



**WELFARE PEER TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK
OFFICE OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE
ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**

**WASHINGTON STATE SITE VISIT: SHARING LESSONS LEARNED FROM TANF
AND CHILD WELFARE SERVICE INTEGRATION IN EL PASO COUNTY, CO**

FINAL REPORT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. OVERVIEW	1
II. SITE VISIT BACKGROUND	2
III. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PRESENTATION.....	5
1. OVERVIEW AND FRAMEWORK	5
1.1 TANF as a Primary Prevention Program.....	7
1.2 Child Welfare as an Anti-poverty Program	9
2. PROGRAMS AND POLICIES	10
2.1 Agency Structure	10
2.2 Four Cornerstones of Staff Training.....	10
2.3 Privatization of Child Placement Services: The Child Placement Agency Project.....	11
2.4 The Teen Self-Sufficiency Program	11
2.5 The Fatherhood Initiative: Center on Fathering.....	12
2.6 The Divert Program	12
2.7 Voluntary Family Preservation Services	12
2.8 Subsidized Permanent Custody Services	13
2.9 The Direct Link Program	13
2.10 The Alliance for Kids.....	13
2.11 The Child Care Response Team	14
2.12 Project Redirect.....	15
2.13 Other Programs	15
3. OUTCOMES.....	15
4. LESSONS LEARNED.....	16
4.1 Start-up and Planning Phase Lessons	16
4.2 Implementation Strategies and Lessons.....	17
4.3 Investing in Staff and Staff Relations Lessons	17
5. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.....	18

This report describes the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network event that took place in Spokane, WA and Bellingham, WA on October 29 – 30, 2003.

The report is available for download at: <http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/taevents/chron.htm>.

I. OVERVIEW

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The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network is a Federally-funded initiative sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA). The purpose of Welfare Peer TA is to provide peer-to-peer technical assistance to public agencies and private organizations operating the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Welfare Peer TA seeks to facilitate the sharing of information between and among States and localities and to establish linkages between organizations serving the needs of welfare recipients. In response to a request for technical assistance from the State of Washington, Welfare Peer TA sponsored a technical assistance event in Spokane, WA and Bellingham, WA that took place on October 29 – 30, 2003. Ms. Barbara Drake, the acting Director of the Department of Human Services in El Paso County, CO, visited both locations in Washington State to share information about El Paso County's model program for TANF and child welfare service integration. In addition to State staff, these technical assistance events were attended by local administrators, program managers, agency supervisors, front-line workers, and directors of local community-based organizations (CBOs).

II. SITE VISIT BACKGROUND

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The results of numerous research studies suggest that poverty is highly correlated with child maltreatment. Children living in families earning less than \$15,000 annually are more than 22 times more likely to experience maltreatment than those children whose families earn at least \$30,000 (Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996). Further, more than half of all foster care children come from welfare-eligible homes, and 70 to 90 percent of families receiving in-home support services through the child welfare system also receive welfare (Geen et al. 2001).

Findings such as these point towards the critical overlap between the systems of child welfare and economic assistance. This intersection of child poverty and child maltreatment validates providing financial support and employment services to low-income and/or TANF-receiving families as a means of preventing possible involvement with the child welfare system. However, while the families served by the two systems are often in common, the systems themselves do not always work well together.

In response to this disconnect, some States and localities (e.g., North Carolina, San Mateo County, CA, and El Paso County, CO) have made great strides in pioneering the integration and collaboration of TANF and child welfare services. As these innovative approaches have been shared across the country, other States and localities have responded by creating initiatives of their own. Specifically, in early 2003, the State of Washington created the Families and Communities Together (FACT) initiative, the vision of which is “to join with families and the communities in which they live to provide a continuum of coordinated and effective care.”

The FACT initiative was first conceptualized in the State of Washington in February 2003 when the Department of Social and Human Services (DSHS) Secretary Dennis Braddock charged the two Assistant Secretaries of the Children’s and Economic Services Administrations to work together to develop a plan for one large statewide Family and Children Services integration pilot project. Subsequently, it was decided that local communities would be heavily involved in the implementation of this project by identifying target groups and developing local service delivery models. Due to their strong community social service networks and their plans for service delivery improvements, Spokane and Bellingham were chosen as pilot sites to implement the vision of the FACT initiative.

Washington’s FACT initiative seeks to increase family safety and child well-being, to foster healthy, educated, and self-sufficient families, and to support strong, healthy, and vibrant communities. FACT is targeted to serve families with children who need services from more than one government administration within a State. The initiative envisions partnering closely with families in choosing services that the families will need and use. As it is conceptualized, FACT endeavors to pilot the systems integration and collaboration of numerous services,

including child welfare services, economic and child support services, juvenile rehabilitation services, developmental disabilities services, and mental health services. Service components that are part of FACT's action plan include family needs assessments, individualized client service plans, and a continuum of care that spans prevention, intervention, and post-intervention services. The structure of the FACT initiative includes a statewide steering committee, State office work groups, and Spokane and Bellingham as the two pilot project sites. The Steering Committee is responsible for selecting the integration model, identifying and approving the pilot sites, approving interagency agreements, plans, and models, and providing oversight by monitoring the overall progress of the initiative. Statewide advisory subcommittees include an intake and screening subcommittee, a fiscal subcommittee, a communications subcommittee, and an outcomes and evaluations subcommittee. The local pilot sites are responsible for developing local implementation plans, forming local collaborations and interagency agreements, and identifying solutions to local issues such as case management, operations, personnel, budget, and communications.

