

**Building Collaboratives to Deliver Human Services
In Bibb County, Georgia**

**Report by The Rockefeller Institute of Government
for the Casey Strategic Consulting Group**

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Summary

The Bibb County office of the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is the focal point of a distinctive effort to provide services to poor families in the county. What distinguishes Bibb County from other locations is the lead role that DFCS has played in developing and staffing a wide range of services called “collaboratives”. Collaboratives take many forms, including a residential drug abuse treatment facility for pregnant and parenting women, a child care and child care training center, health programs at the local medical center, and neighborhood outreach programs.

The goal of these efforts was not initially to integrate services, but over time the result has been an overall improvement in client access to a wide range of services. At the collaboratives, partners share responsibility for site management, each providing services that contribute to the overall effort. One example is the child care center, located across the street from the DFCS office, which provides child care for local families, drop-in child care for DFCS clients, and serves as a training facility for child care providers, including TANF recipients. The center, in operation since 1996, is a collaborative effort of DFCS, the Central Georgia Technical Institute, River Edge Behavioral Health Services, the Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council, the Bibb County Board of Commissioners, the Macon Rescue Mission, and the Bibb County Board of Education.

Successful collaboration results from a number of critical factors:

Moving beyond traditional roles - Management and staff of DFCS have moved beyond their roles as administrators of their core programs (income support and child welfare programs) to play a leadership role in creating and staffing collaboratives. They directly provide and facilitate access to a broad range of services, including child care, education for children and young parents, job training, health care, nutrition counseling, drug and alcohol treatment, and transportation.

Building strong relationships between program administrators and local political leaders - Managers of local program agencies, the Bibb County Board of Commissioners, and the Mayor of Macon have developed strong, long-term working relationships based on a shared interest in improving the local service delivery network to better meet the needs of families. By meeting and working together regularly, they have developed a high level of trust and a cooperative spirit that is obvious even to the casual observer.

Focusing initial efforts - The success of the initial collaborative efforts was due in part to a focus on the most pressing community needs – teen pregnancy and drug abuse. The success of these efforts reinforced the collaborative approach, resulting in the development of a much broader range of services for local families over time.

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Background

Introduction

This paper is the one in a series of reports that describe efforts to integrate the delivery of human service programs in different locations around the country. Funded by the Casey Strategic Consulting Group, the project is designed to document lessons learned, analyze critical success factors, and describe the operational processes and tools, including information technologies, that have contributed to these efforts.

In February 2002 Rockefeller Institute staff conducted a site visit to human service offices in Macon, Georgia, the county seat of Bibb County. Locations visited included the main office of the Bibb County Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) and a number of buildings in close proximity that house collaborative projects developed by DFCS and other community agencies. These collaborative projects, described in detail below, were the focus of the site visit.

Organizational Structure of Service Delivery in Bibb County

Like other states, human services in Georgia, and therefore in Bibb County, are delivered by a combination of state and local government agencies and private organizations. The state, through the county DFCS office, administers income support programs, including TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid, some employment-related services, child welfare programs, and adult and child protective services. The child support enforcement program, as well as other employment services, are also administered by employees of other state agencies housed in other local sites. Bibb County and local non-profit agencies provide a range of health, mental health, transportation, and employment programs and services. Educational services are provided by local public schools and the Central Georgia Technical College.

Site Demographics

Bibb County is located approximately 70 miles south of Atlanta. Though the county is considered to be urban, its population of 153,000 in 2000 represents only two percent of the population of the state. Macon is the county seat and the major urban center. Relative to the rest of the state, Bibb County has a higher percentage of African Americans (47.3 percent in Bibb County, 28.7 percent in the state), and a higher level of poverty (33 percent of children below poverty versus 22.8 percent in the state).¹ Bibb

¹ Statistics from the U. S. Census Bureau QuickFacts at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/>.

County's unemployment rate of 4.8 percent in 2000 was higher than the state average of 3.7 percent.²

There is no dominant industry in the county. The largest single employer is the Medical Center of Central Georgia. Other major sources of employment are public service, textiles, and tobacco. Unemployment is rising, but the increase in unemployment is no greater than in other areas of the state. There is, and has been, a substantial drug problem in the county, as well as a large number of teen pregnancies involving single mothers. Addressing both of these issues is a continuing challenge.

Service Integration in Bibb County

Starting from Scratch -- Forming Collaboratives

A hallmark of the local human service delivery network in Bibb County is collaboratives -- projects created by combinations of local agencies that provide support services to families. The genesis of these collaboratives began in the early 1990s, when the wife of the mayor of Macon approached the director of the county DFCS office with a request that something be done to address drug abuse and health problems among the poor. The result was the creation of a pediatric clinic located in the DFCS office (now in a separate building), a local immunization initiative, funded in part by a grant from the Knight Foundation, and a substance abuse treatment clinic, described below.

