



## Summary of Family Strengthening Peer Network Meeting

April 3, 2008 - Voices for America's Children - Washington, DC

Co-Chairs

Caroline Crocoll, USDA Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service

Jennifer Davis, Goodwill Industries International

### I. **Walking The Talk: Supporting Our Employees and Volunteers with Parenting and Family Responsibilities**

Presented by Karen Key, Vice President of Programs, National Human Services Assembly and Molly French, Consultant, National Human Services Assembly

- “Family Strengthening” for Employers and Volunteer Agencies – Employees and volunteers do better when their families are stable, and families do better when they live, work, and serve in communities that help them to succeed.
- Strong Families = Thriving Business – When employers utilize family supporting practices, employees/volunteers are enabled to be more productive both at work and at home – this creates stable families that encourage children and youth to thrive. Strong families collectively form connected, opportunity-rich communities, thus feeding back into the employers’ return on investment.
- The Writ Large Challenge: What are we doing for our employees and volunteers that supports their family responsibilities?
- Focal areas for supporting families: financial stability, positive connections, community building.
- 23% of organizations surveyed in 2007 have adopted or considered adopting internal HR policies and practices to strengthen employee’s families; 65% already had practices in place, and 13% reported not having family-strengthening policies and practices.
- Survey respondents described formal family strengthening policy and practice changes as including flexible work schedules/telecommuting policies, employee assistance programs, flexible savings accounts for child care/medical expenses, enhanced benefits, and part-time employment options.
- Informal family strengthening policy changes included flexible scheduling, cultural changes to support employee’s family responsibilities, and distributing information on EITC and child care tax credits.
- Possible family-supporting practices for volunteers include stipends, insurance coverage, volunteer training and “job” advancement, time-banking, family-friendly volunteering, referrals to community supports, flex-scheduling, reimbursement for transportation, and child/elder care.
- Contact Molly French at [molly@nassembly.org](mailto:molly@nassembly.org) if ...
  - Your organization would be a good case study on family-supporting practices for employees and/or volunteers

- You would like to serve as an advisor for short-term working group for a new family-supporting recognition program for employers and volunteer agencies
- You know of guidelines and tools that can inform family-supporting practices and policies for employees and volunteers

## II. **Benefits QuickLink**

Presented by Lori Strauss, AARP Foundation

- Increasing benefits access is one of four AARP Foundation impact areas.
- Benefits QuickLink (<http://www.aarp.org/quicklink/>) specifically targets three groups (see below) and uses technology to have a national reach and access point.
  - Older consumers who may be eligible for benefits
  - Caregivers
  - Grandparents and other older relatives raising grandchildren
- Benefits QuickLink is based on the BenefitsCheckUp tool through the AARP Foundation's partnership with the National Council on Aging. One difference is that Benefits QuickLink screens for five children's benefits, such as State Children's Health Insurance Program.
- Benefits QuickLink is part of the foundation's Benefits Outreach Program, which strives to overcome common barriers to older people receiving benefits, such as lack of awareness of benefits, perceptions of stigma associated with benefits receipt, barriers in completing the application process, and not having connections to community resources that can help.
- The program activates community level partnerships to get the word out, create new counseling opportunities, and reach vulnerable populations. AARP has developed messaging to help community-based organizations and potential partners understand how benefits outreach and assistance connects with their mission.
- BenefitsQuickLink collects general demographic data (i.e., no personal identifying information) about users so the foundation can monitor progress toward its screening goals.

