Family to Family

TOOLS FOR

Rebuilding Foster Care

Lessons Learned

A Project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation
July 2001

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INTRODUCTION TO *FAMILY TO FAMILY*

The Annie E. Casey Foundation

The Annie E. Casey Foundation was established in 1948 by Jim Casey, a founder of United Parcel Service, and his sister and brothers, who named the Foundation in honor of their mother. The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

The grantmaking 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 often inextricably linked to conditions in communities where they live. We believe that community-centered responses can better protect children, support families and strengthen neighborhoods.

Helping distressed neighborhoods become environments that foster strong, capable families is a complex challenge that will require progress in many areas, including changes in the public systems designed to serve disadvantaged children and their families. In most states these systems:

❒ Are remote from the communities and families they serve;

❒ Focus narrowly on individual problems when families in crisis generally have multiple needs;

❒ Tend to intervene only when problems become so severe that serious and expensive responses are the only options; and

❒ Hold themselves accountable by the quantity of services offered rather than the effectiveness of the help provided.

In states and cities across the country, public child welfare systems are frequently in need of major change in each of these areas.

Background: The Current Challenges of Public Child Welfare

The nation's child welfare system is struggling:

1. The numbers of children in the care of the child welfare system has continued to grow, from 260,000 children in out-of-home care in the 1980s to more than 500,000 in recent years. This growth was driven by increases in the number of children at risk of abuse and neglect, as well as by the inability of child welfare systems to respond to the significantly higher level of need.

2. As these systems become overloaded, they are unable to safely return children to their families or to find permanent homes for them. Children are therefore experiencing much longer stays in temporary settings.

3. Concurrently, the number of foster families nationally has dropped so that fewer than 50 percent of the children needing temporary care are now placed with

foster families. As a result of this shortage, child welfare agencies in many urban communities have placed large numbers of children in group care or with relatives who may have great difficulty caring for them. An infant coming into care in some of our largest cities has a good chance of being placed in group care and being without a permanent family for more than four years.

4. Finally, children of color are strongly overrepresented in this group of children placed in out-of-home care.

The good news is that during the past several years, a number of state and local child welfare systems have been able to reduce the number of children coming into care and to increase the number of children placed for adoption. However, the duration and severity of the challenges facing child welfare makes this an opportune time for states and communities to again challenge themselves to rethink the fundamental role of family foster care and to consider very basic changes.

The Foundation's interest in helping communities and public agencies confront these challenges is built upon the belief that smarter and more effective responses are available to prevent child maltreatment and to respond more effectively when there is abuse or neglect. Often families can be helped to safely care for their children in their own communities and in their own homes—if appropriate support, guidance and help is provided to them early enough. However, there are emergency situations that require the separation of a child from his or her family. At such times, every effort should be made to have the child live with caring and capable relatives or with another family within the child's own community—rather than in a restrictive institutional setting. Family foster care should be the next best alternative to a child's own home or to kinship care.

The primary mission of the Foundation is to foster public policies, human-service reforms and community supports that more effectively meet the needs of today's vulnerable children and families.

National leaders in family foster care and child welfare have come to realize, however, that without major restructuring, the family foster care system in the United States is not in a position to meet the needs of children who must be separated from their families. One indicator of the deterioration of the system has been the steady decline in the pool of available foster families while the number of children coming into care has increased. Furthermore, there has been an alarming increase in the percentage of children in placement who have special and exceptional needs. If the family foster care system is not significantly reconstructed, the combination of these factors may result in more disrupted placements, longer lengths of stay, fewer successful family reunifications and more damage done to children by the very system that the state has put in place to protect them.

A Response to the Challenge: The *Family to Family* Initiative

With the appropriate changes in policy, in the use of resources and in programs, family foster care can respond to the challenges of out-of-home placement and be a less expensive and more humane choice for children and youth than are institutions or other group settings. Family foster care reform, in and of itself, can yield important benefits for families and children—although such a rebuilding effort is only one part of a larger agenda designed to address the overall well-being of children and families currently in need of child protective services.

Family to Family was designed in 1992 and has now been field tested in communities across the country, including Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Maryland. Los Angeles County is in the early stages of implementation of the initiative. New York City has also adopted the neighborhood and family-centered principles of ***Family to Family*** as an integral part of its reform effort.

The ***Family to Family*** initiative has been an opportunity for states and communities to reconceptualize, redesign and reconstruct their foster care system to achieve the following new systemwide goals:

1. To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive and located primarily in the communities in which the children live.
2. To assure that scarce family foster-home resources are provided to all those children (but to only those children) who in fact must be removed from their homes.
3. To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (in shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs and group homes) by meeting the needs of many more of the children currently in those settings through relative or family foster care.
4. To increase the number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs.
5. To reunify children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished, based on the family's and children's needs—not simply the system's time frames.
6. To reduce the lengths of stay of children in out-of-home care.
7. To better screen children being considered for removal from the home to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family and to assess the needs of the children.
8. To decrease the overall rate of children coming into out-of-home care.
9. To involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts.
10. To become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes.

The new system envisioned by ***Family to Family*** is designed to:

- ❒ Better screen children being considered for removal from home to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family and to assess the needs of the children;
- ❒ Be targeted to routinely place children with families in their own neighborhoods;
- ❒ Involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts;
- ❒ Become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes; and
- ❒ Provide permanent families for children in a timely manner.

The Foundation's role has been to assist states and communities with a portion of the costs involved in both planning and implementing innovations in their service systems for children and families and to make available technical assistance and consultation throughout the process. The Foundation has also provided funds for development and for transitional costs that accelerate system change. The states, however, have been expected to maintain the dollar base of their own investment and sustain the changes they implement when Foundation funding comes to an end. The Foundation is also committed to accumulating and disseminating both lessons from states' experiences and information on the achievement of improved outcomes for children. We will, therefore, play a major role in seeing that the results of the ***Family to Family*** initiative are actively communicated to all the states and the federal government.

The Foundation is also committed to accumulating and disseminating both lessons from states' experiences and information on the achievement of improved outcomes for children.

Family to Family is now showing that good foster families can be recruited and supported in the communities from which children are coming into placement.

The states selected to participate in the planning process are being funded to create major innovations in their family foster care system to reconstruct rather than merely supplement current operations. Such changes are certain to have major effects on the broader systems of services for children, including other services within the mental-health, mental retardation/ developmental-disabilities, education and juvenile justice systems, as well as the rest of the child welfare system. In most states, the foster care system serves children who are also the responsibility of other program domains. In order for the initiative to be successful (to ensure, for example, that children are not inadvertently "bumped" from one system into another), representatives from each of these service systems were expected to be involved in planning and implementation at both the state and local level. These systems were expected to commit to the goals of the initiative, as well as redeploy resources (or priorities in the use of resources) and, if necessary, alter policies and practices within their own systems.

Current Status of *Family to Family*

At the outset of the initiative in 1992, the accepted wisdom among child welfare professionals was that a continuing decline in the numbers of foster families was unavoidable; that large, centralized, public agencies could not effectively partner with neighborhoods; that communities which have large numbers of children in care could not produce good foster families in any numbers; and that substantial increases in congregate care were inevitable. ***Family to Family*** is now showing that good foster families can be recruited and supported in the communities from which children are coming into placement. Further, dramatic increases in the overall number of foster families are possible, with corresponding decreases in the numbers of children placed in institutions as well as in the resources allocated to such placements. Initial evaluation results are now available from the Foundation. Perhaps most important, ***Family to Family*** is showing that child welfare agencies can effectively partner with disadvantaged communities to provide better care for children who have been abused or neglected. Child welfare practitioners and leaders—along with neighborhood residents and leaders—are beginning to develop models, tools and specific examples (all built from experience) that can be passed on to other neighborhoods and agencies interested in such partnerships.

The Four Key Strategies of *Family to Family*

There are four core strategies at the heart of ***Family to Family***:

- ***Recruitment, Training and Support of Resource Families (Foster and Relative)***—Finding and maintaining local resources who can support children and families in their own neighborhoods by recruiting, training and supporting foster parents and relative caregivers
- ***Building Community Partnerships***—Partnering with a wide range of community organizations—beyond public and private agencies—in neighborhoods that are the source of high referral rates to work together toward creating an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system and helps to build stronger neighborhoods and thereby stronger families
- ***Team Decisionmaking***—Involving not just foster parents and caseworkers but also birth families and community members in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for the child and the adults who care for them

❒ ***Self-Evaluation***—Using hard data linked to child and family outcomes to drive decisionmaking and to show where change is needed and where progress has been made

The Outcomes of *Family to Family*

States participating in the ***Family to Family*** initiative are asked to commit themselves to achieving the following outcomes:

1. A reduction in the number/proportion of children served in institutional and congregate care.
2. A shift of resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child- and family-serving systems.
3. A decrease in the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement.
4. An increase in the number/proportion of planned reunifications.
5. A decrease in the number/proportion of re-entries into care.
6. A reduction in the number of placement moves experienced by children in care.
7. An increase in the number/proportion of siblings placed together.
8. A reduction in the total number/rate of children served away from their own families.

