



DC Family Policy Seminar

A community service project of Georgetown University

Seminar Highlights

Finding Families: DC's Foster Family Deficit

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The DC Family Policy Seminar provides accurate, relevant, non-partisan, timely information and policy options concerning issues affecting children and families to District policymakers.

The DC Family Policy Seminar is part of the National Network of State Family Policy Seminars, a project of the Family Impact Seminar, a nonpartisan public policy Institute in Washington, DC.

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DC Family Policy Seminar

Finding Families: DC's Foster Family Deficit

Seminar Highlights

**Moderator: Mark Rom, Ph.D., Associate Professor
Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Georgetown University**

The District of Columbia's child welfare system has problems, mainly because large numbers of children in the District (as in the nation) need foster care services, and the District has had difficulty in recruiting and retaining foster parents to serve the needs of its children. However, participants and panelists have come together for this seminar not merely to rehearse the litany of difficulties but to find solutions to those problems.

After providing opening comments, moderator Mark Rom noted that child welfare services in the District have been operating under receivership by court order since 1995. Rom emphasized that under the leadership of Ernestine Jones, the newly appointed Receiver (effective fall 1997), the District right now has an opportunity to address foster care issues.

The goals of this seminar were to (1) educate participants about the trends in foster care, both in the District and the nation; (2) educate participants about the benefits of community-based approaches to recruiting foster parents, placing children in care, and addressing other issues in child welfare; (3) identify community resources and create networks within the communities to recruit foster parents; and (4) focus on foster care from a community-based perspective.

**Ron Haskins, Staff Director, Subcommittee on Human Resources
Committee on Ways and Means, U.S. House of Representatives**

Ron Haskins began his presentation by stating that an understanding of three issues—federal policy and federal resources, caseload dynamics, and federal waivers—is key to reforming child welfare in the District.

Federal Policy and Federal Resources

Haskins presented information on federal policy and federal resources concerning foster care (see Appendix). The federal government has several foster care programs, which include open-ended entitlement funding. Entitlement funds are authorized permanently and do not need to be appropriated. Therefore, whenever a child from a low-income family is placed in foster care or adopted, the federal government provides funding.

In total, six streams of entitlement funds flow to every state and the District of Columbia from the federal government: three funding streams for foster care and three identical streams for adoption. These funding streams primarily involve administration, maintenance, and training.

- Administration, a broadly defined concept of any administrative costs associated with placing a child in foster care, is reimbursed at a 50 percent matching rate.
- Maintenance, the largest stream, covers the cost of the maintenance fee that an agency pays when placing low-income and other children in foster care.
- Training provides an open-ended entitlement at a 75 percent matching rate for approved training programs that might involve parents, foster parents, or social workers.
- Independent Living is an important but relatively small program that costs an additional 70 million a year.

The federal government also has two appropriated funding programs similar to Block Grant programs, in which the funding is capped. These appropriated funds support programs that provide prevention, counseling, and drug treatment; recruit foster parents; and basically support other programs designed to help families continue to take care of their children.

In addressing federal funding issues, Haskins referred to the graph “Federal Spending on Child Protection Grant Program and Entitlement Program” (see Appendix). The federal spending on maintenance payments through the entitlement program has doubled repeatedly since 1983–84. By contrast, federal spending on grant programs (e.g., funding for services, prevention, and treatment) has hardly grown. In fact, the funding would not have grown at all except for the Family Preservation & Family Support Program, a new program that accounts for the small amount of increase. In effect, the federal policy states that if children are removed from their homes and placed in foster care, the federal government will provide open-ended entitlement funding. However, programs aimed at saving families and preventing removal of children from their homes receive a what Haskins called a “miserly” sum of money from the federal government, a sum that must be appropriated and will not grow over the years. Haskins characterized this as the “fundamental mistake” of federal child welfare policy, an approach that is “deeply flawed.”

Caseload Dynamics

The substantial increase in the foster care caseload in recent years is illustrated by the graph depicting the “Number of children in Foster Care, 1986–96.” In the last 11 years, the caseload has grown from approximately 280,000 to 500,000 children. Haskins commented that this outcome is not unexpected when the federal government creates the incentive of open-ended entitlement funds for agencies when children are placed in foster care homes versus limited funding for preventive care or counseling.

