

New York City Administration for Children's Services

Community Partnership Initiative

Implementation Report

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I. Introduction

In the fall of 2006, New York City Children's Services (ACS) introduced the Community Partnership Initiative (CPI). CPI is based on the idea that neighborhood-based coalitions comprised of a diverse group of stakeholders can play a positive role in the challenging work of reducing maltreatment and promoting stable, healthy families. Rolled out in three phases throughout 2007, ACS awarded one-year pilot funds to 11 coalitions across New York City: Jamaica, Highbridge and Bedford Stuyvesant (Phase I); East Harlem and Lower East Side (Phase II); and Soundview, Staten Island, Mott Haven, East New York, Bushwick, and Elmhurst (Phase III). In 2009, the CPI will be expanded to include all communities in New York City.¹

The charge to the CPI coalitions during the demonstration year was twofold. First, coalitions were asked to focus on developing community partnerships. In community partnerships, coalition members commit to working collectively toward a set of clearly articulated, mutually shared goals. To grow into a community partnership, a coalition needs to create organizational structures that facilitate effective leadership, governance, accountability, and in so doing, foster a spirit of mutual support, trust, and high levels of participation from a broad variety of stakeholders.

Second, the coalitions were mandated to address four child welfare tasks: 1) to facilitate interagency referrals between child care, early childhood education, and preventive services; 2) to support case conferences; 3) to recruit and support foster parents residing in the community; and 4) to enhance the quality and quantity of visits between biological parents and their children. It is through these four mandated goals that the CPI coalitions participate in various kinds of child welfare work that impact families directly.

In the Spring of 2007, ACS asked the Chapin Hall Center for Children to serve as the independent evaluator of the CPI demonstration.² This report describes the work that took place during the period between July 2007 and June 2008, with a focus on the three Phase 1 communities (Highbridge, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Jamaica). The study describes the degree to which the CPI

¹ As of the implementation of the child welfare RFP expected in late 2009, all ACS-contracted agencies will be required to participate in CPI coalitions. ACS will continue to fund coalitions, which will be expanded to include all community districts in New York City.

² The Chapin Hall Center for Children is a non-profit, independent research organization affiliated with the University of Chicago.

coalitions have begun to resemble community partnerships. We also explore how the coalitions fared in their attempt to address the tasks mandated by ACS, with an emphasis on successes, challenges, and their impact to date on child welfare work. In addition, we examine the additional goals the coalitions are taking on that extend beyond the CPI model. Lastly, we set an eye to the future. We draw on lessons learned throughout the pilot year to think about the long-term sustainability of the CPI coalitions.

Theory of change in the CPI

The CPI reflects a particular set of ideas regarding how a public child welfare agency can promote safe and stable families within the context of communities. These ideas – the theory of change – draw on the belief that because communities are the context in which families raise their children, communities can and should play an explicit role in the work of keeping children safe. The theory also places an emphasis on the integration of community supports through close working partnerships that involve service providers and a broad range of community stakeholders.

CPI advances these ideas via a set of linked investments in community-based coalitions. In the first stage, CPI funds are provided to the coalition so that members pool their resources together (e.g., program services, expertise, administrative capacity, staff time, and meeting space). Blending these resources allows the coalition partners to achieve a second stage in which they invest innovative supports into child welfare services (e.g., family visitation, case conferences, foster parent recruitment and support, and the coordination of early childhood education, childcare, and preventive services). In turn, these changes are expected to eventually lead to better child welfare outcomes for the families receiving the enhanced services, such as increased safety, fewer instances of placement, or higher rates of reunification. In this sense, ACS' theory of change can be understood as a three-part model (Model A).

Model A

| Coalitions | Shifts in Practice | Impact on families |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Form Community Partnerships</i> that promote | <i>Changes in child welfare work</i> | <i>CPI outcomes</i> |
| Integration of community supports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Case conferences • Visitation • Recruitment Support • Early Childhood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced instances of maltreatment • Fewer placements • Shorter lengths of stay • Higher rates of reunification • Increased alternative permanency options |

The CPI model builds on previous efforts by ACS to promote neighborhood-based networks of providers. In 2000, the agency created 25 Service Planning Area (SPA) networks across the five boroughs. Since their inception, the SPAs have been functioning as localized provider networks that meet on a monthly basis to exchange program information and build interagency relationships. The CPI expands this prior work by 1) outlining specific child welfare goals to be addressed by the coalitions and 2) providing funding for greater infrastructure building.

ACS' theory of change also implies that a community partnership will bring about broader change in the child welfare system. It is expected that providers will begin to adopt a more community-based approach to their practice. This emergent organizational and community culture will emphasize the importance of drawing on community resources when working with families. Eventually, partners will begin to expand their notions of who participates in the work, where it takes place, and what counts as best practice.

Evaluation framework

Drawing on ACS' theory of change, the CPI evaluation focuses on four interrelated components: 1) community partnership development, 2) changes in child welfare work, 3) broader coalition goals, and 4) sustainability.

In Section IV, we examine the multifaceted participation of ACS in the implementation of the CPI. ACS is at once a key partner to the coalitions but also enacts the confounding roles of monitor, funder, and technical supporter. The nature of the relationship between ACS and the coalitions is an essential part of the development of the CPI.

The model also anticipates the possibility that the CPI may have a broader impact on communities. Indeed, CPI members have already been drawn to an agenda that extends beyond the boundaries of the traditional child welfare system. Because the ideas embedded within CPI favor local problem solving as a way to maintain the initiative's relevance within the context of a given community, the broader set of concerns orients the partnership to a longer-term agenda. At the same time, because child safety and family stability are very practical concerns, the boundary between child welfare work and a broader community agenda has to be watched carefully to determine how the balance is maintained. We address these concerns in part V of the report.

Finally, in section VI, we address the issue of sustainability. By sustainability we seek to understand whether the community coalitions formed during the initial phase of the CPI are able to create a durable presence in the communities where they are located. As we look ahead to the expansion of the CPI in 2009, it will be important for the coalitions to consider how they may draw on the lessons learned in the pilot year to develop a longer-term plan.

Community context

Coalition partners tend to identify with a sense of place. Communities are at once geographical locations and places that evoke particular cultural, social, and political associations. For this reason ACS has granted discretion to the CPI coalitions to tailor their strategies to the unique needs and resources of their individual communities. We address matters of context throughout this report, as it plays a key role in the CPI story. Our main goal, however, is to present a general picture of how the CPI communities are developing. Our aim is not to provide site-specific feedback but rather to acknowledge the importance of local context in creating the kinds of opportunities that shape coalition growth.

Community context impacts the CPI in two primary ways. The first involves the physical, social, and political characteristics of communities in which the coalitions are situated. For example, demographic characteristics related to age, race/ethnicity, and income shape who takes part in the CPI, the resources available in the community, and the unique needs of the families being served by the partnership. The nature of housing stock (a reasonable proxy for the socioeconomic health

of the community and a physical attribute of the neighborhood) is often cited by partners as an example of how place impacts the ease by which community partners can recruit foster homes. The ethnic profile of residents is another example. In the Lower East Side CPI partners have made an effort to address the specific needs of their community members by providing translations of their materials in Chinese and Spanish. In addition, they are developing programmatic strategies for reaching underserved immigrant populations in the neighborhood.

Geographical location also affects collaboration in a variety of ways. On Staten Island, CPI partners speak of their previous history as a tightly knit community of providers who aim to provide adequate services so that their constituents need not “go off the island.” Several partners have shared with us the opinion that the relative geographical isolation of their service community has made it easier to cultivate a sense of interdependence and trust among partners. Even the proximity of neighborhood organizations within communities or the ease by which partners can travel to meetings can affect the capacity of coalitions to develop partnerships.

The history of the coalition is a second aspect of community context that impacts not only its starting point but also its rate of development. The coalition structures, relationships, and other resources that predate the CPI give important shape to the ways in which each community coalition moves forward. The CPI coalitions have different starting points in terms of coalition maturity, their relationship to ACS, experience addressing child welfare issues, and the depth of their roots in the community.

Some coalitions began the CPI with greater capacity because of additional funding sources. For example, the Highbridge CPI grew out of a pre-existing coalition that had received five years of prior funding to create a child-welfare focused integrated service program. Their rich personnel, clinical, and leadership assets have enabled the coalition to support the CPI tasks in ways that surpass what is supported by the CPI funding. In another example, the Bedford Stuyvesant CPI has benefited from the foundation of interagency collaboration laid by the CRADLE, a five-year system of care project funded by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Children’s Bureau.³

³ The CRADLE stands for Community Taking Responsibility for Assisting and Developing Learning and Empowerment. The Project is currently in its fifth and final year.

The prior histories of the CPI coalitions have shaped their structures as well. In the Highbridge case, the CPI is one program within a larger set of initiatives funded under the Bridge Builders Project. A similar structure exists in East Harlem, where the Human Services Consortium, a neighborhood-based coalition that has been in existence for over three decades, acts as an umbrella organization to the CPI. Thus the coalitions are diverse not only in their prior experience collaborating with ACS but also in their structural configurations. Many of the CPI coalitions were drawn from the original community SPAs and continue to operate under similar structures.

Sources of data

Our study of the CPI pilot communities covers the period from July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008. This period coincides with the implementation schedule of the Phase 1 communities only, and for that reason they were the focus of our research. Concentrating our efforts on Phase 1 allowed us to gather a thorough understanding of the coalitions' development during the first year of CPI. Although we were not able to observe the Phase II and III coalitions with the same depth, we tailored our data collection activities to allow for broad comparisons across sites.⁴

In order to optimize our understanding of the variety of perspectives and implementation activities that characterize the CPI, we relied on multiple methods.

Observation. We observed nearly all workgroup and general meetings of the Phase 1 sites. We also observed various workgroup activities and events in the Phase 1 sites, such as foster parent recruitment events. We observed at least two general meetings in each of the Phase 2 sites. In addition, we observed meetings of ACS technical support and administrative staff, as well as community events and forums related to CPI implementation. We were unable to observe the CPI coalitions' clinical activities. This was due to the sensitivity of the partners' work with families and the difficulty of securing the permission of all participants. We relied on in-depth interviews with CPI partners, including ACS staff members, to describe the development of clinical activities occurring in the CPI context.

⁴ In the original conception of the CPI, Staten Island and East New York were to be contracted during the second phase of the rollout. Because the contractual process was extended by several months they became reclassified as Phase III coalitions in the early Spring. At that point in time we had already collected various data in those sites.

Interviews with partners. We conducted in-depth interviews with CPI partners in all Phase 1 sites, including ACS leads, liaisons, workgroup leaders, other key coalition partners, and ACS technical support and administrative staff. We also conducted more frequent, brief interviews or “check-ins” with select CPI partners, such as liaisons. In some cases, we conducted focus groups with partners whose role in the CPI work was shared, such as parent organizers participating in case conferences, ACS technical support staff, and leaders of the Phase II and III sites. In addition, we conducted brief interviews with a select group of partners who could shed light on how various stakeholder groups were thinking about the coalitions’ impact on providers and families. These subgroups include child protective staff, foster care agency staff, and community residents participating in workgroup activities.

Survey. We administered a survey to CPI partners at each of the phase 1 and II sites. The survey was distributed at general coalition meetings, workgroup meetings, and by e-mail. The survey provided insight into the experiences of CPI partners who we were not able to reach through interviews. However, due to the relatively low number of responses in the Phase II and III sites we were not able to compare the responses across sites as we had hoped to do.

Analysis of written materials. We collected and analyzed documents created by the CPI Phase 1 and II coalitions, including strategic plans, progress reports to ACS, meeting minutes, and other materials shared at meetings. In addition, we analyzed electronic communication among Phase 1 partners.

II. From coalitions to partnerships

The CPI coalitions have been asked by ACS to create community partnerships as part of their work. In this section we explore the characteristics of community partnerships in order to understand their formation. By design, the CPI model depends on a diverse set of community players coming together around a shared sense of purpose and priorities. In the CPI context, the shared sense of purpose is centered on child safety and family permanency within the community.

Partnership is to a certain extent an abstract idea, in that the presence of genuine partnership is inferred from the willingness and ability to work together toward clearly articulated goals. In a partnership, we would expect that the relationships among the members to exhibit most, if not all, of the following attributes:

- Representation: Diverse representation of community members and service organizations relative to the stated objectives of the partnership.

