

Consortium
for

**Child Welfare
Studies**

Highlights: 2001-2002 Statewide Evaluation of Community-Based Care

Evaluation of the Florida Department of Children and Families Community-Based Care Initiative in Manatee, Sarasota, Pinellas, and Pasco Counties is a study conducted to evaluate the four counties in which community-based care was operational in fiscal year 2000-2001.

This study is in conjunction with the Consortium for Child Welfare Studies from the Department of Child and Family Studies, Division of State & Local Support at the Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute at the University of South Florida, Tampa.

Highlights Participants

Mary Armstrong, M.S.W.
Eric Brown, M.A.
Neil Jordan, Ph.D.
Mary Ann Kershaw, B.S.
Robert I. Paulson, Ph.D.
Amy C. Vargo, M.A.
Rebecca Whitlock, B.A.
Svetlana Yampolskaya, Ph.D.

Website

www.childwelfare.fmhi.usf.edu

Funding

Florida Department of Children & Families

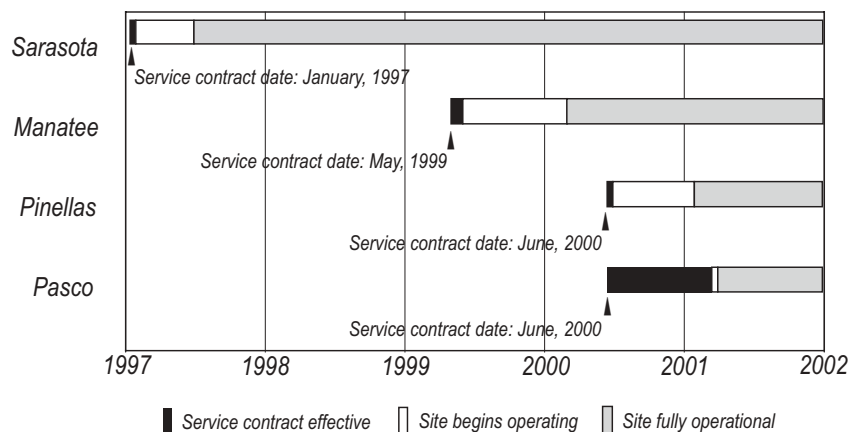


Florida Mental Health Institute
Department of Child & Family Studies
Division of State & Local Support
MHC2413
University of South Florida
13301 Bruce B. Downs Boulevard
Tampa, Florida 33612

Background

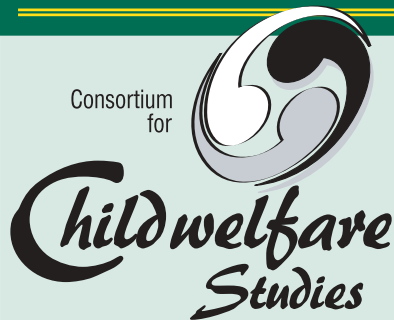
- Ensuring the safety and well being of children in the child welfare system has proven to be a long term and complex problem. Issues at the national level include: 1) fragmented and uncoordinated services; 2) increased cost; 3) more families receiving care, and with more serious problems; 4) limited accountability within state and local agencies; 5) increased public scrutiny of child welfare organizations; and 6) litigation against the child welfare system.
- One of Florida's responses to such problems is the Community-Based Care (CBC) initiative. The intent of CBC is to: 1) improve the safety and well being of children; 2) create community ownership around child welfare issues; 3) shift the responsibility for direct service delivery in child welfare from DCF to newly-created lead agencies; 4) create a more integrated and comprehensive child protective service system, and 5) more flexibly manage available resources.
- The Department of Children and Families (DCF) contracted with the University of South Florida Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute (FMHI) to conduct an evaluation of the four counties in which Community-Based Care (CBC) was operational in FY00-01: Sarasota, Manatee, Pinellas, and Pasco Counties.
- As shown in Figure 1, Sarasota County, whose lead agency was the Sarasota YMCA Children, Youth and Family Services, Inc., was the first to provide services in Florida. Manatee County came under the Sarasota YMCA in 2000. Family Continuity Programs, Inc. (FCP), the lead agency in Pinellas and Pasco Counties, began implementation of CBC in 2000 and completed their effort in 2001.

