



# Learning Tool 15

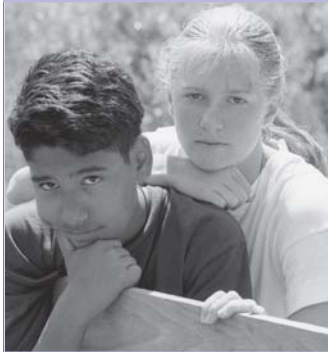
## Best Practices for Maximizing and Sustaining Collaborative Efforts

### Introduction

Collaboration is a strategy that can be used to effectively accomplish goals whether it is protecting children, supporting families, advocating for changes in legislation for improved funding for services or improving services for children and youth with multiple needs.

The Children's Bureau and other Federal agencies have emphasized the need to collaborate in order to achieve improved outcomes for children and families. There is widespread recognition that one system alone is not able to achieve the desired outcomes given the multiple and complex needs of children and families. The current round of Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) has emphasized collaboration with other systems and community stakeholders to meet their performance requirements. This increased emphasis has also extended beyond the CFSR process to include linkages with other Federally funded programs that provide supports to families and communities. This includes collaboration with programs such as the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems (ECCS), System of Care (SOC) and Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), and Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Title I State Grants programs that support child protective services, including alternative response systems in some States, to enhance the prevention of child abuse and neglect. With reduced funding and significant shifts in the economy, the need for collaboration continues to increase as agencies and communities struggle to find ways to meet their performance requirements and improve overall outcomes for children and families within dwindling resources.

Despite the increase in collaborative efforts, State Lead Agencies (SLA) have expressed difficulties in sustaining these efforts with the ever present challenges of staff turnover, fluctuation in state/organizational/local priorities, changes in leadership and decreasing funding. Two recent activities of the FRIENDS National Resource Center have provided the SLAs with simple tools for assessing the status of their collaborations to facilitate their efforts to sustain their collaboration(s) and build on what they have been able to achieve. The most recent tool was the Be A Star: A Tool to Assess and Maintain- Effective Collaborations created by Glenda Eoyang at the Human Systems Dynamics, Inc.,



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presented at the CBCAP grantees meeting in Atlanta, GA in March 2009.<sup>1</sup> The second was the Wilder Collaboration Factors Inventory included in one of the annual Region IV Child Welfare Collaboration Initiatives (CWCI).<sup>2</sup> Both tools provide a simple way to assess collaboration highlighting the strengths, areas to build on, and moving beyond the challenging points that impede progress. This fact sheet highlights what SLAs have done to maximize and sustain their collaborative efforts. Their wisdom and creativity is shared here to illustrate successes in sustaining and maximizing collaboration, and provide examples that SLA peers may consider and adapt in their efforts to move forward within their own network of families, organizations, and communities to prevent child abuse and neglect.

### Defining Collaboration

Collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations that are committed to achieve common goals. While relationships are vital to successful collaborations it takes more than relationships. Effective collaborations also include a jointly developed structure, shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and a sharing of resources and rewards.<sup>3</sup>

While this provides a general framework for understanding the concept, the evolution of any collaboration is dependent on many factors. Individuals, circumstances, resources, and goals all create a unique environment that influence and define the evolution of collaborative efforts. The ability to build upon these and maximize their potential to positively drive change involves a combination of recognizing the opportunity, engaging the essential partners, effectively utilizing available resources, and developing a sustainable plan for implementation. There is no set formula for success; rather, the persons involved must chart a course that aligns with the needs of the communities they serve.

At its most basic level, any collaboration starts with the relationships people have with each other. It is a combination of the individual personalities and the organizations or groups they represent that evolve into the unified effort necessary to create positive change. In some cases it is the champion who drives an initiative forward. Other times, it is an event or series of events that create the environment that provides the impetus to advance a cause. Ultimately, the ability of the people to mobilize their resources creates positive outcomes for children and families.

The CAPTA Title II Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) program provides many resources to guide and support collaborative efforts. This has also provided a forum for the exchange of ideas and strategies. As the field of prevention of child abuse and neglect evolves, the strategies within various jurisdictions have evolved to address the needs of the children and families within their communities. This document represents an effort to capture some of the unique approaches, challenges and effective strategies for addressing these challenges, and resources that have provided the necessary environment to maximize and sustain collaborations.