- High levels of buy in: Partners believe the (CPI) vision is valuable and achievable.
- High levels of commitment: Partners are willing to invest time and effort into the challenging demands of coalition building and are committed to working together toward common goals.
- High levels of trust: Members exhibit confidence in one another, especially in reference to fairness, open communication, and shared responsibility.
- Shared decision-making: Partners have an equal share in decisions affecting the collective.
- Shared responsibility: The work is shared by the partners.

In a partnership, the attributes exhibit certain reciprocities in that success or progress in one area begets growth in another (if not all other areas). For example, productive partnerships depend on how much coalition members share or buy in to the group's mission. Buy in facilitates trust among partners, and the reverse is also true. As trust among partners grows, partners are more likely to communicate openly and are better able to articulate a shared mission. Collective decision-making is made possible by strong, trusting relationships. As the coalition grows in mission clarity and governance becomes increasingly democratic, the coalition gains greater legitimacy in the community, which in turn fosters stronger membership and buy in.⁵

In this section we describe four areas that are critical to partnership development within the CPI. These are membership, leadership, governance, and accountability. Each of these components are interrelated and to a certain extent develop in sequence: growth in membership yields the demands for leadership; leadership and membership guide the development of governance mechanisms, which in turn make it possible for the coalitions to achieve accountability.

These four components can be thought of as organizational structures that the coalitions develop to manage their efforts. We draw on these data to explore the kinds of infrastructure they have created as well as for the purpose of understanding how well the partners are working together. In each area of the work we examine the degree to which the coalitions have moved in the direction of community partnership.

⁵ The reverse is also true. When success in these areas is not achieved, the assets that have been created by the partners can become vulnerable. Failure in one area can beget failure in other areas and the coalition moves farther and farther away from partnership.

Membership

In a community partnership, membership has specific characteristics. It is broad to ensure that the coalition has sufficient capacity to achieve its goals and that responsibility is shared across a large number of individuals. It is diverse, with partners representing a variety of affiliations. Members are adequately engaged to the point where they are providing sufficient investments of time and effort to keep the work moving forward. Membership is also sustainable. Retention is high because members are committed to the long-term goals of the partnership. Finally, membership does not remain stagnant. It continues to grow in step with the partnership, but within the boundaries of the project's overarching objectives.

Who are the CPI partners?

In matters of membership breadth and diversity, the CPI coalitions have achieved significant success over the past year. Though to varying degrees, the coalitions have recruited a wide range of organizations and individuals. Some coalitions have as many as 50 organizations involved in the work and several dozen non-agency affiliated residents engaged. The coalitions have also been able to draw on an impressive variety of community-based institutions. Across sites we see the presence of faith-based organizations, libraries and youth programs, community-based service organizations that provide a variety of services, and community residents. This success speaks to the strong appeal of the CPI vision.

The scope and growth of membership in the CPI has largely been driven by the four mandated goals. These goals have also shaped which members are the most engaged in the work. During the strategic planning sessions, all of the coalitions formed workgroups that correspond to the four mandated tasks of the CPI. Member recruitment efforts subsequently took place from within the workgroups. Stakeholder groups that are essential to the implementation of CPI activities, such as foster care and preventive agency staff or day care centers were targeted.

The CPI coalitions have had success at bringing in key neighborhood organizations such as libraries, recreation centers, and churches. Such entities have embraced the CPI mission because they too are focused on supporting community families.⁶ The engagement of local organizations

⁶ These organizations have played an important role in supporting visitation and recruitment activities by providing event space for workgroup activities to take place and by donating staff to support community outreach efforts.

seemed to add to partners' excitement about the potential of the coalition to firmly ground itself in the community. The visibility of non-staff community partners had a similar effect of creating a sense of legitimacy and purpose for the coalition.

Most sites have some participation from community residents. In the CPI, the involvement of residents takes many forms. In the Jamaica CPI, the recruitment workgroup is co-chaired by two community residents who are active members in the Allen AME Cathedral. This partnership has allowed the Jamaica CPI to draw on the church as a source of foster parent recruitment. As we explain in Section III, some of the work taking place has allowed for the creation of formal positions for community residents.⁷ For example, a key approach in the visitation workgroups has been the development of the visit host position. Although the visit host does not have to be a community resident, several CPIs have developed this as a role for community residents and provides them with stipends for their work.

The importance of success

Membership in the CPI grew over time and in step with activity in the workgroups. In the beginning of their implementation, some coalitions struggled to recruit specific groups, particularly foster care agencies. Membership in some Phase I coalition workgroups did not expand until activities began to yield consistent results in the early Spring of 2008. As new members, churches, day care centers, and residents got involved, they recruited additional partners into the work in numbers unanticipated by many of the workgroup leaders.

The pace of growth over the past year bears out the idea that partners enter into coalitions when they perceive a benefit to participation that outweighs the cost. For the majority of CPI partners, participation in the CPI is a volunteer effort. Many partners are donating their free time; many are salaried agency staff with already overextended schedules. During the first few months of the ramp up period, most of the CPI coalitions found it challenging to garner the consistent participation of individuals unfamiliar with the coalition's intentions and with few results to point to. Membership recruitment was often talked about in terms of the importance of raising awareness about the benefit of participating in the CPI. As the work became more routinized and

⁷ It is important to note that in the CPI terms such as "parent advocate" and "community representative" and "community engagement" are often used to refer to agency staff who may or may not live in the community.

awareness of the CPIs spread throughout the community and professional networks, membership grew more broad and diverse. Retention of workgroup members also increased during the second half of the year, as the work continued.

The importance of pre-existing relationships

A coalition's starting point was a key determinant of its membership. In phase I, the Highbridge and Bedford Stuyvesant CPI coalitions began as programs of larger coalitions with established membership. In coalitions that grew out of the local SPA networks, such as in Staten Island and East New York, informal interagency networks that pre-dated the CPI were also a crucial starting point. Sites having an abundance of partners who were already experienced in collaborative work benefitted in several ways. The notion that "old friends can broker new favors" was commonly invoked in the first half of the pilot year. Many of the partners at the table knew each other and had collaborated in some way in the past, reducing the amount of effort needed to invest in membership outreach and relationship building. The most successful recruiters were those liaisons, ACS leads, and other coalition partners with deep roots in community networks. Coalitions that did not have an extensive history in the community, such as the Jamaica CPI, had to work harder to recruit new partners.

The generally limited participation of the foster care agencies during the first six months of implementation poses an example of the dynamics of membership building in the CPI. CPI leaders and ACS staff put a great deal of effort into outreach to the agencies, as three of the four mandated goals require their participation.⁸ Initial efforts to bring the agencies to the table met with mixed results. A commonly noted turning point occurred in March 2008, when ACS released its concept paper for the upcoming RFP. The concept paper laid out the future mandate for CPI participation among the contracted agencies. Within six weeks, agency participation in the CPI workgroups grew substantially. This time also coincided with the increased stability and productivity of the CPI workgroups in many sites.

The barriers to recruiting foster care agencies were similar to those the coalitions faced in garnering support from preventive agencies, day care centers, and Head Start programs. First, there was a lack of awareness or familiarity with the CPI coalitions and their goals. As a result,

⁸ The foster care agencies are needed to drive activity in the recruitment/support and visitation workgroups as well as in case conferencing workgroups in coalitions responsible for serving reunification conferences.

agencies lacked an understanding of the potential benefit of their participation. Most importantly, many agencies claimed they lacked the staff time and administrative resources to participate in the workgroups. Some of the agencies that serve multiple neighborhoods find that they cannot afford to participate in select CPIs. In addition, some agencies engaged in the Improved Outcomes for Children (IOC) pilot complained of “initiative fatigue.” They did not have enough staff time to donate to the multiple demands being placed on them by the concurrent reforms. For these reasons, building strong contributions from the foster care agencies was a widespread challenge for the CPI coalitions in the first pilot year.

In some CPI coalitions, however, foster care agencies signed on immediately, took on key leadership roles, and contributed substantially with their staff time, expertise, and other resources. Again, this tended to be the case in the more mature coalitions in which relationships between the contracted agencies and other community partners were already well established. For this reason, in some of the sites workgroup leaders tried to obtain buy in from agency executive directors as a means of increasing the agency’s participation. Even though foster care agencies still face capacity issues, the fostering of support from agency leaders who could mandate staff investments did seem to increase CPI participation by agency staff. We anticipate agency participation will continue to pose a challenge as more CPI communities are added, creating additional stress on the agencies serving multiple communities.

The coalitions that needed to increase foster care agency participation found it was easier to communicate the benefit of participation in CPI once the coalitions’ ability to achieve their goals became more clear. Once they arrived, it became more obvious to the staff how the CPI, once fully developed, could potentially decrease staff workloads through greater interagency collaboration in child welfare work.

Moving toward partnership

A community partnership works best when it can draw on the diverse array of resources available in the community, and when varied perspectives come together to produce innovative solutions to community problems. All of the coalitions have been able to bring together a broad variety of partners. Still, the partnerships tend to reflect the practical needs of the workgroups. This is less true in the coalitions with broader programmatic scope and preexisting funding, such as Highbridge, Bedford Stuyvesant and East Harlem. Though the coalitions have not talked explicitly about the scope of membership they wish to achieve, feedback from partners indicate

that they believe the coalitions need to expand their membership. For example, many partners shared the belief that the coalitions need to reach out to other systems that affect their community and are central to child safety. The New York City Department of Education (DOE) and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) are the most commonly cited examples of organizations that ought to be engaged in CPI work.

In addition, many coalition partners identified the need for more community residents to be involved in the CPI. This was true in all of the coalitions, regardless of the level resident engagement that had been cultivated to date. How coalitions define resident engagement and create roles for those partners is, however, a complex issue that the coalitions have not yet fully articulated. Questions of racial and ethnic representation have also been raised during meeting discussions, but it is not a matter that has been talked about in depth at this early juncture.⁹

As many coalition partners have pointed out, it will be important for ACS to work with the coalitions to find ways of supporting the contract agencies – particularly those with multiple CPI affiliations – in fulfilling their new duties as CPI partner agencies. The more that they can communicate the potential value of the CPI to agency leaders, the easier it will be to get partners to the table.

In order to achieve partnership, membership should continue to develop over time as the partnership aims to become increasingly representative and partner investments deepen. At this time, partner membership continues to grow. Yet it remains to be seen to what degree growth can be sustained. Coalitions can benefit from the creation of tools to track growth and membership retention.

Leadership

Community partnerships require leadership that can ensure that the work of the coalition moves forward efficiently and effectively. Coalition leaders are responsible for promoting progress through decision-making, consensus building, and assigning responsibility; monitoring progress over distinct areas of the coalition’s work; carrying reporting duties; and directing communication across partners. Partnerships exhibit leadership structures with the following characteristics:

⁹ The Elmhurst and Lower East Side CPI coalitions are an exception in this regard. Partners in these coalitions have placed emphasis on the importance of incorporating ethnic diversity and immigration issues into coalition objectives and policies.

Leadership matches the demands of the work; leadership is broad and diverse; leadership responsibilities are clear; leaders are assumed legitimate by the majority of partners; and leaders are effective in the role as leaders.

Leadership in partnerships may be difficult to define in that partners are involved in leading the coalition's work in multiple ways. In addition, partners may vary in whom they identify as the leaders of the coalition. For our purposes, we refer to the specific kinds of leaders who are *formally* responsible for moving the coalition's work forward. These include the fiscal agents, workgroup leaders, committee chairs, ACS leads and the coalition liaisons.

Matching leadership and work demands

All CPI coalitions share a basic leadership structure. In each coalition, the workgroups are led by "chairs" who are responsible for facilitating progress toward the group's goals and reporting back to the general membership. The CPI liaison helps to coordinate and facilitate communication among partners and workgroups, manages a wide range of administrative duties, and reports back to partners about recent progress. The ACS lead provides various kinds of technical support to the coalition and acts as the liaison between the coalitions and ACS' Office of Community Partnership (OCP). Some coalitions have added additional committees that are led by various partners, such as in Bedford Stuyvesant where two co-chairs oversee the monthly general meetings. CPI partners who represent the fiscal agent organization tend to oversee budgetary matters and reporting materials to ACS.

Across the coalitions, we saw strong leadership exhibited by members serving in these various roles. The leaders demonstrated productive working relationships and leaned on each other to take on additional demands of the work. In general, the CPI leaders have strong interpersonal and conflict resolution skills, the ability to be proactive and think creatively, and the ability to be responsive to the variety of partner perspectives.

