



1992 Consortium Connections: Fall *S*

Children, Youth and Family Consortium:

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Consortium Connections

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University-Community Research: An Introduction By Laura Bloomberg, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

In an era of declining fiscal resources and increasing risk factors for children and families, establishing strong working relationships among families, service providers, educators, and other professionals is crucial. This belief has been a driving force for many Consortium activities. One example is emphasizing the importance of building collaborative relationships between the University of Minnesota and community agencies for conducting research.

While it is common knowledge that doing research is a central part of the University's mission, the role of community practitioners and the relevance of the research to practice is seldom very clear. The Research Workgroup of the Consortium is addressing this and other barriers to building University-community links for conducting research.

Last spring, the workgroup brought University and community-based agency personnel together to address barriers and identify strategies for fostering collaborative research endeavors. The meetings pointed out the need to improve communication between community professionals and University faculty. Frequently it is difficult to access the "University system" with a research question. Conversely, University faculty often seek community settings for conducting research activities without knowing all of their options. The potential for the Consortium to act as a catalyst in facilitating increased communication is great.

The role of clearly understood, applicable research is an issue of importance for both University researchers and service delivery professionals. The role of the Consortium and the Research Workgroup in the coming years will be to help shape new University-community research relationships and to support those that already exist.

There are several joint projects currently underway that can serve as a model for fostering future collaborative research efforts between the university and the community. An example is the Institute on Community This issue of Consortium Connections will focus on some projects currently underway that can serve as models for fostering future collaborative research efforts between the University and the community. For example the Institute on Community Integration (ICI), housed in the University's College of Education at the University of Minnesota, has established several collaborative research projects with community service providers across the state. Currently ICI is working with the Minneapolis Public Schools to study family-school partnerships and their effect on preventing young adolescents from dropping out of school. Also, ICI is conducting a national study of the effects of prenatal drug exposure on young children. With the help of a community liaison, this project has established collaborative relationships with over 40 agencies and service providers addressing the needs of young children and families who may be a risk. Examples of other collaborative efforts are highlighted in the following articles.

Changing Times, Changing Families:

Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Parent Outcome Interview Study
by Betty Cooke, Minnesota Department of Education

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth and kindergarten. It is currently offered through community education in 397 school districts and the four tribal schools in Minnesota, encompassing 98% of families with young children in the state. More than 220,000 young children and their parents participated in the program during the 1991-92 school year.

ECFE program staff recently worked with Michael Q. Patton, University of Minnesota, and Betty Cooke, Early Childhood Family Education Specialist with the Minnesota Department of Education, on an evaluation project to study the effects of the program on parent participants. Dr. Patton has been involved in evaluating ECFE since the program pilot days in the late 1970's.

THE EVALUATION PLAN

The concept for ECFE parent outcome interview study was arrived at through joint discussion between Patton and members of the State Early Childhood Family Education Evaluation committee. A key criterion of the study was to make the evaluation process part of the regular program and involve program staff in data collection and analysis. Patton worked with staff from 24 programs to develop a set of interview questions to be asked of parents new to the program prior to and at the end of participation during the 1990-91 school year.

THE OUTCOMES

The study revealed five overall changes in parent responses to interview questions before and after a year of participation:

- Increased feelings of support from others.
- Increased confidence and self-esteem as parents.
- Increased knowledge, awareness, and understanding children and child development and the parental role in relation to child development.
- Changed perceptions and expectations for themselves as parents for their children.
- Changes in behavior in themselves and their children.

THE PROCESS

Evaluation has been a priority from the inception of ECFE. The program has had ongoing contact with various University faculty and department for over 15 years related to research and evaluations as well as training and staff development.

