Family Strengthening Policy Center

Policy Brief

An Initiative of the National Human Services Assembly

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Family-Centered Community Building

Policy Brief No. 9

One strategy for transforming tough environments into family-strengthening neighborhoods is family-centered community building. This brief suggests strategies for using this process to seek wholesale change by directly involving families in low-income communities instead of imposing external solutions.

Introduction

Against incredible odds, many families in tough neighborhoods manage to give their children a good start in life. Such families possess many strengths, including access to external supports that they can use when they hit rough spots. Too many other families, however, are overwhelmed by the odds against them. Events outside their control—an ill child, a delayed bus to their job or a rent hike—easily disrupt their delicate balancing act. When community support for families is inadequate, getting back on the right track is difficult.

Families are the basic building block of American communities. When their communities offer support, resources and opportunities, families can be better strengthened and have the means to raise children into healthy, productive adults. One strategy for transforming tough environments into family-strengthening neighborhoods is family-centered community building. The Family Strengthening Policy Center uses this definition:

Policy Recommendations

Federal, state and local governments should encourage family-centered community building (FCCB).
Key policy opportunities include:

• **Reorient programs to stimulate and support FCCB.**

• **Consider family-strengthening policy proposals raised by communities engaged in FCCB.**

• **Use a block grant or other flexible approach for giving financial support to community building.**

• **Provide leadership by giving agencies flexible authority to work with neighborhood groups and establishing FCCB-related performance measures.**

The full policy recommendation section begins on page 11.

Family-centered community building is the process of engaging family residents and other stakeholders in sustained collaborative efforts to strengthen and improve conditions for families with children in an identified geographic area. (Adapted from the United Way of America, with a family-centered focus.)

Policy makers can improve the odds that families will thrive by encouraging family-centered community building. Research indicates children and families in tough neighborhoods do better when their community has strong institutions and when residents are connected to neighbors and community organizations. For example, a study comparing Chicago neighborhoods found areas with high levels of neighborliness had less violence and crime and their children scored better on first grade reading assessments than areas with less neighborliness (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2004).

A full list of policy recommendations begin on page 10. For other outcomes associated with FCCB, see "What Are the Benefits of FCCB?" on page 3.

Understanding Family-Centered Community Building

Family-centered community building (FCCB) takes many shapes and forms because no two communities are alike. As a result, FCCB practice and research take many shapes. Most emphasize engaging families in the process of creating the community conditions for families to thrive and put their children on the path to wellbeing and future success.

In concrete terms, community building is a collaborative effort aimed at capitalizing on community

assets—that is, the talents and resources present among the residents and institutions of a community—in order to overcome problems experienced by residents (Kretzmann et al. 1993). Community building should strengthen the fabric of the community and engage additional resources—from funding to family services to policy changes and more. Rather than a program, it is an ongoing *mobilization* to improve community conditions that enable families and other residents to thrive.

Increasingly, practitioners are integrating the concept of "family strengthening" (see top textbox on page 1) with community building. This policy brief addresses community building efforts that are focused on and involve families raising children in low-income communities. Such neighborhoods convey multiple structural disadvantages that hinder families' efforts to be self-sufficient and successfully raise children. Examples include:

- Physical obstacles – such as public schools and playgrounds in disrepair.

- Economic barriers – such as shortages of living-wage employment opportunities and affordable housing.

- Social decline – such as crime and a lack of trust among neighbors (Putnam 2000).

Quick Stats

37 – **Percent of all US households with children who report housing problems**

78 – **Percent of very low-income renter households with children reporting housing problems**

23 – **Percent of US children (0-17 years) living in a neighborhood with 20% or more of the population is below poverty**

Sources: (Federal Agency Forum on Child and Family Statistics 2005; Annie E. Casey Foundation n.d.)

> **Families and communities must be part of the solution … not viewed as the source of problems needing to be fixed.**

These types of barriers often interact to create a vicious cycle in many communities that is beyond the ability of a family or a single program to overcome.

FCCB can be organized on a macro or micro level. Macro efforts address a challenge or opportunity on a city-, county- or region-wide basis. For example, a macro effort might focus on improving early child development or coordinating housing, community development and human development in the community at large. In contrast, micro approaches focus on a particular neighborhood.