The coalitions ran into difficulty when roles were not filled. In particular, progress in the coalitions was stalled considerably in the months leading up to the hiring of the liaisons.¹⁰ In addition, most of the coalitions have struggled to some extent with lack of adequate leadership in

¹⁰ Though the Phase I coalitions began officially in July 2007, liaisons were not hired until the late fall. The delay had to do partly with the release of funds but also due to the time needed to hire a qualified person. In the later phase coalitions this has also been the case.

the workgroups. In workgroups that did not have strong leaders to push action forward and hold partners accountable to the work, progress was difficult to achieve.¹¹ When leadership is lacking, the burden tends to fall on the ACS lead and the liaison, who may not have the adequate time to manage the additional demands. Within the coalitions, there was significant variation among the workgroups in how much leadership was devoted to supporting activity. Some workgroups are led by multiple chairs, which makes it easier for responsibility to be shared.

In general, we found that workgroup leaders or chairs volunteered for the role, most often during the strategic planning sessions. Formal elections were not held. In some cases, partners were asked to serve as chairs by the ACS lead or fiscal agent. A main barrier to the recruitment and retention of workgroup leaders (who unlike the other leaders are not salaried by CPI funds) involves the extra time investments that are needed to keep the work going. In interviews, some workgroup leaders complained about the high level of administrative work involved in managing their role. As in the area of membership, leadership in the coalitions grew over time, as the workgroups grew more focused. In many instances, able and willing partners took the reins when the opportunity arose. In some coalitions, additional leaders were recruited when the responsibilities of leadership became too much for one person to handle.

Similar to the process of membership building, it was in the older coalitions with well-established leaders where we most often observed high levels of shared responsibility for leading the work. Drawing on the foundation of previous networks, some sites began the CPI work with a large number of leaders who have extensive experience in partnership building and facilitating coalition work. Most of these leaders have worked in leadership roles in relation to other partners in some capacity in the past.

In sites lacking a strong core of leaders in the beginning, early leadership tended to take on a top-down structure. A lack of existing relationships and leaders meant that a few people became responsible for pushing the work forward. Although this approach facilitated the achievement of coalition goals, at times it also hindered the development of trust and commitment among

¹¹ The visitation workgroup in the Bedford Stuyvesant CPI lends a good example. The group was making strides in the work until its chair was reassigned to another position in her agency. Once the partner left, the workgroup met only sporadically. Although the liaison and lead worked to schedule meetings and cultivate participation, the group was never able to reach the high level of activity it had demonstrated previously. Visits took place without the leadership and monitoring of a coherent workgroup membership.

partners. As leadership has grown in some of the newer sites, familiarity and trust is growing between the leaders as the work is unfolding.

Leadership roles and legitimacy

Leadership roles in the CPI coalitions were created in relation to the coalitions' particular functions. For example, the fiscal agent is responsible for managing the coalition's budget. Yet there is some variability in how partners enact their leadership roles. In sites where there exists a large core group of leaders, the responsibilities of the fiscal agents, liaisons and leads is more shared. Likewise, there is some variability among the coalitions in the extent to which the liaison and lead are granted decision-making power.

The responsibilities assumed by workgroup leaders are also a factor that varies across workgroups, and across coalitions. For example, some leaders take on multiple tasks such as communication with members, new partner outreach tasks, and administrative duties such as note taking. Other leaders rely on the liaison and ACS lead to carry out these responsibilities. As we discuss in the section on governance, the partners have not yet developed clear lines of responsibility, which at times has led to some role confusion and conflict among partners.

In the pilot year, very rarely were leaders authorized or voted in by the coalition to take on leadership roles. The fact that leaders were not officially elected did not cause any tensions over their legitimacy. Partners seemed happy to allow others to volunteer for leadership positions because of the time commitments involved. In a similar vein, the effectiveness of leaders has not been an issue that has yet been raised by the coalitions. They have not developed a process for holding leaders accountable to a certain standard of performance. For the most part, the workgroup leaders have shown great commitment to the work. There have been instances, however, where workgroup leaders were not consistently present or did not take initiative to move the work forward, leading to some frustration among the partners.

Moving toward partnership

There is some cross-site variation regarding the strength of leadership in the CPI coalitions. In Highbridge, for example, the coalition enjoys the input of a large group of diverse leaders who share in the work equally. In newer sites like Jamaica, leaders have been cultivated over time and the core group has begun to emerge and work together. Still, all of the sites have faced the

challenge of inconsistent or weak leadership in the workgroups, which has hindered workgroup progress and put great stress on the lead and liaison to move the work forward.

Moving forward, coalitions will need to formalize the scope of leaders' responsibility. As the coalitions continue to develop and leadership responsibilities become clarified, the coalitions should consider ways to promote the democratic selection of leaders. There is also a need for coalitions to plan for leadership transition. In addition, coalitions may consider ways to set standards of leadership that ensure that a variety of affiliations and perspectives are represented and that leaders are endowed with particular skills needed to ensure success. Finally, the coalitions should consider ways to routinely assess how well their leadership structures align with the practical demands of the work. These issues are ultimately managed by governance structures, which are described in the next section.

Governance structures

In order for partners to work collectively, they need organizational structures that can ensure transparent decision-making, cross-partner communication, consensus building, and clear lines of responsibility. These structures may include committees that oversee leadership or programmatic needs, mechanisms for communication among partners, and procedures for collective decision-making. In community-led partnerships, efficient and democratic governance systems are essential to organizational functioning. To a great extent, governance structures can reflect an accurate portrait of how closely coalitions resemble partnerships: how well partners are working together toward their goals, the degree to which they are able and willing to hear each other's interests and opinions, and how well they are able to manage the various aspects of the work as a collective.

In community partnerships, governance structures will exhibit the following characteristics: means to build and articulate consensus in a time-sensitive manner; coherent processes to resolve conflict and disagreement; supports for cross-committee communication and leadership; mechanisms to monitor governance and accountability; and means for clarifying roles and absorbing new partners into the governance structure.

In the CPI, governance strategies were set in place during the strategic planning phases but these also developed as the coalitions grew in capacity and the work got underway. In the Phase 1 communities, we saw new governance structures evolve towards the end of the year; stronger

membership and leadership, along with shifting work demands, called for a more formal structure to allow partners to communicate and make decisions.

Communication and decision-making

As stated in the previous section, the coalitions aimed to have one or two “co-chairs” who would lead each of the workgroup committees. The responsibility for reporting back to the coalition on all workgroup activities tends to fall on the workgroup leaders but may be managed by the liaison. Typically the fiscal agency staff person takes responsibility for matters related to budgets and ACS reporting. At times, additional committees form in response to particular needs, such as a liaison hiring committee, or planning committees for community events.

In Bedford Stuyvesant, a strong system of communication was in place from the starting point. Reflective of its strong leadership base, the coalition was able to draw on the involvement of several partners to support governance-related work. In addition to approximately six consistently involved workgroup co-chairs, two co-chairs lead the general membership. The workgroup and coalition chairs, the fiscal agent, and the lead and liaison form an executive committee that meets every month to discuss a host of issues and concerns, from monthly meeting agendas and administrative concerns to the scope of the coalition’s mission. They also work together to address progress and challenges in each of the workgroups. This leadership committee thus oversees all coalition matters and decides how they are to be communicated to the larger assembly.

The means for cross-communication across a diverse set of leaders offers the added benefit of allowing for more cross-workgroup collaboration. This allows for the work to be dispersed across multiple partners so that the burdens of membership recruitment, budget balancing, and workgroup problem solving do not fall on any one individual or agency. It also allows for quick responses to challenges that are emerging on a daily basis. In Jamaica and Highbridge, similar executive committees became instituted toward the end of the year. These developed largely out of necessity as it became important to figure out how administrative and budgetary processes would be managed in the face of new membership growth and workgroup success.

The degree to which decisions are made outside of a distinct leadership group varies by sites. Feedback between leaders and the larger membership take place most frequently in the monthly general meeting. It is here that workgroup leaders, liaisons, or leads report to the broader membership about workgroup activities or other relevant matters. The extent and nature of these

updates also varies by site. On occasion, leaders use e-mail communication as a means to raise partners' awareness of broader coalition issues and to build consensus.

In general, consensus building occurs informally. The coalitions have not yet developed clear procedures for formal decision-making such as a voting process, though in some sites there is a movement in this direction.

Roles and responsibilities

Governance includes methods for formalizing partners' roles and responsibilities. With few exceptions, the coalitions have not developed official guidelines in this area. At times the absence of formal rules led to some confusion over the scope of responsibility of individual partners. For example, some administrative tasks (such as meeting minutes and agendas) were managed by either the workgroup leaders, liaisons, or leads, but these tasks were not consistently designated, leading to role confusion. The scope of the liaison's work often came up as something that needed to be clarified, as did the role of the ACS lead.

These processes have not received adequate attention for two primary reasons. First, the leaders of the coalitions were preoccupied with the pressure to ramp up the implementation and achieve time-sensitive deliverables in the workgroups. Second, the membership and leadership necessary for a coherent governance structure took time to develop, and is still growing, at different rates in the different sites. However, the coalitions have begun to move in this direction. In several sites, workgroups are using Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) to formalize the guidelines of agency participation. In another example, the Jamaica CPI coalition is currently considering the use of MOUs to establish duties of membership.

Moving toward partnership

In general, the coalitions have productive communication mechanisms that make it possible for all partners to be kept abreast of workgroup activities and fiscal decisions. We have observed a culture of transparency across sites, in which feedback on progress is emphasized and the input of all partners in decision-making is sought out. In sites where a core group of leaders have developed, we see clear cross-leader mechanisms and shared decision-making. Building in the means for cross-workgroup communication allows partners to draw on a variety of perspectives and strengthen the sense of mutual support and accountability. Such governance structures promote rapid progress but also prevent top-down or centralized control within the coalition.

The coalitions have made less progress in the area of formalizing roles, procedures, and lines of authority. Formal rules enable partners to manage the work more efficiently, reduce conflict, and create clear expectations that can be transferred across leaders and partners and help guide newcomers to the work. Such rules should also be assumed to be flexible and should be revisited regularly.

As the coalitions move forward, they should assess the effectiveness of their communication and consensus building mechanisms to ensure that decision-making is shared consistently. It should also be clear to all partners what kinds of matters are being managed internally, separately from the larger membership. Certainly, it is ineffective for coalition leaders to try to reach consensus on all matters, but keeping an eye on these elements of governance is important to the integrity of the partnership. In addition, coalitions should develop the means to elect and appoint partners into leadership positions so that all partners are engaged in the process.

Although we have observed very little interpersonal conflict among partners, putting procedures in place that prepare the coalition for unanticipated difficulties is prudent. There have been a small number of incidents in which some partners were frustrated by decisions that were made by leaders. The coalitions should consider mechanisms for airing and resolving dissenting views.

Finally, governance structures should promote the partners' accountability to their contractual promises and mission. We turn to this theme in more detail in the next section. Partners can benefit from assessing how well the governance structures fit their needs in moving the work forward. This also entails the creation of mechanisms to regularly assess the quality of governance structures, and adjust them when necessary.

Accountability mechanisms

Governance structures support transparent communication and shared decision-making, thus enabling partners to be accountable to leaders and to each other. Coalitions draw on a variety of mechanisms to ensure accountability. These include reporting tools, administrative forms to document progress, formal rules regarding partner responsibilities, and methods for self-evaluation. In partnership, functional accountability mechanisms ensure that: the coalition stays true to its contractual promises; information pertaining to workgroup activities and budgetary actions is consistently documented and made available to all stakeholders and the coalition's work that impacts families is closely monitored and frequently evaluated by partners to ensure best practice.

The CPI coalitions are accountable to multiple audiences. They are accountable to ACS, the funder and monitor, for the deliverables that they are contractually obligated to achieve. They are accountable to the communities and families they serve through their various programs. They are also accountable to each other. Throughout the year, as governance structures evolved in response to implementation needs, so did accountability mechanisms that link and flow through the governance structures. As with governance, we see more developed accountability mechanisms among the older coalitions.

There are also different types of accountability at work in the CPI. On a basic level, the coalition partners are accountable to the goals laid out in their strategic plans. The leads have been responsible for submitting quarterly reports that itemize how close workgroups have come to achieving their deliverables. Contractually, ACS is accountable to the partners to provide technical support.

