD NOTES:

**Acknowledge
the Milestones**

When long-term foster care rates decreased in one county, the agency hosted a party for staff, judges, and advocates. The celebration acknowledged everyone's contributions to the success and underscored the positive impact of collaboration on behalf of Cleveland's children and families.

Market Deliberately

Communicate how *Family to Family* builds on the agency's strengths and relates to what staff are already doing. In orientation sessions with new staff and foster parents, promote the vision of *Family to Family* as integral to the way that the agency does business.

- Return regularly, in public forums, to the core values underlying the agency's mission. An internal communications strategy could include profiling successes in agency newsletters, holding meetings with staff for exploring and making decisions, convening forums for sharing experiences, and establishing channels for prompt distribution of information and receipt of feedback on what has worked to promote *Family to Family* goals.
- Think through how the changes underway will affect each staff group. For instance, workers drive less when caseloads are geographically assigned. Staff feels safer in neighborhoods where community members and services are familiar. Team decisionmaking meetings distribute responsibility and ownership for case decisions and planning. Those same meetings also enable the agency to quickly meet ASFA and Children and Family Service Review requirements to develop a service plan, begin concurrent planning, undertake reasonable efforts, and involve stakeholders in case planning.
- Engage staff in conversations about what concrete resources they need to enact *Family to Family* principles. For instance, just a good map can help placement workers make neighborhood placements.¹⁴

Train for Performance

Help staff develop the necessary skills to work collaboratively with families.

- ❑ Help staff learn how to work collaboratively with the community, including understanding the community's concerns and developing cultural competence.

Celebrate Success

When the opportunity arises, take the time to celebrate the successes and the people who helped make them.

Gather data¹⁵

At the outset of implementing *Family to Family*, agency leadership forms an internal self-evaluation team. This team ensures that program and policy concerns drive data collection and analysis, and that data is used to meet the site's *Family to Family* goals. The team ensures that data gathering and analysis are continual and provide the basis for ongoing communications about progress. At a minimum, the team should consist of program staff, administrators, data analysts, and Information Technology staff to draw on their respective areas of knowledge, promote discussion among different units of the agency, and link data to program and policy decisions. When the team also includes community partners, it ensures data will be translated for wide use. The self-evaluation team also needs to consider the following when proceeding with the data collection and analysis:

Technological Considerations

- ❑ Harness technology to measure outcomes. This process entails tapping into information that is already collected in routine program operations, configuring these data into a longitudinal format, and using new tools such as Geographic Information System (GIS) software to understand current caseload and resource characteristics at the neighborhood level.
- ❑ Emphasize the use of longitudinal data as an alternative to "snapshots" of the caseload of children in custody on a given day. Caseload snapshots include

FIELD NOTES: Use What You've Got

Alabama integrated *Family to Family's* outcome orientation into its existing Quality Assurance process, which emphasized case reviews. This combined focus became the model for the current national Child and Family Service Review process.

FIELD NOTES: Longitudinal Data Show Truer Picture

New Mexico's "point in time" data system indicated that an average of 8% of children were placed in shelter care at a given time. When the state implemented a longitudinal analysis, however, it found that 40% of all children served by the agency had initially entered shelter care. This analysis inspired the agency to develop placement review teams, which ultimately shifted the reliance on shelter care and focused on more stable placements for children.

Cuyahoga County established an outcome of increasing kinship care placements, and its managers knew that staff were working hard to achieve this goal. However, over the course of a year, the data continued to reflect that kinship placements were static. When the team convened with a data analyst, it found it had been looking at "point in time" data that skewed to represent those kids who had been in care the longest, rather than longitudinal data that showed improvements in practice. The longitudinal data showed that kinship care placements were indeed on the rise.

When the team also includes community partners, it ensures data will be translated for wide use.

*Make data
user-friendly.*

**FIELD NOTES:
Bringing Data to Life**

In every site, Geographic Information System (GIS) software enabled agency staff to present geographic information according to a defined boundary, such as zip codes, school districts, or “natural” neighborhoods. Since maps are visually interesting, Geographic Information System (GIS) software allowed lay audiences to quickly grasp current caseload and resource characteristics at the neighborhood level. In addition, GIS can reveal trends that might not be as apparent using other methods of data presentation. For instance, a map might display neighborhoods that have the largest concentration of children removed for abuse or neglect and also where those children are placed.

Longitudinal data better reflect placement patterns and the percentage of children who fall into which type of placement. All *Family to Family* sites have summarized placement patterns and, as a result, have decreased placement moves across the board.¹⁸

Another data tool, the Population Profile Matrix, indicates at a glance the number of children receiving a certain type of care by a specific social service system. Such information might be most interesting to agencies trying to integrate services or a budget analyst trying to determine cost centers.

disproportionate numbers of children who have the longest lengths of stay and the most disruptive care. In contrast, longitudinal analysis allows sites to track the experiences of each child who comes into contact with the child welfare system. By following cohorts of children—such as all children with an initial substantiated report of abuse or neglect during a given year, or all children entering out-of-home care for the first time in a given year—states and communities involved in *Family to Family* have shown it is possible to create performance baselines and monitor future performance against those baselines.¹⁶ Steps for creating longitudinal data files are included in Appendix 3.

- ❑ Identify potential interactions among outcomes, also known as the “rebound effect,” in which there might be improvement in one area and decreased performance in another. The self-evaluation team needs to anticipate relationships among certain outcomes in setting performance targets. For instance, the average length of stay in out-of-home care may increase when the agency consistently uses team decision-making meetings, since the meetings ideally result in placing only those children with the most difficult problems and are, therefore, the most likely to remain in care the longest.¹⁷ The self-evaluation team should make its constituents aware of the potential repercussions of changes in policy and practice, acknowledging that success in one area may have unintended (but predictable) effects on related performance measures.

**The Horse Leads the Cart:
Program Needs Direct Data Collection
and Analysis**

- ❑ Support direct data collection and analysis. The team guides the Information Technology (IT) representative to identify what analytical tools, data, and staff

resources are in place in the agency now to build a performance baseline that will show history and current status with regard to key *Family to Family* outcomes. The IT representative also helps the team identify additional information to be gathered (for instance, many sites have indicated they need to electronically document the child's home address as well as the address of foster home placements). Finally, the IT representative assists with the identification of software and other technology that may be required.

- ❑ Make data user-friendly. Child welfare managers admit that interpreting and using data is usually an unnatural act for them. Their experience usually has been that existing data systems used by the agency were designed for other purposes and do not have the capacity to provide answers to critical program or policy questions. Therefore the team needs first to consider and prioritize what program information it needs, and then translate it into *Family to Family* outcome measures.

Market Information

- ❑ Use data to communicate examples of how *Family to Family* is progressing. The self-evaluation team identifies how the agency can demonstrate it is improving outcomes for children and families. Then staff responsible for communicating the agency's activities determines how to present and distribute information to reach the widest audience.

Directly address the influence of differences in race, culture, and power¹⁹

The differences in race, class, and authority of those in charge of the child welfare system when compared with those of their families and community partners are frequently an issue with both internal and external

FIELD NOTES: Statistics Indicate Program Snafus

Cuyahoga County analyzed why its long-term foster care population was so large. It found that, once placed in long-term foster care, children were never reassessed to determine if their current developmental needs and parent's situation had changed sufficiently to allow for reunification. As a result of reviewing this data, county administrators asked the courts to ensure that long-term foster care plans were re-evaluated, and that Family Decision Teams also periodically reviewed permanency plans for these children.

stakeholders. The value base of *Family to Family* involves a recognition that children of color are over-represented in the child welfare system, and most are from poor families and poor neighborhoods. For these reasons and because *Family to Family* strives to maintain children in their own communities, it is very important that the child welfare agency grapple with the causes of this overrepresentation. Some strategies that *Family to Family* sites have employed for addressing these issues are outlined below:

Evaluate Policy and Practice

- ❑ Determine if agency policy or practice implicitly assumes a white, middle-class, or otherwise "majority" standard for assessing children's safety and well being. For instance, agency policy may disallow placement of children into foster homes without a telephone, linking that form of communication with safety concerns. Families who cannot afford a telephone are therefore eliminated from consideration as foster care providers.

Use data to communicate examples of how Family to Family is progressing.

**FIELD NOTES:
Walk the Talk
on Cultural Diversity**

Community advocates from various sites note that successful *Family to Family* partnerships exhibit a strong commitment to respecting each stakeholder's origins. For instance, involving community partners in discussions about agency policy and practice changes, ensuring neighborhood representatives are present at team decisionmaking meetings, and guaranteeing staff and community members from diverse backgrounds attend trainings are tangible ways of showing respect and building relationships.

Provide cultural competence training to both agency staff and community members.

**FIELD NOTES:
There Are No "Bad"
Neighborhoods**

A community advocate involved in *Family to Family* emphasizes there is no such thing as a "bad" neighborhood. "Outsiders are the only ones who define a neighborhood in negative terms," she states. "My neighborhood has many strengths in terms of its history, diversity, local services, and community involvement." Agency staff and other professionals must respect communities involved in a partnership for the gifts they bring to the collaboration, especially those that will support safe children and strong families.

Offer Meaningful Support

- Foster a sense of mutual development. The agency supports development of community resources for families, and community members support the staff and mission of the agency.
- Ensure that community representatives are invited and have the resources to participate in team decisionmaking meetings. For instance, the child welfare agency might provide contractual funds to community agencies to ensure staffing levels allow for a community representative to attend team decisionmaking meetings, even when they are called on an emergency basis. Team decisionmaking meetings empower community members to determine their unique role and responsibility in community child protection and permanency.
- Advocate for and aid in the creation of peer support groups for agency staff, community members, family members, or current/former client children and families.

Provide Training

- Engage community members in the dialogue about the over-representation of children of color in out-of-home care. Discuss ways communities can assist in addressing this issue, including steps for supporting families of color so children can avoid placement and recruit families from the same communities as the children they will foster.
- Provide cultural competence training to both agency staff and community members. This training helps staff reflect on the role they play in representing the agency to the community. The agency's willingness to respect a community's existing culture and its commitment to the value of cultural diversity, partnership,

and collaboration all impact whether community members perceive the agency as understanding their reality.

- ❑ Provide training to community members on how to advocate for *Family to Family*, for example, to a legislator or the media.

Establish relationships with and secure support from community and other stakeholders^{20,21,22}

Family to Family's first objective is "to develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities where children live." To achieve this goal, child welfare agencies develop partnerships with the communities from which children come. Steps for developing partnerships include:

Identify the Community

- ❑ Define the community boundaries, ideally incorporating the community's own identified parameters. Examples of how a site might define community boundaries include by school district, parish, police precinct, or zip code.

Market Deliberately

- ❑ Market and share the *Family to Family* vision. The agency's self-evaluation committee provides data to educate the community on the current status of children in care. Agency leaders emphasize that community members will help make immediate placement decisions on behalf of children from their neighborhoods. The agency also uses data to show how different community partners can benefit from *Family to Family*. For example, the agency might develop contractual relationships with community providers to support family recruitment and training in the neighborhood, thereby offering a tangible economic benefit. Sharing information and resources encourages mutual accountability, understanding, and trust.

FIELD NOTES: Build on Existing Community Strengths but Acknowledge Historical Challenges

Detroit elected to implement *Family to Family* in neighborhoods with existing community partnerships. While this arrangement allowed the site to initially "hit the ground running," the partners had not anticipated having to spend additional time addressing the residual issues from the earlier partnerships.