In sum, ***Family to Family*** is not a pilot, nor a fad, nor the latest new "model" for child welfare work. Rather, it is a set of value-driven principles that guide a tested group of strategies that, in turn, are implemented by a practical set of tools for everyday use by administrators, managers, field workers and families.

*In sum, **Family to Family** is not a pilot, nor a fad, nor the latest new "model" for child welfare work.*

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSONS LEARNED TOOL

***Family to Family* is about *principles*:**

❒ Children do best with strong families.

❒ Families can become strong when they have the support of their communities.

❒ Child welfare agencies can do their job better when they partner with communities in support of families.

Family to Family sites have used these principles to develop a set of strategies that put these values into daily agency practice:

❒ Innovative recruitment, training and support efforts to strengthen the network of resource families in the neighborhoods that tend to send children into foster care.

❒ Utilizing new methods to make all placement-related decisions through teams that involve families and communities in the decisions.

❒ Building partnerships with the communities where families who become involved with the child welfare system often live.

❒ Tracking the outcomes of child welfare work and using hard data to figure out what is working and what is not.

In order for these strategies to work in behalf of these goals, ***Family to Family*** sites have learned that new *tools* are necessary guides for changes in practice that can help staff and community partners learn what to do differently to make these values real in their daily work lives.

This is one of those tools. In a sense, it is the ***Family to Family*** leader's tool. Unlike some other ***Family to Family*** tools, Lessons Learned is focused on using the real day-to-day experience of site leaders in starting the initiative, keeping it going and seeing it become (as intended) a whole new way of doing the basic work of child welfare. As such, it is a compilation of the lessons that child welfare and community leaders learned—often by making mistakes—and what they wanted to offer to other leaders who are interested in bringing ***Family to Family*** to their communities.

Its purpose is to share insights and learning from across existing ***Family to Family*** sites to aid new communities as they set out to reform foster care and child welfare. As such, it is not a "how-to" manual developed by "experts." It is, rather, the pulling together of what colleagues in the field (the real experts) have learned as they set about the task of making major changes in their child welfare systems using the lens of the ***Family to Family*** principles, strategies and tools. It includes experiences from agency leaders, middle managers, community members and consultants who worked with them in cities across the country.

We hope that the tool captures what these colleagues have been learning about how to implement the principles of ***Family to Family***—and the consequences for action that come from that commitment in the face of the kinds of resistance that always accompany systemic change. We think it also reflects their perspectives on what worked and what did not based on their own experimentation and discovery in sites across the country over the past eight years.

New leaders in different communities will have different challenges and different strengths to build upon—that is why *Lessons Learned* is not designed as a manual. However, to the extent that we all face similar struggles in the work of child welfare, we hope that these experiences can help new leaders use ***Family to Family*** as a vision and a set of strategies that can lead to better outcomes for the children and families that child welfare is intended to serve.

OVERVIEW

Advice from people who have worked in ***Family to Family*** for the past five years can be summarized by the following themes:

I. ***Take the lead.*** There is no substitute for the active involvement of the agency leader in creating a vision and building support both inside and outside of the agency.

II. ***Involve staff at all levels.*** Because the work will involve changes in policies and practices that will affect staff throughout the agency, staff involvement in planning and implementation will help drive as well as sustain necessary changes.

III. ***Build community ownership.*** The crux of ***Family to Family*** is that the agency and community work together to improve care to children and families.

IV. ***Use data to drive decisionmaking.*** Data analysis is critical in self-evaluation, building understanding, testing assumptions and creating focus for the change effort.

V. ***Attend to other constituents.*** In addition to building ownership for ***Family to Family*** among staff and the community, the agency will benefit from attending to other constituents whose support will be critical in garnering resources, changing policies and supporting new ways of operating that include the media, the legislature, the courts and other agencies.

VI. ***Manage the change process. Family to Family*** is a catalyst for systemwide innovation. It needs to be managed thoughtfully as a change effort by finding ways to build ownership, sustain momentum, encourage innovation and build infrastructure to support the work.

I. Take the Lead

The active involvement of leaders, especially the agency director, in the ***Family to Family*** initiative is critical. The leader establishes a vision and helps to communicate the value of changing practice. While the leader will want to involve others to ensure that there is a shared vision, the overall direction of this effort cannot be delegated. The leader's visible support is necessary to overcome the inevitable resistance to change both inside and outside the agency.

1. **Build a planning team.**

   As ***Family to Family*** gets underway, the leader will want to establish a planning and oversight team. Such a team could include administrative and direct-service staff, intra-agency partners, community leaders and other constituents. Members of the planning team may serve many different functions: embodying values, providing leadership, offering analytic skills or voicing legislative and judicial views. Opening the discussion to a wide group of stakeholders helps create a vision for the work that can be shared across multiple parts of the community. This shared vision provides the direction and energy needed to fuel the hard work ahead.

   The first job of the planning team is to develop an initial plan for how ***Family to Family*** will be taken up in the agency. This involves reviewing the agency's current operations in light of the four core strategies of ***Family to Family***, in order to understand what is already in place to be built on and what needs to change in order to support these strategies.

   Since the effort will likely impact a wide array of agency activities and relationships, broad-based representation will help drive the needed changes and ensure the sustainability of the change effort during transitions in agency leadership.

   In convening the planning team, the leader plays an important role in defining the group's role. The leader can describe the scope of the work that the team should address as well as what decisions are strictly the responsibility of the department.

2. **Establish key relationships.**

   In addition to recruiting champions to serve on a planning team, the leader may also want to begin building relationships around key ***Family to Family*** strategies with other leaders outside the agency. The goal is to help people feel like they are part of the process early on, even if they do not participate directly in the planning team. Some key players will be involved in making changes to current services, while others will be important in supporting changes in the long-term direction of the agency. For example, the leaders of other social-service agencies may need to create changes in their organizations to support the work of ***Family to Family*** (e.g., substance abuse agencies may need to change the way they deliver services to support birth parents who are working toward reunification with their children). Legislators, members of the judiciary and the media are among those whose support will be

critical to the long-term direction of the agency. By focusing on these relationships early on, the leader can begin to build support for the vision. This will, in turn, enable positive support for budget requests, proposed legislation and changes in operations that will be needed over the course of the change effort. In the early parts of the initiative it will be helpful to identify those who are likely to be supportive and to build on their enthusiasm. (For more information, see the tool, *Building Support for Innovation Inside Child Welfare Agencies*.)

3. **Tailor the plan to fit your organization.**

   In shaping a plan for ***Family to Family***, you will need to tailor it to fit with your organization's particular structure and environment. In a state-run system, for example, establishing local autonomy in contracting for services or sharing information with the community may require permission from state leadership. Tailoring the plan to fit into "the way we do business" encourages buy-in throughout the child welfare programs and helps the agency build on its strengths in existing practices and operations.

4. **Create the means for ongoing revision of policies and practices.**

   As you implement ***Family to Family***, you will uncover multiple policies and procedures that need to change in order to fit with your vision. The implementation plan can take this into account, for example, by providing guidance for how various policies will be revised and updated. When changing policies and procedures, cross-functional representation will maximize ownership and accelerate the building of compliance.

   > *You need to change policy, management processes, and practice. It's those three things coming in sync that leads to really fundamental changes that stick.*
   > —Agency Director

5. **Create safety by clarifying expectations.**

   While some staff will not share the values that ***Family to Family*** represents, most do want to see changes in the agency that will help them do their jobs better. However, there is likely to be a fair amount of skepticism, particularly on the part of those who have seen other change efforts fall short of expectations. A key role of the leader is to find ways to overcome this skepticism and to mobilize staff to try out new ways of doing the work of child protection.

   One way to begin is to start with the shared belief that there is a need for the agency to be more effective in its work. Another is to identify a desired set of outcomes, set clear expectations about what you hope to accomplish and then, as the leader, make a clear commitment to the values and goals you want to achieve. It can also help to create explicit opportunities for people to share what they are learning as they move from the vision to the desired outcomes. This signals that the responsibility for making changes happen is widespread, not just in the hands of the leader or the planning team. By acknowledging that the organization is in a learning process where there likely will be missteps along the way, the leader gives people permission to innovate. If individuals fear that they will be punished for failed experiments, they will be less interested in trying new ways of working.

6. **Signal dedication to this effort through long-term planning, but do not let planning keep you from getting started.**

   One of the key challenges in implementing ***Family to Family*** is creating a staged approach that allows for ongoing learning and modification, without having it seem like "just another pilot program." ***Family to Family*** is not a stand-alone initiative but rather a catalyst for systemwide innovation. To be successful, sites found that ***Family to Family***

*In shaping a plan for **Family to Family**, you will need to tailor it to fit with your organization's particular structure and environment.*

Even the language used in talking about initial efforts can be important.

needs to be presented as a systemwide change effort, and the actions of the leadership must support this point of view.