Accountability and contractual deliverables

In the Phase I coalitions, the workgroups adhered to the goals laid out in their strategic plans to large degree. Ultimately, there were some shifts away from particular goals due to unanticipated conditions on the ground. In addition, new goals and ideas were created once the coalition activities got underway. The coalitions tended not to refer back to the plans for guidance on a regular basis. Likewise, they did not receive pressure from ACS to accomplish all of the specific goals of their strategic plans. Rather, emphasis was placed on the annual outcomes for the four CPI tasks: hold 40 visits, attend 40 case conferences, coordinate 40 referrals, and recruit 20 foster parents. Accountability was therefore defined more in terms of the scope of services as defined by ACS than by the strategic plans. The deliverables set by ACS after the plans of the Phase I communities had been formalized contributed to certain goals in the plan being de-emphasized.

Documentation

Accountability mechanisms that call for the documentation of events and practices are important to support the growth of partnership in that they may facilitate future decisions and promote transparency. Documentation of activities has varied in the CPI sites and has tended to be driven by the capacity of leadership. Even within individual sites there is variation in which workgroups document meeting minutes and progress reports. In Bedford Stuyvesant, workgroup leaders are responsible for filling out a brief monthly progress report that indicates challenges and

accomplishments, to be disseminated to all partners. There is also variation in the level of record-keeping for budget spending, partner attendance, and workgroup progress.

Quality control and best practice

Another aspect of accountability refers to the degree of quality control around the work. The cross-partner feedback mechanisms the coalitions are using point to how the coalitions are trying to stay abreast of new developments and solve problems in real time. Yet to date, there has been little activity taking place that can enable partners to formalize self-assessment procedures. In one exception, many of the case conferencing workgroups are holding debriefing sessions in which partner participants work through challenges and try to develop solutions.

Several workgroups across coalitions have also considered ways to assess their impact on families. For example, many intend to obtain feedback from families about their experience with visitation or case conferencing interventions and MAPP trainings conducted with prospective foster parents.¹² We find that it is too early for the partners to address the complex challenge of self-evaluation, as their focus has been on the need to put workgroup activities in motion. In many instances the workgroup partners have not gotten to the point in the work where they can articulate the exact practices that they would need to evaluate.

Moving toward partnership

The Phase I coalitions were able to achieve their mandated requirements and we see progress in this direction in the later phase sites. Although ACS has not held the coalition to strict adherence of the strategic plans, it sometimes helps to return back to the plans and revise accordingly. The coalitions can also gain from considering additional strategic planning at future time points. In order to promote strong partnerships, the coalition members need to understand how their mission is or is not being fulfilled, how it aligns with everyday activities, and how families are being impacted.

The coalitions have begun to develop accountability mechanisms, but these are not yet rigorous enough to indicate partnership. The work of building coherent, comprehensive accountability mechanisms requires great administrative capacity and partner investments. As the coalitions

¹² MAPP refers to Massachusetts Approach to Partnerships in Parenting. All foster parents are required by ACS to take the multi-part course.

grow in membership, governance, and leadership – which would likely correspond to boosts in their administrative capacity – we anticipate their accountability mechanisms to grow more sophisticated.

Coalitions should regularly assess the mechanisms they have created or need to create to ensure transparent decision-making, document progress, and establish materials that provide an institutional history that will be useful for future planning and growth. In addition, as the coalitions build their capacity and begin to understand the scope of their practices, new strategies of self-evaluation and data utilization will be necessary to ensure that the work is supporting the intended outcomes for children and families.

Summary

In this section we described how far the coalitions have come down the road to partnership through an examination of four areas: membership, leadership, governance, and accountability. There are many successes to point to, particularly regarding the ways that a large, diverse group of stakeholders have come together to embrace the CPI vision. We see extensive commitments from partners in the collaborative work of drawing on community resources to support children and families. Though it has been easier for more established networks to facilitate high levels of trust, buy in, and partner investments, we see promise across the CPI communities. Partners are taking on leadership roles to help push the work forward, recruiting other members, and developing mechanisms for shared decision-making and accountability. Membership and partner investments have grown in step with the accomplishments of the workgroups.

The data suggest, however, that it is too early in the life of the CPI coalitions to find fully evolved partnerships. In the Phase I communities, it took between six and eight months for the partners to get the workgroups to a point where they had secured the participation and interest they needed to carry through on the deliverables mandated for ACS. Processes related to coalition development – such as the formalization of roles and governance mechanisms – are now beginning to be addressed. We believe that the coalitions will be well positioned to achieve partnership if they continue to progress at the rate of growth demonstrated in the first year.

III. The mandated goals: implementation and lessons learned

In this section we turn to the four mandated goals that the CPI coalitions were asked to address. The primary CPI tasks are: 1) to facilitate cross-agency referrals between Head Start, child care and preventive services; 2) to enhance the quality of family team conferences; 3) to recruit and

support foster parents in the community; and 4) to improve the quality and frequency of visitation between biological parents and their children.

We are interested in several aspects of the workgroup activities. The first pertains to ACS' and the partners' vision for how CPI activities in the discrete goal areas can positively impact child well-being with an emphasis on safety and permanency. We then turn to the unique strategies the coalitions used to address their goals. In doing so, we evaluate points of success and challenges. Lastly we look at the impact of the coalitions' work on traditional approaches to child welfare practice and give suggestions as to how partners can begin to think about increasing their impact. We end the section with an overview of lessons learned and their implications for future success.

As we describe in the previous section, workgroup activities around the four mandated goals shaped coalition attributes, such as the state of membership and leadership, in much the same way that growth in these areas gave shape to the workgroups. As workgroup members began to develop processes for action and routines took form, it became easier to articulate success and draw in greater investments by partners.

The capacity of the coalition partners to achieve the tasks at hand was shaped in part by local context, both related to neighborhood characteristics and the nature of partner relationships. Yet there were also significant commonalities across coalitions. The strategies implemented tended to be similar because the ACS staff deployed to support the workgroups shared information with partners across sites about what strategies appear to be working in other sites. As a result, the challenges faced by the coalitions and the primary areas of success were similar as well.

Coordinating Head Start, child Care, and preventive services

Vision

Although there is a clear overlap between the work of child care organizations, Head Start programs, and preventive agencies, these providers rarely interact. Child care and Head Start staff are in constant contact with families. Therefore, they are uniquely positioned to identify families in need of preventive services. Conversely, preventive agency staff works with families who are in need of a variety of services, including child care.

The goal of this workgroup is to create a provider network that can increase referrals between child care, Head Start and preventive agencies. It is expected that increased access to preventive services will reduce maltreatment by offering families support before a crisis occurs. In a similar

vein, lack of access to child care is a common stressor, both for families who come in contact with preventive services and those within the broader community. Research shows that increased access to early childhood education programs corresponds to higher child well-being across a host of measures, such as school readiness.

The CPI model also provides a way to address the problem of underutilization of available ACS supports. Head Start programs, which are sponsored by ACS, are often operating at less than full capacity. This is thought to be due to a lack of information about program availability among providers and families. Similarly poor information exists around eligibility requirements and application processes for ACS-supported child care. Underutilization is a problem that many believe can be best solved through community work.

ACS required the coalitions to coordinate 40 interagency referrals in their first year. There were no rules about which agencies should be the source or receiver of the referrals, or eligibility conditions for families. The only stipulation set was that the referrals resulted from workgroup activity. As we see below, real strides have been made in this area. All of the Phase 1 coalitions were able to exceed the required number of referrals¹³. The later Phase coalitions are also moving in this direction.

Strategies

In addressing this goal the CPIs have focused on four main areas: network development, education, referral form creation, and referral coordination.

Network creation. There are three main groups that are the focus of the network: Head Start programs, child care organizations, and preventive agencies. How the workgroups have defined “preventive agency” tends to move beyond the ACS-contracted agencies to include community-based organizations that offer a variety of services, from housing support to vocational training. Though there is some cross-site variation, many of the sites have recruited between 20 and 30 agencies to participate in the CPI.

One common attempt to recruit new partners involves the hosting of “meet and greet” events in the community to which the relevant agencies are invited. The goal of these meetings has been to

¹³ For example, the Jamaica CPI referred 95 families in their first year.

introduce the CPI model to the agencies and convey the benefits of participation. In Highbridge, partners have found it useful to allow for more regular networking opportunities. They use monthly workgroup meetings as meet and greet events. Lunch is provided and partners are encouraged to share information about their programs. This network-building approach has proven to be an effective strategy for getting a large number of partners to participate in cross-agency referrals.

Education. Education regarding the availability of services has also been a focus of the workgroups' activity. With the technical support of the Director of ACS' Family and Client Services in the Child Care/Head Start (CC/HS) division and the Director of Early Childhood and Preventive Services Partnerships, the workgroups have aimed to raise awareness of the eligibility requirements and scope of service for early childhood programs sponsored by ACS. Informal workshop trainings run by the ACS team helped to educate the CPI network about how to refer families across agencies. In sites like Jamaica, meet and greet events have also focused on educating preventive and day care partners about their programs so that there is better understanding of how collaboration can be beneficial. Some coalitions have also developed a community resource guide that can be used to share information about local services and eligibility restrictions. In Bushwick, partners have used geo-mapping to create a visual map of all available early childhood and preventive services in the community.

Forms. The coalitions have developed or are in the process of developing referral forms that can ensure that all relevant information about the family is consistently shared across agencies. The forms have been treated as a work in progress that needs to be revised regularly in accordance with new concerns that arise in the field. Several issues have had to be resolved throughout the year, such as the nature of essential information, client confidentiality, the length of the form, and the process by which forms are to be shared.

Coordination. All sites have a point person, usually the liaison, to coordinate referrals. In some sites, partners have been working on developing a framework by which referrals are passed through various touch points in order to ensure coherent coordination and tracking of the families. In order to ensure that inter-agency communication is taking place some workgroups are also using additional staff and volunteers to act as coordinators between agencies. For example, the Jamaica CPI has recruited a parent advocate whose job it is to contact agencies to help identify prospective families in need of services. The advocate then links the families to CPI agencies that can address the family's needs. Bushwick is taking a similar approach by drawing on

partners called community resource specialists. These individuals are local residents who provide outreach and coordinate referrals on behalf of their peers. This extra layer of coordination can also enable the tracking of families after the referral is made. In Bedford Stuyvesant, partners are working to hire a social work intern from one of the local colleges. The intern will not only help facilitate interagency referrals but will be available to provide additional case management services. The coalition hopes that this additional service will help draw interest and commitment from the participating day care agencies. In this sense, some workgroups are extending beyond the referral coordination role to actually work directly with families.

Challenges

We consider this mandated goal to be decidedly different from the others in several ways. Not only does the task detract from the traditional child welfare lens, it calls for an open-ended approach that leaves a great deal of discretion to the partners. The reach of the network, the terms of the referral process, and the scope of services to be offered can be defined as narrowly or as broadly as the coalitions choose. This is unlike the coalitions' role in case conferences, visits, and foster care recruitment activities, which all call for supports to be added at the site of discrete practices.

Ultimately the task suggests the creation of a new referral system (based on interagency referrals generated through the CPI network) that asks agencies to use a common form which may or may not be redundant with the in-house forms they already use. Workgroup leaders in some sites have faced some resistance from partners over the additional administrative burden of sending the form to the liaisons so that the coalition can receive credit for the referral. Sites are also drawing on the engagement of hired or volunteer coordinators to manage this new system, which raises new questions about a potential case management role.

Although coalitions have been able to facilitate interagency referrals, the quantity of referrals does not always reflect the model. Results have so far been mixed as to how many referrals shared between CPI partners are actually being made and received by the three primary groups, and few sites are tracking how many of the referrals are being followed up on by the families. In some cases, the bulk of referrals are coming from a small group of partners. This is not surprising given the scope of the task and the time needed to bring the necessary players to the table and win their commitment to participate in a new model.

A lack of agency diversity amongst the referral network can limit the types of referrals that are made. Although the recruitment events have been successful in getting agencies to attend events, some coalitions have had difficulty keeping these agencies involved in workgroup meetings and participating in the referral network. If agencies do not understand how participation can benefit their agency, they are less likely to participate in a meaningful way. This is particularly true of day care centers that may lack available staff to attend workgroup meetings.

