

The Neighborhood Place System-
Service Integration in Jefferson County, Kentucky

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for the Casey Strategic Consulting Group**

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Summary

Neighborhood Place, the community-centered human services system in Louisville/Jefferson County, Kentucky, is the result of a decade-long effort to integrate and improve services for local residents. The history of the project's development, the scale of the effort, and the involvement of state-administered program staff working in partnership with local and county agency staff, are all factors that set Neighborhood Place apart from other such efforts around the country.

In 1990, legislation to improve the state's educational system became the catalyst for reform of the county human service system. Among the provisions of the legislation was a requirement that local school districts create Family Resource and Youth Services Centers to assist students and families to connect with local human service agencies. In order to better match the availability of services with this new system, Jefferson County developed Neighborhood Place, which houses key health, education, and human service programs in targeted locations throughout the county. Jefferson County, which includes the city of Louisville, is the most populous county in the state. Reforming the human service system to provide better service for this large population has been a major effort involving hundreds of staff and the leadership of seven partner agencies.

A critical factor in the success of the effort is the involvement of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children, which administers income support and child welfare programs throughout Kentucky. Staff from this state-run agency are integral to the effort to provide services in each of the Neighborhood Place centers. Other key features of Neighborhood Place include:

A robust governance structure - The partners have developed a multi-faceted governance and organizational structure that facilitates cooperation among the partner agencies and local community residents. Each Neighborhood Place has a Community Council that provides direction for the center; a Managing Board with several operating committees that oversee management and operation of the centers. These committees are responsible for a wide range of activities including hiring center administrators, maintaining bylaws, and tracking outcomes.

Community involvement - Each Community Council is comprised of residents of the center's service area, including members who have actually received services and neighborhood service providers, ensuring local participation in goal setting and determining the scope of services to be provided.

Using data for multiple purposes - The partner agencies and community councils use data to identify gaps in services and measure performance. An example is a 1997 Community Profile that provided a snapshot of county demographics and has served as a basis for targeting initiatives, such as school attendance, and as a baseline for measuring the effectiveness of programs and services.

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Background

Introduction

This paper is one in a series of reports that describes 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 September 2002 staff from the Rockefeller Institute of Government conducted a site visit to health, education, and human service offices in Jefferson County, Kentucky. Locations visited included local offices in and around Louisville where residents access a range of human service programs, administrative offices of partner agencies, and the central office of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children in Frankfort. The goal of the site visits was to assess and document service integration efforts.

The Human Service System in Kentucky

In Kentucky, like many other medium-sized states, administration of human service programs is a shared responsibility of different levels of government. Income support programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Food Stamps, and Medicaid, as well as child welfare programs, are the responsibility of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children. State staff from this agency provide services at the local level. Other human service programs are provided by counties, private agencies, school districts, and other organizations.

A relatively unusual feature of local government in Jefferson County is the merging of city and county functions. The Louisville/Jefferson County Health Department was created by combining city and county health departments. Another unusual feature is the scale of the Jefferson County Public School district, which, unlike other areas of the state, includes all of the primary and secondary schools in the county -- 86 elementary schools, 23 middle schools, 20 high schools, and 23 other learning centers, serving 93,000 students.¹

Jefferson County Demographics

Jefferson County is a mixed urban and rural county, located on the southern bank of the Ohio River. The major city is Louisville. County population was 693,604 in 2000 -- by far the highest in the state. (The majority of Kentucky's counties are rural, with

¹ From the Jefferson County Public Schools' website at <http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us/JCPS/Intro.html>.

populations less than a tenth that of Jefferson County.) The U. S. Census estimate of persons living below the poverty line, 12.4 percent in 2000, was approximately the same as the state average of 12.7 percent. The percent of children under 18 living below the poverty line, 18.1 percent in 2000, was higher than the state average of 15.8 percent. Median household income in 1999 was \$39,457, versus \$33,672 for the state. African Americans comprised 18.9 percent of the population, a significantly higher percentage than the statewide average of 7.3 percent. The most common employment in the county is in the education, health and social services sectors.² Unemployment -- 4.6 percent in the metropolitan area in August 2002 -- was lower than the state average of 5.2 percent and the national average of 5.7 percent.³

One challenge in reforming the human service system in the county was that until the implementation of Neighborhood Place, many services were centrally located in Louisville, requiring residents of the city's various neighborhoods, as well as those living further out in the rural areas of the county, to travel to central locations to access services. Many of the neighborhoods were relatively insulated, and in some cases, exceedingly poor. In these areas particularly, residents were less likely to connect with service providers because they had little knowledge of service availability and would not seek service providers outside their communities.