## III. **BenefitsCheckUp and Benefits Access – a “Person-Centered” Approach**

Presented by Wendy Zenker, National Council on Aging

- National Council on Aging's four areas of focus:
  - Increasing access to benefits and services
  - Improving health and self care skills
  - Increasing meaningful work and volunteer opportunities
  - Enhancing ability to live in communities with dignity, choice, and financial security
- Of the 43 million Medicare beneficiaries, 34% live at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level. NCOA is committed to helping older adults find out about and get enrolled in the public and private benefits they deserve, significantly improving their health and quality of life.
- [www.BenefitsCheckUp.org](http://www.BenefitsCheckUp.org) is a web-based tool that screens seniors for over 1,550 state, federal, and private benefits for which they may be eligible. It was developed and is maintained in-house.
- Screening tools include: public and private benefits from all fifty states, programs targeted to the 55+ population of all income levels, services and programs for the broader population, information on 50,000 state and federal offices including local contacts, and materials to help successfully apply for each program.

- Rx Extra Help allows users in need of assistance with prescription drug costs to easily submit an application for the low-income subsidy available under Medicare's Prescription Drug Coverage, while also being screened for other benefits.
- Through BenefitsCheckUp, NCOA has helped over 2 million people identify over \$5.8 billion worth of benefits.
- AARP Tax-Aide and NCOA jointly developed a tool to help the 20 million people who are normally not required to file taxes, to do so this year so they can receive their economic stimulus payment.

#### **IV. Benefits Access and Financial Stability – a Community-centered Approach**

Presented by Madye Henson, United Way of America

- Financial stability is a critical impact area for the United Way movement. United Way of America developed a stepwise theory of change to inform its new national initiative, the Financial Stability Partnership, which aims to help individuals and families attain and preserve assets, become more financially stable, and achieve long-term economic independence. (See <http://www.unitedway.org/fsp/>)
- UWA wanted a technology tool to mechanize parts of the financial stability framework. Through an elaborate process using IBM's vendor selection methods, UWA chose Nets to Ladders (<http://www.netstoladders.com>) because it offered a web-based software package, Benefits Enrollment Network. BEN enables UWA to have a national scope with a single complete set of tools for both benefits screening/application as well as asset development (e.g., savings accounts).
- In the first year, UWA is rolling out the platform to 20 states. The rest of states will get up to speed in phase two.
- Implementing states are building local partnerships that reach across all sectors (business, nonprofit, and governmental). Case managers at local United Way partner agencies work with families to use BEN, which shares application information with other agencies in the community network. If states allow electronic transfer, BEN will submit applications to relevant agencies.
- Madye encourages FSPN members to attend the Financial Stability Leadership Conference in Chicago on June 4-6 (<http://www.unitedway.org/fspsummit/index.cfm>).
- After Madye's presentation, Abby Holsclaw, National League of Cities, reminded participants that SeedCo offers the Earned Benefits online tool (<http://www.earnbenefits.org/>). She recommended organizations interested in exploring benefits technology platforms use the Executive Summary of an NLC 2005 brief, *Screening Tools to Help Families Access Benefits* (<http://www.nlc.org/ASSETS/E2DF31BA4AFF4ADEB19BA434142B0545/iyefscreeningtools.pdf>), as it helps readers clarify needs and goals before they start selecting a tool. (Abby advised that the summary of benefits tools in the brief is out of date.)

#### **V. Family Strengthening Writ Large: Moving from Vision to Reality**

Presented by Irv Katz, National Human Services Assembly

- The theory of family strengthening can be reduced to three major elements:
  - Relationships + Stability + Positive Connections = Healthy, Successful Youth
- Ultimate goal is to produce healthy outcomes for children.
- Can the FSPN come up with a standard, consistent message with talking points?
  - Ex. FSPN promotes/endorse \_\_\_\_\_.

- Possibly suggest indicators for Kids Count – key elements of family wellbeing.
- A comprehensive national data set is needed to make the case for changing laws and policies.
- Objective – change public will/change public policy to strengthen families, benefit children.
- Come up with examples of what family strengthening means in the real world at various organizations.

## **VI. Updates and Sharing**

Peer Network members provided the following updates.