On a more encouraging note, Haskins pointed out that although the number of children in foster care increased by about 100,000 during the three-year period from 1987 to 1990, it took *six* years (1990 to 1996) for that number to increase by an additional 100,000. Thus, although the number of children in foster care is still rising, in some states the rate of increase has slowed.

Recent studies on caseload dynamics reveal two ways to reduce the caseload: reduce the number of children entering foster care, or shorten the children's length of stay in foster care. Haskins cited Chapin Hall Center's published reports that have found that the rate of entry into foster care has slowed and has actually declined in some cases, especially in California and New York, although the children's length of stay has increased.

The graph depicting "Median Duration of Spells for First Placements, 1988–94," illustrates one of "the most astounding figures in American social policy," noted Haskins. The average length of stay for a child in foster care in Texas is 7.8 months, compared with 32.7 months in Illinois. This suggests that in addition to demographic variables, policy differences among states may have an impact on length of stay. With appropriate policy, the amount of time that children spend in foster care can be reduced. Haskins noted that although foster care has a definite place in our society, almost all experts agree that it is not good for children to be in foster care for a long period of time.

Haskins cited the following factors as contributing to caseload size:

- Studies show that *infants* stay in foster care longer. In addition, a higher proportion of infants are currently in foster care; as a result, the average length of stay in foster care has increased. Making decisions quickly about these infants is an important means of reducing the foster care caseload.
- The states listed in the chart on median duration of stays demonstrate that New York, Illinois, and California (the states with the longest duration of stays), have the highest proportion of *kinship care*—a very important part of the equation. The federal government needs to decide the extent to which it will fund the program, and society needs to decide whether leaving a child in kinship care for a long period of time is acceptable.
- Bureaucracies need to reorganize and perform casework efficiently (which they can do without any new technology or new developments).
- The chart "Comparison of Experimental and Control Group Discharge Rates" illustrates an effect of *capitated payments* in a New York City experiment. Under capitated payments, each agency receives a fixed sum of money per child, then determines how to spend the money to benefit all of the children. This experiment indicates that the private agencies with capitated payments were more efficient—which resulted in saving money.

Federal Waivers

Bipartisan support for waivers under the federal system provides the opportunity for the District of Columbia to “dream up ways to take money out of one pot and put it in another.” Haskins strongly recommended that the District consider applying for federal waivers.

Haskins concluded by re-emphasizing the critical importance of understanding federal policy and federal resources, the changing dynamics of foster care caseloads, and the use of federal waivers as three key issues in reforming child welfare in the District.

**Sondra Jackson, Deputy Receiver for Program Operations
Child and Family Services Agency**

Sondra Jackson noted that the date of this seminar marked the 104th day of tenure for Ernestine Jones, the new Receiver for Child and Family Services in the District of Columbia. (Ms. Jones had hoped to attend the seminar, but was scheduled to testify before the U.S. Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs.)

Mission of the Child and Family Service Agency

The mission of the Child and Family Service Agency (CFSA) is to protect and promote the health and well-being of the children of the District of Columbia through public and private partnerships focused on strengthening and preserving families with services that ensure cultural competence, accountability, and professional integrity.

Current Challenges

Understanding the foster family deficit begins with an examination of the entire child welfare system in the District. Current challenges include the following:

- *Continued deterioration in the state of the family in the District of Columbia.* Recent statistics on out-of-home care reveal that a growing number of children are entering foster care.
- *Increases in the number of children in the system.* Available data indicate that there are 3,116 children in the adoption and foster care system in the District of Columbia, a 14.2 percent increase over last year. These data document the adverse relationship between the number of children in out-of-home care, the conditions under which families function, and the lack of societal supports available to assist them.
- *Poverty, substance abuse, inadequate housing, HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, and violence—all contribute to the growing number of children needing out-of-home placements.* There is a clear correlation between poverty, abuse and neglect, and the number of children placed in foster care.
- *Kinship care figures have risen.* A large number (probably 60 percent) of children in the foster care population are placed with relatives. Minority populations

have a strong tradition of kinship care, and 98 percent of the District's current foster care population is African American.