Efforts to Integrate Human Services in Jefferson County

The History of Neighborhood Place - Education Reform Leads to Reform of the Service Delivery System

In response to a ruling by the Kentucky Supreme Court that the entire state system of elementary and secondary education was unconstitutional, the state legislature enacted the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA). The court's decision required the state legislature, which is responsible for providing a common school system throughout the state, to create a new system of education.

Along with setting educational goals, establishing an assessment process, and changing governance and funding, among other provisions, the legislation created Family Resource and Youth Services Centers (FRYSCs). The purpose of the FRYSCs is "to assist students and families in need, by providing resources and referrals to service agencies in the community, so that students can focus on learning."⁴ The centers are located in or near schools in which at least 20 percent of the students qualify for the federal free/reduced lunch program. The reasoning behind creation of the centers is that unmet needs, such as nutrition, can prevent students from learning. Social workers in the FRYSCs refer students and their families to community resources to address needs that cannot be met at the FRYSCs.

² Statistics from U. S. Census Quickfacts at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/>.

³ Unemployment statistics from the Bureau of Employment Statistics website at <http://www.bls.gov/lau/>.

⁴ *A Citizen's handbook: The Kentucky Education Reform Act*, Legislation Research Commission, Frankfort, Kentucky, October 1994, p. 14.

The problem in Jefferson County was that the local human service system was not configured in a such a way as to complement the referral process. Human services, to the extent that they were available, were centrally located in downtown Louisville. In essence, there were few service providers in the local communities where the FRYSCs were located, and the services that were available were not adequate to respond to referrals from more than 100 FRYSCs that the Jefferson County Public Schools system expected to open.

The leadership of the school system began to meet informally with peers from human service agencies and community organizations in order to address the problem. After failing to convince the state to allow FRYSCs to be centralized to better fit the county human service system, they developed a plan to co-locate services in local communities. The pilot site, now aptly entitled “First Neighborhood Place,” opened in 1993.

During two years of planning by an informal group of agency and community representatives, decisions were made to formalize processes that have shaped the implementation of the system.

Key decisions included:

- Voluntary involvement of the NP partner agencies;
- Common training in family centered practice for all staff;
- Structuring management processes and responsibilities (see below);
- Maintaining cost neutrality by using existing staff and resources, and phasing in implementation;
- Including at the sites only those agencies that could provide staff and/or financial resources;
- Developing standard client processes;
- Emphasizing community involvement in decision-making;
- Developing a shared vision and philosophy.

The vision for Neighborhood Place is “Local Communities working together to ensure healthy, educated, safe and self-sufficient families through a system of blended, accessible services in Jefferson County.”⁵ Its mission is to work “with communities to provide blended and accessible health, education, employment and human services that support children and families in their progress toward self-sufficiency.”⁶

Partner agencies that provide staff and/or funding for the Neighborhood Places include:

- The Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children Department for Community-Based Services, which provides:
 - Family Support programs (income support programs, including TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid), and
 - Protection and Permanency programs (child protective services);

⁵ From materials provided by the Jefferson County Public Schools.

⁶ From the Neighborhood Place website at <http://www.neighborhoodpl.org/missiongoals.htm>.

- Jefferson County Department for Human Services;
- Louisville/Jefferson County Health Department;
- Jefferson County Public Schools;
- The City of Louisville; and
- Seven Counties Services, Inc. (mental health, MRDD and substance abuse services).

In addition to close connections with the Jefferson County Public School FRYSCs, which refer families to Neighborhood Places, the system is linked with:

- The local United Way;
- The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation's Community Partnership for Protecting Children;
- The federal Department of Health and Human Service's Healthy Start initiative;
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family-to-Family program.

The county Department for Human Services agreed early on to convert existing social worker positions to meet the need for site management and also assigned management assistant positions to most sites. Called administrators, these staff oversee the day-to-day operation of the sites and serve as liaisons to the communities in which the sites are located. Other than supervisory staff of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children's programs, there are no other management staff on site. Many of the offices are located in or in close proximity to schools, and in keeping with the decision to develop the system with little or no additional costs, most of the offices are located in space that originally served other purposes.