Baltimore Rising reported that the Baltimore Mayor’s second highest priority is a two-prong family strengthening program. One end is the coordination part, looking to community agencies to develop tool kits and processes to drive the family strengthening agenda. The other part involves the neighborhood, with regular meetings every Saturday to discuss needs of families. Private citizens will then come together with faith- and community-based organizations to fulfill these goals. It was noted that the families are very aware of the meaning of family strengthening and are eager to be involved in the program.

Towson University’s students who are involved in Prof. Audrey Falk’s service learning courses are looking to connect with local organizations.

The USDA is offering funding to land-grant university partnerships for rural health and safety work – request for funding is due June 1.

The Alliance for Children and Families is publicizing National Family Week, to be held the week of Thanksgiving – programs will promote and celebrate civic engagement in strengthening families and the agencies that serve them.

The Arlington County Department of Human Services is looking for marketing materials geared towards adults aged 30-50 in relationships, as there is a gap in marketing related to family violence for this group. There are two funding sources interested in producing this type of public education campaign.

The National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education distributed a publication titled “Open Doors: How DCPS Can Harness the Power of Parents for Student Success” and also invited FSPN members to attend meetings, typically held on the last Wednesday of each month.

Girls Incorporated is working to convince affiliates to service the entire family and to promote a family strengthening agenda. They are helping connect Girls Inc. affiliates with other local organizations to work together to do this.

The Hatcher Group gave examples of family supporting practices that are going on today, such as a program for families of Native American youth alcohol abusers and a substance abuse program for mothers that encourages the family of the abuser to live together in residential-style housing.

National Council of La Raza recently released a report studying the effects of the mortgage crisis on Latinos. They are also doing a comprehensive analysis of Latino voters for the upcoming election.

Goodwill Industries International has recognized outstanding organizations (rather than individual programs) for showing family strengthening and a leadership agenda. Goodwill in Lufkin, TX will be honored this year as their workforce director and staff found a way to build the capacity of community organizations through partnerships with VISTA and AmeriCorps.

CSREES Families, 4-H and Nutrition offered information about their website [www.extension.org](http://www.extension.org), which is a congressionally mandated system to bring information from universities and communities across the country to the national level. The website offers an “ask the expert” feature, where anyone can ask a question that will be answered by faculty with a quick turnaround time.

Catholic Charities USA recently held a webinar on the topic of Race and Poverty, which is available through the Catholic Charities website (<http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=874&srcid=193>).

National Network for Youth is excited for their new website to go live on May 1, complete with a host of new resources. Website is [www.nn4youth.org](http://www.nn4youth.org). They are currently searching for youth bloggers, to work on a youth voter registration campaign.

## **V. Attendee Roster**

Kelita Bak – Camp Fire USA  
Amy Beall – The Hatcher Group  
Sheila Bennett – Baltimore Rising  
Anna Christ – National Human Services Assembly  
Caroline Crocoll – Families, 4H and Nutrition  
Jennifer Davis – Goodwill Industries International  
Khyati Desai – Points of Light Foundation/Hands on Network  
Brent Elrod – National 4-H Council  
Audrey Falk – Towson University  
Sue Ferguson – National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education  
Ross Ford – Baltimore Rising  
Molly French – National Human Services Assembly  
April Goldstein – National Human Services Assembly  
Shelby Gonzales – America’s Promise Alliance  
Madye Henson – United Way of America  
Mauricio Hernandez – National Council of La Raza  
Abby Hughes Holsclaw – National League of Cities  
Kayla Jackson – National Network for Youth  
Jo Johnson – Arlington County Department of Human Services  
Irv Katz – National Human Services Assembly  
Karen Key – National Human Services Assembly  
David Laird – Voices for America’s Children  
Matt McCloy – AARP Foundation  
Paula Purcell – Alliance for Children and Families  
Caroline Rowe – Girls Incorporated  
Jane Stenson – Catholic Charities USA  
Lori Strauss – AARP Foundation  
Natalie Thompson – National Human Services Assembly  
Wendy Zenker – National Council on Aging