FIELD NOTES Show and Tell

One community used Geographic Information Systems mapping to show businesses the impact on kids who move out of a community. Other site leaders used that same mapping tool to underscore why the agency needs community help, adding that the agency had not succeeded in placing children effectively when it initially did not obtain community assistance. However, agency staff and other professionals need to take care in how they frame the issue of higher rates of placement with a community. A community member involved in *Family to Family* notes that while there may be 500 children in her community who are in foster care, there are 5,000 more who are happy and healthy in their own homes. The community needs to know that its strengths are acknowledged and reinforced if it is to be an equal partner.

*Market and
share the
Family to
Family vision.*

*Educate
other
nontraditional
stakeholders.*

**FIELD NOTES:
Different Agendas
Make a Mosaic**

Initially in Cuyahoga County, the community wanted to focus on prevention, while the agency's priority was to increase the pool of safe, stable neighborhood resource families in the communities where children lived. The agency met with neighborhood groups and described the problems children in their community faced when they had to be removed and could not remain in their own school due to a shortage of foster families. In turn, the community stated their concern about too many placements and their desire to work on better prevention efforts. Both parties ultimately agreed they would mutually address both recruitment and supportive service for foster and birth families.

- ❑ Educate other nontraditional stakeholders. As mentioned above, the child welfare leader approaches legislators and the judiciary early on to discuss the principles and goals of *Family to Family*. Point out to Guardians Ad Litem, parents' attorneys, and other advocates about how grounding child welfare in the community supports their clients' rights and best interests. Ongoing follow-up with these important stakeholders regarding progress of the initiative—especially if it is offered in cooperation with their constituents—sustains political support. Have community partners along for all of these discussions.

Forge Relationships

- ❑ Enlist leaders of each stakeholder group in the community to communicate the vision of *Family to Family*. A respected community person can help bridge the gaps and develop trust between the community and the child welfare bureaucracy. Leaders also articulate the "what, why, and how" of the partnership to their own constituency and mobilize members to action. Leaders model and guide their groups to work with other partners in defining the changes in roles, responsibilities, authority, and activities. The child welfare agency assists community leaders by offering their constituents support for achieving their own agenda on behalf of families and children.
- ❑ Cast a wide net in reaching out to potential partners. The most significant future partners may be the least visible stakeholders. All of the partners must seek and recognize the gifts other partners bring, which may not be mainstream or come with a degree.
- ❑ Use natural bridges to develop or strengthen partnerships with communities. For instance, the child welfare agency may already employ staff who come from the communities it serves; these staff could serve as indigenous community liaisons. For sites interested in dedicating staff resources to *Family to Family* community outreach, Appendix 5 offers an example of a job description for a *Family to Family* Site Coordinator. Another natural bridge includes foster parents who are also community members.

Identify and Link Agendas

- ❑ Assess community expectations and relationships with the agency. In particular, in initial meetings with the community, agency leadership should be prepared for (and seek out) frank discussions about the "old ways" the agency related to the

community. The child welfare agency needs to exhibit respect and humility when listening to the community's initial reaction to its request for assistance. Agency leaders also need to learn what the community wants from the child welfare agency. Community partnerships require that all partners identify and then let go of stereotypes, distrust, cynicism, and blaming.

- ❑ Be clear about the agency's legal obligation for safety and placement. The agency may need to educate community partners on the statutory definition of child abuse and neglect and the agency's responsibility for addressing it. Some community members may disagree with the definition on cultural grounds; in such a case, the child welfare agency may refer those members to training on legislative advocacy.
- ❑ Recognize the crucial role of community members in child protection. Community partners have a unique and discreet role in achieving the goals of *Family to Family* and child protection. For instance, by developing services for families and increasing the number of foster homes in their own neighborhood, community partners bring child protection closer to home. In addition, community partnerships provide services that are more accessible and culturally familiar to the families they serve. And, community partnerships strengthen the safety net for children and families by providing support, resources, and services before, during, and after the child welfare agency is involved. In establishing clear roles for each partner, the collaboration will avoid misunderstandings about legal authority versus local decisions.
- ❑ Clearly state *Family to Family's* expectations that foster parents and other people involved in the child's case will work with and support the biological family

**FIELD NOTES:
Specifying Outcomes**

Cuyahoga County contracts require each community partner to recruit 15 new foster homes; a community representative to attend 10 team decisionmaking meetings a month; and the organization managing the contract to demonstrate how it represents other community partners key to meeting family needs, such as drug and alcohol treatment facilities.

**FIELD NOTES:
From Gotham to Our Town**

New York City changed decades-old contractual relationships with private childcare service providers from a citywide to a neighborhood focus. The city's child welfare leadership now requires all children from a borough to receive services in that same borough. Furthermore, contracts are now performance-based and hold providers accountable for ensuring services originate in and focus on the same community.

**FIELD NOTES:
Contracting for
Emergent Needs**

Cuyahoga County recently increased its contractual amounts to each community collaborative to hire more "Prevention Specialists." These staff members attend emergency team decisionmaking meetings, thereby enabling community representation at those meetings on a moment's notice.

*Recognize
the crucial
role of
community
members
in child
protection.*

and provide information on why reunification is often the preferred permanency goal.

- ❑ Achieve consensus on the most important goals, but allow for different agendas for getting there. While it is important that the partners obtain consensus on the broader goals of achieving child safety and permanency in the community, each stakeholder must understand that it is OK to have a different reason for wanting to participate in *Family to Family*.
- ❑ Be clear about the help that's needed. For example, start the dialogue with maps that show where children were removed from and where they are placed and then ask for help with recruitment and support of resource families in those neighborhoods.
- ❑ Once all partners have agreed to a common broad goal, identify concrete, measurable steps toward meeting it, including specific roles, functions, and tasks for community members and agency partners. Community members also should help guide program and policy development. Later, making community partners members of the decisionmaking team—along with agency staff and other professionals involved with a child and family—is the best way to keep them involved and active in deciding the best ways to meet their children's needs.
- ❑ Don't expect any one agency to be "the answer" to neighborhood concerns, but rather ask contracting organizations to expand their scope and inventory all potential community resources. Contracts need to include measurable goals.
- ❑ Ensure compensation for services and support is adequate to allow the community to respond and participate in a real

way. Paying neighborhood providers for services is equitable and often possible without additional funds; for instance, funds originally used to pay for an available bed at an expensive treatment facility are diverted as more foster families become available for neighborhood placements.

Evaluate Progress

- ❑ Provide continuous self-evaluation by holding periodic meetings so partners may assess their work, ensure that everyone is advancing toward long-term goals, and adjust to new circumstances. At these self-evaluation junctures, it is important to remind each other that *Family to Family* is a work in progress; or, as one community partner notes, "we are not yet where we want to be, but we are farther than we were."

Begin community involvement in placement decisionmaking^{23,24}

The primary vehicle for community involvement in placement decisionmaking is through the Team Decisionmaking meeting model (see Appendix 8). "The goals of team decisionmaking are to improve the agency's decisionmaking process; to encourage the support and "buy-in" of the family, extended family, and the community to the agency's decisions; and to develop specific, individualized, and appropriate interventions for children and families. In these meetings, child welfare staff, family members (including children if their developmental level allows them to participate in deciding on their future), providers of services, and neighborhood representatives together assess a family's needs and strengths, develop specific safety plans for children at risk, and design in-home or out-of-home services and supports."²⁵ The agency undertakes the following steps to implement team decisionmaking meetings:

Achieve consensus on the most important goals, but allow for different agendas for getting there.

Forecast and Develop Resources

Project how team decisionmaking will impact agency resources. Use longitudinal data to determine:

- How many children are removed each month?
- How many of these children comprise sibling groups?
- How many removals, replacements, reunifications, or other significant case occurrences (e.g., Termination of Parental Rights) are projected to occur per month?
- How many team decisionmaking meetings should we project to meet the need?

Develop policies to guide the team decisionmaking process. Include in policies the process by which team decisionmaking meetings will address every placement situation. Then train staff on policy and procedures.

Train an adequate number of excellent caseworkers to facilitate the meetings. Qualified facilitators need to be solid on child welfare practice, policy, and law, and possess a historical perspective on the workings of the agency. The best facilitators often are superior caseworkers who bring experience and reputation that will mitigate any staff resistance to the team decisionmaking meeting process.

Ensure that there are sufficient time and resources to support effective team decisionmaking meetings. For instance, team decisionmaking meetings require space for meetings, support staff to manage scheduling and records management, security when meetings are held in community settings, child care for participants, and adequate time to have the discussion.

FIELD NOTES: Identifying Community Representatives for Team Decisionmaking

Participation by community representatives in team decisionmaking meetings is crucial, since they often are the link between biological families and their community. In addition, community representatives offer support and suggest resources to the family. Communities define their representatives differently, however. The New Mexico *Family to Family* site sometimes defines communities in terms of ethnicity. Since there are a number of Native American tribes in New Mexico, facilitators helped representatives from these tribes be available to participate in the meetings. Similarly, a number of North Carolina counties have military bases that have their own social service systems. Families involved in team decisionmaking meetings there indicated they felt most comfortable having a military representative serve as their ally.

Prepare Participants

Ensure that all critical players are able to get to the table quickly, especially for pre-removal decisions or if the meeting is convened on the next working day after an emergency removal. The agency accomplishes this goal by arranging beforehand with community partners that they be available on short notice; some sites even write this expectation into their contracts with community agency partners. Community partners have a contingency plan for coverage at their worksite or home if they are contacted to attend a team decisionmaking meeting. Likewise,

Ensure that there are sufficient time and resources to support effective team decisionmaking meetings.

Provide decisionmaking teams with access to up-to-date information on service capacity.

caseworkers who place children need a contingency coverage plan so they can invite and prepare participants and attend the meeting. The agency needs to account for situations that may require workers to attend meetings outside of normal shifts in its contract with the labor union.

- ❑ Support participants' attendance by providing transportation, child care, convenient location, and flexible scheduling—especially if the decision to be made isn't a current crisis, as when planning a reunification.

Set the Stage

- ❑ When inviting participants to the meeting, the child's caseworker provides each participant with a brief overview of the presenting issues and/or risk to the child. The caseworker emphasizes participants will make a real, significant decision about where the child will be placed, the possible outcomes of that decision, and the goals of the process. With family members, the caseworker also emphasizes that open discussion will allow all participants to "be on the same page" regarding the issues at hand. Families, community representatives, and professional partners want to be a part of an actual decision, (e.g., to remove or not, to reunify or not, and when, etc.) and to have a voice in more than case planning.
- ❑ Provide decisionmaking teams with access to up-to-date information on service capacity. Case decisions require information about what services are actually available. If the community substance abuse treatment provider has no immediate slots available for a parent, for instance, the team might need to look in another community to address the parent's immediate needs.

Determine if any of the participants may threaten violence. In a domestic violence situation, it may be necessary to meet separately—or forego meeting at all—with the abusive party.

Handle Decisions and Appeals

- ❑ Be clear with participants that the child welfare agency has the ultimate legal authority to make a decision if the group can't reach consensus. If the other team partners disagree, the agency is legally obligated and responsible to proceed with its decision. If agency staff are unable to reach a consensus, an appeal process is provided to them. Staff members may appeal decisions to a higher authority if they believe the decision (in the absence of consensus) places a child at serious risk or violates an important policy or law. The appeal must be held immediately, since the family and other attendees are awaiting a key decision. Typically only agency staff attends the appeal since the focus now is on achieving agency consensus.