Figure 1. Community-Based Care: Implementation Timeline



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Consortium Goals

- Advance a research agenda which investigates child welfare and children's mental health issues
- Improve communication among child welfare and children's mental health researchers, providers, and policymakers
- Provide a forum for exploration of research design and methods
- Translate and disseminate research findings to strengthen practices which support families and communities and are responsive to cultural diversity
- Build partnerships based on mutual respect to support a common agenda

Consortium Staff

- Mary I. Armstrong, M.S.W.
- Marion Becker, R.N., Ph.D.
- Ilene R. Berson, Ph.D.
- Hewitt B. Clark, Ph.D.
- Robert Friedman, Ph.D.
- Neil Jordan, Ph.D.
- Mary Ann Kershaw, M.A.
- Bryon Neff, M.S.
- Robert I. Paulson, Ph.D.
- Steve Roggenbaum, M.A.
- Amy Vargo, M.A.
- Svetlana Yampolskaya, Ph.D.

For more information on the Consortium for Child Welfare Studies

Dr. Ilene R. Berson
Louis de la Parte
Florida Mental Health Institute
Department of Child & Family Studies
Division of State & Local Support
MHC2413
University of South Florida
13301 Bruce B. Downs Boulevard
Tampa, Florida 33612

Phone 813-974-7698
Fax 813-974-7376
Email berson@fmhi.usf.edu

Highlights of Findings

Status of CBC Implementation

- Key stakeholders agreed that there was a mutually respectful and flexible planning process during CBC implementation. In addition, there was policy consensus and clear agreement about the purposes of CBC and the role of a lead agency.
- The provision of a readiness assessment process, start-up funds, and a planning year before service delivery began were important to the success of CBC.
- Those interviewed felt there was a shared commitment to CBC on the part of leadership at each level, and those in leadership roles had done as much as possible throughout the implementation process to ensure the success of CBC.
- The need to consider policies and procedures from the point of view of DCF as well as the lead agencies is a consistent source of tension, and is likely to become more problematic as CBC is implemented statewide. The dual objectives of flexibility at the local level (a key principal of CBC) and standardization (to ensure quality and a consistently available level of services across the state) are not always compatible. While CBC was seen as very important by DCF, it is currently only a small part of the agency's overall operation.
- Two different CBC models/approaches emerged. Both allowed for adaptability to local issues and cultural differences, indicating there is more than one way to successfully implement CBC. In Sarasota the lead agency was a large agency with a well-developed infrastructure but with no experience in delivering child welfare services. The Sarasota YMCA saw its role as being a leader and advocate, and contracted out all services. Family Continuity Programs was a small service provider with an infrastructure much less equipped for such a major undertaking, thus much of their initial planning focused on infrastructure development. FCP stressed the importance of integrated services, and maintained leadership over service integration by continuing to directly provide case management.
- Lead agencies evolved a checks and balances approach to network development and had management information systems (MIS) and quality assurance/quality improvement systems that allowed them to identify and solve problems on an ongoing basis.
- The CBC sites have made considerable progress developing the necessary fiscal, MIS, quality improvement (QI), and personnel infrastructure, but there is still room for improvement. Of particular concern are the recruitment, retention, and professionalization of program staff.
- Other major systems changes caused mid-stream adjustments to implementation timetables and strategies. These changes included the addition of Manatee County to the Sarasota site, and the creation of the SunCoast Region and the Community Alliances.

Safety and Well Being of Children

- The table on the following page summarizes key findings on child safety and expenditures. In the area of child safety, CBC counties performed at least as well as counties where CBC was not introduced on all measured outcomes. No differences between CBC and non-CBC counties were found for the outcome indicators of percentage exiting foster care within 11 months and percentage of children returned to relatives after exiting foster care. Moreover, children in CBC counties were less likely than children in non-CBC counties to be re-abused or re-neglected, and there is a higher percentage of children returned to parents or legal guardians in CBC counties compared to non-CBC counties. On the other hand, the overall proportion of children reentering foster care within 11 months after discharge increased slightly for CBC counties and decreased slightly for non-CBC counties over time. However, the difference was not statistically significant.
- There are a number of alternative interpretations for the programmatic outcomes, and it is difficult to piece together a clear picture without having followed the results for individual children. External factors such as changes in information sources, policies, and practices of Protective Investigations and the courts all affect the indicators and their interpretation.

- It is important to recognize the developmental nature of CBC implementation and the large amount of change experienced by the CBC sites, DCF, and the Florida child welfare system. Implementation has been further complicated by a change in data system (to HomeSafenet) and changes in the collection of accounting data. In short, CBC implementation cannot yet be singled out as the cause of the reported outcomes.