Participation by Head Start programs and ACS-contracted preventive agencies in the CPI has been mixed. Some sites have benefited from ACS technical support in bringing Head Start to the table and getting them involved. One problem here is the lack of participation of the Head Start division at ACS.¹⁴ Many coalition partners have argued that the support from CC/HS has not been sufficient. The two ACS partners that are engaged are spread across the 11 communities and have additional responsibilities unrelated to the CPI.

Given that it takes time to build relationships between the primary partners, additional support from HS/CC leaders and staff, as well as preventive, could be useful. Some of the liaisons and leads are not familiar with early childhood and child care organizations. In workgroups led by staff from agencies that have Head Start or child care or preventive programs, the network building and process development work has been easier.

Overall, referrals tended to be directed towards child care serving organizations, not preventive. Representation from the preventive agencies has tended to be most visible in coalitions where ties that predate CPI were already in place. Some preventive agency staff and others shared with the evaluators that they did not understand how they would benefit from the workgroup because they find it unlikely that families would volunteer for preventive services. Day care center staff also claimed that families are reluctant to be referred to preventive services because of the worry that they will be brought into the child welfare system. By the same token, early childhood staff do not necessarily see themselves as service providers; they see themselves as educators. They also tend to have little experience working in coalitions. These examples highlight the need for more

¹⁴ HS/CC management and staff were not involved during the planning of the CPI model and have not been engaged during the implementation stage. They are relatively unfamiliar with the work being done in the communities and do not have the staff to deploy to the sites. The gap between early childhood and preventive services is one that also exists within ACS. Rarely do managers of the early childhood programs interact with other divisions like the Office of Community Affairs and the Division of Child Protection.

education and relationship building to bridge organizational cultures and expectations. Drawing on the use of resident advocates and case managers to negotiate relationships is one way the sites are trying to speed up the collaborative process.

Another challenge involves a need for a significant amount of administrative capacity to ensure that referrals are being made, forms are being used, and to follow up with new partners who have not remained active. The administrative burdens involved with this work have posed great difficulty for the liaisons. Many of the liaisons we spoke with claimed that this workgroup was the most difficult of the four to manage due to the sheer volume of paperwork and tracking involved. Some sites have attempted to address this challenge by utilizing additional help. As the referral systems grow more consistent and membership grows the coalitions will need to develop additional strategies to manage the practical demands of the work.

Impact

We have begun to see real partnerships developing between Head Start, child care and preventive agencies. Thanks to the efforts of the coalitions, these organizations are talking to each other for the first time, and by so doing are creating the potential to help families. It is through the CPI that these partners are able to discuss and resolve the barriers to coordination. The coalitions have done a lot of work to engage the right partners and to create innovative procedures for how referrals will be shared across agencies. It will take more time for these processes to take hold and for agencies to adjust to the new way of working. It will be important for the coalitions to continue to broker relationships and educate the partners as to why their collaboration is important. Finding ways to manage the administrative demands of the work will continue to be essential to moving the work forward.

Case conferences

Vision

The CPI coalitions are charged with the task of supporting ACS case conferences. Case conferences are part of a general orientation to decision-making about matters of family stability and child safety that draws on the natural support system of the family. ACS is using the CPI to expand the circle of support to include community representatives. This goal draws a direct link between the coalitions and the ACS borough offices, and enables partners to support families at various times in their system involvement, from early risk through reunification. As in the

visitation model, the case conferencing model entails drawing on community-based locations to deinstitutionalize service provision. In addition, it requires the participation of community representatives (providers and residents alike) to assist in facilitating conferences. Sending these “community reps” or “CRs” to case conferences is an important means by which the community supports families and works directly in collaboration with ACS staff.

Case conferences are thought to be an essential intervention that influences outcomes for children and families. It is there that decisions are made regarding the permanency of the family. In general, the role of the community in the conferences is to promote a strengths-based approach and active family involvement in case planning, which are strategies associated with more positive safety and permanency outcomes. It is expected that the coalitions can ensure that the quality of the conferences are as successful as possible by promoting communication, clarity and support. The presence of community representatives is expected to give the family a greater sense of trust in the process and therefore enhance their willingness to communicate openly. Holding the meetings in community locations is also assumed to have the effect of placing the family at ease.

Throughout the first year, ACS rolled out CPI involvement in several distinct types of case conferences: elevated risk (in Jamaica, Bedford Stuyvesant, and Highbridge); child safety (in East Harlem, Lower East Side, and currently Bedford Stuyvesant); and more recently, family permanency and reunification (Staten Island and Soundview). In addition, preventive family team conferences are happening in East New York and Bushwick, in coalitions that are home to agencies that are also participating in the Improved Outcomes for Children Initiatives (IOC).

Concurrent with Phase 1 of CPI, ACS also rolled out Phase I of IOC, a package of major policy and practice reforms that includes a family team conferencing model, which is slightly different in practice than the case conferences taking place in the CPI. As IOC Phase 1 includes a subset of contracted agencies (9 foster care and 5 preventive agencies are participating) most CPI coalitions and partners have not been significantly affected by its simultaneous roll-out. Case conferencing is an area of overlap between the two, and this will be more and more the case as both initiatives spread throughout the city in the coming years¹⁵.

¹⁵ IOC will be extended to all preventive and foster care agencies this fall.

In addition, the CPI overlaps with the implementation of child safety conferences. First piloted in East Harlem and now being utilized across Manhattan, these conferences are also new to ACS.¹⁶ Soon to be brought to scale by ACS' Division of Child Protection (DCP), child safety conferences are called immediately from the time that ACS learns of an alleged case of maltreatment. Much in line with the CPI model, emphasis is placed on bringing a diverse group of family supports to the conference, including relatives, friends, and neighbors.

ACS has asked the coalitions to attend 40 case conferences per year. The coalitions showed strong performance in meeting their case conference goals in several ways. Sites were able to employ CRs to a high number of conferences, exceeding their quotas significantly. In fact, they are unable to accommodate the demand coming from the borough office. In addition, as we describe below, child protective staff have embraced the involvement of the CRs, and it is a partnership that continues to deepen.

Strategies

Because of the concurrent rollout with the child safety conferences, CPI Phase 1 coalitions faced a delay in implementing their plans.¹⁷ The process was postponed until March 2008 due to decisions within ACS as to how CPI coalition involvement could best be made to be consistent with the child safety conferences also being rolled out. Although there has as of yet been little overlap between IOC conferences and the CPI, IOC calls for community representatives to be invited to conferences as well, though how that role is understood is slightly different. In the IOC, community representatives are currently thought of as service providers, not residents trained through the CPI.

Given the selective rollout of the kinds of conferences the coalitions have been assigned to cover, the coalitions are not engaged in multiple conference types at this time. Their strategies in supporting the conferences, however, are common in that all of the sites have focused on two

¹⁶ These conferences were first piloted in East Harlem and funded by the New York State Office of Children and Families (OCFS) and monitored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

¹⁷ The exception here was Highbridge, as connections that already existed between the Bronx borough office and Child Welfare Organizing Project through the Bridge Builders were drawn on to create a relatively speedy start-up to the case conferencing work in CPI.

primary areas: 1) facilitating community-located conferences and 2) working alongside ACS to recruit, train, and deploy community representatives to support case conferences.

Community locations. In most sites, conferences took place at the borough office, and that seemed to work well¹⁸. Given that implementation of the CPI case conferences have only been underway since April, most sites have focused on relationship building with child protective staff, CR training, and refining the CR role. In the ramp up period preceding conference participation, however, the workgroups spent ample time securing community locations so that they could be called upon when needed. The partners realized that by drawing on locations spread throughout the census tracts in the community, they could provide all families with a nearby location.

Community representatives (CRs). In almost all of the sites, the coalitions are drawing on non-staff community residents to attend and support conferences.¹⁹ The coalitions found it relatively easy to recruit residents to participate in the case conferences. Residents find the work interesting, particularly those already engaged in advocacy roles in the community. Residents were drawn from a variety of sources: from churches, referrals from agency staff, and parent advocacy groups like the Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP). These recruits tended to bring in other partners through their friend and family networks. In almost all of the sites, CRs receive a stipend for their time.

In March, ACS allowed the coalitions to train the CRs so that the communities could develop their own processes for the CR role within certain parameters. They were assisted by borough office leadership and OCP staff. The role of the CR is mainly that of a mediator. The CRs are to promote a strengths-based approach to the conferences by ensuring that child protective staff are hearing the concerns of the family and conveying ACS' concerns in a clear and coherent way. It is assumed that the presence of a CR – as an individual unaffiliated with ACS – puts the family at ease, enabling for a more productive discussion. The CRs also act as resource specialists who can offer suggestions as to various events and services in the community.

There was some variety among the coalitions as to whether or not the CR should take on more of an advocacy role. In Highbridge, for example, CWOP “parent organizers” go beyond the role of

¹⁸ Highbridge is an example where conferences have taken place in community locations but these are less frequent.

¹⁹ In Jamaica, service providers have volunteered to attend the conferences.

facilitating communication by offering information to the family about their legal rights in some situations. The same is true in East Harlem, where CWOP parent organizers are participating in Child Safety conferences. The variety reflects different interpretations of the CR role as articulated by the coalitions, as well as coalition resources and relationships at the start. The Highbridge coalition benefited from existing relationships between the borough office and CWOP through the Bridge Builders Project. There, workgroup members started out with a mutual understanding that the CWOP parent organizers were well-positioned to act as community representatives. Despite some initial concern at the borough office that the CWOP staff would be too disposed to advocate for the parents in conferences, it soon became clear to child protective leaders that the organizers could support the conferences in ways they deemed productive and appropriate.

Of particular interest is the way the CWOP partners in Highbridge are able to facilitate access to services for the family. Because they have worked within a service-driven community coalition for several years they have exceptional knowledge of neighborhood resources as well as strong relationships to provider agencies. We have learned that on several occasions they have been able to call to provider agencies after the conference and get immediate service for families. ACS staff has expressed that this kind of facilitation is of enormous value given how long it typically takes for the borough office to connect clients to services and communicate with the agencies.

As they develop their practices, the case conferencing workgroups are also doing ongoing quality control to better understand and monitor their process. Regular debriefing sessions are occurring in Bedford Stuyvesant and other sites so that the CRs are given the opportunity to resolve questions and problems as they come up and learn from shared experiences.²⁰

The process of connecting the CRs with the actual conferences was done in similar ways across the coalitions. A designated contact person, such as the liaison or workgroup leader, facilitated the process through constant communication with borough office staff and the CRs. The coordination of timesheets and stipend payments also fell to the liaison, in consultation with the fiscal agent. Stipends were an important aspect of the coalitions' success in recruiting CRs.

²⁰ In Highbridge, partners have attempted to incorporate case consultation into the workgroup, which would serve as a source of support and ongoing training for the CRs.

Challenges

Although most sites are defining the CR role in similar ways, it is unclear to what extent their involvement in the conference is comparable. One main distinction has to do with whether sites are allowing for CRs to act in advocacy roles. Similarly, there has been debate in some sites and internally in ACS over the degree to which CRs should have prior child welfare system involvement, which most CWOP partners do. Although CWOP partners are attending conferences in several CPI communities, recent protocols – supported by trainings by ACS administrators and staff in the field – specified that CRs should not be advocates. Though at this time each approach seems to be working relatively well, it will be important for ACS in the future to have more systematic ways for understanding how certain participants vary in their impact on the conference, as well as whether different kinds of conferences call for different approaches.

Developing processes for the CR role grew out of step with the actual deployment of CRs in the conferences. It took several modules for the trainers contracted by the workgroup to understand what kinds of curricula would be most useful. In some sites the CRs were not consistently coming to trainings, and they were different in their level of knowledge of child welfare issues and ACS practice. In Bedford Stuyvesant, the workgroup drew on lessons from the past months to decide on rules for training participation. They have developed a questionnaire that trainees must fill out to demonstrate their knowledge.

Another challenge was the capacity of the workgroups to administer the delivery of this service. Some liaisons found it increasingly difficult to keep up with administrative functions, such as collecting CR timesheets and paying the stipends, securing conference locations, and notifying all participants of scheduled conferences and last minute cancellations.

Although each of the Phase 1 coalitions have coordinated case conferences to take place at community locations, several concerns have arisen regarding their use. Logistical concerns include the difficulty of securing the location on short notice and notifying all participants, of whom there may be 8 to 10. Second, some families have communicated to DCP staff that they are more comfortable meeting in the borough offices than in community locales that, although they may be located conveniently, are unknown and unsecured. We have also heard concerns that child safety conferences will be especially difficult to implement because they are done on short notice, will be happening too frequently, and involve families who are unknown to the workers.