As of September 2003, both Washington State pilot sites were in the early planning and implementation phases of how they will address the FACT initiative. These two sites are actively working to formulate service delivery models that are suitable for their individual respective communities. Each group has established a mission statement, vision and charter statements, target populations, and tentative anticipated outcomes. During planning meetings, staff at both locations identified various social service models throughout the country that they'd like to learn more about to enrich their strategic plans. The social service system in El Paso County, CO was identified as being of particular interest due to its promising implementation of the integration and collaboration of TANF and child welfare services. Key stakeholders from Washington State visited El Paso County in May 2003 to learn about its model systems reform.

In a technical assistance request to the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network, staff voiced their desire to gain ideas and learn more lessons from the history of El Paso County's system reform. Specific implementation issues articulated by Washington State staff include:

- How do you create realistic timelines for system integration?
- How do you communicate a coherent integration strategy?
- How do budget considerations affect the planning process?
- What are the most effective and efficient means of collaboration with State and Federal policy-makers?
- How do we prepare staff to operate in a different service environment?

To facilitate this peer-to-peer interaction, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Family Assistance (OFA) Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network approved the technical assistance request and provided funds for Ms. Barbara Drake, the acting Director of the Department of Human Services (DHS) in El Paso County, CO, to visit both locations in Washington State and address their main implementation questions by describing El Paso County's model program. The Spokane Welfare Peer TA event took place on October 29, 2003, and the Bellingham event occurred the following day. The goal of the TA event was not to assist Washington State in replicating the El Paso County model but instead to provide Spokane and Bellingham with important lessons from which to learn. The following report describes the combined content of Ms. Drake's technical assistance presentations at these two sites.

Works Cited

Geen, Rob, Lynn Fender, Jacob Leos-Urbel, and Teresa Markowitz. (2001). *Welfare Reform's Effect on Child Welfare Caseloads*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban Institute. *Assessing the New Federalism* Discussion Paper 01-04.

Sedlak, A.J., & Broadhurst, D.D. (1996). *Third National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Washington, DC: United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect.

III. TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PRESENTATION

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While on-site, Ms. Drake conducted two consecutive one-day presentations, first in Spokane and then in Bellingham. The following sections of this report detail the combined contents of her two one-day presentations.

1. OVERVIEW AND FRAMEWORK

During her two technical assistance presentations, Ms. Drake outlined various aspects of the El Paso County model, including a basic overview, the conceptual philosophy, new definitions, key components for services, the team approach to case management, fiscal strategies, lessons learned, outcomes, and timelines. She began both days by recounting the history of the new model, which dates back to 1997 after the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996.

Ms. Drake began her presentations by laying the conceptual groundwork for systems collaboration to occur. She discussed the importance of having a clear vision and the value of a mission and guiding principles. For Ms. Drake, a vision, a mission, and guiding principles are the foundations that tie programs together that previously may not have considered degrees of common ground. When embarking on a large collaboration and integration project, it is important to first inquire, “What is the common ground that these agencies share?” In order for an organization to function in an integrated manner, Ms. Drake emphasized that there must be a conceptual framework within which all staff members can perform their job. This conceptual framework allows staff to understand and internalize where they fit into the broader structure of their agency. Because the systems of child welfare and economic assistance have separated themselves over the past 20 years, it is especially important that staff from both types of agencies agree on a clear vision and mission as the systems come together. These processes will facilitate culture change within an organization.

To provide examples of an integrated vision statement and mission statement, Ms. Drake presented El Paso County’s versions of these two unifying tools. The vision of this county’s Department of Human Services (DHS) is “to eliminate poverty and family violence in El Paso County, CO.” Their mission statement reads: “to strengthen families, assure safety, promote self-sufficiency, eliminate poverty, and improve the quality of life in our community.” Ms. Drake suggested that each community should make their vision as broad as possible, because a broad vision forces you to embrace the entire community to achieve it.

Ms. Drake also enumerated what she referred to as the “Guiding Principles” of her agency, stating that Guiding Principles are the glue that link agencies together and keep all staff on the same page. For Ms. Drake, guiding principles are the “how” steps of an agency moving

forward to work towards their vision and mission. This county's DHS has outlined Guiding Principles for the two categories of Systems of Care and Services.

In El Paso County, systems of care must:

- Be family-driven
- Protect the rights of families
- Allow smooth transitions between programs
- Build community capacity to serve families
- Emphasize prevention and early intervention
- Be effectively integrated and coordinated across systems.

Services must be:

- Culturally respectful
- Evaluated for outcomes continuously
- Delivered by competent staff
- Accessible, accountable, and comprehensive
- Individualized to meet the needs of families
- Strength-based and delivered in the least intrusive manner.