Consider Confidentiality

- ❑ Discuss issues of confidentiality regarding the proceedings with participants. Many systems operate more from "folklore" about confidentiality requirements than actual legal mandates. As a result, staff and other meeting participants may be very hesitant to fully share information. While the team decisionmaking model does not promise confidentiality, it does rest on a strong value of respect for the sensitivity of the issues at hand. It demands a commitment from participants to share information gained in the meeting only with those who have a need to know. If the team promises confidentiality or if any party signs releases or waivers, the tone of the process may be greatly affected; it is then difficult to regain an atmosphere of strengths-focus and mutual support.

**HELPFUL HINTS:
Staff and Team Decisionmaking**

Expect a wide variety of reactions from staff about the team decision-making process, which will continue to change as the process becomes more embedded in the agency's regular course of business. Some staff object to what they see as a loss of control over their own cases or the potential for higher scrutiny of their work. The most common issues are caseworker fears of time drain, anxiety about the challenges of practicing straight talk in the presence of families and community partners, and a general fear that public discussion of the case may expose weaknesses in their skills. Staff at all levels may have a general mistrust of external professionals, exhibiting the sort of "bunker mentality" that sometimes results from the climate of public criticism around child welfare. Most staff learn to appreciate the process when they fear poor outcomes—for then they can rely on the fact that a team made the decision! Staff also like to share

responsibility for key decisions from the outset. They appreciate the support and can see that time committed to meeting together up front often means time saved later in terms of obtaining collateral contacts, phone tag with providers, etc. Because it tends to jump-start services, facilitate the identification of kin, and create a good record of issues and grounds for decisions made, the benefits of team decisionmaking quickly become accepted as routine. The use of team decisionmaking meetings also meet many federal and "best practice" requirements—including the provision of reasonable efforts, inclusion of providers, and inception of concurrent planning. At least one site uses the same facilitator to run the six-month administrative review to maintain consistency of staff and knowledge of the case. Over time, team decisionmaking simply becomes "the way we do business," and staff forget any other way of doing it.

Consider Attorney Participation

- Decide whether attorneys are welcome to attend family team decisionmaking meetings. There are often heated debates about whether to include attorneys—including those representing the agency, the parents, and the child—in the meetings. Whether attorneys attend the meeting is always a local issue and must be decided based on the climate and culture of each community. The benefits of attorney participation include cross-training of legal and social work perspectives, an opportunity for team building, the addition of legal expertise should an unusual

resolution be considered, and earlier engagement of legal players in the case. Potential drawbacks of attorney participation include the possibility that social workers may shut down in the face of the higher-status legal players, the process may become legalistic and adversarial, families may be even more intimidated, and attorneys may be impatient with the more clinical aspects of the meeting. Agency attorneys may object to losing control over last-minute changes that they have traditionally made in response to plea agreements. To address this concern, some agencies insist that attorneys

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**HELPFUL HINTS:
Supervisors and Team
Decisionmaking**

Some supervisors may object to what they perceive as a usurping of their authority to make placement-related decisions. They may also react negatively to the coaching role that facilitators may assume in many team decisionmaking meetings. On the other hand, most supervisors, experienced in team decisionmaking meetings, seem to appreciate the assistance in training and supporting staff, especially new workers. They view the conferences as a great forum for continuing education and the modeling of good communication for new staff. There are other benefits: shared ownership for difficult decisions; immediate access to family support services and quicker access to foster families who will meet the child's needs.

**HELPFUL HINTS:
Community and Team
Decisionmaking**

Use team decisionmaking meetings as a vehicle for sharing work and responsibility for placement decisions with the community. Often the most effective aspect in breaking down resistance with community partners is the emerging sense of trust that occurs through their involvement in the process. When they come to the table and see the agency's willingness to share its toughest work, they appreciate the complexity of that work and become more supportive of the agency's efforts.

Prepare line staff to work with the community and vice versa.

advocate only for the decision made at the meeting, or else seek approval for another decision through the social worker's chain of command. Attorneys may also worry that the agency will give away too much information, or divulge a trial strategy, by sharing its decisionmaking with a broader group of participants. If an attorney insists on attending a meeting, but it is not the general practice of the site to have attorneys present at team decisionmaking meetings, a higher-level administrator should discuss with the attorney that the meeting is not legally mandated, and that no participant will be asked to sacrifice legal representation.

Roll out neighborhood-based assignments²⁶

Assigning child welfare front-line workers to individual communities allows them to develop personal relationships with community partners. It also allows each to become more knowledgeable about the other's resources, culture, constraints, and strengths. It is very complicated to make these assignments. Caseloads will have to be adequately distributed to allow for increased interaction with the community issues of racial equity in caseloads and assignment of responsibility will also have to be factored in. Everyone in the child welfare agency will eventually be affected.

Align Cases Within Communities

- Align active cases within the community's boundaries.²⁷ Then verify current addresses of families in care to ensure equitable distribution of caseloads and staff.

Build Bridges

- Prepare line staff to work with the community and vice versa. Agency leaders and supervisors should serve as the first line of contact with the community, and as such, broker introductions when implementation is certain.

- ❑ Form partnerships between staff and community mentors who can help them learn about the neighborhood in which they will work.
- ❑ Facilitate staff preparation by providing opportunities to be visible and “work the community agenda.” For instance, staff can assist at community events or undertake a common project such as a *Family to Family* kickoff event.

Establish Case Transfer Policy and Procedures

- ❑ Develop a time frame and procedures to transfer cases. In large systems, this should be a deliberate and time-limited “phase-in” plan that starts with communities where other critical elements of neighborhood-based services have had time to take hold and show success (e.g., contracting with neighborhood organizations). The agency develops a case transfer policy to ensure the original worker and the new worker can meet with the family, the foster family, and the community providers to discuss continuity of care. The agency also develops policies to address other special circumstances in the geographic assignment of cases; for instance, when families move to another part of the city, if siblings are located in two different neighborhoods, if Termination of Parental Rights already is initiated, if there is a date for reunification, etc.

Define Roles

- ❑ Define changing worker roles. When child welfare workers move to the neighborhood, they reallocate some of their time from crisis management to building support or neighborhood-based care and meeting with local individuals and groups. They may find themselves helping to develop community newsletters and participating in open community forums. Rather than seeing themselves as the only professionals responsible for a case, they

begin to extend their knowledge of the positive forces within their neighborhoods; they convene neighborhood folks (extended family, neighbors, foster parents, neighborhood service providers, clergy, etc.) to design specific supports that address the needs of individual families. They help to advocate for new services for the community. In short, they become generalists, retaining case management responsibility for formal cases, but helping to advocate and organize neighborhood-based supports for children and families from that neighborhood.

- ❑ Jointly define the role of community providers of services in this effort. Many different neighborhood service providers may participate in helping one family. In prevention/early intervention cases where a family voluntarily requests services or is referred for “wrap-around” services, the case may be referred directly to the neighborhood. For cases where the risk is higher, the child welfare worker may become part of a neighborhood-based team and responsibility is shared without having to open an official case. But for open abuse and neglect cases, the neighborhood-based child welfare worker remains the case manager, responsible for developing and implementing a specific intervention plan and for reporting to the court

Refine Roles

- ❑ Help caseworkers learn the necessary skills to collaborate. Convening team meetings, collaborating with neighborhood groups to develop individualized service plans, working out of a neighborhood center, etc., often means that workers need to learn new skills or refine their existing skills. Staff also require training on cultural competency and issues of concern to the community. Training also needs to target supervisors to help them become comfortable managing a neighborhood-based staff.

Staff also require training on cultural competency and issues of concern to the community.

Dedicate full-time positions to coordinate and direct recruitment.

**FIELD NOTES:
Creating Ambassadors**

At the outset of implementing a new neighborhood-based *Family to Family* site, Cuyahoga County community partners offer bus tours of their community to agency staff. Likewise, the agency invites community members to shadow workers for a day.

- ❑ Provide/participate in joint training for staff from the child welfare agency and neighborhood agencies. Simultaneously, offer community members opportunities for training on child welfare issues. By convening joint training events and meetings in neighborhoods, staff and partners meet on equal footing, learn from each other, create more natural relationships, and begin working as a team.

Market Deliberately

- ❑ Reinforce and publicize the value of neighborhood-based casework within the larger community. Agency leaders communicate the rationale and values that drive neighborhood assignment with the jurisdiction's major political and social service stakeholders. Community members from the original *Family to Family* sites indicate that geographic assignment means they have fewer workers to get to know, and thus more opportunities for developing deeper relationships.

Make foster families partners in *Family to Family* implementation^{28,29}

Four of *Family to Family*'s seven systemwide goals for redesigning the foster care system directly address developing quality family foster home resources. Indeed, *Family to Family* promises that, "with changes in policy, in the use of resources, and in program

implementation, family foster care can respond to children's need for out-of-home placement and be a less expensive and often more appropriate choice than institutions or other group settings."³⁰

Recruitment, training, and retention are integrally linked, and steps for undertaking these efforts are outlined below:

Recruitment Is Everyone's Business

- ❑ Dedicate full-time positions to coordinate and direct recruitment. Agencies may combine recruitment with licensing and training since they are so closely linked. Recruitment staff can enlist management and front-line staff, resource families, older or former foster children, and community partners (where capacity exists) to assist in developing the recruitment, training, and retention plan.
- ❑ Although the agency has full-time recruiting staff, clearly communicate that all child welfare agency staff are responsible for ongoing recruitment and support—the "care and feeding"—of foster parents (e.g., "Recruitment is everybody's job, and for the hotline that means..."). Agency leadership reinforces this expectation by using "caregiver support" as a measure in staff performance evaluations and promotions. It also emphasizes that staff efforts to develop quality foster homes will ultimately mean a payoff for the future workload of everyone in the agency.
- ❑ Enlist foster, kin, and adoptive parents as partners in recruitment. "Foster parents are the best recruiters of other foster and adoptive parents. Most adoptive parents were also once foster parents. If your *Family to Family* foster parents are enthusiastic about your program, they will quickly become your best sales and marketing force." Provide generic cards for existing foster parents to give to prospective resource families.

Determine Recruitment Strategies

- Assess the agency's current recruitment strategy. Determine how the agency currently identifies and retains sources of "good" foster parents. Find out the annual net gain or loss of foster parents and the reasons for that gain or loss, perhaps by mapping the recruitment and retention process from the first phone call through the week after placement to determine where families drop out and why (e.g., is the placement process simply a "drive-by?"). Also streamline time-consuming or bureaucratic processes that sap the foster parent's willingness to wait for the opportunity to foster; one such area might be the agency's home study and licensure process.
- Determine what kind of recruitment efforts the agency needs and when to employ each. General recruitment is best when used to raise the agency's public profile and broaden community awareness of the continuing need for foster families. Child-specific recruitment consists of finding relatives or a close friend who will provide a foster home to a child or teen they already know and care about. Targeted recruitment focuses on the specific kinds of children and teens in need of temporary and permanent homes in the community, as well as specific geographic areas. *Family to Family* emphasizes this latter recruitment strategy as the most effective for placing children.
- Conduct foster and adoption family recruitment as one effort. In nearly all states, 60 to 85% of families who adopt children from the public child welfare system are already foster parents. The agency might survey foster and adoptive resource families and staff to determine their mutual needs, as well as the supports foster families need to become adoptive families. The agency may need to invite

HELPFUL HINTS: Create a Profile of Waiting children

Each site begins to understand the needs of the children requiring placement by considering the following questions:

- What do we know about the number of children in each community requiring placement?
- How many children are currently in placement?
- Of these, how many are placed in their community of origin?
- What do they have in common? Can we group them in terms of age, ethnicity/race, sex, neighborhood or need? Are these groupings consistent over time? What are the trends or patterns of change?
- What will be required for foster or adoptive parents of each kind of child? Where is the need most urgent?
- Do particular neighborhoods seem to have more problems or needs?
- What sources are referring children to us? Can the population from each source be generalized in any way?

foster parents to consider adoption, or ask waiting adoptive parents to provide foster, respite, or emergency care in the interim.

