



Family  
TO  
Family  
TOOLS FOR  
Rebuilding Foster Care

Building  
Community Partnerships,  
Step by Step



# Family **TO** Family

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Rebuilding Foster Care

## Building Community Partnerships, Step by Step

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This document updates the *Building Community Partnerships* tool developed for *Family to Family* sites and community partners in 2002, and may be helpful to others seeking to create and extend community partnerships in child welfare.

## S T R A T E G I C O V E R V I E W

### *Why public child-welfare agencies need “partners” in the communities they serve:*

The work of the Annie E. Casey Foundation is grounded in two fundamental convictions:

- ❑ First, there is no substitute for strong families to ensure that children grow up to be capable adults.
- ❑ Second, the ability of families to raise their children is inextricably linked to conditions in communities where they live. We believe that community-centered responses, such as the **Family to Family** Initiative, protect children, support families, and strengthen neighborhoods in a growing and increasingly complex child welfare system.

Within the **Family to Family** initiative, *Community Partnerships* are one of four linked strategies that have helped to improve outcomes for children coming into foster care. The others are: *Team Decisionmaking*; *Recruitment, Development and Support of Resource Families*; and *Self-Evaluation*.

### *What public child-welfare agencies and their partners in the community seek to achieve:*

All **Family to Family (F2F)** strategies are focused on achievement of nine child-welfare outcomes, or goals:

- 1) To reduce the number and rate of children placed away from their birth families.
- 2) To place more children in their own neighborhoods.
- 3) To reduce the number of children served in institutional and group care, and shift resources to kinship care, family foster care and family-centered services.
- 4) To decrease the lengths of stay of children in placement.
- 5) To increase the number and rate of children reunified with their birth families.
- 6) To decrease the number and rate of children reentering placement.
- 7) To reduce the number of moves children in care experience.
- 8) To increase the number and rate of brothers and sisters placed together.
- 9) To reduce any disparities associated with race/ethnicity, gender or age in each of these outcomes.

### *How community partnerships help in the achievement of these goals*

#### **Nobody understands a neighborhood better than the people who live there.**

Community partners possess critical perspectives on the neighborhoods and cultures from which the children come. They bring needed skills and contacts, and can help to

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*Neighborhood resource families are more culturally and geographically relevant for children, and aid in the transition back home.*

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increase local awareness of issues, such as child abuse and neglect, that lead to out-of-home care.

**Community partners can greatly expand the resources available to children by participating in critical team decision-making meetings (TDM) with social workers and families.**

The larger the number of resources available, the greater the chances that children, their siblings and their birth families can stay together – decreasing the number who come into care unnecessarily. This same TDM process can ensure that children are not being placed disproportionately because of their race, culture or language, age, or gender.

**Community partners can help recruit residents to become resource families.**

Neighborhood resource families are more culturally and geographically relevant for children, and aid in the transition back home. Partners in the community can serve as links between the child welfare system and these potential resource families, encouraging them to become involved.

**Partnerships offer support and neighborhood services to birth families, kinship care providers, and resource families – further improving children’s chances of being placed with their siblings and staying near their schools, places of worship and recreation while in care.**

*F2F* uses the term “Neighborhood Foster Care” to describe the opportunity sought when kinship care is not an option. The neighborhood becomes the hub of activity in which the public child welfare agency social worker introduces the birth family to the resource family, and begins the process of building relationships among all parties. The opportunity for such relationships usually increases the amount of contact between children and their birth families during placement. This kind of partnership helps to decrease the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement, increase planned reunifications, reduce the number of moves experienced by children in care, decrease re-entries into care, and reduce the number of children (especially youth) in institutional and group care.

**Community partnerships help to build trusting relationships between families and the child welfare agencies.**

As public agencies gain residents’ trust, they also gain knowledge about local services, resources and informal support available to help families. Improved coordination with other service and support providers can allow everyone to do what they do best – and to learn from one another.

## K E Y E L E M E N T S

### The Key Elements of Community Partnerships in *Family to Family*

Each of the four *Family to Family* strategies is based on the same shared values, manifest in different ways. The assumptions, goals, and key elements for Community Partnerships are shown below.

#### Key Elements of Community Partnerships

Strategy	Community Partnerships
<b>Values</b>	<p>Every child deserves a family.</p> <p>Every family needs the support of its community.</p> <p>Public child welfare agencies need community partners.</p>
<b>Assumptions</b>	<p>All neighborhoods have strengths; every community has a history, legacy, and celebrations that should be acknowledged and respected.</p> <p>Youth and children want to be with families in their neighborhoods.</p> <p>A culturally sensitive network of family resource care in communities in which children have lived will accelerate reunification or other permanency plans.</p>
<b>Goals</b>	<p>To focus on communities that have been the most affected by child welfare removal practices.</p> <p>To build relationships with these communities and aid the PCWA (public child welfare agency) staff in learning about services and resources in the communities.</p> <p>To establish a strong network of neighborhood-based resource families.</p> <p>To ensure that community representatives are present at every TDM meeting.</p> <p>To identify and enhance neighborhood services and supports that are accessible, affordable and culturally specific for all families who live there.</p> <p>To raise awareness of the overrepresentation of African-American and other children of color in the child welfare system.</p>

*(continued on next page)*

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*Youth and children want to be with families in their neighborhoods.*

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(continued)

<b>Key Elements</b>	<p>Formation of a Community Partnership Work Group to assist the agency leaders in creating, implementing and evaluating this strategy.</p> <p>Participation of community partners in all four <b>F2F</b> strategy work groups, along with the public child welfare agency staff.</p> <p>Sharing of neighborhood-specific data for the nine <b>F2F</b> outcomes with community partners, to initiate meaningful dialogues.</p> <p>Development of a tracking tool to measure, and assess the impact on outcomes, of community partners' attendance at TDM meetings.</p> <p>Ongoing support and empowerment of birth and extended families, leading to reunification or permanence.</p> <p>Ongoing recruitment and support of resource families in the neighborhoods of focus.</p> <p>Reallocation of funds through contracts with grassroots community groups for the implementation of child welfare activities in neighborhoods of focus.</p> <p>Movement of child welfare activities, including family visits, TDMs, PCWA supervisory meetings and family reunification celebrations, into the neighborhoods.</p>
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## E X P L A N A T I O N O F T E R M S

In *Family to Family*, **community partnerships** refers to the relationships between the public child welfare agency (PCWA) and external (or potential) stakeholders around child safety, well being and permanency. These relationships yield a web of shared responsibility and must be nurtured, with participants contributing what they can, when they can, toward the welfare of children. As these relationships grow, the partners, as external stakeholders, assume increased responsibility in caring for children and families, often supported by an increased share of financial resources.

Such partnerships with traditional placement providers, and other public systems such as mental-health services and schools, are critical for PCWAs – providing opportunities for all to commit to a more child-focused, family-strengthening, community-based approach to child welfare. It is important that the PCWA enhance its associations with these traditional partners as it seeks to develop trusting relationships with potential new partners around the issues of child welfare.

But the word **community** can have many meanings, and in the context of **F2F**, is best defined by the family members themselves. It may refer to a geographic concept, such as a neighborhood, census tract or zip code; to an affiliation such as shared faith or ethnicity; or to some other connection that is meaningful to the individuals involved. Thus, the term “community partner” in **F2F** is quite fluid. For example, traditional PCWA colleagues can be seen as community partners. These might include public entities such as mental health organizations, public schools, family maintenance and jobs programs; or private placement providers. Some use “community partners” to refer to representatives of specific programs, such as domestic-violence services, substance-abuse treatment, or mental-health counseling. Others may refer to faith-based services and grassroots supports – whether or not they have offices, meeting space or formal organizational structures.

In **F2F**, we embrace all of these potential partners as having a purpose in the life and well-being of the family. In this document and in our work in **F2F**, however, we place a particular emphasis on *extended family, friends of the family, grassroots neighborhood supports*, and services that families describe as their *personal circles of support*. We have learned that such partners, often overlooked in traditional practice, provide opportunities for support that more formal providers of service cannot. Community partners may include:

- people that family members identify in their network of support and resources,
- community-based mutual aid and self-help groups,
- faith-based organizations and supports,
- individuals with an interest in the welfare of children and families from the neighborhood of focus, and
- other private, nonprofit organizations.

## R E L A T E D T E R M S

In this document, we will use the following definitions of related terms:

**Birth Family.** Also called the biological family. The constellation of individuals who are genetically related to, or who live in the home of, the child or youth.