Similar to a strategic planning process for an organization, an FCCB effort:

- Engages families and other key stakeholders (financial institutions, employers, congregations, public officials, etc.).

- Scans the environment.

- Establishes goals and selects strategies that can be sustained.

- Mobilizes and sustains efforts to implement those strategies and attain goals.

Unlike organizational planning, though, FCCB is not owned by a single organization; instead, community residents are in the driver's seat. In addition, FCCB engages people and institutions within and external to the community as partners that help the effort make progress. Technical support from intermediary organizations (such as a United Way organization, a community foundation, volunteer center, human service coalition, planning councils, etc.) can be critical in helping FCCB groups achieve their goals (Tropman 2001).

Importantly, FCCB seeks to both improve community structures *and* build social capital because neither element by itself is sufficient to transform communities (Kingsley et al. 1997; Macy 2000; Kubisch et al. 2002; Schneider 2004).

- *Structural improvements* are policy and practice changes that increase community supports, resources and opportunities for families. Making these changes often requires involvement from both the public and private sectors.

- *Social capital development* creates community connectedness, a dynamic that enables residents to work together for mutual benefit and helps open doors to supports, resources and opportunities.

What Are the Benefits of FCCB?

Evaluations of community building to strengthen families has documented many improvements to tough neighborhoods where families live with their children.

FCCB Strengthens Families and Children

Structural and social improvements in communities translate into measurable improvements in the lives and wellbeing of families. Evaluations have found FCCB strengthens families in many ways, some of which are highlighted below.

- Family residents:
  - Achieve new levels of self-sufficiency.
  - Have more connections to needed supports, resources and opportunities.
  - Are less exposed to violence, crime and personal victimization.
  - Become more involved in neighborhood institutions.

- Have stronger parenting practices.
- Feel more obligated to look out for their neighbors' children.

• Children score higher on 1st grade reading assessments.

• Measures of early child development improve.

Sources: Kingsley et al. 1997; Annie E. Casey Foundation 2004

FCCB Improves Neighborhoods and Communities

In addition, evaluations of community-building efforts, some with a family focus, have found positive changes in community conditions.

FCCB Limitations

Notably, not every FCCB effort achieves all of these valuable outcomes, and many have yet to fundamentally transform their community. Why? First, socio-economic forces and policies that constrain tough neighborhoods are rarely changed overnight. Instead, broad-scale social change to put a neighborhood on an upward spiral requires a complex renewal supported by organizations and leaders at all levels (Hahn et al. 2001; Kubisch et al. 2002).

Second, overcoming poverty and inequities requires long-term investment that continues to build capacities and enhance resources at all levels, from the family to the state agency (Kingsley et al. 1997; Hahn et al. 2001). While FCCB efforts can be self-sustaining, external support—such as technical

Improving Community Structures	Developing Social Capital in Communities
• Physical infrastructure – such as housing, parks, commercial areas – improves. • New services are added to fill gaps in family supports—such as health care, child care, crisis prevention. • Family services and supports become more available and accessible. • New dollars—both public and private—are invested in human services, local business development, education, housing. • Provider agencies are more responsive to families. • Neighborhood organizations are stronger—as evidenced by continued progress after external funding ends. • Economic activity rises and creates new jobs for residents.	• Residents report a greater sense of being: - A part of a community (both as a place and as a group of residents). - Able to effect change. • New activities build community identity and pride— such as local newspapers, neighborhood celebrations, clean-up days. • Residents gain leadership skills and experience, especially in planning and governance. • Resident participation in community efforts and civic activities increases. • New partnerships develop between local institutions and organizations in other neighborhoods or at higher levels. • Neighborhood institutions have more opportunities for inter-organizational collaboration.

Sources: Mattessich et al. 1997; Macy 2000; Rozansky 2001; Kubisch et al. 2002

guidance, training, grants, facilitation and convening – can make a critical difference at any stage. Many FCCB efforts begin with a package of time-limited external support. Sometimes the initial support program ends as community organizations and leaders are ready to take on complex issues that will require sophisticated strategies and infrastructures.