In this particular evaluation, the process used was as significant as the results themselves. The completion and success of the study depended on the combined efforts and expertise of the University evaluation consultant, ECFE local program staff involved in the project, and the Minnesota Department of Education specialist who was able to oversee the project and compile the report. Not enough can be said for the critical role played by the staff from local programs who helped design the study, conducted the interviews with parents, and analyzed the results. This process allowed for the development of a group of "inside experts" who understood the program philosophy and practice and developed additional skills as interviewers and evaluators that will be useful to them and the program beyond this study.

For further information contact:

Betty Cooke, Early Childhood Family Education Specialist, Minnesota Department of Education, 992 Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, MN 55101, 612/296-6130, Fax No. 612/297-5695.

Community Moving Forward - Le Sueur County by Marlene Stum, Family Social Science, University of Minnesota

Collaborative efforts are underway in Le Sueur County to empower community leaders to be proactive and address priority issues facing families with youth. Leadership is being provided by the Minnesota Extension Service and a local steering committee composed of county residents and professionals working with families. The community action process included phases of helping diverse community members explore "what is," "what can be," and "what will be" for children, youth and families in their communities.

PHASE 1

The first part of the community action process involved linking community leaders with existing research tools and methods to examine what is it like for children, youth and families in their communities. The research design included: 1) Search Institute's Profile of Student Life focusing on identifying assets and deficits to gather information about teenagers in four school districts; and 2) a written survey to discover how adult participants assessed strengths and concerns of youth and of families and to gather information about their attitudes regarding who is responsible for action.

PHASE 2

Data specific to their local community was then available to present for discussion at a community forum on youth and families. This localized data was invaluable in moving community members beyond the denial -- "such problems don't exist in my community". Community members participated in focus groups to further identify strengths and concerns and then to prioritize issues facing families with youth which needed to be addressed in their communities.

PHASE 3

A second community forum was held in Le Sueur County to focus on four priority areas which emerged: 1) building strong, healthy families; 2) holistic community development; 3) promoting community chemical health and well-being; and 4) understanding and coping with unhealthy behaviors. Focus groups developed shared visions for what it could be like for youth and families and began forming community action plans for the community. The process is continuing, and additional community forums will follow to assist the citizens in determining their direction and moving forward.

Development of the process and research assistance has been provided to Le Sueur County by three state extension faculty: Marlene Stum, Family Social Science; Ron Pitzer, Rural Sociology; and Diane Flynn, Extension Home Economics.

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Interagency Initiative on Children's Mental Health by Gary Cox, Minnesota Department of Human Services

A model currently being designed by a statewide, interagency task force would integrate services delivered to Minnesota's emotionally disturbed children and the funds that pay for them.

The Children's Integrated Fund Task Force was created by 1991 law to study whether an integrated children's mental health fund would be feasible. Members - who represent state and local agencies, providers, parents, and advocates - quickly determined that an integrated fund would work only if service collaboration existed, so they went forward to design an integrated system. The Task Force will report its recommendations to the legislature by February 1993.

The crux of the problem is that mental health, social service, school, and juvenile justice systems are all serving the same children, and their efforts are uncoordinated. Children and their corresponding costs are passed from one system to another. Disorders are detected only after they have reached a crisis stage where treatment costs more but is less likely to succeed.

In contrast, the task force is considering an "hour glass" model which would integrate assessment, service planning, and case coordination for children whose need for mental health services has been identified by one of the agencies. Children would be referred to existing providers treatment and support services. Emphasis would be placed on early intervention and mandatory comprehensive assessment criteria. This local-level interagency collaboration would be supported by a flexible pool of state, federal, local, and private dollars with expenditures based on a child's needs rather than the current hodgepodge of eligibility criteria. Changes would constitute fundamental restructuring of the ways services are provided to children whose needs cross service disciplines and agency boundaries.

An integrated fund addresses need for a more flexible funding structure but also could assist with the other primary fiscal problem-funding levels. The pooling of multi-agency dollars under the auspices of mental health would expand resources used to leverage federal medicaid reimbursement.