- Kick off the recruitment effort with large printed messages; cartoons; pictures of kin, children, foster/adoptive parents, and staff; fact sheets; and suggestions for where to carry the message.

Determine what kind of recruitment efforts the agency needs and when to employ each.

Prepare prospective foster/adoptive parents to work with birth families.

**HELPFUL HINTS:
A Single Picture
is Worth
A Thousand Families**

- ❑ Prepare top-quality color photographs and well-written profiles of children who are or will be legally free for adoption. Request local newspapers, journalists, and photography studios to donate services, time, and developing costs.
- ❑ One person should schedule photo and interview sessions and ensure materials are produced promptly.
- ❑ Ask local companies to run photos and captions in their newsletters.
- ❑ Compile photos of waiting children in a permanent photo album as a way for potential and newly certified foster/adoptive parents to obtain profiles of waiting children.

Profile Children Needing Families

- ❑ Profile all children entering the system. Longitudinal data provides information about child and family demographics, length of time in care, and other characteristics. Statistical forecasting predicts the probability of future placements and characteristics of the children placed. Desktop mapping provides a comparison of the neighborhoods from which children come into care and the neighborhoods into which they are placed. See "Helpful Hints: Create a Profile of Waiting Children," for questions that can help agency staff target recruitment to families likely to help children most in need.

Profile the Community's Capacity to Provide Families

- ❑ Profile the community's potential to provide foster/adoptive family homes for the children in the system. The agency can use this profile to tailor its outreach and recruitment efforts to particular groups and areas. Strategies for gathering this information are listed in "Helpful Hints: Create a Profile of a Waiting Community."

Make a Mutual Assessment

- ❑ Oversee a mutual assessment process between the agency and family to determine if that family is best able to meet a child's needs for safety and permanency. Like most incipient relationships, the initial interaction between the family and agency is akin to a courtship, where first impressions and evident respect matter.
- ❑ Emphasize to potential resource families that the agency is seeking strong families able and willing to care for any child, as long as the family receives the proper training and support to do so.
- ❑ Establish standard procedures for responding to calls from prospective foster parents so the relationship gets off to a good start. The "Helpful Hints: Get It Right the First Time—Make a Good First Impression with Prospective Resource Families," indicates practices that facilitate building partnerships with foster parents from the beginning.
- ❑ While preservice training will address the issues foster parents may face when they receive foster children into their home, the recruiter can help prepare them—or answer questions they may pose—before training.
- ❑ Prepare prospective foster/adoptive parents to work with birth families. A tenet of *Family to Family* is that birth parents are part of the team in determining plans to meet the child's best

HELPFUL HINTS:

Create a Profile of a Waiting Community

- ❑ Determine where existing foster families live and how many children they care for. Demographic and census information provides information about the general community; one can find this information through the library, planning department, or state census data center (reach the Census Bureau on-line at <www.census.gov>). This data might suggest the presence of families in the neighborhood the agency previously may have overlooked.
- ❑ Determine how many more homes are needed in the communities from which children come or are expected to come. Desktop mapping can show the difference between children's communities of origin and where there are current foster home resources. In addition, longitudinal data can describe sibling groups needing care and show where there are foster homes with the capacity to take them in.
- ❑ Determine what kinds of families successfully have worked with the agency in the past, including their values, habits, behavior, and what drew them to, and sustained them in, providing foster care. The agency may locate this information by convening focus groups with existing foster parents, teenagers currently in the system, community representatives, hotline staff, child protective services, and ongoing workers to discuss who makes a good foster parent. After profiling different "successful" groups of foster parents, match each group with an appropriate recruitment message (e.g., ask "empty nesters" to share their family's success with a child who needs it). Also determine where each group is likely to congregate (e.g., churches, military posts) and send recruitment speakers, post bulletins, or send notices to potential resource families at each location. Ensure that agency staff and the recruitment team reflect the neighborhood's demographic diversity, that they have enlisted indigenous community leaders to receive educational materials and spread the message, and that translations of agency material is appropriate.
- ❑ Determine reasons the agency uses group care and crisis facilities, and see if foster families might be trained to address the needs of certain children currently placed in those institutions.

*Children
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return home.*

interest. Children need to have connection with their birth family, even if they cannot return home. Foster parents nonetheless may fear threats or abuse from people they perceive as violent, unstable, or otherwise dangerous. Thus, the recruitment staff must assure foster parents they will

obtain, through training, concrete skills for working with biological families.³¹ If the foster parents still do not feel able to work with biological families, the recruiter might gently steer them to another role in which they can support children in need.

The best curriculum is worth little without good trainers.

HELPFUL HINTS:

Get it Right the First Time – Make a Good First Impression with Prospective Resource Families

- Provide a special phone number for prospective foster parents so they do not get stuck in a bureaucratic telephone maze. The phone number should be easy to remember and printed on all stationery, business cards, recruitment materials, and agency signs.
- During nonbusiness hours, leave a phone greeting requesting that callers indicate the best time and place to return the call. Then return the call promptly the next business day.
- Expect each call or individual contact to take 30 minutes or longer to allow adequate time for questions. Be familiar with the most commonly asked questions about the agency as a whole, in addition to those related to becoming a foster parent. For certain communities, enlist translators, bilingual recruiters, or TTY equipment for the hearing impaired.
- Provide staff name and numbers, and ask the callers if they would like to be addressed by first name or more formally.
- In an effort to meet some children's special needs, the agency may invite semi-retired or disabled adults, or people with special training or education to become foster parents.
- Invite the caller to preservice training.
- Mail an information packet to the caller within 24 hours. Conduct a home visit within 3 to 5 days. Maintain a record on each caller as needed.

- Put applicants, who are not ready nor legally eligible to foster/adopt, to work providing child or respite care, tutoring, mentoring, babysitting, driving, shopping, or serving as a companion. Thus, they can still support children in need.

Assess Your Training Curriculum

- Give prospective foster parents who have decided to participate in preservice training the tools and supports they need to provide a safe, nurturing home for children who will be placed with them. The training curriculum must be rich, interesting, and directly applicable to meeting the needs of children and their families. Most public child welfare agencies already have training curricula for foster parents. It may suffice

for new sites to adapt their existing curriculum to meet **Family to Family** values by addressing the issues included in the "Helpful Hints: Must Do's for Foster Parent Training."

Find Good Trainers

- The most important task is to find exceptional trainers. The best curriculum is worth little without good trainers.
- The agency also needs to locate exceptional staff, foster parents, providers, community partners, and others who can reach a very special audience. The box "Helpful Hints: Finding Trainers for Foster Parents" indicates some methods for locating trainers.

Support the Foster Parent-as-Trainee

- ❑ Again, the combination of good curriculum and trainers is undermined if neither has a chance to connect with the intended audience. The agency thus must schedule preservice training to meet the needs of resource family applicants. The “Helpful Hints: Supporting the Training Process” box offers recommendations from veteran sites for ensuring that prospective foster parents attend training.

Take Care of Business

To maximize the time the agency has with its prospective foster parents—and to show respect for their limited time as well—address bureaucratic procedures during the training. Two major procedures that can occur at the first preservice training session are the initiation of the application process and background checks. “Helpful Hints: Get'em While They're Up,” notes tips from veteran sites on how to cover these otherwise dry areas.

Support a Professional Role

- ❑ To retain foster parents, help them build their skills, expertise, and personal experience while working with children and families. Especially when the family has not yet fostered a child, it is imperative to maintain frequent contact while the family awaits a placement. Agency staff might direct them to further training, offer reading material, and help them network with other foster parents.
- ❑ Once a family receives word that a child will be placed with them, agency staff must prepare them for the children for whom they will care. Tips for such preparation are included in “Helpful Hints: Preparing the Family for Arriving Children.”
- ❑ Offer professional development on an ongoing basis. Foster parents today provide care for children who would have been in institutions in the past. Jointly train foster parents and staff to forge bonds among

HELPFUL HINTS: Must Do's for Foster Parent Training

- ❑ Emphasize the principles and values behind *Family to Family* rather than rules and regulations.
- ❑ Provide a textbook or workbook for families to use as a resource guide during class.
- ❑ Use solid adult learning theories, ensuring that the training is interactive and participatory. Use audiovisuals and handouts. Provide humor, fun, and excitement.
- ❑ Address key topics, such as profiles of the children who require out-of-home placement. By providing clear but positive descriptions of children needing care, the agency initiates the mutual assessment process. In particular, the trainer asks if the participants believe they could help these children, and whether they would be willing to undertake additional “developmental training” after licensure to improve their skills in working with these children. Other topics might include understanding and addressing the emotional problems of children, behavior management and discipline, child development, use of community services, ways to work with the children's parents toward reunification, attachment and separation, parenting sexually abused children and teens, teamwork, the impact of abuse and neglect, and adoptive families.

Offer professional development on an ongoing basis.

Identify staff with energy, expertise, enthusiasm, and cultural awareness.

HELPFUL HINTS:

Finding Trainers for Resource Parents

- Identify staff with energy, expertise, enthusiasm, and cultural awareness.
- Work with other agencies to locate, train, and share competent trainers, possibly through joint training sessions or contracts.
- Invite different partners to assist with the training. For instance, foster parents can co-lead the program or participate on panels of foster/adoptive families who provide practical advice; young people who have "aged out" of the system can discuss their experiences; community leaders can share information on community services; and agency staff can attend to receive joint training and begin team development.
- Train trainers to master the material and a teaching plan.
- Factor into employee-trainers' workload sufficient time to prepare materials and settings, plan for each training session, and clean up and follow through afterward.
- Provide or enable others to provide in-service and ongoing specialized training to support foster parents in their job.

HELPFUL HINTS:

Supporting the Training Process

- Offer several options for training locations, if possible, including neighborhood settings. Hold training sessions on public transportation routes and with plenty of free parking.
- Hold training sessions at times convenient for foster parents to attend, such as 6 PM – 9 PM on weeknights or on Saturday mornings. Remember safety concerns of participants during winter when it gets dark earlier.
- Provide or reimburse for childcare and transportation.
- Hold sessions frequently, e.g., weekly or biweekly, depending on the number of foster parents the agency needs and the state's certification requirement regarding training hours. Repeat the curriculum regularly so people are trained continuously and year-round.
- Send reminder notices of training seven days before the event. Attend the first training to provide continuity of contact. Send a second reminder notice if the caller misses the first session. Send "We missed you" cards to callers who miss two training classes.
- Require all new staff to attend the entire foster parent training. This action will enforce the message that foster parents are the agency's most precious resource when children are removed from their parents, every child deserves a family, there is a family for every child, and once the agency removes a child, it is the agency's responsibility to quickly find a safe, stable foster family.

them. Offer “real life” training opportunities to all caregivers. Use experienced foster parents as trainers, support group leaders, and mentors to new caregivers. Establish ongoing developmental education. Offer per diem compensation commensurate with foster parents' training and experience and which reflects the actual costs of caring for a child.

