Casebook on Youth Violence Prevention Projects - Four Key Elements for Success

by

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OVERVIEW

Meeting the Challenges of Youth Violence Prevention

Communities are constantly searching for more effective ways to prevent youth violence. There's an increasing recognition that projects built around community collaborations are more likely to succeed, and that the programs they implement need to be evidence-based. This volume identifies four key elements for success with this kind of project:

- Building collaborations through strategic planning
- Careful transitions from planning to implementation
- Strategic implementation and local evaluation
- Promoting project sustainability

Taken together, these elements frame a core assumption - that success depends on making an investment in bringing the community together around a youth violence prevention project, thoughtfully implementing it, determining how well it works and how it could be improved, and helping it survive over time if it is having a substantial positive impact. Nothing about this assumption should be surprising to community leaders, educators and prevention professionals concerned with getting new projects going to prevent youth violence. However, the reality is that these steps are often missed (or at least slighted) in the urgent rush to intervene - especially given the shortage of resources and multiple demands on communities today!

To make these four elements for success more real, we have focused on a group of youth violence prevention projects in the Federally-funded School and Community Action Grant program. Eight case studies of successful projects funded under this program are presented here, with lessons learned about each of the above four key elements for success. The intent is offer guidance for future projects not just in this one program, but for a variety of youth violence prevention efforts in American communities.

Although youth violence has been a problem in the United States since its origins, the lethality of this behavior has increased dramatically since the 1970s (Fagan & Wilkinson, 1998). There have also been several recent high-profile school shootings and other horrific acts of violence by youth that have created an even greater sense of urgency. As a result, communities across the country are mobilizing to develop and implement effective youth violence prevention and intervention programs, bolstered by a surge in public and private support for these efforts (Backer, 2001a).

However, recognizing the importance of the youth violence problem and the need for prevention and intervention programs is much easier than deciding what programs and services are needed, how they can be supported, and who will provide them. Youth violence has many forms ranging from school bullying to gang violence to domestic assaults or homicide. Prevention programs can be offered for all children or a selected group of children, and they can begin before birth or well into adolescence.
Programs can run the gamut from after-school tutoring and recreation to school-based social competence programs to intensive family counseling. Precisely because the youth violence problem and possible solutions are complex and challenging, many communities begin their efforts with some type of a collaborative planning process.

This process varies greatly from community to community. In some cases, collaborative planning is seen as an ongoing process designed to bring together community leaders to develop collective solutions on a community-wide level. In others, planning takes place within a specific organization such as a school or school district. Some communities set out to write a comprehensive document such as a "community strategic plan" for youth violence prevention that can be used for multiple purposes. In still other locales, the mandate is to develop a program or set of programs to be implemented following the planning phase, with the bulk of planning activities designed to build a collaborative base in the community for the implementation projects.

Whatever specific approach is selected, challenges are to be expected. It is what we learn from these challenges and how to overcome them that can provide guidance for future efforts.

Similarly, there are also many approaches to the selection and implementation of violence prevention programs. In some cases, decisions about which programs to implement occur as part of an earlier collaborative planning process. In other cases, agencies or community groups decide to provide a specific program (such as mentoring or family counseling) and seek funding for implementation.

Sometimes programs are developed locally in response to particular needs and problems. For instance, a school with growing racial or ethnic tensions may decide to hold regular assemblies focused on diversity.

Recently, there has been increasing support for using "evidence-based" practices as part of local efforts (Elliott, 1998). In other words, communities have been encouraged to select programs that have been shown in well-controlled scientific research studies to be effective in violence prevention. Another approach focuses less on selection of a particular program and more on coordination of services into a "system of care" that involves multiple agencies and services. Finally, communities often struggle with what to call their efforts, as seen in discussions about "youth development" or "asset-building" versus "violence prevention."

Regardless of the type of approach selected, agencies often face a new set of challenges when it comes to actually implementing the program. A good idea or an "evidence-based" program can run into many problems along the way. Youth and families may not sign up for the program as expected, staff turnover can cause problems, unexpected events can occur, and so on.

It is actually quite surprising that, until recently, very little attention has been directed towards this important issue in violence prevention and other areas of youth services (Backer, 2001b). Concerns about how programs are adopted, whether an organization or community is "ready" to implement the program, whether programs must have a minimum "dosage" or amount of program exposure,
and characteristics of youth, organizations, and communities that impact implementation generally have not been systematically considered. Yet anyone who has been on the service delivery end of violence prevention programs knows that these issues are critical for day-to-day successful operation as well as for long-term impact and sustainability.

Given these multiple influences on program success, combined with the urgency of developing effective and sustainable responses to youth violence, funding agencies, community groups, and local agencies are increasingly interested in learning about "what works" in community settings. In scientific jargon, this is described as moving from program efficacy (scientific trials) to program effectiveness (real world applications).

In practice, learning about what works in the real world involves more than a study of outcomes across multiple sites. It also involves documentation and discussion of challenges and solutions faced by local service providers or community groups during the course of collaboration, planning, program development, implementation, and evaluation. Towards that end, the Federal Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) has commissioned this volume to describe the experiences of selected School and Community Action Grant (SAG) projects it has funded.

**The School and Community Action Grant (SAG) Program**

Currently, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), through its Prevention Initiatives and Priority Programs Development Branch (PIPP), is supporting several programs that provide funding for violence prevention projects, including the Safe Schools/Healthy Students program (with the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice), the Youth Violence Prevention Grant program, and the Coalitions for Youth Violence Prevention Grant program. All of these grant programs target the prevention of youth violence and other youth problem behaviors, or the promotion of positive youth development through community-wide or statewide coalitions, collaborations, or partnerships among governmental agencies, service agencies, and other community groups and constituencies.

The SAG program, recently retitled the Youth Violence Prevention Grant program, began in 1999, and is still being funded by CMHS each year as part of its school violence prevention effort. CMHS has now funded over 150 of these projects. The projects described in this *Casebook* were funded in 1999. At that time, 40 awards were made to schools and community-based organizations, each of which received up to $300,000 over two years (some grant periods were later extended at the request of the grantee). These first 40 projects were evaluated by Backer, Howard & Koone (2003a).

The purpose of these projects is to build community consensus and collaboration around evidence-based programs that promote healthy child development and prevent youth violence. Grant projects are required to: (1) develop a community-wide collaboration to address youth violence/positive youth development in their communities; and (2) implement an evidence-based violence
prevention/positive youth development enhancement intervention program or programs through this collaboration.

Limited assistance was provided to the projects described here through a national technical assistance center. This center provided consultant-brokers for individual site-based assistance on project development, implementation and evaluation.

Most grantees are community-based service organizations, schools and school systems, or already-existing community coalitions focused on youth problems. Although these projects share common goals of youth development and violence prevention, they also differ on a number of basic factors. These include the level and extent of collaboration activities, type of community and how it was defined (e.g., geographic, school district, etc.), characteristics of youth served, nature of the local youth violence problem, and types of problem behaviors, risk or protective factors being addressed.

More recent rounds of funded projects have focused on specific target populations - vulnerable youth who experience violent victimization because of physical or social differences from other youth (for example, youth with disabilities, gay/lesbian youth, immigrant youth, biracial youth), and girls as victims or perpetrators of violence. Applications were also requested that focused on certain specialty youth service settings, for instance school-based mental health services and youth with justice system involvement. The Casebook may be helpful in shaping these projects and similar future projects as they unfold.

**Organization of the Casebook**

This volume documents and discusses the experiences of eight grantees from sites across the United States. The sites range from small agricultural communities to mid-size suburban towns to large urban centers. The programs include a wide range of service approaches, such as mentoring and tutoring programs, family interventions, alternate service delivery models, and community-wide violence prevention mobilization activities. The selection of agencies and programs was based on a number of factors, including the desire to include a diverse set of projects in diverse communities, availability of reports and documentation, and a willingness of project directors and agency personnel to participate in this project.

The agencies selected and their primary programs are (alphabetically by location):

C  Chicago, Illinois: Chicago Commons, *Common Ground for Youth*

C  Conejos County, Colorado: San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center, *Mi Animo Mentoring Project*

C  Eugene, Oregon: Lane County Department of Children and Families, *Community Safety Net*

C Salt Lake City, Utah: Department of Human Services, *Preserving, Empowering, and Assisting Refugee Children Through Enhancement*

C Topeka, Kansas: Keys for Networking, Inc., *WrapAround Family and Community Services*

C Tucson, Arizona: Metropolitan Education Commission, *Tucson Resiliency Initiative*

C Tulsa, Oklahoma: Mental Health Association, *SafeTeam*

Before the case studies, we discuss in more detail the four key elements of success with youth violence prevention programming mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Although this volume emphasizes the actual experiences of the eight projects described above and lessons learned from their experience, we also provide a very brief review of what has been written about lessons learned from other work in this area. We include references for articles and books that have been written about the four topics we discuss here.

The eight case studies that follow are based on information from many different sources - project grant applications, project reports, surveys, focus groups, evaluator reports, and interviews with project directors and evaluators. Because sources of information vary from site to site, we note the specific information sources used at the end of each case study. We also provide general background information such as project dates, host organization, contact information, and a general description of the program.

In order to provide a clear focus in this *Casebook* and to provide consistency across our descriptions of each of the individual case studies, we organize each case study into ten sections as follows:

- Project summary
- Collaboration successes and challenges
- Links between planning and implementation phases
- Implementation successes and challenges
- Local evaluation successes and challenges
- Utilization of technical assistance
- Project sustainability
- Summary of lessons learned
- Source of information for case study
- Background/contact information

In the lessons learned section, five topics are covered for each case study: *funding and support, collaboration, implementation, evaluation* and *sustainability*.
In the last section, we discuss ways in which the SAG project experiences and lessons learned were similar or different from other youth development and violence prevention programs. Then we made a series of recommendations for future efforts, based on these lessons learned.
Before discussing the experiences of the individual SAG projects included in the case studies section of this volume, we present a brief review of the current science and wisdom knowledge base on the four key elements. The SAG projects certainly are not the first examples of community collaboration and systems implementation approaches for youth violence prevention programs. In a recently-completed evaluation of the first (planning and collaboration) phase of these programs, Backer, Howard & Koone (2003a) emphasize that the SAG projects also represent a trend in systems change approaches to implementing evidence-based interventions in the human services, e.g., the SAMHSA/CMHS-funded Community Action Grant program (evaluated by Backer, Howard & Koone, 2000, 2003b). Others sets of projects have been funded by philanthropy, such as Knight Foundation’s Youth Violence Prevention Initiative (Backer, 2001a). These evaluations and other recent work on these topics provide the basis for the brief review that follows.

Building Collaborations Through Strategic Planning

Collaborations bring together two or more agencies or organizations towards a common purpose that is accomplished by sharing of goals, activities, responsibilities, and resources. These groups can be time-limited or ongoing, informal or structured, and range in scope from very limited to quite broad (Backer & Norman, 2000). Collaborations can be formed to facilitate local planning around problems such as youth violence (that may or may not produce a strategic planning document), to build a base of support for one or more implementation projects, or to coordinate services to facilitate collaborative actions including referrals, case management, co-location of services, and joint planning and service delivery (Knapp, 1995).

Many funding agencies have made collaboration in some form a requirement for participation in a funding initiative. However, this requirement is not necessarily related to documentation of the beneficial effects of such planning activities (Kreuter & Lezin 1998). Still, although results from research studies have been mixed, many studies have identified factors important to the success of planning efforts.

Decades of research on collaboration (summarized in Backer, 2002) boil down to the following eight fundamental elements for success:

1 - **Systematic planning** is critical to the ultimate success of collaborations, leading to a set of objectives and activities that the partnership’s members can support.

2 - **Psychological challenges**, such as power differences among the partners or resistances based upon previous bad experiences with other collaboration, can seriously jeopardize the chances for success; the collaboration must focus both on identifying potential challenges such as these, and then taking active steps to resolve them.
3 - A strong core idea or intervention strategy lies at the heart of most successful collaboration - they’re “about something” that is concrete and relatively easy for the partners to identify.

4 - Collaborations are not cost-free; they require financial and human resources to be successful.

5 - Strategies learned from other successful collaborations can be incorporated usefully into a new partnering activity, especially if these are available at the critical early planning stages.

6 - Collaborations that succeed over time also evolve over time, as they learn from their successes and failures, and maintain responsiveness to their community environments.

7 - Good collaborations begin with a due diligence process to look at the pros and cons of partnering, including an estimate of needed start-up costs, done before the initial decision to partner is made.

8 - If a collaboration is intended to survive over a longer period of time, planning ahead for sustainability is needed at the outset, including creation of a revenue model that will provide financial support beyond initial funding (e.g., a time-limited foundation or government grant).

One useful framework for examining these factors in more detail is provided by Mattessich and Monsey (1992). They list 19 factors in successful collaborations that can be broadly categorized into 6 areas:

**Environmental Characteristics**

- History of collaboration in the community
- Leadership status of collaboration entity
- Favorable political/social climate

**Membership Characteristics**

- Mutual respect, understanding, and trust among members
- Appropriate cross-section of members
- Members see collaboration as in their self-interest
- Ability to compromise

**Process/Structure Characteristics**

- Members share a stake in both process and outcome
- Multiple layers of decision-making
- Flexibility
- Clear roles and policy guidelines are developed
- Adaptability
Communication Characteristics

C  Open and frequent communication
C  Established informal and formal communication links

Purpose Characteristics

C  Concrete, attainable goals and objectives
C  Shared vision
C  Unique purpose

Resource Characteristics

C  Sufficient funds
C  A skilled convenor

Most support for the importance of these factors comes from case studies and follow-up reports from different projects. Many studies have highlighted the particular importance of membership and process/structure characteristics, stressing the need for active involvement of key people (Barton, Powers, Morris, & Harrison, 2001; Fawcett, Paine, Francisco, & Vliet, 1993). It stands to reason that collaborations, being associations of people, work better if people get along with each other, are able to work out their differences, and are guided by a clear, but flexible, process.

Other studies have looked at the importance of the strategic planning process to program development and program implementation. Although there have been few systematic studies, it does seem that strategic planning makes a productive difference for community prevention initiatives. These efforts seem to be most effective when they are guided by an active community collaboration (Backer, 2001a).

Some collaborations in youth violence prevention clearly have had real impact in guiding the process of change. This is their basic reason for existence - to design a program or implement it, or to change a policy or procedure. What is being changed is almost always at the systems level within a single organization, a group of them, or an entire community - which is a main part of the reason why a group of community entities have to come together to make the change happen!

In other cases, collaborations fail to have as much impact as was hoped for. Many get created without first conducting an appropriate assessment - asking questions like: is a partnership the right step at this time, in this community, to address this particular problem? Moreover, few collaborations are created with appropriate attention to the behavioral and management science that has accumulated over the last few years - both about how to create them and about how to sustain them over time (see below for a quick synopsis of some of this knowledge). As a result, even when collaboration is the right step to take, it may not be realized well, so it doesn't work or doesn't last.
The dysfunction and mortality rates among community collaborations is high - not unlike the high divorce rate in American society! More about cautions that arise from systematic evaluations of collaborations follows. Although the types of collaborations highlighted here have important differences from the individual counterpart of marriage (e.g., they typically do not involve co-mingling of funds), they are similar in that they involve deeply shared values, common missions that may spread out over a period of time, and emotionally complex relationships that spring from the first two features.

As Marian Godfrey of the Pew Charitable Trusts put it (Backer, 2002):

“People tend to collaborate because they can get something by doing it, but they need to be clear about what it can really provide. Take an analogous example: many times I’ve seen cultural organizations propose mergers, wanting to save themselves - but they end up with twice as much debt and twice the structural problems. The result is a larger frail organization.”

Funders, community leaders and others helping to create collaborations would do well to heed the relevant French proverb, “Marry in haste, repent at leisure.” And in some cases “pre-marital counseling” in the form of training about how to engage in successful collaborations prior to embarking on one can be essential to success. Finally, collaborations in youth violence prevention or other fields need to be evaluated systematically, both to justify the investment in funding them and to determine how they might be improved over time (Backer, 2003).

**Careful Transitions from Planning to Implementation**

The shift from a planning phase to program selection for implementation can vary along a number of dimensions. In some cases, a particular program has been selected for implementation prior to the planning phase; in these instances, the planning phase revolves around how best to implement the pre-selected program. At other times, the collaboration may review different available programs and strategies and decide to adopt a specific program or set of programs. In either case, the collaboration must select the program of choice or program strategies from an array of possible options.

The specific focus for programming may be driven by a community needs assessment or asset assessment conducted during the planning phase. Needs assessments often rely on formal processes such as surveys and structured interviews as well as informal approaches such as group discussions. One type of "asset-driven" approach involves looking for strengths that communities have to facilitate implementation and service delivery (Kretzman & McKnight, 1993). Another approach, used, for example, by the Search Institute, focuses on assessments of positive individual and contextual supports for youth in order to identify areas in need of improvement (Backer & Kunz, 2000).

The specific type of program or programs chosen is often based on local knowledge of available options. In recent years, this task has been made easier (or has become at least more formalized)

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because of the availability of a number of pre-designated "evidence-based programs" in such areas as substance abuse prevention and violence prevention. These programs have undergone a fairly rigorous review process, and then are classified as effective (scientific evidence indicating consistently positive outcomes), model (effective programs made available for systematic dissemination that includes technical assistance), and promising (some evidence of positive outcomes) (Backer, 2001b).

These programs are made available through several nationwide efforts, such as the National Registry of Effective Programs (CSAP, 2003) and the Blueprints program (Elliott, 1998). Many funding agencies now require the use of evidence-based programs for violence prevention and youth development programming.

However, even programs that have been classified as effective may have only been replicated in one or two communities. In practice, there are often differences in community characteristics and clients served that make exact replications with this type of "top-down" approach more difficult. Yet, if too many adaptations of the original program are made, it is unlikely that the same effects will be found (Backer, 2001b). Part of the transition from planning to program selection involves an assessment of the appropriateness of different programs for local conditions as well as consideration of possible modifications. Later, further adaptation may be needed as the program is actually implemented in the community, and again if it proves viable over the long haul.

Backer (2001b) asserts that the key is “finding a balance” between fidelity and adaptation in implementing evidence-based programs, given that both are important. Both Federal and state agencies with responsibility for youth programs in areas like substance abuse or violence prevention now are developing practice guides that can help implementers make better decisions about how to achieve this balance. For instance, experience suggests that consistent documentation of the implementation process, including how any program adaptations were made, increases the chances for success in overcoming the many challenges of implementing programs in communities.

On the other hand, a different approach to programming emphasizes integrated services across different systems rather than the adoption of a specific, pre-determined program. Given that violence has multiple causes that emerge across many different contexts, communities often focus on the process by which services that address these risk and protective factors are delivered. Implementation focuses on improving this service delivery process, rather than on providing a new service.

In some instances, this effort is accompanied by a focus on changing community or organizational (e.g., school) ecologies so that all systems operate in a coordinated fashion to foster healthy development and prevent youth violence. As part of this process, the community implementers may review existing programs to optimize use of evidence-based strategies.

In all cases, the ultimate success of any program or service implementation strategy will hinge, in part, on the degree of support received from those who will be affected by the program (e.g., agencies that will implement it, clients served, concerned citizens, etc.) (Backer, David, & Soucy,
1995). Certain groups of people may resist implementation because they feel that the program is not appropriate or that a different strategy would be better. Cultural differences in perception of need and choice of solution may emerge. The process of program selection also may facilitate or hinder feelings of ownership and participation. This is particularly problematic when limited dollars necessitate funding some programs at the expense of others, or when key agencies involved in the project (such as schools) have not been involved in selection from the outset.

In addition, part of the success of the transition from planning to implementation depends on selecting interventions that fit into the developmental life cycle of an organization or a community. Programs often fail not because they are inadequate, but because the environment is not ready for the type of program planned (Edwards et al., 2000; Oetting et al, 1995; Backer, David, & Soucy, 1995).

Consider a violence prevention curriculum designed to be implemented by teachers in their regular elementary school classrooms. Although there are several effective, evidence-based programs of this type, a school district or school that has extremely high rates of teacher turnover, teacher shortages, and low morale would probably not do well to have teacher-based curricula as a new program before addressing the problem of teacher motivation and effort. Taken to the extreme, this is akin to taking a healthy eating program to a community suffering from widespread and severe famine; hence, the importance of building readiness assessments into the program decision-making process.

**Strategic Implementation and Local Evaluation**

Researchers and practitioners in the field of youth violence prevention generally have embraced the importance of evidence-based and theory-driven programs. However, in addition to selecting an effective program or strategy, the ultimate success of a prevention effort at the community level hinges on effective implementation, and on a feasible and useful local evaluation.

For many years, implementation was seen as something that “just happened” along the course of providing prevention services. More recently, implementation is seen as a complex process that can be problematic and, if not done properly, that can compromise outcomes (Backer, 2001b; Backer, David, & Soucy, 1995; Chen, 1998; Durlak, 1998). Indeed, there have been recent calls for prevention programs to conduct systematic research on the implementation process (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000).