**Champion.** A leader in the effort to keep staff and constituents focused on their vision and values throughout the change process. Champions effect training, policies, and practice, and build access to the PCWA administrative team, **F2F** steering committee and others with decisionmaking authority. Some have the authority to cross division lines to secure the necessary support and partnership. Champions understand the importance of follow-up and tracking to assure that a system change remains in place until there is an administrative decision to modify the practice. They need not be child protective workers or agency directors; any member of a community – bus driver to beautician – can help to champion improved outcomes for children.

**Collaboratives.** Entities, organizations and individuals who, in **F2F**, agree to partner relative to child welfare issues. Collaboratives have a common interest, and can be neighborhood- or interest-based.

**Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).** In some areas of the country, private nonprofit agencies are called community-based organizations. May be centrally based with outposts in certain neighborhoods, or fully anchored in the neighborhoods, with board members living in the areas they serve.

**Faith-Based Organizations.** Churches, temples, mosques and other religious organizations, which are already offering help to families they know.

**Foster Care Recruitment and Development Staff.** PCWA staff responsible for recruitment, home study, training, licensing and support of resource families and kinship care providers.

**Grassroots People / Natural Helpers.** Activists or other concerned citizens, usually unpaid, who come forward around issues, problems and policies and may be viewed as safe and nurturing friends or even extended family of families in crisis. They are key “community partners” in **F2F**.

**Icebreakers.** Meetings at which birth parents are introduced to resource families to discuss the needs and preferences of children in substitute care, soon after placement. Also known as family team meetings, their purpose is to build relationships between birth and resource parents and to minimize the trauma that children experience upon being removed from their families.

**Neighborhood.** Geographic subdivision of a community, or a network of friends, families, resources, and community leaders who identify with the neighborhood and have a stake in its future.

**Neighborhood Organizations.** Historic entities such as Boys and Girls' Clubs, Girl Scouts of America, Salvation Army, YMCA/YWCA, Masonic and fraternal organizations, and settlement houses, offering services, support and leadership opportunities for youth and adults. These tend to be well respected gathering places for social and educational interaction, with nonprofit status, and are easily accessible without referral.

**Partnership.** A relationship that strives for equity, provides benefits to both parties, implies shared goals and values, and involves shared decisions, information, resources, responsibilities, and credit.

**PCWA.** Public child welfare agency. This is the agency with the legal responsibility to investigate allegations of abuse or neglect of children, to provide services for children and families when allegations are substantiated, to place children who cannot be protected in their own families, and to ensure a permanent family for every child when their intervention ends.

**Private Foster Care Placement Providers.**

Private nonprofit foster family alliances or child-placement agencies, which may license, recruit and supervise resource families, and share board and care and permanency planning responsibilities for children. Historically, these have been key partners with PCWAs.

**Public System.** Government-funded health, mental-health, education, and financial-aid systems, with critical relevance for families in the child welfare system.

**Resource Families.** All licensed or approved out-of-home care givers, from kin to foster and adoptive parents.

**Team Decisionmaking (TDM).** Meeting at which a critical child-placement decision is made, based on risk, safety and permanency. A TDM is held for all decisions involving removals, disruptions in substitute care, and reunification. Parents, social workers, foster parents, relatives, service providers, community/family advocates, and any support person identified by the family can participate. (If consensus cannot be reached, the final decision will be made by the child welfare agency social worker and supervisor.)

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*A TDM is held for all decisions involving removals, disruptions in substitute care, and reunification.*

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## B E N E F I T S   O F C O M M U N I T Y   P A R T N E R S H I P S

PCWAs have found that investing in the building of new and trusting relationships with the communities from which children are most often removed can produce strong positive benefits – not just for children and families but for neighborhoods and child-welfare staff as well.

### ***How Children and Youth Benefit***

- ❑ If children or youth are in danger, community members who have positive and hopeful views of the PCWA will more likely step in, knowing that if the situation is serious and the PCWA is needed; the family will be treated fairly, and the community will have a meaningful role in ensuring access to effective services, supports and resources.
- ❑ If children or youth need to be placed, the involvement of their communities can ensure they are placed in close proximity to familiar schools, places of worship and recreation, near extended family and friends – all of which can lessen the trauma of out-of-home care.
- ❑ Youth usually want to be in their own neighborhoods, because neighbors often constitute their extended family. When they run from foster homes or detention, they usually can be found in those neighborhoods. If partnerships exist, the PCWA can work with the youth's home community to find a safe and supportive environment for him/her there.

### ***How Birth and Resource Families Benefit***

- ❑ Neighborhood stakeholders can often recruit family advocates to partner with the PCWA, supporting birth parents with whom they may already have relationships.
- ❑ Community partnerships can nurture positive relationships between the birth parents of children in care, and caregivers. Birth parents often gain a supportive “coach” in their struggles to become stronger parents to their children.
- ❑ Community-based family visitation, because it occurs closer to birth families' homes, permits more visits in a less restrictive environment, often leading to speedier reunification.
- ❑ When supported by their communities, resource families may continue the relationship with a child long after reunification and case closing, easing the pain of saying goodbye.

### ***How Neighborhoods Benefit***

- ❑ As neighborhoods become aware that they have high referral and placement rates (because the PCWA is sharing such data) they often mobilize to respond to child welfare crises, and promote the safety, well being and permanence of all their children, more effectively.

**Field Notes:**  
**Establishing Stability If Family Preservation Efforts Fail**

*In Cleveland, Ohio, where neighborhood foster care contributed to an increase in adoptions, the change began with the sharing of data that showed (the rate) at which children were being removed from their communities. One of the things that happened as a result was that the community began to design programs and services to keep children with their families. That in turn led them to ask, "What about the children who do go into care – what happens to them?"*

*The public agency began working with the community to license residents to become resource families so that children could stay in their communities. "One thing led to another, and before we knew it," a former staff member said, "visitation services were also being provided by the community."*

*Growing out of joint efforts to help birth and foster parents in Glenville, a Cleveland neighborhood, these visitations made clear which parents were not participating. Community staff would sit with the children of the no-shows – "and little by little, they began to identify with the child who didn't get a visit," the worker said.*

*In cases where the Department of Children and Family Services moved to sever parental rights, the community's response was, "if the public agency is going to sever parental rights, we'd like our foster parents to be the first people you ask about becoming adoptive parents," and they encouraged others to consider adoption.*

*"Had the department approached the community initially with the idea of adopting, I think they would have been resistant," one community member said. "Instead, they saw for themselves what children go through, waiting for their parents to come visit them, which made them much more concerned and quick to respond to children who needed permanency."*

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*As community partners and agency staff get to know one another, opportunities to share resources become apparent.*

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- ❑ As community partners and agency staff get to know one another, opportunities to share resources become apparent. Neighborhoods benefit from an influx of new contractual relationships with agencies, enhancing their communities.
- ❑ Building trusting relationships with the PCWA allows for increasing awareness and understanding of cultural contexts on both sides, to the benefit of families and communities.

**How Child Welfare Staff Benefit**

- ❑ Child welfare staff gain access to new resources, allowing for stronger case management and more effective social work practice; cases can be resolved earlier.
- ❑ Child protective workers close cases with more confidence, knowing that community resources will be there if the family experiences stress in the future.
- ❑ When out-of-home care decisions are made, social workers make better placement choices with relatives or

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*Child protective workers close cases with more confidence, knowing that community resources will be there if the family experiences stress in the future.*

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family foster care; neighborhood support increases the children's chances of staying in the community.

- ❑ Community members bring gifts and life skills too numerous to mention – among them, resilience, knowledge of how to make the most out of limited resources, and 24-hour-a-day concern for the children living among them.
- ❑ Geographical (neighborhood) assignment of cases helps PCWA staff at many **F2F** sites to form and strengthen personal relationships with residents and local service providers, and makes it easier to plan and schedule meetings, reducing paperwork and workloads.

- ❑ Many social workers also report experiencing less stress because they are not working in isolation, telling us that personal relationships with community members deepen and enhance their work in meaningful ways.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND F2F STRATEGIES

Community partnerships are integral to all four **F2F** strategies – inextricably linked, with successful outcomes dependent on the simultaneous implementation of all four: Community representatives provide *team decisionmaking meetings* with relevant information about the neighborhoods and cultures in which children live. They help to *recruit, develop and support resource families* in neighborhoods from which children come. And they analyze *self-evaluation data*, provide crucial feedback on cultural and neighborhood factors and agency practices that affect child safety and well being.