> *Because the state only wanted **Family to Family** to be a pilot, they hired temporary staff. Everything about what they did said, "This is only going to be around for two or three years and it will be gone." But as long as you think about the work as a pilot, there is always an end. After you have that pilot mentality, it is harder to break out of that than to just start from the beginning. You need to say to staff, "This is good social work practice. This is not a pilot. We are doing what we should do that is good for our system, for parents and for workers."*
> —County ***Family to Family*** Coordinator

One way to signal a long-term commitment is to incorporate a phased rollout plan that accounts for how the effort will move from a few sites to broad scale and from a few changes in practice to wholescale practice reform. Even the language used in talking about initial efforts can be important. For example, by calling the first neighborhoods, "Phase One sites" rather than "pilot sites," you signal your intention to spread the work to other areas in the future.

Another way to enable the spread of ***Family to Family*** across the agency is to include everyone in the training and orientation sessions—including staff from all levels (frontline to leadership), all geographic regions (not just Phase One sites) and across the continuum of services the agency offers (not just foster care). This can be a way to let everyone know what is happening in the agency and to build excitement for the changes that ***Family to Family*** represents.

While you will want a plan that sets out clear direction for going to scale, it is most likely that the first drafts will need to be modified as you learn from early efforts. It is likely that in some cases, you may not even know what to include in the plan until you have started to experiment. The goal, then, is to create a plan that can be flexible and to put in place a planning process that allows for reflection and adaptation based on what is being learned. Your learning agenda itself can signal a commitment to broad-scale change. For example, your team could develop an explicit learning agenda for Phase One sites focused on topics that will help spread the work to future sites.

> ***Family to Family** is not a pilot, and it is not a model. It's a change in the way we do business. Anything short of that won't bring about wholesale change. The work is so complex that we cannot rely on people's sense of what's good and right to get the right thing done. We've got to go way beyond that. We've got to change the way we structure the work.*
> —Agency Deputy Director

7. Celebrate and recognize accomplishments along the way.

While you are focusing your efforts on a few pieces of the initiative, it helps to keep the process visible to everyone by celebrating accomplishments and recognizing progress broadly. Small wins can perpetuate enthusiasm for the change effort, while more difficult and less visible changes are underway.

> *We instituted a regular column in our newsletter called "Above and Beyond." By picking out specific practice examples of someone carrying out the values of the initiative, we highlighted someone that was doing something very specific. We made it clear that one of the things that would be looked at when someone was up for promotion was how they had carried out the values. And in their interview, they would be asked about that: "How do you feel about the **Family to Family** initiatives? Team decisionmaking? How have you incorporated this into your work?" It was a calculated effort to keep the values on everyone's tongues all the time. Whenever we achieved a benchmark, we'd have an agencywide celebration.*
> —Agency Director

II. Involve Staff at All Levels

Staff at all levels and in all parts of the organization—especially frontline workers and middle managers—are critical to putting planned changes into action. As with building a shared vision, building ownership for the work and the principles behind it takes time. In retrospect, the majority of sites reported that they would have spent additional time with staff prior to approaching external stakeholders. One site, for example, reported that earlier education of their child welfare staff could have prevented misinterpretations and rumors about the initiative and would have helped with the rollout when the initiative moved from specialized foster care unit to agencywide changes. In this area, the leader again plays a strong role both to involve staff and to articulate vision and expectations. (For more information, see the two tool series, *Building Support for Child Welfare's Frontline Workers*.)

1. **Design a communications infrastructure.**

   In times of rapid change, it helps if core messages are repeated through multiple forums. Relentless repetition and redundancy about core values are needed to ensure that the core messages are being heard (e.g., moves hurt children; all children deserve a family). Also important is the involvement of staff in different types of decisionmaking to ensure shared ownership of the work. For example, staff could be asked to think together about changes in practice that would be needed to support particular ***Family to Family*** principles. As part of the planning process, a communications infrastructure is key. Such an infrastructure could include meetings for exploring and making decisions, forums for sharing experiences and establishing channels for prompt disseminating and receiving of information and feedback. Our experience has been that speaking to staff is not enough during times of change—leaders also needed to find out what was heard and to engage staff in a dialogue about how the vision would translate into actions.

   An analysis of the organizational culture can be helpful in developing a plan for involving staff in ***Family to Family***. In several of the sites, the middle managers were identified as the group most skeptical of the change effort. This was addressed by engaging the group in a discussion of community work during weekly meetings to involve them directly in making needed changes.

   > *It was clearly not going to work to have people several layers up impose protocols on line supervisors who were resistant in the first place. The strategy was, again, around partnership and empowerment. We could have written protocols ourselves much more quickly, but the way that staff is treated in this building is the way they're going to work with their families. We cannot expect people to treat families with respect and as partners if we aren't behaving that way in this building in our own ways of managing. We constantly put that on the table. You'd be trying to counsel line workers on how to behave when seeking a collaborative relationship and you'd find out that the way they were being treated by their own boss was anything but respectful and collaborative. If you're trying to motivate a parent, it doesn't work any better when you're punitive, distant or condescending than it does when your own supervisor behaves that way towards you. We have to "walk the walk" in the building to get staff people to walk it with their families.*
   > —Agency Deputy Director

   Putting ***Family to Family*** principles into action means opening a dialogue with staff about the vision, values and principles and working together to find ways to put them into action. One site learned the hard way that if staff are not included in discussions about principles, their actions often reflect rule-based decisions rather than value-based

As with building a shared vision, building ownership for the work and the principles behind it takes time.

judgement calls. The director there learned that caseworkers were placing children with relatives without enough consideration as to whether that placement was right for the child. The director had previously established a rule that, at a minimum, caseworkers needed to do a fingerprint check, make sure the child had a bed and verify that the home had smoke detectors. Several years later, when caseworkers were asked how they determined whether a relative's home was the right placement for a child, they described the processes for doing fingerprint checks and providing the home with a bed and smoke detector. They had not taken up the work of ensuring that the placement itself was right for the child.

2. **Use staff development to signal new ways of working.**

   A first step is to familiarize every member of the staff with the initiative and with the vision of how it meets the agency's goals. A clear vision of what the agency hopes to accomplish can go a long way toward bringing staff on board. The leader and other champions will need to help build understanding so that staff see that this is not necessarily additional work but rather a new way of doing the work of the agency. It helps to find ways to show how this work builds on the agency's current strengths. Staff need to understand how the initiative relates to what they do already and be given the tools they need to change the way they work in those areas that need to change.

   Training will be critical and will be most effective if it can be customized for different staffing levels and groups. For example, middle managers will need to develop skills to build ownership for the vision and to support supervisors and line workers in accomplishing it. Caseworkers will need support in understanding their role in the community work and the advantages of geographically assigned caseloads such as less driving. Involving foster parents and other community members in staff training sessions can help build bridges between staff and the community.

Training will be critical and will be most effective if it can be customized for different staffing levels and groups.

3. **Use the vision and values of *Family to Family* as the basis for the work and find ways to make them concrete.**

   While the work of the initiative centers around a shared vision and set of values, finding ways to translate those concepts into concrete examples helps the work come alive. Staff can help in coming up with ideas for how to do this. Cleveland used pictures of children throughout the agency offices to serve as reminders of what they were trying to accomplish.

   > *We lined our walls with pictures of the children waiting for adoption in great big two-foot by three-foot pictures. On the bottom of it we wrote, "Waiting since January 17, 1995." Then, when the child was placed, there was a big, splashy, red flag across the bottom that said, "Family found." It makes the vision much more personal, much more visible. Something that linked very closely to the values at hand, something that had brought those social workers to work there in the first place. When you hang around in child welfare agencies very long, you see so many social workers that have forgotten. They truly are experiencing honest-to-God burnout. Our reform initiative gives you an opportunity to remind people why they are there.*
   >
   > —County Agency Director

   In New York City, the agency went through a planning process in which the vision and values were explicitly translated into goals for each division, then for each team and, eventually, for individual workers on those teams.

   > *We introduced a large number of reforms resulting in wide-reaching system improvements in a very short period of time. In order to sustain the gains in the long term,*

we needed to ensure that we had buy-in from middle managers and frontline staff. To foster ownership, managers led their staff through a series of "values into action" exercises: "Why did you first come to work here? How do we want to work together? What do you want the agency to be known for in the future? What legacy do you want to leave behind?" Staff members at each level examined their own values and how these values align with the goals and principles of the agency. As a result, directors, managers, supervisors and caseworkers discovered that they did share similar values with each other and that those values are very consistent with the mission of the agency and the objectives of its reform efforts.