Implementation can be thought of as putting ideas into practice. Anyone who has written a grant application or project outline knows that programs as planned (or manualized) are often quite different than programs as they actually unfold. There is also a delicate balance between fidelity (following detailed guidelines for program implementation) and adaptation, as already mentioned. The fidelity-adaptation balance is important at all stages of program implementation.
On the one hand, the use of standardized, evidence-based programs requires a relatively high degree of fidelity or consistency with the program as described. On the other hand, many studies have shown that programs simply are not implemented with absolute fidelity, because of varying local needs and resources (Backer, 2001b; Rappaport & Seidman, 2000; Tricker & Davis, 1988). Although this may compromise the effectiveness of the program, particularly if it is changed significantly, it may also be necessary in order to respond to local conditions.

Some programs are probably more amenable to adaptation, and not all types of adaptations will have the same effects. For instance, changing program content is quite different than changing the exact timing of service delivery (e.g., from weekly to twice a week). In some cases, fidelity of the underlying principles or core components of the program may be most important and allow for modifications of the mechanics of delivery. Still, it is important to learn more about the ideal balance between fidelity and adaptation and how it impacts program outcomes. Some thoughts on how to do this were given earlier.

It is also important to focus on the characteristics of the implementation setting and how they influence programming and outcomes. Some organizational and community climates are simply more amenable to change, and can more readily integrate new programs or practices. Settings also vary in terms of perception of need from the perspectives of various constituencies such as project personnel, clients, policy makers, citizens, etc. In some settings, as programs unfold, responsiveness and interest often changes. It is common for new programs to experience a "honeymoon period" where interest and motivation is high followed by a gradual loss of interest and focus on the next "new" program to come along.

In the same vein, staff changes during the course of the project may result in changes in interest level and support. School-based programs are often significantly affected by changes in key leadership. Whereas one principal may be very supportive of curriculum-based violence prevention programs, a new principal might prefer to reserve class time for academic subjects. Similarly, policy changes during implementation (e.g., school funding tied to standardized test scores) or dramatic events (e.g., school shootings) may impact level of interest and support for prevention programs.

Settings also vary in terms of degree of system support for youth development and violence prevention, number and type of programs available, and level of integration of programs. In recent years, there has been increasing support for comprehensive programming that involves multiple contexts such as families, schools, peers, and community groups (Dryfoos, 1990). Some programs try to provide this web of services or organize existing services into integrated systems of care. Other efforts provide a specific type of program such as a family intervention. However, the effectiveness and sustainability of a family prevention program may also hinge on whether or not it dovetails with other compatible efforts and is offered in a receptive prevention climate.

Another important component of implementation is quality. Assuring standardized delivery of a program does not assure that it will be done well by interested service providers who convey this interest and enthusiasm to their clients. Many community-based agencies struggle with high staff turnover and low staff morale, in part, because of the insecurities and low salaries often associated
with grant-funded social service programs. Funding constraints also frequently result in lack of training and administrative support to promote smooth program operation. Personal relationships within agencies or across agencies can also support - or - hinder collaboration and quality of services provided.

Finally, the local evaluation can be a critical part of the implementation process (Backer, 2003). The evaluator can provide assistance in monitoring program fidelity and adaptation, documenting the process of implementation, and specifying and measuring realistic outcomes to evaluate program impact.

However, in practice, there is often a great deal of ambiguity over the role of the evaluator. Agencies and community service providers are often overwhelmed with mandates for outcome-based evaluations derived from elaborate logic models. They are often confused about how best to select and utilize a local evaluator, and have not clarified their own expectations for the involvement of the evaluator (e.g., part of program team, provide regular feedback, provide outcome data only, conduct assessments, etc.).

In many instances, the scope and nature of the evaluation depend on who is selected as the evaluator; for instance, university-based researchers typically try to maximize the research components of the evaluation. Further, in most cases limited time and funding significantly constrain the ability to conduct rigorous outcome evaluations. This often results in evaluation plans that are much more ambitious than actual evaluation products.

**Promoting Project Sustainability**

It is frequently the case that grant funding ends just as full implementation has occurred, and quality services have been firmly established. In practice, it typically takes one or two years to hire and train staff, build a client base, smooth out initial operational difficulties, make relevant project modifications, and examine initial program impact. Given the short duration of grant funding (typically 2-3 years), service providers must quickly shift gears and look for additional monies to sustain their programs. The more expensive the program, the greater this challenge becomes, particularly during economic downturns.

This is not to say that funding is the only issue in long-term survival of programs and services. Case studies in the prevention and mental health fields have pointed to other important factors. In particular, adaptability of the program to changing service needs and community characteristics seems to increase the chance of sustainability (Akerlund, 2000; Glaser & Backer, 1977, 1980). Other means to promote sustainability include institutionalizing new programs though state and local policy and/or legislative changes, or integrating new programs into an existing system of care for which a funding base already exists (Backer, Howard & Koone, 2003a).

Planning for sustainability of an innovation springing from a short-term grant must be done at the beginning of the grant period, along with the allocation of resources to pursue it. Even the most
successful innovations will not remain in place unless there is planning ahead for sustainability (Cutler, 2002; David, 2002). Early planning for sustainability that focuses on how the programs can benefit the community and how operations can be maintained within existing funding streams has been shown to be beneficial, particularly when projects involve collaborations between researchers and communities (Glaser & Backer, 1977, 1980; Altman, 1995).

In a major study of sustainability of neighborhood preservation interventions supported by The Pew Trusts, Cornerstone Consulting Group (2000) identified critical factors common to sustained success:

• community members had legitimate voice in the original effort to shape the intervention, and active engagement in its activities

• their involvement was part of a comprehensive plan that was embraced by those who live and work in the community

• there was organizational leadership to manage the community change required in order to fulfill that plan

• there was evidence of change in the form of concrete products

To summarize, the research and practice wisdom on the sustainability of innovative programs identifies the following four factors as most critical to enduring operation and impact:

1- **early planning for sustainability** - Early in their operation, long-surviving successful projects typically plan ahead for the long run, including developing plans for leadership transition and for long-term funding support. Often these plans are in writing, and have the support of the key stakeholders supporting the organization in which the project lives.

2 - **continual personal involvement by key community leaders** - One of the surest signs that a project will not survive is when the community leaders who were its strongest supporters start drifting away. Sometimes this is nothing more than "leadership fatigue" - people get tired, bored, and other causes or circumstances in their lives motivate them to move on. A two-pronged approach seems to be most effective in grappling with this reality: developing new leaders, and periodically interacting with long-time leaders to explore how to keep each one involved.

3 - **program adaptability** - Even during its initial period of operation, a program may face changes in the environment where it is operating (changes in policy, community circumstances, target populations, etc.). That means the program must be flexible, able to adapt itself to the changes occurring in the environment (while not changing in ways that compromise the basic program model). This is even more true for long-lasting programs, for which some degree of adaptation is imperative.
4 - **continued funding support** - The single most common cause of a program’s failure to survive (assuming it is worthwhile and doesn’t end due to poor quality) is simple...the money runs out. Periodic re-assessments of what funding options are available and how new ones could be developed requires an investment of energy by the project's leadership - which must not make the assumption that the original funder will be around later.

Some projects will have internal resources to tap into for this purpose - colleagues, parent organizations or others with fund-raising experience, for instance. External resources also are increasingly available. For instance, nonprofit associations, management assistance centers with training programs, and community foundations increasingly are offering training courses on fundraising for nonprofit managers.
CASE STUDY #1: MI ANIMO MENTORING

Project Summary

The Mi Animo Mentoring project involved community consensus building and implementation of an intervention program for mentoring at-risk youth. The program was run by the San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center, a well-established service agency in Conejos County, Colorado.

The program was designed to serve at-risk youth in elementary, middle, and high school. Program implementation began in Year 1 with a target service group of 40 youth; however, due to demand, 51 youth were enrolled in the program. The ethnic composition of youth served reflected the ethnic composition of Conejos County, with approximately 2/3 Hispanic participants and 1/3 non-Hispanic White students.

The Mi Animo program was based on mentoring guiding principles, but they did not follow a standard model such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters. This was intentional in order to develop greater local ownership and buy-in for the program. This is a rural agricultural community with many Latino families, and they wanted to be certain the program was sensitive to diverse geographic and cultural needs.

Collaboration Successes and Challenges

The project has been very successful in building and sustaining community collaboration around violence prevention and youth development, and has extended that collaboration to include the Mi Animo Mentoring project. In part, this was possible because the community group has been meeting for many years to strengthen opportunities for youth, regardless of whether or not there was grant funding. The focus has been “success in numbers,” in other words, local service providers try to help each other out and work towards a common goal. According to the program director, this is particularly important in small and rural communities.

Relevant to the Mi Animo Mentoring project funded through SAG, a core group of residents, the Mi Animo Health Advisory Committee, has been working together for almost four years. Thus, they had been working together for approximately two years prior to receiving funding for consensus building and program development around school-based health centers, youth violence prevention, and other opportunities for youth and families. This group included teachers, school administrators, students, parents, health providers, members of the local community center, lawyers, clergy, and representatives from a variety of agencies including mental health, probation, social services, and law enforcement.

A unique feature of this project was their incorporation of a community readiness model as part of their development and evaluation strategy. The purpose of this model was to provide a structure that
assists communities, organizations and groups assess how “ready” they are to address an issue and provides strategies that are appropriate for each stage of readiness. Further, the project involved comparison of community readiness before and after the project implementation, and it appears to have increased on several dimensions.

In addition, the idea of mentoring was not new, but had been a formal and informal component of many other youth development and violence prevention programs run by the San Luis Valley Comprehensive Community Mental Health Center. Thus, this project (both the collaboration and mentoring) was really part of an ongoing collaboration and service delivery system rather than a new project. As one staff member noted, “The program has been well established for a long time and so there was already integrity in the process.”

Community members (including the two school districts involved) were also excited about the program and the continuing opportunities it would afford children and families. Program staff (from focus group discussions) and the program director all noted the importance of this community commitment from the beginning of the program. As noted by one staff member, “Even the county commissioners and school board members have been cooperative and committed.” This points to the importance of an agency’s reputation and work history in the community, as well as the overall support for certain types of programs.

Mentoring seems to be a particularly good candidate for widespread support for several reasons including: (a) there is a reasonably high level of public awareness regarding the importance of a loving and caring adult for the healthy development of children; (b) many adults remember how a particular “mentor” or caring adult helped them make important decisions and/or get through difficult times; (c) agencies can also cite recent research findings and “model programs” focused on the beneficial effects of mentoring; (d) mentoring builds on a community service/volunteerism model that has become increasingly popular in the United States; and (e) it is a rather “portable” service in that mentors and youth can meet in mutually convenient locations rather than at a pre-designated center.

The only real challenges mentioned by staff and community members in regards to community collaboration were time and distance. As the project director noted, “Developing and operating a program in a small rural area takes more time and planning. You must include everyone which at times can be frustrating.” Distance was also noted as a continuing barrier. It is quite difficult to get people to meetings when members must often travel up to 60 miles in bad weather to get there. Further, most collaboration members had to integrate meetings with their jobs, which could be in the opposite direction. To accommodate schedules and travel, meetings were held at 7:00 am.

**Links between Planning and Implementation Phases**

The two-year structure of the SAG grants, with Year 1 for planning and Year 2 for implementation, did not fit the rollout of their program. First, the project director and staff did not feel that one year consensus building and one year for implementation was enough time. In the case of Mi Animo,
there was a history of consensus building, so initial efforts were not as difficult. However, they view consensus building as a continuous process that does not stop when the intervention begins. To the contrary, the collaboration is very important during program development and implementation, and is even more important for addressing issues of sustainability.

Another concern mentioned by Mi Animo staff was the grant requirement of a consensus building model followed by an evidence-based program. The applicants had to select the specific evidence-based program they would use and describe this in their proposal. However, the very premise of consensus building within a community is that community members and participants should have a voice in the selection of a particular program.

In some communities, there is a fair amount of enthusiasm around selecting an evidence-based program from a recommended list; however, community members still want to be a part of that selection. In other communities, there is a concern that a program evaluated in a very different setting may not be appropriate for addressing local issues. For these reasons, it is difficult to specify the specific program or strategy that will be used.

In fact, because the Alamosa group knew they wanted to provide mentoring and because they were aware of the “Blueprint” mentoring program of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BBBS), they selected this program in preparing their application. However, after funding was awarded and they began to set up the program, they learned that BBBS does not do collaborations, but rather hires their own people.

However, the collaboration did not think this would work well in Alamosa where local “ownership” is very important. As the project director mentioned, “The BBBS model is primarily for urban, single parent, at-risk youth; our program takes all children from rural, mixed family situations. Consequently, the project used some of the mentoring guiding principles of the BBBS program, but adapted this to respond to local conditions.

**Implementation Successes and Challenges**

In examining the successes and challenges of the Mi Animo project as it was implemented in Conejos County, three main arenas are covered: (1) services provided by Mi Animo; (2) project impact on youth and mentors; and (3) project impact on the community.

**Services Provided by Mi Animo** The project planned to match 40 youth with mentors and actually matched 51 youth with mentors. A total of 3,154 contact hours for all participants was documented, with distinct groups of “low dosage” and “high dosage” youth. Their ability to recruit and train more mentors than expected and match them with youth certainly represents a successful outcome. There also seems to have been a high degree of staff enthusiasm and dedication - staff surveys and focus groups consistently attest to the strength, diversity, and commitment of staff. Half of the staff are bi-lingual, which is critical in this setting.
In addition to the importance of high-quality, committed, and culturally responsive staff (critical to all programs), a mentoring program is particularly difficult to run because it also requires volunteer commitment, training, supervision, and monitoring. It also hinges on the quality of the match between mentor and mentee, so procedures must be in place to evaluate this match and make adjustments when necessary.

In fact, the project director stated that she didn’t realize how much time it would take to do the mentoring program. Her agency tended to be client-focused in terms of their services. However, the mentoring program required a lot of other community work that they had not anticipated, including training the community, recruitment, public relations, and support activities. During the very brief implementation period, they were trying to run the program while they were also learning about how best to conduct mentor recruitment and training, how best to conduct student recruitment and training, how best to engage the media, and what types of activities were most effective.

Although the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program provided guidelines for Mi Animo, many challenges in program development and implementation were really unique to this community. For instance, they found that it was important to have community members “nominate” other members (again, this is a small community where people know each other), rather than soliciting mentors through advertisements, mass mailings, or public service announcements. This process involved asking community members to nominate others who would be excellent mentors, then calling the person and telling them they had been nominated by someone they know. They also found that presentations at local stores (Wal-Mart, K-Mart), presentations to local agencies, and involving Advisory Board members in mentor recruitment was helpful.

Training was also a challenge. The project director notes that many potential mentors did not feel that they had the required skills to be a mentor. In response, staff spent several hours educating mentors on skills and confidence building in order to be productive volunteers. This had to be individualized; training in large groups was not thought to be effective. Overall, direct and individual contact with mentors (for instance, face to face communication rather than letters) was important. However, distance also made training difficult. The solution seemed to be to travel to wherever the mentor was, either their workplace, home, or agreed upon location.

Still, mentors overall felt they needed clearer information on what was involved, including how long it would take for details such as records checks, time commitment expected, etc., and more consistent training. Mentor comments included: “I was never trained and we need training,” “It was really confusing because the training and recruitment wasn’t consistent,” and “more formal trainings are needed.” Mentors also noted a need for clearer direction, for instance as one mentor said, “There should be some rule clarification and role definition for parents, mentors, and students as well as programs.” Finally, mentors mentioned a need for more resources and direction on working with children who are especially needy and how to set limits.

Distance was an important challenge in general for the implementation of the mentoring project. As noted, mentors typically had to drive two hours round trip in order to interact with their mentee for two hours or so. In addition, there are no addresses on the house, no cell phone coverage, and one
can often travel miles without seeing any markers at all. Quarterly activities for mentors and mentees were also difficult because there are no places big enough to accommodate the turnout.

Another aspect of rural life that created challenges was how to program over the summer. Several staff noted that summer “is hard on mentor programs.” In a farming community, summer is a busy time to prepare for winter. Families rely on children to assist with this work. Some students leave to work in cities or spend summers with the other parent outside the area. For others, this is a time for family vacations. Thus, the program found that contact with both the student and the mentor was extremely minimal during the summer.

Student recruitment seemed to run relatively smoothly. The school district was on board and helped facilitate referrals; having bilingual (Spanish-English) staff was also seen as a plus. The tie to a mental health agency proved problematic, for instance, some families were upset when they received a letter from the mental health agency. The solution was to create a distinct program letterhead and work more closely with the schools. Another related issue mentioned was challenges when staff personally know the mentor and have to ask about personal experiences. For some families, this borders on disrespect. Staff suggested changing the forms and using staff for interviews who do not know the mentor.

In terms of the mentor-mentee relationship, there seem to have been both successes and failures. In many cases, this seems to be due to the commitment of the mentor. One story was mentioned where a brother had been in the program and decided to drop out so the mentor drove 50 miles each way to work with the boy’s brother in order to continue to help both boys and the family. Unsuccessful matches occurred when mentors did not follow-through.

For instance, several children in the mentee focus group made comments such as: “I call my mentor but she’s never home,” “Neither is mine,” “I call my mentor four times a month and she’s never there,” and “Mentors need to show up when they promise.” Other children had the opposite experience, for instance as one child noted, “I see my mentor every day,” “I do a lot of stuff with my mentor,” and “My mentor lives in my neighborhood, he’s my neighbor and he helps me all the time.”

**Project Impact on Youth and Mentors** Another measure of success involves the effects of the program on both youth and mentors. This can only be determined from the available data including: (a) youth survey (48 completed); (b) youth focus group (9 participants), and (c) mentor group focus group (number of participants not specified).

Pre-post scores on the youth survey are provided in tabular form in the project’s final report. Survey questions addressed drug use, perceptions of risk of drug use, attitudes toward use, amount of time spent in activities, feelings of support, feelings of loyalty, time spent with parents, liking school, getting along with others, and family contact with law enforcement. Although mean scores are presented, little information is provided in the report about the specific measure used, time between pre- and post-testing, or other procedures. There is also no comparison group, although comparisons are made between low dosage and high dosage groups.
Data are presented and evaluated by “eyeballing” differences. However, this is somewhat problematic as it is virtually impossible to determine whether a certain amount of change (either up or down) really means anything. For instance, participants in the low dosage group had a mean score for wrongness of alcohol of 1.6 at pre-test and 1.7 at post-test (on a 1-4 scale). The interpretation was made that “the low dosage group changed their attitudes about using drugs as well, reflecting that use was less “wrong” at post than at pre. This clearly seems to be an overstatement.

Overall, when eyeballing scores, the low dosage group appeared to get worse and the high dosage group appeared to get better. What does this really mean? That low levels of mentoring are harmful? Too many alternate explanations are possible, including the simple possibility that the youth in the high dosage group were more likely to want to please adults and hence, at post-test, give more socially desirable answers.

In terms of outcome assessments, the project should still be commended for trying to collect this type of information. However, as noted throughout this Casebook, it may not be possible to collect much in the way of useful and understandable data given project constraints.

The information provided in the focus group with youth seems particularly valuable and important, although it is limited to nine of the 51 youth. In projects with very small numbers of participants and no comparison groups, it might be more effective to rely on individual interviews and focus groups. This type of information, although not seemingly “scientific,” can truly tell the story of the project and provide useful information about both benefits and potentially negative aspects of the program.

It would also be helpful to include direct and specific questions such as “how has this program helped you” or “what has changed about you” rather than simply asking what youth liked and did not like. It would also be potentially interesting to have students keep journals to record their experience. In some sense, those who are supposed to be most impacted by the program actually provide the least and least detailed information. Children did discuss the activities and what they liked. Most of the children stated that they liked the activities with their mentor, wanted more activities, more group things with other mentees, and more “fun stuff” rather than just tagging along with their mentors.

Mentors’ evaluation also seems to be limited to one focus group (number of attendees not specified). Again, this focus group was oriented more towards implementation challenges and successes, rather than how the mentor, himself or herself, actually benefitted from participation in the program.

Still, mentors provided useful comments that lay out qualities of good mentors, challenges in mentoring, and suggested changes to the program. These centered on the importance of time and patience to be a good mentor, and the need for better training and clearer policies (mentioned previously). One of the focus group questions asked about changes mentors have seen in kids - what keeps you doing this? A few mentors expressed the feeling that youth were really needy and if they kept with it they could make a difference. Another mentor noted that “The young man I had was
kind of crazy but by the end of the year he was the hardest worker I had - he’s turning into a great kid.”

**Project Impact on the Community** Although the specific implementation project for SAG funding was the mentoring program, this group was also simultaneously interested in community consensus building and increasing community "readiness" for collaboration around youth development and youth violence prevention. The evaluator conducted pre (April 2000) and post (October 2001) community interviews using their readiness assessment model. They divided the county into north and south because they felt they were distinct communities. This illustrates the importance of carefully defining "community" in terms of measuring impact.