Expenditures

- The CBC sites appear to have done as well as non-CBC sites without incurring additional cost to DCF for direct services, but this may be because FCP did not gain responsibility of all children in Pinellas and Pasco Counties until April 2001. Average expenditures in these two counties may have been much lower than in Sarasota and Manatee Counties in FY00-01 because the Department was still paying for many child services in Pinellas and Pasco Counties.
- No full assessment can be made about overall cost-efficiency because the analysis excluded indirect costs of the programs.

Summary of Key Findings

Outcome	Key Findings
1. % exiting foster care within 11 months	Increased for CBC counties (except Pasco) and for non-CBC counties over time
2. % re-entering foster care within 11 months after discharge	Increased slightly for CBC counties (except for Manatee and Sarasota) and decreased for non-CBC counties over time
3. % of recurrence of maltreatment	Increased for all CBC and non-CBC counties over time and lower rates for CBC counties vs. non-CBC counties
4. % returned to parents and legal guardians after exiting foster care	Increased for all CBC counties (except Pasco) and for all non-CBC counties over time
5. % returned to relatives after exiting foster care	Increased for all CBC counties (except Pasco) and for all non-CBC counties over time
6. Average expenditures per child served	Slightly increased in both CBC and non-CBC sites for FY95-96 to FY99-00; decreased in CBC sites and increased in non-CBC sites in FY00-01. Pinellas and Pasco had lower average expenditures than non-CBC sites in FY00-01; Sarasota, Manatee, and non-CBC sites had similar average expenditures in FY00-01
7. Average expenditures per child-day	Same as finding number 6
8. Average expenditures per total child population	Same as finding number 6

Empowerment of Local Communities to Meet the Needs of Children and Families

- The two CBC sites have been able to implement quality assurance plans that ensure appropriate identification of children's needs and evaluate the ongoing performance of the provider network.
- A comprehensive and integrated array of services provided by individuals who are properly qualified and supervised needs to be developed to meet the needs of children and families identified by lead agencies. Respondents suggested that this is occurring on an increasingly consistent basis within the CBC sites, and that services are being provided in new ways, building on traditional child protective services (e.g., parenting, counseling, and placement).

Outstanding Issues and Recommendations

- Outstanding issues as the Department moves into the role of purchaser include: 1) relationships between DCF, lead agencies, and the provider network; 2) staffing; 3) organizational dilemmas; 4) contracting; and 5) a past vs. future orientation. The following recommendations support the plan for a more rapid, statewide expansion of CBC.
- Continue to **develop and strengthen the CBC Leadership Forum**. This forum brings stakeholders throughout the state together on a regular basis to discuss emerging issues and policy changes, share lessons learned, and resolve conflicting interpretations of roles and relationships between DCF, lead agencies, and provider network agencies.

- **MIS issues need to be resolved** quickly. The child welfare MIS must provide a way for lead agencies to electronically submit all data required by state and federal agencies through one data entry source. The system needs the capacity to produce timely reports on outcomes and budgetary information at the county level.
- A **more balanced contract monitoring process** is needed. The executive and legislative branches should work together to identify priorities for the level of specification required by statute for each compliance requirement. Some current statutory requirements could be enforced via assurance, allowing auditors to focus their efforts on more critical contract aspects.
- **Fiscal processes need to be more efficient.** Issues of highest priority include: 1) the transfer of funds from CBC sites with lesser need to those in greater need; 2) the matching of services and expenditures to federal funding sources and categories; and 3) the resolution of cash flow problems. In addition, new lead agencies will need technical assistance to master the federal financing requirements.
- The **process of organizational culture change** at the regional and district office levels needs to accelerate so that the Department can be responsive to the anticipated, more rapid development of CBC sites.
- The current **organizational structure of the Department** needs to be examined as the Department moves into the role of purchaser. Each of its operations (contracting, accountability mechanisms, QI, and MIS) needs to be reviewed and aligned with the functions of a purchasing entity. In addition, the conflicting interpretations of relationships between the lead agency, DCF, and the provider network need to be resolved.

Conclusions

- Many people underestimated the complexity of change that was required for the implementation of CBC. For this reason it is not surprising that Sarasota County, the longest standing CBC county, performed best on the programmatic indicators.
- The CBC counties generally did as well on the outcome indicators as the comparison counties did without incurring additional cost to DCF for direct services. They also successfully changed the service delivery structure. On average, children in CBC care appear to be at least as safe as children were/are under the previous model. Significant progress in implementing a viable system of child welfare services has been made, but there is insufficient evidence at this point to conclude whether the CBC model is more effective (or less effective) than the previous model. Improvement of the organization, coordination, and quality of services is still a work in progress.



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