Ms. Drake stated that these Guiding Principles provide the service framework for all staff in the El Paso County Department of Human Services to work together under the same conceptual understanding of the underlying values of their job. There must be a commitment to operating within this framework at all levels of the organization. In addition, the "Seven P's" of El Paso County serve to help staff from multiple systems realize that their services are truly linked. These P's include: Protection, Prevention, Preservation, Placement, Permanency, Partnerships, and Proficiency. These seven P's demonstrate the existence of a continuum of services, which is a critical aspect to the concept of integrating services.

The pioneers of TANF and child welfare systems integration in El Paso County did not attempt to merely push two preexisting systems together. Instead, they endeavored to create an entirely new kind of system: one that takes the best from both systems and addresses families' needs in a more effective manner. Over 50 percent of individuals on the DHS TANF caseload

have been victims of domestic violence, either in their childhood or as adults. El Paso County DHS staff looked to statistics such as this one to realize the necessity of blending the systems to maximize resources, optimize service delivery options, and create the ability to provide customized services to each family. Ideally, El Paso County DHS sought to create an integrated system that would provide seamless, strengths-based, and family-centered services to all families that entered either the child welfare or economic assistance system.

After defining terms and laying the conceptual framework for systems integration, Ms. Drake introduced the two cornerstone concepts of the TANF and child welfare service integration in El Paso County: TANF as a Primary Prevention Program and Child Welfare as an Anti-Poverty Program.

1.1 TANF as a Primary Prevention Program

The DHS in El Paso County has shifted their focus on TANF from solely an economic assistance program to a significant means of providing prevention services. They frame the goal of TANF not to merely move people off welfare but instead to prevent later poverty. After the passage of welfare reform legislation in 1996, TANF was a sizeable block grant program that included considerable amounts of flexible money for States to fund prevention. In the first year of TANF implementation, Colorado identified six million dollars to use for prevention efforts. With their flexible funding, El Paso County decided that TANF child-only cases would be the first place that they would initiate their systems integration. Child-only cases are those TANF cases in which no adult recipient is included on the TANF cash grant.¹ Ms. Drake stated that non-parental child-only cases are often created when relatives care for a child because no parent is present. Grandparents raising their grandchildren comprise a large portion of non-parental TANF child-only cases. Parental child-only cases are defined as when a parent is present in the household, but is not eligible for receipt of TANF for a variety of reasons.² In these cases, although the parent is present, the TANF cash grant is calculated based on the child(ren).

Following the passage of welfare reform and the identification of flexible prevention funding through TANF, staff in El Paso County made the connection that the TANF child-only population, especially non-parental cases, is very closely linked to the practice of kinship care in the child welfare system. At the time, the county's TANF caseload included approximately 500 child-only cases. The decision was made to use non-parental child-only cases as the catalyst for systems integration because many of the reasons that lead grandparents to raise their grandchildren are similar to the characteristics of families that enter the child welfare system

¹ Charlesworth, L., Hercik, J., & Kakuska, C. (2003). "TANF Child-Only Cases Trends and Issues." A Newsletter sponsored by the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network. Found at: <http://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/newsletter/index.htm>.

² Ibid.

including substance abuse, teen parenting, and domestic violence. Even when families are not involved both the child welfare and economic assistance agencies, they often face similar challenges that can interfere with employment and parenting.³

To pioneer their earliest TANF and child welfare systems integration, El Paso County staff first developed a service delivery program for relatives that are raising their grandchildren. County leaders created their first-ever integrated team of child placement workers from the child welfare system and TANF workers from the economic assistance system. Next, DHS developed a relationship with the probate court to facilitate grandparents' ability to obtain guardianship and enroll children in school. Guardianship provided a legal buffer for grandparents as they began to play a larger role in their grandchildren's upbringing. In addition, DHS started support groups for grandparents to ask exactly what the grandparents needed to help them better raise their grandchildren. Ms. Drake stated that ten times as many grandparents in El Paso County are raising children through TANF child-only cases than as kinship caregivers in the child welfare system. Most importantly, all of these services to grandparents were funded using TANF dollars because serving non-parental child-only cases falls within the overall purposes of TANF.

Ms. Drake offered a particularly poignant example to illustrate the positive effects of reframing TANF as a primary prevention program. She recalled the case of one grandmother who was forced to raise nine grandchildren after her daughter was incarcerated. At the time, this grandmother lived alone in a one-bedroom apartment that soon was populated with nine young children. Using TANF dollars, the integrated TANF-child welfare DHS team helped this grandmother to relocate to a bigger house with sufficient space for such a large family. DHS helped pay the deposit on the house, assisted with purchasing furniture, and paid the first few months' rent. Without these front-end prevention services, Ms. Drake suggested that the alternative to this situation might cause these nine children to enter the foster care system. Instead, using TANF funds, the integrated team was able to keep this family together and provide prevention services to the grandmother. Ms. Drake used this example to encourage audience members to think differently about the many prevention services that can be offered using TANF funds. She also outlined the benefits of viewing TANF as a primary prevention program, such as keeping families together and saving foster care expenses for the State. For Ms. Drake, child welfare services, such as removing a child from a home, are some of the most intensive, intrusive, and expensive services that the State funds. By preventing the need for these services by using TANF funds, El Paso County's DHS has saved considerable amounts of money.