- ❑ Include foster parents as full partners in the service team. Involve them—along with birth parents and children—in important program and policy work, e.g., team decisionmaking meetings, six-month administrative reviews, training,

**FIELD NOTES:
Integrating
Foster Parent Training into
Daily Child Welfare Business**

Oregon's State Office of Services to Children and Families uses Title IV-E funds to support the Foster Parent Association's training efforts on a statewide basis.

recruitment, policy development, and legislative testimony. Invite foster parents to court hearings, case reviews, case conferences, meetings, etc. Provide foster

*Include
foster parents
as full
partners in
the service
team.*

**HELPFUL HINTS:
Get 'em While They're Up**

- ❑ Distribute applications and provide a “homework” packet to gather additional information over time. Also provide phone numbers of foster care unit staff, adoption and recruitment teams, and other key agency personnel—including the director.
- ❑ Assist the parents in completing their applications. Licensing staff also should attend to respond to questions and concerns. Arrange mini-interviews at the training for people who have language, sight, or reading difficulties.
- ❑ Provide a poster-sized blowup of the application form to review basic questions.
- ❑ Once the prospective foster/adoptive parent has completed the application at preservice training, the pre-assessment phase begins. Agency staff analyze the application carefully. Recruitment staff call applicants at least every 30 days until placement to maintain contact, solve problems, and advocate for them.
- ❑ If your state requires fingerprints or other difficult information to obtain for background checks, obtain them as early as possible to allow for bureaucratic processing time. For instance, you can have staff ready at the first training session in a separate area to take families' fingerprints. Ensure equipment is top quality and up-to-date.
- ❑ Explain up-front why background checks are necessary, including the ASFA requirements. Provide an easy out for those people who may not qualify due to previous convictions or arrests by providing a private opportunity after class to share concerns.
- ❑ Complete licensing and fill in the preplacement gaps in a timely manner. Complete the necessary paperwork, training, home study, and certification approval by the time the family is ready to foster children. Help applicants meet safety regulations by arranging for minor home repairs, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, and equipment needed to care for the child.

Express appreciation and recognize foster parents' contributions to child welfare.

**HELPFUL HINTS:
Preparing the Family
for Arriving Children**

- Provide the family with as much information as possible about the birth family, the circumstances of removal, and the personality, preferences, and habits of the child.
- Provide the family with official documents such as the state's official child information form, a letter authorizing Medicaid services, medical information, procedures for securing medical care, clothing vouchers, and other social services.
- Provide basic lifebooks to assist the child in recording information and dealing with separation issues.
- Call the family the day after placement to see how it is going and what they need.
- Visit the foster home within a week of placement to review childcare notes and forms and begin linking the foster family with available services.
- Make arrangements for a visit between the child and birth parents as soon as possible.

parents with a copy of the service plan for the child in their care."Experience shows that respecting foster parents as members of the service team—making them partners with the agency staff and other professionals involved with a child and family—is the best way to keep them involved and active."³² Whenever possible, hold meetings when foster parents are available to attend and provide childcare and transportation reimbursement.

- Prepare and support foster parents in their work with birth families. Extensive tips for doing so are included in the *Family to Family* tool, "Recruitment, Training, and Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care." In addition, team decisionmaking meetings are important vehicles for building bridges between foster and biological families. There the parent and caregiver discuss what is expected of them, share information about the child to create a continuum of care and reduce trauma to the child, and nurture a relationship between them so the child feels supported by both while in placement. In cases where a foster parent resists working with biological families—for instance, for "traditional" foster parents not familiar with the team approach, or for one who has experienced a challenging interaction with a biological parent—the agency might create incentives to support development and implementation, e.g., respite care or a leadership role in promoting *Family to Family*.³³

Give Public Acknowledgment

- Express appreciation and recognize foster parents' contributions to child welfare. Examples of important recognition activities include publicizing foster parents' service in agency newsletters and other media, sending thank-you cards, remembering birthdays and other special events with calls and notes, holding special events for foster families, celebrating successes such as reunification or adoption, and sending each family a letter of personal appreciation from the agency director.

Provide Services to Foster Parents

- Provide caregiving assistance. Offer as many free items as possible, such as toys, books, clothing, etc. Offer respite or day care to give foster parents a break before they are driven to request it. Include foster parents' birth children in activities, e.g., providing tickets for the entire family to

HELPFUL HINTS:

Preparing the Children for Placement

An implicit focus of *Family to Family* is minimizing placement trauma for children. Since, ideally, placement decisions are planned in advance, the biological parent, foster parent, and caseworker can work in concert to prepare the child for foster care.

❑ In an emergency placement situation, the foster parents ideally should meet the child at an assessment center (if one is used) or agency office and bring a snack or small gift. The foster parents then return home and wait for the caseworker to prepare the child as much as possible. If the worker brings the child directly to the foster parents' home, she might do so first as a quick visit to meet the foster family and tour the home; following the "drive by" visit, she then can take the child to a neutral place, such as for a snack, to discuss the placement and the child's reaction. Even these preparations in the face of an emergency allow the child to absorb and prepare for foster care.

❑ In nonemergency situations in which a child requires placement, significant people in the child's life need to prepare the child for placement. When the child must be removed from the home of origin, the biological parents should prepare the child for the placement and answer any questions. Caseworkers and foster parents need to support and guide the parent in this activity. Likewise, preplacement planning and preparation should occur before the child is moved from group care or from one foster home to another. Most sites have policies that require foster parents to give notice when requesting that a child be moved to another foster home. The team decisionmaking meeting is a natural setting for placement planning, support, and

guidance to occur. The site might prepare a checklist indicating who will be responsible for which tasks in preparing the child for the move (see Appendix 6).

❑ As part of preplacement planning, the worker, biological family, and foster family set up visits before or at the time of removal to prepare the child for seeing the biological parents again. In addition, a child should have the opportunity to meet the foster family, visit their home, tour the neighborhood, and meet significant people in the foster family's life (e.g., ministers, neighbors, etc.) prior to placement. If time allows, a child even may stay overnight at the foster home prior to placement.

❑ During the first few days of placement, the foster family helps the child to acclimate. For instance, a child may be allowed to stay out of school for a day or two to get used to the change and to mourn being away from home. If the child must attend a new school, allow the child to finish out the week at the old school before making the change.

❑ The foster family maintains as much of the child's routine and familiar rituals as possible. For instance, they should help the child continue with religious and cultural affiliations. Also, they can offer the same kind of food the child is used to eating. For younger children in particular, providing common smells and sounds will calm them.

❑ The agency provides the foster family with a lifebook and a framework for what it might include. In addition, the contract with the foster family indicates that lifebooks need to be updated frequently, given the children's sense of time and the changes they are going through.

*Address in
policy and
procedure
the expectation
for developing
and nurturing
resource
families.*

attend a special event or slots for all the children to attend camp. Dedicate parking spaces at the agency and a waiting room for foster parents to use when their foster children are in visits. Provide "care packages" with items such as diapers or toothbrushes to be dropped off at the foster home when they receive a foster child. Identify and link foster parents with community resources, such as tutors for their children. Provide encouragement. Ensure foster parents have affordable liability insurance, medical cards for the children, and lists of good care providers. Reimburse expenses as soon as possible. Have funds available to supply emergency needs, and make access easy for vouchers or other cash equivalents. Set up a "warmline" that foster parents can call with questions about parenting. Offer in-home training sessions for special caregiving issues. Some of these resources do not have to cost additional money. For instance, community partners, waiting adoptive families, or older foster children might offer volunteer child or respite care services.

- ❑ Provide crisis services for the emotional or behavioral challenges that foster children will inevitably pose. Return phone calls as soon as possible. Guarantee 24-hour, seven-days-a-week access to the agency, and offer multiple ways to gain that access. Offer family preservation services, dispute mediation services, and legal service access. Ensure the agency's procedure for investigating and following up on allegations of mistreatment are objective, and support the foster family until the matter can be investigated.

- ❑ Set up buddy or mentor family programs to facilitate peer support. Cluster support groups in geographic areas or around special child care issues. Ensure regular in-home contact with social service staff. Offer easy access to professional counseling services. Reach out to the foster family after a foster child's departure.
- ❑ Enlist community partners to support foster parents, e.g., by providing "foster-ware" parties, asking local businesses to donate goods or services to foster parents and their children, providing respite child care, etc. Likewise, ask foster parents which community agencies are or could be most supportive of their work with children.

Exhibit Respect

- ❑ Child welfare systems could not function if there were no foster parents. Because foster parents are truly the frontline of child welfare practice, it is imperative that their partners exhibit respect for their role, responsibilities, commitment, and expertise. Some tips for showing foster parents what they mean to the child welfare system are included in "Helpful Hints: R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find Out What It Means to Me."

Ensure Agency Policy and Procedure Reflect That Retention Is Everyone's Business

- ❑ Address in policy and procedure the expectation for developing and nurturing resource families. Ensure that policy and procedures establish standards for the agency's timely response to phone calls, completion of home studies, third-party protocols, and other procedures impacting resource families. Also ensure that policy and procedure reflect only what needs to be in place to make a resource family and its home safe and nurturing. Agency standards that are too rigid and not directly related to safety or nurturing capacity might screen out otherwise good resource families. Conversely, policy

HELPFUL HINTS:

R-E-S-P-E-C-T, Find Out What It Means to Me

- R**eturn phone calls as soon as possible.
- E**nsure staff are culturally competent.
- S**et appointments at times convenient for the foster family, and follow up after any delays or cancellations with a call and apology.
- P**ractice listening fully to foster parents' concerns and issues without interrupting.
- E**nsure that agency leaders attend foster parent association meetings, pre-service training, and graduation. These are prime opportunities to promote *Family to Family* and model respectful communication. For instance, one child welfare administrator invites members of the Foster Parent Association to contact her directly any time they feel the agency or its staff have not treated them appropriately.
- C**aregiver's preference for terms of address should always be considered first.
- T**rain staff to support the foster parent role.

The agency might consider convening combined foster/adoptive work teams to develop responsive policy and procedures.

and procedures also can be too lenient because the agency is concerned about losing the resource families it has. High but reasonable standards encourage good resource families to apply and remain as caretakers for children needing out-of-home care. The agency might consider convening combined foster/adoptive work teams to develop responsive policy and procedures.

- Keep track of the numbers of prospective families who drop out at each of the critical junctures of the recruitment, training, and licensing process. By identifying large losses at a specific juncture, the agency can target changes in practice to support recruitment and retention.
- Provide continuous assessment of the recruitment and retention plan to assess progress; adjust to meet new or changing resource family needs.

INSTITUTIONALIZING POLICY AND PRACTICE CHANGES

This Implementation Guide outlines the main steps for implementing *Family to Family*. This section addresses how to institutionalize *Family to Family* reforms over the long-term. In part, this process requires changes to the child welfare system's infrastructure to sustain the program. Sequencing planning into manageable steps, creating formal boards or steering committees representing diverse constituencies and champions, changing policies and laws, and implementing new organizational processes and structures all uphold the vision of *Family to Family* in times of crisis or administrative change.

Many sites found that while policies were consistent with *Family to Family* principles, common practices were not. To address this issue the agency needs to:

- evaluate its policies as the first step in making procedural change;
- ensure the policies fit with the values and principles the agency supports;
- consider the differences between policy and practice;
- emphasize practice.