Neighborhood Place(s)

Nearly 400 staff from partner agencies are co-located in a system that now includes eight Neighborhood Places and three satellite sites that provide services throughout Jefferson County. Although programs and services available at the sites vary somewhat, services provided at the Northwest Neighborhood Place are an example of the range of services available at each location:

- Emergency financial assistance for those who are eligible;
- Assessment and referral in a variety of areas: employment and training, behavioral and academic problems, alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence and other mental health concerns;
- Screening for Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program (KTAP), Medicaid and Food Stamps;
- Child abuse intervention and prevention;
- Counseling and intervention, especially as a prevention of more serious problems;
- Student attendance and support;

- Preventative Health Services

Staff at each of the offices provide walk-in services for a range of programs (e.g., intake for the TANF and Food Stamp programs), and also conduct home visits for certain programs (e.g., child protective services), as well as for cases that present multiple barriers. (In addition to staff located in the Neighborhood Place offices, the partner agencies maintain staff in central locations in Louisville, in part due to space limitations at the local sites.)

Client Services

As originally planned, client processes were intended to be streamlined and simplified, so that information would only be provided once and would be used for multiple programs. Staff from the partner agencies would share responsibility for conducting comprehensive needs assessments. A computer system would be used to connect programs, share information on clients, and facilitate the delivery of services.

Unfortunately, actual implementation does not yet match the original vision. Currently, when a client first visits a Neighborhood Place, she completes a self-assessment that is reviewed by a receptionist who determines the most pressing need and refers the client to appropriate staff. If the family has multiple needs, a more complete assessment may be completed. If service needs are identified that are outside the responsibility of the initial interviewer, a referral is made to other staff at the site or to other agencies in the community.

Staff from the partner agencies do meet to review shared clients in integrated services and family team meetings, but only for a limited number of cases. In some of the centers such reviews occur infrequently (e.g., monthly). A statewide initiative of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children, called Comprehensive Family Services, which is designed to bring families into the case planning process, has not yet been fully implemented in the Neighborhood Places. Nevertheless, by bringing services to neighborhoods that had previously been underserved, Neighborhood Place is clearly an improvement over the human service system as it existed in 1990.

The Effects of Service Integration in Jefferson County

Surveys of families that visited Neighborhood Places between 1998 and 2001 show a high degree of satisfaction with the facilities and the services that they received. In each of these four years, over 90 percent of families surveyed felt that their rights were respected and that staff were courteous and concerned.

One of the major purposes of the development of the Neighborhood Place system was to more effectively meet the needs of families with children in the county school system. The close connection between the school system's FRYSCs and the Neighborhood Place offices (during 2000 - 2001, there were 4,158 referrals) facilitates access to benefits and services. One result suggested by available data is an increase in county school

attendance in each of the three school years since 1997/1998. Another result is a significant decrease in the number of expired immunizations for students in kindergarten and 6th grade, with rates that dropped between 60 and 85 percent among the eight offices from 1999 until 2001. The number of pre-adolescent children committed to state care decreased in all of the offices between 1999 and 2001, in some sites by as much as 70 percent.⁷

Although the data above indicate that client satisfaction is high and suggest that there are positive results in such areas as student health and school attendance, quantifying the effects of the Neighborhood Place system is difficult. For example, as described below, information systems for the various programs are not linked, and as a consequence there are no summary statistics on the number of clients served by the system. There has been no comparison of outcome measures or performance data between areas of the county served by Neighborhood Places and those that were not (all areas of the county are now served by a Neighborhood Place). As with other sites visited for this study, determining the effects of service integration, particularly quantifiable effects, is a challenge. Nevertheless, it is clear that the effort has, at a minimum, improved access to programs for residents of previously underserved neighborhoods.

Critical Success Factors

A number of factors have contributed to the success of efforts to integrate and improve services in Jefferson County.

Community Involvement - Each Neighborhood Place includes a Community Council with 15 to 21 members. Two-thirds of the members live in the community, the other third work in the community but reside elsewhere. One-third of the members currently or in the past received the types of services provided in the center. In addition, the Managing Board, the decision-making body that oversees the Neighborhood Place system, is comprised of representatives of the funding partners and community council representatives, with the latter in the majority, ensuring that community needs are paramount in decisions regarding deployment of resources.