³ Hutson, R. (2003). "A Vision for Eliminating Poverty and Family Violence: Transforming Child Welfare and TANF in El Paso County, CO." Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) Policy Brief.

Lastly, Ms. Drake stressed that funding more prevention services through TANF dollars is a legitimate option to States. She emphasized that her agency has not played a fancy trick with “smoke and mirrors.” She encouraged members of the audience to revisit the four original purposes of the TANF legislation, noting that they are much broader in scope than the previous welfare legislation Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Ms. Drake believes that TANF was intended to more holistically address the needs of families living in poverty and prevent the need for services later on. As such, she does not believe that her agency is doing something that stretches the scope of TANF or pushes boundaries. Instead, the system reforms in El Paso County embody the original holistic purposes of welfare reform legislation.

1.2 Child Welfare as an Anti-poverty Program

As a compliment to viewing TANF as a primary prevention program, Ms. Drake also discussed her county’s approach to child welfare as an anti-poverty program. She stated that poor people are overrepresented in the child welfare system, as are minority children. Ms. Drake cited statistics that indicated that poverty is the most significant predictive factor for families entering the child welfare system.

With the robust infrastructure of services that have been developed through child welfare and TANF, such as safe housing, transportation services, and support services, Ms. Drake asked, “Doesn’t it make sense to use all the resources from TANF to serve families that are involved in child welfare and to use all the resources of child welfare to serve families that are on TANF? Why should a family in one system be denied the resources within the other system?” In a situation where an adoptive parent loses their job and is in danger of losing their adoptive parental rights as part of the child welfare system, employment resources can be used through TANF funding to help this parent get a job, get back on their feet, and safeguard against losing their adoptive child. This example illustrates the clear linkages between these two systems and the benefits associated with combining the service resources of both.

El Paso County DHS is currently working to form a combined team of child welfare caseworkers and TANF eligibility staff that will be completely cross-trained in both systems to address poverty-related neglect issues that arise during child welfare intake procedures. This team will examine the psychosocial and economic issues associated within the correlation of poverty and neglect. Ms. Drake discussed both the benefits of this integrated team and also the need for county leadership to be open to such notions of change and new ways of providing services.

2. PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

At any given time, the El Paso County DHS system runs approximately 60 to 70 initiatives and programs to support families. Although time did not allow her to elaborate each of these programs, Ms. Drake did summarize many of El Paso County's service programs and internal policies during her two one-day presentations. This section of the report provides brief summaries of the programs, policies, and initiatives that she described.

2.1 Agency Structure

The El Paso County DHS is structured into four main areas: Economic Assistance, Community Programs, Child Welfare, and Administrative Functions. TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid resources are offered in the broader Economic Assistance section. The bulk of social services are offered in the Community Programs section. Moreover, the department is creating a continuum of care within which the eventual goal will be that the child welfare administration only provides child protection services. Many caseworkers that once worked in child welfare are currently being transitioned into the Community Programs administration, which is the largest and fastest growing portion of the agency's organizational chart. This organizational philosophy seeks to divert families from child welfare services by building infrastructure in Community Programs.

2.2 Four Cornerstones of Staff Training

Ms. Drake emphasized that staff from all agencies need to understand the links between their interrelated services. She wants individuals that work in one specific area, such as adoptive placements, to understand the importance of other areas and to conceptualize their place within the larger agency as a whole. Ms. Drake commented that in the push towards specialization of labor, individuals within the system have lost their sense of providing holistic services and being connected to the greater whole.

El Paso County DHS seeks to reverse this trend by structuring their internal staff development training into four holistic cornerstones: anti-poverty, culturally relevant and respectful services, professional development, and child safety and/or ending family violence. Receiving training in these four "cornerstone" areas is a requirement of all staff, regardless of where they work. Ms. Drake believes that comprehensive training enhances job performance and enriches an understanding of service provision.

Other training opportunities provided through the agency include a tuition reimbursement program, outside speakers and workshops, case management classes, and foreign language classes. In addition, the Mission Possible training program sends new staff out into the

community for the purposes of learning how to navigate government services, as their clients must. As part of this training program, new staff eat at a soup kitchen, visit the Red Cross, travel using the public bus system, and fill out the cumbersome applications for different forms of government assistance such as Food Stamps and TANF.

2.3 Privatization of Child Placement Services: The Child Placement Agency Project

El Paso County DHS contracts out \$40 million in social services. These contracts include purchasing child support services and the privatization of child placement services. As part of the program called the Child Placement Agency Project, the El Paso County DHS privatized much of their child placement work through partnerships with child placement agencies in the community and Goodwill Industries. These agencies often provide both foster care and case management services. In this strategy, El Paso County worked with local county's attorney's offices and purchased a majority of casework services instead of providing them through the State. Due to the county's cap of 360 employees, they turned to privatization and contracting as a means of keeping agency staff numbers down.