In changing policies and procedures, the agency assigns cross-functional representatives to maximize ownership and accelerate compliance.

Some changes to policies and practices require changes in the underlying child protection laws that govern the agency's work. Building relationships with legislators and other elected officials early on in the process will help generate support for making these changes. The state agency might:

- host briefings;
- participate in conferences and publish a fact book of county-to-county data to educate legislators;
- inform new legislators of its outcomes-based plan and the data that indicate *Family to Family* reforms are on track.

Legislators find cost-saving results linked to practice changes, such as lower rates of entry into care or reduced lengths of stay, especially compelling. In addition to changing existing laws, agency contact with the legislature to create new laws in support of system reforms ensures long-lasting change.

It is important to build into the system a consistent method for monitoring that *Family to Family* reforms are being implemented as planned. Too often when a child welfare system does not achieve its desired results, it assumes the plan was inadequate. It is difficult to achieve practice changes unless the change is monitored, supported, and celebrated on an ongoing basis.

The responsibility for continuity also resides with front-line staff and middle managers who remain after administrators leave. A solid infrastructure ensures that the *Family to Family* message remains constant through ongoing staff training and recruitment of new staff with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to implement *Family to Family* strategies, such as working with community partners and identifying and building on family strengths.

Finally, the agency must always attend to the agendas of its community partners so that their stake in the reform continues. By sharing responsibility for continuity with the community, the agency ensures that *Family to Family* becomes larger than the sum of its parts.

Marketing the Successes with *Family to Family* Outcomes³⁵

While the child welfare agency's infrastructure serves as the frame around which the *Family to Family* "house" is built and supported, the environment external to the agency is akin to the neighborhood where that house is situated. That environment may contain helpful neighbors as well as local bullies, so it is important that the child welfare agency learn how to entice the latter into becoming a good neighbor. One way to create supportive relationships with potential adversaries is to create a mutually beneficial relationship: something like enlisting the next-door ruffian as the lead in a neighborhood watch effort. Similarly, the child welfare agency must work to engage the media as a partner in getting the *Family to Family* message out to a broader audience.

FIELD NOTES: Sequencing for Success

To sustain the momentum for implementing *Family to Family*, leaders may divide the ongoing planning into phases, identifying milestones along the way that can be tied to particular results one hopes to achieve. One way to do this is to create short-term, "100-day" projects that involve different stakeholders and address a particular issue or item for change. By sequencing such projects, the steering committee can help people see how these short-term steps build toward a larger goal.³⁴

The media are a key constituency because of the power they have to shape public opinion, which also has an impact on how elected officials view the child welfare system and its work. Building relationships with the media early on, and around successes or issues of concern to them, can be helpful when the agency is faced with a crisis. For this reason, the agency's public relations staff should develop a campaign to publicize *Family to Family* soon into the implementation effort. Key steps to working with the media are summarized in "Helpful Hints: Working with the Media."

It is difficult to achieve practice changes unless the change is monitored, supported, and celebrated on an ongoing basis.

HELPFUL HINTS:

Working With the Media

- ❑ Identify your target audience, and frame the issues of child welfare in terms they and the media will understand and consider important. For instance, opinion polls show that the public considers promoting safety and stopping violence as a top issue. Thus, a child welfare spokesperson can present *Family to Family* as a vehicle "that promotes safety and prevents violence."³⁶
- ❑ Maintain good media contacts. Hold regular meetings and phone conversations with journalists and reporters to place stories, initiate press coverage, provide the child welfare agency's perspective on a pending policy issue, and hook the agency's spokespeople up with reporters. Return calls promptly. Be prepared to share both positive and negative results of child welfare programs as a way of building trust.
- ❑ Hold press briefing sessions to provide "in-depth background information" on a *Family to Family* issue. For instance, the agency might plan a briefing session when kicking off *Family to Family* or to promote foster care month.
- ❑ Make regular annual visits to your local editorial board. Present the editors with background materials on your agency and *Family to Family*, facts and data on children in care, and an overview of your mission, goals, and progress.
- ❑ When talking to reporters about *Family to Family*, make the message salient and personal. If you have time to present a "macro" view, share with the reporter a vision of what an excellent child welfare agency looks like and explain the challenges to building it. For any story to capture media and public interest, it is imperative to present personal stories of how *Family to Family* supports children and families. Use data to support the story, and discuss foster parent "heroism." Urge the reporter to look at the system through the eyes of a child, the birth parents, the foster family, or a caseworker. If you coordinate a media interview with a client family, ensure you are familiar with the family's background and history, the family is comfortable articulating its story, and your communications staff is at ease with the choice. Also prepare the family for questions they might be asked, their rights, and the general procedure for interviews.
- ❑ Suggest arresting images, and graphically present statistics and data to support your story. These visual supports are crucial for communicating a story through television or print. Also prepare and provide "nice enough" background materials to leave with media representatives.
- ❑ Make use of relationships with community partners when facing inquiries from the media. By educating external stakeholders, an agency can work with them to reinforce its successes. For example, agency leadership could invite targeted members of the media to community meetings. Community partners can validate the *Family to Family* message as outside experts on child welfare.
- ❑ Enlist media to promote the *Family to Family* message. For instance, local media can assist in recruiting foster and adoptive parents. Newspapers might offer pro bono writing and photography services to profile waiting children. Nearly all media markets have at least one television station that airs a weekly segment featuring a legally free child, often called "Wednesday's Child." Likewise, local newspapers or radio stations might run a profile as a free public service announcement.
- ❑ In addition to proactively creating relationships with the media to promote *Family to Family*, have a strategy to deal with a crisis if and when it occurs. Ongoing support for reforms such as *Family to Family* are inextricable from the agency's overall reputation, so crisis management is an essential part of media relations. The four areas of crisis communications management—general procedures, prevention and risk management, roles and responsibilities, and possible scenarios—are detailed in the "Strategic Communications: Media Relations for Child Welfare" tool.

C O N C L U S I O N

This Implementation Guide summarizes the key steps for a new site to implement *Family to Family*. It cannot, however, dictate a recipe for making *Family to Family* work, nor is it a static tool since new sites are developing innovations all the time. It is clear that creating a system of child welfare services that is most responsive to the needs of children and families is not an easy undertaking. The comprehensive systemic changes advocated by *Family to Family* will require strong leadership; long-term commitment to *Family to Family* values, principles, and strategies; new partnerships; and significant new capacities and skills from all its participants.

This guide offers a roadmap created by the combined/collective experiences, challenges and successes of early *Family to Family* sites. It delineates the approaches, planning and sequencing of activities that these sites have identified as common, crucial components of effective implementation. Their contributions have added a wealth of information to our body of knowledge about effective implementation efforts.

Although this guide reflects the "best" knowledge we currently have about implementing *Family to Family*, there is still a great deal more to be learned. System improvement is an ongoing and evolving process. New *Family to Family* sites will find their own approaches, strategies, and innovations when redesigning their systems. We will look to these new "architects" to enrich and expand our knowledge about implementing *Family to Family* and to continue the process of moving us all closer to the promise of child welfare. Good luck!

**Family to Family Compatibility with ASFA and
Child and Family Service Reviews**

Prompted by concerns that too many children remained in foster care without permanent homes, on November 19, 1997, President Bill Clinton signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) in an effort to effect changes in the nation's foster care system. Among its most significant provisions is statutory language stipulating child safety as the paramount consideration in all decisionmaking related to permanency. Designed to reform current child welfare practice, it explicitly establishes safety, timely permanency, and well-being as the national goals for working with children served by the child welfare system.

This landmark legislation makes several important changes to the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980. While Title I of ASFA reaffirms the importance of reasonable efforts to preserve and reunify families, it also identifies exceptions to the reasonable efforts requirements based on safety considerations. In other provisions, the law shortens time frames in which agencies must either reunify children or seek termination of parental rights, promotes the development of concurrent case plans, and reauthorizes funding for family preservation and support programs under the "Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act."

To improve system performance, ASFA also directs the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to identify outcomes to assess states' progress toward achieving the goals of safety, permanency, and child and family well-being, and to report on these outcomes in an annual report to Congress.

The enactment of ASFA places legislative emphasis on the same goals promoted by the *Family to Family* movement—safety and timely permanency for children served by child welfare agencies. Indeed, the specific

ASFA outcomes articulated in the Final List of Child Welfare Outcomes and Measures (published in August 1999) are congruent with those of the *Family to Family* reform movement, as shown in Table 5.

In addition to emphasis on program results and child and family outcomes, under the Final Child Welfare Rules (published in January 2000) HHS employs the Child and Family Services Review to analyze systemic factors that affect state capacity to deliver services leading to improved outcomes for families. Some of those systemic factors evaluate whether the state:

- has an array of services to assess and address the strengths and needs of families and children;
- establishes and maintains plans and procedures for recruiting and retaining foster and adoptive parents;
- engages in ongoing consultation, coordination, and annual progress reviews with community stakeholders.

Partly as a result of this national emphasis, states and localities are expanding reforms and innovative programs undertaken in recent years to make child welfare services more responsive to the multiple and often complex needs of families and children.

Family to Family enlists four major strategies for strengthening and restructuring child welfare systems. The core values and family-focused strategies of *Family to Family* are fundamental to achieving the systemic and practice changes required by ASFA. Rather than layering reform efforts, an agency committed to achieving a child-centered, family-focused, neighborhood-based system can integrate *Family to Family's* strategies into its practice to achieve comprehensive change.

Family to Family enlists four major strategies for strengthening and restructuring child welfare systems.

**Table 5:
A Comparison of Federal and Family to Family Outcomes**

ASFA

- reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect³⁷

- reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect in foster care

- increase permanency for children in foster care³⁹

- reduce time between foster care and reunification without increasing re-entry
- reduce time in foster care prior to adoption

- increase placement stability

- reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions

Family to Family

- decrease the number of children entering out-of-home care
- decrease the number of children re-entering out-of-home care³⁸

- increase the number of strong foster families

- increase the number of siblings placed together⁴⁰
- reduce the number of children served away from their families

- increase safe reunifications whenever possible
- decrease frequency and length of child's stays in foster care

- develop network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located in communities from which children come⁴¹
- reduce the number of moves experienced by children in care

- reduce the number of children served in institutional and congregate care
- shift resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child- and family-serving systems
- increase number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs

Family to Family Strategic Planning Questions

What data do we have about where we are in achieving these goals?

- What should the site's child welfare effort look like five years from now?
- What are our goals for the *Family to Family* program in our state/community? How do these goals fit into our vision for how child welfare should look in five years? How do they incorporate the four *Family to Family* strategies? How do they fit with current reform initiatives? What other goals do we want to address?
- How should service design and delivery look? What currently happens to a case as it moves through the system, versus how we would like it to proceed?
- Who are our current partners? Who else needs to be involved to implement *Family to Family*?
- What training do staff and our partners require to implement new methods?⁴²
- How do we revise policy to reflect these changes?⁴³
- What barriers—including outmoded programs and practices—do we need to overcome to achieve these goals? How do we plan to address these barriers?
- On which strengths in our child welfare system do we want to build to achieve these goals?
- What data do we have about where we are in achieving these goals? What additional data do we need to assess progress?
- What are the principles that will guide our work? How do we communicate them in a concrete way to staff, community partners, families, foster parents, the media, and other stakeholders?
- What is the time frame for implementation?
- How will we maintain our focus on the planning and implementation of *Family to Family*, especially as change or crises occur?
- What types of consultation, resources, and other assistance do we need?
- What is our budget for accomplishing *Family to Family* reforms? How will this effort be financed once the Annie E. Casey Foundation funds are used? What is our contingency plan in the event of a budget shortfall?