The Community Readiness Model offers a structure to assist communities and groups assess how ready they are to address an issue and provide strategies that are appropriate for each stage of readiness. The model begins with key informant interviews, usually four interviews per community. The questions asked during the interview focus on six dimensions of community: (a) current community efforts; (b) community knowledge of efforts; (c) support of community leadership; (d) attitudes in the community about the issue; (e) community knowledge about the issue; and (f) current support for the issue. Each score is associated with a specific descriptor, for instance, initiation, preplanning, vague aware, preparation, etc. Different strategies are provided to facilitate increases in readiness on each dimension.

Pre and post scores in Alamosa indicated that community readiness for youth violence prevention increased on all dimensions. This seems like an important accomplishment; however, it is a bit difficult to know if this was a result of the specific collaborative activities, the mentoring project, or both. It is also a bit difficult to know what it means, for instance, to move from a 5.9 pre-test score to a 6.4 post-test score.

Nevertheless, the entire planning and implementation process seems to have had a positive effect on the community. More information from focus groups and/or individual interviews with key leaders would also be useful. Additionally, community impact was measured at the end of the project, so it is difficult to determine if this impact was sustained after the project ended.

**Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges**

The evaluation task was a bit difficult because it included both assessing changes in the community as a result of the collaboration process as well as individual outcomes related to participation in the mentoring project. As noted in the project final report, the evaluation had three distinct components: (a) the Community Readiness assessments; (b) evaluation of program process; and (c) evaluation of program outcome (ongoing and yearly comparison data).

Overall, the evaluation seemed to run quite smoothly. This was due, at least in part, to the fact that the agency has been partnering with this evaluation firm for 10 years and has an established
relationship with them. Although not local, the firm is in Colorado, and is aware of some of the particular challenges of working in rural communities in Colorado.

The evaluators were also involved in program development and adaptations, development of forms and reporting procedures, and working with staff on an ongoing basis. The project director spoke very highly of their work and mentioned that they were clearly seen as part of the "team" rather than external evaluators. She also noted that they viewed their role as to assist the program, not to criticize or find fault. This attitude facilitated positive relationships with staff and administrators.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

This project identified several technical assistance needs and were able to identify appropriate consultants. For example, they needed consultation from someone who had run a mentoring program, particularly around "nuts and bolts" issues. They identified a potential trainer, secured his services, and brokered funding from CMHS. Overall, the project director thought this was extremely useful and would like to have been able to access even more technical assistance.

**Project Sustainability**

The project director noted that "sustainability is money and people who are invested in the value of programs." Clearly, the project was successful in building local investment of people in the project. However, money is often more difficult to come by, particularly in times of budget deficits. The project was able to patch together small pockets of funding from the state. They were able to take on a few more youth and match with mentors. However, they note that funding has been drying up at the state level and they have had to scale back on matches and support activities. The advisory group still meets quarterly, but they have less available resources to work with.

It is apparent that this project really did all it could to increase sustainability. However, as with many youth development and violence prevention programs, there are few funding options for sustainability, and programs are left to seek new short-term grants when the current grant expires. Although there are some block grant options (such as Safe and Drug Free Schools), these monies are often already committed and it is difficult to get funding for new programs.

**Summary of Lessons Learned**

The Mi Animo Mentoring project and community collaboration seems to be an exemplary project that was able to accomplish a lot within a two-year time frame. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

**Funding and support** Project management felt that two years was simply not enough time to develop and sustain a collaboration, and implement and fine tune a program. In some sense, short-
term funding can increase expectations, particularly once the program is running and positively received, and then create a general let-down when the program loses funding and is no longer available.

**Collaboration** One of the most important lessons for collaboration is that developing, building, and sustaining collaborations requires a lot of time, planning, and effort, particularly in rural communities. This is actually a process that evolves over time, rather than a short-term accomplishment that, once formed, is relatively stable.

Another important lesson for collaboration focuses on the need to allow for community input and decision-making during all phases of the project. For instance, although current thinking emphasizes evidence-based programs, it is important to allow projects that flow from a collaboration process a certain amount of leeway in sorting through potential projects as part of the planning process. Perhaps grantees could be asked to list five evidence-based projects that will be presented to the collaboration for discussion.

A related issue concerns the extent to which evidence-based projects that are frequently evaluated in only a few communities can address local needs, particularly in areas with unique demographic and historical characteristics (such as Conejos County). The value of a collaborative approach is allowing members to be part of the decision-making and implementation process so that programs are responsive to local conditions and needs.

**Implementation** An important lesson learned was that operating a program in a rural area takes more time and planning. Although, in general, operating a program takes more time and planning than typically expected in almost every community, the problems in rural communities (distance, local economic conditions, everyone knowing everyone else, etc.) seem to create even more demands.

The most pressing implementation challenge for Mi Animo seems to have been recruitment of qualified and committed mentors, and providing adequate training and supervision. Again, this was further exacerbated in a rural community, where mentors must travel great distances to meet with their mentees and to attend trainings. It does seem that it would be helpful to develop a carefully articulated training plan at the outset of the program; perhaps this is an area that would benefit from early technical assistance.

**Evaluation** The relationship of project staff and evaluation consultants appears to have greatly facilitated their collaborative work and the usefulness of the evaluation process and data to ongoing program implementation. However, the pre- and post-testing of individual participants did not provide very useful information. It would have been more informative to conduct more interviews, have mentees keep journals, or simply collect archival data on school attendance and grades, which is a bit easier to make sense of. Again, rigorous outcome evaluations may simply not be possible for projects of this scope and duration.
Sustainability  Project sustainability was mentioned as one of the most pressing problems. As the program director discussed, agencies need money to provide services over the long haul rather than hurry up and get the program running and evaluated within two years, only to have funds dry up. Sustainability must also be addressed from the beginning of the project, rather than six months before the program will end. However, even with the most committed community, sustainability still requires funding, and community groups must often compete for limited (and currently shrinking) funds. Four to five year grants would certainly provide a bit more of a cushion, particularly if sustainability planning was built in from the outset.

Source of Information for Case Study

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; (d) pre-post mentee evaluation data; (e) staff surveys and summaries; (g) summaries of focus groups held with staff, mentors, and mentees; (g) evaluator report; (h) interview with Donna Briones, project director; and (i) interview with the project evaluator. This project should, indeed, be commended for its excellent record keeping and tracking of progress and challenges.

Background/Contact Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

Project Dates:  October 1999 – November 2001

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CASE STUDY #2: CHICAGO COMMONS’ COMMON GROUND FOR YOUTH

Project Summary

The Chicago Commons’ Common Ground for Youth project is a violence prevention effort in two Commons’ sites: Mary McDowell Settlement House (serving a predominantly African-American population) and Emerson House (serving a predominantly Hispanic population). These two settlement houses are part of the larger community-building approach, Chicago Commons, that has been operating in the Chicago area since 1894.

During the SAG grant period, Chicago Commons was serving over 17,000 children, youth, and families in 21 sites. Their approach emphasizes the development of individuals and families in poor communities by addressing their self-sufficiency and economic independence in a manner responsive to local needs. Thus, the new SAG project was part of a larger effort with considerable history and grounding in the community.

In addition to bolstering the local collaborative efforts around youth violence prevention in the communities served by Mary McDowell Settlement House and Emerson House, the project also involved the pilot implementation and adaptation of two evidence-based exemplary practices, Self Enhancement, Inc. (SEI) and the Buddy System with 90 youth.

SEI has been implemented and evaluated with African-American youth. It is based on a “Relationship Model” that emphasizes constructive relationships between students and adults in leadership roles. This model emphasizes three roles for the adult leader: parent, mentor, and instructor. Students receive a minimum of one in-school class and two after-school activities each week as well as individual counseling and incentives for appropriate behavior.

The Buddy System is a community-based mentoring program that uses community members as change agents and relies heavily on principles of behavior modification. Each "buddy" works with three youth to build relationships, engage in enjoyable activities, and monitor progress.

Collaboration Successes and Challenges

Given the different physical location and population demographics, each site had a different collaboration. Because of the longstanding presence in the communities of the Mary McDowell Settlement House and Emerson House, collaborative practices had been well established. Many members of the new coalition had worked previously in these communities and/or were already working at the sites to address other community concerns.

The SAG project provided an opportunity to add new services for youth in the community. Each community coalition met monthly and included representatives from social services, a congressional aide, parents, and the local hospital. Although they had anticipated that the coalitions would meet
quarterly, members decided they wanted to meet monthly. The coalitions provided guidance and direction, including facilitation of additional meetings.

The project director felt that the coalitions were quite successful. Again, this success was linked to the longstanding and positive reputation of the Mary McDowell Settlement House and Emerson House. Further, each site had a community builder, a program coordinator, and an indigenous consultant who worked with coalition members. In particular, the community builders were active in coalition building and sustainability. At Emerson House, where many members spoke only Spanish, staff were available for translation during coalition meetings. Also, many program staff and coalition members lived in the community and were familiar with local issues, community leaders, and residents.

The coalitions were active in both the planning and implementation phases of the project. The project director felt that the active participation of the coalition members in all phases of the program was important to sustaining their involvement. Coalition members not only reviewed the implementation plans and dealt with issues that came up over the course of the program, they also attended events, served as chaperons on trips, and helped seek additional funding. In addition, many of the coalition members served as mentors, working with the program coordinator on a regular basis to monitor the progress of their mentees.

Because the two coalitions represented distinct cultural groups and were at opposite ends of the westside of Chicago, they also developed mechanisms for communication among members of both coalitions. Most notable was a website that included listserv distribution of messages, e-mail addresses, and chat rooms.

Although there were many collaboration successes, there were also some marked challenges. During the early stages, one important challenge was to expand the collaborations in order to include members with a broader diversity of skills.

Another challenge was to work towards consensus building. It was relatively easy to get members to join; however, building consensus proved to be a slower process that required specific training. Specifically, they felt that the project was “bogged down” during the middle of the first year, and they were unable to move forward without mission and goals statements and a more clearly defined sense of where they wanted to go. An overnight retreat was held during the latter part of the first year of grant funding to provide training on consensus building and facilitate the bonding of coalition members. This seemed to have a positive effect on how well the coalitions were able to make decisions and proceed. The progress reports note that a strong consensus was established on the details of program implementation prior to startup for both programs.

Several challenges were related to practical arrangements. For instance, progress reports noted the need for continued follow-up and reminders to insure that members would attend the meetings. Another challenge was the relocation of Emerson House. Although this occurred during the grant extension period and did not impact grant activities, the coalition did not continue as before. A new
coalition group was established, with some new members joining the group. Efforts were made to allow “ownership” of the coalition in the new community.

**Links between Planning and Implementation Phases**

The pre-selection of two “model programs” for implementation seemed to provide direction for the coalition. There did not seem to be a sense of taking on what someone else had selected. Perhaps this ownership was related to the extensive coalition and consensus building activities that were designed to lay the groundwork for implementation. In addition, the SEI program did not have a formal curriculum, but rather emphasized a specific set of principles (e.g., code of conduct, incentives, quality of relationships between youth and adults). This allowed for some flexibility and input into the specific details of the program.

In this regard, the coalition was quite active in incorporating African-American beliefs and practices into the model (Self-Enhancement, Inc.) used at Mary McDowell Settlement House. A mission statement was developed through a consensus process that acknowledged the importance of incorporating African-American principles (in particular, the seven principles of Nguzo Saba). This addressed the need to help African-American children feel good about their ethnic identity and their culture.

**Implementation Successes and Challenges**

The implementation phase of this project built on the previous coalition building process during which relationships with various community agencies were established. This greatly facilitated implementation. The community seemed eager and ready for the services that were developed as part of the model programs selected.

An important measure of implementation success is number of youth served. Otherwise put, programs that meet or exceed participation expectations can be seen as offering services that exceeded enrollment projections - each site enrolled 45 students, rather than 30 per site as initially planned. From the information in the progress reports and final reports, both programs seem to have been well implemented, with a range of services offered. However, little detail is provided about hours of service per youth, making it is difficult to determine exact amount of services.

The project director attributes much of the program success to "great staff." She notes that staff were highly motivated, competent, and committed to the program. In some cases, staff were hired from a volunteer pool, so they had "seen the person in action." In other cases, staff were recommended by other staff members. In most all cases, staff had demonstrated a strong commitment to the community because they had connections and/or had volunteered with the organization previously. They also formed positive relationships with each other, coalition members, youth, and families. The project director also noted that these relationships were extremely important to the success of the projects.
As with most programs of this type, there were also some implementation challenges. A very basic challenge was transportation—many of the children identified to participate in the program by the schools did not live within walking distance of their school or program site. This problem was solved by providing transportation, although this was an unanticipated need. Another challenge was linked to the mechanisms for getting referrals to the programs. They had initially expected most referrals to come from the juvenile justice system, but later modified and expanded the referral base to include schools and other agencies (particularly for the project at Emerson House).

Adapting the SEI program and the Buddy System for use in each community also presented some challenges. SEI did not have a specific curriculum, so the coalition needed to develop this while still holding true to the principles of the program. This required more planning than simply implementing a model program; however, the modifications appeared to be successful and to increase the relevance of the program to the local community. Staff met with representatives of the Center for Self Enhancement in Portland, Oregon who oversee the SEI program.

They also selected a curriculum that incorporated the principles of KWANZA, the SETCLAE curriculum. Adapting the Buddy System was a bit more of a challenge because the program per se is no longer in existence. However, staff met with former staff members to discuss their experiences with the program and share any available information. They also worked with a college student who gathered additional information from the research literature relating to the Buddy System. A clinical consultant was hired to deal with specific behavioral problems and related issues identified by mentors when working with their students. Overall, it appears that they were able to incorporate principles of the Buddy System into a comprehensive program for youth.

Programs offered for "at-risk" youth also run the risk of conjuring up images of "at-risk" and what that implies. The SEI program at Mary McDowell House ran into this problem. This was primarily because the person they hired as a liaison was a social worker, and that signaled to families that the student was having "problems." Families resisted participating because they did not want to be identified as such. In particular, this was a problem for parents of children who were doing pretty well— they did not want their children to participate in a program for problem youth and felt stigmatized by the referrals. Although this issue presented an unexpected challenge, the project director mentioned that the planning period provided time to work this out before the program began.

Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges

A local evaluator was hired to conduct the evaluation. She focused primarily on providing feedback on the coalition building process and implementation of programs as well as preparation of grant reports. She attended local meetings and worked with project staff to integrate evaluation information into program operations. They also had a community organizing consultant at Mary McDowell House and a clinical consultant at Emerson House who helped monitor implementation. Relatively little effort was put into gathering outcome data for students. The consultant collected
archival data from report cards, and school promotion was used as the primary outcome measure. All of the youth who participated were promoted to the next grade.

The evaluator seems to have had a good relationship with staff and was well integrated into program monitoring. In other words, the evaluation seems to have been quite useful for learning about what was working and where modifications were needed. The project director noted that the evaluator helped pull things together for the quarterly reports. She felt that this process was important because it kept them on schedule in terms of monitoring their progress.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

Staff had already identified specific programs and specific consultants to help with their programs. They felt that the technical assistance they received from the Center for Self Enhancement, former staff from the Buddy System, and local consultants who worked with them on a regular basis was quite helpful and important to the success of their programs.

**Project Sustainability**

The project director emphasized that projects of this type should last longer than two years. As she mentioned, it takes two years to get a program up and running, even when the necessary collaborations are in place. During this short time frame, it is quite difficult to be seeking additional funding, when most efforts are directed towards getting the program up and running. They would have liked more time to build in a "sustainability phase," much like the planning phase, so the coalition could have specifically focused on this need.

Still, the multiple collaborations with agencies, commitment of the coalition members, and link to Chicago Commons (with its long history of social services in the community) helped them sustain parts of the programs. Specifically, at Mary McDowell they are engaged in a collaboration with other agencies through the Governor's Workforce Advantage Initiative that allows many of the SEI activities to continue. At Emerson House, they were able to get a foundation to fund the mentoring program and some additional programming. The project director felt that the coalitions were quite helpful in exploring funding options.

**Summary of Lessons Learned**

Common Ground for Youth represents a community-based model for adapting best practices in diverse communities with diverse needs. The program was particularly strong in building local coalitions and establishing effective relationships. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

**Funding and support** Both programs operated in neighborhoods with a high level of need, but also with a solid base of support and commitment from agencies and community members. This
helped build support for the programs and secure additional funding. Although the two-year funding period was too short, coalition members were able to secure additional monies to keep parts of the program going.

Collaboration  The Chicago Commons had a long history of community collaboration. Many of the people involved in the SAG project had been involved in other projects of Chicago Commons. They were also sensitive to the distinct needs of communities separated both geographically and culturally, and developed collaborations in each community to best reflect local needs. Still, the coalitions struggled with some issues commonly faced by collaboration groups.

Most notably, they found it somewhat difficult to reach consensus on important decisions. Because this problem was identified during the early stages of their collaboration, they were able to respond with a two-day retreat focused on consensus building. This was an important milestone and seemed to result in much more effective collaboration. As the project director noted, "Collaboration and cooperation is really important--relationships with agencies are essential for implementing programs."

Implementation  An important lesson learned is that it is important to exercise caution when using terms such as "at-risk," particularly when programs seek to include a diverse group of children and families. Although parents of children who would be considered less at-risk were particularly reluctant to send their children to this type of program, it is probably not necessary to label any children as at-risk--rather programs can be pitched as helping all children succeed.

Evaluation  The evaluator seems to have had a good relationship with project staff and a strong reputation in the community. This greatly facilitated her work with the coalitions and was important for the utilization of evaluation findings. Further, she seemed to maintain regular contact with the day-to-day operations of the project. This demonstrates how evaluation can be integrated into the overall operations of the project.

Sustainability  An important lesson learned is that establishing a strong community base of support (in this case through diverse coalitions) can be helpful in securing additional funding.

Source of Information for Case Study

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; (d) evaluator report; (e) interview with Josephine Robinson, project coordinator; and (f) interview with the project evaluator.
Background Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

**Project Dates:** October 1999 - September 2001

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CASE STUDY #3: COMMUNITY SAFETY NET

Project Summary

The Community Safety Net (CSN) is a community-based response to youth who are identified as being at-risk of abuse or neglect but have not yet reached the threshold of child welfare action (for example, children showing early signs of potential abuse or serious family problems). The project is a countywide, collaborative, and intensive service-delivery model in Lane County, Oregon. The SAG project specifically provided for CSN in the Springfield Middle School district, a community of about 10,000 residents.

CSN is designed to serve families that child welfare services (State Offices of Children and Families) cannot serve, or those who fall through the cracks of other agencies criteria. Children and/or families are referred by child welfare to a community-based, inter-agency triage team of professionals. This team assesses each family, makes decisions about what type of support and services can be provided, and develops a Family Service Plan. The project also employs family support workers to work with families on a range of needs.

CSN is based on the Patch System, a community-centered, “wraparound” service delivery model developed in the United Kingdom and used in some communities in the United States (e.g., Cedar Rapids, Iowa). It is not a new agency, but a change process to provide for better integration of services.

A primary goal of this approach is to make human services less bureaucratic and more responsive to family needs than the prevailing approach. Services are adapted to the culture of the neighborhood as defined by a limited geographic area or “patch.”

Not only is the patch approach based on serving a specific community, it is also based on bringing together multiple agencies to strengthen families by working as partners on a patch team. This team serves a specific geographic area and serves as a centralized entry point for a wide array of services for at-risk children and families. Thus, the patch approach is a mechanism for providing services for children and families as well as a system reform strategy that seeks to build collaborations and collaborations across service providers.

Collaboration Successes and Challenges

When the SAG project began, collaborative efforts to improve services for children and families had already been well established in Lane County. These projects supported the CSN collaboration. For example, a year-long community planning process resulted in “The Commission on Children and Families Five Year Comprehensive Plan” for a wellness system incorporating multiple levels of prevention. A key strategy of this plan was early identification of children and families in crisis so services could be provided before problems became more serious.
Lane County was also involved in a comprehensive state-mandated planning effort under Senate Bill 555. In addition, there were several other ongoing, standing committees that addressed issues such as safety, abuse prevention, and community action. These included the Public Safety Coordinating Council, Lane County High Risk Juvenile Crime Prevention Partnership, the Child Abuse Prevention Project, Lane County Success by Six, a State Level Steering Committee to support community initiatives, and the Springfield Together Community Action Plan.

Lane County had also spearheaded a number of system reform and integration projects prior to the CSN project. For example, there had been a previous SAMHSA grant to the county for mental health services for children. Some of the participants on that project were meeting in a collaboration and were excited about moving the model into child welfare and abuse prevention.

The county had also been involved in a system change effort called New Opportunities for several years. New Opportunities was based on a strength/need-based, coordinated service delivery system and involved two primary collaboration groups. The Funders group had representatives from directors of social service, school, and governmental agencies in Lane County. The Mid-level Managers (M&Ms) represented supervisors and managers from those agencies. During the planning phase of the SAG project, the M&M group agreed to expand their membership and serve as the Steering Committee for CSN. Thus, key stakeholders of New Opportunities became key stakeholders in CSN.