### **Team Decisionmaking**

Participation by a community representative is key. People from a child's community and culture often know more about the neighborhood, the options for support, and the contributing factors to harm, than child welfare workers. They may be more able to pull in informal supports to keep children safe. And TDM provides an opportunity for the PCWA to demonstrate, in a very public and visible way, its commitment to community partnership.

The idea is to develop an individualized intervention plan that is supported by the group, in which the community can share responsibility for keeping children safe. Communication improves, making the process better understood. This increases the probability that children are removed from their birth families only when really necessary, changing the public's perception of the child welfare agency and its representatives as "baby snatchers" or out-of-touch bureaucrats. The greater the community involvement in the process, the fairer and more family-friendly it is.

### **Recruitment, Development and Support of Resource Families**

Partners assist child welfare or private placement agency staff to recruit, license, and maintain resource families in communities, building community strength. Many people are surprised at the idea of having resource families in the neighborhoods from which children and youth are referred. Traditionally, we have thought about getting children and youth away from "bad" families and neighborhoods. When we remove children from those connections, however, we may also remove them from their cultures, their school, their friends, their history and their ability to bond with others in our society. Rather, we should do everything we can to preserve the precious aspects of the lives of children and youth while protecting them from unacceptable risks.

### **Recruitment**

Community members can play key roles in locating and supporting appropriate caretaker relatives or other resource families. They are the best recruiters in their own neighborhoods and communities; they know their streets, businesses, meeting halls, faith-based gatherings, and so forth. They also can suggest language for recruitment materials to fit the cultural groups targeted for recruitment.

### **The Care and Nurturing of TDM Community Reps: A Guide for PCWA Staff**

1. Invite a community representative to all TDM meetings, especially when considering the removal of a child from the birth family.
2. This person, who may be identified in a joint effort by your community partnership and TDM work groups, can help you to forge new relationships with members of communities from which children are often removed.
3. The representative agrees to attend TDM meetings, especially involving the possible removal of a child from the birth family, subject to the permission of the parents.
4. Provide an orientation to TDM, and basic training on the role and responsibilities of the child welfare system, prior to the representative's first meeting. (Training of public agency staff by the community is also recommended.)
5. This person is invited by the agency, to ensure that every family has a natural ally at the TDM table, in addition to anybody participating at the family's request.

*The TDM community representative may assume one or more of the following roles at the meeting:*

- To be a natural ally, and potential advocate, for the birth parents;
- To represent the birth family's "community" (neighborhood, community of faith, ethnicity or other natural connection), a supportive role that can continue throughout the involvement with the system and beyond;
- To help identify resources which might support the family, especially in its home community;
- To make the birth family feel as comfortable as possible;
- To help the agency's staff and partners better understand the family's community of origin, especially its strengths;
- To help the family in understanding the agency's concerns in relation to safety and risk;
- To fully participate in the meeting, and particularly to share ideas for ensuring the child(ren)'s safety while supporting the family.

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*Some communities co-host resource family support groups with PCWA and private provider staff.*

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### **Training, Home Study, and Licensing Support**

Resource family training, both pre-service and ongoing, is best held in community settings so that participants can easily attend. Once potential resource families have begun the process of becoming licensed, community members can work with licensing staff to identify individual barriers and make plans to overcome them.

Typical barriers for potential foster families are the need for transportation to training sessions, inability to translate and fill out forms, and not knowing where to bring their concerns, or where to find people who can answer their questions. During the home study process, community partners can assist with house repair, supplies, and introductions to other foster parents. Some communities co-host resource family support groups with PCWA and private provider staff.



## Placement

Once a resource family is licensed, or a kinship family approved, community partners can work with both families to develop a plan of support; this is especially important when the child is the first the foster family has cared for.

- ❑ PCWA and community partners can support the building of relationships through “Icebreakers,” and with offers of meeting space, resources and community activities for resource and birth families.
- ❑ Having resource families in a child’s home neighborhood can decrease the disruption in a child’s life if placement is necessary. They allow a child to maintain ties with parents and siblings, to remain in his or her own school, and to stay connected to friends. They also allow continuity with other community resources the family uses. It is more likely that a culturally similar home will be found for the child here, and there is the added bonus of putting economic resources into at-risk neighborhoods.
- ❑ Neighborhood resource families can provide a less disruptive option for foster care when the need arises – shortening foster care stays by allowing for more frequent visits, which correlate with quicker reunification.

## Self-Evaluation

Community partners are critical to the **Family to Family** Self-Evaluation team, which collects data and tracks processes in the development of family support efforts. Community members should be asked to help set goals, monitor overall progress, analyze data, and develop new strategies when goals are not being met. The Self-Evaluation team often tracks benchmarks toward the **F2F** outcomes, such as community participation in TDMs, and recruitment, development and support of resource families.

- ❑ As the PCWA begins to reach out to communities in search of partnership, the sharing of data reflecting the community’s experience with child welfare can be a great “hook.” Discussion of the nine **Family to Family** outcomes provides opportunities for community engagement, allowing for early consensus on goals and focus. It is not uncommon in the early stages of partnership for the community to advocate for issues of concern that do not overlap with child welfare goals; however, the **Family to Family** initiative is clearly focused on the achievement of specific goals, reflecting improved outcomes for children and families who are involved (or at risk of involvement) with the PCWA. Though senior recreation, community signage, and other issues may be important to a neighborhood, they are typically not directly related to child welfare and are not the focus of **F2F**. PCWAs, always under-resourced to meet even their legally required duties, are usually unable to offer partnership toward outcomes outside the scope of their control and responsibility as part of the **F2F** effort, and must be explicit about that fact in early discussions.
- ❑ When the PCWA agrees to share data, the community is made aware of reports of child abuse and neglect, removal and placements. The community learns that when children are placed outside the community, valuable resources leave with the child. Other data relating to community-specific progress on **F2F** outcomes should be shared as it becomes available, especially with regard to the number of resource families within the community.

See “Some Considerations Regarding Community Partnerships and Self-Evaluation” referenced as Attachment “A” at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

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*Having resource families in a child’s home neighborhood can decrease the disruption in a child’s life if placement is necessary.*

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## **BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS, STEP BY STEP**

For some public child welfare agencies, the idea of developing new community partnerships is daunting. The important thing is take it in small steps, and give everyone full credit for their efforts at each step. There is no one “right” way. Try the parts that make sense; if they work, keep going in that direction. If they don't work, try a different strategy.

In this document, we present a phased-in approach to effective partnering. This is not a template for all **F2F** sites, which will have different partners, political leadership and social issues at different times. But it does provide a framework for a step-by-step transition toward enhanced community partnerships, along with some practical suggestions for engaging residents, identifying local leaders, and maintaining the commitment to **F2F** values over time. You may wish to adapt all or some of these suggestions, or experiment with others.

See “An Overview for Self-Assessment of Building Community Partnerships,” and “Possible Benchmarks in Phases of the Development of Community Partnerships” referenced as Appendices “B” and “C” at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

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### **P H A S E   O N E**

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#### **Develop an Infrastructure within the PCWA for Community Partnerships**

*In this stage, agency leaders make a firm public commitment to community partnerships; educate managers and staff about goals; inform and include existing partners; select priority neighborhoods; hire a **Family to Family** coordinator; form a community partnership work group (as well as work groups for **F2F**'s other core strategies); and clarify messages to present to the staff, existing partners and potential community partners.*

#### **The Challenge**

Most public child welfare agencies cannot enter into clear community partnerships without making some cultural and structural changes. Some resistance is to be expected between the internal preparations and the initial outreach to a wide range of partners. The agency must communicate persuasively with staff, existing partners and contract providers about the expected changes. At the same time, it should have a realistic expectation of some mistrust or even open hostility as it seeks new partners in targeted communities.

#### **What Leaders Must Do**

Agency leaders will reflect on **F2F** materials and talk with their technical assistance team and managers, to fully understand why partnerships with communities from which the children come are critical to better child welfare outcomes. Leaders will make this clear to their managers, to avoid staff perception of conflict from the top. The leadership needs to persuade others that the formation of community

partnerships is a value and priority for the organization. The agency management will develop a strategy for engaging and preparing all staff in all departments in planning. During the transition, leaders should take personal responsibility for talking with staff.