Children's Lives in a Minnesota Community by Ronald L. Pitzer, Minnesota Extension Service

The project was designed to increase our knowledge about children and to foster a "child and family friendly" community. Our interest was in how children perceive their community and how they spend their time in the community during summer vacation. The results will be reported to the county extension office, community schools, and city administration, with recommendations regarding community support for children and families.

The impetus came from a 1992 spring meeting with Isanti County extension agents interested in conducting a community visioning forum on children, youth, and families in the fall of 1992. In previous forums, teenagers, families, and community had been studied in cooperation with the Search Institute. This project examined information provided by children.

THE STUDY

Subsidized by a grant from the human ecology program of Minnesota Extension Service, community involvement was elicited, and data were collected in July and August.

Data were gathered by interviewing and observing children (ages 7-13), having them draw community maps and keep a log of daily activities, interviewing identified "community leaders," and observing goings-on in the community. A local teenage girl and the project graduate assistant conducted the interviews and observations.

Any field study requires community involvement in addition to the obvious cooperation of research subjects. A research project involving children as subjects requires greater community support and involvement, especially in today's climate of concern about child safety. This project required more involvement because of its applied intent of fostering "child and family friendliness" in the community.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The U of M extension agents took the major role in gaining the support of school officials and city officials. They also helped locate a teen interviewer and people willing to solicit prizes for participant incentives. Finally, the extension staff arranged an ice cream social at the close of the project to thank the community for its participation.

Community involvement was extensive:

The school provided the list of children from which the sample was selected and the list of parents to receive mailings. The school also helped legitimize the project to parents and children.

City administration also helped legitimize the project to parents. City council and police knew who we were and why we were driving around town and could answer questions raised by parents or other community members.

The business sector supported the project by providing prizes and refreshments for an end-of-the-project ice cream social celebration and prize drawing for participating children.

The community education director agreed to be an official co-sponsor of the project. Local churches distributed flyers to their congregations early in the project explaining the plan. Also, one of the churches provided a pleasant room to conduct interviewer training.

Interviews were held in a popular downtown cafe with a neutral location. The room was convenient for interviews - quiet and private. Refreshments were available, parents or guardians had a pleasant place to wait, and the owner of the cafe charged a very nominal fee for rental.

This project demonstrates that it is possible to procure sound and theoretically interesting data and, at the same time, promote community action. The planning and implementation of this project stimulated thoughtful consideration of the children's place in the community.

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Connection Corner

The Parenting Resource Center

The Parenting Resource Center of Austin, Minnesota, has developed a set of audio tapes to help families new to our country gain a better understanding of customs, laws, and the educational system here in Minnesota. Funded by the Minnesota Technical College System, Human Development Studies, a set includes nine tapes in three topic areas: child care, Minnesota schools, and legal issues (alcohol and chemical abuse). On each tape, side A is in one of three languages, and side B is the same material in English. The playing length of both is about half an hour. Tapes come in Vietnamese, Laotian, and Spanish.

The same material is presented in both English and the other languages to help professionals in guiding families adjusting to American lifestyles. Through listening to the tapes, families may also gain some English-speaking skills.

An introductory offer one tape for \$15, \$40/set of three tapes in the same language, and \$100 for the entire nine-tape set. Prices include shipping.

Contact the Parenting Resource Center, Inc., 1900 NW 8th Avenue, PO Box 505, Austin, MN 55912 or call (507) 433-0692 or 1-800-247-5039.

TOUGH LOVE

Tough Love is a self-help program for parents, kids and communities. The program provides support to parents who are experiencing problems with their children's behavior by encouraging parents to take a stand against inappropriate behavior and set boundaries which often facilitates a renewed self-respect in the parents. For information, please call Joy Windisch, (612) 432-8066 or (800) 333-1069

WORKING ON THE DREAM

The National Association of Counties in cooperation with Intermountain Health Care, Inc., have produced a video for families entitled, Working on the Dream. It discusses five family success concepts: strengthening relationships through family activities, establishing reasonable rules and expectations, building self-esteem, setting achievable goals, and evaluating family strengths and needs. Single copies of the videotape may be ordered for \$5, plus \$2 shipping and handling. Larger quantities may be ordered at reduced prices. Copies of the Working on the Dream brochure are available for \$20.00/100 copies including shipping and handling. For information, write to: Working on the Dream, P.O. Box 2046, Salt Lake City, UT 84110-2046.