Neighborhood-Centered Services - One major objective of the effort was to change from a centralized service-delivery model, moving services to the areas where poor families live. The geographic boundaries of the Neighborhood Place centers are based on census tracts, which facilitates tracking demographic data. The centers are located in areas with 5,000 or more at-risk children, as determined by eligibility for the free and reduced-price lunch program. The eight centers and three satellite sites provide coverage throughout the county.

A Unified School District - Unlike other areas of the state, Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS), with approximately 150 primary-, middle-, high-school, and other learning sites, is a unified district. There is a single management structure, which

⁷ All data provided by the Jefferson County Public Schools.

facilitates interaction with partner agencies and simplifies bureaucratic issues - fewer decision-makers speeds the decision-making process. In addition, because resources are consolidated in a single organization, JCPS is able to target a sufficient level of resources to initiatives, such as Neighborhood Place is possible, an accomplishment that is less likely to occur with multiple school districts. Though JCPS has limited staff at the Neighborhood Place sites, JCPS management is very much involved in planning and oversight of the Neighborhood Place system.

A Robust Governance Structure - Though initial management efforts to develop the Neighborhood Place system were relatively informal, as staff began to locate in the centers, the partners determined that a more rigorous approach to managing the system was needed. They created a robust management and organizational structure designed to cover all aspects of system operation and ensure community involvement in decision-making. The organizational structure includes the following bodies:

- Managing Board, composed of executives of the partner agencies and representatives from the community councils;
- Executive Committee, composed of the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary and at least one other member of the Managing Board, with at least one of the members from a Community Council. This committee is responsible for decision-making authority during periods between Managing Board Meetings;
- Operations Committee, which includes representatives of the funding partners and oversees the operations of all of the centers;
- Finance/Personnel Committee;
- Nominating/Bylaws Committee;
- Program Committee;
- Information Systems Committee;
- Outcomes/Trends Committee, which includes the Community Assessment and Planning Project Group;
- Communications Committee;
- Training/Staff Development Committee.

Neighborhood Place bylaws describe the governance processes, including the responsibilities of the Managing Board, committees, and officers, and define operating procedures and program goals. The roles and bylaws of the Community Councils, one for each of the Neighborhood Place sites, are also well-defined.

Involvement of Senior Managers - Senior managers of partner agencies emphasized that one of the reasons they have been successful in developing the Neighborhood Place system is that in each agency, a senior-level manager represents the agency at meetings and in decision-making. Participation by managers who can speak for the agency and who are in a position to make decisions for the agency facilitates governance, ensures buy-in, and reduces frustration for other managers present at meetings.

Using Data to Guide Decision-Making - In July 1997, the county published a multi-faceted analysis of Neighborhood Place service areas designed to assist the Community Councils in planning for service improvements. The report, the Community Profile of Jefferson County, Kentucky, includes quantitative data as well as qualitative measures of citizen perceptions of community strengths and concerns. Topics include analyses of community populations, social and economic well-being, safety, health, and education. The report has served as a baseline for measuring change and a decision-making tool for targeting resources. The report is currently being updated to reflect changes in the intervening five years since it was released.

The Neighborhood Place Outcomes and Trends Committee provides partners and the larger community with information that shows how the system is performing through the use of multiple data sources and indicators. Yearly reports update such factors as how clients feel about the system (based on opinion surveys) and how individual programs are performing (based on data collected by the program partners - e.g., school attendance).

Barriers and Challenges to Service Integration in Jefferson County

Information Sharing - One of the immediate barriers that managers had to address in planning Neighborhood Place, a barrier commonly faced in many efforts to integrate services, was how and when client information would be shared among the partner agencies. Initially there was resistance to allowing information collected by one agency to be shared with the partners. After a prolonged period of discussion and meetings of partner-agency officials and their legal staffs, the solution developed was a common release-of-information form that clients are asked to sign which satisfies the legal requirements of all of the partners.

Information Systems - A barrier that continues to present problems for staff and that was mentioned by many of the managers interviewed for this report involves information systems. Although the county has developed a shared information system that is available to all staff at the local sites, it is not used universally because legacy systems must be used for administering the various programs. For example, while a single information system provides integrated processing for the TANF, Food Stamp, and Medicaid programs, other systems are used for health programs and for child protective services. As a consequence, staff use the information systems associated with the programs for which they have responsibility. The county system does not interface with these legacy systems, necessitating dual data entry -- a task avoided by busy staff. Unless all staff, regardless of program affiliation, input information into the shared system, it is not reliable, and is therefore not useful. This problem is common to many of the sites visited in other states for this study.