The Steering Committee’s efforts were primarily directed towards creating, directing, and making needed modifications in the implementation of CSN. Although the SAG project was linked to a specific CSN site in Springfield, a major goal of the system reform effort was to expand CSN throughout Lane County. Indeed, state and federal dollars were used to establish other CSN sites. The Steering Committee served to guide this countywide effort. As such, they functioned primarily as an oversight committee for the entire effort.

As described above, Lane County had a history of community planning efforts around coordinated services for children and families that provided a rich backdrop against which the CSN collaboration could unfold. However, this extensive community involvement in planning also presented challenges precisely because people were already extensively involved in similar efforts.

One barrier involved over-commitment. As noted in one of the progress reports, “The primary barrier to community consensus building is the full agendas of current planning and policy bodies, as well as those of service providers.”

An additional barrier mentioned was the lack of clear changes as a result of many previous planning efforts. Again, as noted in the progress report, “The problem lies with the community’s skepticism regarding planning efforts. Past experience has shown little change in the service delivery system in response to planning efforts.” Still, past and concurrent planning efforts in Lane County created a readiness for CSN that greatly facilitated its acceptance and integration into the service system. A previous and extensive collaboration history seems to have significantly helped the SAG collaboration.
Links between Planning and Implementation Phases

The SAG-funded project in Springfield was an extension of earlier work with the Community Safety Net in Lane County. Specifically, SAG funds were used to implement and evaluate expanded access to the Community Safety Net for residents living in the Springfield Middle School catchment area.

The Safety Net concept had already gained momentum and acceptance in Lane County. This history proved quite valuable for the Springfield project. During the collaboration phase much effort was spent on informing local agencies and groups about this expansion in Springfield, building linkages with the Statewide Community Safety Net (part of the Oregon Department of Human Services), expanding linkages in Lane County, and building consensus within the steering committee and local groups. An additional tool for consensus building was a marketing plan that was created by the Project Director and Project Coordinator. This plan included a detailed budget for operating the Safety Net. Further, a local marketing consultant was hired to work with the Steering Committee in this area.

In this fashion, the collaboration and planning phase focused specifically on setting the stage for implementation of CSN in Springfield. CSN had already been adopted at the state level, several collaboration groups were operational in Lane County, and CSN was able to build on these previous efforts in order to have a smooth transition into the implementation phase. Otherwise put, the need for this type of wraparound services had been previously identified and support had been gathered. Thus, the planning phase was designed to further this effort and build the program in Springfield. In addition, the Steering Committee continued to meet during the implementation phase to monitor progress and make changes when needed.

Implementation Successes and Challenges

Looking at numbers of families referred, the CSN project in Springfield was very successful. Over 1,375 families were triaged during the two-year SAG grant period. In addition, during this time (and with additional funding) the Safety Net program was extended into nine communities covering all of Lane County. It seems that there was a clear need for this type of coordinated service approach as well as widespread recognition of the merits of the Community Safety Net.

When asked what contributed to their success in establishing this service network and in receiving a large number of family referrals, the project coordinator mentioned "the need, the staff, and the commitment of community members." Community and agency representatives were anxious to help children and families who are usually neglected by the system.

The program also builds on the strengths of the community. Each community can decide on who should be on the triage team based on availability and interest. This creates a flexible program. Public agencies support the program, but they don't provide it. This was seen as very important because governmental agencies typically are not flexible enough to accommodate this type of program. Still, public agency support is critical for utilization.
In addition to flexibility in program oversight, family support workers also have a good deal of flexibility in terms of their workload. They can take several hours or several weeks to work with one family according to family need. Thus, they can respond to family strengths and needs, rather than providing some type of time-limited, curriculum-based parent training program.

Given the well-established and sustained network of support for the program, relatively few implementation challenges were noted. Indeed, these challenges seemed to be more in relation to the mechanics of program operations rather than the substance. One specific challenge involved establishing a viable referral mechanism for families. Originally it was thought that referrals to triage teams would come from schools and the child welfare system. However, in practice, this became too complicated for several reasons.

First, schools were not used to making referrals regarding child welfare unless abuse was suspected. In the case of suspected abuse, they are also mandatory reporters of such abuse. Thus, in practice it proved easier to have schools make their referrals to child welfare services, with a directive to lower the bar for referrals.

In other words, because school staff knew of CSN and their ability to intervene as a preventive mechanism for families at risk, they were thus able to refer families in need to child welfare services before actual abuse was suspected. As this referral process evolved, CSN was able to establish good working relationships with the schools, which was critical for their success. As the project coordinator noted, "Everyone believes that schools are essential and the challenge has been on how best to integrate the schools. School support is very important."

Project staff also felt that there was great value in having families on record and screened by child welfare even if their cases were not opened. Over time, child welfare screeners learned to refer families they could not open to the CSN. Still, this took a lot of education and confidence building. In particular, much work was done with intake workers, forms were modified and amended, and the process took some time to become established as practice.

An exception to this referral practice occurred in rural areas, where schools do make direct referrals to CSN triage teams. However, they need parent permission to make these referrals, but not for referrals to child welfare. This resulted in some difficulties in the referral process, and has raised some important issues with regard to program growth in these communities. Other issues such as wording of the initial contact letter and lack of technological sophistication needed for reporting also created some difficulties in rural areas.

The fact that the Springfield CSN was linked to a larger statewide effort was generally helpful, but did create some interdependencies that were problematic. For instance, during the third quarter of the SAG-funded project, the Oregon Family Support Network ended a 5-year federal grant, and the Lane County branch of the Network closed. This resulted in a loss of family ally positions. Further, some of the Springfield CSN members worked in the satellite offices, and phones and e-mail were not fully operational at all sites during the early months of the project. In spite of these challenges,
program operations were re-established, sustained, and expanded over the course of the 2-year SAG-funded project.

**Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges**

According to the project coordinator, evaluation was one of the biggest challenges faced by CSN. The funding for evaluation was too minimal and only enabled them to develop a data base and secure minimal staff support. At the end of the day they did not have a report to "put down on the table and show the effectiveness of CSN." The project coordinator felt that this interfered with their ability to seek continued funding for the program.

The evaluation was conducted by a local public agency. The focus of the evaluation was on implementation of services, specifically the documentation of number of families served, number of families deemed ineligible, demographic characteristics of each group, etc. Although it is clearly important to document participation of families in CSN and actual utilization of referral services, no information was collected on specific services used, extent of family involvement in these programs, and the impact of CSN and specific services on family well-being and/or child outcomes. For instance, no data was collected on number of families referred to CSN who were subsequently referred to child welfare for suspected abuse.

Further, no data was collected on types of services families received, barriers to services, and benefits of these services. At the very least, it would have been useful to document number of families referred to CSN who showed no further contact with child welfare during a reasonable follow-up period. In the absence of this type of information, it is only possible to say that CSN did process a large number of families and refer them to outside services.

Further, little information was collected regarding the system-level outcomes of the wraparound model. Clearly, CSN is designed not only to provide a specific type of services to families at-risk, but also to change the way services are provided in order to prevent families from falling through the cracks. The fact that CSN was sustained and expanded provides some evidence for its impact on child welfare systems; however, additional details regarding specific system-level changes would have been useful. Still, this problem is not unique to Lane County. Although wraparound services have gained popularity over the past few decades in the United States, relatively few comprehensive outcome evaluations of these projects have been conducted.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

CSN project staff stated that they could have really used more technical assistance. In particular, they needed assistance on evaluation problems, and on how best to utilize the local evaluation results.
Project Sustainability

The project has been sustained and expanded through a variety of mechanisms. Although prevention programs are often not an easy sell, the perceived need for this project and widespread local support facilitated sustainability. In part, CSN has been able to build a patchwork of funding for both individual community Safety Nets as well as for the whole Lane County System.

Further, the program was able to continue because of the high level of support from in-kind and volunteer efforts. This has included donations of both staff time and space and equipment. Still, all of the Safety Nets are under-funded, and some can only support part-time staff. In this case, triage teams often meet on a volunteer basis to provide safety net services to families referred to the program.

Summary of Lessons Learned

The Community Safety Net project was quite successful in implementing a collaborative, community-based prevention model for wraparound services. The support for this model was demonstrated by both number of referrals received as well as the expansion of the project to multiple communities. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

Funding and support Because the SAG-funded project was designed to extend already existing services to a different community, the two-year time frame allowed for development of the local collaboration and implementation of the wraparound model. The focus was on system change and the support allowed providers to work through details of this new and integrated system.

Collaboration Even in a climate where there was a history of collaboration and where individuals and agencies saw a need for collaboration, the "full agendas" of service providers and key stakeholders placed constraints on collaboration. In communities with responsive social services such as Lane County, the demands on agencies frequently exceed the capacity. Overall, they were able to establish effective working collaborations. In particular, the Steering Committee functioned both to market the program as well as to regularly monitor progress and oversee any needed changes.

Implementation Flexibility is the key to successful implementation. The CSN model provided a common process for providing services to families; however, the specific details of implementation were flexible and could be adjusted to meet local needs. Flexibility was also key to success in working with families. Rather than providing each family with the same service (such as a parent training program), individual family services could be tailored to individual family needs. The project coordinator noted that there must be a willingness to allow adaptation rather than saying "this is what we'll do."
Evaluation  Evaluation presented on of the biggest challenges for this project. They needed more technical assistance in understanding the potential and limits of a local evaluation, which questions to ask, how data could be used to support the program, and what to expect of their local evaluator. They felt that at the end of the day, they had little documentation of program effectiveness they could use to leverage additional funding.

Sustainability  The involvement of multiple private and public agencies, a history of collaboration for wraparound services, volunteer and in-kind commitments, and utilization of several different sources of funding made it easier to sustain the CSN. Some of the services have been sustained through a patchwork of local, foundation, and in-kind services. Communities are excited about the project and have adopted many of the components. The City of Eugene and the City of Springfield are ready to support it in a more consistent fashion. There is also some state support.

An important lesson learned is that it is easier to sustain a project if there are multiple sources of support and the perceived need/value of the program is clear. However, this still does not provide a consistent and stable funding stream. This concern should be addressed from the outset of the program, i.e., how to develop a more consistent funding mechanism for this type of program.

Source of Information for Case Study

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; and (d) interview with Serafina Clarke, project coordinator.

Background Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

Project Dates:  May 2000 - May 2002

Host Organization:  Lane County Department of Children and Families

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CASE STUDY #4: COMMUNITY PLANNING, EXEMPLARY PRACTICES

Project Summary

The Community Planning, Exemplary Practices (CPEP) program is a school, community, family, and individual collaboration developed by the William Floyd School District. The William Floyd School District is located in Mastic Beach, New York, a suburban community 70 miles east of New York City with high rates of poverty, violence, substance use, and illiteracy. With an approximate enrollment of 10,500 students, the district is the 15th largest in the State of New York and the 7th largest suburban district in that state. It is located on the south shore of Long Island and serves the communities of Mastic, Mastic Beach, Shirley, and Moriches.

The CPEP program emphasizes a public health model that acknowledges the interconnected and interdependent nature of programs and the importance of school-community collaborations in reinforcing positive behaviors. The program is designed to have a broad impact in the William Floyd School District and surrounding communities by enhancing the quality of community life, as well as to impact a select number of students who participate in specific exemplary practices prevention programs.

The program is organized around four primary goals: (1) to obtain community level buy-in for system changes to enhance the capacity of schools and communities to promote healthy development and resilience among students and their families; (2) to implement targeted exemplary practice programs for at-risk youth, specifically Families and Schools Together (FAST) and Reconnecting Youth; (3) to disseminate exemplary practices to other communities via targeted dissemination efforts; and (4) to develop outreach activities for a broad spectrum of professionals that provide training on prevention and resiliency.

The organizing themes for systems development and systems change are that activities and programs must empower children and families by embracing their strengths rather than focusing on their deficits, and that parents are the child’s most important teachers and should be full partners in efforts to assist their children. These two themes provided the impetus for the selection of a community mobilization and empowerment strategy as well as for the selection of two exemplary practice programs, FAST and Reconnecting Youth.

Collaboration Successes and Challenges

The William Floyd School District had a history of active partnering with students, parents, educators, staff, and the community. Prior to the SAG-funded project, a number of collaborative mechanisms were already in place. For example, there was an active school-community council that met monthly with over 45 active members, a Law Enforcement Education Partnership Consortium that met on a regular basis to coordinate prevention activities, an early literacy collaboration, and
a local advisory council for Safe and Drug Free Schools. Further, the district had been actively involved in a number of school-community collaboration activities such as the development of a Comprehensive District Education Plan (CDEP) that called for community and parent involvement.

This history of collaboration proved to be an important asset for the CPEP project--new collaboration activities were able to build on these previous efforts. Specifically, building on the work of the school-community council (which focused primarily on school issues), the District Superintendent asked a group of “regulars” what could be done to mobilize residents as partners in building healthy and resilient youth and families. The Superintendent held meetings to pull together different groups, and invited everyone to participate in a “visioning” meeting.

From this meeting, a “vision plan” emerged focusing on what members wanted their community to look like. The main themes centered on safety, promoting a healthy environment, and concerns about substance use and violence among youth. This visioning process and plan led to a coordinated focus on community improvement and community change, and a community group entrusted with this mission.

This group, the Community Summit, met regularly, with 50-80 individuals representing a variety of organizations. They developed by-laws, subcommittees, an organizational structure, an executive committee, letterhead, mission statements, and goals, in addition to their vision statement. Each subcommittee was encouraged simultaneously to take quick and tangible actions such as graffiti removal, park cleanup, or other types of neighborhood improvements.

As a “kick-off” activity, the group organized a “Community Night at Shea Stadium” to promote a sense of community pride and enhance the reputation of the community. Over 3,500 community members attended, as well as the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education and the CSEP project director, making it the largest community mobilization effort in the history of Shea Stadium. The school chorus and band performed on the field, the baseball and softball teams lined up on the field, and local residents were honored with spirit awards.

In addition to the efforts of the CSEP project director, a coordinator was responsible for overseeing the work of the Community Summit. All participants were volunteers, including the coordinator (a retired community leader whose children had attended local schools). Indeed, the project director stated that the Community Summit was quite successful at reaching the untapped potential of community members.

In particular, she felt that the community was ready for this type of effort, in part because many residents had felt ignored and devalued, and had not felt very good about their community. Further, although there had been much in the way of previous collaborative efforts, these were often somewhat fragmented where service groups did “bits and pieces” in different parts of town. The Community Summit gave residents a chance to sit together, synthesize efforts, and build a synergistic response where they could be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.
The collaboration was further supported by a high degree of commitment and cooperation on the part of the schools. As the project director mentioned, for a school district it’s often hard to give up control. However, the Mastic Beach superintendent was willing to allow the community to make decisions. Issues were framed as “here is what we want to accomplish, how do you want to do this?” rather than “here is what we will do.”

This approach truly served to empower people and motivate them to work hard and be committed to the process. The collaboration had a large cadre of hard-working volunteers and highly-committed staff that worked nights, weekends, and whenever necessary.

One of the biggest challenges of the collaboration was keeping everyone focused on the goal. As each subcommittee became more empowered, it was important to keep them from veering away from the vision. Leaders kept reminding members that their efforts were grounded in a joint and collective vision. Nevertheless, some members were not happy if they were not supported in their ideas and dropped out of the collaboration. In some cases, individuals went off and did things on their own that were potentially counterproductive for the group’s efforts. However, all in all, members of the collaboration understood the importance of working together.

When asked to describe the overall success of the collaboration, the project director stated she would rate the collaboration a “10.” When asked to discuss some of the most important reasons for this success, she listed the following key reasons for success:

C people were empowered;

C there was a relentless pursuit of a common goal on the part of all stakeholders, including the school district;

C the Superintendent has been a key player and is genuinely concerned about the welfare of children—he sees his role as more than the instructional program;

C the collaboration was a true partnership, not just another program;

C the community was “ready” for this type of approach; and

C the collaboration created a “movement” rather than a program that was focused on systemic change.

**Links between Planning and Implementation Phases**

In addition to improving the quality of life in communities served by William Floyd School district, the Community Summit was also responsible for overseeing adoption and implementation of exemplary practices.
However, because the grant application for SAG funding required prior identification of research-based practices, in essence, these projects were identified before the collaboration was up and running.

Members of the collaboration were told that the grant required identification of research-based programs, there are a number of programs available, they had to select one or two, and they think that FAST and Reconnecting Youth are very good programs. This did seem to be a good selection of programs that matched the overall organizing themes (e.g., positive youth development, connecting with families), and the collaboration was supportive of these programs.

However, prior to actual implementation and as the Community Summit evolved, the collaboration also realized that it was not feasible to take on the two planned exemplary practices, FAST and Reconnecting Youth. The group decided to focus their efforts on the FAST program as part of the SAG-funded project (Reconnecting Youth was later implemented using a different source of funds).

By the end of the second quarter of Community Summit, the collaboration had developed into two groups one consisting of key stakeholders for the FAST program, and a second group focused on working towards large-scale community change objectives. The group working with the FAST program was able to garner further support for implementation through conversations and meetings with additional stakeholders (e.g., principals, FAST staff, administrators, Family Service League). By the end of the third quarter, it was determined that community mobilizing efforts had successfully produced community readiness for full implementation of the FAST program.

The collaboration group focused on large-scale community change also continued to develop a number of community and youth service activities. These include Community Clean-Up Day, a community mural, Youth Speak Out, a prom gown accessory program, enhanced recreational activities, and community rallies. Because the collaboration was involved in both initial planning for collaborative activities as well as ongoing implementation of these activities, there was a seamless transition between planning and implementation phases of the project.

Implementation Successes and Challenges

There were two components of program implementation for CPEP: (1) continuation of the Community Summit collaboration, meetings, and activities, and (2) implementation of the FAST program for 75 families. The Community Summit was able to successfully implement a diverse set of community building activities. These ranged from beautification efforts to grant writing seminars to securing funding for new programs. Overall, implementation of these efforts has been accomplished with few challenges and many successes. A particular highlight has been the implementation of community rallies that drew crowds in the thousands. Rallies were used to provide table displays from various agencies, schools, and groups, ceremonies with elected officials, and breakout groups focusing on youth service and quality of life issues.
Once the collaboration decided not to implement two exemplary practice programs under the SAG grant, but instead to focus on the FAST program, they were able to devote time and resources necessary to facilitate program implementation. In some sense, because FAST is a manualized program with extensive training, implementation is greatly facilitated. However, it is still important to connect this program with local resources.

Towards this end, the collaboration contracted with the Family Service League, a local agency, to oversee program operations. They also had sufficient start up time to meet with key stakeholders and participants prior to actual implementation in order to develop a common sense of purpose and a common focus.

As noted in a progress report, “The notion of ‘taking time’ to implement, rather than rushing into it, has truly enabled us to successfully plan and mobilize resources.” The FAST program was successfully implemented and enrollment exceeded projections. Further, the Family Service League was able to work with the school district and other agencies to secure additional funding to continue FAST beyond the SAG funding period.

**Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges**

The project hired an independent evaluator who had served as an evaluator for a number of prevention programs for the school district and was also working on other related projects. The project staff were quite happy with his participation and products. The project director noted that the evaluator was really part of the collaboration—he came to meetings, shared his work with stakeholders, and was involved from the start in the design and implementation of the evaluation.

Primary tasks of the evaluator were to develop survey instruments for evaluating the consensus building process and to track children in the district that have participated in different programs in order to examine a set of school-related outcomes (e.g., absences, school performance). Based on reports and documents prepared, the evaluator seems to have done an excellent job both in working with the ongoing collaborative efforts as well as in documenting outcomes.

In addition, the program participated in the national FAST evaluation. This is an important, low-cost service for FAST programs. Staff collect a battery of measures on children and families, send these measures to national FAST headquarters, and receive a summary report and tables showing the effects of FAST on these measures. This provides more focused evaluation information on the subset of children and families participating in the FAST program. It is also easy for programs to utilize, requires relatively little effort other than collecting data, and is relatively inexpensive.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

The project director suggested that it would be useful to ask grantees for an assessment of their technical assistance needs in the grant proposal itself. She would also have liked to participate in
1-2 day regional meetings with similar projects in the area. When the project identified specific needs, they used the internet and other sources to access resources.

**Project Sustainability**

Although it took time to cultivate and secure funding, issues of sustainability were addressed from the outset. Part of the work of the Community Summit was to identify additional sources of funding and to train community members to be engaged in the grant writing process. This focus resulted not only in continued funding for the FAST program, but also enabled the collaboration to secure additional funding for new programs, including the 21st Century program and the Parent Child Home Program. This additional funding was possible, in part, because of the comprehensive and extensive base that was developed during the planning phase. As noted in the final report, “We have been successful in securing funding…because this grant (the SAG grant) enabled us to develop a plan, rather than jump into implementation.”

In addition to successfully securing additional funds, the Community Summit committees continued to meet regularly and pursue additional projects. They applied for incorporation status as a non-profit organization in order to apply for funds directly.

Finally, the school district has tried to institutionalize exemplary practices in order to increase sustainability through a number of regional dissemination efforts. These included publication of a monograph, development of promotional literature, summaries of reports distributed to the community, and continued meetings with interested groups and the media.

