



Summary of Family Strengthening Peer Network Meeting
Thursday, November 16, 2006, 11:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.
National Assembly, Washington, DC

1) 2006 Study of Family Strengthening in the Human Services Community

The Family Strengthening Policy Center collected quantitative and anecdotal evidence that since 2003 the human services field has integrated place-based family strengthening. Key findings include:

- A major transformation in the human services community is underway. At both the national and community level, human services organizations are integrating place-based family-strengthening approaches into their policies, programs, and practices.
- The evolution is not limited to organizations with Annie E. Casey Foundation grants.
- The family strengthening approach is adaptable to a wide array of settings, services, populations, and purposes.

Also, 75 percent or more of community responses reflected five core family-strengthening principles:

- Builds on family and neighborhood strengths.
- Strengthens the capacity of families to function effectively and progress towards self-sufficiency.
- Intentionally addresses the needs of the family as a whole or collective unit.
- Responds flexibly to family and community circumstances.
- Creates or strengthens partnerships across service systems.

Two-thirds of national survey participants strongly agreed or agreed that the Family Strengthening Policy Center has been helpful. Some of the many suggestions for improvement included:

- Support the peer network as a venue for fostering collaboration and searching for common ground; draw in additional organizations such as federal agencies.
- Provide additional best practices in newsletter and on Web site.
- Consider narrowing the focus of the Center's work.

Because the study used a convenience sample and participation was voluntary, the results should be considered exploratory. It builds on a study by the Points of Light Foundation regarding uptake of the concept of neighboring by volunteer centers and nonprofits. Both studies are evidence that the family-strengthening approach is adaptable for a wide array of settings, services, populations, and purposes.

For more information, please see the attached handout entitled Measurement Project Findings.

Discussion:

What is the driving force behind family strengthening?

- Casey Foundation—commissioned research, recruited willing advocates
- software—connecting clients to services
- “no wrong door” entry for services
- integrating family, youth and community development, centered on kids

Next steps:

- adopt family strengthening as policy priority for National Collaboration for Youth
- facilitate sharing and networking between organizations

--capture promising practices (PEPNet as example/model)
--paint picture of what a family strengthening community has—what are all the pieces/elements (i.e. parental involvement, access to services, etc.)
--family strengthening as a different way of talking to policy makers about poverty reduction—people-centered strategies
--profile national organization programs in family strengthening newsletter (award winners, interviews with peer network members)

2) Organizational Platform for Strengthening Families

In much the way that the National League of Cities (NLC) challenged its members to think and act comprehensively about strengthening families, the Family Strengthening Policy Center's goal with this platform is to challenge our member organizations, and in turn, their networks and affiliates, to turn their gaze inward, and look to take concrete steps to help strengthen the families within their organizations.

NLC identified two components to organizational family strengthening – essential infrastructure and action steps:

- Essential Infrastructure, such as key organizational functions and processes that play a crucial role in effective or sustained investments in families. For example, convening a task force or committee of internal and external leaders, moderated by an independent party, to identify needs, opportunities, and priorities for future action.
- Specific Action Steps taken by organizations and their leaders in the following areas:
 - Family support systems: building appropriate, stimulating and adequate systems of support for healthy family development that encompasses general health, childcare, education, and other essential components for family success.
 - Family economic success: supporting and facilitating family self-sufficiency, including a living wage with benefits such as paid sick leave or FMLA-type benefits, information and assistance to help employees receive public benefits for which they are eligible, and support for the accumulation of assets such home ownership and savings.
 - Thriving and nurturing communities: building nurturing and supportive environment in which healthy families can pursue long-term goals. Essential components for family success include access to affordable housing, strong neighborhood institutions, safe streets, supportive social networks, and an environment that promotes community and strengthens bonds.

This platform will not represent a catalog of everything that an organization should do to strengthen families. Rather, it provides starting points for action – practical steps that every organization can take, no matter the size, to build stronger families.

Discussion:

--platform includes a special focus on low-wage employees--moving beyond just being family-friendly to strengthening low-income families; what are we doing for low-wage employees (i.e. promoting EITC)
--circulate platform with peer network and National Assembly's HR Council
--meeting participants completed and discussed a worksheet to examine their organization through a family strengthening lens
--participants identified internal programs/benefits that fall into family strengthening categories:
Family Support Systems: flex time, telecommuting, flu shots
Family Economic Success: continuing education, tuition reimbursement, 403(b) with employer contribution, competitive salaries, life/health insurance, transportation benefits, encourage professional development opportunities (networking)

Thriving and Nurturing Communities: group volunteer activities, volunteer with affiliates, food/clothing drives for community, hiring local residents

--For more information, see the attached handouts entitled Organizational Platform for Strengthening Families and Worksheet for Organizational Assessment.

3) Relationship Between Youth Development and Family Development

--need developmental assets for families raising children—similar to Search Institute's 40 Assets, America's Promise's Five Promises, and Forum for Youth Investment's Ready By 21
--start dialogue

4) Peer Network Business

Structure of peer network:

--moving from advisory group for Family Strengthening Policy Center to peer network
--choose different meeting locations in Washington area—Goodwill (Rockville) and Communities In Schools (Alexandria) offered to host
--have site visit or guest speaker from local organization (i.e. Casey award winner)
--meet 3-4 times per year—in person and conference calls
--nomination process for electing peer network co-chairs

Attendance

Kelita Bak, Camp Fire USA

Renee Carl, National Human Services Assembly

David Carrier, National Human Services Assembly

Jennifer Davis, Goodwill Industries International

Elizabeth DiLauro, Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPIY USA)

Lisa Esquivel-Griffin, Communities In Schools

Molly French, National Human Services Assembly

Kayla Jackson, National Network for Youth

Irv Katz, National Human Services Assembly

Doug McDurham, McLennan County Youth Collaborative

Jane Stenson, Catholic Charities USA