



WHAT ARE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN?

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Community partnerships for protecting children refer to an innovative approach to child protection rather than to a specific program. The approach recognizes that keeping children safe must be everybody's business. No single person, organization, or government agency alone has the capacity to protect all children. Child protection agencies must partner with families and communities to give children a safe start. Unlike many collaborative approaches in communities, the public child protection agency is an essential player in the community partnerships approach. The goals of the community partnership initiatives are to: prevent and thereby reduce child abuse and neglect among children in the target areas, reduce re-abuse among children who come to the attention of the child protective service agency, and reduce the rate of serious injury to children due to abuse or neglect. Community partnerships for protecting children were first started in four communities – Jacksonville, Florida, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Louisville, Kentucky, and St. Louis, Missouri, with the support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare, part of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, now oversees these and other activities around the country.

What are the core elements of the community partnership approach?

The community partnership approach represents a new way of doing business for child protection agencies, families, and communities. There are four core elements to the comprehensive, community partnership approach. It is the interaction of these elements and strategies that is especially powerful. The core elements include:

- **Strength-based, family-tailored services as embodied in the Individualized Course of Action (ICA) process.** Parents, formal service providers, and those offering informal support to the family (i.e., relatives, pastors, etc.) come together in a family team meeting or a series of family team meetings to develop an action plan that is individually tailored to the child and his or her family. The plan builds on their strengths and needs and often includes a blend of formal and informal services and supports. The ICA process has been used primarily with families where the children are at greatest risk of abuse and neglect.
- **Changes to the child protective service (CPS) agency's culture and practice.** The CPS agency changes its policies and practices so it engages families and communities in new ways that build on the strengths of each. Staff may be out-placed in schools and other neighborhoods organizations so they can get to better know the community and job descriptions may be rewritten to build in more community work.

- **Neighborhood network of formal and informal supports.** A network of child protection agency staff, other child and family service providers and representatives of specialized service agencies is combined with family, extended family and representatives of other community institutions, such as faith-based organizations, businesses, schools and early childhood centers, neighborhood associations, and organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs and others to help families keep their children safe. These neighborhood networks should help build a system of support around individual families.
- **Shared local decision-making.** Local governing boards that include community residents as well as representatives of child protection agencies, other child-serving organizations, and community institutions govern the partnership.

Where is the community partnership approach being implemented?

The original community partnership sites in Jacksonville, Florida, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Louisville, Kentucky, and St. Louis, Missouri are still operating and have expanded to include additional sites --- 11 in Florida, 5 in Iowa, 5 regional sites in Kentucky (including 8 additional neighborhoods in Louisville and 33 additional counties), and 6 additional sites in St. Louis. Community partnerships also are underway in nine counties in Georgia, including Fulton County (Atlanta), Hartford, Connecticut, and additional communities in Vermont, and Michigan.

Are community partnerships only applicable to preventing the abuse and re-abuse of children?

No. Although the community partnership approach was first used to reduce abuse, neglect, and the re-abuse of children, it is an approach that is applicable at all points in the child welfare continuum. It includes a network of formal and informal supports, an individualized approach to service that reaches out to a broad group of supporters, and a practice regime for the child protection agency that engages families early, builds on family strengths, and draws on both formal and informal support. It applies to finding appropriate foster home placements for children, helping older adolescents transition from foster care, and promoting adoption or other permanent placements with grandparents or other relatives. The Family to Family initiative, for example, which the Annie E. Casey Foundation developed in consultation with community leaders and child welfare practitioners, is built on many of the principles used in the community partnership approach. Family to Family is designed to develop a network of family foster care that is neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive and helps to provide permanent families for children in a timely manner.

How do I get a community partnership started in my community?

If you are committed to keeping children safe and want to begin implementing the community partnership approach and working toward the development of a system of community child protection that builds on the four core elements described above, you

can start now. Depending on your vantage point, specific steps may vary. A child welfare administrator might work with her staff to begin family team meetings or to find ways to link staff more closely to the community. Representatives of other service agencies may want to work more closely with the CPS agency to better meet the needs of families in an integrated way. Advocates may want to begin by making a strong case for such reforms and possibly organizing a trip to a community partnership site or bringing a team from a site to its own community.

The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare has developed several useful pieces to help you get started. *Getting Started on Community Child Protection* suggests specific ways for local and state leaders, faith-based organizations, and parent and neighborhood advocates to begin the process of creating reform in the child protection system. The paper offers alternative starting points for various groups and outlines potential first steps needed to begin moving child protection towards a neighborhood-based system. The journal of the Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare, *Safekeeping*, also regularly explores in depth the core elements of the partnership. The Center has also published a guide, *Creating a Community Partnership: Guidance From the Field*, which identifies the ingredients for successful implementation of the community partnership approach. For more information about the partnerships and these documents, visit the Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare's Web site at <http://www.cssp.org/center/index.html>.

What are the ways different community organizations can be involved in the community partnerships?

There are many ways different community organizations can be involved. Examples include:

- **Faith-based organizations** can promote community child protection strategies by opening their facilities to services for children and their parents, pairing members of their congregations (young and old) with children and families in need of assistance, or opening facilities for parent-child visits or respite child care. In Louisville, a local minister used \$2,100 in seed money to organize a program for children whose parents were struggling with substance abuse. Faith-based organizations could also sponsor scholarships for children to participate in special recreational activities, or survey their members about talents they have to offer children and families in their community.
- **Community-based civic or professional organizations** can sponsor community celebrations. These celebrations can be used to highlight neighborhood assets and build awareness of child safety – enforcing the concept that child safety is “everyone’s business.” Parent-Teacher Associations could sponsor family picnics throughout the year where participants can learn about the community partnership and volunteer to get involved. They can also raise money to support health fairs where Community Partnerships have booths with information about child safety.

- **Students or student organizations** can support struggling families by serving as a mentor or tutor to children. A college student organization can volunteer its facilities for recreational or academic services. It can also raise money to support resident proposals to help keep families safe or increase awareness of community child protection. In Jacksonville, a resident wanted to make her home a “safe place” for women who needed to leave an abusive partner. With only \$200, she was able to make adjustments to her apartment that would allow her to accommodate an additional family in an emergency situation.
- **Individual residents** can become neighborhood leaders and recruit others to serve as “links” in the network. These community leaders are essential to community partnerships. They spread the child safety message and connect families with available resources. These leaders welcome new families to the neighborhood, organize residents on the block to be alert to crime, and help families find the services they need. Some links can also provide direct assistance to families such as transportation to family team meetings, meals or child care. Other individuals may want to donate funds to help provide food for meetings or transportation for families and staff.

What do we know about the results from community partnerships for protecting children?

The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare has commissioned the University of Chicago’s Chapin Hall Center for Children to evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the community partnership approach. The findings from this multi-year evaluation will be available in the spring of 2004. The four original sites also are conducting self-evaluations.

Encouraging initial results from selected sites show reduction of repeat child abuse reports for families served by community partnerships and a reduction in foster care placements. Additionally, participants themselves affirmed the benefits of the community partnerships approach. For instance families report that their engagement in family team meetings and joint decision making has been a positive experience. They note that the workers too have had positive views of the individualized approach that is at the core of community partnerships. Co-location of services also has made it easier to get families what they need.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF) from the many useful materials available about the Community Partnerships for Protecting Children. For further information about the Partnerships, visit the Web site for the Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare, part of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, at www.cssp.org or call (212) 979-2369. For additional information from the Children’s Defense Fund, contact jchang@childrensdefense.org or (202) 662-3629.