FCCB limitations must be viewed in context. In many communities, critical improvements have been made and are underway. Blockages to success may be external. For this reason, being responsive to community organizations working to strengthen families must be a priority for human service providers, policy makers and for private entities whose presence, or lack of, in a community affects family wellbeing.

FCCB: Challenges and Solutions

Communities are complex places that are always changing. As a result, FCCB is not a neat and defined process. While no two FCCB efforts are alike, many initiatives encounter similar challenges, which can be addressed with a variety of solutions.

Challenge: *While family residents may be interested in participating in community-building initiatives, they must overcome multiple obstacles,* including:

- Low self-esteem or confidence in skills.

- Cultural and/or language barriers.

- Negative views about external volunteer organizations.

- Lack of time, child care and transportation (Points of Light Foundation n.d.).

A recent survey sponsored by the United Way of America found that while nearly all Americans agree that volunteering in the community is very

or somewhat important, only a third report volunteering in the past year. A "demanding work schedule" was the most frequently cited barrier to volunteering (United Way of America 2002).

Solution: Qualitative research by the Points of Light Foundation on volunteering in tough neighborhoods found these barriers can be overcome by holding meetings at locations that are easily accessible, offering child care, helping family residents recognize their talents, providing tangible rewards to help overcome negative perceptions and using facilitators and translators (Points of Light Foundation n.d.).

Solution: Employers can also actively support volunteering. (See the Resources section for employer guides from the Points of Light Foundation.)

Challenge: *Swift outcomes to FCCB are the exception, not the rule.*

Solution: FCCB participants and leaders must recognize that creating a strong foundation for community building takes time. It can take months, even years, to involve a wide variety of stakeholders, build relationships, get buy-in from key institutions and influential community leaders and develop actual partnerships. However, research shows that:

- Doing a good job at these essential tasks offers a substantial pay-off when FCCB coalitions move to implementation. Once people and groups have learned to work together, they can accomplish new tasks more easily and quickly than newer coalitions (Tropman 2001).

- Short-cutting these steps often results in delays and frustrations when implementation is held up to bring a new partner up to speed and adjust plans to obtain their commitment (McNeely 1999).

Solution: Studies of community-building also reveal that shared vision, funding, adequate workforce, sound organizational structure and technical know-how make a difference in the timing and quality of outcomes (Berkowitz and Cashman 2000).

Challenge: *Many communities find it difficult to initiate family-centered community building because the FCCB concept is so broad and flexible.*

Solution: FCCB practitioners and researchers have found intermediary organizations to be

Some of the Faces of FCCB Movements

Because each community is unique in its opportunities and challenges, FCCB takes many forms. Below is a snapshot of some major FCCB movements.

- Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) recognizes that external investments in community development will bear fruit when aligned with efforts "to locate all of the available local assets, to begin connecting them with one another in ways that multiply their power and effectiveness, and to begin harnessing those local institutions that are not yet available for local development purposes" (Kretzmann et al. 1993). More than 30 years of research by Kretzmann and McKnight substantiate the effectiveness of this approach. While not explicitly family-centered, the ABCD paradigm has transformed community building across the world and is a cornerstone of FCCB.

- Comprehensive Community Initiatives (CCIs) "are neighborhood-based efforts that seek improved outcomes for individuals and families as well as improvements in neighborhood conditions by working comprehensively across social, economic and physical sectors. Additionally, CCIs operate on the principle that community building—that is, strengthening institutional capacity at the neighborhood level, enhancing social capital and personal networks and developing leadership—is a necessary aspect of the process of transforming distressed neighborhoods" (The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change n.d.).

- Family Re-Union is the name of a network of policy makers, practitioners and researchers promoting FCCB as a way to re-connect all families to their communities and involve them in the community-building process. One network researcher describes FCCB as having "an explicit goal of strengthening relationships among family members, supporting families in their primary function of caring for their members" (Erickson et al. 2002).

- Neighboring, as promoted by the Points of Light Foundation, is "the act of neighbors helping neighbors." Neighboring plays an essential role in family success and neighborhood transformation. In practice, neighboring initiatives engage and empower residents in tough communities to work together on community issues and create networks of mutual support (Shrestha 2003).

critical in facilitating community mobilization, strategy and action. Intermediaries can offer a variety of assistance.