**Summary of Lessons Learned**

The Community Planning, Exemplary Practices (CPEP) project was quite successful in building a collaborative base for community development based on a strength-based, family-centered approach and in implementing a specific exemplary practice, Families and Schools Together (FAST). Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

**Funding and support** Issues of sustainability and continuation of support were addressed from the beginning of the project. Because there was sufficient time to develop the collaboration and engage in planning prior to implementation, programs were more smoothly implemented and seemed to garner wide-scale support. The community-building and empowerment focus also provided for a cadre of volunteers who supported the process.

**Collaboration** Collaborations work best when members are empowered, when they are true partnerships rather than a collection of individuals focused on their own self-interest, when they simultaneously focus on system change and specific activities, and when they forge ahead towards a common goal. In this specific project, the high level of support and willingness to be true partners
on the part of the school district was critical for the success of the collaboration. However, it still takes time, endurance, and commitment to mobilize communities.

**Implementation** Projects take time to take root—time spent in planning, engaging community stakeholders, and identifying potential implementation barriers is critical. It is also important not to take on too much. Early on in the process, the collaboration decided that implementing two programs for two distinct age groups would water down their efforts and that it was better to concentrate efforts, particularly given the short time frame of SAG funding.

**Evaluation** Their experience with the local evaluator was quite positive. In part, this was due to the fact that they had worked with him on other projects and were also working with him during this time period on related projects. The evaluator was truly a team player and was engaged throughout the entire collaboration, planning, and implementation stages. He was seen as an “evaluation partner” rather than an external evaluator. This emphasis fit well with the empowerment and community engagement strategies employed by the Community Summit.

**Sustainability** Sustainability must be considered at the outset of a project rather than when it is almost over. Community stakeholders and collaborators can play an important part in sustainability, including learning about and writing grants, continuing to volunteer, and mobilizing support from others. It is easier to garner additional support for programs that are relatively small, easy to implement, and have observable benefits (such as FAST).

**Source of Information for Case Study**

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; and (d) interview with Janet Gilmor, program director.
Background Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

Project Dates: October 1999 - October 2001

Host Organization: William Floyd Union Free School District

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CASE STUDY #5: PRESERVING, EMPOWERING, AND ASSISTING REFUGEE CHILDREN THROUGH ENHANCEMENT

Project Summary

The Preserving, Empowering, and Assisting Refugee Children Through Enhancement program was a collaboration between the State of Utah Division of Mental Health, the Salt Lake City School District, and the New Hope Refugee Center. The overarching goal of this collaboration was to build community consensus around the adaptation of the Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum for refugee communities and to oversee implementation of this curriculum in the schools.

Second Step is an official violence prevention/social competence curriculum of the Salt Lake City School District. It is a research-based, developmentally-sequenced curriculum designed to reduce aggression and increase social competence for children from preschool through 8th grade. The program is designed specifically to develop skills in empathy, impulse control, and anger management. The curriculum consists of 28 lessons implemented by teachers once or twice a week for 14-28 weeks in the regular school classroom.

In addition to the teacher-led curriculum lessons in school, parent training is available. This consists of a six-session, facilitator-led, video-based series for parents and caregivers of students involved in Second Step. The training is designed to create a positive relationship between home and school, encourage family support of the school-based program, and introduce parents to the same skills their children are learning so that they can reinforce and practice these skills at home.

Second Step has been widely used in the United States and other countries over the past ten years. A recent one-year evaluation of the curriculum in the United States demonstrated modest reductions in observed aggression for students who participated in the intervention, although these decreases were not found when behavioral reports by parents and teachers were considered. Based on these findings, the program has been included in a number of “exemplary practices” publications such as the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development report and the Safe Schools/Safe Students report published by Drug Strategies.

Although Second Step has been implemented in other countries including Canada, the Phillipines, and Germany, it has not been regularly implemented with refugee populations in the United States. Because the Salt Lake City School District had adopted Second Step as an official curriculum, and because they had the largest number of refugee students in Utah, they realized that they would need to engage the refugee community in order to ensure the cultural appropriateness of this program. For this reason, the district was quite interested in partnering with agencies more knowledgeable about working with refugee populations.

The Division of Mental Health had been a leader in the area of cultural competency, establishing the Cultural Competency Program in 1997 to respond to the increasing needs of minority mental health in Utah. Thus, the Division of Mental Health took an active role in planning for adaptation
and implementation of prevention programs in refugee communities and became the applicant for SAG funding to adapt the Second Step program.

The consensus-building process involved the establishment of Project Action Teams and Work Groups (originally named Community Boards). Project Action Teams (PAT) were established to oversee the general management of the project and were comprised of diverse group of community leaders including representative of refugee resettlement agencies, mental health service providers, juvenile justice, refugee parents, school resource officers, school administrators, teachers, and school support personnel.

Two Project Action Teams were established in order to include the large number of key leaders and avoid potential conflicts between certain refugee groups. Sixteen Work Groups were established, with four to six members in each group. These Work Groups represented 10 distinct refugee communities, as well as the school community and the general community.

Each Work Group identified a spokesperson to attend the Project Action Team meetings. Most of the Work Groups met regularly to examine topics of interest. For instance, refugee Work Groups conducted needs and resource assessments, examined the appropriateness of the Second Step program, and recommended methods for implementation. The school community Work Groups mobilized school district support for the project, selected project schools, and ensured that all school personnel were invested in program efforts. The Work Groups were also mandated to engage consumers throughout the process.

Through the joint efforts of project staff and community leaders, the Second Step was “ratified” and modified for use with refugee groups. Project staff wrote a 64-page guide profiling refugee youth in Utah designed to help teachers and others address refugee issues in schools. The PEACE project piloted the Second Step program in two schools with high refugee populations. At the end of the pilot phase, Second Step was not only sustained in the pilot schools, but expanded to other sites that had requested assistance with implementation. The PEACE program also received requests to assist other school districts as partners for implementing Second Step with refugee children.

**Collaboration Successes and Challenges**

Overall, the consensus-building process was successful, albeit slow and often painstaking. This project had the particular challenge of bridging large gaps in cultural practices, beliefs, and understandings both between many different refugee cultures as well as between refugee groups and the schools. Different refugee groups as well as factions within those groups also had distinct ideas of how things should work, causing some difficulties for collaboration. Because of these large gaps and challenges for collaboration, project staff felt it critical to allow sufficient time for consensus building.

This created some issues with the schools, because the school community wanted to see immediate implementation of Second Step and had some resistance to the concept of consensus building.
However, their attitude changed when the benefits of the consensus-building process became apparent.

Refugee collaborations were characterized by diversity, factions, skepticism about collaboration, and overall lack of experience both with the collaborative process and the educational system in the United States. As the project director noted, refugee groups are diverse in cultures and languages and some do not get along with each other due to past histories or religious issues. There were also some incidences where community “leaders” initially recruited turned out not to be well respected by their own people. These issues resulted in some difficulties with collaboration and cooperation.

Trainings were conducted to build leadership and participatory skills as well as to familiarize members with the western educational system. Additional trainings on cultural sensitivity and methods for working in culturally diverse settings were provided for other key stakeholders and project staff members. Overall, many barriers were bridged through training, persistence, flexibility, and good will.

An overarching theme that presented one of the greatest challenges to the consensus-building process centered on the specific “violence prevention” terminology used to describe the Second Step program. The refugee community balked at the term “violence prevention.” They felt it stigmatized refugees as being pro-violence or prone to be violent. Project staff immediately responded to this misperception and explained that Second Step was to be implemented for all students, but that PEACE was designed to enable refugee children to receive maximum benefits from this curriculum.

The program was also recast as a way to enhance school success. This term was readily accepted because it is a strength-based concept and taps into refugees’ desire to see their children succeeding in schools and in society. As the project director noted, “terms are very important—school success is positive, violence prevention is negative.” This shift also provided for a more holistic perspective focused broadly on health promotion, including how to integrate refugee issues into mainstream society.

Another issue faced by the Work Groups was the balance between structure and flexibility. Initially, each Work Group would investigate a common set of agenda items and bring recommendations to the Project Action Team. However, it became apparent to project staff as soon as the first few groups were organized that each Work Group had its own particular interests. There was resistance to following a rigid agenda. In order to keep the consensus-building process flexible enough to meet the needs of the Work Group, the project shifted to allowing each group to develop its own priority agenda. This change allowed each group to tap into its strength, expertise, and enthusiasm in particular areas.

The project director noted that the “best” collaboration that emerged was with the refugee community and the school district. The refugee community helped to design the project and the schools helped to implement it. Eventually, the refugee community also began to collaborate with schools in order to push refugee issues. They established an ongoing group that met as needed—with great improvements noted in terms of access of the refugee community to the school
Links between Planning and Implementation Phases

The PEACE project was built on the concept of collaborative decision making focused on adapting the Second Step program for refugee children and families. Given this emphasis, the collaborative process was an essential precursor to implementation of the curriculum. Indeed, several preplanning meetings were held prior to the submission of the SAG proposal to set the stage for collaboration between refugee groups, schools, mental health, and other community agencies, and to set the direction for the PEACE project.

Because the SAG grant required identification of an exemplary practice in the grant proposal, and because the Salt Lake City School District had adopted Second Step, this program was chosen prior to actual consensus-building by refugee groups around its selection. In other words, the project had already decided on implementing Second Step.

During the initial consensus-building process, it was important to secure buy-in for this program from the diverse refugee groups. In general, this was not a problem. It was presented to the refugee community as a good program that the school district endorsed. The refugee community was unfamiliar with other programs and seemed to accept this program based on the school recommendation. They were told that their job was to help adapt it to the specific needs of the refugee community.

Schools were also excited to expand the Second Step program to meet the needs of refugee children. They realized that they needed training and consultation on refugee issues and lacked linkages with and cooperation from the refugee communities and refugee service providers. During the initial phase of this project, the school district came to appreciate the importance of the collaborative, consensus-building process in guiding this effort.

Implementation Successes and Challenges

The overarching goal of this project was to engage refugee groups with schools for the primary purpose of adapting the Second Step program for use with refugee children. This goal was clearly met. Refugee groups were engaged through Work Groups and other mechanisms, and took an active role in modifying Second Step and overseeing implementation.

Several specific modifications were made. An important modification was to shift from presenting the program as a violence prevention effort to calling it a school success program. Other modifications emerged from the collaboration phase. For instance, staff learned that refugee parents did not want their children taught Second Step in special classrooms, but wanted this integrated into regular school activities. Therefore, they needed to provide more training and curriculum to make the program school-wide.
Implementation was also facilitated by the identification of “champions” who were interested in expanding services to refugee children in each pilot school. These champions were the key people who made the project a school-wide experience in their respective school. In addition to implementation of Second Step in the two pilot schools, the program has expanded to other sites and other districts that requested assistance. Further, going beyond implementation of Second Step, the PEACE project has been successful in raising awareness of refugee needs in the schools and other agencies, and in empowering refugee groups to speak out about these needs.

Staffing was an important implementation success as well as an implementation challenge. The project insisted on hiring staff members who were knowledgeable in refugee cultures and communities. For instance, one key staff person, a refugee himself, had become a recognized leader in his community, served as a liaison with the International Red Cross, and was able to speak and write seven languages fluently.

On the other hand, staff could also present challenges. In particular, the project was somewhat adversely impacted by a part-time staff person who had difficulty taking directions from the project director. After she was terminated, she spoke poorly of the project and urged the refugee community not to be involved.

The project responded by letting the community know that it was available to clarify any questions they might have about the project. This openness seemed to ease the anxiety of the community. Over time, the community came to ignore this individual’s comments and did not allow this incident to distract the focus of the project. Nevertheless, it serves as an example of how staff difficulties can have far reaching effects on a program.

Another challenge, particularly for the middle-school program, was that it required a level of English proficiency that many refugee students lacked. To address this challenge, several strategies were identified and used. Interpreters were available when needed and appropriate. Students with better English proficiency and understanding of American cultures were used to assist in teaching when appropriate. A vocabulary sheet with key English words and translations and visual aids were developed.

Given the multiple challenges to implementation for a program of this type, it is commendable that the program was able to be implemented and even expanded within the relatively short time frame for SAG funding. Clearly, the program staff were well versed in issues of diversity and were able to mobilize community resources and strengths to promote effective adaptation and implementation of this program.

*Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges*

The primary evaluator was affiliated with a local state agency. The project emphasized the importance of a process evaluation from the beginning, with a primary interest in learning about how networking and collaboration was progressing. The evaluator attended every meeting, reviewed
progress reports, and provided an evaluation report for the consensus-building process. The project director felt that working with someone who was in-house, understood the workings of the system, and was engaged in numerous related evaluation activities was an asset to the program (as opposed to an independent, external evaluator). The evaluator also worked closely with the schools to develop evaluation instruments and monitor/oversee data collection.

In terms of an outcome evaluation, they did not conduct their own evaluation but utilized the Second Step evaluation available to project participants. Project staff send information to the Committee for Children (who oversee and manage Second Step), who process the data and provide feedback. In addition, the evaluator helped them interpret and utilize this feedback.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

The project director and project staff were keenly aware of their need for technical assistance, both in terms of the consensus-building process as well as in adaptation of Second Step. They were able to secure a number of local consultants, as well as trainers from Second Step, to help with various tasks.

However, the project director felt that the success of the consensus building is critical for implementation and that many agencies do not fully understand or appreciate the benefit of consensus building. Further, it is her experience that they need technical assistance every step of the way in that process because mistakes and obstacles are inevitable. Consensus building is much harder than actual program implementation because it takes a lot of time and work to do it right.

**Project Sustainability**

Compared to many other SAG-funded projects, this project had fewer challenges to sustainability. The Second Step program was an official curriculum for the Salt Lake City School District, and the district was committed to implementing the curriculum in as many schools as possible. SAG funding helped them to purchase materials and adapt them to refugee needs. The SAG project was only implemented in two schools; however, several other schools and districts requested training. In this fashion, the program is likely to continue, and the school district is likely to continue to be more responsive to refugee issues.

Another strategy used to sustain the project was to assist schools to recruit interns to help with implementation. Specifically, the University of Utah was interested in this project because it could expose their students to issues of diversity and provide training in working with individuals from different cultures. Another strategy was to encourage ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers to incorporate the curriculum into their regular ESL program, with Second Step providing an engaging mechanism to simultaneously increase students’ English proficiency.
Summary of Lessons Learned

The PEACE project was quite successful in coordinating efforts of diverse groups in order to adapt and implement the Second Step curriculum in Salt Lake City schools. It also provided a rallying point to increase responsiveness to refugee issues in the schools. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

Funding and support Because this project was an extension of ongoing work with Second Step in the school district, funds were needed for purchasing materials and facilitating adaptation through consensus-building and training. Once this process had taken hold, the program was easily integrated into school programming, with less funding needed for sustainability.

Collaboration Collaboration and consensus-building were the biggest challenges for the project. This was particularly problematic because constituents came from diverse cultural groups that had been divided historically and generally had not worked collaboratively. It was important to allow time to “listen to the community” and hear what they had to say. It was also important to accept that mistakes happen along the consensus-building path, but they should be viewed as part of the process rather than roadblocks that interfere with the process.

Implementation Implementation was facilitated by creating a sense of “readiness” for the program through intensive adaptation and matching of program content/emphasis to the groups served. For instance, they learned that it was important to present the program as focused on school success rather than violence prevention, and to ensure that refugee children were not singled out in any fashion as “deficient” (such as special classrooms versus regular classrooms). Implementation was also facilitated by using an existing curriculum that was being used widely both in the school district and elsewhere, with a well-developed training and evaluation component available from the national project office.

Evaluation The project was able to combine a process evaluation focused on learning about how networking and collaboration were working. It was helpful to use a local evaluator who functioned as part of the project team, attended important meetings, and prepared key reports. Also, the project was able to take advantage of the outcome evaluation services provided by Second Step.

Sustainability The program continued and expanded after SAG funding ended. In part, this sustainability was built-in from the beginning because the project was designed to expand an existing program and adapt if for use in certain populations. Clearly, the number of refugee students and the importance of attending to refugee issues created a need for the school district—this program helped fill that need and should likely continue.
Source of Information for Case Study

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; and (d) interview with Ming Wang, program director.

Background Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

Project Dates: October 1999 – September 2001

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CASE STUDY #6:  COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT TO PREVENT VIOLENCE AND PROMOTE RESILIENCY IN FAMILIES

Project Summary

Keys for Networking received a SAG grant to build consensus around WrapAround principles and infuse this approach into east Topeka, with a particular emphasis was on serving African-American and Hispanic families. This effort was part of a broader statewide movement in Kansas to develop a comprehensive system of care for at-risk children and families with complex needs. The SAG project was intended to demonstrate how WrapAround principles of community planning can work to prevent violence, promote family involvement with schools and community agencies, and train provider organizations to work more closely in positive ways with families, youth, and each other.

Since the 1970’s the concept of WrapAround services for children and families has grown immensely in popularity, with literally thousands of programs based on these principles currently operational. Although there are also significant variations in implementation of WrapAround principles, several common themes can be found. Specifically, WrapAround mandates the individualizing of services to the specific needs of each child and family, even when the services are delivered as part of a categorical program.

Further, it requires that families, mental health agencies, schools, and other service providers share power and money and come together in a collaborative system of care. WrapAround is a research-based model and has a well-documented record of improving outcomes for children and families with multiple needs.

The Keys for Networking project chose a specific WrapAround model, the VanDenBerg WrapAround process, as their exemplary practice. This approach is an outcome-focused, family-centered model that stresses unconditional care, individualized, strengths-based interventions, family voice, access and ownership, cultural competence, and the least intrusive method of intervention. WrapAround is seen as a “process” that must be shaped according to the needs of individual communities rather than as a specific “model program” that is readily transferable in its entirety.

Keys for Networking focused on integrating WrapAround processes into east Topeka by convening a Project Management Core group to plan for and model expectations of WrapAround planning principles and suggest approaches at the community level. The team met quarterly to define children’s mental health needs, outline the Kansas system of care model, clarify service parameters, and establish feedback loops and corrective measures when needed. The Management Core group was guided by three overarching goals: (1) to direct, model, support, and evaluate full community implementation of strengths-based, family driven, multi-agency planning and service coalition; (2) to assure quality in the process of WrapAround as well as to measure its impact on child and family outcomes; and (3) to define and practice critical elements necessary to develop and sustain a family-driven system of care through publication of critical issues papers and resources materials for adoption across Kansas.
In practice, this project experienced several difficulties and setbacks, in part, due to the far-reaching and comprehensive nature of this endeavor. They found it difficult to bring stakeholders together and to build consensus around the principles of WrapAround. Staff noted that it was difficult to move from “discussion to consensus.” They were unable to begin pilot implementation as planned during Year 1. Many proposed activities had to be postponed or defined more narrowly. Project staff concluded that the original goals had been too ambitious. In spite of these challenges, they did manage to create a vehicle for students to talk with adults through citywide youth summits and created a system of shared staff development. As the project director noted, “A true collective spirit has emerged.”

**Collaboration Successes and Challenges**

The collaboration was brought into existence specifically for this project. As a new collaboration, this group of stakeholders experienced many challenges. In general, considerable difficulty was noted in gaining momentum. The project director mentioned that there were simply too many meetings in Topeka. Some people felt that they were just meeting for the sake of meeting. Many were tired of meetings and were involved in their own programs. Another issue that emerged was related to difficulties getting stakeholders to trust each other. It was also difficult to get stakeholders and families to buy into WrapAround principles.

Some people felt that there was too much emphasis on mental health. Minority families interested in receiving counseling and medication saw WrapAround as carrying with it the stigma of “mental illness” and did not want to be involved. Even when stakeholders embraced WrapAround principles, it was difficult to translate this into practice. Thus, difficulties were noted both in moving from discussion to consensus, and, when consensus was reached, in moving from consensus to action.

These challenges were addressed in three ways. First, meetings were focused more on developing shared solutions to problems rather than just one implementing “the grant.” Project staff also developed clear goals, distinct roles for partners, and carefully developed agendas for each meeting.

Second, the collaboration was able to infuse specific “actions” into the collaborative process, specifically large-scale youth summits that allowed students to talk with adults. Youth also spoke out about specific prevention and intervention activities they would like to see in their communities.

Third, when the collaboration seemed to get “stuck,” the project brought in an outside coach, Dr. Barry Kibel, to jump start the process. He helped them develop a list of partners they would like to see at the table and to develop specific “interventions” to improve partnering with these agencies. He also helped design a tracking system to better target their actions towards consensus-building among partners.
Links between Planning and Implementation Phases

The collaboration was developed to facilitate implementation of WrapAround services in east Topeka. However, because the collaboration experienced difficulties garnering support for the concept and support for its implementation, very little was done in terms of actual piloting or practice of WrapAround. However, the collaboration did facilitate implementation of a number of related, community-wide activities such as the youth summits, Hoops Camp, youth cable program, mentoring program, youth/parent leadership conference, the Oscar awards, an alternative suspension program (In Lieu), and the Midwest BEST training program for youth workers.