While case management services are frequently contracted out, these contracts are comprised of very clear expectations and guidelines for service. This initiative also seeks to create incentives within the system to better serve children that will most likely not be able to permanently return home. Through financial incentives, these children have been adopted quickly in El Paso County, primarily by their foster parents. To create these incentives, El Paso County obtained additional Medicaid funding in addition to a Medicaid match through the State. This additional funding increased the amount of financial subsidies going to foster parents who become adoptive parents.

2.4 The Teen Self-Sufficiency Program

While working with adults to find employment is an important task, it does not necessarily change the outlook or goals of teens growing up in low-income households. Ms. Drake stated her strong belief that teens need to learn the importance of staying in school, to feel like they can have an effect on their future, and to consider what they want to be when they grow up. Funding services that motivate teens to believe that they can make influential decisions about their own futures can be an effective means of prevention.

To facilitate more effective services for teens, El Paso County DHS staff made efforts to consolidate all teen programming into two community centers. Monday-Friday, 3-6 p.m., these two community centers provide centralized teen programming by combining the services of up to 35 community partner agencies. The centers serve teens that live with their grandparents, teens on TANF, teens in foster care, and teens living in group homes. Notably, the effort to

consolidate these teen services was funded through TANF by paying the salaries of only two employees. The Teen Self-Sufficiency Initiative provides independent living skills, employment and training opportunities, and supportive services to adolescents, teens, and young adults (ages 13 to 25) living in foster care or living in families receiving TANF.⁴

2.5 The Fatherhood Initiative: Center on Fathering

El Paso County DHS has created a Center on Fathering to provide support services to fathers across a range of issues. This center was created out of the recognition that multiple departments throughout the agency were dealing with the various ways that fathers intersect with government systems. Social service systems are negatively impacted when fathers are not involved in families. A dad struggling to pay child support, an adoptive father grappling with a new parental role, and a divorced father trying to gain custody of his children are all examples of fathers interacting with the system at different points. The El Paso County Center on Fathering attempts to integrate some of these access points and provide across-the-board support for fathers.

2.6 The Divert Program

Ms. Drake stated that the Divert Program is essentially an enhanced domestic violence response team. Comprised of representatives from law enforcement, the District Attorney, Guardian ad Litem (GALs), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Head Start, the Humane Society, child protective services, TANF staff, and domestic violence organizations, this team deals with the most lethal and extreme domestic violence cases in the community. The Divert Program serves approximately 200 families at any given time and provides intensive wrap-around domestic violence services. It is co-located with a team of TANF staff mainly for the purposes of ensuring that victims of domestic violence can immediately access economic assistance and financial support services that they need. As an example, the Divert team intervened in a potentially lethal domestic violence altercation, found the female victim a safe place to live, and put money on her Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card, all within two and a half hours of the domestic violence incident.

2.7 Voluntary Family Preservation Services

A new addition to the Community Programs section of DHS, Voluntary Family Preservation Services is a team of former child welfare colleagues. This team now provides preventive voluntary family preservation services outside of the child welfare system to families

⁴ Hutson, R. (2003). "A Vision for Eliminating Poverty and Family Violence: Transforming Child Welfare and TANF in El Paso County, CO." Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP) Policy Brief.

who are not eligible for cash assistance. The team partners with community agencies to make referrals, and provides direct services to families. They take cases, make home visits, and provide resources to families who are in danger of entering the formal child welfare system. In addition, through what is referred to as ‘sanction prevention’ services, they also work with TANF families who are approaching their 60 month time limit and may be at future risk for becoming involved in the child welfare system. Hence, with this team, El Paso County DHS has generated a way to do family preservation and prevention services on the front-end yet pay for these services with TANF prevention dollars.

2.8 Subsidized Permanent Custody Services

Before the re-organization of El Paso County’s DHS, serving subsidized permanent custody cases required the State to pay for legal services and make monthly home visits. After the organizational change, El Paso County DHS leaders shifted the funding for these services to TANF, because of their links to TANF child-only cases. This shift moved these cases out of the juvenile court system and into domestic relationship court. Moreover, the judges approved and supported the change, as long as they were assured that the county was not attempting to shirk service provision. Ms. Drake stated that monthly visits were not relevant to what these families needed. Therefore, this new organizational shift eliminates unnecessary expenditures of staff time and money to conduct monthly visits and allows those resources to be spent in other ways.

2.9 The Direct Link Program

The impetus for this program was the concern of DHS staff about the numbers of parents losing their parental rights due to drug addictions. El Paso County staff wanted to find a way to provide substance abuse prevention and treatment services to these parents as an intervention to help families stay together. To provide these front-end services, El Paso County DHS formed a partnership with a small organization located in Denver that offers a program entitled Direct Link. The program seeks to prevent children from being removed from the homes of drug abusing parents by providing intensive home-based addiction recovery services to substance abusing parents who are at risk of becoming involved with child protective services. The recovery contract includes a high degree of parental accountability and numerous requirements that parents must meet in order to maintain custody of their children while they recover from an addiction. This prevention program is funded with TANF dollars because it diverts at-risk families from potentially becoming involved with the formal child welfare system.