It is likely that existing agency policies, protocols, and practices will need adjustment if a community partnership focus for the work of the PCWA is adopted. Leaders must initiate a careful examination of current practice in order to identify examples of

places where the PCWA's activities may be in conflict with a community approach. The result may be a movement toward neighborhood-based service contracts, enhanced geographic staff assignment, or other adjustments to practice.

- ❑ Inclusion is the key. Leaders should inform the agency board, political leaders, key community stakeholders and union representatives early on of the **F2F** initiative. Advocate with state and local government for support.

### **Field Notes: Leadership**

*In one child welfare agency, a leader's courage in trying something unorthodox helped to secure more neighborhood participation and resources. According to a former staffer, "When we began to encourage communities to apply for grants, the language we used in the request for proposals helped to steer these contracts to grassroots community organizations...so that it was clear that we wanted grassroots communities to apply."*

*The challenge was to keep from offending private providers. "A less adept leader might have been intimidated by the holders of existing contracts, who typically were the first to apply for additional dollars. Our leadership told the private providers, "No, we are not going to pay you twice to do the same thing...we are already giving you recruitment dollars and boarding care dollars. This is a matter of needing to **engage the community's resources in the neighborhoods from which children are coming into care**, which is a part of the vision of **Family to Family**."*

### **Leadership ideas from other F2F sites:**

In order to promote the benefits of community partnerships and win staff support, leaders can:

- ❑ create email and newsletter announcements of **F2F** events;
- ❑ host Directors' Brown Bag Lunch discussions to hear staff questions and concerns;
- ❑ direct staff to the **Family to Family** website so that they can do individual research on community partnerships;
- ❑ post messages in the public child welfare agency stressing the importance of community partnerships;
- ❑ encourage staff to participate in community forums (a key activity in later Phases), and other community gatherings; and
- ❑ work closely with staff to develop explicit descriptions of how job expectations may change as new partnerships evolve; this will allay fears and enlist potential champions for the work.

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*The agency management will develop a strategy for engaging and preparing all staff in all departments in planning.*

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*Decide which and how many neighborhoods can be addressed at once, and which will be phased in over time.*

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## **Implementation**

**Identify internal champions.** Leaders should look for potential champions among their staffs who know the residents of targeted communities and are aware of any historical mistrust between the agency and community members, to talk up community partnerships. The best “point people” are charismatic and enthusiastic residents of the neighborhood of focus, who also take pride in the work of their employer, the PCWA. Leaders should look for people who are open to new ideas because it will take more champions than just a few.

**Include all staff.** Inside the PCWA, leaders must engage staff personally, as implementation begins. Some examples of ways to do this include listing all scheduled **Family to Family** meetings and asking each manager to designate some staff to participate in the work groups. Managers might conduct focus groups within their departments about anticipated changes in outcomes, and how they think the partnership work can impact these changes. These discussions will prepare workers to have frank and honest discussions about what is working well and what is most damaging to children and their families in child welfare. In addition, managers will want to help staff envision, in very concrete ways, how their jobs may change when there is a focus on community partnerships. Emphasize the promise of improved job satisfaction as well as better outcomes for families.

**Hire a Family to Family coordinator.** Ideally, each site hires a **Family to Family** coordinator to shepherd all aspects of the **F2F** implementation, and provide training for others, furnishing a job description that outlines the goals, objectives and activities for this position. The best candidate is committed, engaging, open to new ideas, and values the community as well as the PCWA – and

may be drawn from the community or from within the agency. Training and supervision of the individual will be critical to his or her success.

See “An Example of a **Family to Family** Coordinator Job Description,” referenced as Appendix “D” at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

### **Identify priority neighborhoods.**

Coordinate closely with the Self-Evaluation work group to determine which neighborhoods have the most children and youth in out-of-home placement. Decide which and how many neighborhoods can be addressed at once, and which will be phased in over time. (Ultimately the PCWA seeks to establish new partnerships with all communities it serves.) With help from the staff, clarify names, geographical boundaries, zip codes or social systems for these neighborhoods. Identify current resource families, as well as other licensing agencies and service providers, in the priority neighborhood. Then, compile data into straightforward summaries for use in discussions with the staff and potential new partners. Mapping software might be used to geographically depict these data. Start with simple data such as:

- ❑ Characteristics (i.e. race, age, gender) of children who are entering placement from the neighborhood;
- ❑ Numbers and percentages of children who are placed with relatives, in foster homes, or in group care; and
- ❑ Numbers and percentages of children who are placed outside of the neighborhood.

(If neighborhood-specific outcome data are not available, countywide data can be used to get started. In some systems, the first step may be to focus on how many children are placed out of county or out of state.)

**In the Self-Evaluation Work Group, determine how success will be measured and how data will be analyzed**, within the Community Partnerships Work Group and in terms of the nine **Family to Family** outcomes.

**Develop a Community Partnerships Work Group.** Agency leaders will formally establish a Community Partnerships (CP) Work Group, to include key staff and current community partners. Its purpose will be to support the leadership's overall organizing vision, values, goals and strategic plans in relation to community partnerships. It will meet regularly to explore ways to meet its goals. The group initially might seek no more than 10 to 12 members with the expectation that new members will join as the effort evolves. If more people want to be involved they may be assigned to task groups that operate on an ad hoc basis and report their activities to the workgroup.

An early task of the Community Partnerships Work Group may be to use the priority neighborhood data to help design community forums for the targeted areas. These forums (which are described more fully in Phase 2) can provide the foundation for future partnerships, as the PCWA and the neighborhood each learn more about the other, and make new acquaintances. The CP Work Group will inform and seek to involve other **F2F** work groups in these forums and in all community activities.

An example of the way a community partnership might look in its more mature state is discussed in the description of Phase V in this document.

See "A Way for All Workgroups to Work Together," referenced as Appendix E at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

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*The CP Work Group will inform and seek to involve other F2F work groups in these forums and in all community activities.*

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#### **Field Notes:**

##### **Establishing Community Partnership Work Groups**

*Many agencies find it difficult to develop diverse community representation when establishing their community partnership workgroups. Often the workgroups are small and heavy with participation from child welfare staff, versus community representatives. Many agencies overcome this challenge by using a retreat format to engage new partners, similar to that employed at a longtime county **Family to Family** site. As a part of its first-year community workgroup development, it conducted a two-day conference developed in collaboration with community members and faith-based organizations.*

*In this conference, community representatives looked at neighborhood data and prioritized child welfare-related areas that they wanted to impact. They picked three, developed an action plan, and made commitments as to how they would participate.*

*The retreat process enabled the agency to establish community buy-in – as demonstrated by the community's willingness to volunteer and participate in planning. The goals and strategic plan that the public agency and community developed were adopted by existing neighborhood associations or collaboratives of community partners, both traditional and non-traditional, as their working strategic plans for that year. Each year since the retreat, these groups have revisited and updated their goals and plans, as the data revealed new areas for focus.*

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*The emphasis is on building honest dialogue that can grow into trust in preparation for the work ahead.*

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### **Phase One Summary:**

At the completion of Phase One, the PCWA should have:

- ❑ Clarified its mission, goals and outcomes for child welfare, reflecting a child-focused, family-centered, community-based practice;
- ❑ Made managers and staff aware of the direction of the agency;
- ❑ Distributed and talked about **F2F** outcomes, prepared a **F2F** database, notified PCWA staff, and identified foster parents from the prioritized community;
- ❑ Begun development of a contract with community entities to support community-based child welfare practice;

- ❑ Initiated contacts and meetings by the PCWA leader with the community;
- ❑ Distributed **F2F** outcomes and county-wide data to existing partners (placement and service providers, etc.) and made them aware of the agency's **F2F** commitment.

The steps described are not set in stone but are suggestions for assessing a site's current status and moving incrementally, to minimize the chances of staff being overwhelmed.

Completion of the steps in Phase One will enable the PCWA to respond productively to increased community involvement, staff participation, and inclusion of existing partners in **F2F** implementation.

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## **P H A S E   T W O**

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### **Reaching Out**

*In this phase, the PCWA begins a concerted effort to: reach out to new partners, inform existing partners of plans, become acquainted with priority neighborhoods, meet neighborhood people one-on-one or in small groups, and set up community forums where it can start to get community input. The emphasis is on building honest dialogue that can grow into trust in preparation for the work ahead.*

#### **The Challenge**

The dilemma in Phase Two is how to balance development of the public child welfare agency's own new message and goals with input from the community. It is essential to listen to suggestions from the community and respond to its concerns, but partnerships can develop best when the PCWA clarifies its boundaries around child welfare goals, as defined by statutory and administrative guidelines and reflected in the **Family to Family** principles and nine outcomes.