- *Recruitment and retention of social workers has been an issue in the District and nationally. To address this issue, the District must be able to reduce caseloads, train staff, understand the public system, and work with universities to ensure that social work programs prepare students for the reality of work in a public agency.*
- *More federal and state support is needed to promote professional standards and effective policy initiatives. These policies must be relevant to the families and children being served.*

Child and Family Service Agency Reforms

Jackson explained that the reform of CFSA would include the following initiatives:

- *Develop a new system of intake. The District of Columbia is the only child welfare agency in the country with a bifurcated child protective services system, one that does not investigate abuse and neglect together.*
- *Define a kinship care program. Other states have made more progress than the District in developing a kinship care program. As a result of a special workgroup that has been created, a kinship care legislative program should be ready by April. Referring to Haskins' comment that the federal government is not prepared to comment on kinship care because the government is not sure how to deal with or fund it, Jackson stated that the federal government must address this issue soon so that states can develop programs.*
- *Strengthen prevention services. Reform the system to develop provisions for making timely decisions concerning reunification, termination of parental rights, and adoption.*
- *Develop new methods of recruiting foster and adoptive homes for children. The District is not going to have traditional foster homes because an increasing number of people work outside the home. Foster parents were very common in the 1960s and 1970s, but economic changes under the Reagan Administration in the 1980s resulted in more women joining the labor force. Therefore, recruitment efforts have to be very different. Foster parents in the system also need different parenting skills because many children today have severe emotional and psychological needs.*
- *Reduce the number of males ages 18–21 in foster care. The foster care system needs to do a better job in preparing children for independent living.*
- *Gain legal support for agency decisions concerning the "best interest of the child." Currently, 59 judges are authorized to make this determination. We need a family court. In addition, CFSA needs its own legal representation, to improve the preparation of caseworkers and the coordination between legal counsel and caseworkers.*
- *Develop a clear organizational structure in CFSA. The recently reorganized system, which will be made public after February 1998, aims to improve delivery of services and to establish strong administrative leadership.*

- *Design community-based services through the neighborhood Collaboratives. CFSA will have a community services administration component to coordinate with the Collaboratives and to help meet their needs. In addition, CFSA has worked with individuals in the Consortium agencies to discuss service delivery issues.*
- *Maintain consistent standards, practice, and service delivery in CFSA's approximately 400 homes served by private agencies.*
- *Develop a comprehensive health care system for foster children, including physical, mental, and developmental health screenings. CFSA must also advise foster parents about the health of the children placed in their homes. The earlier these children's health needs are determined, the greater their well-being as they move through the system.*
- *Implement the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, P.L. 105-89. CFSA will develop a new plan for permanency in the child welfare system.*
- *Develop a pool of available families who will be prepared to provide homes for children as they become eligible for adoption. CFSA needs to recruit more adoptive parents among District families rather than relying on families in Maryland.*

Conclusion

In summary, Jackson again stated that CFSA must address the entire family foster system in the District in order to reduce the deficit in the number of foster families. She thanked those who have come forward and offered their help, and she urged others to become involved as well. Jackson concluded by stating that she did not come to the District to “fix DC” (as one child had asked), but to help communities bond together to make life better for children.

**John Mattingly, Senior Associate
The Annie E. Casey Foundation**

John Mattingly explained that the Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF) was established in 1948 by Jim Casey (a founder of the United Parcel System) and his brothers and sisters. Concerned about the well-being of his employees and recognizing that employees who had the most difficulty staying with the job came from “broken families,” Casey and his siblings dedicated AECF to supporting disadvantaged children and their families.

Mission of the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Family to Family Initiative

The Baltimore-based AECF is dedicated to two fundamentals: First, there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up to be capable adults; second, the ability of families to rear children well is often inextricably linked to conditions in the communities where they live. AECF believes that community-centered responses can better protect children, support families, and strengthen neighborhoods.

Mattingly framed his remarks within the context of his respect for foster families, relative [kinship] families, and adoptive families as well as the front-line caseworkers and supervisors who are “real heroes struggling in what, in many cases, are impossible circumstances.” Nonetheless, Mattingly asserted, if the approach to child welfare does not change, the situation will continue to “spiral down” with negative outcomes.

Developing Partnerships

In 1992 and 1993, AECF offered grants to 13 states as part of its Family to Family Initiative. AECF insisted that these states include a major city in their local initiative, since cities are the setting in which child protection systems have the most difficulty. (Initially, the states objected because they felt the initiative would first have to succeed elsewhere, but eventually cities were included.)