### Role of the State Lead Agency

The individuals, organizations and social context within a state or community all influence the ability to effectively collaborate to prevent child abuse and neglect. Each state or jurisdiction has the flexibility to establish the organization that will apply for the funding and provide oversight of the CBCAP program and activities. The process by which that decision is made and the identified organization themselves influence the trajectory of prevention efforts within the state. In all cases the States Executive Officer designates a lead entity to administer the CBCAP funds for the implementation of community-based and prevention-focused programs and activities designed to strengthen and support families to prevent child abuse and neglect. This can be a state

<sup>1</sup> The tool can be found at <http://www.friendsnrc.org/download/09confpresentation/starassess.pdf>, (2009) HSD Institute.

<sup>2</sup> [www.friendsnrc.org/CBCAP/priority/collaboration.htm](http://www.friendsnrc.org/CBCAP/priority/collaboration.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Mattessich, P., Murray-Close, M., and Monsey, B. *Collaboration: What makes it Work, 2nd Edition*. (2001) Fieldstone Alliance.

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agency, an entity under the umbrella of state government or a separate non-profit agency.

The role that the CBCAP State Lead Agency (SLA) plays within the community is focused on preventing child abuse and neglect; however, the actual work may be impacted by whether they are a public agency, a quasi-public agency, or a separate non-profit agency. Perceptions are greatly influenced by factors that may have little to do with the program itself because of larger, more visible programs within the umbrella organization. In examining the various structures of CBCAP programs, it is striking that despite their differences in types of organizations administering the Federal prevention dollars, each organization has leveraged their role within the state/jurisdiction. The SLAs have found ways to utilize their existing partnerships and create new alliances to build strong collaborations sharing a common goal of preventing child maltreatment. Programs that are administered through the State offer the advantage of having a large organization and infrastructure from which to draw information and supportive resources. For instance, the SLA from Vermont noted that their association with the state agency provided them with credibility and access to a larger pool of funding than might have been available for an organization outside of the state agency. SLAs housed within the state agency in several states noted that the proximity provided for greater access to the key partners in the rest of the child welfare and TANF systems. This afforded them opportunities for engagement on key activities within the state.

The ability to integrate activities has had a multi-directional impact on the various systems that interface with prevention of child abuse and neglect activities. This provides opportunities for collaborating in a number of different areas. For instance, the SLA in New Jersey noted that the initiation of a differential response program had positively impacted their prevention activities throughout the state and was beneficial in engaging various organizations and communities. The CBCAP program staff in Illinois also identified the initiation of a differential response protocol as a positive influence on multiple levels as it encouraged a shift in thinking about the role of prevention within the

child welfare system. In California, the SLA has taken on a role in promoting and advocating for the use of differential response among community providers with whom they connect in order to align their prevention work with that of the child welfare system. This shift influences the child welfare system, prevention focused organizations, and the public as it highlights the interdependence of multiple systems and value added in collaborative efforts to prevent and address child abuse/neglect. Similarly, the SLA in the state of Oregon identified their ability to promote the overall prevention philosophy within the child welfare infrastructure as one advantage to having the program housed within the state agency.

The co-location of prevention of child abuse and neglect programs and state systems, whether they are administered by the State agency or not, was identified by many prevention program staff as providing valuable opportunities for interaction and engagement, which are key to setting the stage for collaborative work. As one person noted, having complimentary programs ‘a cube away’ created an atmosphere of cooperation that enhanced collaboration within the state systems. The proximity of the CBCAP lead in particular allowed for joint projects, and joint resources, that promoted prevention activities within the state. The Vermont SLA identified the area of public-private partnerships as being enhanced by the close association with the state agency. Collaboration was supported and encouraged through the established mindset that public agency staff works closely with community agencies throughout the state. In a state with a comparatively small population such as Vermont, this attitude is both a benefit and a necessity for successful delivery of services to children and families. This atmosphere of cooperation creates a fertile climate for building strong prevention efforts.

Those SLAs that are non-profit organizations functioning outside of the public child welfare system identified several advantages to their program structures. For instance, staff in Idaho commented that they found it advantageous that they ‘look like’ the organizations that were being funded to do prevention work at the community level. This

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perception of being a peer has allowed them to build collaborations without some of the dynamics of being an outsider in the community attempting to drive change. Others noted that the public viewed non-profit agencies as a non-threatening entity in the community which resulted in greater consumer involvement and leadership in the prevention efforts. Their view that the organization plays an important role in the community, both as leader and as a member of the community affords them a unique status that gives credence to their collaborative efforts.