Implementation Successes and Challenges

During the two years of SAG funding, there were many changes and modifications to the program as planned. This was due to a number of issues mentioned previously, including difficulty building the collaboration, difficulty achieving consensus, difficulty translating ideas into action, as well as the challenges of taking on too big of a project with a small amount of money over a short time period. It seems that the task of bringing stakeholders together around a different model of services was simply more difficult than had been expected.

Still, project staff were able to remain flexible and respond to the realities of implementation. When Year 1 goals and objectives proved to be too ambitious, project staff re-visited these original ideas and developed a revised set of goals more in line with community needs and objectives. Project staff also sought the help of an outside consultant and their evaluation team to further develop directions for action.

A number of separate youth and family-focused activities were successful implemented. In particular, the youth summits were successful in energizing the community and the collaboration. These summits were attended by several hundred youth who had an opportunity to speak out about bullying and violence, and make recommendations for solutions.

For instance, students wanted support for school work at a community location. In response to this request, the project secured an Americorps volunteer and started a mentoring program. During the summer, they hired ten students who had done well as mentors at a summer camp for younger children. The following summer they had more students and secured five sites to work with them for tutoring. They also put on a statewide, week-long retreat for students with mental health and behavioral problems that was quite well attended.

Overall, it proved somewhat difficult to implement a system-level reform project that was not widely endorsed over a short time period. This was further complicated by pragmatic issues such as overload of meetings and lack of clear guidelines and roles for partners.

The project director also mentioned that staffing such an effort was challenging. They engaged a number of part-time staff and consultants for specific tasks, but this created some difficulties in
terms of management and accountability. They had a coordinator when the project started, but the job proved quite taxing and they shifted to part-time staff. In part, this was done to stretch the funding. However, when they realized that they need full-time help after the project was up and running, they didn’t have enough money.

**Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges**

The evaluation was focused primarily on documenting the process of collaboration and consensus-building in order to provide feedback to staff to improve the program. They hired three evaluators, a mental health, school, and minority expert for the evaluation. The evaluators were part of the project team, and helped them think about what they wanted to accomplish, what they had accomplished, and how they could best meet stakeholder needs. They conducted interviews with stakeholders in the beginning, middle, and end of the project.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

The project director indicated that they really needed technical assistance. In particular, they needed help with community building, collaboration, sustainability, and funding opportunities. They did find some technical assistance on their own using local consultants, but could have benefited greatly from more help. She also would have liked to have met with other SAG-funded projects, particularly sites with programs that tried to engage partners in system-change and alternate service delivery programs such as WrapAround.

**Project Sustainability**

The project did not really continue after the SAG funding period. Some small funds were leveraged to keep youth involved in different activities. Further, in response to many issues raised during the course of the SAG-funded project, Keys for Networking developed a proposal to Midwest BEST (Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers). This proposal was funded by the Marion Ewing Kauffman Foundation and pays for 40 hours of standardized training for youth workers.

The project director indicated that if she had known more about community building and how to engage partners more quickly, she could have partnered with more agencies, which might have enhanced sustainability. She also could have devoted more time from the beginning to sustainability.

However, although the project per se did not continue, Keys for Networking became the catalyst for creating a community-wide initiative to reduce youth violence in Topeka. Thus, although the specific project activities were not sustained, the SAG project did result in expanded responsibilities for the lead agency, Keys for Networking. In this sense, project success might be measured more
accurately by its contributions to the larger process of systems change for youth and families in Topeka.

**Summary of Lessons Learned**

The Keys for Networking project set overly ambitious goals for community-wide system reform around WrapAround and was not able to fully implement the project as planned. However, they were able to develop and implement a number of collaborative, youth and family-focused activities. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

**Funding and support**  Project staff and management felt that two years of support was not enough for a project of this scope. Consequently, they tried to stretch the funds to cover the range of supports needed, and wound up not having enough funding for basic needs.

**Collaboration**  Consensus-building is a difficult process that takes time. It is also important to look at things from different perspectives. Sometimes people inside a project have tunnel vision, and it is helpful to have an outside perspective. It is also important to fully understand the role that partner agencies are asked to play, the role they do play, and what role is needed by agencies for the success of the project.

**Implementation**  Planning is essential for implementation. However, it often takes longer than expected and does not always result in predicted outcomes. Systems-change programs are quite difficult to implement. It is important to include focused activities, in this case programs such as the youth summit, to provide a rallying point for action and allow stakeholders to see the results of their efforts.

**Evaluation**  Programs that represent a different “way of doing business” are often difficult to implement. Thus, it is important to include a process evaluation that provides regular feedback along the way. This can allow for mid-course corrections. It is also important for the evaluators to be part of the project team and work closely with staff and stakeholders.

**Sustainability**  In this case, the project itself never really took off in a fashion that could lead to sustainability. However, several agency and system changes were realized. An important lesson learned is that projects often need assistance to address sustainability, and that this must be addressed from the beginning of the project rather than when funding is ending.

**Source of Information for Case Study**

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; (d) evaluator report; and (e) interview with Jane Adams, project director.
Background Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

Project Dates: October 1999 - September 2001

Host Organization: Keys for Networking

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CASE STUDY #7: TUCSON RESILIENCY INITIATIVE

Project Summary

The Tucson Resiliency Initiative (TRI) seeks to help schools create an environment that fosters resiliency and positive development of students, staff, and faculty. Rather than promoting a specific program or programs, TRI is a systems-oriented approach that tries to promote a philosophical and practical acceptance of the importance of resiliency. This is then supported by training and dissemination of information about exemplary programs and practices that nurture resiliency. This project relied on the "Resiliency in Schools" model developed by Nan Henderson and Mike Milstein.

This model emphasizes six components of resiliency in schools: (a) provide opportunities for meaningful participation; (b) set and communicate high expectations; (c) provide caring and support; (d) increase pro-social bonding; (e) set clear, consistent boundaries, and (f) teach life skills.

With SAG funding, TRI worked in 17 schools (primarily elementary schools, but also a few middle and high schools). They began by introducing the concept of resiliency and sharing research with schools and community leaders to get people interested in this idea.

Once this was established, TRI helped each school determine what resiliency would mean in practice. They held seminars and trainings, developed a website, and provide ongoing technical assistance for capacity building and program development. The emphasis was on providing an "umbrella" for thinking about programs that can guide program selection, rather than engaging schools in selecting programs that may not be connected in a meaningful way.

The Technology of Development consensus-building model of William Lofquist and David Lynn was used to guide this system-change effort. This model has been widely used at the state and local levels over the past several decades to foster organizational change and improvement.

Collaboration Successes and Challenges

For over seven years prior to the grant application, the Mayor's School District Action Task Force (SDATF) had been meeting to coordinate programs for the children of Tucson. This group included representatives of the five major school districts in Pima County (where Tucson is located), and representatives from law enforcement, city government, libraries, youth service agencies, and other committees and task forces serving Tucson youth (for example, the Metropolitan Education Commission, The Youth Advisory Council/Tucson Teen Congress, Family Resource and Wellness Centers, and the Children's Success Foundation). In the spring of 1998, the SDATF developed a commitment to fostering resiliency and formed a collaboration with the University of Arizona towards that goal.
This group worked as an ongoing volunteer effort that got the TRI rolling, put on the first conference, and worked together to develop the proposal for SAG funding. In some sense, the SAG project was truly a "next step" of this collaborative effort and fit quite well with the rollout of the resiliency initiative. The SAG project essentially provided additional support to the pre-existing collaboration (SDATF) to extend their resiliency emphasis to a specific cadre of schools by adding consultation and activities to enhance consensus development and identify exemplary programs.

One factor that contributed to the success of the collaboration effort on the SAG project was that the collaboration was essentially a coalition of organizations, not associated or identified with any one school district. Project staff believed this was very important because this inclusive approach kept the initiative out of the politics found within and among school districts. They note that partner schools from smaller districts seemed more willing to join TRI than they might have been if it had been attached to a specific district. They also note that school personnel were more open in their communication than perhaps would have occurred if the collaboration was staffed by someone employed by their district.

Another successful component of their collaborative effort was the involvement of non-educators as well as school personnel. There was some initial concern that "only educators can speak on a level with other educators," but this did not prove to be the case. To the contrary, staff felt that the inclusion of health and prevention practitioners with educators on TRI's guiding committees gave it a broader perspective.

However, these diverse perspectives also resulted in different "images" of what the project should look like. This was addressed through regular strategic planning during the entire grant period. The project coordinator noted that "ongoing planning helped everyone come together and made the focus clearer and more concrete. It also helped lay out what piece of the action each person had to do."

This collaborative process was further supported by an emphasis on personal growth and development of the individual members of the collaboration. All of the collaboration members attended trainings and conferences so they could access the same resources. They acted as a support group for each other and helped others with personal and professional issues. The members felt that the collaboration also helped them develop their own resiliency. As noted in the Final Progress Report, "The initiative itself is a source of development for its committee members. Members of the Executive and Steering Committees stated they believed participation in TRI assisted their personal as well as professional development."

A collaboration challenge was how best to reach out to those who were opposed to the idea of resiliency or were reluctant to embrace it. This was particularly problematic at the individual school level, in terms of the local school collaborations and TRI involvement. They found that the best strategy was to actively invite "resisters" to participate, but also continue to move forward and not force participation. An important role for TRI has been to help keep teams focused on those who are willing to hear the message rather than spend too much energy on the few who won't. They found that as momentum spread, the concept of resiliency was increasingly accepted. However, this was often a slow process and could not be forced.
**Links between Planning and Implementation Phases**

During the many years of collaboration around youth development in Tucson, a momentum had emerged for helping youth. This was enhanced by the shift from a deficit-based to a competence-based, resilience model, and resulted in an ever greater enthusiasm for actual implementation of this effort at the school level. In other words, the dedication and enthusiasm of the key stakeholders seemed to create a type of "readiness" for this type of project. As the project coordinator notes, schools wanted to be involved so they were ready for this type of project. Indeed, the ongoing collaborative effort greatly facilitated the implementation process.

The implementation phase also involved the development of local, school-based collaborations, so that collaboration was actually infused in the day-to-day operation of this project during the implementation phase as well. The project used a voluntary application process where all schools in the five metropolitan Tucson districts were invited to attend presentations on resiliency and were invited to participate in the first wave of the project.

One of the requirements of the application process was that administrators gain the commitment of the school site councils, comprised of school faculty, staff, parents, and youth. Thus, continued collaboration was essentially a condition of implementation. This was also extended to include a site-based planning process, Breakaway. This process was designed to allow schools to focus on conditions they wanted to work on, underlying causes, and action planning.

**Implementation Successes and Challenges**

Overall, the greatest implementation success of this project seems to be their progress in infusing the "resiliency" concept into the daily language, policies, and practices of schools, teachers, service providers, and other agencies in Tucson. For example, several schools and school districts adopted the resiliency model as a common language and approach. This approach also formed the basis for a Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant, the LINKS project, that was modeled on TRI's operations and uses resiliency as the foundation of its efforts. Beyond the schools and school districts, the University of Arizona's College of Education has begun offering courses related to resiliency as part of their training curriculum.

Similarly, the City of Tucson has included a resiliency element for human services funding whereby all proposals must address how they will improve resiliency. Finally, the local media have become more familiar with the resiliency concept, and it has become part of the local vocabulary in stories about youth and educational issues. These are impressive accomplishments, given that these agencies and practices have more typically been dominated by "deficit" and "punitive" models of development and services.

When asked what accounted for this success, the project coordinator noted that this was due, in part, to the presence of "early adopters and visionary people" who were leaders in their schools. She mentioned that "a few key individuals were championing it and others were thus eager to embrace
"There was also a sense that in some ways people were tired of negative messages and ready for a positive message.

TRI included "educator resiliency" as a part of their efforts. Rather than only focusing on student needs, they focused on teacher needs as well. In this fashion, they acknowledged the challenges teachers faced and tried to provide support for their work. Teachers clearly did not want something "extra" to do, and resiliency was presented as something they were already doing and something that could help them in their own personal and professional development. TRI was simply a mechanism to make these efforts more cohesive and to support them in a systematic fashion.

Still, this project was not without challenges. They had anticipated that there would be difficulties in creating system-wide change and creating a "mindset" that supports resiliency. There were also important practical and political changes that affected schools during the SAG funding period for TRI. As has been occurring nationwide, teachers and schools were under ever-increasing pressures to comply with mandated testing requirements and standards. This created many demands on teachers and school personnel, and made it difficult for them to find time to participate in projects such as TRI.

In addition, at the state level, two statewide referendums passed in the Fall of 2000 that challenged the status of bilingual education and teacher merit pay. According to the project final report, both of these referendums had a very negative effect on morale in the Tucson schools.

Specifically, the bilingual education referendum required a complete revamping of the structure of elementary schools to require English-only instruction. It also called for penalties on teachers who violated the referendum by using any non-English language in the classroom. Because approximately 40% of Tucson students were language minority students, predominantly from Spanish-speaking families, and a high percentage of teachers were bilingual English-Spanish, this created a lot of stress on the Tucson schools.

In addition to these challenges, three of the five Tucson school districts had new superintendents during the implementation of the TRI project. Other events that impacted the project included a threatened teacher strike about salary issues and a highly publicized list of underperforming schools.

As is evident, a number of things occurred during the time of the SAG-funded project that worked against the resiliency initiative by creating forces that lowered, rather than raised, teacher morale. Indeed, teacher surveys conducted as a part of the local evaluation yielded mixed results. Different schools improved in some areas over some time periods, but there was little significant evidence of substantial improvements across multiple components of building a resilient environment across all schools. This highlights the difficulty of a broad-based initiative that is designed to bring about system change, particularly when many system-level forces are beyond the control of those responsible for the initiative.

At the school level, variations in implementation were also linked to specific factors. For instance, all 17 schools were offered the opportunity to participate in a formal planning process, called
Breakaway, but only 2 schools followed through with this. Those schools did seem to have very positive results, with a large turnaround in terms of staff morale being noted. Among schools that did not participate in the planning process, some mentioned that they just did not have the time, others felt that they already knew what they wanted to do, and still others did not get far enough into the process of adopting the resiliency concept to get to the next stage of planning.

Among the other factors that contributed to success at the school level, active principal support was particularly important. A key finding was that schools with principals who regularly took time to read the materials provided and understood and embraced the resiliency model were more likely to adopt this approach and engage in a range of programmatic activities designed to foster resiliency. Also, the evaluators noted that TRI found that it was better to partner with schools where the principal had at least one year to become established at the site. It seemed as though too many other factors needed attention during the principal’s first year so that resiliency could not be kept at the forefront.

Another factor related to successful implementation was ongoing technical support and "cheerleading." Several schools commented on how important it was to have a core team of resiliency champions who helped support them in various efforts including training, planning, and action. This seemed to be particularly important in school programming, where new programs and practices seem to be introduced almost monthly. The technical support was seen as a mechanism for sustaining interest and enthusiasm for the resiliency approach.

Most of the changes made during the implementation phase were related to timing, for instance, when trainings were conducted. Project staff worked closely with the project evaluator to utilize feedback and make appropriate modifications. The evaluator would provide information about what schools were most interested in; presentations and trainings would then be modified. For instance, they had initially scheduled the training of trainers at the end of the school year, with the idea that they would continue to meet over the summer. However, the evaluation showed that teachers were reluctant to meet again in the summer, and many other district-required trainings were held then. Again, this type of modification was related more to scheduling and logistics than actual program content or strategies.

**Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges**

The project evaluator is a professor from a local university. She has been doing program evaluation with community groups for over 20 years and has a PhD. in program evaluation. She was asked to join the collaboration task force (SDATF) because of her interest in resiliency. Before SAG funding was received, she volunteered to do an evaluation of their earlier collaborative work on resiliency. She did a quick evaluation of the presentations to the community and the conference, and interviewed the principals who came to the orientation meetings.

Then the opportunity to apply for the SAG grant came up. The evaluator organized the grant writing team that put the grant together, using data that she had gathered as a volunteer for the proposal.
She also wrote the evaluation section and when the grant was funded, she was awarded the evaluation subcontract. In some respects, the proposal, planned activities, and evaluation were a joint and collaborative effort between the project evaluator and the community collaboration.

This collaboration was viewed very positively by participants. The program coordinator noted that their relationship with the evaluator was important in creating a team spirit that allowed for integration of evaluation into the day-to-day management of the project. Many evaluation activities were, indeed, designed to provide process information that could lead to improvements in the project.

Specifically, project staff wanted to know how conferences and trainings were received, any suggestions for improvement, and needs for additional resources. They also wanted to know what activities or programs were implemented as a result of resiliency training. This was considered part of the process evaluation.

This was accomplished through active involvement of the project evaluator in the TRI Executive Committee that made policy for TRI. She shared evaluation results frequently at meetings and any changes were made as a result of review of the evaluations. Overall, the project evaluator had a positive relationship with the project coordinator.

In terms of outcomes, the project was primarily focused on bringing about changes in teacher attitudes and behavior; regular assessments of faculty perceptions were included in the design and reported in the final evaluation. However, completion of teacher surveys, particularly at the end of the project, proved challenging. The evaluator noted that several schools had to be coaxed to complete the post-test. In particular, changes in administrators lead to varying degrees of cooperation at the teacher/school level.

They were also interested in student outcomes, specifically whether students experienced any of the changes the faculty were making. However, this component of the evaluation never got off the ground because of human subject requirements to have active parent permission. The project staff and evaluator determined that this would be too cumbersome and not feasible within funding limitations. As a result, the evaluation focuses more on school climate change and adoptions of resiliency practices as documented by types of services, evaluation of training, and changes in teacher perceptions.

**Utilization of Technical Assistance**

Most of the project’s technical assistance was organized locally, either through volunteers or resiliency practitioners in the Tucson area, or through consulting arrangements with developers of programs used in this model. One thing the project coordinator mentioned that would have been helpful would be to have additional monies available for technical assistance that comes up during implementation. The systems-change approach that they used did include some amount of TA money for the schools (that was used primarily for books and training), and additional funds (or at
least availability of funds) would have been useful. As mentioned, it is often difficult to anticipate all TA needs when writing the initial proposal and preparing the budget.

The project coordinator felt that it would have been helpful to develop groups of grantees with at least somewhat of a similar focus, rather than what appeared to be somewhat of a random division into groups. In other words, she would have liked to sit down with other people doing similar projects. Also, she mentioned that more information on the "big picture" including evaluation and sustainability would have been helpful.

**Project Sustainability**

The TRI is actually continuing in some fashion, but only because the district received a Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant. Although the main focus of the program was on systems integration, which should be easier to sustain once achieved, the process was not yet far enough along to continue without paid full-time staff to oversee and coordinate activities. Although volunteers were an essential component of the success of this project (particularly for the collaborative efforts), it still is important to have a program coordinator or director to help monitor progress, tell schools what other schools are doing, convene meetings, and provide general oversight. They could not have continued at full capacity without some funding. The new grant will bring in many more schools and include the resiliency concept as part of their activities.

This is not to say that small changes at each site that emphasize resiliency did not persist. Because each site was allowed to tailor the specific response and activities to their own needs, several local changes were made and can more easily be sustained.

For instance, one principal began the practice of calling on random staff at faculty meetings to share a "resiliency story." He encouraged staff to talk about their own resiliency and what helped them succeed in life. As another principal mentioned, "We've had many programs that have come to us from researchers and from the district, and none have lasted beyond the funding. By changing the way people think about children, it will be impossible for this resiliency approach to evaporate."

**Summary of Lessons Learned**

The Tucson Resiliency Initiative represents an innovative model to change how communities and schools think about and work with children. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

**Funding and support** One of the challenges of this type of innovative and somewhat different approach is to secure funding. Although they firmly believe that it is important to have an overall "big picture" and guiding framework to integrate programs, grants are often tied to specific programs that have been designated as best practices.
However, an important lesson is that it is possible to get funding for these integrative, systems-change efforts. Their collaboration with Kris Bosworth from the University of Arizona seemed to enhance their ability to get funding, particularly because she was able to link this approach with research and best practices. They also note that it was frustrating to struggle with continued funding when momentum had already been established. In many cases, short-term projects create expectations, particularly when they are successful, and short-term funding does not allow those expectations to be met.

**Collaboration**

One of the most important lessons for collaboration is that diverse perspectives need to be represented, even when the primary focus of activities is on educators and schools. An important task of the collaborative process is to integrate these diverse perspectives. TRI found that ongoing strategic planning activities were quite helpful in providing this integration and in developing a clear course of action for participants.

Another important lesson learned is that being part of a collaboration can also contribute to the personal and professional development of each member of the collaboration. TRI emphasized enhancing resiliency among those who were participating in the initiative, including members of the community-wide and local collaborations, rather than simply focusing on improvements in the clients (teachers and students) of the initiative.

**Implementation**

An important lesson learned is that programs of this type must strike a balance between recommending evidence-based practices and other "top-down" methods for program development and allowing local participation, ownership, and decision-making to occur in a more "bottom-up" fashion. Because resiliency is a rather broad concept, a diverse set of activities can be included under this rubric. However, it is important to monitor what is selected and to provide gentle guidance towards programs and activities with more evidence of effectiveness.