2.10 The Alliance for Kids

Over the past six years, El Paso County DHS has experienced a significant rise in child care spending from a payroll of three million dollars in 1997 to the current 13 million dollar

payroll budget. Consistent with the pattern of many of the agency's other prevention efforts, DHS staff decided to think of early care and education as prevention activities that can be funded with TANF dollars. Ms. Drake stressed the agency leaders' belief in the importance of contributing to a community agenda around quality care instead of simply buying child care slots.

To integrate child care services through the agency into the broader community agenda, El Paso County DHS created a community coalition entitled Alliance for Kids. The coalition is comprised of community stakeholders who are involved in early care and early education. The group has formulated its own set of bylaws and has independently raised two million dollars through private foundations. Overall, the mission of the group is to create a system of care for young children that encompasses the different fields of child care, mental health, and early education.

2.11 The Child Care Response Team

For Ms. Drake, one noteworthy byproduct of the creation of the Alliance for Kids coalition was the initiation of a new team approach entitled the Child Care Response Team. During the initial planning phases of the community coalition around early care, Ms. Drake anticipated that efforts in the child care arena would eventually intersect with and impact child welfare services. The Child Care Response Team was the manifestation that directly made the foreseen link. This team predominantly serves children who are at-risk of expulsion from a child care setting due to their disruptive or unmanageable behavior. The team consists of a group of early childhood developmental specialists and serves children in the age range of 12 months to eight years old. These specialists labor to identify the causes of the child's misbehavior, exploring options such as undiagnosed mental health problems, medical problems, or even allergies.

The Child Care Response Team is funded in part using bridge funding from the State's Child Care Block Grant. However, the majority of its funding comes from private foundations. To date, the team has worked with over 300 children (mainly boys) by going into the child care setting, assessing the environment, and observing children's behavior. Plus, the project has generated significant outcomes. The efforts of the team enabled 296 of the 300 children served to remain in the child care setting from which they were in danger of being expelled.

Ms. Drake used the example of the Child Care Response Team to encourage audience members to think creatively about certain streams of money and to consider the impact of government spending power in communities. She advanced the notion of using child care

dollars, which States are spending anyway, and using them in new ways than simply buying slots.

2.12 Project Redirect

This program works with delinquent teens that either have been expelled from school or are in danger of removal from school. Jointly funded by law enforcement, the school districts, DHS, and Goodwill, this program operates in residential treatment settings for youth. Project Redirect offers a considerable amount of outdoor programming for teens, such as a running trip up Pike's peak, activities in an Olympic Training Center, and judo. The program strives to achieve very specific outcomes for teens and has enjoyed a high degree of success to date. Moreover, Ms. Drake stated that Project Redirect generates trickle down effects to other family members and siblings when troubled teens get their lives back on track.

2.13 Other Programs

Ms. Drake also briefly mentioned numerous other programs such as the Parent Opportunity Program (POP), their Linkages policy, a faith-based mentoring program, their family preservation team called Team Success, their Leadership Development program, and their Diversity Coalition. Additionally, she stated that El Paso County is one of six Green Book sites implementing the Green Book Guidelines for domestic violence and child maltreatment, as well as a Family-to-Family site as part of an Annie E. Casey Foundation initiative.

3. OUTCOMES

Since the inception of the TANF and child welfare systems reform that took place in El Paso County, CO, the social services system there has helped approximately 7000 to 8000 families move from welfare to work. Moreover, even with a four to five percent increase in population every year, the El Paso County Department of Human Services (DHS) has managed to maintain foster care placements at a steadily low number. Also, after considerable sustained efforts to move children from foster care to adoption, the adoption system in El Paso County has virtually no children waiting to be adopted. They have increased their adoptions over 300 percent since 1997. Ms. Drake tallied less than six children currently waiting to be adopted in El Paso County, a significant accomplishment given that one third of the county's population is under 18. In fact, El Paso County has the highest proportion of children of all counties in Colorado, yet systems reforms have caused the near complete elimination of adoption waiting lists.

Another effective service strategy employed by El Paso County is the diversion of a large amount of families that apply for economic assistance. Specifically, of the 64 counties in

Colorado, El Paso County alone is responsible for 47 percent of all families that are diverted from welfare assistance. They divert close to 250 families every month, often in as little as 60 days. The time clock never starts ticking for these families because this county finds other front-end support services that prevent families from going onto welfare.

Lastly, 70 to 75 percent of children who have been placed through the child welfare system return home within the first six months of placement. El Paso County has achieved a very low recidivism rate for re-abuse of children and a considerably high rate of family reunification.

Ms. Drake enumerated these outcomes during both the introduction and conclusion of her technical assistance presentations to validate the notion of delivering child welfare and economic assistance services in a new and innovative way. She also emphasized that these successes were not achieved at the expense of any other positive outcomes in the county.