In several states, the role as a non-profit had less to do with that identifier and more to do with the perception that they have expertise in some areas that are critical to managing programs. Evaluation expertise emerges as a common theme when discussing the perception of key stakeholders regarding many CBCAP programs. This is especially true in those states where the political leaders were strongly engaged in supporting prevention of child abuse and neglect efforts. Some SLAs described a very deliberate effort on the part of their state legislatures to identify those organizations best able to provide them with evaluative data to support their agenda for children and families while in political office. There was a recognition that the data would tell the story that would result in legislation getting passed to benefit the communities they represent.

Several of the SLAs indicated that the director or other key personnel had worked within the child welfare system prior to moving to the prevention arena. They felt that this background had allowed them to work very effectively with their public agency partners because of their previous associations and knowledge of child welfare programs. In Vermont, this 'inside perspective' has been useful when collaborating with public agencies. Because of this familiarity, they were already viewed as a member of the child welfare team and their perspective has been integrated into activities such as the CFSR and PIP activities. In Ohio, there is a recognition that these relationships give them the advantage of understanding who the 'movers and shakers' are within the public agency so that energy can be directed towards building networks utilizing those

influential drivers to maximize the ability to successfully push forward prevention of child abuse and neglect efforts.

The common theme throughout the CBCAP programs, whether based in a public agency, a quasi-government entity, or a non-profit organization, is clear. The ability to build and sustain strong relationships is the necessary component to a strong collaboration. This requires many qualities including a personal commitment to serving children and families, an understanding of the landscape of the population served, expertise that adds value to all aspects of family services, and perseverance in seeking to build partnerships throughout the community. One person from the SLA in Minnesota viewed their role as that of a recruiter who sought out those persons that would become champions of prevention efforts. This may require making dozens of connections with a few resulting in new leaders and partners. All of the connections are viewed as essential. There is the recognition that the role of the SLAs in various activities throughout the state may take different forms and varying levels of involvement. In some arenas, serving as a peer reviewer or member of a coalition may be the doorway to opportunities to introduce prevention of child abuse and neglect into communities or disciplines that previously had little understanding or involvement with this area of focus. These activities support and enhance collaboration throughout the state.

### **Climate for Change**

Often adaptation of new ideas and the engagement of new partners are the result of significant events that occur at the local, state, or national level. While these events may create an environment open to new or different ideas and approaches, it is the ability of people within prevention networks to recognize significant events, or potential partners, and seize the opportunity to advance their efforts in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. Mobilizing resources at the local or state level requires an effective leader that can carry a message that resonates with communities. In some cases, it is the power of the message conveyed that carries an initiative. For example in Ohio, the families involved in parent leadership roles have been

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one of the most significant, positive influences on prevention activities within the state. Their voice provides a much needed family perspective and has shaped the day to day work of building a strong prevention program throughout the state. Their feedback on everything from intake forms used at the local level to the importance of working across systems has been invaluable in providing guidance as prevention efforts are evolving within the state. As the involvement of parents has grown, the value of collaboration has become increasingly clear.

In the state of Idaho, a few key proponents from the business community emerged as strong advocates capable of driving change. Although they have limited involvement with the world of service provision and family support, they understand the importance of prevention and are able to use their influence effectively to promote community wide prevention activities. The SLA in Michigan found that their greatest supporters came from the judicial and law enforcement systems. The former in particular carries significant weight when it comes to garnering support, both financially and politically. They have been able to leverage this effectively both within their own organizations and within other community level activities and in terms of influencing state legislation.

The SLAs in several states have been successful in building legislative support for their prevention efforts. This is especially true of those with a strong connection to early childhood activities. This support is the result of a confluence of events, group identities and dynamics, and deliberate efforts to promote prevention activities. In Michigan, the director of the lead agency recalled the time in the late 1990's when the research on the return on investment (ROI) of early childhood programming was released in popular media. The response of prevention advocates was to provide every legislator with copies of Time and Newsweek magazines that ran stories on this ground-breaking research. Following up individually with legislators created a major shift in perspectives that has carried through since then. Even in the current challenging economic times, when many states are cutting funding to