The Family to Family Initiative is designed to develop and strengthen partnerships among all child-serving agencies, public and private. This initiative proposes to change the way foster care operates, to change the decision-making process, and to provide support for birth parents. If public agencies are going to maintain foster families, Mattingly stated, these families need more support. However, if agencies provide more support for foster families than for birth families, AECF is not fulfilling its stated values.

To achieve its goals, AECF adheres to certain tenets:

- *Rebuild the network of families that care for abused and neglected children.* The crack cocaine crisis devastated cities, bringing increasing numbers of children with physical, developmental, emotional, and psychosocial health problems into the system and doubling the number of children in care. As a result, more foster families are needed.
- *Find partners for public agencies.* Foster, relative [kinship], and adoptive families must feel that they play a substantive role in the lives of the children and that the child welfare system is responsive to their needs. AECF believes these families have a very strong capacity to bring resources to bear to help the birth families. AECF aims to build partnerships between the birth families and the foster families, relative [kinship] caregivers, or adoptive families in order to help the birth families so that the children can either return home safely or be adopted, with everyone involved confident of the outcome.
- *Develop partnerships in the children’s own communities and neighborhoods.* Agencies should not remove children from their roots and comfort zones at the same time the children are being pulled away from their families. Therefore, rebuilding neighborhood networks will provide birth families with the kind of support that AECF hopes caregivers can provide. This would also allow public agencies to bring back youth from placements in group care homes in distant cities (the only placements previously available).

- *Rebuild the decision-making system and develop a process for supporting decisions.*
- *Put more resources into local communities. Funds could be better spent in the neighborhood and could help the neighborhood rebuild its strength.*
- *Confront the problem of substance abuse treatment. This issue is at the heart of child protection today, and efforts will fail if families cannot receive family-centered substance abuse treatment when needed.*

Results of the Family to Family Initiative

What has the Family to Family Initiative accomplished? Mattingly reported that the first round of evaluations indicates that this work can be done successfully.

- Cities larger than the District have increased their number of foster families by 60 percent in the course of three years and have tripled the number of foster families in the children's home neighborhoods.
- Length of stay can be reduced by providing support to staff and foster families.
- Children are moved less often.
- Families are available in the middle of the night and on weekends. In fact, a number of the big cities, including Toledo and Cleveland, closed their emergency shelter care because family homes were available.
- The public agencies were able to provide support to families 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In order to rebuild the systems, AECF first had to find the strength within the network and then put tools in place to help accomplish the goals. Mattingly noted that the first visit between the birth parents and the children is best achieved when the foster parents bring the children to the meeting and ask the birth parents: "What do you want your children to call me?" "What do they like to eat?" "How do they do in school?" That approach indicates to the birth parents that the foster parents value them and are not trying to take their place but are trying to help them. The birth parents begin to think that the foster parents are not the enemy and may even be an ally. That approach helps transform policies into real change.

Conclusion

Mattingly stated that the process is "doable," but that it is very difficult and requires funding resources. Top leadership needs to initiate the process by discussing the problems in the system with current families and addressing these problems. Being responsive to the issues identified is a key part of retention of families. In addition, the initiative requires partnerships and simultaneous changes in policy, management structure, organization, and front-line practices.

Mattingly concluded by stating that ideology is not the issue; rather, it is primarily about getting the work done person-to-person, family-to-family. He maintained that if every person on every angle of the ideological spectrum sat down with 90 percent of the cases, there would be substantive agreement on what action to take, but also

agreement that it can get done. He urged everyone to stop arguing and start working to rebuild the systems.

**Fred Taylor, Executive Director
For the Love of Children**

Fred Taylor spoke positively about this “moment of incredible opportunity” in the District. The new Receiver Ernestine Jones, the Deputy Receiver for Program Affairs Sondra Jackson, and others in CFSA have brought a new spirit to the public agency. For example, they have dedicated time to very serious dialogue with local partners.

Taylor urged the community to tap into the outrage over what is happening to children in the cities as their futures are “foreclosed.” He stated that the community should look at slavery from today’s perspective and get in touch with the outrage concerning why that happened, project that 25–30 years out, and see what this nation has tolerated for a long time. Taylor emphasized that “we should not let that outrage divide us, but unify us, and not make targets of ‘bad’ people, but of the problems that we have to come together to address.”