Another important lesson learned is that operating youth development programs within schools is challenging because of mandates, policy changes, staff changes, and general lack of stability in many system-level events. Interest of teachers and others can wax and wane depending on a number of factors.

Further, although the resiliency initiative was designed to improve teacher morale, other unanticipated events (such as a statewide referendum) seemed to counteract or work against the resiliency efforts. In part, this speaks to the difficulty of working within schools, with multiple and often competing forces at work. On the other hand, any type of system-change initiative is difficult, particularly when the project cannot directly control other system-level influences.

**Evaluation**

The relationship of the evaluator and the collaboration appears to have greatly facilitated both the initial grant application and much of the continued project activity and evaluation. The agency/university collaboration worked to the advantage of the project in this case.

Process evaluation was useful and was integrated into programmatic decision-making and changes. The outcome evaluations focused only on teachers and were a bit more difficult to interpret,
particularly given the multiple influences on teacher morale operating during the time period of the grant. Very little data on student outcomes was collected, in part because of difficulties involved in human subjects and this type of data collection, and in part because this was an idea in development so evaluation was focused on program improvements.

**Sustainability**  From the outset, the issue of sustainability was addressed by emphasizing the importance of system-level changes. Still, although small efforts that emerged at each site or agency were easily sustainable, it was also the case that the initiative as a whole was not sustainable without additional funding. A lesson learned is that volunteers are useful, but paid staff are also important in assuring continuity and sustainability. In the case of TRI, much of their work facilitated the application for a Safe Schools/Healthy Students grant; this application was funded and has provided monies to sustain many of the efforts of TRI.

**Source of Information for Case Study**

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; (d) evaluator report; (e) interview with Pam Parrish, project coordinator; (f) interview with the project evaluator, and (g) review of materials on TRI website. This project should be commended for its excellent record keeping and tracking of progress and challenges, as well as its comprehensive final evaluation report.

**Background Information**

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

**Project Dates:**  October 1999 – September 2001

**Host Organization:**  Metropolitan Education Commission

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CASE STUDY #8: SAFETEAM

Project Summary

The SafeTeam project emerged from a growing recognition in some Tulsa schools that they were ill-equipped to deal with the myriad of mental health and other social problems faced by students, and that most interventions occurred only after a crisis. Specifically, the program grew out of an initial collaboration in 1997 in response to a request for help from Booker T. Washington High School to the Mental Health Association (MHA) in Tulsa. The high school was responding to numerous requests from students for help with the challenges and problems related to multiple academic, family, and peer pressures they experienced. They realized that they needed an “early-warning system” of communication to identify students who were potentially violent or suicidal, as well as to detect a host of other mental health issues, including substance abuse, eating disorders, and depression.

The Mental Health Association responded to this need with an initial design model for SafeTeam. As part of this design, MHA required complete buy-in from school administrators, parent-teacher associations, school faculty, and permission to implement a pilot program for one school year. They also required that the school provide staff time release for the school nurse to serve as the SafeTeam coordinator. During this time period, another school in Tulsa, Bixby Middle and High School, had received a one-year non-renewable grant to fund a staff person who would not carry an academic advisor caseload, but would provide only personal contact with students related to non-academic problems.

Although this request for funding was successful, the planning staff were still unclear as to the specific details of implementing this support model. When they heard of the MHA SafeTeam model, they contacted MHA, set up a series of meetings with them, garnered required buy-in from schools and parents, and decided to implement SafeTeam at Bixby.

Thus, the first year of pilot implementation of SafeTeam was implemented at both Booker T. Washington and Bixby schools. During that first year, MHA solicited feedback and input and continued to modify the program based on information received from multiple sources. The initial program was an organized and structured communication and intervention system at each school based on three core components: (a) the SafeTeam Coordinator; (b) the Committee on Student Safety; and (c) the Clinical Consultant. This team is charged with the task of responding rapidly and effectively both as critical incidents arise and before they arise. Together they gather important information about students and their problems and decide on appropriate services, interventions, and referrals.

The SafeTeam Coordinator (an educational, health, or social service professional) works full time on campus and is charged with coordinating all SafeTeam activities. The coordinator’s first priority is “to assess and evaluate any developing situation regarding the potential safety of a student or students once the information becomes known.” The Committee on Student Safety consists of the
The Committee is chaired by the coordinator, and members attend regular meetings to discuss concerns about individual students and ways to increase safety and well-being at their school. Members of the Committee strive to create an identity focused on serving students, keeping in mind the “pulse” of the school as a whole. The Clinical Consultant is an experienced mental health professional who provides counseling services, leverages referrals, and assists the school as needed regarding mental health and safety issues.

Building on this initial pilot year, the SAG-funded proposal included three additional components of the SafeTeam Model. First, both schools recognized the need to include students in the model. Indeed, students frequently came forward asking if they could participate. In response to this identified need, the project created a Student SafeTeam with its own format and function. This presented several challenges, as it would be inappropriate to parallel the work of the Committee on Student Safety, given concerns about confidentiality and student-specific focus of some discussions. A structure developed for the student teams that was quite flexible, with an overall mission to “work together to keep friends and school safe.” This component of the SafeTeam approach proved to be among the most enduring after funding ended.

Second, a Safe Council forum was developed as a mechanism to provide an opportunity for parents, students, teachers, administrators, and other interested individuals to meet once a semester to discuss school safety issues. Third, a SafeTeam Citizen’s Advisory Committee was established to meet quarterly in order to oversee the activities of the SafeTeam program. This was divided into two groups, the Safe Team Advisory Committee and the SafeTeam Design Group, although most of the Design Group members are also members of the Advisory Group.

The Advisory Committee included several individuals who could be influential in developing continued mechanisms of support, such as a U.S. Senator, the Tulsa County Sheriff, and other top-level officials. In addition, the SAG-funded project included training seminars for students, parents, and staff on topics such as identification of at-risk behaviors, teen pregnancy prevention, mental disorders, and suicide/violence prevention.

**Collaboration Successes and Challenges**

The program has several collaborations. It began as a collaborative effort between schools and the Mental Health Association. The program itself is a school-wide collaboration. In addition, within this program, there are smaller collaborations related to specific committees and teams. MHA essentially designed the program and collaborated with schools to fit it to needs they had identified. Overall, there was a high level of consensus prior to implementation, and the two pilot schools were eager to participate in the program.
The Superintendent of Tulsa public schools also endorsed the project, and that gave it a high degree of legitimacy. Still, some issues emerged in the ongoing collaboration between MHA and the schools. The SafeTeam approach required a shift from viewing student problems as an opportunity for disciplinary responses towards viewing student problems as an opportunity to help students.

Further, SafeTeam approach required schools to think beyond academic development and consider the emotional and mental health needs of students. As noted in one of the progress reports, “Schools seem to become very confused when discussion…turns to funding positions that do not deal directly with the delivery of some form of the educational product.” Thus, although schools were quite supportive initially and continued to be supportive during implementation, some unavoidable tensions arose because of the different underlying philosophies guiding schools and mental health associations.

SafeTeam information meetings were conducted during the early stages of the project to inform the public about the project and to seek stakeholders for ongoing collaborative involvement with the project. As mentioned previously, stakeholders were divided into two groups—advisory stakeholders and design group stakeholders.

Advisory stakeholders were individuals who did not have time to work with program implementation but wanted to be kept informed of program developments, and who could be influential in project sustainability. Design group stakeholders were individuals who wanted to be very involved with actual implementation in the schools.

Overall, project reports noted that the stakeholders groups were enthusiastic, willing to discuss new ideas, and eager to support the project. The project director felt that success was due, in part, to the ability to communicate, enthusiasm, and the timeliness of the issue.

However, as with all collaborations, getting collaborators to commit the time needed for action was more difficult. Attendance at meetings seemed to wax and wane. This was particularly problematic after September 11—individuals who had been involved with SafeTeam soon became overloaded with meetings and projects focused on the aftereffects of that crisis.

Project reports noted that they had identified three types of stakeholders (1) ongoing stakeholders who had been with the project from the beginning and continued to be enthusiastic and supportive (this group was largely made up of staff and supporters who were directly involved in implementation at both schools); (2) passive stakeholders who provide verbal support of the program but irregularly attend meetings—this group is comprised of parents and administrators who are supportive but not involved in the program; and (3) potential stakeholders who are policy and decision makers with clout to make the program successful—the goal was to encourage this group to become more active stakeholders.

Another barrier to involvement noted was the fact that some people seemed to disagree with the model’s level of openness and trust, particularly in regard to sensitive issues (such as dealing with gay and lesbian youth). In some cases, students and parents refused to participate.
Some refusals were related to time, transportation, or other pragmatic issues, while others had more to do with internal family issues and concerns about confidentiality. Further, because of the strains of numerous academic mandates, the School Board was often resistant to the idea of social service programs and systems within the school, and did not give priority status to these programs.

The SafeTeam collaborations that met within each school (i.e., Committee on Student Safety and Student SafeTeam) seemed to be quite effective in carrying out the program. In fact, the project director felt that the biggest success of the program was how the students have embraced it and how they were able to engage students on the Student SafeTeams.

Overall, demand for SafeTeam services by students was extremely high. As students had positive experiences with SafeTeam, the message of how it could be helpful spread to others. One important function of this project was to address the pressing and often unacknowledged stressors that many school children face on a daily basis. Indeed, although the project had expected that teachers would be the biggest referral source, the students themselves accounted for the most referrals to SafeTeam.

**Links between Planning and Implementation Phases**

Collaboration and implementation occurred on an ongoing basis and were essentially simultaneous. The program was premised on collaborative activities involving multiple stakeholders, rather than a collaboration planning phase to develop an implementation plan and monitor implementation. In this sense, the link between collaboration and implementation was virtually seamless.

**Implementation Successes and Challenges**

Overall, the project was implemented quite successfully at both sites. In fact, one of the challenges was the ever-increasing number of referrals that exceeded the staff capacity. For example, during Year 2, 387 students were served across the two schools. The average number of contacts per case were 2.61 in one school and 4.81 in the other school. The final evaluation report conducted by an independent team notes that “All of the individual SafeTeam components were successfully implemented in the two participating schools and through the Mental Health Association of Tulsa.

These pilot experiences provided evidence for both the feasibility and flexibility of the SafeTeam model.” The report also notes that “The school community’s response to SafeTeam was favorable as indicated by considerable service utilization.”

Implementation success seems to be tied to several important factors. Different sources mentioned the importance of flexibility in programming. Interventions were tailored to individual student needs, ranging from on-site service coordination to outside counseling referrals. Rather than a “one size fits all” intervention, the overall approach was well-defined but implementation could proceed on a case-by-case basis.
As the project director noted, most of the strategic planning for the overall program is done at the design group level, then the local, school-based committee and partners iron out the specific activities and programs at their school. In this fashion, each school can tailor the program to its own needs. Schools have reacted quite positively to the guidelines and the flexibility for implementation.

Another factor that contributed to successful implementation was the ability of the project to truly engage and empower students. SafeTeam was based on a help and understanding perspective designed to build trust. Students were engaged as partners, and their voices were clearly heard. The project director felt that the success of SafeTeam was due, in part, to their ability to engage students in the planning, development, and implementation phases of the project.

In this regard, the spirit of openness also presented challenges, particularly in regard to confidentiality and the need to refrain from casual discussion around sensitive issues. This challenge was met by implementing regular training regarding the legal and ethical boundaries of confidentiality and privileged communication.

Perhaps the greatest challenge to implementation was melding the two cultures—that of the schools and that of mental health. As the project director noted, decisions at the district level are largely political and reflect current issues in the educational system. Most frequently, these do not involve the mental health needs of children (unless a recent crisis such as a school shooting has occurred). The standard practices educational model used at the schools does not include mental health—indeed, it is often difficult to convince schools that mental health issues are important.

Another challenge with the schools was related to bureaucratic procedures for hiring staff. These were eventually ironed out, but did cause delays in hiring for the coordinator position at Booker T. Washington High School, which delayed the start-up of the program. They also had some difficulty with the clinical consultants in terms of finding the “right” person for the job. They seemed to have problems getting effective consultants. Further, they learned that the specific person hired for the SafeTeam Coordinator position is critically important. This person must be concerned, trustworthy, and engage students.

**Local Evaluation Successes and Challenges**

The project struggled initially in determining the details of the local evaluation, and in securing a qualified evaluation contractor. The project ultimately contracted with a local university evaluator, although there were several delays in ironing out the details of their involvement. SafeTeam questioned whether the University had the resources and commitment to provide the level of evaluation services they needed. This seemed to have been worked out. However, after the university strengthened their commitment to the evaluation, some difficulties were noted in getting the schools to cooperate with the increased requests for data from the evaluation team.

Another difficulty related to the late start-up of the evaluation—no baseline information on students was collected. The evaluators were left to work with existing surveys, such as the Youth Risk
Behavior Survey that was administered in the previous year as part of the Safe and Drug Free Schools program. Unfortunately, these data were available on a very limited sample of students in the pilot schools and were insufficient to provide a reasonable accurate baseline measure. Still, the evaluation compiled a range of archival, case-related, and anecdotal information on the program to support its effectiveness.

Utilization of Technical Assistance

Project reports noted numerous identified needs for technical assistance. These included help with evaluation, website development, training, and PowerPoint presentations. Unfortunately, because of day-to-day operation needs and funding constraints, they were unable to access much in the way of technical assistance.

Project Sustainability

Overall, the costs for sustainability were low and the SafeTeam program was easily integrated into the regular school programming. Schools were able to find bits and pieces of funding for the coordinator position, the program was extended into a third year with a no-cost extension for SAG funds, and new funds were applied for.

However, budget cuts and school funding priorities also made sustainability problematic. Rather than expanding the program to additional schools, the focus was on strengthening the program at existing schools. As project staff were seeking additional funds for this purpose, the Department of Human Services (DHS) decided to partner with the Tulsa Public Schools to provide social service workers for six local high schools. SafeTeam was exploring how to integrate these new services with the SafeTeam Model.

Summary of Lessons Learned

Overall, this was a successful pilot implementation of a school-wide, early warning and response system designed to address mental health and safety needs of students. Many modifications in the program were made over the course of implementation, and many of its elements were sustained in schools. Lessons learned in each of five categories follow.

Funding and support Funding for school-based mental health services is often difficult to sustain. Schools have a “first and foremost” commitment to the regular educational program. Further, many school administrators do not see mental health concerns as within their purview. The project was aware of the need to address sustainability from the outset. Towards this end, they actively sought additional grant funding and engaged key leaders in the Advisory Committee.
Collaboration  Collaboration was easiest among individuals with high levels of commitment to the project. Still, because of the multiple levels of collaboration, the project needed to rely heavily on the continued participation of multiple stakeholders and constituents. Maintaining active interest and involvement proved somewhat difficult, particularly in the wake of September 11.

Implementation  High quality staff, good relationships with the schools, active involvement of students, and flexibility in program were extremely important for successful program implementation. Challenges revolved around relationships with schools, particularly the school system.

Evaluation  An important lesson learned was that evaluation responsibilities, timelines, and level of involvement need to be clearly specified at the outset of the project. Further, it is important to start the evaluation and collect data early in the project. Another lesson learned is that clarity should extend to the schools (or other agencies who will provide data)—that is, schools must also buy-in to the evaluation and be willing to provide data in a timely fashion.

Sustainability  Just as evaluation must be considered during the early stages of project implementation, sustainability must be addressed early on and continuously during program implementation. The project was successful in tapping into different sources for sustainability. A more rigorous evaluation and presentation of findings also might have been helpful in securing additional funding.

Source of Information for Case Study

This case study synthesizes information from several sources including: (a) project grant application; (b) project quarterly reports; (c) project final report; (d) evaluator report; and (e) interview with Michael W. Brose, project director.
Background Information

This information was provided in the project final report - contact information may or may not be current.

**Project Dates:**
October 1999 - September 2001

**Host Organization:**
Mental Health Association in Tulsa

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REVISITING THE FOUR KEY ELEMENTS OF SUCCESS

At the beginning of this *Casebook*, we provided a review of what is known about collaboration and implementation of youth violence prevention projects in the United States. The eight cases that followed each described the individual experiences of projects funded through the School and Community Action Grant (SAG) program. In this section, we discuss the specific experiences of these projects, resulting in an “enhanced set” of lessons learned about collaboration approaches and their impact on the overall implementation of a youth violence prevention project. We also draw on their collective wisdom to provide suggestions for future efforts in youth violence prevention or related fields.

As described in the first section, the *Casebook* is organized around four key elements of success:

- Building collaborations through strategic planning
- Careful transitions from planning to implementation
- Strategic implementation and local evaluation
- Promoting project sustainability.

We begin this section with an analysis of what emerged from the case studies as the most important lessons learned in each of these four areas. Following this, we provide a more detailed discussion of these issues. We conclude with some "take home messages" provided by the project directors.

**Building Collaborations Through Strategic Planning**

The most important lessons about how to create a local collaboration, and the strategic planning needed to support it, are the following:

- **Build on past experience.** Collaborations seem to work best when they build on and expand already existing collaborations.

- **Clear guidelines are important.** It is important to have clear roles, tasks, guidelines, and goals that are supported by all members.

- **Relationships count.** The success of a collaboration hinges, in part, on the relationships between people that develop and that incorporate mutual respect and effective communication.

- **Collaboration takes time.** Collaboration is a process that takes time and energy, particularly when individuals come from diverse personal, professional, and cultural perspectives.
C  **Take action.** It is important to incorporate visible actions into the collaborative process so that members can see the results of their work.

**Careful Transitions from Planning to Implementation**

When making the critical transition from the planning stage of a community-based violence prevention program to its full-scale implementation, critical elements that need to be taken into account include:

- **Allow time for program planning.** Program implementation is facilitated by active and extensive prior strategic planning that requires time, energy, resources, and commitment. This should allow for assessment of community needs and readiness for intervention.

- **Collaborations can have a role in both planning and implementation.** The transition from planning to implementation is facilitated by continued involvement of the collaboration and/or individuals and agencies involved in the planning process during the implementation phase.

- **Build program ownership.** The planning process should be used to build "ownership" of programs and to support buy-in by different individuals and agencies that will be involved in implementation.

**Strategic Implementation and Local Evaluation**

Innovative, often rather experimental programs such as these, even though they may spring from an evidence-based program model, need even more than traditional programs to be evaluated. This is true both for program justification purposes (to continue funding, to promote expansion) and for program improvement. Some of the specific lessons related to the role of program administration and evaluation in these programs include:

- **People run programs.** Hiring, training, and retaining committed, engaged, and competent staff is crucial to program success.

- **Keep key leaders involved.** The commitment and involvement of key leaders (such as school principals) and others involved in implementation (such as teachers) must be sustained.

- **Balance standardization and flexibility.** Programming must balance standardization of intervention (for instance, with "best practices" programs) with flexibility of implementation.
• **Use evaluation wisely.** The role of the evaluator should be clear--this can include documentation of progress, feedback for improvement, and assessment of impact. It is also important to be realistic - outcome evaluations are often not possible.

**Promoting Project Sustainability**

In the end, an investment of public funds in an experimental program can only be justified if it has the potential for ongoing operation and therefore ongoing positive impact on the intended target population - youth at risk for violent behavior and/or mental health and substance abuse problems in this case. Some of the lessons learned about how to promote project sustainability include the following:

• **Start with sustainability.** Sustainability must be addressed from the beginning of the project and be included as part of the ongoing activities.

• **Engage the collaboration in sustainability.** Members of the collaboration should play an active role in sustainability.

**Building Collaborations Through Strategic Planning**

Earlier in the *Casebook*, we presented information from descriptive studies and reports that point to elements of successful collaboration. These studies emphasized a number of factors, including the importance of a history of collaboration, respect for others, communication, diverse representation, and involvement of key people in the community. The experiences of the eight projects described here are consistent with these previous discussions of successful collaboration. We highlight aspects that were mentioned most frequently.

**Build on past experience.** As noted in the individual cases studies, collaborations that were able to build on a history of collaboration got off the ground more quickly and confronted fewer challenges. For instance, the collaboration group working on the Mi Animo Mentoring project in Conejos County, Colorado had been meeting for many years to strengthen opportunities for youth, regardless of whether or not there was grant funding. The focus was “success in numbers,” whereby local service providers tried to help each other out and work towards a common goal.

Similarly, in Lane County, Oregon, there had been a history of community planning efforts around coordinated services for children and families that provided a rich backdrop against which the Community Safety Net (CSN) collaboration could unfold. In Mastic Beach, New York, the William Floyd School District was also able to take advantage of a history of collaboration. This history proved to be an important asset, and new collaboration activities for the Community Planning, Exemplary Practices (CPEP) were able to build on these previous efforts.
In contrast, the collaboration for Keys for Networking WrapAround services program in Topeka, Kansas was brought into existence specifically for this project. As a new collaboration, this group of stakeholders experienced many challenges. In general, considerable difficulty was noted in gaining momentum. The project director mentioned that there were simply too many meetings in Topeka. Some people felt that they were just meeting for the sake of meeting. Many were tired of meetings and were involved in their own programs. The lack of collaborative history also resulted in difficulties getting stakeholders to trust each other.