- During mobilization, they can involve citizens, serve as a neutral convener and act as the catalyst to initiate FCCB.

- In the strategy and action phases, they can help collect and analyze data for planning or evaluation, resolve conflict, facilitate the process to assure productive interaction among the participants, offer communications expertise for outreach to new partners and the community at large, foster cooperation among diverse stakeholders, negotiate and provide technical guidance and training.

- In particular, coaching or mentoring is emerging as a promising strategy that intermediaries can offer to FCCB efforts. Coaches help FCCB leaders navigate the complex community-building process and work through problems.

Sources: Kingsley et al. 1997; Brown et al. 2000; Tropman 2001

Solution: Research indicates community-building efforts achieve more success and are more self-sustaining when participants with varied backgrounds and affiliations find a common issue (Berkowitz et al. 2000). Strengthening families with children from challenging neighborhoods can provide such an initial focal point.

Case Studies of Effective FCCB Efforts

The following case studies examine different approaches to FCCB and provide insight into the wide range of potential outcomes.

- *Inglewood Neighborhood Housing Services*
  When organizing "block clubs" yielded small-scale results, this intermediary scaled up its FCCB efforts to the community level and engaged families.

- *Kenilworth-Parkside Resident Management Corporation*
  This grassroots-driven and -managed FCCB achieved significant success in transforming a tough neighborhood.

- *North Carolina System of Care for Children and Families*
  State and local public agencies adapt the FCCB concept for service planning and delivery and ultimately achieve better outcomes for children and families.

- *United Way of Central Maryland*
  Through a collaborative partnership with other community nonprofits, this intermediary is helping neighborhoods achieve systemic improvements in how families with young children are supported.

- *Volunteer! Baton Rouge*
  Low-income families may face many demands, yet they are willing to volunteer to help other families, as United Methodist HOPE Ministries and Volunteer! Baton Rouge are discovering.

Inglewood Neighborhood Housing Services (INHS)
Inglewood, CA
http://www.homeownershipcenter.com/

Prior to convening Parent and Residents Groups, INHS's community-building work focused on block clubs and neighborhood clean-up in southeast Inglewood. In time, INHS realized a multi-neighborhood approach was needed to bring about change in community structures. Parents who joined the new groups surveyed families about their needs and planned after-school programs. The survey,

which received a high response rate, revealed limited English proficiency kept many parents from effectively helping their children with homework. The Parents and Residents Groups used survey and city data to design after-school programs in two elementary schools. When the California budget crisis precluded the proposed state funding for after-school programs, the Parents and Residents Groups decided to do the programs themselves. They organized parents to volunteer, solicited policy support from the school system, obtained local business contributions for supplies and snacks and set up systems to monitor the programs. Community-based police officers let the groups meet in their centers and held a walk-a-thon with broad participation from police department. A city council member also assisted with garnering local business support. Outcomes include:

- In the first year of the after-school programs:
  - Each child participating in the after-school program received a student-of-the-month award from his/her school at some point during the school year.
  - Two child participants received a most-improved award at the end of the school year.
  - Two hundred parents were mobilized.

- The Parents and Residents Groups developed relationships with key community decision makers, with whom they now have direct contact. In the past, they relied on INHS or another intermediary to communicate their issues.

- The school board enhanced security for a playground that an elementary school shares with a city park. Residents' relationships with policy makers proved valuable when one of the Parents and Resident Groups took up parents' concerns about safety. Because the playground/park is open to the public during school hours, students were being exposed to drugs, alcohol, violence

and other inappropriate language and behaviors. The Parents and Residents Group convinced the school board to take action.

With a small community-organizing grant from the NeighborWorks® America, INHS played a key role in supporting the groups. Specifically, INHS helped organize and coach them as the groups surveyed residents, developed plans and implemented the programs. Other INHS support included writing proposals on behalf of the groups (because of limited English skills) and providing a five-week leadership training course to 16 community leader-parents.

Kenilworth-Parkside Resident Management Corporation
Washington, D.C.