Taylor separated his discussion into macro components (the foster care system) and micro components (recruitment and retention of foster parents), but added that both components must be considered together.

The following demographic changes demonstrate the extent of the problem:

- Between 1990 and 1995, the number of children entering foster care increased by 19 percent nationally but by 37 percent in the District of Columbia—nearly double the national rate.
- In 1990, the number of District children in foster care totaled 1,700; by 1998, that number reached 3,000—nearly double the number in 1990.

In his 30 years’ experience with District child welfare and foster care issues, Taylor stated that he could not remember a stretch of more than two or three years without reports of a crisis in finding homes for abandoned, abused, and neglected children. This does not diminish the problem, the need, the crisis; however, the crisis involves complexities that must be addressed without fear. Quoting the maxim “simplicity this side of complexity is worthless, but simplicity the other side of complexity is priceless,” Taylor urged that “as a community, we must get to ‘simplicity the other side of complexity’—and I believe we can.”

Dissecting the Underlying Patterns

Taylor noted that Peter Senge and other students of social systems state that in order to understand what is happening at the surface of a problem, one must examine the underlying patterns. Once the patterns that drive the ways things are done and the surface results are identified, one must go even deeper and identify the underlying structure that arranges the patterns driving what happens on the surface.

Thus, stated Taylor, it is important to note that foster care services in the United States and in the District are predominantly split into two separate tracks: one track specifically aimed at sheltering the children (e.g., foster home, education, and health care) and the other aimed at correcting the “deficits” of the parents (e.g., drug rehabilitation and housing assistance). The child is to be “stabilized” in his or her track until the mother completes her own track or fails to do so—at which point parental rights may be terminated. The mother cannot exercise any aspect of her parental role (no involvement with the child’s schoolwork, no concern for the child’s health or emotional needs, no guidance of the child’s social life). She is not even expected to see the child very often; the frequency standard is 1–2 hours per month, with visitation taking place at the agency and under the supervision of the workers. In summary, foster care in this country is currently designed to exclude birth parents almost completely from their children’s lives.

At the next level of patterns, this underlying structure plays out as follows. Even “safe” forms of parental participation are ignored or discouraged, based on the premise that foster care practice must prevent not only the possibility of physical harm, but also the possibility of “bad feelings.” A paramount concern is that the child might feel rejected by the parent, be given unrealistic promises of a prompt return, or wait for a phone call that does not come. If the visit is uneventful and positive, it might trigger the child’s “separation anxiety.”

Taylor stated that an underlying and unintended pattern results from protecting children and adults from experiencing the normal human feelings in adult-child bonding. This amounts to desensitizing them to each other, thus eroding and even destroying the very fabric of their relational system. As one therapist explained, “children who are not allowed to experience first-hand the unreliability of a parent are also denied the chance to demand her accountability; the parent who is protected from her children’s demands is also deprived of an opportunity to become more responsible and compassionate toward them.”

This underlying pattern, in turn, is translated into social work practice—as if parents could become better parents without actually parenting, or children could maintain their attachment to their parents in the meantime. The fallacy here, noted Taylor, is that isolation begets disaffection. As the ties that bind parent and child begin to dissolve, each becomes attached to different realities. Children “stabilize” in their foster home, while their mother adjusts to life as a childless woman. A tragic consequence, ironically, is that children who are thrown together with their parents after a long period of estrangement are more likely to get hurt.

Taylor asserted that there is potential for changing this dysfunctional structure to a one-track unified structure that supports rather than sabotages the parent-child bond. That supportive structure is embodied in the concept and practice of neighborhood foster care.

Pilot Project

Commending the work of John Mattingly and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Taylor noted that his own organization, For the Love of Children (FLOC) is currently developing a pilot neighborhood foster care project in the District in partnership with CFSA, the Consortium for Child Welfare, and the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative. This approach involves recruiting neighborhood residents to train as foster parents for children from the Columbia Heights/Shaw area. The goal is to provide a foster home when needed, with the least possible dislocation for the child. Initially, this means a foster home close enough for the child to remain in the same school, stay in touch with friends and neighbors, and have as much contact as possible with the mother and father.