LISTENING

Janet Macy, associate professor in the Department of Family Social Science, is on Radio Aahs (1280 am) each morning at 9:20 am with Robin Blair, where she researches and answers parents' questions.

LEAVE NO CHILD BEHIND

The Leave No Child Behind Campaign, a Children's Defense Fund program supported by Congregations Concerned for Children, is conducting a public awareness campaign on how voters can make children's issues central concerns during this election year. Free brochures are available highlighting the problems facing Minnesota's children and easy but crucial steps voters can take to insure candidates commitment to children's issues. Call Terri Anderson at Congregations Concerned for Children at (612) 870-3660.

RESEARCH FUNDS

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is planning a new grant program to build on past research on causes and predictors of violence, and fund projects aimed directly at curbing it. The projected fall 1993 announcement of the new program to translate basic and epidemiologic research into interventions will describe the main goal of the Violence and Traumatic Stress Research Branch: to fund projects that zero in on key factors, either situational or individual, that influence the development of violence. Projects would compare alternative methods and treatments, and early plans suggest expanded prospects for service-oriented and collaborative projects. NIMH may fund research centers or use cooperative agreements or contracts to accomplish some tasks. NIMH's violence program funds are usually received by psychologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, and nurses, but NIMH is eager to receive more applications from researchers in public health and social work. For more information or to discuss project ideas, contact Eford Voit, Violence and Traumatic Stress Branch, NIMH, Room 18-105, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857, (301) 443-3728.

READING

Two recently published books on issues relating to children, youth, and families have been receiving much attention in the media. Today's Children: Creating a Future for Generation in Crisis (Times Books, Random House, NY, 1992) was written by Dr. David A. Hamburg, president of the Carnegie Corporation, and focuses on issues relating to children and education. Fateful Choices: Healthy Youth for the 21st Century (Hill and Wang, NY, 1992), authored by Fred Hechinger, is devoted to the problems facing today's adolescents.

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation has published two booklets discussing violence. One is directed toward adults, the other toward children. Entitled, Peace is a Season, Peace is A Way of Life, the booklets can be used as a source of discussion in the family or workplace and/or as a tool for personal change. They are available free of charge by contacting Rita Cox, (616) 642-4039, or writing to her at the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 919 Lafond Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104.

THE NORTHEASTERN MINNESOTA INITIATIVE FUND The Northeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund is a regional foundation created in 1986 to serve the seven counties of northeastern Minnesota: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis. The mission of the Initiative Fund is to improve the lives of northeastern Minnesotans through funding various projects especially relevant to the following areas: connecting kids and community; aging with independence; job creation, business assistance, and diversification; and opportunities for self-reliance.

In 1990, the initiative fund adopted their Kids+ Plus Campaign with the goal of improving the well-being of children and youth in northeastern Minnesota. The Kids+ Plus program provides technical and financial resources to support community efforts to better serve young people. The goals of the program are to: raise public awareness of and interest in issues facing young people; create effective coalitions that will nurture children and youth in community settings; assist in designing, implementing, and evaluating imaginative projects; provide necessary technical and financial support for community-based coalitions; and create an information base on program models and sources of support for youth-focused projects. The initiative fund is also sponsoring the first annual Kids+ Plus Conference December 1, 1992, entitled "Connecting Kids and Community".

For more information, contact the Northeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund, 600 Providence Building, 332 West Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55802, (218) 723-4040 or the Iron Range Office, Olcott Plaza, 820 North 9th Street, Virginia, MN 55792, (218) 741-2315.

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