#### **What Leaders Must Do**

PCWA leaders, along with the **F2F** coordinator, will make initial contact with new key stakeholders (identified by staff and existing partners in Phase I) to introduce the concepts of **Family to Family** and invite their participation. This may be a difficult conversation for the agency leader and community, because of past practices that may have negatively impacted community perceptions of the PCWA. This past should be acknowledged and the belief introduced that child welfare cannot proceed independently of the family's community. Champions may be asked to serve as links to the community and assist with initial conversations. Share data collected in Phase One with all parties and begin discussions around the common interests of child welfare and the experiences of children and families.



### **Leadership Suggestions from Other Sites**

- ❑ The PCWA staff and other stakeholders, such as existing resource parents and partners, receive and review the data being shared with the community, in order to clearly connect the proposed community partnership work to desired outcome changes.
- ❑ Instead of having different meetings for each stakeholder group, invite some of each to be a part of neighborhood gatherings.
- ❑ Encourage existing and potential community partners to visit the PCWA to see how it operates.
- ❑ Ask partners in the community to host a visit by PCWA staff to learn about neighborhood assets and meet some of its leaders.
- ❑ When people are asked to come to meetings that are relatively difficult for them to get to, consider reimbursement for travel and childcare costs.

See “Helpful Hints for Dealing with Sensitive Issues,” referenced as Appendix F at the end of this document and available on the *Family to Family* website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

### **Implementation**

**The Community Partnership Work Group sets an agenda and a meeting schedule.** CP work group members visit the prioritized neighborhood and, within a couple of months, begin to hold their meetings in spaces there, in order to create a consistent place for PCWA workers to meet and greet new partners. They make sure that people are greeted with friendliness, and are respectful of others’ time. Food and a welcoming spirit are important in neighborhoods. Expect and allow time for introductions and potentially long personal stories, but

provide clear messages regarding the agency mission, goals and challenges.

- ❑ The CP work group talks with the other **F2F** core strategy work groups to determine what activities the PCWA and new potential partners can embark upon together. They learn what opportunities exist in the PCWA for community people to receive training, join work groups or observe Team Decisionmaking meetings, if they have begun.
- ❑ CP workgroup members and other PCWA staff can highlight specific outcomes that they wish to target with their community partners. For example, if the outcome data show that teenagers entering placement are usually placed in group homes, that can lead to a discussion with the community partners on how to work on targeted foster home recruitment for older youth.

See “Identifying Existing Community Partners,” referenced as Appendix G at the end of this document and available on the *Family to Family* website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

**Expand the community partnership work group.** Most Community Partnership Work Groups begin with more staff than community members. In Phase Two, seek to achieve a goal of half staff and half community members. Agency staff begin to share leadership with community members in the workgroup; however, the bulk of the tasks will be carried out by the PCWA work group members. CP work group members keep minutes of all meetings, and written records of challenges and obstacles encountered, as well as the ways they address or overcome them. All this is shared with the PCWA leadership and management team, so that staff can be supported in incorporating those activities into their work plans.

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*Encourage existing and potential community partners to visit the PCWA to see how it operates.*

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*Key new partners will be determined by the cultural and social issues most prevalent in each neighborhood.*

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- ❑ In Phase Two, all **F2F** workgroups should begin to invite potential partners to informal one-on-one and small group meetings, as well as to community forums related to priority neighborhoods. Many sites maintain a notebook or scrapbook, which can later be used as a record of the partnership history.

**Prepare the staff to approach neighborhoods.** The **F2F** coordinator helps to spread the **F2F** message throughout the PCWA. This individual can help the staff to recognize a need to increase familiarity with priority neighborhoods, and the resources in those neighborhoods which can improve outcomes for children and families. In some sites, staff are already familiar with and embedded in priority neighborhoods. In others, only workers who remove children have spent much time there, and that time has been spent in a painful manner. It may be necessary to create opportunities for staff to visit and learn about communities in new ways, in order to break through assumptions and in some cases, fears.

- ❑ In some of the larger **Family to Family** sites, public child welfare agencies contract with private agencies to manage child abuse and neglect case responsibilities. Here, the public agency encourages its partners on the private side to become more familiar with priority neighborhoods. Unfortunately this may add another layer of complexity to the task of developing trust among the partners.
- ❑ In sites which have moved to a privatized system for child welfare services, special attention must be paid to the partnership between PCWA and its contracted providers, to ensure that the values and strategies of **F2F** are promoted by contractors, and that they are reflected

in performance measures. Private partners in such systems must be fully engaged in all aspects of community partnership work, including developing their own relationships with neighborhood organizations and other key community partners.

- ❑ For staff in public or private agencies, it is helpful to ask: What does the neighborhood look like? What does it feel like? How does it work? Once staff get out and spend time where people are living, they should keep their minds and their ears open, and listen, listen, listen. Some of the ways management can help this process are to hold child-welfare meetings in a neighborhood location, and to start with a blank slate; in other words, with few assumptions about the potential new partners they are meeting.
- ❑ Staff will want to talk about shared values, possibly repeating and writing down what is said to make certain everyone understands. Key new partners will be determined by the cultural and social issues most prevalent in each neighborhood.

*Outreach ideas from other F2F Sites:*

Managers provide opportunities for staff to:

- ❑ take a drive around the neighborhoods of focus,
- ❑ eat lunch in them,
- ❑ attend community and cultural events, and
- ❑ become involved in other community activities.

Management must not only support these ideas, but help staff incorporate them into their work expectations.



**Organize community forums.** Organization is key in initial and ongoing community meetings. Ideally, public agency staff and community members will share in the planning, but at first it may fall to the staff to handle all the details. It's worth it. The climate, comfort, and openness of the meeting will depend heavily upon a clear agenda and effective use of time.

❑ **Hold Community Forums in the target neighborhoods.** Identify a community partner that is willing to help in the planning of each event. The forums' objectives should include: sharing the target data for this community, introducing the vision for agency change, and beginning to enlist new partners for the hard work of system reform. Forums should be advertised as community events and hosted by the community partner. It is essential to have the child welfare agency leader take part. In many communities, the PCWA must overcome years of bad blood with the neighborhoods from which it has removed so many children. It is often necessary to acknowledge that you are asking them to take a leap of faith by joining with you in a new way; and to demonstrate your commitment to earning their trust by visibly doing your work in new and different ways – for example by including the community in TDMs for every placement decision, and recruiting families in the target neighborhoods.

❑ **Designate a recorder to keep track of the discussion, and to write down questions, concerns, and agreements.** Allow time for feedback. A good facilitator can help coach people to be more specific with their ideas and suggestions. Such recorded materials can evolve into a plan that is comprehensible to all – community members, service providers and potential funders.

❑ **Produce a “How Can I Help?” sign-up tool that includes an evaluation of the event.**

This tool should allow attendees to choose how they would like to participate in planned activities, and to suggest other potential neighborhood partners from among friends and neighbors who did not attend. It should include a wide array of opportunities for community involvement in child welfare, such as service and support to biological families in crisis, recruitment of foster and adoptive families, participation in TDMs, and/or the provision of space for neighborhood/child welfare activities.

❑ **Follow-up is essential.** The PCWA staff and community hosts should meet immediately after the forum to debrief. They will decide if objectives were met, discuss next steps and assign follow-up tasks, to assure that momentum is not lost. Another community gathering should be held within the next few months, with an agenda clearly focused on identified child welfare objectives.

See “Building the Agenda Together,” and “Yes, I Want to Help Children and Youth in My Neighborhood!”, referenced as Appendix “H” and “I” at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

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*Organization is key in initial and ongoing community meetings.*

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*Plans that are developed at each site, and strategies for implementation, will be unique.*

**Field Notes:**

**Holding Community Forums in Target Neighborhoods**

Community forums are often utilized by new **Family to Family** sites in the early stages of partnership building. Forums are a good way to introduce the community to the public agency's issues and goals, and alert the community to the issues facing children in their neighborhoods.

According to one child welfare expert, it is important to bring to these early neighborhood meetings not just data people and administrators but also child welfare staff, so that you actually have social workers and supervisors sitting in the audience. This will allow them to brainstorm together about following up on matters discussed during the forum.

It is also important to provide a method for follow-up and gathering feedback from the group.

In one California **Family to Family** site, participants have actually written into their county-wide plan that every regional office will have a series of community forums during the year. They are learning the importance of debriefing and then getting back to the community.