Steps for Creating and Mapping Longitudinal Data Files

1. Use available software and Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System(s) (SACWIS) data files. If your child welfare information system already has a program to extract data, build your cohort and profile data extracts on it. The software you use must be capable of creating new data files from one or more extracts of raw data and presenting analyses through high-quality tables and graphs. Local support should be available to service the software package.
2. Obtain Annie E. Casey Technical Assistance to convert existing state SACWIS data into longitudinal cohort data files in a PC format. These data will reflect the placement experiences of all children, including beginning and ending dates of each placement event, geographical placement of home, geographical placement of foster home or other placement setting, placement termination reasons, custody type, reasons for custody, sibling information, child's special needs. The Experiences Report in Appendix 4 illustrates how this baseline information can be presented.

In addition to these data, California and North Carolina sites also track the experiences of children who are not placed in foster care. Tracking families and children served in their home provides information on the impact of family support and preservation services, as well as a baseline for comparing why certain children with a history of allegations, but not placements, may eventually end up in care.

3. At this point, a site may combine longitudinal data with Geographic Information System (GIS) software mapping technology to obtain a graphical presentation of the

data. This process includes the following steps:

- (a) Obtain Geographic Information System (GIS) software and expertise, preferably through interagency collaboration with a service system already using it, e.g., the school system, police department or tax department; all may employ geomapping for their own purposes. Invite the other service system to share their software and experience by working on a common concern, e.g., education and child welfare systems both have the goal of keeping children in their own school, regardless of placement.
 - (b) Identify data captured in geographically defined local systems that are not contained in statewide data, e.g., state data files often do not include the child's home address, while local data files do.
 - (c) Create a common case identifier for both state and local files. Each locality identifies a staff person to match the local files with state files.
 - (d) Define the issue to be tracked, e.g., where children live when the initial report of abuse or neglect is made, versus where providers are located.
 - (e) Create the data map.
4. Extract data periodically from the central information system and reorganize it to accommodate statistical use. Some sites update the statewide database first and then send local subsets to the local branches to supplement the data with items they are tracking locally.

5. Analyze data and assess agency progress against a baseline related to: volume and patterns of initial admissions, disruptions of care, length of stay, patterns of exit from care, and re-entry into care.

If your child welfare information system already has a program to extract data, build your cohort and profile data extracts on it.

Experiences of Children Entering Child Welfare Custody: 1996 - 2000*

	Statewide				Level 3 Counties						Sample County							
	FY96		FY99		FY97		FY98		FY99		FY96		FY97		FY98		FY99	
	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Pattern of Initial Placements																		
Own Home	5%	5	5%	6	5%	5	5%	5	6%	5	5%	5	0%	0	2%	2	2%	2
Relative	14%	15	18%	19	14%	16	16%	19	19%	16	13%	9%	9%	9	16%	10	10%	9
Foster Home	41%	40	42%	40	39%	36	41%	35	44%	43	42%	35	35%	42	42%	31	31%	45
Group Homes	4%	4	6%	5	5%	4	6%	5	6%	5	5%	5	10%	7	7%	7	13%	13
Other	16%	14	12%	14	18%	16	14%	16	14%	16	23%	25	8%	8	10%	10	8%	8
Unknown/Missing	19%	22	17%	16	17%	22	19%	18	11%	13	17%	20	25%	40	23%	23	23%	23
Total	100%	515	100%	526	100%	510	100%	510	100%	510	100%	510	100%	510	100%	510	100%	510
Number of children	5155	5274	5294	5266	5109	2252	2235	2264	2170	1973	221	232	212	214	191	100%	100%	100%
Length of Time in Custody/Placement Authority																		
Median Number of Days	425	401	391	369	NA	460	473	499	509	NA	539	788	679	644	NA	NA	NA	NA
% remaining in custody/pa after 3 months	84%	82%	84%	82%	83%	87%	88%	88%	86%	86%	84%	83%	86%	86%	86%	86%	86%	86%
% remaining in custody/pa after 6 months	74%	73%	74%	70%	72%	78%	79%	81%	78%	77%	78%	79%	77%	77%	77%	77%	77%	77%
% remaining in custody/pa after 12 months	56%	54%	53%	51%	NA	60%	59%	62%	60%	NA	60%	69%	72%	67%	NA	NA	NA	NA
% remaining in custody/pa after 15 months	42%	40%	39%	38%	NA	45%	46%	48%	47%	NA	45%	64%	64%	61%	NA	NA	NA	NA
% remaining in custody/pa after 24 months	33%	31%	31%	NA	NA	36%	37%	39%	NA	NA	41%	52%	48%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
% remaining in custody/pa after 36 months	20%	20%	NA	NA	NA	23%	24%	NA	NA	NA	32%	37%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
% in custody when record checked 9/30/00	11%	15%	22%	34%	64%	14%	19%	30%	43%	70%	18%	26%	33%	48%	83%	83%	83%	83%
Experiences of Children Ever Placed in Non-Family Settings																		
Number of children	1061	1034	1159	1177	1031	504	469	580	520	470	36	46	48	40	48	48	48	48
Proportion of children	21%	20%	22%	22%	20%	22%	21%	26%	24%	24%	16%	20%	23%	19%	25%	25%	25%	25%
Median # of days in non-family settings	116	140	151	118	87	123	151	142	125	88	225	208	190	125	110	110	110	110
Median # of days in custody/pa	618	631	594	518	NA	763	770	649	578	NA	1132	908	792	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Placement Stability																		
% children with 1 placement as of 9/30/00	29%	32%	31%	34%	39%	29%	30%	26%	30%	35%	38%	36%	28%	27%	32%	32%	32%	32%
% children with 2 placements as of 9/30/00	26%	25%	28%	27%	31%	26%	24%	26%	27%	32%	26%	27%	31%	31%	44%	44%	44%	44%
% children with 3 placements as of 9/30/00	16%	16%	15%	16%	16%	15%	16%	16%	17%	17%	15%	17%	16%	29%	17%	17%	17%	17%
% children with 4+ placements as of 9/30/00	29%	27%	26%	22%	14%	31%	30%	33%	26%	16%	20%	20%	25%	14%	6%	6%	6%	6%
Re-entry to Custody/Placement Authority																		
# of children who left custody/pa	4666	4525	4130	3457	NA	1978	1820	1583	1238	NA	181	171	141	111	NA	NA	NA	NA
# of children who re-entered custody/pa	415	375	264	NA	NA	170	125	79	NA	NA	11	3	3	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Re-entry rate	9%	8%	6%	NA	NA	9%	7%	5%	NA	NA	6%	2%	2%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA

*This report tracks the experiences of children each fiscal year who entered DSS custody/placement authority for the first time in their lives. NA = data not available due to insufficient follow-up time. Note: Percentage totals may be slightly greater than or less than 100% due to rounding.

SAMPLE
Family to Family Site Coordinator Job Description

A. Serve as liaison with the Annie E. Casey Foundation

1. Work closely with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on the distribution of *Family to Family* information.
2. Serve as a consultant for site visits with the Foundation. Prepare presenters, assist with presentations and communicate the link between philosophy, beliefs and practices with other sites.
3. Provide regular *Family to Family* program reports.
4. Oversee the *Family to Family* budget.

B. Coordinate and Develop Community Collaborative Contracts

1. Identify and develop interested community groups that have the staff and ability to become partners with the public child welfare system.
2. Elicit from each community collaborative their goals and plans for each year, and their capacity to meet these goals, e.g., physical site, available staff, qualifications of staff, service capability.
3. Develop an RFP process to guide contract development and deliverables in response to each community collaborative's goals.
4. Establish a reporting process with each site, e.g., monthly reports on progress toward goals.
5. Establish evaluation and remediation process to measure or redirect progress of community collaborative toward meeting goals.

6. Provide technical assistance to community collaboratives related to developing neighborhood wraparound services for children and their families, foster/adoptive homes in the community, and partnerships with geographically assigned child welfare workers.
7. Coach each site coordinator of a community collaborative in operations, accountability, and outcome measurement.

C. Facilitate Relationship Between Child Welfare Staff and Community Collaborative Partners

1. Clarify the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
2. Introduce child welfare supervisors and workers to community partners by planning a community forum or kick-off event.
3. Ensure regular meetings occur between agency and community leaders, as well as their staff and members.
4. Assist child welfare and community collaborative leaders with agenda setting and maintaining a focus on the contract deliverables.
5. In conjunction with child welfare agency supervisors, serve as liaison between site coordinator and child welfare agency staff to ensure quality communication.
6. Provide leadership at regular site coordinator group meetings, assisting with agenda setting and ensuring that meetings provide a forum for issues and policy/practice discussion.
7. Monitor site coordinator efforts to identify resources for use by child welfare agency staff. (See section E, page 62.)
8. Consult with child welfare supervisors

Work closely with the Annie E. Casey Foundation on the distribution of Family to Family information.

*The
Neighborhood
Services
Directory
provides
information
on proximate,
affordable
services and
resources.*

and staff on strategies for developing the relationship with the neighborhood, e.g., to connect with churches, schools, foster home recruiters, etc.).

9. With child welfare supervisors, clarify the role of site coordinators in the process of matching a child with a neighborhood foster home, e.g., coach the site coordinators to be consistent players in family team decisionmaking meetings for children in the neighborhood.
10. Serve on the planning teams to develop and implement agency policy, practice, and procedures for *Family to Family* implementation.

D. Coordinate the Work of the Local Planning Group

1. Coach, support, and consult with local planning group members to serve as representatives of their individual constituency groups, e.g., neighborhood collaborative coordinators, Foster Parents' Association, police department, public school system, kinship care representatives, One Church/One Child, etc.
2. Lead agenda development by emphasizing work on issues important to the community, e.g., kinship care, community policing, etc.
3. Provide agendas and reports to agency and community leaders to facilitate communication on progress to constituency groups and external leaders.

E. Consult on the Development of a Neighborhood Services Directory

Assist each community collaborative to develop a Neighborhood Services Directory for use by child welfare agency staff, community partners, and families. The Neighborhood Services Directory provides information on proximate, affordable services and resources.

F. Support Family-Centered, Community-Based Practice Through Neighborhood Deployment

1. Serve as consultant to child welfare supervisors and staff on practice-related changes related to neighborhood assignments, e.g., family visits, team decisionmaking meetings, etc.
2. Assist in refocusing contractual services to better serve neighborhoods, e.g., geographically assigned parenting classes and family preservation programs.
3. Serve as liaison between site coordinators and child welfare staff related to specific case concerns or agency practices.
4. Advise training unit on training needs of neighborhood-based staff.
5. Coordinate community activities such as a *Family to Family* kick-off event or other gatherings.
6. Provide ongoing consultation and technical assistance to represented child welfare staff and union regarding move to neighborhood-based child welfare practice.

G. Support Resource Family Placement and Development Processes

Consult on recruitment efforts involving multiple stakeholders, e.g., foster care staff, providers, site coordinators, and recruiters, to ensure consistency with *Family to Family* goals.