4. LESSONS LEARNED

This section of the report presents a summarized compilation of the many of the Lessons Learned that Ms. Drake mentioned throughout her two presentations. These lessons have been categorized by topic. They include:

4.1 Start-up and Planning Phase Lessons

- Formulate a clear vision, mission, and guiding principles that will serve as the foundation to guide the TANF and child welfare integration;
- If you create a very broad vision, you're forced to embrace the community to achieve it;
- Build widespread support to overcome resistance to change;
- Form as many partnerships with the community as possible because no one agency can complete these systems changes in isolation of their partners and their communities;
- Systems change must occur through a community-based effort;
- Be as inclusive as possible when you are beginning a new initiative. It may be more work up-front, but it creates a much more comprehensive service system in the long run; and
- Make the decision and the commitment to try new things. If you jump off the dock, you're highly motivated to learn how to swim before you hit the water.

4.2 Implementation Strategies and Lessons

- Leaders should set a high bar for performance standards but then know how and when to get out of the way for day-to-day implementation processes;
- Being willing to take risks is an essential component of success and reform;
- Make services available to families when they need them and when they can be provided in a voluntary and strengths-based way;
- If you think of your organization like a monolith, each time you add a new program it falls into the paradigm of adding one more program to the monolith, like a barnacle on a rock. Instead, when you integrate programs, think about remolding and reframing the entire monolith and service structure;
- It is very important to understand what is important to your community and to involve community voices in your decision-making processes. Conduct community forums. Learning the needs of the community helps you to understand, as an agency, where you fit into the bigger picture and into the overall goals of the community;
- You'll be surprised at how little you have to actually create if you think in terms of all the resources that both systems have developed. Both systems already have the infrastructure, and it is your job to figure out a way to use all the services and resources that both systems offer; and
- Don't allow the particular door that a family enters the system to determine what services that they are eligible for. Work to ensure that regardless of how a family accesses the system, they benefit from all the services that the entire system has to offer.

4.3 Investing in Staff and Staff Relations Lessons

- Involve your staff at all levels to help them to internalize the vision and make it their own;
- Involve your consumers or clients at all levels in a meaningful way, even for staff training purposes;
- Better outcomes require a significant investment in staff and staff development;
- If you treat your staff like they are essential and important, they will respond to such treatment by performing as if they are essential and important; and
- Involve your staff and community as much as possible in the decision-making process. Don't make decisions behind closed doors because you'll then spend so much time explaining the decisions and clarifying why you didn't invite more people to be involved.

5. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q: It sounds as though TANF-child welfare systems integration has the potential to eliminate the need for certain State jobs, a possibility which makes me very anxious. Could you address this concern of staff layoffs?

Ms. Drake: In El Paso County, we are actually county employees. We transitioned from a State merit system a number of years ago. However, when we privatized our case management services, we did not lay off any staff. Instead, we reconfigured staff to ensure that everyone kept their job. We are moving numerous staff that used to work in child welfare into the economic assistance arena because their child welfare expertise is particularly relevant as we use TANF as a primary prevention program. In fact, our system creates new opportunities for staff to move into new roles.

Q: For the Direct Link program, can you elaborate a bit on serving methamphetamine cases and on the elevated accountability for substance abusing parents?

Ms. Drake: We have a drug court in El Paso County with magistrates who are very dedicated to monitoring the behavior of substance abusing parents. In most open cases, the children are able to remain at home while the parent undergoes recovery. The program is provided by the private group in Denver and is purchased with TANF dollars. An integrated team of child welfare case workers and TANF eligibility staff from DHS collaborates with the agency in Denver. Direct Link is very comprehensive and highly accountable. It allows kids to stay home instead of going into foster care. Effective and intensive front-end services can create totally different outcomes for families and for children, simply by creating cultural and organizational change within an agency. If these children were to enter foster care, their case would typically lead to the termination of parental rights. Through Direct Link, these families stay intact, and the kids stay home.

Q: How large are your caseloads in El Paso County for child welfare?

Ms. Drake: We currently have 2,500 households involved in child welfare. Yet, with our over-arching mentality of using TANF as a primary prevention program, we have an incredible opportunity to serve families early-on before they even reach the child welfare system. If you look at the case history of the majority of child welfare cases, the first time they came to any system's attention was when they applied for child care or TANF. The crux of what we're trying to do as an organization is to offer preventive services early-on instead of waiting until families reach the threshold of the child welfare system, which involves the most expensive, intensive, and intrusive services for both the family and the State.

Q: How do your staff cope with the introduction of so many new programs? It seems that they are bombarded with new programs to learn every few months.

Ms. Drake: In an integrated system, each new program cannot merely be one more thing for staff to learn and deal with. New programs cannot simply add to the existing status quo. Instead, new programs must redefine the way you do business, but staff cannot humanly keep up with such an influx of new programs in addition to the old ones. It is up to agency leadership to make the decisions about how new programs can redefine protocols, processes, and agency culture to ensure that staff do not feel overwhelmed.

Q: What is the structure of Colorado's TANF system?

Ms. Drake: In terms of TANF and human services, Colorado's system is State-supervised and county-administered. The structure of this system has afforded us the independence to implement the reforms that we have in El Paso County.

Q: How does our agency even begin to get started doing something like the systems integration that you describe?