In more seasoned sites that have been working with the community for a while, community forums are used as a way to get new people on board while continuing to build on ongoing activities.

**A few things to keep in mind when facilitating new community partnership meetings:**

- ❑ Each community is different, and each public agency is different. Plans that are developed at each site, and strategies for implementation, will be unique. As people proceed to full implementation of community partnerships in **Family to Family**, key public agency staff will continue to support all participants in implementing their action plans, using the variety of resources they have identified and helped to mobilize. When a community member has a burning issue outside those goals, an agency employee should hear that person out, either after the formal presentation, or at another time, and respectfully help him or her to find the right venue for expressing that concern and getting it addressed.
- ❑ Sometimes the public child welfare agency and community members are well organized, and clear about what needs to happen in relation to **Family to Family**. Often, however, they are somewhat confused and will welcome help in developing a strategic plan. Plans should involve removing barriers to self-help, enhancing neighbors' ability to help themselves and others, and improving linkages with service providers. There should also be ongoing self-evaluation to allow groups and their funders to assess progress in achieving child welfare outcomes they have defined as desirable.
- ❑ Community folks may or may not partner with the PCWA initially. It takes time to build trust. Continue to create more opportunities for the community to hear the message again and again. Don't get discouraged.

### **Phase Two Summary:**

In this phase, the task was to create a foundation for the PCWA-community relationship, with a focus on child safety and well being, resource development, and community availability and participation in child welfare work.

By the end of Phase Two, activities or plans are underway to:

- ❑ identify existing local services for families and list them in a resource manual,

- ❑ distribute foster care recruitment materials,
- ❑ seek neighborhood support for local resource families,
- ❑ arrange social worker visits to the community and community visits to the PCWA to deepen mutual understanding,
- ❑ solicit community participation in all strategy work groups, and
- ❑ retool private foster care placement provider systems to respond to the demand for community-based practice.

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## **P H A S E   T H R E E**

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### **Joining Together**

*In Phase Three, PCWA community partnership work groups have identified and begun to systematically define activities that grassroots are already doing, or are interested in doing, to help reach **Family to Family** goals. Roles of placement providers are clarified, with benchmarks to close shelters and lessen congregate care; and less restrictive placement policies specify kinship, neighborhood placement, and family foster care as best for children.*

*Increasing reunification and tackling issues of overrepresentation are prioritized. Honest, straightforward discussions take place consistently between community and PCWA staff. Partnership funds have been allocated for community contracts. The partnership is reflected in PCWA policy, and in neighborhood agreements and memoranda of understanding. The culture, race and customs of all families are respected and ingrained in all stakeholders' strategic plans.*

### **The Challenge**

In this phase, the challenge is to sustain motivation and commitment during a demanding period for staff, community and resource families. In Phase Three, the agency works to create an atmosphere of hope and enthusiasm for all. Explore different methods of sharing success stories and

opportunities for evaluation of child welfare outcomes. Maintain a receptive posture in listening to community input while championing a "We're all in this together" message.

The shifting of some financial resources to new community groups is likely to provoke concerns from large, traditional partners. Potential and past partners may drift in and out of discussions during this phase as they wait to see if the initiative will really be implemented, or will "pass," like many others. It is critical at this point to have the agency's internal infrastructure in place to continue to move the work and partnerships forward, and at the same time create opportunities for all stakeholders to learn from one another.

### **What Leaders Must Do**

PCWA Leadership hosts a quarterly "State of the Agency" address or all-staff meeting, with the help of managers and the **F2F** coordinator, for staff, partners and other stakeholders, based on the nine **F2F** outcomes and anticipated improvements. The leader sets the tone for the expectation of continued improvement and celebrates the role of all involved.

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*In Phase Three, the agency works to create an atmosphere of hope and enthusiasm for all.*

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*Shelter and group care will be targeted to decrease as neighborhood family foster homes increase.*

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During this phase, PCWA staff, community partners, private placement providers, resource families and other stakeholders will want to know how their work is impacting the overall outcomes.

- **Help Managers Become Change Agents.** *It sends a powerful message to assign* all managers to community groups, to model reaching out for the rest of the staff. If supervisors and social workers attend community and neighborhood job or health fairs, celebrations and other special events, community issues and concerns related to child welfare will continue to be identified. As conflicts arise, agency staff and community partners will design and begin to practice strategies for their resolution, including joint training opportunities. If staff responsibilities are organized geographically, these tasks are much more easily accomplished.

See “Geographic Assignment of Cases,” referenced as Appendix J at the end of this document and available on the *Family to Family* website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

### **Implementation**

**Manage the data collection and analysis in the work groups.** The Community Partnership and Self-Evaluation Work Groups will assess the internal capacity to collect and use data. Ask questions such as: *Are the data in accessible formats? When is it possible to modify data collection systems?* You may need to collect additional information to address issues and questions raised at the forum and community gatherings. Ask all stakeholders what additional data they would be interested in collecting. Encourage each stakeholder to use the data to set a challenging yet attainable goal for itself. The **F2F** coordinator and managers should continue to coach all child welfare staff to be able to talk about changes in outcomes, and how they think

the partnership work is impacting these changes. In this way, workers also learn how to emphasize progress and point out challenges when talking with community partners.

**Make team decisionmaking meetings more accessible.** TDM Workgroup members should design a PWCA protocol for notifying and encouraging community representatives to participate. Community partners should design a process to account for their attendance at TDMs. The Community Partnership Work Group can maintain copies of agreements, processes and protocols developed to support the TDM strategy. Tracking tools to record the frequency and outcomes of meetings that have had community participation should be in place. The CP work group will develop a community resource guide that can help the PCWA staff and community representatives to bring needed resources to the TDM table. The work group will begin scheduling TDMs in the communities, with consideration for the safety, comfort and logistics of families and other attendees.

**Community members should assist in the recruitment, development and support of resource families.** The RDS and CP work groups will develop a plan for public and private recruitment staff to be coached and supervised in their efforts to help community partners recruit residents to become resource parents. The plan will utilize **F2F** outcomes and the least restrictive placement protocols, to increase the numbers of neighborhood foster homes for priority placement. Plans should include joint education on all aspects of RDS licensing requirements; community cultural perspectives for recruiting, monetary and human resources needs; and schedules for training, home study, and licensing. A tracking tool should be designed to capture community recruitment. Shelter and group care will be targeted to decrease as neighborhood family foster homes increase. In sites with historically high numbers of children and youth placed far from home, early benchmarks may

focus more on bringing children back to the state or county than on placing them in their own neighborhoods; these critical early steps must be acknowledged and celebrated.

- ❑ In all strategy work the PCWA staff must continue to focus on building and rebuilding trust, and allow for airing and in-depth discussion of community partners' issues. At the same time, positives need to be recognized and celebrated as frequently as possible. Formal and informal service providers need to be reminded of what each brings to the table.

**Prepare to reallocate funds.** The PCWA agency should develop, in conjunction with the community, one or more Requests for Proposals to stimulate grassroots capacity to participate in team decisionmaking, recruitment, development, and support of resource families, and support of birth families, youth and kinship care.

- ❑ The PCWA should examine potential funding opportunities that may be available through existing IV-E, contracted services, or other funds that the agency has allocated for recruitment activities. Creative thinking, and close examination of PCWA contracts, may help to identify nominal funds for partners.
- ❑ If no internal funding is identified, the public child welfare agency can show reciprocity and good faith with community partners in other ways. For example: Offer free training to neighborhood partners in the community; encourage and arrange for child welfare staff to volunteer in community-based activities and participate in neighborhood organizations; and sponsor neighborhood recruitment activities that offer child care or food.
- ❑ The Public Agency can also offer technical assistance to community members in researching and submitting proposals for grants to collaborative projects.

**Help and encourage the community to build its capacity for child welfare work.**

Encourage community members and PCWA staff to raise questions about public agency activities and the community's involvement, and help resolve differences of opinion. In order for true partnerships to evolve, community members and PCWA staff must be empowered to raise difficult issues. This should be done with as much tact and objectivity as possible. Community members have substantial life experience with child welfare services, and often believe they know how they work and might be improved. Some of their information may be accurate, some may not. It can sometimes be difficult for residents to raise issues about desired changes, but providers will not know what's needed if community members don't speak up. PCWA staff may also have longstanding opinions about certain communities, which may or may not be grounded in reality. It is relatively easy to discuss past mistakes and current ineffective procedures. If everyone is going to move ahead together, community members must work with agency staff and other service providers to design, implement and evaluate better ways of doing business.