—Agency Associate Commissioner

4. Implement a team-based approach to the agency's interactions with families.

One way to ensure a change in practice is to introduce innovative approaches into the day-to-day work of the agency. For example, Team Decisionmaking brings birth parents and community members into a structured decisionmaking process with the agency for placement decisions. While the agency retains ultimate responsibility for the placement of the child, this process engages the parents and community members in making the best decision for the child. Later, family team meetings can be used to bring together birth parents, foster parents and the caseworker to discuss permanency planning. (For more information, please see the tool, *Team Decisionmaking: Involving the Family and Community in Child Welfare Decisions*.)

5. Work toward consistency among policies, procedures and practice.

As you move forward with the vision, there will likely be policies, practices and procedures that need to be changed to fit with the principles and outcomes you want to accomplish. Such changes might include new contracts with providers or new ways of recruiting and training foster parents. Some can become quick wins, while others will take more time. The following are some suggestions for dealing with existing policies and procedures:

1. Evaluate the agency's own policies as the first step in making procedural changes. Do the policies fit with the values and principles you want to support? For example, are the policies guiding placement aligned with the placement philosophy?
2. Review policies sooner rather than later; in large agencies it takes a long time to go through necessary channels to change policies.
3. Consider the differences between policy and practice and *emphasize practice*. There is often a gap between what is articulated in policy and what is carried out in practice. Address both, but do not imagine that practice will be in place because policy is. Many sites found that while policies were consistent with ***Family to Family*** principles, common practices were not.
4. Identify bureaucratic barriers to developing effective community partnerships (such as foster home recruitment/approval or funding for contracts) and eliminate them whenever possible.
5. Use requests for proposals as a forum to communicate your principles, establish dialogue and begin to build trust with communities. One site did this by accepting proposals only from neighborhood collaboratives with full-time site coordinators.
6. Engage staff in conversations about what they need in order to put the principles of ***Family to Family*** into action. For example, 18 months into the effort, one agency director visited

One way to ensure a change in practice is to introduce innovative approaches into the day-to-day work of the agency.

the field office to ask what they needed in order to make geographic-based placements. Their request was simple—a good map.

(See the tool, *The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice*.)

6. Provide opportunities for champions to lead.

Identifying and cultivating champions is an ongoing process. As changes are being made throughout the agency, there may be new supporters or people whose skills are needed to get the work done. It helps to find opportunities to bring them into the effort in meaningful ways and to give them opportunities to generate momentum for the work.

Staff who are passionate about the initiative can be used to influence their peers. In many of the sites, the champions of the initiative were assigned to critical units to provide support. However, some staff will be reluctant to change their practices. Leaders can use turnover to bring in new staff who are supportive of the community work.

> *I started to use people who had bought into the concept as the next wave of would-be supervisors and managers. I started making sure that these people were the ones being groomed for leadership positions in this agency. Then I turned to those people who had not bought into the idea but were open to change. With these two groups on board, we turned things around.*
> —Agency Director

*For **Family to Family** to be successful, the community has to be included as a real partner, right from the start.*

7. Create incentives to encourage involvement in *Family to Family* from all sides.

In Cincinnati, ***Family to Family*** generated supplemental neighborhood-based services for the foster families and additional resources for the social workers. For example, they developed a respite service for foster families who were willing to participate in ***Family to Family*** as a way to build initial support for the initiative. With these kinds of additional services, both foster parents and staff were eager to work with the program. With enough support, the site was eventually able to move ***Family to Family*** from a special program to a way of doing business that was no longer optional.

Recognition can be a powerful incentive. Foster parents and staff who are supportive of ***Family to Family*** can be recognized, for example, by giving them leadership roles in promoting the initiative or having them present to others about their experiences. For staff, linking performance measures, promotion criteria and development opportunities to ***Family to Family*** objectives can be a powerful way to build participation and signal a long-term commitment to change.

> *We publicly stated and published the fact that a criterion for promotion was the person's visible performance or exemplification of **Family to Family** values. It's another way to say, "This isn't going away. This is what we do."*
> —Agency Deputy Director

III. Build Community Ownership

For ***Family to Family*** to be successful, the community has to be included as a real partner, right from the start. (See the four-tool series, *Building Community Partnerships in Child Welfare*.) Strong relationships with the community will help sustain changes and can help the agency in the face of various kinds of pressure—for example, from the media or the courts. This means reaching out to community leaders to involve them in the planning process—from creating the vision to thinking with you about how the work of the agency might need to change.

> *The department has to be very careful about doing a lot of the planning and then just announcing that they're going to show up one day uninvited. Nobody sent for*

them. That's why it's important that you have people involved who are well respected in the community, who can convene a meeting and really bring folks to the table. People will come to our meetings because this is their home.

—Community Leader

1. **Draw on existing resources.**

A first step in the collaborative work is to identify community resources that can support the change effort. Building on established resources lends credibility to the initiative and establishes the community as a whole (not just the agency) as the foundation of the change effort. Several sites found existing community resources, such as settlement houses, community centers or religious groups that could be enlisted. Existing foster parents can also serve as important links to the neighborhoods.

We used existing foster parents to invite their friends and neighbors over, like a Tupperware party, to hear about foster parenting. We knew that our best recruiters were existing foster parents. Most people come into foster parenting because they have heard about it from a current foster parent.

—Local ***Family to Family*** Coordinator

2. **Take into account the influence of differences in race, culture and power.**

Race, culture and power have a strong influence on the implementation of a neighborhood-based initiative. The discrepancy between the race and class of those in charge and the children in care may be an issue with both internal and external stakeholders. Especially in the beginning, community members are likely to be suspicious of agencies they feel are out of touch with their reality. At the same time, staff resistance to neighborhood-based work in some sites exposed class biases inside the agencies. The power differential between the agency and community, compounded by race, class and professional differences among their members, is often reflected in beliefs each holds about the other.

A largely white staff is coming into a largely African-American community. There are fears and lack of experience with that. They are very worried about their personal safety, their cars, the issues they have perceived or heard about in the community which often are not necessarily true, certainly not at the alarming statistics that they perceive them to be.

—Community Leader

It is not uncommon for agencies to believe that the agency is "developing the community"—a perspective that community members may find offensive. Instead, the agency needs to foster a sense of mutual development. The agency can support the development of community resources for families, and community members can support the staff and mission of the agency. Changes in beliefs will also be needed at a personal level, particularly as agency and community representatives begin to work together across race and class differences.

Given the depth of feeling associated with these issues and their complexity, it is no surprise that race, culture and power continue to inform most discussions about ***Family to Family***. Working through these issues depends on the agency's willingness to respect a community's existing culture, to engage in open discussion about these issues and to "practice what they preach." Training in cultural competence helps staff members reflect on the role they play in representing the agency to the community. It also helps to have an agency culture that reinforces the value of cultural diversity, partnership and collaboration.

I don't care how professional a person is—when they come to the community, there still has to be that orientation, that

Race, culture and power have a strong influence on the implementation of a neighborhood-based initiative.

in-service that happens in the neighborhood. How you do work across town may be very different from how you do it in this neighborhood. They need to come expecting to learn, to value what they learn and value the people who are teaching it. Every lesson is not going to be textbook, and every lesson is not going to be comfortable.
—Community Leader

3. **Find a community liaison to facilitate communication and agency learning.**

When approaching the community, it helps to find a "guide" who has credibility in the community. This person can build links between the agency and the community by serving as a messenger and by helping the agency to learn about and effectively navigate within the community. In many sites, the agency recruited a community advocate to fill this role. In others, the agencies looked for someone already on their staff who had strong community ties. These guides helped the agencies meet key people, discover existing community resources and recognize opportunities they might not have been able to find on their own. In some cases the guide also helped train agency staff to teach others how to navigate through the community and to see the community as a partner, rather than an adversary.

You really need a person who has some neighborhood ties, a neighborhood history, even approach a neighborhood so that you have a spokesperson on your behalf, someone who is trusted in the community.
—Community Leader

*Making training sessions more accessible for foster parents reinforces **Family to Family** values.*

4. **Err on the side of inclusion, but be honest about limits.**

In order to create shared ownership for this work, agencies found it was best to err on the side of inclusion in bringing community members into the planning process and sharing decisionmaking. For example, Pennsylvania asked community residents to develop ways to distribute the grant dollars from the Foundation and then asked elected officials to participate in developing the request for proposal for these funds.

At the same time, there are certain decisions for which the agency holds the final legal responsibility. Honesty about the legal obligation of the agency and the limits of shared decisionmaking can help prevent disillusionment and resentment later on. For example, bringing families and community into decisionmaking about placement indicates that you want to involve them, but there are limits to this involvement since legal responsibility for placement rests with the agency.