The issue of conference cancellation is an important one that also relates to the role clarity issues mentioned above. Clearly it is time- and resource-consuming for participants to plan to attend conferences that are cancelled at the last minute, usually due to the absence of a key participant.²¹ Yet there is some disagreement over who holds the responsibility for assisting these participants with attendance. ACS staff has indicated that meeting with birth parents and reminding them about conferences is one function of the CR. Others feel it is the contracted agency's staff person that is responsible for informing the family about the conference and making sure they have access to transportation.

Finally, as with other programmatic areas of CPI, it is necessary for the workgroups to collect and analyze feedback from the families who come into contact with services. Such self-evaluation serves to guide ongoing training and support of the CRs, solve problems, and plan for the future. It is especially important that there are clear lines of communication between the borough offices and the community partners to resolve problems as they arise.

Impact

An important lesson of the first year of the CPI is that trusting, durable, productive relationships can be built between the ACS borough offices and the coalitions in a relatively short time span. On a practical level, borough office support has been essential for implementing the workgroup activities. More broadly, their buy in demonstrates that the CPI vision is being articulated on the ground in ways that are meaningfully shaping child welfare work. Though these relationships are new in most sites, there has been enormous success in terms of the trust being fostered between ACS staff and coalition partners.

Our interviews with ACS staff indicate that they feel positively about the CPI coalitions in that they believe the conferences run more effectively and smoothly due to a higher level of satisfaction and ease on the part of the family. It seems that engaging the CRs in the conference is emerging as a routine practice. In this way, the case conferencing activities are a site where we have begun to see the start of real shifts in child welfare work. It is important to note that these shifts are occurring at the same time that case conferencing is becoming increasingly integrated

²¹ One of the guiding principles of Family Team Conferencing is “nothing about me, without me,” meaning that most conferences will not occur if key participants are not present. This is true for the birth parent as well as a child of 10 or older.

into different points of the system. As the CPI begins to interface more regularly with other case conferencing-based reforms, and the coalitions expand their reach to other kinds of conferences, there will be a wide network of CRs ready to participate, further deepening the impact of the community in child welfare work. Most importantly, anecdotal feedback from the coalitions and the borough offices point to positive experiences for families.

Foster parent recruitment and support

Vision

Roughly 80 percent of children who enter the foster care system in New York City get placed with families that reside outside their local neighborhoods.²² These children face the additional challenge of adjusting to new schools, making new friends, and adjusting to new communities. In addition, placement of children outside of their communities makes it more difficult for visitation with birth parents to occur, and as a result may hinder reunification.

Recruitment of foster parents is extremely difficult work that can benefit from innovative strategies. In particular, the CPI coalitions have connections to a diverse set of neighborhood networks and organizations that are believed to facilitate recruitment efforts. By allowing the partners to draw on community resources to develop new ways of recruiting local foster families, it is expected that more children will be able to be placed in homes located in their communities. In addition, it is believed that the CPI communities can draw on various resources to provide better supports for current foster parents, thereby increasing the number of prospective foster parents and foster parent retention. The collaboration of CPI partners can also promote improved practice among foster care agencies by encouraging them to work in collaboration rather than in competition, pooling their resources toward the aim of supporting biological and foster families.

The coalitions were asked to recruit 20 foster parents throughout the year or to recruit 10 foster parents and hold four recruitment events. This requirement resulted in focusing workgroup resources on recruitment, largely at the expense of their strategic goals to support foster parents. The coalitions have for the most part been able to recruit the required number of parents and have drawn on community-based strategies to accomplish their goals.

²² New York Children's Services administrative data.

Strategies

The workgroups have employed different strategies to meet this goal. They include holding recruitment events, facilitating the certification process, partnerships with faith-based organizations, and using residents to recruit neighbors. Most of the recruitment workgroups have benefited from strong technical support from ACS. Community collaboration is familiar to the Office of Parent Recruitment and Retention, as it has always been a part of their strategic orientation.

Events. Several sites have hosted events in the community to garner interest among potential foster parents. These events have been held at various locations such as churches or the local YMCA. Agency representatives are present to share information and resources with attendees. The coalitions have also partnered with ACS to host “meet and greet” sessions in which prospective foster parents can meet active foster parents and teens in need of foster homes. These activities have led to the recruitment of several new homes.

Faith-based organizations. The strategy of drawing on local faith-based organizations is not unfamiliar to ACS. ACS staff has long focused on the churches as a source of support in the work of recruitment. The Jamaica CPI’s work in this area deserves mention as it has been upheld as a model of success in the pilot year. The Jamaica CPI partnered with the Greater Allen AME Cathedral, a local church that has strong roots in the community, with close to 20,000 members. The workgroup is co-chaired by two Jamaica residents who are active leaders in the church and current foster parents. The group has utilized several innovative marketing tools to generate interest among the congregation, including a video, information cards, fans, and door hangers. In addition, the workgroup co-chairs are certified MAPP trainers and have led the trainings for potential foster parents recruited through the church. By the end of the year, the Jamaica CPI had recruited 71 foster parents and conducted two MAPP trainings. Five of the recruits have completed certification at this time.

Certification. Some coalitions are working to expedite and streamline the certification process. For example, many CPIs are working to purchase a fingerprinting machine, which is expected to quicken the pace by which the coalition can move prospective parents through certification. ACS is also working with the coalitions to address the “pipeline,” which is a list of prospective parents recruited by foster care agencies. The hundreds of prospective parents on this list are at different stages in the recruitment process. For example, some need to have home evaluations done while

others have yet to begin the MAPP training. The CPI partner agencies are finding ways to work together with support team staff to push these prospective parents forward in the process.

Drawing on community residents. One strategy that has been shared across all CPIs has been to draw upon strengths of community residents, including current foster parents and foster children. The Highbridge CPI has addressed the goal of recruitment by engaging current foster parents as “anchor parents” who are responsible for recruiting new foster parents by networking amongst their friends and neighbors. Anchor parents receive a stipend for every foster parent they recruit. In another example, the Staten Island and Bedford Stuyvesant CPIs have enlisted teenagers in foster care to help recruit foster parents at meet and greet events.

Foster parent supports. Although there has been less attention placed on providing supports for existing foster parents, some CPIs are addressing this goal as well. Several CPIs have encouraged members from local Circle of Support groups, which are support groups for active foster parents, to participate in the CPI. In communities where no Circle of Support currently exists, some CPIs are attempting to develop one. In Jamaica, foster parents who are recruited from the church are encouraged to become part of the church’s foster care ministry where they can receive support from other foster parents in the church. On the Lower East Side, partners are working to conduct focus groups with foster parents to help understand how the coalition can address their needs.

Challenges

Some sites struggled to get full participation from the foster care agencies in the community. This seemed to be particularly true for coalitions that had less of a history of foster care collaboration.²³ As we have noted in earlier sections, it has been difficult for the foster care agencies to adjust to the time and staffing demands involved in participating in several workgroup meetings across multiple communities. Capacity will continue to be an issue as the CPI goes to scale next year.

New approaches to foster parent recruitment also led to challenges in the workgroup. Although the Jamaica CPI was successful in the recruitment of new foster parents, it also created tensions

²³ For example, the Jamaica CPI struggled the first six months of the implementation period to get foster care agencies to participate in the workgroup (see membership section). In contrast, the Staten Island CPI did not experience this challenge as they had strong agency collaboration prior to the CPI.

among partners. Because families were recruited from a community location, families were not automatically attached to an agency. As a result, foster care agencies, which historically have worked in competition, were required to distribute families amongst themselves. This tension was exacerbated by the unequal participation of agencies throughout the implementation period. Eventually, the group developed a protocol for the distribution of families. After taking into consideration where families are located and the agencies that serve those areas, families are distributed on a rotation basis.

Although partnering with a faith-based organization has been successful in the Jamaica CPI, it is not clear whether this approach can be applied as successfully in other CPI communities. Some communities do not have large faith-based organizations that can be drawn upon. In addition, very diverse communities may struggle to achieve participation from different denominations. Perhaps the greatest barrier is that this model is unlikely to be successful if the CPI coalitions do not have the participation of a respected member of the congregation as is the case in Jamaica.

On a related note, Jamaica leaders have at times linked their success in recruitment to the fact that Jamaica is a neighborhood of socioeconomic diversity, with many middle-class families living in homes large enough to accommodate foster children. Housing stock is an issue that has been raised consistently in certain coalitions as a barrier to recruitment efforts. In highly dense areas like the Lower East Side, partners have difficulty finding prospective parents with apartments large enough to pass through certification. The concentration of poverty in particular areas is a related issue. Families that are struggling economically are less able to manage the complex needs of foster children.

Lastly, many partners were frustrated at how the pressure to recruit foster parents diverted attention away from the workgroups' strategies on how to support foster parents, which many argue is equally important to the creation of homes. It is possible that once recruitment strategies become steadier, the coalitions will be able to integrate support activities so that there is a more seamless process to address both recruitment and supports for existing parents.

Impact

Although in many ways the recruitment of foster parents is the most challenging task assumed by the CPI coalitions, the communities have made great progress in this area. With the freedom to develop their own recruitment strategies and approaches, they have been able to draw on the

resources of their communities to make strides in the work while working in successful partnership with ACS.

The fact that foster care agencies are coming together to work as a united body around foster parent recruitment and support is a powerful accomplishment taking place across the CPI communities. Our data indicate that the foster care agencies have begun to embrace the collaborative vision. They are beginning to see how staff investments in collaboration can pay off in helping them access prospective foster parents in the community. Some had positive working relationships that predated the CPI which facilitated their collaboration. Others have been struggling to adapt to the process, particularly as they make efforts to donate staff time to coalition activities and work through strategies on sharing recruits. These struggles are a natural product of a shift in practice and will most likely become less frequent as agencies learn how to work together.

Visitation

Vision

The CPI coalitions were asked to enhance visits between biological parents and their children in foster care. ACS included visitation into the CPI model due to its assumed impact on reunifying families. ACS staff and community partners alike have expressed the belief that by improving the quality and quantity of visits, the CPI coalitions can help parents stay connected to their children and have more productive interactions during visits. Better visits are expected to have the potential to decrease time in care and increase the occurrence of reunification.

Visits can be enhanced through community partnerships in several ways. By moving family visits out of traditional agency settings and into the community, parents and children are allowed the opportunity to interact in a more natural setting that can be both fun and instructive. In addition, community-located visits allow parents the opportunity to develop the skills necessary for interacting with their children outside the agency. The coalition partners may also work with parents to help them find appropriate opportunities to become involved in more aspects of their children's lives, such as attending a school event or accompanying them on a doctor's visit.

The quantity of visits is another important aspect of the family's chances for success. Research has shown that children in foster care who have more consistent and frequent contact with their biological parents have stronger attachments than children who have less contact. High caseloads

and insufficient resources often prevent foster care agencies from holding visits as often as they would like. Having coalition members monitor visits instead of an agency worker allows for more flexibility in terms of the duration and quantity of visits. This practice can lead to an increase in the frequency and quality of family visits.

The coalitions were asked to facilitate 40 community-located visits. The partners drew on a variety of strategies to begin thinking about what constitutes best practice and how CPI partners can add benefit to family experiences.

Strategies

Below we discuss the workgroups' general strategies, from the locations that were used to the ways they chose to enhance the visits.

Community visits. All CPI coalitions are sponsoring visits held in community locations. Several CPIs have developed new partnerships with local organizations, such as the YMCA, as a way to create visitation sites within the community. For example, in Jamaica, the CPI has fostered a relationship with the Jamaica YMCA. The coalition recruited the YMCA's executive director as a co-chair of the visitation workgroup and purchased YMCA passes to provide biological and foster parents access to the facilities. In Bedford Stuyvesant, visits have taken place at movie theaters, restaurants, and libraries.

Visit hosting and coaching. With the support of ACS' Office of Family Visiting, the coalitions have implemented a variety of strategies to enhance the quality and quantity of visits. Most notably, ACS has collaborated with the majority of CPIs to implement the pre-existing Visit Host Initiative. "The Visit Host is someone who can assure the safety of the child(ren), is invested in the well being of the child(ren) and is supportive of the parent and the family's attempts to reunify or maintain strong relationships."²⁴ During the visit, the host stays nearby in case the parent needs any support or wants to talk. The host is also responsible for documenting what occurs during the visit. The Visit Host Initiative is intended to reduce strain on agency staff, allow families to interact in more naturalistic settings, and increase the frequency and quality of visitation.