Ms. Drake: Each community is different and must find the way that is best matched to its demographic, caseload, strengths, and State policies. I cannot outline specific action steps for you and your community. However, I can describe the process that worked for us in El Paso County. We started by first identifying our vision, mission, and guiding principles. Next, we redefined TANF as a primary prevention program. In this sense, we labeled the purpose of our job not to just help someone get off welfare. Our job in the economic assistance arena is to help someone get out of poverty and become self-sufficient. Third, we reframed child welfare as an anti-poverty program because of the overrepresentation of families living in poverty in the child welfare system. After that, we explored opportunities to use flexible money in different ways, beginning with our child-only caseload. We began to think of services in terms of a holistic quilt. For example, employment does not only apply to people on TANF. It also applies to families in the child welfare system, children who are emancipating from the child welfare system at age 18, or grandparents raising their grandchildren who must emerge from retirement into the workforce again. The concept of fatherhood runs through TANF, child support, and child welfare. Finally, we structured our agency, including staff training, our organizational structure, and community partnerships, based on the threads like employment and fatherhood that cross-cut multiple systems.

Q: What have been some of most beneficial aspects of partnerships with community agencies that you have observed?

Ms. Drake: We have a partnership with Goodwill for case management services. What we've found is that Goodwill is an excellent organization that is wonderful at helping individuals to find employment. They have had success in obtaining jobs for felons with past criminal records and people with developmental disabilities. The interesting thing for me is that when you partner with a community agency, you do not only receive the benefits of the specific scope contract. For example, with Goodwill, our partnership with them does not only provide us with case management services; we also derive benefit from their good reputation in the community, their vouchers, and their outreach. Goodwill now provides a significant amount of our case management services, as well as the majority of our job training, job placement, and supported employment services to TANF recipients. The beauty of community partnerships is that when you work with them, you gain all the qualities that they have to offer as an organization. Partnerships also create choice for consumers. In our agency, we have 360 staff, but we also have 90 staff of community partners located on-site at our TANF offices.

Q: Have you added any staff in your systems integration?

Ms. Drake: We have not added a significant number of staff. If any, we've added a few in the economic assistance department. Instead of adding or subtracting staff, we've simply been moving staff and reorganizing the way we do business. We have not laid off anyone. The majority of our staff moves have been from child welfare to our new Community Programs department.

Q: How has the systems integration affected staff caseloads in child welfare?

Ms. Drake: We have contracted out some of our foster care casework to two community agencies, and we have really brought staff caseloads down. Foster care staff work with no more than 15 children each. Child protection caseworkers serve approximately 10 to 15 cases each at any given time.

Q: Since you have a great deal of co-located services and staff, do they use many of the same databases?

Ms. Drake: In part yes, and in part no. We have a recently revised child welfare database system that is more inclusive. Moreover, our partners at Goodwill can access the same economic assistance database that we use. We're also in the process of getting a new Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) management system that will determine eligibility.

Q: Do you use common intake forms?

Ms. Drake: We use a form that we call an Individual Responsibility Contract. It is a blended contract that combines application for TANF with a child welfare treatment plan. However, the treatment plan in child welfare takes precedence. This form helps us to bridge the systems and eliminate duplicability.

Q: Can you describe your diversion processes a bit more?

Ms. Drake: Our diversion programs are voluntary, and we still divert almost half of all diversions in the entire State. People choose diversion as an option because they see that it makes good sense. It's Workfirst, with a voluntary twist, but it has been extremely successful. We first conduct a comprehensive assessment of the family when they first come into our office. Most of the questions are quite open-ended. We simply ask them to describe what's going on. At that point, we have two types of diversion: county-based and State-based diversion. Colorado has a county-based diversion system where counties can set a threshold and use TANF funds for prevention services. We use this type of diversion for families that need one-time help. It is voluntary, and it contains a stipulation that the family not return and apply for TANF assistance for a certain period of time. The State-diversion system requires TANF eligibility to be determined, and it is also voluntary. We offer a wealth of up-front resources such as food, clothing, and transportation as part of our diversion services.

Q: Has your integrated model been implemented statewide?

Ms. Drake: Our model has not been implemented at the State level. Sometimes other counties are interested to learn about a particular project. We discourage State legislation to force systems to integrate like we have because we believe that each integration has to come from within each distinct community. Each community has its own context and unique characteristics, and any partnership, collaboration, and integration efforts need to account for that individuality.

Q: Can you discuss how schools have been involved with your systems reform?

Ms. Drake: We've partnered with schools on a number of projects and initiatives. In fact, we have a youth assessment center in the biggest school district in Colorado Springs. We also have staff located out in several schools as consultants. We're trying to create prevention and early intervention alternatives that schools can access for families that have problems but do not yet meet the threshold of abuse. We have good relationships with schools around early care and prevention.

Q: How do you address the issue of confidentiality, especially with your partnerships in the fields of mental health and substance abuse treatment?

Ms. Drake: It's an ongoing issue and will continue to be. However, the simplest solution is to directly ask families to grant us permission to communicate across agencies to serve them and best meet their needs. We explain our mission and our systems reform to families, and in the majority of cases, we've found that clients are okay with us sharing information if they understand the purpose. Just because systems work more closely together does not mean that you cannot still honor what families want to be kept private.