**Set clear guidelines.** A few collaborations indicated that they were somewhat "bogged down" at some point in the process and needed to reflect, reorganize, and refocus their mission. For instance, the coalition for the Common Ground for Youth project in Chicago, Illinois seemed to lose direction during the middle of the first year. They realized they would not be able to move forward without mission and goals statements and a more clearly defined sense of where they wanted to go.

An overnight retreat was held during the latter part of the first year of grant funding to provide training on consensus building and facilitate the bonding of coalition members. This seemed to have a positive effect on how well the collaborations were able to make decisions and proceed.

Keys for Networking had an additional challenge in building a common focus. In particular, although their work was guided by the common principles of WrapAround services, they found it difficult to get stakeholders and families to buy into these principles. Some people felt that there was too much emphasis on mental health.

Minority families interested in receiving counseling and medication saw WrapAround as carrying with it the stigma of “mental illness” and did not want to be involved. Even when stakeholders embraced WrapAround principles, it was difficult to translate this into practice. Thus, difficulties were noted both in moving from discussion to consensus, and, when consensus was reached, in moving from consensus to action. As a result, the collaboration seemed to get “stuck.” In response, the project brought in an outside coach who was able to help members of the collaboration focus and organize their actions and goals.

The Tucson Resiliency Initiative had a further challenge in trying to refocus collaborative efforts on resiliency instead of problem behavior. The diverse perspectives of participants resulted in different "images" of what the project should look like. This was addressed through regular strategic planning during the entire grant period. This seemed to help everyone come together and made the focus clearer and more concrete. Again, this experience highlights the importance of sharing clear goals and means for achieving these goals.

**Build effective relationships.** Not only is it important to have clear direction, it is important that this direction emerges from a true collaboration where all voices are heard and where leadership provides direction but does not impose it on members. For instance, in CPEP project of the William Floyd School District, the project director emphasized the importance of empowering members of the collaboration. This was accompanied by a relentless pursuit of a common goal on the part of all
stakeholders, including the school district. In other words, the collaboration was a true partnership of individuals who valued each other's ideas and focused on real change, not just another program.

Mutual respect and willingness to listen to others can facilitate the development of strong relationships. Although this is often dealt with in an indirect fashion through subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) suggestions, in the Tucson Resiliency Initiative, this process was actually part of the collaborative focus. Specifically, members of the collaboration were asked to focus on and reflect on their own strengths and resiliency and how these strengths could facilitate productive and respectful relationships among members of the collaboration.

Allow time for collaboration. In almost all projects, even those with a substantial history of collaboration, it was noted that "collaboration takes time." This involved time to build consensus around issues, time to integrate diverse perspectives, and time to show the community that their efforts would have a positive impact.

For example, the consensus-building process for the Preserving, Empowering, and Assisting Refugee Children through Enhancement (PEACE) program in Salt Lake City, Utah was successful, albeit slow and often painstaking. This project had the particular challenge of bridging large gaps in cultural practices, beliefs, and understandings both between many different refugee cultures as well as between refugee groups and the schools. Different refugee groups as well as factions within those groups also had distinct ideas of how things should work, causing some difficulties for collaboration.

Because of these large gaps and challenges for collaboration, project staff felt it critical to allow sufficient time for consensus building. This created some issues with the schools, because the school community wanted to see immediate implementation of the selected program and had some resistance to the concept of consensus building. However, their attitude changed when the benefits of the consensus-building process became apparent.

Similarly, the Tucson Resiliency Initiative had difficulty promoting resilience as an organizing theme of the collaboration. Over time, they realized that not everyone was willing to hear the message. An important role for the collaboration was to help keep teams focused on those who are willing to hear the message rather than spend too much energy on the few who won't. They found that as momentum spread, the concept of resiliency was increasingly accepted. However, this was often a slow process and could not be forced.

Take action. In some cases, there was resistance to ongoing meetings and commitment without visible results. As project staff noted, it was important to avoid a culture of "meeting for the sake of meeting." This problem was exacerbated in communities where previous planning efforts had not resulted in visible actions or improvements. For instance, the CSN collaboration in Lane County found that there was some skepticism about the outcomes of planning in light of lack of clear changes as a result of many previous planning efforts. This resulted in a fair amount of community skepticism regarding planning efforts.
One strategy used in some collaborations to avoid this was to infuse regular activities (such as youth forums, park clean-up days, etc.) into the ongoing activities of the collaboration. For example, the collaboration group for the CPEP program of the William Floyd School District continued to develop a number of community and youth service activities. These included Community Clean-Up Day, a community mural, Youth Speak Out, a prom gown accessory program, enhanced recreational activities, and community rallies. This provided a mechanism for active participation of members throughout the duration of the grant-funded program.

**Careful Transitions from Planning to Implementation**

As discussed earlier, program planning has many different meanings. In some cases, collaborations plan for types of programs they feel are needed and jointly select these programs. In other cases, planning is directly tied to start-up or a specific program or set of programs. Although planning can serve these different functions, it is clearly an important part of the program development and implementation process and provides a time for active involvement of service providers, recipients, and others who will be involved in day-to-day operations. The experiences of the projects in this Casebook highlighted three very important aspects of the planning process and the transition to program implementation.

**Allow time for program planning.** Many of the projects expressed concern with the relatively short (two-year) time frame for both planning and implementation. Unfortunately, these time constraints are often imposed by the guidelines of the specific grant mechanisms.

For example, the project director of the Mi Animo Mentoring project in Conejos County felt that the two-year structure of the SAG grants, with Year 1 for planning and Year 2 for implementation, did not fit the rollout of their program. First, the project director and staff did not feel that one year for consensus building and one year for implementation was enough time. In the case of Mi Animo, there was a history of consensus building, so initial efforts were not as difficult.

However, they view consensus building as a continuous process that does not stop when the intervention begins. To the contrary, they emphasized the role of the collaboration during program development and implementation. Also, there was relatively little time for working out some of the specific implementation details, which proved even more problematic in a rural community with unique implementation challenges.

These time constraints were less critical when a clear need and readiness for the program or activities had already been established, either through a prior strategic planning process or other mechanisms. For example, Lane County had spearheaded a number of system reform and integration projects prior to the CSN project. The Steering Committee’s efforts were primarily directed towards creating, directing, and making needed modifications in the implementation of CSN.
Thus, their history of community planning efforts around coordinated services for children and families provided a rich backdrop against which the CSN collaboration could unfold. Efforts were directed towards strengthening a model that was already widely supported; this level of need and readiness facilitated the planning and implementation process.

**Include collaboration in implementation phase.** Most of the projects were able to create roles for the collaborations in both planning and implementation. This continuity was frequently mentioned as a primary reason for the success of the project. For instance, in the Common Ground for Youth project in Chicago, the project director felt that the active participation of the coalition members in all phases of the program was important to sustaining their involvement.

Coalition members not only reviewed the implementation plans and dealt with issues that came up over the course of the program, they also attended events, served as chaperons on trips, and helped seek additional funding. In addition, many of the coalition members served as mentors, working with the program coordinator on a regular basis to monitor the progress of their mentees.

Similarly, the Safe Team project in Tulsa involved collaboration and implementation on an ongoing basis. The program was premised on collaborative activities involving multiple stakeholders, rather than a collaboration planning phase to develop an implementation plan and monitor implementation. In this sense, the link between collaboration and implementation was virtually seamless.

**Build program ownership.** The collaboration planning phase was designed, in part, to build local ownership of selected programs. However, grant guidelines also required pre-selection of one or more exemplary practices. Grantees frequently mentioned the inherent contradiction of these requirements. In other words, if one task for the collaboration is to collectively select a program or programs, this is somewhat precluded by the fact that the specific programs were already detailed in the grant application.

This seemed to be more problematic in communities that had reason to be concerned about the appropriateness of many evidence-based programs for their specific needs. Some programs expressed concerns about the extent to which evidence-based projects that are frequently evaluated in only a few communities can address local needs, particularly in areas with unique demographic and historical characteristics.

The value of a collaborative approach is allowing members to be part of the decision-making and implementation process so that programs are responsive to local conditions and needs. However, this is a bit more difficult when programs are pre-selected—the task of the collaborations thus became solely to adapt the program. There was general consensus that it is important to allow projects that flow from a collaboration process a certain amount of leeway in sorting through potential projects as part of the planning process. One suggestion was that grantees be asked to list five evidence-based projects in their proposal that would be presented to the collaboration for discussion and selection.
This seemed to be less problematic in communities where programs already had an institutional history and where the task was to adapt the program to a specific population or group. Consider the experience of the PEACE project in Salt Lake City. The focus of their grant was to adapt the Second Step program for refugee populations.

Again, because this program had been chosen prior to actual consensus-building by refugee groups around its selection, it was important to secure buy-in for this program from the diverse refugee groups during the initial consensus-building process. In general, this was not a problem. In part, this was because Second Step was already the official program of the school district.

Thus, it was presented to the refugee community as a good program that the school district endorsed. The refugee community was unfamiliar with other programs and seemed to accept this program based on the school recommendation. They were told that their job was to help adapt it to the specific needs of the refugee community.

**Strategic Implementation and Local Evaluation**

As noted earlier, in recent years there has been an increasing awareness of the importance of program implementation. Rather than being seen as something that just happens along the way, researchers and practitioners have called for more attention to this complex and sometimes problematic process. Indeed, projects included in this Casebook all experienced some difficulties during the implementation phase. Four implementation issues were mentioned most frequently.

**Build good staff.** There is often a great deal of care and planning involved in selection of a specific program. In many instances, this involves an exemplary program with a detailed (and often manualized) implementation protocol. This protocol often specifies number and content of lessons, logistics of implementation, and other administrative details.

Still, as mentioned earlier, assuring standardized delivery of an exemplary program does not assure that it will be done well by interested and engaged staff who share this enthusiasm with their clients. The best programs can fail in the hands of poorly motivated and inadequately trained staff. In particular, all of the projects mentioned the critical role of the project coordinator. This person must be concerned, trustworthy, and able to engage others.

Most project directors routinely talked about staff and success in the same breath. For example, the project director of Common Ground for Youth in Chicago attributed much of the program success to "great staff." She noted that staff were highly motivated, competent, and committed to the program. In some cases, they were hired from a volunteer pool, so they had "seen the person in action." In other cases, they were recommended by other employees. In most all cases, staff had demonstrated a strong commitment to the community because they had connections and/or had volunteered with the organization previously.
They also formed positive relationships with each other, coalition members, youth, and families. In the Chicago experience, mechanisms to increase familiarity with staff before they were hired seemed to facilitate the hiring of competent and committed staff.

Unfortunately, staffing often presents one of the biggest challenges for youth development and violence prevention programs, in part, because of the insecurities and low salaries often associated with grant-funded social service programs. This challenge is even greater for projects serving underrepresented minority youth and families. For instance, the PEACE project in Salt Lake City insisted on hiring staff members who were knowledgeable in refugee cultures and communities. This often resulted in a limited pool of applicants. Sometime they were fortunate to find outstanding staff with direct experience with refugee populations.

Staff could also present other challenges. In one instance, a part-time employee did not work out and was let go. However, after she was terminated, she spoke poorly of the project and urged the refugee community not to be involved. The project responded by letting the community know that it was available to clarify any questions they might have about the project. This openness seemed to ease the anxiety of the community.

Over time, the community came to ignore this individual’s comments and did not allow this incident to distract the focus of the project. Nevertheless, it serves as an example of how staff difficulties can have far reaching effects on a program and how care must be exercised in hiring good employees and keeping them positively engaged in the project.

**Keep key leaders involved.** Another element of program implementation that can often "make or break" a program is the ability to sustain the involvement of key leaders and decision makers. Most programs reviewed in this *Casebook* went to great lengths to secure buy-in and engagement of key individuals, either during the pre-planning, grant development, or collaboration phase. However, even under the best circumstances, these efforts can be offset by changes in this leadership.

This is particularly problematic when working with schools and school districts where changes in leadership are common. For example, the Tucson Resiliency Initiative worked with five school districts. During the implementation of the project, three of the five districts had new superintendents. Teachers also played a leadership role in implementation, and engagement of teachers was sometimes compromised by other events. These included a threatened teacher strike about salary issues and a highly publicized list of underperforming schools that resulted in increased pressures on faculty.

In addition to key administrative leaders, some projects identified key community leaders who served to generate enthusiasm and support for the project. For example, the PEACE project in Salt Lake City identified local “champions” who were interested in expanding services to refugee children in each pilot school. These champions were the leaders who made the project a school-wide experience in their respective school. They also helped to raise awareness of refugee needs in the schools and other agencies, and in to empower refugee groups to speak out about these needs.
Balance standardization and flexibility. This issue presents a particular challenge when implementing exemplary programs. This is because an important replication issue for exemplary practices is the extent to which program guidelines are followed with minimal variation. However, in practice, all projects noted the central importance of maintaining flexibility in both program content and implementation practices. How, then, can projects follow program guidelines while simultaneously adapting programs to local conditions?

Projects that were successful at this utilized a number of strategies. Some of them were able to enlist the assistance of the program developer so that modifications were consistent with the original intent and guiding theory of the program. In other cases, modifications were focused on adapting to cultural practices, such as in Salt Lake City.

In yet other instances, adaptations were necessitated by the logistics of implementation, such as transportation issues in rural areas like Conejos County. However, program coordinators and community stakeholders were able to determine essential features of the program implemented and ensure that those essential features were maintained.

Flexibility also was important in translating what was planned into what was feasible. Several projects noted that they had taken on too much; in practice, they had to cut back on services and/or programs they were able to provide. For instance, the CPEP program in the William Floyd School District had planned to implement both the Families and Schools Together (FAST) program and Reconnecting Youth. However, they realized that resources would be spread too thin, and decided to implement only the FAST program with SAG grant funds.

Similarly, the Keys for Networking Wraparound project in Topeka ran into a number of challenges to implementation. Still, project staff were able to remain flexible and respond to the realities of implementation. When Year 1 goals and objectives proved to be too ambitious, project staff re-visited these original ideas and developed a revised set of goals more in line with community conditions.

Some of the projects reviewed in the Casebook implemented a model strategy rather than a model program. This frequently involved system-level changes in how services were provided, how clients were matched with services that met their specific needs, and how specific activities selected in a given setting were also tailored to local concerns.

For example, in the Safe Team program in Tulsa, interventions were tailored to individual student needs, ranging from on-site service coordination to outside counseling referrals. Rather than a “one size fits all” intervention, the overall approach was well-defined but implementation proceeded on a case-by-case basis.

As the project director noted, most of the strategic planning for the overall program was done at the design group level, then the local, school-based committee and partners ironed out the specific activities and programs at their school. In this fashion, each school was able to tailor the program to its own needs.
Use evaluation wisely. Grantees experiences with their local evaluators ranged from "not very useful" to "extremely helpful." The local evaluators also generally had an easier time collecting process information for program improvement, and they had a more difficult time collecting meaningful outcome information.

However, the extent to which evaluators shared this process information with program directors and staff varied considerably. This was facilitated by a previously established working relationship between the program staff and the evaluator and/or the evaluator's engagement in other programs run by the same agency.

For instance, the CPEP program in Mastic Beach has a very positive experience with the local evaluator. In part, this was due to the fact that they had worked with him on other projects and were also working with him during this time period on related projects. The evaluator was truly a team player and was engaged throughout the entire collaboration, planning, and implementation stages. He was seen as an “evaluation partner” rather than an external evaluator.

Several projects expressed frustration with their inability to conduct impact evaluations. As they noted, at the end of the day, local programs with positive results are more likely to be sustained. Impact evaluations could be very useful for this purpose, but were rarely carried out at the level anticipated. However, these types of evaluations simply may not be feasible given the multiple demands and limited funds for project operations.

For instance, the CSN project in Lane County was frustrated by the process focus of the evaluation. Specifically, the evaluation involved documentation of number of families served, number of families deemed ineligible, demographic characteristics of each group, etc. Although it was clearly important to document participation of families in CSN and actual utilization of referral services, no information was collected on specific services used, extent of family involvement in these programs, and the impact of CSN and specific services on family well-being and/or child outcomes.

Thus, no data were collected on number of families referred to CSN who were subsequently referred to child welfare for suspected abuse. Further, no data were collected on types of services families received, barriers to services, and benefits of these services.

At the very least, it would have been useful to document number of families referred to CSN who showed no further contact with child welfare during a reasonable follow-up period. In the absence of this type of information, it is only possible to say that CSN did process a large number of families and refer them to outside services. This points to the overall need to be realistic in evaluation planning, but also to include some type of evaluation of “benefits” or impact of the program whenever possible.
Promoting Project Sustainability

All of the projects included in the case studies mentioned sustainability as one of their most pressing problems. Unfortunately, even under the best circumstances, sustainability ultimately requires some level of funding, and community groups must often compete for limited and shrinking funds. The challenge of securing funding for the long-haul cannot be met by agency response alone. Indeed, the short funding cycles of many grants severely curtails the ability of agencies to keep programs going.

Against this system-level barrier, some factors do seem to contribute to an increased likelihood of sustainability. A number of these characteristics were described at the beginning of this Casebook. These include adaptability of the program to setting characteristics, service needs, changing community characteristics, and early planning for sustainability. In particular, grantees emphasized the importance of early planning. Many of them also mentioned the need to engage the collaboration, with all of their energy and resources, in addressing the challenge of sustainability.

Start with sustainability. Several project directors emphasized that sustainability must also be addressed from the beginning of the project, rather than six months before the program will end. However, this often proves difficult when energy and resources are directed at building and engaging the collaboration and setting the stage for program implementation.

After the program is up and running, energy is often spent in the day-to-day management. In some cases, project staff believe that sustainability is linked to demonstrating success. Therefore, they wait for the results of the evaluation, and anticipate using these results to garner additional funding and support. In practice, even when impact evaluations are available, and even when results are positive, this is too late in the game to secure funding and continuity of programs.

Engage the collaboration in sustainability. In many cases, members of the collaboration were influential community leaders, important champions, and enthusiastic supporters of the projects. In this manner, they were probably the best spokespeople for continuation and sustainability of the project. Further, many projects build additional community linkages. Indeed, many projects were able to increase sustainability (at least of some aspects of their programs) by engaging members of the collaboration and building on these community linkages.

For example, the Common Ground for Youth program in Chicago benefited from multiple collaborations with agencies, a high level of commitment of the coalition members, and a link to an agency with a long history of social services in the community. These connections helped them sustain parts of the programs.

Take Home Messages

In our interviews with project directors from the eight programs we asked for the "end of the day take home message." Here is what they said.
Common Ground for Youth, Chicago, IL: Collaboration and cooperation are really important; relationships with agencies are essential for implementing programs. Staff are key!

Mi Animo Mentoring Project, Conejos County, CO: Operating a program in a rural area takes more time and planning. You must include almost everyone which can at times be frustrating. Also, the problem of sustainability is central. Agencies need money to provide services over the long haul rather than hurry up and get the program running and evaluated within two years. Sustainability is money and people who are invested in the value of programs.

Community Safety Net Lane County, OR: Programs must be flexible at the local level. There must be a willingness to allow adaptation rather than saying "this is our vision of the program, this is what we'll do" - so that the vision can adjust according to input from different sources.

Community Planning, Exemplary Practices Mastic Beach, NY: Have patience; it takes time, endurance, and commitment to mobilize communities. You must put in a huge effort up front, but it pays off in the end.

Preserving, Empowering, and Assisting Refugee Children through Enhancement Salt Lake City, UT: Listen to the community through consensus building. Allow time to work with the community and hear what they have to say. Terms used are also very important: school success rather than violence prevention. Everyone makes mistakes everyday; it is part of the consensus building process, but shouldn't stand in the way of that process.

Keys for Networking WrapAround Services, Topeka, KS: It's important to look at things from different perspectives. People within have a limited vision and they need an outside coach. Your world is no bigger than the table you sit at.

Tucson Resiliency Initiative, Tucson, AZ: If you really want to see change that is lasting and sustainable, you need to pay as much attention to systems-oriented and philosophy-based approaches that provide technical support, coaching, etc. as you pay to programs. Make sure that you pay attention to the system and the climate in which you are working. If you don’t, it can undermine whatever you are doing.

SafeTeam, Tulsa, OK: Listen to the students and they will tell you if something is working or not. They are amazing - they will tell you if you are on track or not.

Taken together with the lessons learned presented both from other experiences with youth violence prevention programs, and those emerging from the specific projects analyzed here, these “take home” messages all lead in one uniform direction - that planning and implementing youth violence prevention programs is a complicated, labor-intensive process requiring both skill and knowledge resources, considerable financial backing, and (as important as the first two) simply enough time to overcome implementation challenges and take root in the community. Done right, these systems change interventions can have a significant impact not only on their original target populations, but on the larger community in all its efforts to wrestle with the challenges of youth violence prevention.
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