²⁴ "A Bridge Back Home: Visit Hosts," June 2007, New York City Administration for Children's Services Division of Family Support Services, Office of Family Visiting.

Another strategy being implemented in sites such as Mott Haven is “visit coaching.” Visit coaches take a more hands on approach to guiding parent-child interactions during the visit. Trainings for the visit coaches are conducted by ACS’ Office of Family Visiting and the sites.

The CPIs have also taken different approaches towards recruiting visit hosts and coaches. For example, many CPI coalitions have provided community residents a stipend for serving in these roles. In other sites, foster care staff are acting as visit hosts. One CPI has begun to develop relationships with the Department of Aging with the hope of recruiting older community members to serve as visit hosts.

Other enhancements. The Highbridge coalition has further developed the work of a pilot project that began under the Bridge Builders Project: the Therapeutic Visitation Program (TVP), which emphasizes raising parents’ awareness of the emotional dynamics of parent-child bonding and early child development. The program started as a collaboration between the Highbridge Community Life Center (HCLC), Albert Einstein Medical Center, and ACS. Because the TVP activities are privately funded, the CPI workgroup has been able to expand the scope of their work by adding a new service for supervised group visits of infants and toddlers. In a similar vein, in places like East New York, CPI is partnering with a “Baby and Me” program in order to offer families access to high quality services that support early learning and parent-child bonding.

Challenges

Although the CPIs have made impressive strides in addressing this goal, they have also encountered challenges along the way. Several CPIs have struggled with membership and participation from key players including foster care agencies, families, and visit hosts. Although some CPIs experienced a shift in participation during the course of the year, initially some had difficulty recruiting foster care agencies to participate in this workgroup. Agencies did not fully understand how the CPI strategies could benefit their agency and their clients.

In addition, some caseworkers have expressed concern about allowing their families to be supervised by a non-agency visit host. There has been some confusion about which families are eligible for visits and the precise responsibilities of the visit host. In addition, some CPIs have had difficulties getting families to participate in the enhanced visits. Foster care agency staff has encountered resistance from families when they have suggested having their visit outside of the agency. Some families are nervous about being in new surroundings and managing their children

in new environments. On the agency side, some case workers claimed that the initiative created more, not less, administrative work and burdens on their time.

Some coalitions have had difficulties recruiting community members to act as visit hosts. Although both the Bedford Stuyvesant and Jamaica coalitions have struggled in this area, the Bedford Stuyvesant CPI was eventually able to recruit visit hosts. This may be due to the fact that the Bedford Stuyvesant provided a stipend to its visit hosts while the Jamaica CPI did not. Because the Jamaica CPI was not able to recruit a consistent group of visit hosts, the visits that were held in community locations required supervision by the caseworker. This created more of a burden for caseworkers who had to leave the agency to attend visits.

In addition, we have observed that some visit hosts are often unclear about their role. What it means to “support” the family during a visit can leave room for different interpretations. Similar to the community rep role in case conferencing, it is sometimes unclear how personal the relationship can and should become and whether or not it is the role of the visit host to give advice about parenting or address mental health concerns. Unlike the community reps, the visit hosts have not received extensive training or access to debriefing sessions. Given that the visit hosts are not trained to address the clinical needs of the family, it will be important for role boundaries to be further monitored and managed.

Another challenge that has emerged involves the coordination between the host site and foster care agency. Some liaisons have faced difficulty in alerting the visit site that a visit is scheduled to take place and coordinating the needs of the family with the services of the visit site.

Impact

For some foster care agencies, community-located visits are not a new idea. Many have been operating such visits as part of their traditional work with families. However, the CPI has allowed agencies to consider additional community locations as visit sites and more agencies seem to be encouraging families to have their visits in community locations on a more consistent basis. These advances suggest that the CPI has begun to affect agency perspectives on visitation, although it is too early to tell the degree to which the agencies are beginning to adopt these practices on a broader scale.

The degree to which families are benefiting from the particular clinical enhancements as well as from the change in locations is a matter that demands additional oversight and monitoring in the

CPI context. Anecdotal reports from those who have participated directly in family visitation activities across the CPI sites indicate that many families have responded favorably to visit hosting and find the process to be a positive one. Though there has been reluctance to participate on the part of some families and agency staff, support team staff is hopeful that the adjustment to these new practices will come with time. The implementation of visit coaches is an area where the CPI coalitions have enormous potential to influence practice in positive ways.²⁵

Throughout the year, we have seen a shift in foster care agency participation with more agencies attending workgroup meetings and providing families for visits. Visitation workgroups continue to strengthen relationships among community partners and staff and draw new community partners into the coalitions. In addition, visitation workgroups have been reaching out to alternative community locations and working to develop protocols at visit sites in order to make visits as smooth as possible.

Conclusion: Looking ahead

Our data on CPI workgroup activities point to several lessons learned. In this summary section we include some recommendations for how the workgroups can get closer to their vision for change. Our findings point to several areas of success:

1. After the ramp up period, the CPI partners achieved significant partner involvement in the workgroups.
2. Though the workgroups have more to do in order to fulfill their missions, the work has proven to be manageable and has given substantial focus to the coalitions.
3. Thus far, the CPIs have successfully integrated a diverse array of partners into the work, including a variety of roles for residents. They have also had success in drawing on the resources of local institutions to push forward on their goals.
4. It is too early to tell if organizational cultures are changing but movement in this direction is evident. For example, some child protective staff and foster care agency partners have begun to integrate the CPI strategies into routine practice. Some areas of the work point to a struggle over change, such as in the tensions among some foster care agencies around the sharing of prospective foster parents. We believe that such struggle is a necessary prerequisite for change to occur.

²⁵ Unfortunately, the evaluators were not able to speak directly with any partners participating in the work of visit coaching.

5. ACS' involvement in the workgroups has had a positive impact on perceptions of ACS and its commitment to the CPI partners.

The data suggest that the progress of the workgroups can be expedited in the following ways.

- *Sort out capacity needs.*

In previous sections we discussed how the coalitions need to think about ways to delineate formal roles and responsibilities of partners. Some of the workgroup leaders we spoke with have had difficulty managing the administrative responsibilities required to move the work forward.

Similarly, several liaisons claimed to be overwhelmed by the volume of administrative responsibilities associated with the coordination of four workgroups. The coalitions can work to resolve areas of stress by seeking out greater support from ACS and/or from its other partners.

- *Interlinking workgroups*

Workgroups have the potential to overlap in a variety of ways. For example, information related to access to Head Start programs can be useful for community reps to share during case conferences. From an operational point of view, one workgroup may have strategies for managing practical challenges or knowledge of community resources that another workgroup can benefit from. Although feedback mechanisms exist at the leadership level, the coalitions have not put much thought to date into how they can pool their assets. A related issue has to do with the potential of the coalitions to serve families across workgroups. When a visitation workgroup learns that a family is in crisis and can no longer participate in community visits, to what extent will the coalition try to support that family outside of the workgroup's function? This is a question that has been raised sporadically by partners in some sites. It is an issue that warrants attention as the coalitions move forward and work to further define the reach of their care.

- *More cross-site communication.*

Partners across sites often relayed the desire for more cross-coalition communication. They were curious to know how other communities were working to solve the problems they were facing and where they are finding success. Partners seem to be expecting ACS to put such communication in motion but this has not occurred. Networking opportunities and the sharing of contact information could be of great value.

- *Measuring success.*

Moving forward, the partners need time to establish their own measures for success as well as to develop processes for self-evaluation and quality control. This may or may not require additional capacity building. Time should be devoted to assessing the implications of workgroup strategies on agency practice and most importantly, on the clinical needs of families. Once the work becomes more consistent and routine it will be important for the workgroups, with the support of ACS, use neighborhood data that can help guide their work and assess their impact on child welfare outcomes. Partners may also consider the development of feedback tools to assess how families perceive the interventions.

- Greater internal coordination between ACS divisions.

The coalitions' work around case conferencing and early childhood education are especially in need of greater internal consistency so that the coalitions and the various divisions within ACS can pool their resources effectively and keep each other abreast of new developments happening across points of policy and practice.

IV. ACS as Partner

In this section we take a closer look at the relationship between ACS and the community coalitions. We deal with this particular set of relationships separately as they are unique and essential to the functioning of the coalitions. As the CPI calls for communities to support child welfare work, the development of trust and productive communication between ACS and its community partners is of crucial importance. Our central question is to what extent and in what ways does ACS function as a partner to the CPI coalitions?

For a large public agency to act in partnership with a community-based coalition is a complex and challenging matter. Most importantly, inherent tensions exist inside an initiative that aspires to be “community-led” but which is ultimately shaped in large part by the goals of the agency.

Although the CPI model gives latitude for coalitions to exercise a certain level of discretion to tailor the work to their community, they are held accountable to ACS to achieve programmatic deliverables. For its part, ACS needs to maintain a certain level of control over the process and its outcomes, as it holds the ultimate responsibility for the performance of its contracted agencies and for the safety of the children. There are also important organizational differences. ACS is a government agency with a particular way of managing work and communication that may be set apart from other agency cultures. In addition, the relationships ACS can build in the CPI are

ultimately shaped by its multiple, sometimes contradictory roles: as partner, funder, technical supporter, and monitor to its CPI partnerships.

Given ACS' multiple roles in the partnership, primarily its role as funder, the ACS-community relationship is most evident in negotiations over control and coalition autonomy, technical support, and accountability. It is around such matters that trust and transparency – the foundation of partnership – are negotiated. Below, we examine how this particular relationship took shape during the pilot year.

Sharing the vision

As we have noted, the CPI has been a great success when measured by the ability and willingness of coalition partners to work together to achieve the CPI vision. For the most part, participants embrace the value of community partnerships in child welfare work. The degree to which coalition partners have committed resources to achieving the four mandated goals speaks to a growing sensibility towards ACS as being a partner to the coalitions and the communities in which they work. In our surveys and interviews, many partners expressed enthusiasm toward what they perceived as ACS' unprecedented commitment to community collaboration through the CPI.

Yet conflicts have arisen on occasion regarding the parameters of action set by ACS in the CPI model. Although the majority of partners relayed that the four mandated goals were appropriately chosen, others have been critical of their scope. Some partners have argued that the CPI mandate overemphasizes the importance of foster care and pays less attention to the prevention of child abuse and neglect and broader issues of community well-being. Some argued this belief was corroborated by the unequal resources ACS has devoted to the strategic goals designed by some coalitions in addition to the four mandated by ACS.²⁶

The most constant source of frustration raised by coalition partners relates to the CPI deliverables. It was ACS' intention to create a scope of service that could give the coalitions focus and provide the means for monitoring their progress. In many ways the requirements did push the coalition workgroups into action. For some partners, however, they seemed to undermine the potential and mission of the CPI. As we have explained in previous sections, the

²⁶ ACS did not support the additional goals fiscally or with additional technical assistance.

reporting rules had the unfortunate outcome of limiting the amount of discretion the coalition workgroups could take and time they could devote to develop work processes and ancillary goals. Some of the strategies laid out in their strategic plans had been neglected due to the pressure to achieve quantifiable results. There was also resentment on the part of some partners, particularly key coalition leaders, who felt that the reporting requirements set up by ACS created a merit system that did not match the partners' most important accomplishments. Likewise, some partners felt this feedback system did not capture the quality of effort the coalition was investing toward the achievement of their goals.

Expectations and transparency

Confrontations with ACS occurred most commonly when community partners felt that ACS had not been transparent about their expectations. The CPI was a demonstration project, and ACS was managing a vast scope of unfamiliar terrains, leading to a few occasions where the coalitions were asked to change course. These incidents were the greatest hindrance to ACS' attempts to build trust. Examples abound, from the timeline of the contracts and funding availability, to the deliverables being defined after the strategic plans had been completed. On the one hand, most partners were sensitive to the learning curve that affected ACS as much as the coalitions in the sense that CPI is new for everyone. At the same time, there was widespread frustration about what many viewed as ACS' frequent inability to clarify expectations about future plans. For example, some Phase 1 partners have argued that ACS should not have waited until the Spring to clarify if and when "bridge funds" that would allow the coalitions to continue their work beyond the pilot year would be available.