Best Practice for Out-of-home Placement: Preparing the Child

The placement of children out of their familiar environment is a traumatic experience for families, children, and social workers. It is imperative that several issues be addressed in placing children. Placement strategies should:

- minimize the degree of stress for the child and family;
- increase the child's and family's ability to cope with the placement by involving them in the planning, preparation & placement activities;
- assist the child and family to achieve a realistic perception of the reasons for placement;
- provide supportive post-placement services to assure reunification ASAP;
- maintain and strengthen parent/child relationships while the child is in care;
- enhance the child's adjustment to foster care;
- strengthen the resource family's ability to meet the child's needs while in placement.

A critical stage in the placement process is adequately preparing the birth and extended families, the child, and the resource family. There has been much information written on preparation of resource families; however, not often mentioned is the preparation of birth families and especially children. Unprepared children can play a major role in a disruption from a resource home; therefore, it is necessary to prepare children for the traumatic experience of removal.

Adequately preparing the child for the placement serves several important purposes:

- The social worker may alleviate many anxieties and greatly reduce the stress by providing children with information regarding the need for placement and

by familiarizing them with all aspects of the setting to which they are moving, preferably prior to the move.

- If the social worker does not know the child well, a preparation period can be used to better assess the child's strengths and needs. This information can then be communicated to the caregivers to assist them in receiving the child and in making the child's transition into the new setting easier.
- Working with the child during the preparation phase helps the child to establish a supportive relationship with the social worker. The social worker can then better assist the child during the move and in the child's adjustment to the placement setting.

All methods for preparing the child should:

- be age-appropriate;
- help the child understand the reasons for placement;
- help the child cope;
- give the child control (choices);
- maintain relationships;
- assist the child in adjusting.

Age-Appropriate

All preparation of children should be based on their ability to comprehend, using methods that are age and developmentally appropriate. If children are delayed cognitively, they should be prepared according to their comprehension level.

Infants: Little direct preparation can be done for the child; instead the worker should prepare the environment to receive the child, i.e., maintaining child's schedule, creating similar atmosphere, taping birth parent's voice, etc.

A critical stage in the placement process is adequately preparing the birth and extended families, the child, and the resource family.

Toddlers: Preschool children may have limited vocabulary but will understand something important is happening. Therefore, using concrete language will be critical to children this age. The worker can use “play” techniques to communicate information about the move.

Helping Children Understand

One of the best ways to minimize trauma for children is to help them to understand what is happening. This, of course, will be based on their ability to understand. This is a crucial step in the placement process, one which should involve birth families. Social workers should assist birth families in communicating some of the reasons for placement. A family team meeting can sometimes provide an opportunity to facilitate this assistance. Many times children feel more comfortable when birth families share in the process. Getting birth parents “buy-in” can be challenging but worth it.

Helping Children Cope

Understandably, children will experience great stress and discomfort from the placement event. Workers can help the child cope by familiarizing them with all aspects of the placement setting to which they are moving prior to the actual move. This is known as a preplacement visit. There are several ways this can be accomplished, whether the placement is an emergency removal from a birth family or a more planned removal from a residential facility or from one resource family to another. During emergency situations, workers may take children to their placements and show them around, allowing them to meet the members of the house. They then take them for a ride, to a park, or to McDonalds to discuss their feelings. After this discussion (maybe 30 minutes) the social worker returns to the placement setting to complete the placement. This way, the child has been previously exposed to the setting prior to being left there. This may take time, but it is extremely beneficial from the child’s point

of view. In placements that are more planned, children may actually stay overnight prior to an actual placement.

Giving Children Control

Since children will be affected most, workers should reduce as much anxiety as possible. This can sometimes be accomplished by giving children choices when possible. For example, when there are several resource families available, ask the child for preferences, family composition (single-parent versus two-parent), neighborhood, other children in the home, etc. Allow children to decide if they want to be placed before lunch or after lunch. These small gestures can greatly minimize the stress children endure during the placement process.

Maintaining Relationships

One of the removal goals should be to disrupt the child’s and family’s life as little as possible and still maintain safety for the child. Neighborhood-based care helps to accomplish this goal. Extended families should be a part of this process. Keeping children linked with other supports in their community will help children cope with their feelings. At the time of removal, workers should schedule the first visit (ideally the next day, definitely within 3 to 5 days). This will reduce some anxiety with both the child and the family. The extended family may be used to ensure safety during the visitation.

Helping Children Adjust

Because the environment will be new to the child, the birth family plays a major role in assisting the child to adjust to the new situation. The family can offer comfort to the child during visitations as well as giving the child permission to attach to the resource families. For this to happen, birth families must be comfortable with the resource family. To accomplish this, the worker needs to provide opportunities for the birth and resource family to meet and develop a relationship.

Since children will be affected most, workers should reduce as much anxiety as possible.

Family Group Conferencing and Team Decisionmaking: Different but Compatible

Both Family Group Conferencing and the *Family to Family* strategy called Team Decisionmaking have the potential to greatly benefit children and families. The two similar but separate approaches to family-focused group problem solving emphasize family engagement and a strengths/needs based approach. Positive outcomes include a sense of ownership by family and community members for planned interventions designed to strengthen families and keep children safe; and better, more consistent decisions around critical issues of child safety and family stability. Although they have these outcomes in common, the two approaches differ somewhat in focus and process.

Family Group Conferencing is primarily a clinical family intervention. It encourages families to meet as a team, with support from helping professionals. The team's focus is on resolution of family problems which have led to the crisis: typically, a child is on the brink of out of home placement due to his/her own behavioral problems and/or the parents' difficulties in ensuring a safe and nurturing family environment.

In Family Group Conferencing, the team meeting may be called by any helping professional involved with the family, and it is usually facilitated by an assigned social worker. The ultimate goal is for the family, with the support of other participants, to make its own decision regarding a plan to stabilize the current crisis. In the process, the family often makes positive steps toward re-establishing appropriate relationships and roles that have been blurred or weakened over time.

Team Decisionmaking, a key strategy of the *Family to Family* initiative, is also a way to involve family and community in the work of the public child welfare system. The family's social worker convenes the group to assist in making critical decisions and a trained agency facilitator leads the team decisionmaking process. The purpose of this approach is to invite a diverse team to the table to assist in making critical decisions regarding placement, i.e., removal, change of placement, reunification or other permanent plan, of children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. Case planning, assessment and review functions are secondary to the main purpose of the meetings: to make an immediate decision regarding a child's placement.

Team decisionmaking provides gatekeeping for the public child welfare system by focusing on the central issues of safety and risk to ensure that only those children in imminent need of placement are placed.

In this approach, the agency maintains its responsibility and ownership for the ultimate decision, while welcoming the input of family and community partners. It is thus more targeted and more narrow in focus than Family Group Conferencing but very broad in its application, since team decisionmaking meetings are held as a prerequisite to all court petitions for removal or reunification and prior to any placement disruptions which could result in a new placement.

Family Group Conferencing is primarily a clinical family intervention.

E n d n o t e s

- ¹ See also *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, Center for Applied Research, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (July 2001), pp. 22-25.
- ² See *Casey Family Programs 2001* report on concurrent licensing.
- ³ See also *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, pp. 18-22.
- ⁴ *Family to Family Evaluation*, p. ES-3
- ⁵ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 12.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ See also *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 16 and p. 21.
- ⁸ See also *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, "Create the means for ongoing revision of policies and procedures," p. 13; suggestions for creating consistency with policies, p. 17; and correspondence between state law and agency policy, p. 26.
- ⁹ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, "Create safety by clarifying expectations," p. 13.
- ¹⁰ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, "Build broad ownership for the initiative," p. 26.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 18.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 18.
- ¹⁵ The *Family to Family* tool, *The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice*, provides an in-depth discussion of the self-evaluation process and analysis strategies. Some of the key points in that tool are summarized here.
- ¹⁶ Lynn Usher, *The Focus of Self-Evaluation: Child Welfare Outcomes*, revision to *The Need for Self-Evaluation* tool. (July 2001)
- ¹⁷ For children who need to be placed, team decisionmaking meetings ensure that they are served in the least restrictive setting possible.
- ¹⁸ From 7/12/01 phone conversation with Lynn Usher.
- ¹⁹ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, "Build Community Ownership," pp. 18-22.
- ²⁰ The steps included in this section incorporate the "Twelve Key Messages on Community Partnerships," developed by Lajean Ray and Pat Newell, *Family to Family* Consultants on Community Partnerships.
- ²¹ See also *Building Partnerships with Neighborhoods and Local Communities: Part One: Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare. Family to Family Tools for Rebuilding Foster Care*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- ²² *Family to Family's* emphasis on working with the community addresses the federal Child and Family Services Review assessment of the child welfare agency's responsiveness to the community by including stakeholders in consultation, coordination, and review of child welfare system activities.
- ²³ See also *Team Decisionmaking: Involving the Family and Community in Child Welfare Decisions*, Part Two: *Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare*, Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- ²⁴ The majority of the steps outlined were first documented by Patricia Rideout, consultant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation and team leader for many *Family to Family* sites.
- ²⁵ *Team Decisionmaking: Involving the Family and Community in Child Welfare Decisions*, Part Two: *Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, p. 8.
- ²⁶ From *Building Partnerships with Neighborhoods and Local Communities, Part One: Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare*, Annie E. Casey Foundation, pp. 21-22.
- ²⁷ See "Identify the Community" in the above section, "Establish relationships with and secure support from community and other stakeholders."
- ²⁸ See also *Recruitment, Training, and Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care*, Annie E. Casey Foundation. That tool details a number of strategies necessary for recruiting, training, and supporting foster family resources. This section highlights some of those strategies and summarizes additional "lessons learned" from the original sites following publication of the tool.
- ²⁹ Judith Goodhand of the Jordan Family Institute at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Denise Goodman, consultant with the Cuyahoga County Department of Children and Family Services, provided the majority of content for this section.
- ³⁰ *Recruitment, Training, and Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care*, p. 5.
- ³¹ *Ibid.* See especially pp. 27-28 regarding dealing with foster parents' reluctance to work with the biological family and "Bridging the Gap of Separation Between Children and Their Families: A Continuum of Contact!"
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ³³ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 18.
- ³⁴ *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 27.
- ³⁵ For more information, see "Strategic Communications: Media Relations for Child Welfare," Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11. See also the "Message Strategy—*Family to Family*" on p. 14 of this tool that combines *Family to Family* values with issues the public feels are most important.
- ³⁷ The Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) Procedures Manual indicates two related outcomes: "Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect," and "children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate" (HHS: August 2000, p. A-1).
- ³⁸ Similarly, the CFSR identifies "the incidence of foster care re-entries" as a performance indicator that it will measure in each state (CFSR Procedures Manual, p. A-1).
- ³⁹ The CFSR Procedures Manual indicates two related outcomes: "Children have permanency and stability in their living situations," and "the continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children" (p. A-1).
- ⁴⁰ Similarly, the CFSR identifies the "placement of siblings" as a performance indicator it will measure in each state (CFSR Procedures Manual, p. A-1).
- ⁴¹ Similarly, the CFSR identifies as performance indicators the "proximity of foster care placement," "preserving connections," and "relationship of child in care with parents" that it will measure in each state (CFSR Procedures Manual, p. A-1).
- ⁴² See also *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, p. 16 and p. 21.
- ⁴³ See also *Family to Family Lessons Learned*, "Create the means for ongoing revision of policies and procedures," p. 13; suggestions for creating consistency with policies, p. 17; and correspondence between state law and agency policy, p. 26.



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EFF-089 (9/97)