prevention programs, this message from the researchers and the business community has continued to be heard within the state legislative bodies. When there was consideration of eliminating funding for zero to three programming, there was enough support to remove that from consideration. Although funding has been cut and the entire state is feeling the effects of the downturn in the economy, there continues to be a recognition that activities supporting this population are important enough that they need to be spared the budget trimming process as much as is possible. Through the groundwork laid regarding early childhood programs, legislators have become valuable partners in the prevention efforts in the state. Other SLAs identified this juncture as a major turning point in prevention activities, with variations on the underlying message heard and resulting impact. In some cases, it has taken several years of perseverance to build strong support for prevention programs among legislative entities. And the message carried forward has taken on variations that carry the general theme within the state. Many SLAs noted that the importance of evaluation and data is the 'take-away message' that has become embedded in all human services programs in their state. The shift in thinking focuses on the way programs function and reporting requirements rather than the specific programmatic areas. A juvenile justice program is perceived as no more or less important as an early childhood program; it is the ability to demonstrate the effects that is important. This is where many CBCAP programs have been able to establish themselves as leaders in the human services community.

In California, the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) had a major impact in terms of solidifying support for data driven programming and outcome measurement. The timing of the first round of reviews, after a state bill directing a redesign of the child welfare system, provided momentum and support for the on-going evaluation of all activities and a transparency in the field of child abuse and neglect. The university partners within the state took an active role in making data publicly available, providing access to leading researchers, and in reinforcing the idea that policy should be based on data. This created an ideal

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environment to support collaboration between child abuse/neglect prevention and child welfare programs.

In many jurisdictions, external local or national programs that share common goals with the CBCAP program have become the centerpiece of collaborations and prevention of child abuse and neglect activities. The Fight Crime, Invest in Kids program has become a major catalyst in some states. This organization is a collaboration of law enforcement leaders and professionals from related fields working to promote quality early education programs, prevention of child abuse, after-school programs, and interventions with troubled youth. The shared goals provide an opportunity to extend outreach and present a unified message highlighting prevention strategies in the community. In Iowa, the Family Team Meeting (FTM) approach has become a major influence on prevention work across the state. The FTM approach represents a philosophy and practice strategy that includes family members and community participants identified by the family. The FTM allows for active involvement of extended family, friends, and support systems in the decision making process to resolve difficulties that necessitate intervention. The Community Partnerships for Protecting Children program has complimented the FTM model of service provision and effectively engaged neighbors, friends, and extended families in many counties. In Washington DC, it is a community leadership network that has been instrumental in engaging families in prevention of child abuse and neglect activities. The local cable television agency has provided a boost in terms of building good will through their professional production of a regular feature highlighting various community organizations and events. This initiative has helped spread the word about local programs and has resulted in an enhanced sense of purpose and value for organizations serving the community. In New Jersey, the Parents Anonymous program has become a mainstay in community collaborations and plays a major role in outreach to a variety of human services programs. In Idaho, a statewide pinwheel campaign has strengthened the message of prevention across the state. The previous focus on the number of preventable child deaths has shifted

to a positive message of supporting families and preventing abuse/neglect before it occurs.

Many States identified that using a Protective Factors framework is the foundation for many of their prevention initiatives. This has garnered support from many different venues as the message resonates with a variety of audiences. Several persons from SLAs noted that the cross-cutting themes allowed many populations to 'see themselves' in the approach and have been enthusiastic about embracing the message carried with it. This has enhanced collaboration among a variety of stakeholders ranging from those in early childhood and child care to education as well as programs targeting older children and youth populations.

Those states using the protective factors and the Strengthening Families Framework identified it as an effective method of grounding their work and engaging others in prevention of child abuse and neglect work. Since adopting this approach, many cited it as the central theme to all collaborative efforts and one that has prompted renewed energy around prevention of child abuse and neglect across their states. Child care providers were identified as a population that has experienced a significant transformation since adopting this model. While the transformation has experienced some challenges with finding the implementation model that is most effective, once it has 'taken hold', the changes within collaborations has been dramatic. The Idaho SLA described it as the 'aha' moment; that point at which its significance was recognized across many programs and populations. The business communities' support and promotion has further galvanized the people to become engaged in prevention of child abuse and neglect efforts.

The common theme in these circumstances is the ability to recognize and capitalize on those circumstances, big or small, that create the environment and community readiness for building strong collaborations focused on preventing child abuse and neglect. The combination of significant events, people, and resources create an opportunity for strengthening prevention efforts and embedding the theme

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of collaboration in services supporting children and families.