5. **Find ways to move the work to the neighborhoods.**

Reinforcing community involvement in the change effort will mean finding ways to move the work of the agency into the neighborhoods. Moving meetings and training into the community provides on-site opportunities for breaking down barriers and building strong relationships. Making training sessions more accessible for foster parents reinforces ***Family to Family*** values. The agency is then not acting upon children's lives as an external agent but rather is facilitating a group of stakeholders to take action from the inside. We should also note that, while assignment of caseworkers to geographic units is essential to ***Family to Family***, merely moving workers to neighborhood offices does not assure real community partnership.

You can't just work from a building downtown if you're talking about doing real neighborhood work. You have to be in the neighborhood. People have to have relationships with you.
—Community Agency Director

6. **Focus on building support for and among foster parents.**

Changing the way the agency recruits and supports foster parents is a core strategy in implementing ***Family to Family***. (For more information, see the tool, *Recruitment, Training and Support: The Essential Tools of Foster Care.*) Most sites found they needed to recruit foster families in the neighborhoods and clearly establish expectations with foster parents about their role in working with birth parents. Many sites found it helpful to hold foster parent recruiting events and training sessions in the neighborhoods, rather than at agency offices elsewhere.

Sites found it essential to meet regularly with foster parents and relative caregivers to understand their needs and concerns. By listening to their most effective foster parents from the beginning, they learned about changes needed in the foster parent program—some of which could be implemented before kicking off the recruitment program. Ongoing communication with foster parents keeps the agency in touch with whether changes are working and can build support for recruitment.

As with staff, some resistance is inevitable. Involving foster parents in the planning and development of ***Family to Family*** and linking their work back to the vision and guiding principles builds support. As with staff, it also helps to find opportunities for foster parents to "try out" the changes in a learning frame of mind as a way of easing into their new roles.

> *Some foster parents were very resistant to doing this work. But once they'd actually had an experience with mentoring a birth family, they really felt their role as a member of the service team had been validated; they were touched. There was something about working with the birth family that brought home to them why they wanted to be a foster parent, because they really felt they were making a difference.*
> —Statewide ***Family to Family*** Coordinator

7. **Find ways to build ties to the community on an ongoing basis—this is not a one-time effort.**

The following suggestions highlight work that needs to be done on an ongoing basis to build and maintain ties with the community. While it is likely that you will not be able to start with all of these all at once, over time these efforts will strengthen your ties to the community:

- ❒ Share information on an ongoing basis, using community leaders to deliver your message as much as possible. An early foster parent crisis occurred in one site when foster parents assumed that the agency preferred to place children in "tough" neighborhoods so that they would always be placed with same-race families. The foster parents filed a civil-rights action that might have been avoided if foster parents had understood the principles behind ***Family to Family*** practices.
- ❒ Be visible in the community and accessible to all stakeholders. Workers became more comfortable in the neighborhoods as they got to know community members and learned more about the neighborhood. In many sites, geographically based caseloads contributed to this growing level of comfort.
- ❒ Clarify and redefine responsibilities with community agencies as their roles change over time.
- ❒ Tap into community power structures, so community members can speak on behalf of the public agency.

*Changing the way the agency recruits and supports foster parents is a core strategy in implementing **Family to Family**.*

By using data effectively, self-evaluation can become an ongoing process, not a one-time event.

- ❒ Be flexible; allow your agenda to be shaped by the community and its needs. While your goals and vision will need to be unwavering, how you get there can be determined with the community.
- ❒ In initial meetings with the community, be sure to send someone from the leadership of the organization whose position carries respect. The message to the community needs to be that this is important and worthy of the leader's time.

IV. Use Data to Drive Decisionmaking

Using data is not just about numbers. It is a means of building understanding, testing assumptions and creating focus for the change effort. When lofty talk is falling on deaf ears, data can translate the vision into concrete terms, making the work—and its results—feel more real. Without data, success is entirely subjective. In that environment, it is easy to feel that your work has no real impact. (See the tool, *The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice.)*

> *I was able to put my hands on this figure, which I'll never forget. In a nine-month period, our county had placed 90 children age four and under into long-term foster care. I took that piece of information to my staff and we ran with it. We caught everybody's attention because long-term foster care is not for young, adoptable children. Not ever, ever, ever. By taking a critical, visceral piece of data and saying, "Picture a kid four or under who we have just decided, as a system, including our judges, doesn't need to have reunification, adoption or permanent kinship care. It's going to be O.K. for him to grow up in this long-term foster care status." That really grabbed people.*
> —Agency Deputy Director

One of the core strategies of ***Family to Family*** is to develop an ongoing flow of information about agency performance to all parts of the agency and into the community on a regular basis. This information, organized by key outcomes, makes it clear where progress is and is not being made. By using data effectively, self-evaluation can become an ongoing process, not a one-time event.

1. **Review current data and determine what more you need to know.**

   Determine what kind of data you have and need in order to measure progress toward your goals. Experiences from other sites can provide examples of data that others have found useful. Tracking the experience of a child throughout his life in out-of-home placement can serve as valuable data in helping you understand what children are experiencing in your system.

   Early in the initiative, you will want to consider the data you already have to gauge where you are with respect to the outcomes you hope to achieve. This self-evaluation will help you see what needs to be changed and will create a baseline for measuring progress. Develop milestones for tracking progress and use the achievement of these milestones to communicate successes to the legislature, media and the community. The tool, *The Need for Self-Evaluation: Using Data to Guide Policy and Practice,* offers specific suggestions about the types of data that may be helpful to include.

2. **Establish processes for capturing and disseminating data.**

   Many sites found that it was helpful to create a self-evaluation team to compile, analyze and disseminate data in support of ongoing monitoring and adjustments. Having representatives on this team from multiple perspectives and multiple parts of the organization helped support integration of data and information across the agency.

In some places, the self-evaluation teams worked to establish standard processes for capturing, evaluating and sharing data. They found that having such processes saved wasted time and prevented duplicated efforts. Before putting such processes in place, data evaluation was limited to special requests that required lengthy, sometimes manual, counts.

The Department of Human Resources would say, "I need to know x about your kids in foster care; for example, how many teenagers you have and where they're living." People would scramble and send out messages to all foster care supervisors saying, "Count up all your teens and their living arrangements. I need this by tomorrow." It was a mess. Once we developed the systems, I could produce an answer to a question like that in ten minutes.

—***Family to Family*** Coordinator

3. Find ways to increase your staff's comfort level with data.

Data provides a "roadmap" for managers, indicating where to begin change efforts and how to gauge success. Managers can be encouraged to evaluate practices on the basis of outcomes and to use data to shape policy and procedures. In order for data to be used effectively, the information needs to be presented in ways that are accessible. A manager's ability to use reports to see trends and track progress toward goals will help build sustainability.

I created a friendly, low-key report called, "What's Going On Around Here?" It said things like, "How old are our kids? Where are they living? Why did they come into care?" I sent out the draft to the supervisors and workers saying, "Look at these numbers. If they don't look right to you, we need to talk because this information came from the system. So if they're not right, the only way it can be changed is for workers to report what they know to be accurate."
It gave them a chance to see that the data was being used. They had an investment in not wanting information put out there that was wrong. It was wonderful. Workers used the data in recruiting foster parents by being able to tell them, "In your community, x number of kids came into care. Many of those kids had to be placed in other communities because we didn't have foster homes in their neighborhood. That's why it's important for you to become foster parents."

—***Family to Family*** Coordinator

Because the use of data will surface issues of accountability, it may contribute to some anxiety among staff, who may be worried about being held accountable to new measures—particularly if they only have limited control over outcomes. Setting expectations about the use of data as a learning tool, rather than as a way to monitor individual performance, can help address this concern.

4. Put data to use.

❒ ***Build community involvement***—
Sharing data about a neighborhood with its constituents can make a provocative argument about the need for their participation.

A couple of our staff members who had connections in the neighborhood started talking to people there, using data to help them understand why it should matter to them that children were being placed outside of the neighborhood. For example, when they met with the principal of the local school, they showed him how much money his school was losing in allotments because of the number of children being placed in other school districts. They also met with local shop owners and showed them what they were losing in sales because children were leaving the neighborhood. With this information in hand, they were able to gain support for recruiting more foster families in the neighborhood. When it became personal, people began to have a real interest in it. The

Data provides a "roadmap" for managers, indicating where to begin change efforts and how to gauge success.

breakthrough was getting our data broken down so it was geographically accessible for sharing with the neighborhoods.
—County Agency Director

❒ ***Show progress toward outcomes***—Data provides clear information about the results of the agency's actions, including what is working well and what might not be producing the desired outcomes.

When we were finally able to get a self-evaluation team together to look at the data, it was very powerful. It was the first time we were able to look at whether or not we were getting the kinds of outcomes that we had thought we were. We could show that some of these practices actually worked, and we realized that some of the things we had been doing didn't seem to be working at all or had unintended outcomes. It just really inspired people.
—Statewide ***Family to Family*** Coordinator

❒ ***Promote agency communications***—Simple presentation materials can be developed to share data with a wide variety of audiences in promoting ***Family to Family***. Data can demonstrate the impact of the agency's work and mark progress toward a shared set of goals. Information can be built into presentations and trainings on related initiatives to show the connections between ***Family to Family*** and existing change efforts.