Community leaders and local service providers began to meet on a regular basis to identify other community needs and develop strategies to address these needs. They called the process "Challenge for Change." The large number of collaboratives in the county is an outgrowth of the relationships developed in these meetings. As additional needs were identified, new projects were initiated. The state Department of Human Resources (DHR) now supports the concept through its "Family Connections" program, which provides funding for local coordinators, promotes the development of local service agreements, and locates potential sources of grant funding.

Bibb County agencies and organizations that have developed collaboratives include:

- Bibb County DFCS;
- The Bibb County Board of Commissioners;
- The City of Macon;
- Macon-Bibb County Health Department;
- The Macon Housing Authority;
- The Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council;
- River Edge Behavioral Health Services;
- The Medical Center of Central Georgia;
- Bibb County Juvenile and Superior Courts;
- Bibb County Public School System;

² U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

- Heart of Georgia Council on Child Abuse;
- Central Georgia Technical College;
- Middle Georgia Consortium;
- The Mental Health and Substance Abuse Division of DHR;
- The Georgia Department of Labor; and
- Goodwill Industries.

Collaboratives

The DFCS Complex

The Bibb County Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) office and its staff are the hub of a number of these collaboratives. The main office houses approximately 300 staff of DFCS, a division of the state Department of Human Resources, responsible for income support programs, such as TANF and Food Stamps, funding for child care, and social services (including child welfare programs). Located close by are six smaller buildings that house a variety of services, effectively creating a one-stop complex for county residents. The county provides the buildings, constructed on land that in some cases was donated by local businesses.

The complex is not the result of a grand plan to produce a campus-like setting; it is more the result of local agencies identifying community needs, and over time, taking advantage of available land in the area close by the DFCS office. The main target population is DFCS clients, but services are available to other families in the community as well. Through the intake assessment process at DFCS, families are referred to various services. If there is an immediate need, they are taken directly to the appropriate building, thus ensuring that families receive needed services as quickly as possible. By providing services at intake, DFCS has successfully diverted many families from welfare dependency. Brief descriptions of the collaboratives in the DFCS complex follow.

Pediatric Clinic³

The goal of the clinic is to provide community-based health care and health counseling to families in the area, and to ensure that all children are immunized. The clinic is staffed by a registered nurse, provided by the Medical Center of Central Georgia, a second registered nurse under contract with DFCS, a caseworker from DFCS, work experience participants, and volunteers. The Pediatric Clinic has been providing quality health screenings and treatment to children of Bibb County since September 1992. Clinic staff interview clients as they come into the main DFCS office. If there is a health issue for a parent, or children in need of immunizations, they are taken to the clinic for services.

³ The following descriptions are based on information provided by the Bibb County office of the Division of Family and Children Services.

Substance Abuse Treatment Center

The Substance Abuse Treatment Center, which also opened in 1992, is a residential program that allows mothers to receive treatment for substance and alcohol abuse and related problems. Children may reside with their mothers in the facility during treatment and are not placed in foster care. Pregnant women receive an easily accessible, comprehensive array of services including prenatal care, drug and alcohol treatment, individual and group counseling, parenting skills, money management, family planning and other supportive services. This project, currently located in a former school building, is co-sponsored by Bibb County DFCS, which provides an on-site caseworker, River Edge Behavioral Health Services, and the Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council.

Child Care and Child Care Training Center

Through the efforts of the Bibb County DFCS, The River Edge Behavioral Health Services, The Macon Technical Institute, The Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council, the Bibb County Commissioners, Macon Rescue Mission, and the Bibb County Board of Education, the Bibb County Training/Child Care Center was established in 1996. The Center provides:

- Skilled training for welfare recipients as child care providers.
- Parenting skills training for welfare recipients.
- Quality child care slots for children to allow welfare mothers to work.
- Training for existing child care providers, including in-home providers, to improve the quality of child care.
- Parenting skills for absent fathers.

A current Job Bank listing of all local job opportunities in child care is available at the Center. Staff make monthly contacts with every licensed child care center in Bibb County. Vacant staff positions are noted, and referrals for job placement are made.

Staff at the Center also operate a referral service for anyone in the community, including JOBS participants, who requests In-Home or Family Child Care. The Job Bank maintains current vacancies for placement of these children with JOBS trained in-home staff as well as JOBS clients trained in Family Child Care Development. Staff collect and disseminate information about child care and provide consultative assistance to the community. Center Resource and Referral counselors help parents through the network of local public and private child care providers, help them find subsidized child care, if eligible, and provide an entry into parenting services.