With help from the Freddie Mac Foundation and the Columbia Heights/Shaw Family Support Collaborative, FLOC has recruited and hired two women who are well known and highly respected in the neighborhood to recruit foster parents who will hold their homes open for neighborhood children of any age. If the plan is approved by CFSA, the Collaborative will convene a family conference immediately after placement of the child, to bring together parents, relatives, close friends identified by the parents, and the FLOC social worker assigned to the case. Collaborative staff will lead the family conference to help the extended family system develop plans for achieving permanence for the child. The task of the social worker is to then implement the plan developed.

In developing the plan, FLOC has explored questions involving (1) how to create sufficient incentives to recruit and retain neighborhood foster homes for neighborhood children; (2) how to retrain staff to embrace and implement the very different philosophy and practice of this model; and (3) how to adhere to the timetable of the new federal legislation, which sets 12 months as the time limit for achieving permanency for children entering the foster care system, before proceeding to terminate parental rights.

Conclusion

Taylor concluded by sharing ideas by Teri Ali, director of the AECF's program in Cleveland. Since child protective workers in that community have an image of being child snatchers, the Cleveland program began by creating a new positive recruitment message: "Let's bring our children home." Cleveland offers extensive pre-training and on-the-job training, has reduced the time requirements for licensing foster parents to 6 weeks; and conducts initial family conferences as well as monthly team meetings that include the families. In preparation for these meetings, both the birth parents and the foster parents make lists to bring to the meeting. The birth parents list what is important to the child; the foster parents describe in detail what the child did on the first day, the second, and so on. The foster parents convey to the birth parents that "our job is to help get you and your child back together." All stakeholders are brought to the table and kept informed. As a result, birth parents acknowledge the care and generosity of the foster parents rather than feeling threatened by them.

Taylor and others hope to begin the pilot neighborhood foster care project by April 1, 1998. Their intention is to start small with just a few cases (probably three) to address the complexities. They plan to grow and extend the program throughout the city as soon as possible.

Question and Answer Session

Children with Disabilities

I was pleased to hear comments about children with special needs. I think for too long we have had separate agencies that serve children with special abilities and their families, and other agencies that serve children in foster care. There is a critical need in terms of supporting families. Also, abuse and neglect often result in disabilities and these families need appropriate support—a big issue in terms of family preservation, recruitment of foster families, and ongoing training and support. Georgetown University's Child Development Center is certainly very interested in partnering and continuing to work in this effort.

Marisa Brown, Georgetown University, Child Development Center

CFSA is working to pull together the appropriate professionals to work on mental health and developmental health, and is in dialogue with members of the Mental Health Administration. However, that is not really enough. There needs to be a forum to discuss this issue. Anyone who is interested, please contact CFSA.

Sondra Jackson

Coordination with Welfare Reform

First, is CFSA coordinating with the program in welfare reform? Second, is there any emphasis on prevention to reduce the caseload of the number of children entering the foster care system?

Cornelia Moore, Department of Labor

The seven DC Collaboratives are working in territory where collectively 85 percent of the child abuse and neglect cases have reportedly occurred. These Collaboratives try to create that front-end primary prevention/intervention structure so that the community is available to meet its own needs. For example, just the other day, the community pulled together to find housing for a 17-year-old mother and her child. What stands out is the relentless effort and alacrity with which the community is responding to human need. That capacity is being developed. We need to create the infrastructure, the accountability, and the standards for the community—and that is happening.

Fred Taylor

Ernestine Jones has met with individuals in welfare reform and is beginning to discuss the connection between welfare reform and child welfare. More dialogue is needed because it is certainly going to impact the child welfare system. CFSA must

examine all the components of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program.

Sondra Jackson

Cincinnati has been AECF's strongest site in welfare reform. Cincinnati geographically assigned all of its workers and set up offices in each of the communities from which children were coming into care. Every city now needs to do this. Now TANF workers are being located in the same offices with child protection workers to create seamless service delivery so that every family who applies for TANF can also obtain the family services provided by the child welfare system.

In terms of schools, some of AECF's best work is in the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles, where Family to Family is incorporated in the schools. The community has a greater sense of ownership of the schools than does the child welfare system. Family to Family, for example, can have family meetings in the schools and can successfully recruit foster families in the schools because families do not feel they are joining a big faceless bureaucracy, but rather a neighborhood school through which they might care for a friend's children.