- ❑ **Acknowledge and accept that there will be different levels of readiness.** Some communities may be only loosely organized; they may not speak one another's language, or understand one another's cultures. Their initial separation must be acknowledged and respected by the public agency. This may entail relating to formal and informal groups that do not label themselves "collaborative"; often, such groups can identify a community person or agency to take the lead in their behalf. Technical assistance may be needed to help them collaborate through development of their own mission, internal infrastructure, and memorandum of understanding for partnership, along with the development of an out-come measurement tool to gauge success.

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*In order for true partnerships to evolve, community members and PCWA staff must be empowered to raise difficult issues.*

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*Knowledge is power, and taking time to learn will lead to greater credibility when concerns are raised.*

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- ❑ **At least initially, informal groups may require individual attention, and over time, may or may not choose to join together.** From their point of view, they risk loss of identity. At the same time, many realize they will have more political power together. The public child welfare agency may not be able to honor the desire of many community entities to be recognized separately as community partners because of the agency's limitations in assigning staff liaisons and assuring active participation.
- ❑ **Community Partners must reach out to their own communities.** Key people, also known as champions, should continue to attend and host community events and ensure that everyone in the community is invited and aware of activities, such as fish fries or block parties, that are organized to deepen the partnership. They can also step up efforts to meet individuals in their own communities by going door-to-door and block-to-block; or by encouraging others to host events.
- ❑ **Key leaders can identify, organize and mentor new community leaders, or champions, by talking about their critical role in achieving systems reform.** They can encourage youth coming out of resource homes to form alumni groups, and mentor them in developing leadership capacity.
- ❑ **Champions can also serve as necessary links to the formal system.** They can help service providers to remember that community members are their clients and consumers. They can help mobilize police in housing developments, and accompany vulnerable family members to meetings at schools and agencies where they may feel intimidated or ill-prepared to deal with the PCWA. They can educate systems staff regarding cultural issues and opportunities.

- ❑ **Key community leaders can help educate PCWA staff** by inviting them to attend social and cultural gatherings or simply walk around the neighborhood, thereby helping them to be seen as part of the community.

**Communities should seek funds from the PCWA to provide neighborhood-based services.** Depending on the financial capacity of the public agency, community groups can now prepare to seek funding from the agency, or if that is not available, should set out to acquire the political power to advocate for funding in the future. Even without system funds, collaboration or outside help, there are many things that community mentors, natural leaders, neighbors, friends, and other concerned citizens can do to help them secure funds now.

**Encourage traditional service providers to hire from, and reach out to, the community.** F2F discussions have educated formal service providers about the existence and value of informal community supports. In Phase Three, these and other private partners should be strongly encouraged to hire from the community, and to redesign job descriptions to include attendance at community events. They will need to understand how changes in hiring may affect professional licensure, codes of ethics, agency policies and liability insurance, and what steps can be taken to address these challenges.

**Continue to offer cross-training. While opportunities to learn about each other's worlds are important in Phases One and Two, in this phase also** private placement providers, PCWA and community partners can benefit from participation in joint orientations on child welfare topics of interest. Staff can also benefit from continuing education on community assets and cultures. Knowledge is power, and taking time to learn will lead to greater credibility when concerns are raised.



### **Field Notes: Cross-Training**

In one **Family to Family** site, community partners are not only encouraged to attend Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings, they are also invited to attend and participate in TDM trainings and debriefings with agency staff. These have allowed them to provide feedback on their TDM experience, which is, according to one **Family to Family** technical assistant, “critical – because a lot of sites talk about getting community partners to the TDM table; however, it is the conversations and discussions that come from cross-training opportunities and debriefings that can really help the community partners to know and understand their role at these meetings.” Cross-training opportunities can provide a means for moving a community person from being a spectator at a TDM meeting into a real-world situation of bringing resources and services. And the community partner can link the family to resources within its own agency or collaborative.

That site’s training department is also considering inviting community people to participate in trainings for public agency staff. According to one **F2F** technical assistant, “This is another way that agencies can begin to help form diverse groups of people who are not typically in each other’s hierarchy. This can encourage rich conversations where participants are not just obeying a criteria or a policy but are actually brainstorming and trying to find the best solution.”

### **Phase Three Summary:**

Ideally, by the conclusion of Phase Three, activities to achieve progress on **F2F** outcomes are beginning to be co-designed by all partners and supported through everyday practice, revised policy, and human and monetary resources. Traditional contract providers are beginning to make their services more accessible and culturally appropriate. There is urgency in the PCWA to lessen the number of children in shelters and congregate care. Neighborhood based in-home, wraparound, and other services that have been tailored to keep siblings together will provide creative options for children and youth. Communities are hosting resource parent support groups; resource parents have begun to mentor birth families via Ice Breakers; and family visits are occurring in the community. Neighborhood-specific data are beginning to show improvements in one or more areas, such as reunification, net gains in the numbers of foster homes, decreased

placement disruptions, increased kinship care and neighborhood placements, and growing community involvement in TDMs. A Request For Proposals (RFP) has been sent out to prioritized neighborhoods, and contracts have been awarded to neighborhood groups. Together, PCWA staff, placement providers and community partners set specific goals with respect to neighborhood services and supports, resource development, training, and resource parent recruitment.

See “Developing Collaboratives on a Shoestring Budget,” “Example: Development of a Cleveland Community Collaborative”, “Example: Oregon’s Community Collaborative Without Agency Funding,” and “Examples of Deliverables for In-Home-Service and Placement Providers” referenced as Appendices K, L, M, and N at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

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*Traditional contract providers are beginning to make their services more accessible and culturally appropriate.*

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## P H A S E F O U R

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### Rolling It Out

*In this phase, relationships between the public child welfare agency and the community are deepened and formalized. Increasingly, services are contracted out to neighborhood groups. PCWA geographically assigns cases. Data are collected to determine the effect of community-based child welfare; placement providers are licensing resource families in targeted neighborhoods and training their foster parents to work with birth families; youth are routinely placed in family care, not group homes, and community members attend all types of TDMs.*

#### **The Challenge**

Though community partnerships begin to flourish and produce results, contractual relationships and financing need to be extended to additional, non-traditional grassroots agencies; this probably will entail streamlining and in some cases decreasing board and care dollars for high-end placement providers. Formulas must be found through cost analysis to fund increased family care within the communities that children come from.

See “Closing a Shelter: What It Might Take,” referenced as Appendix O at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

Another challenge is that each respondent to an RFP must be able to document its ability to affect the defined outcomes. Often the groups most in need are least able to write these formal proposals.

Within the PCWA, leaders must continue to support the commitment of staff to work closely with community partners on the ground. Staff who model partnership behavior are likely to see better results for the families they serve, and visible recognition

for their efforts will send a strong message to all. If published standards of performance require staff behavior which illustrates a commitment to **F2F** values, and promotions visibly reward such staff, the PCWA’s commitment to this ‘new way of doing business’ will be apparent to all.

See “Changing Roles in Partnerships Between Public Child Welfare and Communities for Better Child Welfare Outcomes,” referenced as Appendix P at the end of this document and available on the **Family to Family** website ([www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools](http://www.aecf.org/familytofamily/initiatives/tools)).

#### **What Leaders Must Do**

PCWA managers and the **F2F** coordinator continue to restructure the PCWA internally to sustain the partnership. The leader and the management team have broadened the base of participants from the public child welfare agency as well as from the community, perhaps by expanding the focus of **F2F** to more and more geographic areas. The challenge is to maintain the momentum and focus while expanding. Relationships are *everything* and should not depend upon contracts, but should rest on authentic, honest communication. Using data to inform and guide the activities upon which partners embark will sustain the changes that have been made.

#### **Implementation**

**Fully integrate community partners and resource families in efforts to reach F2F goals.** Ongoing training and updates on **Family to Family** goals, values, and outcomes should be provided to agency staff. New PCWA workers should be oriented in neighborhoods by community partners and new community partners should be oriented at the PCWA. The public child welfare agency will respond to changes recommended by

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*Using data to inform and guide the activities upon which partners embark will sustain the changes that have been made.*

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### **Field Notes: Leadership**

One public child welfare agency director identified a need to go beyond the usual agency foster care and mental health partners to seek support for the agency's work in a new target community. In doing so, he met and shared local child-welfare data with the mayor of that community.