❒ ***Facilitate interagency teamwork***—Many of the sites developed data teams that included a representative from partner agencies such as juvenile justice, education and mental health. Developing the capacity to track placements across systems and to compare outcome data resulted in better communication and facilitated other collaborative efforts.

One site created an interdepartmental team from various agencies, and they learned a lot about each other and their programs. It was amazing how little they knew. There was this hypothesis that the same children were being seen by multiple agencies, but what they actually saw when they "unduplicated" the numbers was that there was less of a problem than people thought.
—Self-evaluation Consultant

❒ ***Justify additional funding***—Data can help agencies to demonstrate qualifications for additional, previously untapped sources of funding.

Using data analysis right on the spot, we saw that 77 percent of the children in care had developmental disabilities, but only 14 percent of the children were in programs designated as such, and six percent of the families were receiving SSI. Someone picked up the phone and immediately tried to get some information and correct this. It was an example where you could actually see that information was having a powerful policy reaction.
—Self-evaluation Consultant

The case for building ***Family to Family*** into the overall budget structure needs to occur in the beginning phase to ensure the future sustainability of the initiative. In many sites, using data to enhance budget requests was successful in later phases in gaining new staff and additional funding for the initiative.

One county was able to request, using their data projections, an amount of money for a county tax levy for children's services. They looked at the cost associated with the number of children expected in each of the different placement categories and then projected the total dollars needed to serve these children. The tax levy was successful, in part, because their projections were backed by really defensible numbers based on a long history of serving children over time.
—Self-evaluation Consultant

An early task of your planning team could be to identify those constituents who will have a stake in the change effort.

❒ ***Make the case for policy changes***—Data can help agencies support recommendations for changes in laws and policies.

Without data, our credibility was very low. If you are trying to argue a case to your policymakers at the state office or the legislature, it doesn't work to say, "Just trust me."

—***Family to Family*** Coordinator

V. Attend to Other Constituents

Identifying and approaching constituents outside the agency will be an ongoing part of the change effort. Constituents for the ***Family to Family*** work have included agency partners (including private agencies), the courts, the legislature and the media. A process for identifying constituents or "stakeholders" for the initiative has been developed and is described in the tool, *Building Support for Innovation Inside Child Welfare Agencies*.

1. Identify, prioritize and plan for reaching out to key stakeholders.

An early task of your planning team could be to identify those constituents who will have a stake in the change effort. Plans for reaching out to these groups can then be sequenced and coordinated with the overall implementation plan for the initiative. Many sites found it helpful to invite key political leaders to participate in planning and implementation efforts. In addition to determining target constituents, the team will also want to plan how you will reach out, who will take the lead in building each relationship, and how you will keep key stakeholders informed about your progress.

You need a strategic communications plan to cultivate the champions that are there now. Then, you look down the road and figure out a plan over the next five- to ten-year period. Elected officials and reporters come and go. How are you going to educate and bring the new people into the loop? You've got to be looking to the future and finding the best horse to ride for the long-term relationship. It's all about strategic thinking.

—Director, statewide nonprofit organization

2. Build relationships with the media.

A large part of stakeholder management is publicizing ***Family to Family*** activities and successes. (For more information, see the tool, *Strategic Communications: Media Relations for Child Welfare*.) The agency's public relations staff might develop a campaign to publicize ***Family to Family*** early in the implementation effort. By supporting and educating the media, you can work with them to reinforce your successes. For example, you could invite targeted members of the media to community meetings. Some agencies found that it was important to share both positive and negative results as a way of building credibility.

The media are a key constituency because of the power they have to shape public opinion, which also has an impact on how elected officials will view your work.

If you walk into a legislator's office, the first thing you'll see is the morning newspaper clips. That's why our relationships with the media are so crucial. You try to put yourself in the position of being the expert so that when stories break, the papers always contact you for your opinion. You have to cultivate these relationships on an ongoing basis. You feed them a little information, send them news articles and success stories saying, "Hey, we thought you might want to see this." It's a marathon as opposed to a sprint. You keep putting your material in front of them.

—Statewide ***Family to Family*** Coordinator

Building relationships with the media early on can be tremendously helpful when the agency is faced with the inevitable crisis. For example, when a child died in Birmingham, the newspaper

Some agencies found that it was important to share both positive and negative results as a way of building credibility.

coverage focused on the need to build community responsibility for the safety of children rather than putting blame on the agency.

3. **Work with the legislature to change statutes to support *Family to Family's* principles.**

   Some changes to policies and practices will require changes in the underlying child protection laws that govern the agency's work. Building relationships with legislators and other elected officials early on in the process will help generate support for making these changes. In Ohio, the state agency hosted briefings, participated in conferences and published a fact book of county-by-county data to educate legislators. They met with legislators in the capital and also in their home districts and focused on providing them with concrete data to inform their decisionmaking. By reaching out to candidates early, you may be able to influence their views.

   It may also be helpful to work with new leaders to let them know you have an outcomes-based plan supported by data and that you are staying on track. Sites found that it helped to be able to show results linked to particular changes in practice. Those that could reduce costs—such as lower rates of entry into care or reduced lengths of stay—were particularly compelling. In addition to changing existing laws, working with the legislature to create new laws to support the agency's new ways of operating can ensure long-lasting change.

4. **Build support among private agencies.**

   Implementation of ***Family to Family*** will bring about changes in the ways that private agencies operate and relate to the public agency. This effort works best if it is seen as collaborative and built upon principles rather than simple authority. Just as with internal staff, education, encouragement and assistance can go a long way toward sustaining needed changes.

   Private agencies may have relationships in the community and may be able to play a role in supporting the agency in the neighborhoods. In one site, private providers were encouraged to become involved in community collaboratives and were also asked to build capacity in areas where the agency needed support. (See the two tool series, *Collaboration for Change*, particularly *Part One: A Model for Public and Private Child Welfare Partnerships*.)

*Implementation of **Family to Family** will bring about changes in the ways that private agencies operate and relate to the public agency.*

VI. Manage the Change Process

Because ***Family to Family*** serves as a catalyst for systemwide innovations, the work of the leader is all about managing change. Prior sections have covered many ideas, including activities, relationships and infrastructure that are needed. Below we summarize some of the key aspects of managing change effectively.

1. **Build broad ownership for the initiative.**

   As described throughout this tool, one of the keys to the success of ***Family to Family*** is a shared vision that is "owned" by multiple constituencies both inside and outside the agency. Building this level of commitment takes time, flexibility and ongoing dialogue.

   Looking back, if there was one thing on which each ***Family to Family*** site would have spent more time on early in the process, it would have been building the skills and understanding of middle managers. These are members of the "Be Team"—they will be here when you arrive and they will be here when you leave. Building their commitment to the principles of ***Family to Family*** and developing the skills they need to manage such a long-term initiative will be critical. Leaders

cannot accomplish all of the work; those in the middle are key to successful changes in frontline practice.

> *Regardless of what position I held, I met with staff on a periodic basis and did training and talked with them about concepts and issues and where we were going. In the whole process of managing change, there needs to be some constant that says, "This is your vision. This is what you're working for. These are the values that undergird us." They can rely on those to help sustain them, even when their whole caseload got transferred or if they had to go to another unit or they lost everybody in the unit.*
> —Agency Deputy Director

From New York's Administration for Children's Services:

> *For nearly three years we have held quarterly management retreats with all frontline and middle managers in our Child Protective Services division to deepen their involvement and active participation in reform. The managers have been challenged to work each day as though they are building the legacy that they will leave behind. They have come to realize that without ownership there is no legacy. Frontline and middle managers are now the champions and implementation leaders of reform innovations such as Family Team Conferences and Instant Response Teams in Child Protective Services.*
> —Agency Associate Commissioner

2. Build and then sustain momentum.

Many of the ideas discussed in earlier sections focused on ways to build momentum—for example, through identifying a shared set of outcomes, building community participation early, developing champions and so forth. One challenge you will face is in sustaining that momentum over time.

Since this is a long-term effort, it helps to divide the work into phases, identifying milestones along the way that can be tied to particular results you hope to achieve. These can become opportunities for celebration, as mentioned earlier. One way to do this is to create short-term, "100-day" projects that address a particular issue or piece of the change. Managers, line staff, community members and others can become inspired by knowing that they are taking on a piece of work that can reach a successful outcome in a relatively short time. By sequencing such projects, the planning team can help people see how these short-term steps are building toward a larger goal. This approach can keep the energy up and include many people without their having to serve on endless task forces. One success can breed the desire for another, and the work can bring different kinds of people and interests together around particular tasks to get results.