Teen Parent Center

The Teen Parent Center, which opened in 1997, is designed to educate pregnant and parenting middle and high school students who are working toward their high school diplomas, and was established in collaboration with the Bibb County Public School

System, Bibb County DFCS, River Edge Behavioral Health Center, and the Bibb County Board of Commissioners.

The Center provides comprehensive services for students as they continue their education. Teen parents receive instruction in the content areas of language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. On-site child care, health care, counseling services and transportation are also available at the Center.

Department of Labor Building

In 1997, in collaboration with the local office of the state Department of Labor, DFCS opened a small building located across the street from their main office. At this location, DFCS clients have access to employment services, with the focus on placing clients in employment as quickly as possible. (Additional employment services are provided at a WIA one-stop site at a different location in the city.)

Work Experience Center

The Work Experience Program is dedicated to assisting TANF job seekers on the road to self-sufficiency. With property donated by Georgia Power and with the assistance of River Edge Behavioral Health and Bibb County Government, Bibb County DFCS was able to establish this customer resource site in 1997. With a primary mission of helping job seekers obtain skills and secure gainful employment, the Work Experience Program, in collaboration with the Department of Labor, offers a full array of services. Services include job search skills training, computer-based training, assessment for supportive services, job skills training and work experience activities. Additionally, employers are encouraged to come to the Center to recruit employees.

Nutrition Center

Opened in 2000, the Nutrition Center is a collaborative effort of DFCS, the state Department of Public Health, and the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) program. The Nutrition Center offers nutrition education classes, a food demonstration center and a model grocery store, which is used to teach participants to read labels on food items and to do comparison shopping. WIC, Food Stamp and Medicaid clients use the center. The instructor demonstrates and prepares meals that minimize food costs while maximizing nutritional value. Ethnic and low-cost recipes are developed and cooked on-site. The Nutrition Center also serves as a lactation center where new mothers can receive assistance and instruction on breast feeding and houses an operational WIC clinic where certifications, voucher delivery, and all other functions and services of WIC are delivered. Nutrition education classes are taught to a variety of clients in the community including children, the elderly, and the disabled. Special classes for clients who have health problems, such as diabetes and heart disease, are also taught.

Other Bibb County Collaboratives

In addition to the collaboratives located close to the Bibb County DFCS office, there are many other collaboratives in and around Macon. These collaboratives provide a range of services and also serve as initial points of contact for the income support and child welfare programs provided by DFCS. Applications for these programs are available at the collaborative sites. In some cases, workers from the DFCS office are located on-site. Following are a few examples of these collaboratives.

First Steps Program-Medical Center Of Central Georgia

Through the efforts of the Bibb County DFCS, the Medical Center of Central Georgia, and the Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council, the First Steps Program expanded in Bibb County. The program includes a DFCS caseworker and a Senior Clerk located at the Medical Center of Central Georgia on a full-time basis. The First Step staff visits all mothers who give birth at the Medical Center of Central Georgia. At-risk teenage mothers are visited by the First Step Aides, who provide parenting skills assistance and referrals, basic baby care, referrals for the newborns' immunization and Health Checks, and other supportive services. The mothers are assisted in applying for TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, and WIC. When the mothers are ready to go home, they are referred to the Parent Aide Program for follow-up support.

Parent Aide Program

Through the efforts of the Bibb County DFCS and the Bibb County Economic Opportunity Council, the Parent Aide Program was initiated. The overall goals and objectives of the Parent Aide Program are to utilize Parent Aides to provide intensive and non-threatening intervention to child protective services families, families that have already experienced a separation and have had a child placed in foster care, and families referred from the First Step Program. Paraprofessionals make home visits to teach parenting skills, self-esteem, child care, and appropriate methods of discipline, nurturing, and family management. The Parent Aides attempt to bring about positive changes in these areas through joint visits with the caseworkers and separate visits with the family. The Parent Aide visits the home one or more times per week, depending on the service plan.

Macon Police/Bibb DFCS Joint Investigations

Bibb County DFCS partners with the Macon Police Department, jointly investigating reports of child abuse. A Social Services Specialist from DFCS is out-stationed at the Macon Police Department. The police and DFCS staff cross-train on their respective agency needs in order to prompt more accurate information gathering and be better prepared for court. This procedure also prevents duplicate interviews that can be very traumatic to a child or the family. Interviews of children involved in sexual abuse cases

are completed jointly by both agencies and in cooperation with the Child Protection Team of the Children's Center-Medical Center of Central Georgia.