John Mattingly

Family to Family Reduction in Length of Stay

Does Family to Family have any data regarding reduced length of stay for children in foster care? Also, are there any changes in terms of social workers' caseloads?

Darlene Herring, DC Refuge Resettlement Program

There is a long story to the various outcome results AECF has been tracking. A key issue involves tracking the results of the current system as well as the results of the new approach. So each site had to develop the capacity to track length of stay and number of moves in care. It is very important to have a sense of history, of what has been achieved.

Length of stay in a majority of sites has decreased. Specific results depend on the site, but there has been as much as a 20 percent reduction in the average length of stay, based on a cohort analysis. Overall, 20 percent of the youngsters go home within 2 weeks, 20 percent go home within 30 days, 20 percent go home between 30 days and 6 months, and 20 percent go home between 6 months and 1 year. Another 20 percent basically do not leave the system. These data enable comparison and problem analysis.

Second, Family to Family provided funds to jump-start this work. So, if a site did not have enough workers or funding to be available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to help a foster family, Family to Family would then fund more support workers. However, sites have to be able to take this design and apply it in most places that have reasonable caseloads. AECF is not trying to develop an approach that would be too expensive for other places in order to provide round-the-clock support (which

might mean reassigning some workers who are not at capacity in their current positions). In some places, caseloads are simply unworkable. No design in the world is going to turn that unit around. Although in most places, one can improve the system with a new and smarter way of thinking and working, some other places simply need more resources.

John Mattingly

Also, consider the fact that in states with a high number of children in kinship care, the length of stay is longer.

Sondra Jackson

There is a dramatic difference between paid and unpaid relative care where the relatives are provided AFDC or TANF or emergency funding. In those Family to Family states in which relatives cared for children without getting foster care rates, the length of stay for those children in kinship care was shorter than for those in foster care. At the same time, in a city like Los Angeles, 65 percent of the children are in relative care. The issues in relative care must be confronted to address length of stay.

John Mattingly

Criteria for Neighborhood Care

What would be the criteria for deciding which child would benefit from neighborhood care? A lot of our children are involved in crack cocaine at very young ages. When a child is removed from a family that is using or buying drugs, do you automatically place that child back in the neighborhood?

Vicki Rayfield, United Planning Organization

The Family to Family neighborhood-centered foster care approach is not going to resolve the problems for the system. First, children should stay in their initial placement until they go home or are adopted. It is not wise to start moving children back because a neighborhood-based foster home becomes available. That's a basic principle of child welfare that doesn't change. If a child is going to move for other reasons and if a neighborhood home is available, a caseworker should consider that home as a placement. However, competing values exist. Child welfare agencies need to set up a process by which people can gauge the various values they are trying to achieve. This is another tool for making good decisions to carry out good practice.

John Mattingly

Relative care involves family preservation and family values and these cannot be separated. We do need family-based/community-based foster care, but we also need to make decisions about when that care is appropriate and for which children. We must strengthen communities and families at the same time.

Sondra Jackson

I do not mean to convey that this will solve all problems. Currently, neighborhood care is not available as an organized process. This is a matter of taking the risk to try

something and to do it slowly to see whether it will work. The particular decision regarding which children should be referred will be made at intake. The caseworker will decide whether a particular case is suitable for trying neighborhood foster care. We have to innovate or we are going to stay stuck.

Fred Taylor

Supervised Living for Families with Substance Abusers

The seminar discussion has been in part about substance abuse and the negative impact on families and children. About a year ago, the D.C. Department of Health's Addiction, Prevention and Recovery Administration started the supervised living component, which allows addicted women to come into care with their children. While the mothers receive treatment, the children are in day care. This provides both the mothers and their children with mental health screenings and a support system. Preliminary data indicate that mothers with problems can succeed, but this requires support, supervision, parenting skills, training, and transportation for children to their original schools.

The real challenge is that the Department of Health does not have enough resources to do this alone. However, without these services, many of these children would be placed in foster care and money would have to be paid for that care. This innovative system needs coordination, collaboration, and financial resources to work.

Wanda Johnson, Addiction, Prevention and Recovery Administration, D.C. Department of Health

Role of Public Agency in Community Building

What are the possible roles of the public agency in community building?