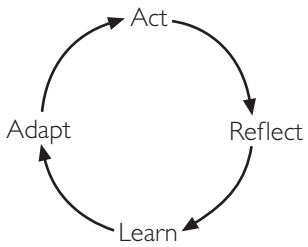
3. Experiment, learn and adjust as you go along.

Implementing ***Family to Family*** is an ongoing process of putting a core set of values and principles into action. Each agency and, in fact, each neighborhood, will need to find ways of doing this that fit with their particular circumstances. While the core principles of ***Family to Family*** apply across sites, the ways of implementing them will need to be discovered in each place.

Discovery can be a messy process, leading even the best of plans astray. While it is important to have initial plans in place to guide your work, it is just as important to have a process for adapting them. As you work with your staff, the community, courts, legislature, media and others and as you explore and use data more effectively, there will be multiple opportunities for learning. An "action-learning" approach, illustrated below, balances action with reflection and adaptation.

*Implementing **Family to Family** is an ongoing process of putting a core set of values and principles into action.*

One of your challenges as a leader will be to create time for reflection for yourself and your staff, despite the daily pressures you face.



This model recognizes the need for insights, which are developed over time and are based on experiences and data. It suggests a process that includes taking time to think about what is working and what you may need to be doing differently and then shifting your plans accordingly.

As you reflect on your work, you may find that some parts of the change effort are taking longer than you had hoped. For example, a change you had planned to complete in three months may take six or even more months to complete because of the complexities of bringing multiple constituents (foster parents, community groups, private agencies, etc.) together. The fact that it takes longer than planned does not mean that the effort will not ultimately be successful. Sometimes you have to slow down to go fast.

One of your challenges as a leader will be to create time for reflection for yourself and your staff, despite the daily pressures you face. Making time for reflection and learning will enable you to look for the "big picture" systemic causes of day-to-day crises. By addressing these problems systematically, rather than putting out the same fire again and again, you and your staff can eventually save time, which will enable you to focus on other important issues. Some agencies found that having reflection time as a regular agenda item in meetings kept up the momentum. Periodic offsites were also helpful in providing more concentrated thinking time.

Building this work into an existing meeting structure, rather than adding more meetings, helps emphasize that this is not a pilot initiative but rather a part of the ongoing work of the agency. For example, rather than holding separate meetings with community members, some agencies brought community members into certain existing meetings, which signaled a real shift in the way work would be done.

4. Create infrastructure to ensure sustainability.

In order to help ensure that the changes being made can withstand new administrations and shifts in the political tide, changes need to be supported by infrastructure—such as formal boards, changes in policies and laws and new organizational structures. At times of crisis or administrative change, these kinds of infrastructure supports are important to sustain the work. For example, in one site, the group of community and agency members who planned the initiative formed a community board that successfully resisted a new commissioner's attempts to dismantle ***Family to Family***. It was the community board's voice that made the difference.

Like many of the changes described in this tool, building a supportive infrastructure that can be sustained through multiple administrations can only be accomplished over time with the help of champions and other supportive constituents whom you have identified and groomed along the way.

VII. Conversation with Judith Goodhand, Former Director, Cuyahoga County Department of Children & Family Services, Cleveland, Ohio

Why did you decide that *Family to Family* was needed in Cuyahoga County?

Staff, at that time, were miserably demoralized. They were angry, depressed and felt criticized for everything. They had very high caseloads, did not have adequate training and had inadequate resources. Not surprisingly, the services for families and children were poor, and the agency had a very bad reputation in the community and with the state. This was a staff that, above anything else, needed a reason to come to work and needed a vision of what could and should be. Maybe even before that, they needed a sense that things could change and that things could get better for kids, for families and for themselves.

Another issue was how to gain credibility for the agency. I started calling around to get ideas and talk about best practice. About three to four months after I arrived in Cuyahoga County, Kathleen Feely from the Casey Foundation came to do a presentation on ***Family to Family***. It was very much in line with my vision that children should have families and that if foster parents actively worked as team members they could really achieve a lot. It was designed to be a real reform effort. In September 1993 we became a ***Family to Family*** site.

What did you hope that *Family to Family* would accomplish?

I was hoping that it could provide a very broad and strong safety net—a foundation of services and support for children who are at risk for abuse and neglect and for their families. I was very attracted to ***Family to Family*** because I felt that this would only work if there was a shared responsibility among the community, political leaders, agencies and organizations that traditionally work with at-risk children and families, mental health professionals, the schools, the media and the neighbors who live next door to the families and children. It had become increasingly obvious to me that the work that needed to be done in child welfare could not be done by our agency alone.

When you were first starting the work on ***Family to Family***, what were your top two – three priorities? In other words, where did you focus your attention first?

Kids in the lobby

The first priority was very clear. We had a crisis in placement. Children were sleeping on chairs and benches in our lobby with their belongings stuffed in plastic bags after being dumped off at the agency by private agencies, foster parents or the police. It wrenched your heart out. There had come to be an extraordinary acceptance of this situation with staff because they felt helpless to change things. On my first day at the agency we formed the KIL (Kids in the Lobby) group whose task was to find a way to end children sitting in the lobby and place those children with families. It was a very short-term goal; it took about three months to achieve and was meant to be very visible and emblematic of the fact that things can change.

Defining our goals

I felt that it was very important to create, define and articulate the purpose of the agency to establish and make visible the vision and to define the goals we wanted to accomplish. This was necessary for a number of reasons. For one thing, the process involved a lot of staff and created a sense of team. Also, there was more pressure than I would have dreamed of from other stakeholders in the community for their priorities. We developed goals based on the mission and values of the agency. We prioritized them based on what our data showed us were the greatest needs of the children and families

This was a staff that, above anything else, needed a reason to come to work and needed a vision of what could and should be.

who were referred to the agency. We could not do everything at once, and this strategy gave us a way to respond to pressures that would have diverted us from our priorities.

What were the principles that guided your work?

- ❒ Children need families to protect them and meet their needs.
- ❒ Families need the support of their communities in raising their children.
- ❒ Public child welfare agencies need to build new partnerships in the neighborhoods where those children and families live.

How did you develop your strategic plan?

We began by pulling out all of the data we had about our agency. We had an archaic system of gathering data, but we did have the basics. In some cases, we set our goals based on the data we had and then defined the first step in implementation as gathering solid baseline data about our current operations so that we could understand what was needed.

Reaching out to the community

Reaching out to the community was another major priority. That was the hardest thing in the world for me to do—not because I did not believe in it. I believed in it passionately. Not because I did not want to—up to that point, I had lived in smaller communities where we had worked closely with the community, and I had seen how powerful it could be. It was hard because when I spent time reaching out to the community, I felt like a neglectful parent, going off to watch the neighbor's kids without paying attention to my own family. There was so much to be done here inside the agency; I needed reinforcement. Fortunately I had some very good staff—from frontline to top team—who kept reminding me that we had to be out there.

We knew we had to get to know some folks in the neighborhoods from which most children were entering care.

Did you have a plan for approaching the community or going to meetings?

It would be inaccurate to say we had a well-developed plan. We cast a broad net for our local planning group. We reached out to every stakeholder we could think of—beyond the usual cast of characters, we made strong efforts to get foster parents, birth parents and youth. We did things like pick them up and make sure they had a buddy who could accompany them.

We knew we had to get to know some folks in the neighborhoods from which most children were entering care. We went to our staff to find out who were the neighborhood leaders and asked them for some help getting connected. We also are a city of community centers, so we reached out to them for this initial planning group.

When did you begin working with the community and how did you get started?

We began to reach out to the community immediately. We organized the first meeting with the local planning group within my first six months. Because we involved others so early on, they really got to see us stumble along the way.

I think some of that muddling through had a beneficial effect. We did not always walk into the room agreeing with one another among our staff, so some of that dialogue went on in front of the community. While we did not always agree with each other about how to get them accomplished, there was total agreement about the principles and the goals.

When we had meetings, we sent out informal invitations describing what we wanted to do. We also used the model we talk about in foster parent recruiting—we would follow up the invitations with phone calls. So people came to the local planning group, and we had astonishing attendance. We met weekly. It became obvious that this was a community that had a lot of interest in

children. For the first several months, our meetings ranged from 40 – 60 people from all around Cleveland. We really did not begin to target particular communities at first, except for inviting particular neighborhood community centers to come.

What was the role of the planning group?

The local planning group was pulled together to work for nine months on the plan to be presented to Casey. They were a good sounding board. We would have the other committees come in and present their ideas to this planning group. They would raise other issues, share their perspectives or endorse the plans.

Private agency providers

I felt that it was very important to immediately address issues with the private agency providers. Shortly after I began as director in 1992, I had a big meeting with the private providers to introduce myself, tell them about our mission and talk about the values that I came with. We were proposing a major change in the way we would do business with them. I was saying that children needed to be in families. One out of five children were in congregate care, and we needed the private agencies to help us change that. We gave them an opportunity to ask questions about any rumors that had come up, and we committed to answer them or to get the answers.