Neighborhood Outreach Project

Caseworkers are out-stationed in a number of neighborhoods through the efforts of DFCS, local churches, and Bibb County Public Housing Authority. The Neighborhood Outreach Project is designed to meet the social service needs of low-income families who live in targeted at-risk zip code areas of the county. Most of the clients served are senior citizens and single mothers on fixed incomes, without means of transportation. Outreach workers provide ongoing child protective services, preventive services, and general assistance. In addition, a variety of services, including tutoring, GED classes, child care, first aid, parenting classes, food pantry, and clothing are available at the sites.

A network of area agencies provides office hours in at-risk neighborhoods, increasing the likelihood that each child and family's educational, psychological, medical, and emotional needs will be met. Mentors teach classes on independent living. Older teens are enrolled in alternate educational programs, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships.

Additional Collaboratives

Additional collaboratives in the county include child care sites in local housing, a mobile medical unit, a food commodities program, and numerous other programs designed to improve the health and well-being of children and families.

The Effects of Collaboration

DFCS staff, as well as representatives of other local human service providers, believe that the result of their efforts – the ease with which clients can access services – sets Bibb County apart from other counties in the state. In terms of results for clients, they point to a number of indicators, including:

- Reduction in the number of babies born with drug problems. Since September 1992, approximately 397 women and 634 children have been kept out of foster care due to the County's treatment program. Fifty babies have been born drug-free to mothers who have enrolled in the program, saving taxpayers the cost of treatment.
- Reduction in teen pregnancies. During the late 1990s, the number and rate of teen pregnancies in the County declined.
- Improved children and family health. Between September 1992 and March 2000, the health clinic immunized 6,322 children, completed 8,920 health screenings, and treated 1,810 children for health problems.

- Better child care. Between May 1996 and April 2000, 3,600 children received child care at the Child Care Center, and 57 clients completed training as child care providers.
- Reduction in the number of recipients of financial assistance. As a consequence of welfare reform, DFCS undertook a major effort to divert clients from TANF. The many supportive services provided by the collaboratives are in no small part a result of this focus. Bibb County has experienced one of the largest per capita decreases in TANF recipients in the state.

While these and other measures indicate that the efforts of the collaboratives appear to be successful, there have been no rigorous efforts to assess the overall impact of collaboration.

Critical Success Factors

Staff of the Bibb County DFCS provided the following list of factors that they believe have been critical in their efforts to better serve the needs of poor families.

- A holistic team approach to meeting customer needs.
- Specialization of caseloads when it best meets customer needs.
- Multidisciplinary staffings with internal and external partners.
- Morale-boosting activities for staff and work experience trainees.
- Centering caseloads within zip code zones to improve staff efficiency.
- Strong support by the Bibb County Commissioners for the operation of the DFCS office and related collaboratives.
- Visionary leadership of the collaborating partners.
- Commitment to work toward “yes,” instead of “no.”
- Action-oriented support of elected officials and community leaders.
- Giving others the glory while building trust and resolving turf issues.
- Listening and responding to community needs at the grass-roots level.
- Facilitating access and delivering services within communities of need through collaborative (often co-located) design.
- Frequent utilization of volunteers, mentors, and interns.

Other factors that have contributed to the success of local efforts include:

Administrative Databases Developed by the County DFCS

Bibb County DFCS staff use a number of information systems to administer programs, such as TANF, Food Stamps, Medicaid, Child Care, and Child Welfare. These systems are operated and maintained by the state Department of Human Resources. Because accessing management information from these state systems is difficult, Bibb County DFCS developed stand-alone databases with information that allows them to conduct relatively sophisticated analyses of caseload trends in income-support programs and adult

and child protective services. Funding for the systems came from the county and state. Development of the databases has allowed DFCS to focus services in areas of Macon with the greatest need, track client progress, and to know at a glance what the status of the client population is at any moment.

Funding from a Variety of Non-Programmatic Sources

In order to support a number of initiatives, collaborative leaders secured funding from non-traditional funding sources. A large grant from the Knight Foundation supported efforts to immunize children in the “Shots for Tots by Two” program. Grants from the federal government support other health initiatives. As mentioned above, the county provided funding to develop the administrative databases in DFCS, which is a state office. The county developed and maintains the buildings for the collaborative sites in the DFCS complex. Local businesses donated the land for some of these sites.

Conclusion

Managers and staff of the county DFCS office and collaborative partners in the local human service community did not set out to integrate services in Bibb County. Their initial goal was to address a limited number of pressing community needs. But the success of their initial efforts, and the cooperative relationships developed between local program and political leaders as a result, have led to the creation of a range of collaborative services that effectively form an integrated service network. Although TANF and entitlement programs continue to operate in traditional fashion, with separate eligibility processes, staff, and information systems, over the last decade local program and political leaders have taken a decidedly non-traditional approach to service delivery. The result is better services for families in Bibb County.