Under the leadership of a parent-activist, residents of the Kenilworth-Parkside public housing development in Washington, D.C. first began working together to have more resident children enter college. In time, the family-focused group assumed management responsibility of the housing project. An independent audit found that, in four years, the group's efforts created new jobs for residents, helped move residents off of welfare, reduced vacancy and increased rent collections. After seven years, the audit revealed a substantial drop in the monthly crime rate. After 15 years, 700 youth from the housing project had entered college. The residents created new economic opportunities and family supports: mandatory classes on raising children and managing a household, after-school homework assistance and tutoring for children, employment services and improved access to health and dental care (Kingsley et al. 1997).

North Carolina System of Care for Children and Families

http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/mhddsas/childandfamily/index-new.htm

Since 1999, North Carolina has been developing community-based family-focused service-delivery systems in 22 counties to better meet the needs of children with serious emotional disturbances and their families. The North Carolina System of Care Network Project (SOC Network) was established by the state Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services using a six-year grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The SOC Network engages families in two ways.

• Each child and family works with a single, unique team involving front-line service providers and others to coordinate an often complex array of services and supports.

• At the community and state level, families are involved as full partners in system design, management, evaluation and improvement (training, technical assistance, planning, etc.). These SOC collaboratives bring families together with policy makers, service providers, businesses and other stakeholders to improve the delivery of services and supports.

Compared with their peers, children with serious emotional disturbances are more likely to drop out of or be expelled from school, have substance abuse problems, be convicted of crimes and have unplanned pregnancies. A SAMHSA-sponsored evaluation of the SOC Network found the North Carolina approach made a difference in the lives of the children and their families. Compared with

measures at enrollment, in just one year, children:

• Attended school more regularly.

• Earned higher grades in school.

• Had fewer hospital and out-of-home placements.

• Experienced less severe behavioral and emotional problems.

• Had fewer arrests and detentions.

Two additional indicators of the usefulness of this FCCB approach merit attention.

• The SOC approach has been sustained by communities even after their initial grants ended.

• North Carolina policy makers replicated key elements of the SOC approach—child and family teams and the community collaboratives – when they established the Comprehensive Treatment Services Program to serve children at risk of being placed outside their homes (DMHD/DD/SAS 2004; DMH/DD/SAS n.d.).

United Way of Central Maryland (UWCM)
Baltimore, MD
http://www.uwcm.org/Home/

In the late 1990s, a youth-improvement movement guided by Baltimore residents led to Baltimore's Success By 6® Initiative (an early child development initiative sponsored by local United Ways across the country—each unique in its approach). The Initiative's mission is "to ensure that Baltimore's children are healthy, safe, nurtured and enter school ready to learn." The United Way of Central Maryland and The Family League of Baltimore City, Inc., oversee and manage Success By 6.

Achieving the mission requires strengthening neighborhood health and social conditions. Each year,

the Success By 6 Initiative works with some of the city's most challenging communities, each home to about 20,000 residents. Together, the Initiative and the communities are building a system that is increasing services and opportunities for young children ages birth to six, their families and their neighborhoods.

From the start, families have been involved in the community-building process. During the planning stage, surveys and a city-wide summit engaged 7,000+ city residents in prioritizing strategies to address issues facing families with young children. Next the Initiative used an extensive dataset to identify 15 neighborhoods where young children were especially at risk and invited them to participate. In order to receive support and maintain accountability, community governance boards were expected to recruit and sustain participation from local stakeholders—including parent-residents and parent-clients. The boards are charged with mobilizing multiple partners to enhance the health, functioning and self-reliance of families with young children. UWCM supports parent involvement by offering training on advocacy, leadership and governance. Beyond serving as chairs of governance boards, parents have also organized community fairs and other events.

Each Success By 6 community tailors to local circumstances a common set of best practices in early childhood development services.

- Home visits offer expecting and current parents support, education and referrals.

- Community advocacy seeks policy change to improve access to services.

- Service linkage and integration strives to fill service gaps and create a well functioning and comprehensive network of support.

- Implementation and management activities improve the quality and efficiency of community-based services.