Margaret Trostel, American Public Welfare Association

Collaboration between public and private sectors is a common vision. I hope that the neighborhood [Collaboratives] will be a core concept, but not the only one. The Collaboratives are bringing new resources to the table in a structured way. This project will proceed with care and deliberation so that the infrastructure can be developed. People in the community are ready to participate in a way that is extraordinarily beneficial to children and provides a level of protection that has not been there before.

Fred Taylor

How are you going to link that with the public agency?

Margaret Trostel

Right now, the public agency is funding the start-up of these Collaboratives, and both groups are trying to work out the division of roles. This will result in a revolution in practice, because to proceed as a team model will take an entirely new kind of training.

Fred Taylor

CFSA supports the work that the Collaboratives are talking about; however, we need to work out the implementation and the relationship between these departments. Much of this work should be done in the community, with the entire community included.

Sondra Jackson

One comment from AECF's experience across the country: (1) these partnerships have to be very clear-cut and stated in writing; and (2) the roles need to be clearly described and understood upfront—the role of the public agency is not going to disappear because the agency has partners. For example, in cities facing problems related to babies with positive toxicologies, agencies have been unable to deal with each referral effectively. One approach involves a partnership between new mothers of babies with positive toxicologies and mothers whose children have been returned home successfully and who have been “clean” for two years. These experienced mothers accompany a child welfare worker to the hospital to meet the new mothers who have a need for help and to try to develop a partnership with them. The approach is wonderful, but the roles are very difficult to work out logistically.

In addition, the public agency is more likely to enter certain policy partnerships than others. In some Family to Family sites, the public housing authority referred every family that was thrown out of public housing to the neighborhood family-to-family collaborative. This enabled the early intervention process to deal with this crisis. The same partnership is needed, for example, when a public housing resident wants to become a foster parent but needs more room. A public agency (not necessarily the neighborhood group) can talk with the public housing authority about getting priority for a larger apartment when someone applies to become a foster parent.

John Mattingly

Helping Unofficial Foster Families

In Ward 8, and probably elsewhere, families are quick to open their hearts and homes to children in trouble, but they are not known to the foster care system. If they were known to the system, the foster care population would triple. The families that care for these children do not want to enter the system because, in reality, it would create problems for them. For example, their rent would increase if they are in subsidized housing and their food stamps would be cut. Nonetheless, in a lot of instances when they barely have enough for their own child, if they see a child in trouble, they are quick to open up to them. It is a terrible situation when someone wants to help a person, but does not do so for fear of hurting their own families. These unofficial foster parents are asking for only a little bit.

Barbara Shorter, Far South East Neighborhood Collaborative

When one takes a public system and tries to place it within people's lives, it does not always succeed. Kinship care is a natural response, but when placed in an unnatural system, it does not always work. The system of Collaboratives in DC will help to uncover these issues and provide families with the services they need. It is less expensive to move families to another house than to pay foster care rates for four

children. Innovation is required. Quite frankly, the system has not begun to address the real-life needs that people have.

Sondra Jackson

Concluding Remarks

Two things to remember from this seminar and discussion: First, we have severe problems—children who need help and are not getting the assistance they need; second, and more important, we can do some things to help them. We can address the problem child by child, family by family, neighborhood by neighborhood. We can improve the lives of children who need it most. This is how we will be judged as a government, as a society, and as a community—what have we done to help the most vulnerable among us?

Mark Rom

Appendix

The graphs on the following pages were used by Ron Haskins during his presentation.

Federal Spending on Child Protection Grant Program and Entitlement Program

Source: US House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee. 1997.

Number of Children in Foster Care, 1986-96

Source: US House of Representatives, Ways and Means Committee. 1997.

Median Duration of Spells for First Placements, 1988-94

Source: Wulczyn, F.H., Harden, A.W., Goerge, R.M. 1997. An update from The Multi-State Foster Care Data Archives: Foster care dynamics, 1983–84. Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago. (Reproduced with permission of F. Wulczyn.)

Comparison of Experimental and Control Group Discharge Rates

Source: Wulczyn, F.H., Zeidman, D. 1997. HomeRebuilders: A family reunification demonstration project. In J. Duerrberrick, R. Barth, N. Gilbert, eds., *Child Welfare Research Review—Volume II*. New York: Columbia University Press. (Reproduced with permission of F. Wulczyn.)