In this way, the director was able to open a line of communication that formed a foundation for the expansion of work in that community, and resulted in a critical directive from the mayor: the mayor appointed a person from his staff to be the liaison with the public agency and to participate in the community partnership work group for this particular community. An invitation list was developed identifying both traditional and non-traditional partners that weren't typically known by child welfare agency staff. The agency did win the support and involvement of these partners, which created a diverse group to begin goal and action planning for the child welfare work there.

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*All contracts will include measurable deliverables that can be connected directly to their impact on one or more of the nine Family to Family outcomes.*

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community partners and resource families by reviewing its practices. Community partners will function as full partners in placement decisionmaking for families in their neighborhoods, and resource families will have a place at the decisionmaking table for children in their care as well. They will be able to participate in providing a large range of services and activities. The community will receive all RFPs issued by the PCWA, and be encouraged to apply internally for other funds. All contracts will include measurable deliverables that can be connected directly to their impact on one or more of the nine **Family to Family** outcomes.

#### **Community members will become full partners in recognizing and addressing safety and risk concerns with the PCWA.**

The community will host child-safety forums, understand safety and risk assessment well enough to structure conversations and debates, and build consensus around child-safety and permanency issues, with or without the PCWA. Partners will have a way to get internal or external disagreements resolved.

The community will have moved toward providing both front-end and back-end services. It will have invested in new services that help it to anticipate crises – before PCWA intervention is required. This progression demonstrates how **F2F** can expand to become an effective prevention approach.

#### **Establish formal agreements between the public child welfare agency and the community.**

From the public child welfare agency's point of view, it is easiest if community members and entities can coalesce into unified, collaborative organizations. Contracting is simpler; relationships can be streamlined, and communities often benefit from the collaboration between providers serving them. Those who are able to respond to a Request For Proposals must be able to document their ability to deliver the services which will impact the **F2F** outcomes defined in the RFP. However, often the groups most needed as partners are least able to write these formal proposals. In that case, it may fall to CP Work Group participants to mentor them in proposal development and financial management techniques.

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*Ideally, by the completion of Phase Four, the PCWA has geographically assigned its social workers.*

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However, formalization of relationships with communities goes beyond agreements for services. Self-evaluation data must be provided regularly. Community stakeholders should hold seats on the child welfare advisory board and/or steering committee. Neighborhood collaboration should be highlighted at every opportunity.

- ❑ **Use data to show changes in outcomes.** By Phase Four, the child welfare agency should be able to track changes in some outcomes over time for specific neighborhoods. These neighborhood-specific outcome data are shared quarterly with community partners. At the same time it must clearly hold them accountable for providing the support to families outlined in their contractual agreements.
- ❑ The child welfare agency can also share data connecting community partnership work to progress demonstrated via other **F2F** strategies. For example, the child welfare agency might show (1) that when community representatives attended reunification TDMs, children experienced a reduced reentry rate because of the supports offered by neighborhood collaborative members to birth families following reunification; or (2) that fewer children are being placed out-of-county because, with community recruitment

of potential caregivers, and targeted recruitment of families willing to care for older youth, the agency has successfully recruited more resource families who can care for children and youth closer to home; or (3) that children are more likely to be placed in extended family settings because of the support offered by community partners to relatives in their neighborhoods.

### **Phase Four Summary**

Ideally, by the completion of Phase Four, the PCWA has geographically assigned its social workers. Community groups regularly meet with the PCWA workers who have cases in the community. Managers are holding supervisory meetings with PCWA staff in the community, to build closer working relationships. Resource and birth parents and youth assist in recruiting, training, and supporting other resource families, and help to train new trainers. Agency staff and foster parents will be comfortable with and supportive of resource parents working directly with birth parents, and Icebreaker meetings happen routinely following initial placements. The community sponsors many child welfare activities, funding is increasingly available for neighborhood groups, families visit their children frequently and in community settings; and siblings who are not placed together also visit regularly in comfortable settings close to home.

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## PHASE FIVE

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### We Are in This Together

#### The Challenge

At this stage, the concern is that the public child welfare agency might become complacent, the mission may stagnate in the community, or that changes in leadership or resource availability might threaten the commitment to the original principles, values and practices of **F2F**. If reforms have not become firmly embedded in the PCWA's practices and in its relationships with the community, they may not survive. One predictable period of risk will occur following the inevitable cessation of funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The community's voice can be a critical factor in sustaining PCWA reforms, since elected officials are often sensitive to the opinions of their constituents. If true partnerships have developed in conjunction with the system reforms generated by **F2F**, the PCWA will have many new voices of support joining the public conversation at points of change and/or crisis. This is one of the most significant and valuable outcomes of **Family to Family**.

**Community Partnerships are a work in progress.** As this document went to press, it was doubtful that any **F2F** site was prepared to claim that it had fully realized the **Family to Family** vision of community partnerships. Most sites continue to struggle toward achieving the type of relationships needed to sustain community partnerships over time, through leadership, social and political changes. In even the strongest and most mature sites, partnerships continue to be a challenge; however, many **F2F** leaders are struck by the rich potential for deepening support to families, and preventing the cycle of abuse and neglect, which this strategy has demonstrated even in its early manifestations. "We'll never go back to the old way" is a common remark.

The vision is clear and compelling.

What would full realization of community partnerships look like?

Imagine having:

- Webs of neighborhood-based hubs providing a wide menu of responses to families in trouble, in which community members are not just available to one another between the hours of 9 and 5, but 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- More funding for family than congregate care, and far more resource homes to choose from.
- So many caregivers and champions in the neighborhoods from which children come that it's easy to find resource homes, accessible to children's birth families and schools, that reflect the child's culture.
- Community partners who so powerfully support birth and resource families to gradually return children and youth to their homes, for good, that in many cases, solid, loving ties are maintained long after reunification.
- Representatives of all ethnic groups, faiths and neighborhoods participating regularly in Team Decisionmaking meetings, leading to more culturally relevant solutions for children.
- Highly visible child-welfare activities, from visitations and TDMs to training, recruitment, and supervisory activities, right in the target neighborhoods.
- Flourishing grassroots groups, working energetically to increase culturally relevant family supports, with the help of well-timed grants from your agency.

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*One predictable period of risk will occur following the inevitable cessation of funds from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.*

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*The vision  
is clear and  
compelling.*

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- ❑ Thriving collaboratives that meet monthly to identify gaps in neighborhood services, and resist disruption when there are changes in leadership.
- ❑ Community partners who successfully lobby state and local politicians for additional funds to support community-based, family-centered practice.
- ❑ And, rarer still, a supportive constituency when tragedies occur.

To a PCWA just beginning to explore the possibilities of community partnerships, this extraordinary vision may seem unattainable. But by mid-2005, more than 40 **Family to Family** sites around the country were indeed moving away from traditional, closed child welfare practice to embrace partnerships with their communities, and in many cases producing outcomes that seemed just as improbable a decade ago. This is very hard work, but stunning, new possibilities are created when advocates and neighbors are informed, consulted and brought to the table repeatedly, over time. With patience and unwavering commitment, child-welfare agencies are finding powerful partners in unexpected places, and improving prospects for children, case by case, community by community – one step at a time.

## A P P E N D I C E S

These documents are available on the *Family to Family* website,  
[www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily](http://www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily)

Click on Tools and go to the section on Building Community Partnerships –  
Additional Resource Documents

- Appendix A**      Some Considerations Regarding Community Partnerships and Self-Evaluation
- Appendix B**      An Overview for Self-Assessment on Building Community Partnerships
- Appendix C**      Possible Benchmarks in Phases of the Development of Community Partnerships
- Appendix D**      An Example of a *Family to Family* Coordinator Job Description
- Appendix E**      A Way for All Workgroups to Work Together
- Appendix F**      Helpful Hints for Dealing with Sensitive Issues
- Appendix G**      Identifying Existing Community Partners
- Appendix H**      Building the Agenda Together
- Appendix I**      Yes, I want to Help Children and Youth in My Neighborhood!
- Appendix J**      Geographic Assignment of Cases
- Appendix K**      Developing Collaboratives on a Shoestring Budget
- Appendix L**      Example: Development of a Cleveland Community Collaborative
- Appendix M**      Example: Oregon's Community Collaborative without Agency Funding
- Appendix N**      Examples of Deliverables for In-Home Service and Placement Providers
- Appendix O**      Closing a Shelter: What Might It Take
- Appendix P**      Changing Roles in Partnerships between Public Child Welfare and Communities for Better Child Welfare Outcomes



Additional free copies of this report are available from:

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