The Initiative is sustained through grants, training, individualized technical assistance and evaluation services.

Initial results indicate Success By 6 is having a positive impact on participating neighborhoods. Families receiving home visits have fewer low-birthweight babies, preterm deliveries and infant deaths. The Initiative is also in the process of obtaining data to assess outcomes in terms of child abuse and neglect, injuries, school readiness and other measures of child wellbeing.

UWCM has played a critical role in Success By 6 by serving as a primary catalyst for systemic change. At each stage in the Initiative, UWCM has convened stakeholders, recruited experts for an advisory committee, provided public policy leadership, engaged community leaders and fully collaborated with the Safe and Sound Campaign and Family League of Baltimore City to make fiscal and programmatic decisions. In addition to serving as the Success By 6 fiscal agent, UWCM is directly contributing more than $7.5 million from its annual campaigns, endowments and other fundraising efforts.

Volunteer! Baton Rouge (VBR!)
and United Methodist HOPE Ministries
Baton Rouge, LA
http://www.volunteerbatonrouge.org/

Struggling with the daily challenges of meeting a growing demand for its human services, United Methodist HOPE Ministries jumped at the opportunity to receive a boost from their metro-area volunteer center, VBR! The faith-based nonprofit organization and VBR! are integrating an FCCB approach called "neighboring," in which low-income families are engaged in volunteer service to strengthen their peers. With a grant from the Points of Light Foundation, the partners' goals are to:

- Engage families from the disadvantaged neighborhood served by HOPE in volunteering to help meet the increasing needs of their neighbors, especially families with children.

- Expand HOPE's two-tier services: food assistance and mentoring for entire families transitioning from or at-risk of homelessness.

- Build HOPE's capacity to support, sustain and even grow an expanded service base by:

  - Developing a resource module for families mentoring other families.

  - Instituting a training program for volunteer mentors.

  - Creating a marketing plan and promotional materials to help HOPE reach into the local community to promote services and find new volunteer mentors.

  - Establishing a new volunteer advisory council with client-volunteers, area businesses and other local partners to inform HOPE's operations and planning.

  - Developing HOPE's partnerships with local businesses and churches as sources of volunteers and contributions.

  - Providing technical expertise on the development of additional volunteer opportunities that will engage entire families in the community.

Both VBR! and HOPE realized engaging local residents in service delivery and design was an untapped opportunity to close the gap between HOPE resources and client demand. The neighboring initiative began when HOPE attended a VBR!-organized training session on partnering with volunteers in low-income communities. HOPE's

volunteer coordinator used the new techniques to recruit 14 volunteers from the neighborhood.

Currently, VBR! and HOPE are revising the family mentoring program so local families will be the ones helping their neighbors avoid homelessness. (Mentors will guide the families as they navigate the overloaded social service system, overcome problems and get back on their feet.) HOPE will recruit volunteer mentors using its new marketing materials and partnerships with neighborhood churches. The strengthened training program and mentoring resource guide will provide volunteers with the skills and knowledge they need to be effective.

Though many aspects of the initiative are just starting, both partners are confident they will attain their goals. VBR!'s post-grant plans include:

- Using neighboring to transform its own core services: recruiting and matching volunteers with nonprofits, building nonprofits' capacity for effective volunteering and promoting volunteering.

- Encouraging other nonprofits to adapt the HOPE model and integrate neighboring into volunteer programs.

Policy Recommendations for Local and State Governments

Programs, supports and relationships are key to strengthening families with children and the communities in which they live. However, most community-building approaches are piecemeal, such as a particular program or policy addressing a limited need or challenge. The case examples and research summary reveal that FCCB is different in several respects. Specifically, FCCB:

- Engages families in very active ways—so they ultimately become the drivers of change.

- Builds upon the strengths that children and families possess or could possess, not on their disadvantages.

- Works to address the underlying conditions that affect children, families and communities in multiple ways rather than tackling isolated problems.

- Strives to create what is known in the current vernacular as "social capital," essentially, personal, family and community relationships that provide connections, continuity and strength.

In summary, FCCB is not a retail, boutique solution imposed from the outside. Rather, FCCB seeks wholesale change with the direct involvement of those affected. This mobilization has the potential for much greater impact and lasting power and is what policy makers should promote.