These problems stem from ACS' status as a bureaucratic agency that is vulnerable to budget crises and constraints and administration term limits. Policies are often changed in unanticipated ways due to external and internal demands on the agency. ACS' future commitment to the CPI coalitions is a politically sensitive issue that has played an inevitably important role in the cultivation of trust among partners. Many partners expressed suspicion and anxiety over ACS' true intentions to provide the support needed to sustain the coalitions. For some, the uncertainty about ACS' future fiscal commitment raises questions of authenticity: if ACS is not truly committed to a future of partnership, its professed interest in community building can be understood as self-promoting, self-interested, and disingenuous. Still, as both coalition and ACS leaders have committed to working together amicably in this early phase of coalition growth, such tensions are rarely addressed.

Negotiating partnership in the everyday work

The technical support role is important in helping the coalitions achieve mandated goals, but it also provides a real opportunity for ACS to work alongside coalition stakeholders as a partner. In workgroups where an ACS staff person built trusting relationships with coalition members over time, there was clear progress toward the accomplishment of an important aspect of the CPI vision: the perception that ACS is a community partner with shared values and a common vision of child safety and well-being.

Trusting relationships are the means by which mutual responsibility is successfully negotiated in any partnership. Coalition partners, including ACS staff, often speak of ACS as a distinct entity engaged in this work, rather than as a set of individuals. When describing ACS' expectations and policies, we too are referring to the agency at large. However, the role of the individual warrants discussion because it is in the everyday work in which partners, including ACS staff, work together as persons who listen, support, and rely on each other. It is not the behavior of any one staff person that is relevant to understanding ACS-community partnership; rather, it is the patterns of those interactions on the ground. Many of the coalition partners we interviewed who were most critical of ACS' policies and/or facilitation of the CPI had very strong relationships with particular ACS technical support staff. In many workgroups, the ACS staff partners are simply a team member with equal responsibility and decision-making power as the others.

Again, the ACS leads play a particularly important role in that they liaise between OCP and the coalitions. When tensions emerged over ACS' expectations and deadlines, the ACS leads were best positioned to smooth over the partners' concerns. In many ways, the leads carry the most difficult charge: they are the point persons who negotiate boundaries and responsibilities with partners and simultaneously represent the coalition to senior management at ACS. In some situations they are the bearer of bad news from higher ACS management to the coalitions. They are also leaned on by the partners to manage gaps in capacity. ACS support team staff was also instrumental to the coalitions' work. Many team partners provided leadership to the workgroups, providing leadership and encouragement.

Time and again we came across strong partnerships between ACS staff and non-ACS partners. These individuals tended to be those who had been working with coalition partners in the past. The fact that the trust had been established previously made it much easier for the work to move along quickly and for the difficulties that arise on an ongoing basis to be resolved efficiently. Many partners spoke about particular ACS staff as "one of us." These individuals have been

working and possibly residing in the communities for years and are perceived as having the community spirit.

Moving forward

The CPI model calls for positive relationship building between ACS and community coalitions. ACS' function as a funder and policy-maker sets it apart from other coalition partners. Although it will take considerable time and effort to achieve partnership, the first year of CPI suggests significant promise in the area of trust building. The investment of ACS staff as technical supporters helped to create opportunities for real collaboration. The following recommendations highlight areas where additional growth is needed.

- *Engage staff with experience working in communities*

The coalitions that have made the greatest strides toward partnership are those in which existing resources are mobilized. The coalitions will benefit if ACS continues to use leads and technical supporters with existing links to the communities. Less experienced staff should be provided some training to enhance their ability to work collaboratively with community partners. Staff that has the most experience in community partnership building should be assigned to coalitions most in need of support.

- *Clear expectations.*

Although many of the operational features of CPI were still in development during the pilot year, new coalitions may benefit from greater clarity around ACS' expectations of their work.

- *Transparency*

The funding and policies of CPI are areas in which transparency of communication is vital. When information about policy matters cannot be shared the partnership can benefit from clear communication as to when particular matters may be resolved.

- *More extensive feedback system*

Though there is ongoing feedback between ACS and coalition leaders, the partners expressed the need for more interaction with upper management to discuss coalition accomplishments and challenges. They also expressed the desire to have a more comprehensive set of reporting

requirements so that there could be increased recognition regarding the various kinds of work being done by the workgroups and the coalition at large.

V. The coalitions' broader goals

Throughout the report we have used the term community partnership to refer to the ways CPI coalition partners are working together to develop coalition structures as well as to design and implement strategies to enhance child welfare work. Yet community partnerships interact with their respective communities in multiple ways. Though in the CPI context such interaction is driven by the goals of safety and permanency, it is ultimately up to the coalitions to decide how narrowly or how broadly they wish to define the parameters of their work. In this section we turn to the broader ways in which the coalitions have been thinking about their mission and role.

Looking beyond the four child welfare tasks

Some CPI coalitions have defined their programmatic goals to address child well-being in their respective communities more broadly. In Jamaica, the coalition created two additional workgroups on health and education that function in the same way as the other four workgroups. The health workgroup has aimed their efforts at addressing the physical health needs of children in foster care.²⁷ The education workgroup is working to understand the barriers to educational success children in foster and preventive care face.

In East Harlem the CPI is one program within a larger Consortium that meets to discuss a host of policy issues affecting the community, including access to healthcare and housing, teen violence, law enforcement practices, and education. In Staten Island, the SICCAN network, which includes the CPI, has a workgroup that focuses on youth-related issues.²⁸ In East New York, partners have placed a priority on addressing substance abuse issues in addition to their four mandated tasks.

In the surveys, many partners shared the belief that the next stage of coalition growth in the CPI is to extend beyond the current child welfare focus to a more cross-systems approach. Time and again we partners have expressed frustration regarding the difficulty of gaining participation from

²⁷ For example, the group tries to educate teens in foster care about health.

²⁸ SICCAN stands for the Staten Island Council on Child Abuse and Neglect.

key city agencies that affect the child welfare system, such as the Department of Education, the Housing Authority, and the Human Resource Association.²⁹

Presence in the community

Some coalitions have given priority to social marketing objectives. They are working to raise community awareness of their work to ensure that the CPI is truly an effort “by and for the community.” For example, the Bedford Stuyvesant CPI developed a quarterly newsletter that can be disseminated easily in a variety of settings, from beauty salons to schools to restaurants. The coalition is also in the process of forming a social marketing committee that will focus on neighborhood-based recruitment strategies exclusively.

The CPI in Bedford Stuyvesant has also sponsored community events in which CPI leaders present their work to the audience. ACS leaders and local legislators were also invited to speak. Having public officials participate in coalition meetings has been a strategy used in several sites. By doing so, partners believe they are bringing a sense of legitimacy to the coalition while also developing resources that may be useful to the sustainability of the coalition in the future.

Residents as leaders

The engagement of residents is an essential component of facilitating the community role in support of local families. Without the participation of residents, CPI coalitions can be thought of as just another service organization, not a community partnership.

The Bedford Stuyvesant and Highbridge CPI coalitions have residents involved at various levels of implementation and leadership. This is due in part to previous investments in community engagement. Due to the presence of the CRADLE project in Bedford Stuyvesant and the Bridge Builders Project in Highbridge, the communities received funding to support parent-led organizations such as CWOP and the Bed Stuy Activists. In both sites, leaders have discussed ways to integrate residents into the governance structure to ensure equal power and representation.

²⁹ Some coalitions have already built ties to the Department of Education, such as in East New York and Staten Island.

The implementation of the CPI mandated goals has created multiple roles for community residents. As a result, there has been an effort to specify what it means to be a resident in the CPI and how terms such as “community partners” are defined. These kinds of questions will continue to be raised in all of the sites as they continue their work. In this way the sharing of experiences from Bedford Stuyvesant and Highbridge can be of great value to the newer sites that have few resident partners.

Conclusion

These broader goals of the CPI coalitions should be acknowledged. They are essential to the mission, capacity and sustainability of the coalitions. In some of the less mature sites, matters of building political capital and raising community awareness have not yet been discussed in depth. This is not surprising, given that the leadership and membership capacity does not yet exist to support such additional goals. It is expected that as the coalitions move forward they will look to address the broader implications of their work and deepen their ties to their communities.

Whether or not the coalitions can create and sustain the capacity to move in new directions is not yet apparent. In the Phase I sites, there has been some discussion of seeking additional funding sources in order to broaden the scope of services and mission of the CPI. Whether or not the coalitions will move further down this path remains to be seen.

VI. Sustainability

In this final section we turn to the matter of sustainability. We use the term sustainability to refer to the ability of the CPI coalitions to 1) develop the infrastructure needed to proceed as viable partnerships over the long term; 2) promote changes in child welfare work that are absorbed into day-to-day practice; and 3) create a durable presence in their respective communities. Regarding partnership sustainability, strong membership, leadership, governance, and accountability structures are needed to ensure that the partnership stays on task and can absorb shifts in resources. In the area of change in services, the coalition must be innovative, efficient and diligent enough to promote the adoption of its strategies over time. As for community presence, the partners must consistently work to engage community participation in the CPI and raise community awareness about the value of the coalition’s work.

The findings presented in this report point to movement in a positive direction. In the first year of implementation the progress demonstrated by the CPI coalitions suggests a strong start toward sustainability. A critical mass of players from a wide range of affiliations has joined together in

support of the community partnership vision. The Phase 1 and Phase II coalitions were able to work together to achieve an impressive number of goals in a short amount of time. This success is promising, as is the fact that the rate of progress tends to be linked to the age and maturity of the coalition. In this sense partnership building becomes easier and grows richer as relationships among partners have time to develop. As the partners work together more regularly, trust grows and collaboration becomes the natural way of doing business. In addition, we found that success in the CPI begets success. As the coalitions grow more confident and successful in their work, they are better able to draw more regular participation and attract new partners.

But progress in community building efforts is not necessarily constant. Just as it requires a great deal of effort to build partner commitment and obtain momentum, further efforts are needed to hone and maintain success. As we have argued throughout this report, the capacity and infrastructure to keep the challenging work of partnership development going is paramount to success. Partners need to work diligently to continue to recruit partners, strengthen partner commitments, employ public relations strategies, and assess their impact on families. Once the CPI goes to scale, it is possible that the market of resources available to community coalitions will be increasingly competitive. In addition, though the workgroup activities gave great focus and motivation to the coalitions in the first year, there is no guarantee that partners will remain interested, or that the leadership needed to keep the work growing will remain in the future. The work of engaging participation from the community requires a great deal of creativity and persistence to promote sustainability. Without the right ingredients, the coalition's sustainability becomes fragile.

The coalitions can achieve sustainability through the development of the membership, leadership, governance, and accountability structures that will endure over time. Partners' ongoing commitment to promote effective communication and governance systems will enable the coalitions to keep on track. A healthy partnership, once in place, is one that can absorb new ideas and goals without losing sight of its mission, and adapt to changes in capacity and resources without losing control over the work. In particular, strong leadership is essential to sustainability, and should be treated as a priority. Strong governance structures allow partners to progress forward quickly, promote role clarity and transparency and in turn give rise to higher levels of mutual trust and shared responsibility. Given that success in the CPI seems to draw new partners and deeper commitments from existing partners, coalitions should find ways to understand and highlight their successes in a timely manner.

Capacity will continue to be a concern as the coalitions push further on developing the infrastructure needed to establish viable systems of governance, leadership, membership and accountability. We expect that as the coalitions move forward they will begin to think more extensively about the creation of additional funding and staffing streams, either by drawing on their partner agencies or boosting their fundraising capacity. The fiscal question will be crucial to the functioning of the coalitions, especially if they are to grow in programmatic scope.

VII. Conclusion

In this report we set out to describe the first year of the Community Partnership Initiative, which will be going to scale by the middle of 2009, and thereby impacting all neighborhoods in New York City. The ideas behind the CPI model have been embraced widely. Individuals believe strongly in the importance of community playing a role in child welfare work. A wide range of partners are working together, as united communities, to create innovative and highly valuable services, partner with ACS, talk about community concerns, and wrap supports around families. We have described how the rates of development are tied to community context in various ways that speak to the unique attributes of individual neighborhoods and coalitions.

Strengths aside, there is more work to be done in order for the coalitions to develop into full partnerships that can be sustained over the long term. The future success of the CPI will continue to rest on the hard work of community partners. So far, the partners have come to the table because they see the potential of the CPI to bring about positive change in the quality of services, the strength of communities, and outcomes for children and families.