Resource Limitations - The partner agencies do not all have the same level of resources available to devote to Neighborhood Place. One consequence is the lack of capacity to conduct intensive initial assessments, as had been originally planned. Workloads and lack of training have prevented staff from partner agencies from sharing responsibility for conducting such assessments. Instead, clients complete a simple self-assessment at

intake. Another consequence is a problem staffing seemingly simple functions such as answering phones and reception desk coverage. Given the decision to limit staff resources to available personnel and positions, there has been no allowance for shared office functions, forcing administrators to devote excessive time and attention to such matters, time that could be better spent on more substantive tasks.

Management Limitations in the Neighborhood Places - Because the staff in each Neighborhood Place come from multiple agencies, retain connection with, and are “officially” managed by a supervisor from their home agencies, the on-site administrator does not have direct supervisory responsibility or control of their day-to-day functions. Although there is a high level of cooperation among staff, there are nevertheless limitations on administrators’ ability to affect such functions as the client assessment process.

Lessons Learned

Over the last decade, managers of human services programs have made significant progress in reworking local service delivery systems and processes. Managers’ insights provide useful lessons related to service integration and changing the nature of human service programs.

Regular Meetings - Committees meet on a regular basis, maintaining communication and fostering a sense of unity among the members. For example, the Operations Committee, made up of representatives of the partner agencies meet every week, and have done so, with limited exceptions, for a decade.

Presence of Senior Managers - Managers interviewed for this report emphasized the importance of the presence of senior managers of the partner agencies at meetings. Rather than lower-level staff who would report back to partner agencies, the expectation is that senior management of the partner agencies will participate on an ongoing basis in meetings and related activities. Their participation means that, generally speaking, there is a person who can speak for each partner agency at meetings, someone who is a decision-maker, rather than a messenger.

Variation in Focus of the Neighborhood Place Offices - Though the basic concept and partner agencies are the same across all of the Neighborhood Place offices, that does not mean that the offices are all the same. The emphasis on community involvement in planning and goal setting means that there may be significant differences in the initiatives underway in each office, and that there are variations in local office procedures. Operating within the broad framework established by the management committees, there is flexibility to tailor activities to local needs.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, partner agencies and local communities in Jefferson County have built a successful system of neighborhood-based human services offices that provides

easy access to a range of programs. A number of factors set Neighborhood Place apart from similar efforts in other states. Legislation that targeted the state's school systems became the impetus for redesign of the local human services system. The result is that the leadership of the Jefferson County Public Schools system is integrally involved in managing Neighborhood Place, and social workers in county schools are able to connect families to needed services. Another important feature of Neighborhood Place is the inclusion of the Kentucky Cabinet for Families and Children as a partner in what is primarily a local effort. The presence of management and staff from the Cabinet is essential to the goal of providing convenient, neighborhood-based access to services. A third important feature is the scale of the effort. Neighborhood Place offices and satellite sites serve all of Jefferson County, the most populous county in the state. The co-location of staff from private agencies and multiple levels of government throughout the county is no small achievement.

There is, nonetheless, room for improvement in the operation of the local sites. While much progress has been made developing the governance structure and processes that facilitate overall management of the system (e.g., the committee structure), there are more mundane issues that continue to trouble local office operations (e.g., lack of phone coverage and uneven participation in client assessments). While staff have been successfully co-located in offices around the county, there is perhaps less teaming, common case staffing, and family involvement in planning than might be expected. Information systems, as in most other locations around the country, hamper information sharing. Local office administrators have little direct control over the functions of on-site staff. Space constraints limit the range of services available at the sites.

Even considering these limitations, Neighborhood Place is among the better examples of service integration in this study. Local representatives of a large state agency, the county school district, other city and county agencies, and community representatives have reshaped the county's human service system. Instead of traveling to multiple offices in locations distant from those most in need, families now receive services in a single location conveniently located in their neighborhoods. Neighborhood Place is a vibrant and evolving experiment in redefining the way that human services programs function, and is a testament to the hard work and continuing involvement of the staff and management of the partner agencies and community representatives.