### **Addressing Specific Issues**

Many programs noted that specific challenges within the state or jurisdiction called for unique strategies to addressing common societal issues. While all communities may struggle with problems such as domestic violence or disparities based on race, the approaches must be based on the specific needs and strengths available within the community. The significant piece of this involves engaging and partnering with families to create a problem-solving environment that support families and promotes the well-being of children and parents. In Washington DC, a major issue that has been creatively addressed is that of cultural competence and disproportionality. Their approach has been one of trial and error in terms of identifying effective engagement strategies of families and promoting cultural competence in a very diverse jurisdiction. After attempts to bring families 'to the table' in terms of prevention of child abuse and neglect utilizing traditional approaches based on professional models, it was determined that a new approach was necessary. A striking example of this was the hosting of a 'professional style' conference for families. The results were disappointing with minimal participation. The collaboration members went back to the drawing board to re-evaluate their outreach approach and came up with one tailored to appeal to families. With the support and involvement of many local services such as hair styling, manicures, and massages, a conference billed as a 'love affair' created a day of pampering for parents, received an overwhelming response. Throughout the day, parents participated in educational and informational sessions and were recipients of free services provided by local businesses. Since then, the approach of engaging through the provision of services that might be inaccessible to many families has effectively engaged the community in prevention activities.

Cultural competence is particularly critical in a city as diverse as Washington DC. The SLA has approached this by establishing themselves as experts in this area among

non-profit agencies, faith based organizations, and a variety of other programs within the community. A curriculum on cultural competence is offered free of charge to organizations requesting it. The National Multi-Cultural Institute Certified training has been embraced throughout the city by a variety of organizations. Several lessons were learned as the SLA sought their niche in this area. One of the most significant lessons learned was that, although a person may be from a particular ethnic background, they may not necessarily be an effective voice in creating a culturally competent environment. The message that cultural competence must be embedded and on-going in all activities has resulted in the ability to work effectively with a variety of populations and organizations.

In the state of Illinois, their use of community based organizations serving specific ethnic populations has been instrumental in providing culturally competent prevention of child abuse and neglect activities. Examples include a Hispanic community that identified a need to recruit persons to work with Latino teens and a home visitation program geared for Latino families. The Humdar Center serves the Middle Eastern populations by providing parenting and domestic violence outreach within the school system so that women who cannot access traditional shelter programs are able to obtain help in a way that respects the role of men and women within their cultural context. Other outreach programs focus on medically fragile children and persons affected by HIV. Grandparents raising grandchildren are another population targeted by some of the community collaborations that have been formed. Connections with migrant Head Start programs have provided opportunities to collaborate with other federal programs to address the local needs of migrant families with young children. Persons in the state of Iowa also noted that the migrant population has been a focus of their efforts. Over the past few years, they have seen a significant influx of immigrants and have worked to address unique challenges at the community level through local collaborations. New Hampshire has also integrated work with minority populations into prevention activities through their community level collaborations. As a Strengthening

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Families site, they have reached out to immigrant populations. They have also developed materials in both Spanish and English. A Minority Health Coalition provides a valuable linkage between health care and minority populations to ensure their specific challenges are addressed.

The linkages between prevention efforts and the Native American populations are especially important given the historical relationships between child protection and public child welfare systems. In those states with reservations, there are opportunities to connect with established tribal leadership. The SLA in Idaho noted that their approach has been to recognize and be clear about the common cause of preventing child abuse and neglect. As with all activities, their focus has been on relationship building through the acknowledgement of common goals. In California, the number of tribes represented, the large geographic location of the various groups, and the unique issues for urban Native American populations create a particularly challenging environment for building collaborations. However, they have actively integrated their prevention work into existing networks through an ICWA workgroup. This has provided an opportunity for their agency to highlight their strengths and take on an active role with the issues relevant for Native American populations. Activities include work with judicial councils in developing a guide on expert witnesses and the development of training on ICWA for professionals in child welfare. They have also provided training to tribal social workers and worked with tribes on building capacity within their social service programs. Their involvement in a permanency workgroup has included support for a Customary Adoption bill under consideration which allows for Indian child adoptions without a Termination of Parental Rights, thereby respecting the rights of Native Americans, their culture and their values. This and direct efforts by the state to create an accessible network for engaging tribal leaders and families has established an environment supporting the exchange of resources for Native children and families.

The common thread for all of these approaches is an understanding of the population or issue, an ability to recognize the problem and develop creative solutions, and most importantly, the engagement of families and communities in developing strategies to address challenges. Collaboration becomes the critical element in successfully building the capacity to resolve difficult issues faced by families and communities.