Local governments should reorient their human service, community development and infrastructure programs to stimulate and support FCCB (Kingsley et al. 1997). For example, agencies should:

- *Integrate a focus on families as a unit* into their programs.

- *Develop strong partnerships with family-centered community groups.*

- *Offer competitive grants for FCCB mobilization* directly to community groups.

- Assure FCCB efforts have *access to training, technical assistance and information clearinghouses.*

- *Use the bully pulpit to garner support from other community institutions* to participate as FCCB partners.

> **To make the greatest impact, FCCB seeks wholesale change by directly involving those affected (families and residents), instead of imposing external, limited "solutions."**

At a minimum, ***family support agencies should regularly solicit feedback from families, other clients and community groups regarding opportunities to improve policies and services***. ***Family-strengthening policy issues raised by families and community groups should receive due consideration and, when possible, result in policy change***.

The North Carolina SOC Network (featured in the case studies section) offers one model for creating community and statewide collaboratives that involve families in designing, implementing and improving services.

State and local governments should provide leadership for FCCB efforts by:

- *Giving public agencies flexible parameters to work with neighborhood groups* since a one-size-fits-all approach is ineffective in FCCB.

- *Authorizing human service agencies to coordinate and integrate public programs with those offered by other community human service agencies* (nonprofit, faith, for profit) in ways that will strengthen families (Schneider 2004).

- *Establishing performance measures for agencies regarding family and community engagement.* For example, measures could be set for establishing new and deepening existing partnerships with family-centered community organizations.

- *Setting an example and encouraging other employers to promote community volunteering* so working parents can participate in or coach FCCB efforts. Agency leaders can establish workplace volunteering programs and modify agency policy to give paid time-off and flexible work schedules for approved volunteering. Almost 80% of Americans report that they would volunteer during working hours if employers assisted with arrangements and there was no conflict with their work (United Way of America 2002).

- *Resisting temptation to impose a particular FCCB model* or drive change from the top. Local families need to shape how they adapt and take on the community building (Schorr 1999).

Federal and state community development/ building grants should have a block grant or other flexible structure so that funding can be used to invest in local priorities, however varied (Kingsley et al. 1997). Grant recipients should be required to *directly involve families and community groups* in ways that build local leadership. **Long-term grant support for structural and social improvements**, contingent on performance, are often necessary to bring FCCB efforts to fruition.

For example, since 1974 states and localities have relied heavily on Community Development Block Grants (CDBGs) to revitalize low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. The federal government requires citizen participation before CBDG funds are disbursed. CDBGs have upgraded public infrastructure, rehabilitated housing, added community services and created jobs—the actual mix varies depending on local priorities.

How Can Foundations Support and Encourage FCCB?

Many FCCB efforts depend on external funding and support to get underway. Foundations, then, are often critical partners. Numerous studies indicate limited **grant resources are best invested in communities that are "ripe" for building**, that is, communities with multiple sectors that are ready to work together toward common goals (Hahn et al. 2001).

FCCB practitioners and researchers have found that a **flexible FCCB model improves the odds for success**. Such a model:

- Offers or arranges for a *menu of financial and technical resources that communities can easily access* (Kubisch et al. 2002).

- *Does not impose a particular community-building model,* but instead responds to the goals and strategies developed by communities (Schorr 1999; Hahn et al. 2001).

- *Offers flexibility* so funded communities can respond to unexpected emerging issues (such as a plant closure) or alter their strategies as they gain experience.

- *Promotes self-sufficiency,* yet does not artificially cut off support after a specified time period.

- *Helps grant recipients develop partnerships with local sources of support.* Community colleges, United Ways, nonprofit assistance centers, local foundations and other intermediaries have a rich history of offering effective community-building support.

- *Recognizes the road to success can include failures,* so provides support to help communities regroup and apply what they learn from such experiences.

- *Allows FCCB initiatives to compensate residents for time, talent and services* as well as use funds for meeting food, child care and transportation assistance to reduce barriers to participation in FCCB (Points of Light Foundation n.d.).