I also raised the issue of the number of kids who got dropped off at night in the lobby by the private agencies. They complained about how difficult these kids were, and I pointed out the irony to them—if these kids were easy children we would want them with families rather than in their specialized care. I think they were impressed by the work of the KIL group. We took a problem that had been going on for years and, in three months, we stopped it. That sent the signal that there was enough will among the top staff that changes would be made.

We found we had to listen to the private providers about the things that we were not doing, too. We were not paying our bills on time, not getting medical cards for the children or sometimes not even telling them the name of a relative contact for the children we were placing in care. Reciprocity came from some very straight talk between the private providers and our staff.

Before that time, there had been very little respect between the private providers and our staff—they had had very little interaction. Frontline workers and supervisors perpetuated myths that private providers were money grubbers, and their staff stereotyped the public agency workers as lazy and bureaucratic. At that first meeting we agreed to start two committees—administrative and practice. Out of that, 20 subcommittees were created. Sometimes it felt crazy to have so many committees, but I think it was important. When you sit around a table together and talk and wrestle with different issues, you create different relationships.

Looking back to the beginning of ***Family to Family***, are there things that you did not do at first that you wished you had done?

We were not as clear as I thought we were about the fact that this was a reform effort that encompassed the whole agency. As a result, we kept having to go back and explain that neighborhood-based foster care was not for a subset of foster parents. This was the philosophy for foster parenting in our county.

I also think that I did not find enough ways to address the staff in order to bring everyone on board. There were 900 employees in the agency at the time, so getting everyone on board was really difficult.

I did spend a lot of time building allies inside and outside of the agency, although in that first year I did not give enough attention

When you sit around a table together and talk and wrestle with different issues, you create different relationships.

From very early on, we measured progress against very specific goals.

to the media. I got an unfortunate reminder of that when we had a child death. From that point forward, I never neglected the media.

I tend to still believe that sometimes you cannot do all of the things that have to be done first. I think it is important to build a strong foundation and to take all of those developmental steps but, sometimes, you have to plunge ahead even when you are not ready. We told staff, "We are not going to place any more babies in group homes," and immediately put in place a policy that every foster parent had to be called and asked whether they would take a baby needing placement before a group placement could be considered. Staff had said that there were not foster parents who wanted to take babies, but for caseworkers carrying more than twice the normal caseload, it was easier and safer to leave babies in the hospital or place them in group homes. People were so overwhelmed that they were taking shortcuts.

How did you work with the staff to build support for *Family to Family*?

I thought about this a lot as I was walking into an agency where I did not know a soul. I spent a lot of time and energy getting to know people. Every night I went to the child-abuse and neglect hotline unit to see what was going on and how things were being responded to. I ate in the cafeteria every day for the first year so that I could meet and talk to caseworkers. I pulled and read files. I spent a lot of time walking around and talking to people. I asked people how they made decisions. I did all of this because I wanted to have a sense of where the agency was and to communicate the values of where we needed to be.

How did you find champions inside the agency for this work?

As we worked on the strategic plan we asked for staff to volunteer on committees. I began sitting in on committee meetings to get to know staff. Sit through a few meetings and you get to know who has passion for the work, who is a leader and who has connections outside the agency in the community.

When we set up our planning-group meetings, we sent out invitations to staff saying that we were looking for leaders in our agency. When you pose an offer like that, you are likely to get people who are interested in being proactive. We encouraged everyone to come, but we also had particular people that we targeted to make sure they got the message (because in an agency that big, it was hard to get the word out to everyone). Beyond that it was word of mouth.

How did you build ownership among the staff?

Committee membership was a big factor in building ownership for the reform. The Team Decisionmaking Committee, for example, worked together for a year working out how we would provide training, sorting out issues of confidentiality and deciding what it meant for us to share ownership with the community. There were dozens of committees like that.

From very early on, we measured progress against very specific goals. Whenever we reached a benchmark (i.e., for recruitment in a neighborhood), we had an agency-wide celebration by hanging balloons or having coffee and donuts (often donated by a local business) available in the lobby. We announced our successes at meetings with the commissioners. We would hang large banners across the lobby congratulating particular units on meeting their benchmarks. We had stories in our newsletter honoring people doing particular ***Family to Family*** work.

I also met with every division in the agency for a conversation about how this

is changing day-to-day work. What do you do differently now? What would make it easier to do the work you need to do? We tried to think of as many ways to remind people about ***Family to Family*** as we could. Team decisionmaking was one of the best ways because every time a child came into care or was moved, there was a caseworker who was part of a process that was designed to show community involvement, respect for parents and shared decisionmaking.

It was amazing to me how quickly the staff embraced the goals of ***Family to Family***. They believed in children being with families, and they believed in community. They had grave misgivings about the specifics of that—the issue of placing the children in the neighborhoods. However, they were very responsive when they began to hear from families and children.

How did you communicate and enact your principles?

We used every opportunity to communicate our principles. We revised the foster parent training, the contracts with private providers and the signed agreements with foster parents to institutionalize the principles. We required a family team meeting every time a foster parent requested that a child be removed. In 50 percent of the cases the request was withdrawn after the meeting. We set standards around returning phone calls and making visits to foster families to increase the foster parents' sense of being valued. We also began to use birth parents, foster families and youth in new caseworker training because we wanted staff to hear from the people who had experienced both good and bad practice and what it felt like to be subject to bad practice. Caseworkers learned that respect was a very important thing to demonstrate physically. Walking the foster family to the door when they visited the agency, promptly returning phone calls and increasing the parents' level of comfort during the Team Decisionmaking meeting by seating them next to someone they were familiar with were all ways to demonstrate respect.

How did you communicate why it is important for the community to be involved in decisionmaking?

It really helped to have staff meet with and listen to families in training, orientation or at foster parent cluster meetings. For example, when asking birth parents, "What would have made it easier for you?" they answered, "Having someone in the meeting who lives on my block." Most of the change in caseworker attitude about community involvement happened when workers were geographically assigned. Exposure to a particular community helped them to learn resources and to know names and faces. Also, every time there was one of these decision making meetings, with the permission of the parent, we would call the neighborhood center and ask for a support person to come because these were the people who knew what supports and resources would be available to these families.

How did you roll out neighborhood-based assignments?

We started practically the first day, saying that one of the major considerations should be to find a foster family who lived in the child's school district. It was an incremental process—something that is still going on. Summer 2000 marks a major milestone because in Cleveland two units of caseworkers are going to move their offices into a neighborhood center. Up until now they have gotten their cases from the neighborhoods and used the center for training and meetings, but they have not had their whole offices there. Now the plan is that they will be located with offices in the neighborhoods. That has taken from 1993 until now to put in place.

*It was amazing to me how quickly the staff embraced the goals of **Family to Family**.*

For me what was most important was the feeling that we had built some ownership—and, as a result, sustainability—for this work.

How did you involve foster families in this work?

We tried to have good representation at each foster parent association meeting. The deputy director also met monthly with a committee of foster parents to talk about any issues they wanted to address. There was initial resistance and suspicion about neighborhood foster care; however, we quickly discovered that some foster parents had already been doing this work. They came forward as natural leaders for the reform. Obviously, they could be heard by other foster parents in ways that we could not be heard.

Did you work with other stakeholder groups early on—the legislature or the media?

Yes, we tried to provide them with either the data or the numbers that indicated our progress and the stories that would put a face on these numbers. We had much more success with the newspapers, where we had the opportunity to relate to one or two reporters, than with other media. This began when I reached out to them after a major story about a child death. I sat down with the editorial board to understand what additional information might have been helpful to present the agency's point of view. I believe one result of this conversation was that they took the time to learn about the complexity of the decisions caseworkers make. We developed a great deal of trust and felt comfortable letting them track a number of cases over time to deepen their understanding. It was a lot of work, it felt like a big risk, but it paid off with intelligent and thoughtful reporting.

How did you know that the work you had been doing to build ownership was working?

It is hard to know, but I have to tell this story because it was so important to me at the time. After we had been working on ***Family to Family*** for a couple of years, there was a change in political leadership in our county. During the election, there had been a highly publicized child death. As a result, once the new team was in office, there was a public hearing where I had to give a report to the commissioners. It was a huge meeting—absolutely packed—and all of the media were there. I gave my report, and the commissioners asked some very pointed questions, which I answered. As I turned to sit down, someone from the audience (from the community) asked to be heard and, after that, another 15 people spoke up, including neighborhood leaders and more traditional private providers. Each of them, in turn, voiced their support for the work we had been doing, saying things like, "We believe in the direction the department is going in, and we can't turn back. This is important to us." It was very powerful. For me what was most important was the feeling that we had built some ownership—and, as a result, sustainability—for this work.

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