### **Involvement with Public Programs**

An essential element within CBCAP activities is collaboration with a variety of public programs. The degree to which SLAs are able to do this varies depending on many factors. In some cases, there are natural linkages because of common goals and approaches. In other instances, it is necessary to strive to build connections to populations and programs that may not immediately recognize the value of linking with child abuse prevention efforts. Every state and jurisdiction also has its own challenges and opportunities to develop strong connections to a variety of programs serving children and families. In talking with persons from the SLAs around the country, it was evident that each had evolved into a unique mosaic of associations, and that they continuously strive to reinforce collaboration while building new linkages to create a seamless system of supporting families.

The CBCAP and child welfare systems may be perceived as opposite ends of a spectrum of services. However, their mutual interests and common populations, along with federal mandates, necessitate their working collaboratively in addressing issues of child abuse and neglect. The child welfare systems across the country have undergone major transformations since the integration of the Child and Family Service Reviews (CFSR) into the federal monitoring processes. This legislatively mandated oversight focuses on measuring outcomes in the three main areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The process also looks at seven systemic factors that impact a state's ability to achieve positive outcomes for children and families. The first reviews started in 2001 and as of this writing in 2009, approximately

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half of the states, have completed their second CFSR. Since no state/jurisdiction achieved substantial conformity on all outcome areas, each has developed a Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) to address those outcome and systemic factors that have been identified as not being in substantial conformity with the Federal guidelines for compliance. Both the CFSR and PIP processes are lengthy and require a great deal of input and collaboration from several categories of stakeholders, such as courts, private providers, training partners, and youth in the system. The PIP is a two-year undertaking of targeted activities aimed at improving performance in specific areas of deficiencies. These activities are developed by the state child welfare agency with feedback from the federal Administration for Children and Families. The federal agency approves and monitors the states' efforts and success towards improving outcomes for children and families.

The PIP activities focus on the needs of the jurisdiction and require a collaborative effort between public child welfare, related state programs serving families, and community stakeholders. The process is designed to build upon the collaboration that is necessary to provide safety, permanency, and well-being for children involved with the child welfare system. The strong emphasis on stakeholder engagement of the PIP process aligns well with the CBCAP approach to prevention of child abuse/neglect and offers an opportunity for linkages between the programs.

This creates an environment that would appear to be ideal for collaboration across prevention and intervention programs. However, some states have struggled with integrating these programs despite their natural connections to communities and families. Historically, funding streams and other barriers have made it challenging to collaborate effectively. The increased interest in outcomes and data that have accompanied the CFSR process have opened a door to greater collaboration and sharing resources to address common goals.

As many CBCAP programs have found, the ability to integrate primary and secondary prevention efforts into the

child welfare intervention systems requires both the recognition of shared goals and forging new ways of working together to improve outcomes. In some cases, this has occurred as a natural extension of previous collaborations. In other cases, it has required a change in mindset and intensive efforts on the part of all involved in order to shift to a model of shared responsibility and reliance on many stakeholders to successfully drive change within communities and agencies.

Several State CBCAP Leads found the integration into child welfare activities relatively smooth by virtue of their previous connections. In Vermont, the key staff within the SLA has had first-hand experience in the complexities of evaluating outcomes in child welfare. Their familiarity with the CFSR process allows them to easily step in to participate in the statewide review process and the subsequent development of the PIP. This ability to collaborate may have been enhanced due to the size of the state and the limited personnel resources available. The additional support provided by stakeholders is necessary in a labor-intensive program such as the CFSR. In Idaho, the SLA identified opportunities to collaborate at the regional level on their regional Performance Improvement Plans. Other SLAs felt that they were at the early stages of becoming integrated into the CFSR and PIP process and still moving towards true collaboration with their child welfare counterparts. Many noted the value of resource materials available in helping to better understand the role they might play in child welfare intervention systems.

Entrées into other related programs serving children and families has also varied from state to state. In Minnesota, the perspective of supporting the work of other program areas has allowed the SLA to demonstrate their value in tangible ways that encourage collaboration. Their involvement with mental health programs includes participation in monthly planning meetings working on program development. Their engagement with juvenile justice includes the provision of safety, permanency, and well-being information to judges has created an atmosphere of shared responsibility. In Vermont, the SLA

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is involved with the state level council on juvenile justice. Involvement with mental health and SAMHSA grants includes participation as peer reviewers.