Overnight successes are few. **Long-term funding commitments are essential** to transforming neighborhood structures and social networks.

Recommendations for Human Service Agencies and Intermediary Organizations

Strengthening families will only occur with a coherent strategy to improve both the neighborhood environment and community connectedness. As a result, human services agencies and coalitions should:

- **Work collaboratively alongside families in tough neighborhoods to develop a rational approach to neighborhood transformation**. Otherwise, piecemeal efforts will not make a sustainable difference.

- **Embrace service coordination and integration** to help fill gaps and improve access to neighborhood supports for families.

- **Integrate a focus on families into all programs and approaches to bettering communities** (Katz 1999; Macy 2000).

- **Initiate training programs for staff (or contractors) in family engagement** so that effective practices are used to regularly involve family residents in planning and assessment. Family involvement should provide meaningful input and two-way communications.

Intermediary organizations – United Ways, human service planning councils, community coalitions,

volunteer centers and other entities—**should support FCCB efforts by providing technical assistance and guidance** during community mobilization, strategy and action.

- Critical roles include facilitator, coach, technical consultant, convener and trainer.

- Intermediaries should commit to providing long-term support in a timely way.

- Intermediaries should help externally funded FCCB groups develop partnerships with local sources of financial and technical support to fill in after initial grants end.

Sources: Kingsley et al. 1997; Brown et al. 2000; Tropman 2001

RESOURCES

Applied Developmental Science Institute at Tufts University
http://ase.tufts.edu/adsi/education.htm

The Institute's website provides a course syllabus for "Special Topic Seminars in Applied Developmental Science: Family-Centered Community Building for Youth," which offers an insightful bibliography. For those interested in self-evaluation, the website's Planning & Evaluation Resource Center contains tutorials and tools.

Assets Based Community Development Institute
http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/abcd.html

Based on the noteworthy research by John Kretzmann and John L. McKnight at Northwestern University, the institute's website offers excellent resources and tools for building communities by mobilizing neighborhood assets.

Family Re-Union
www.familyreunion.org

This network of policy makers, practitioners and researchers promotes family-centered community building. The website offers proceedings and other materials from 11 conferences featuring thought-leaders and practitioners.

Inventing Civic Solutions: A How-to Guide on Launching and Sustaining Successful Community Programs

The Pew Partnership for Civic Change presents eight case studies of civic efforts to overcome tough issues facing communities across the US. The report analyzes factors for success and offers guidance for others who may want to replicate the initiatives. To access the report click: http://www.pew-partnership.org/whatsnew.html.

Making Connections Reading Room
http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/mc/readingroom/

Making Connections is a ten-year investment by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to improve the outcomes for families and children in tough or isolated neighborhoods. The initiative's reading room offers some excellent FCCB resources, including: *Not Quite Chaos, Residents Engaged in Strengthening Families and Neighborhoods and A Practical Guide to Documenting Influence and Leverage in Making Connections Communities.*

NeighborWorks® America
http://www.nw.org/network/home.asp

Created by Congress, this national nonprofit organization provides financial support, technical assistance and training for community-based

revitalization efforts. Together with more than 235 local NeighborWorks® organizations—including Inglewood Neighborhood Housing Services—and Neighborhood Housing Services of America, NeighborWorks® America promotes affordable homeownership and community development. A key publication is *Community Organizing in NeighborWorks® Organizations*, which reports on a three-year study of 18 NeighborWorks® organizations and their community-organizing efforts (http://www.nw.org/network/neighborworksprogs/leadership/documents/coppReportSpring04.pdf).

Points of Light Foundation
http://www.pointsoflight.org/

Neighboring

With support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Points of Light Foundation developed and promotes neighboring, which is an empowerment and assessment-based approach to volunteer engagement in under-resourced communities. A Neighboring Action Kit is available at http://www.pointsoflight.org/programs/neighboring/default.cfm.

Workplace Volunteer Resources

Employers interested in developing or improving their workplace volunteer programs can access the foundation's many business-focused resources. Highlights include: *Developing Excellence in Workplace Volunteer Programs, Principles of Excellence for Workplace Volunteering* and the *2004 Business Leadership Forum on Workplace Volunteering*.

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