Participation in these various activities provides a broad, state level perspective of funding and activities going on in various program areas throughout the state. In Minnesota, a connection to substance abuse is made through the provision of training developed by SAMHSA on alcohol use by children and youth. The state of New Jersey SLA has also worked at the state level with juvenile justice initiatives, including participation in a larger, multi-state initiative. The understanding of the importance of participating in cross-systems collaborations to promote prevention of child abuse and neglect and the degree of commitment to do so is clear. One SLA noted that while much work was being done in early childhood, she also was worried about the teens and actively sought to become more involved in programs that addressed their needs.

The area of early childhood is one in which all CBCAP programs identified a strong alliance and participation. In many states, it was the research on the return on investment of early childhood programming that provided them with the evidence needed to earn the support of legislators and solidify their involvement in state level early childhood initiatives. Some state CBCAP programs identified the protective factors and Strengthening Families approaches that have been instrumental in building strong connections to early childhood programs. Others have identified the data surrounding the prevalence of abuse/neglect in the zero to five year old population that has raised the flag of awareness of a prevention approach.

The nature of involvement of CBCAP programs in early childhood activities covers a range of approaches. In many states, home visitation programs have provided a focus for prevention in early childhood. In Minnesota, this has included involvement in the Minnesota Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems work throughout the state. This has included teen pregnancy prevention activities and coordination of resources through the federally funded program Project LAUNCH. In Michigan, the message

carried to the legislature about the importance of early childhood has created a level of support for linkages to early childhood. Their local level initiatives have also worked to push the message forward within state organizations. In Iowa, an Early Childhood Council has been codified; ensuring that an awareness of the needs of this population infiltrates all activities. In Idaho, there is a strong connection to the Idaho Association of Young Children that has centered on the Strengthening Families curriculum and protective factors. Joint expertise is maximized and relationships established with child care centers and child abuse/neglect prevention agencies. In New Hampshire, the connection is made through involvement in the Head Start Advisory Council. In Ohio, prevention efforts are linked to a Governor appointed early childhood council called "Help Me Grow" Advisory Council. The Ohio Help Me Grow Advisory Council is the interagency coordinating council that assists the Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Early Intervention Services and includes the Individuals with Disabilities Education Action (IDEA) Part C programming in the state. Through a major restructuring, a Center for Early Care was created and a Home Visitation program supported. The SLA has worked with these groups to ensure that outcomes are reported on all activities. In New Jersey, a deliberate connection to early childhood programs is made through physically locating programs in areas frequented by parents. Child care centers provide an ideal location for busy families who may have challenges with accessing services elsewhere. There is also special attention paid to locating services in areas accessible by public transit. This ensures that most families will have exposure to and be able to easily access prevention related services. It also creates an atmosphere of collaboration through their proximity and mutual dependence.

Regardless of the issue or population, the focus and expertise in building strong collaborations ideally situates the SLAs to take a leadership role in working across programs. Those individuals and organizations that are able to effectively demonstrate the common goals and interests of a variety of programs are most successful in

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working with several partners in addressing child abuse and neglect in their communities.

### **Necessary Supports to Sustain**

Sustaining child abuse/neglect prevention efforts requires a commitment to collaboration while evaluating and responding to the needs of families and communities. The current economic situation has created an environment where collaboration is particularly important and also increasingly challenging. The ability of child abuse/neglect prevention programs to develop strategies to overcome these challenges is the hallmark of the CBCAP efforts across the country. In those states that had strong support prior to the economic downturn, the impact may be lessened somewhat but it remains a major obstacle to collaborating effectively. Many jurisdictions have observed a tendency to revert to a silo approach in human services as resources shrink or disappear. As both non-profit agencies and public programs have experienced significant cuts in funding, some smaller agencies are finding it necessary to merge with other agencies in order to survive. Many public programs that serve children and families have been cut back and in some cases, consideration has been given to eliminating programs altogether. Those that do continue to function often do so with reduced staffing and budgets.

There is a tendency for programs to move away from collaboration at such times because it does require a great deal of work, especially in terms of relationship building and staff time. Although the availability of new federal dollars to support communities is encouraging, it can further exacerbate the obstacles to collaboration as individual organizations compete for the dollars that are available. As leaders in collaboration, the role of CBCAP programs becomes even more critical in sustaining relationships that have taken years to develop and nurture.

The experiences in the state of New Jersey have provided an example of how the CBCAP program can become a leader in sustaining collaborative efforts, both within prevention programs and throughout related human services programs. Their approach of collaboration as a

means of broadening expertise across a variety of program areas has provided a model for many programs throughout the state. By bringing as many people/organizations to the table as possible, they have been able to help break down the turf issues and focus on the expertise that is available through the sharing of power and resources. At a time when many organizations are losing capacity due to layoffs and budget cuts, the importance of collaborating to fill voids in expertise has been increasingly evident in sustaining community based efforts throughout the state. A core group of individuals provide continuity to initiatives as organizations downsize. This combined with simple strategies such as having more than one person from an agency involved in collaborations have ensured stability when capacity and personnel numbers shrink within an agency. Similarly, in Washington DC, the mantra is “don’t do anything in isolation”. The approach of requiring the community collaborations to sign off on any request for funding ensures that there is buy-in and support at a local level and solidifies the collaborative approach. The collaboration model allows for the sharing of expertise across agencies, protecting the integrity of critical activities that provide a safety net for children and families.

The availability of national level expertise and networking is a significant resource for CBCAP programs. Informational materials on areas such as the CFSR process, program evaluation, and building a logic model provide critical information necessary to build a successful program. By using the protective factors framework, several states have been able to embed prevention in programs throughout their state. Minnesota has been a leader and other states also have adopted the framework provided through the complexity theory work resulting in significant enhancements to their work.

The opportunity to network with colleagues and national level experts has also expanded the amount of information available. Many persons from SLAs identified the annual CBCAP grantees meeting and regular conference calls provided through the FRIENDS NRC for CBCAP as a critical component that enhanced the work in their state. Of particular value are informational sessions that focus on

## Best Practices for Maximizing and Sustaining Collaborative Efforts

the ‘nuts and bolts’ of implementing a new program. Although the face-to-face meetings and trainings are preferred, webinar style programs also add value to the work being done in communities and states. Many CBCAP programs also identified connections with related programs such as PSSF and Head Start as a means of expanding their reach and understanding of best practices in serving children and families.

The sustenance of strong prevention efforts within a state or jurisdiction requires local and state resources and supports in order to be successful. This necessitates a community and state centered approach that mirrors the family centered approach to supporting healthy families. Every SLA has developed their own network of resources, including financial, professional, and relational resources upon which to build and sustain collaborative prevention activities.

### Conclusion

The overarching message of sustaining CBCAP programs is that collaboration must occur at many levels and with multiple stakeholders. This extends from the community level on up to a state and national level that allows for the sharing of resources and expertise. The ability to take information from a variety of sources and modify for use with a unique population has resulted in a rich array of approaches to building successful collaborations to prevent child abuse and neglect.

The primary messages that have emerged among successful collaborations include a few key elements.

- It is essential that there be a strong mission and vision that guides all prevention activities. A core set of values provide the connectors necessary to develop a broad base of support.
- A commitment to the work and tenacity in finding the essential connections to advance the prevention message throughout the state and within related programs drives change at all levels.

- Continuous evaluation and data ensure that activities have value for children and families.
- The family voice is critical in order to garner support for CBCAP activities. This includes involvement not only in terms of ‘telling the story’, but also to maintain the focus on children and families for the larger community. Families can also provide important feedback throughout the collaboration building process.
- Following the guidance of communities served leads to strong collaborations.
- The SLAs have a number of roles ranging from that of partner, supporter, and a leader to create an atmosphere that will maximize the ability to embed prevention throughout a community. Respecting the values of the families and communities, and espousing the principals of collaboration builds strong relationships and programs.
- Success in collaborating depends on relationships. Building strong relationships is a core skill that is integrated throughout all activities.

Those organizations that are successful in building strong child abuse/neglect prevention programs have demonstrated an ability to draw upon their strengths in these key areas to sustain and maximize their collaborative efforts.

## **Acknowledgement**

*It is with gratitude that we wish to acknowledge the people who shared their time and insight to contribute to this document. In addition to the people listed below, many more provided expert consultation and valuable background information through other publications developed by and for the FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP. Among these are resources collected from staff at the Children’s Bureau, state CBCAP program personnel, professionals in related disciplines, and stakeholders equally committed to protecting children, supporting families, and building strong communities.*

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Nancie Brown – IL  
Stephanie Jernstedt – OR  
Rhonda Boltz – IA  
Paul Shaheen – MI  
Ralph McQuarter – MN  
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© September 2009 FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP). This publication was developed by the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), a FRIENDS partner agency, under a subcontract with the FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP. FRIENDS is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children, Youth and Families, Office of Child Abuse and Neglect, under Cooperative Agreement 90CA1729. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funders, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Permission is granted for readers to copy and disseminate this material, but please credit the FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP.