GUIDES TO COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

Building Villages To Raise Our Children:

Evaluation

THE HARVARD FAMILY RESEARCH PROJECT, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

Building Villages To Raise Our Children: Evaluation

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"It takes a village to raise a child" is a fundamental theme in family support and education efforts. This African proverb is so powerful because it conveys what children and families need: personalized, accessible, and interconnected support. The village is an inclusive concept built on the idea of mutual responsibility. It captures the fact that the whole community and all its members, not just a particular program or agency, are responsible for what happens to children and families. The village theme explores anew a vision of family support services: No longer is it sufficient for a community to increase self-contained programs; instead, a community needs to develop a system of interrelated services. Such a system encourages agency collaboration and public-private partnerships, while nurturing the capacity of individuals to help themselves and each other.

The *Building Villages* series includes an overview volume and guides on five topics: collaboration, funding and resources, evaluation, community outreach, and staffing. The goal of the series is to provide information that will help you create a caring community for children and families, a village of services that will give children a healthy start and the family a supportive and comprehensive network of services.

Each guide provides a framework for thinking about its topic and information to apply to your own program planning effort. The guides contain practical suggestions based on the experiences of many programs. The guides also describe typical problems and the ways practitioners have chosen to resolve them. The information is relevant for programs in the process of being designed, as well as those already established.

A core group of family support principles lays the foundation for each guide. The series provides a set of building blocks for a community approach to supporting families.

EVALUATION — examining the who, what, where, when, and why of your program — is integral to its success. All programs can and should initiate some sort of evaluation, and there are many ways to perform one. In this guide we discuss how evaluation can be useful and provide a framework in which to assess your evaluation options. Evaluation can make a program better, suggest new directions, and empower those who come into contact with it. In many ways evaluation is a "reality check." Now, when so many people can benefit from community-based family support and education services, evaluation can contribute to the development and growth of effective initiatives.

Acknowledgments

Building Villages to Raise Our Children grows out of a decade of research about programs and policies to strengthen and support families with young children and the communities in which they live. The Harvard Family Research Project sought to capture the voices of those who work intimately with families across a broad range of settings — schools, social service agencies, youth-serving organizations, daycare centers, and various types of nonprofit entities. Because so much of what is contained in this series is practitioner based, we acknowledge the cooperation of directors and staff of the family support programs we were privileged to know. We thank our informants for the time they spent answering the many, many questions we posed in telephone and on-site interviews. We appreciate their allowing us to conduct field visits and the opportunity to observe first-hand the different facets of their work. Their reflections on their experiences are invaluable in helping us understand what good programs are all about as well as in framing the future directions of family support and education.

The *Building Villages* series evolved as a team effort within the Harvard Family Research Project. We met bimonthly with Heather B. Weiss, the project director, to define the issues, elaborate the themes of the series, and learn to write with a single voice. We involved other project research staff who shared information with us and commented on the manuscripts as they went through several revisions. Their challenges as well as support contributed to a much better synthesis of emerging issues in child and family services. Marji Erickson Warfield, Julia Lieblich, and Ann Rittenburg gave their critical analyses of our manuscripts. Vicki Magee formed part of this group and in addition inspired the opening vignette of this guide. Our series coordinators and editors, Anne Pender, Elena Lopez, and Katherine Wrean, did a fine job of nurturing the writing process and keeping us to our timelines. Our research assistants went about their work with persistence and careful attention to detail. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the help of Kathleen Sweeney and Teri Elniski.

Further support was provided by our technical and administrative staff. Angela Shartrand was our troubleshooter for computer problems and patiently undertook the task of copyediting. Ellen Mayer hired only the best research assistants to work with us; Kate Ouderkirk and Laura Stephens-Swannie taped and transcribed our bimonthly meetings and never failed to supply our sessions with bagels.

Our research was made possible through the generous support of foundations, though the contents of this publication are solely the responsibility of the Harvard Family Research Project. Our thanks go to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Noyce Foundation. The Harvard Graduate

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Finally, we say thanks to the children who illustrated this series. The drawings of Emily Baskin, Heather Bowden, Sarah Cohen, Sarah Haber, Katrina King, Alex Lukas, Jenny Pittman, and Amity Weiss are a reminder that children need a village in which to grow, develop, and spend the magical years of childhood.

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Introduction

In a team meeting to discuss the dimensions of evaluating its program for teen mothers, a group began to brainstorm about the best way to proceed. A typically jargon-filled academic discussion ensued: they wondered what the exact goal of the program was and how they could "operationalize" that goal in order to look at outcomes for the girls involved. After much back and forth debate about "reducing the incidence of this factor" and "increasing the number of times the mothers did this" one exasperated staffer declared, "Look, what are we really doing with these moms? What's our *mission*? Forget about the details of our intervention for a moment."

The group bantered back and forth again, saying that they were trying to improve children's lives and make it easier for their mothers. One person added, "Well, really, don't we hope to kind of nudge the next generation out of poverty?"

After a few minutes of silence, another group member caught the team's attention by saying, "What we're really trying to measure here is the instillation of hope in people's lives, aren't we?" The discussion continued:

"Oh great, how do we measure that?"

"Well, let's just say our program gives people a chance to improve their lives."

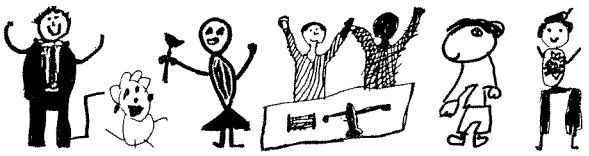
"Yes, but we just agreed that that's not something we can really *measure*. It's too abstract."

"Okay. But just because something's very abstract doesn't mean you can't measure it. In fact, we all agree that what we're doing is creating conditions under which our girls are given hope that they haven't ever had before. It's hope for their future and their children's futures, too."

"I still don't see how that hope is something we can evaluate."

"Well we can. We could go to each mom and ask them how the program has helped. We can talk to them — they're smart enough to say this is what it was for me before and this is what it is for me now."

The group soon agreed that it wanted to measure the hope of program participants as part of its research. Then a lone dissenter remarked, "We have an obligation to our funders to assess results, remember? I'm not sure if what we're devising is really an evaluation."



Have you taken part in a meeting like this before? It is difficult to agree upon how to go about an evaluation; it is a process requiring much thought and planning. Measuring whether a program actually changes the lives of its participants sounds like a formidable task, but as you shall see even feelings such as hope can be measured. A program that plans an evaluation scheme from its inception will have an advantage. A practical and visionary evaluation plan meets the needs of participants of family support and education programs and the community in which those programs reside by providing useful and insightful information to the programs themselves and their funders.

The team working with teen mothers is on the right track. It realizes that an evaluation is a negotiated activity. Ideally, team members will confer with people in the program and outside the program to determine the appropriate evaluation strategy.

WHY EVALUATE?

Experience has taught us that some form of evaluation is essential for all early childhood and family support programs. A well planned and well executed evaluation allows you to assess effectiveness and thereby explore the potential for beneficial program change. Moreover, if you invite the active participation of your families, staff, and community throughout the evaluation process, you empower them. When we say empower, we mean to instill a sense of self-worth and importance to program operations.

By empowering the players in your program, you create a stronger, more viable program. By continuously assessing both service delivery and family progress, you generate valuable, ongoing feedback that you use to develop a better program. You can design an evaluation solely to explore the effectiveness of your program, but we want to encourage you to examine all aspects of your program operation as well.

In the planning phase of a program it is crucial that you are clear about what the program is trying to achieve and think carefully about what will be needed to measure and describe those achievements. The point of evaluation is to gather information to use in strengthening your program. You'll want to:

- collect data to document program activities and validate the program to funders and the community

Good programs, by definition, have good systems of data collection and analysis. Be flexible and creative when thinking about the goals and design of your evaluation.

- institute an ongoing process of analysis and reflection about how a program can be improved
- advance the field of family support and education by sharing learning experiences and understanding program successes and shortcomings

Evaluation is a mutually beneficial experience for those involved. The process enables the program to be more responsive to the needs of the community and its participants. By involving people outside the program, the community support network expands and gains community backing. Evaluation measures the degree of program success; its purpose is progress.

The Resource Guide at the end of this volume lists sources of more information on program evaluation techniques and methods. Here we discuss both the strategic and practical issues related to evaluation:

- why all family support and education programs should consider some form of ongoing evaluation
- the role evaluation has in advancing the field of child and family support and education
- how to involve key community members, service providers, staff, and families in the evaluation process
- what additional resources and information are available

An evaluation is not successful unless the information discovered is *useful*. Whether you document who your clientele is, assess the impact of your program, provide feedback for program refinement, or monitor progress in meeting goals, the information should aid in decision making or suggest improvements. Many tasks not traditionally thought of as evaluative are a routine part of program operation. For instance, entrance and eligibility forms and contact or attendance reports are sources of program data. Most likely, you are already collecting part of the information you will need for your evaluation.

There is not a definitive answer to the question of how to evaluate a given program. The information we present, however, is based on knowledge gained from years of experience in the field. As you read this guide, there are several themes you will recognize:

All programs can do at least some sort of evaluation. Using both quantitative and qualitative data increases your evaluation options greatly. More importantly, combining both types of data gives you the ability to describe your program more fully. Facts, figures, and feelings make for a rich description of your program's families and services; do not emphasize one at the expense of another.

How established your services are is important: program "age and stage" determine how you select an evaluation plan. Your evaluation approach is dependent on the level of service development your program has achieved. Young programs are focused more on start-up concerns, such as recruitment, implementation, and staff training. Older and more stable programs can begin assessing the effects of their services. Tailor your evaluation to "who" you are.

An evaluation that takes program evolution into account plans ahead for future needs. In thinking about evaluation, we view program development as a continuum of four stages:

STAGE 1:
This is the stage of the single organization, which may be a multicomponent program with multiple sites. At this stage of development, the evaluation might be an intra-agency assessment and include descriptive information about your program. You will also monitor your service delivery and assess client satisfaction. For newer programs, the focus is on implementation of program components, while more established programs can examine whether services reach those intended to receive them and the effects of these services.

STAGE 2:
Stage 2 includes programs with formalized interagency linkages and at least some common planning procedures. Now your evaluation plans will also include assessing coordinated activities. Here you might track participants across agencies, explore how the referral system is working, and assess the level of integration of coordinated services.

STAGE 3:
Programs in this stage share funds and comprehensive service networks, and collaborate on staffing. In addition to the evaluation tasks carried on from the first two stages, programs in the third stage plan for measuring their network of coordinated services and assessing the implementation of their shared information system.

STAGE 4:
This is the phase of true collaboration and occurs at the systems level; here community-level issues are examined. Programs are one component of a community effort to change the way services are delivered to children and families. At this point you examine the benefits of genuine systems change by assessing the linkage between agencies, determine any changes measured at the community level, and describe governance structures.

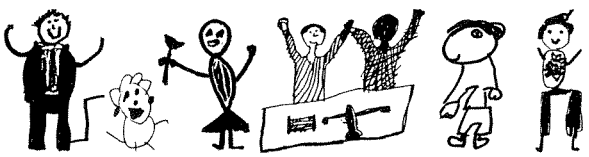
No matter which stage your program starts from, evaluation helps build the "village" that is home to your program. "Village building" is an approach to program design and implementation that encompasses the broader vision of the program's later developmental stages from the beginning. Just as evaluation enables you to improve your program, your program enriches the community and the village the program serves.

As you plan your evaluation, solicit the input of village members. Your community, staff, and families are involved in the evaluation from the outset, so it is best to plan for their inclusion. Recognizing their importance to the process right away increases their willingness to participate and helps you avoid resentment and address concerns as they arise.

An evaluation can be an empowering process for the community, staff, and program participants. When we say evaluation leads to a feeling of empowerment, we mean it makes people feel a part of the project — that what they do or say matters. This creates a sense of accomplishment and self-worth.

Evaluation is integral to program design and instrumental to program success. Discovering your program's strengths leads to greater enthusiasm from those both directly and indirectly involved. Learning about your program facilitates astute action.

This guide tells about the role evaluations have played in the evolution of family support and education services. We introduce the key aspects of an evaluation and important considerations, then discuss choosing an evaluation starting point. We present options, not a formulaic, predetermined approach.



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Role of Evaluation in the Evolution of Family Support and Education Services

We review the history of the theories of child and family development — and the subsequent shift in evaluation methods — to show you how the results of evaluation shape program design.

CHANGING TIMES [1]

Although we used to think that children's capabilities were largely predetermined, we now see youngsters as far more malleable, the product of both "nature and nurture." We view them within the context of family, community, culture, and society, yet this perspective has not always been true. To serve children and their families, interventions have necessarily adapted to this increasingly complex model of human interaction, and this has influenced how and in what way development is measured.

Earlier efforts to understand and enhance children's development concentrated on improving cognitive competency and the intervention focus was primarily on the child alone. It appeared that cognitive gains were easy to assess and the corresponding evaluation of change in children would be simple and direct. Programs from this period often provided preschool services to alleviate the deficits of the home environment and jump-start the child for school. Some parent involvement might supplement the basic educational program and reinforce the school-based intervention. The focus, however, remained on cognitive enrichment of the child, and parent development was not considered in any way.

The preschool years were seen as the best time to intervene in order to ameliorate cognitive deficits. Early education evaluation consisted of looking at intelligence test scores before and after program completion.

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[1] The Resource Guide lists sources used to compile this history.

Evaluation data on the earlier programs began to point toward new directions for early intervention and evidence accumulated that by assessing both child *and* parent indicators, new factors of success were uncovered.

By the 1960s, large studies were undertaken to begin separating out for study the effects of the pioneering early intervention projects, such as Head Start. By the early 1970s, there was a great deal of evidence which both supported and refuted the value of early intervention programs where the primary focus was on children alone. This brought about the development and assessment of new programs. The focus shifted away from simple cognitive intervention, and early intervention programs now offered a wide range of services which were individualized to meet unique family needs. This tailoring of program elements to each family challenged evaluators to assess the effects of their unique sets of program services.

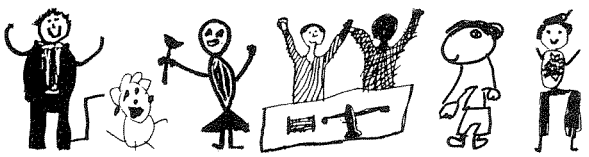
The next phase in the effort to understand and enhance child development centered on the interactions between mother and child, now seen as essential for development. Interventions concentrated on teaching mothers to teach their children, and the home environment was seen as the locus for improvement. Exemplary programs from this period relied on well planned and well executed home visiting components. At this point, evaluations were still quantitative, but they explored changes in both child *and* family. Thus, measures were devised to assess both the home environment and the style of the mother-child interaction. Planning for descriptive data collection began to be incorporated into evaluation design.

The next wave of early childhood programs began to account for community-wide factors more directly, incorporating community elements in the intervention model. Understanding basic needs was seen as a key to supporting and enabling families to advance their growth and development. The norm became to systematically observe intergenerational effects, as opposed to focusing solely on children and their innate capacities. The child was seen to contribute his or her own strengths and weaknesses to his or her path of development.

We now realize there are many levels on which to assess a child's progress: physiological, psychological, interfamilial, cross-cultural, societal, and historical. Programs can attend to families by evaluating their strengths as well as their needs and simultaneously examining parent-child interactions.

Interventions that follow from this ecological model aim to affect multiple aspects of a child's life, as well as a family's informal support networks. Evaluations of these programs must necessarily attempt to demonstrate a family's self-sufficiency and linkage to the community.

Programs soon began to explore the developmental context for family and child, and to then alter functioning within that realm. This intervention focus could be on interpersonal, familial, social, and economic spheres, thus acknowledging environmental influences on the family. Connecting a family with community



Effective intervention in the lives of children can only be accomplished through involving parents and the community in the intervention effort.

resources so that survival needs were addressed became as important as home visiting and an essential part of helping families cope. Evaluation then had to capture the complex interplay of these factors.

For family support and education programs, the concept of who is being served has gradually expanded to include the family, and often, the community as well. The concept of how to best serve a community has shifted: deferring to the professional as expert has been recast as a more empowering process. Staff members and families work together from the outset, so that contact with a program is viewed as an alliance or partnership where goals are jointly established and progress measured by agreed-upon markers.

In this newer intervention approach, the needs of the child and family support village are explored and collaboration among agencies is encouraged. Programs operating in isolation can of course be effective, but as noted throughout this series, coordination engenders more comprehensive and continuous services for families.

Today an array of services are available to address various needs of families in the context of their communities. The service network has been expanded and enriched to include not just parents and children, but their formal and informal support systems as well.

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

> Evaluation research is more than an application of methods. It is also a political and managerial activity, an input into the complex mosaic from which emerge policy decisions and allocations for the planning, design, implementation, and continuance of programs to better the human condition.[1]

The reliance in the past on quantitative assessment techniques implied there was only one "right way" to develop an evaluation. Now, however, qualitative methods are recognized as equally informative. And combined quantitative and qualitative research data describe a program most fully and accurately.

There is a greater understanding today that it is people who carry out evaluations — and people carry their own subjective baggage with them. The hope is that as long as we know this, we will not impose our views too strongly. Complete objectivity, however, is viewed increasingly as an invalid and unrealistic expectation. Individual belief systems do affect the process! They influence "the questions we ask (and those we don't), the methods we deploy (and those we reject),

An evaluation team member for New Beginnings, a school-based comprehensive service program located in San Diego, California says,"[an evaluator] can't be someone from outside [who] gathers the data and goes home [to] write the evaluation. It really is a process of being very involved."

the interpretations we advance (and those we never imagine) and the writings we produce (and those we bury in our desk drawers)."[2] Beliefs and personal biases must be acknowledged, as well as the fact that they can have a legitimate place in evaluation.

The result is that both hard science and human values have a role to play in the evaluation process. An array of research methods now available enables programs to assess a range of factors, from hope for the future to how many people live in poverty. Evaluation measures intangible feelings and numerical facts.

The use and purpose of these subjective and objective evaluation findings are also being reconsidered. There is growing emphasis on the validity and importance of using evaluation information to guide policy decisions. And, instead of examining idealized versions of a program, evaluators try to see a program as it really is. Similarly, just as they know that programs change, so must an evaluation evolve. Neither programs nor evaluations are static — in fact, they should be dynamic.

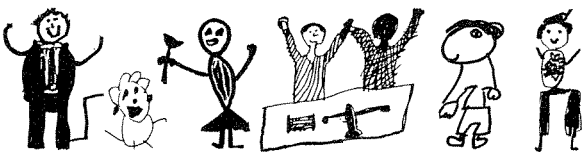
Presently, the evaluation component is expected in almost all family support and education programs. Evidence clearly verifies the valuable and long-term effects of early intervention strategies. Documenting the means to positive outcomes helps assure the continued efforts to support families. The present scarcity of resources, and the assumption that resources will be allocated prudently for some time, makes understanding how to do successful evaluations imperative.

EVALUATION MODELS

We include two sample evaluation models. The first describes a multidimensional evaluation form to be used during the course of the year. The second outlines an evaluation plan for a collaborative multiservice intervention.

Model 1: The Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) Program[3]

In Minnesota the ECFE staff designed an evaluation instrument highlighting indicators of program quality. The "Quality Indicators for Early Childhood Family Education Programs" is designed to assist local ECFE program staff in program planning, goal setting, and self-evaluation for the purpose of program improvement, as well as to allow staff members to be more objective about the development of their program, and to provide a common protocol for use by the Department of Education when doing site visits. The quality indicators cover four broad program areas and are designed to reflect observable characteristics of successful programs.



Each program area or "quality category" on the form is followed by a series of goals or "quality indicators." For example, there are 27 of these indicators for the outreach category, and 31 for parent education. The evaluation looks at how close sites have come to each goal by checking the current level of implementation (needs to be done, planning stage, partially implemented, or fully). This assessment recognizes that each ECFE program will be at different places in relation to the quality indicators depending on factors such as: age of the program, local community characteristics, and the needs and interests of the eligible population. Here is a sample of program components evaluated:

Community Assessment, Outreach, and Input Goals:

- Outreach - staff members design programming to meet the specific characteristics and needs of eligible families
- Parent and Community Input - advisory council parents represent the eligible population
- Linkages - the program integrates itself into the school district and community

Parent Education Goals:

- Environment - the room set-up facilitates interaction
- Curriculum Resources - resources used are consistent with philosophy, mission, and goals
- Educator Role - parent educators set goals and plan strategies for each session

Early Childhood Education and Parent-Child Interaction Goals:

- Environment - the environment meets the minimal state requirements for children's health and safety
- Curriculum Resources - encourages child- and parent-initiated learning
- Educator Role - the staff presents activities in multisensory ways

Program Operation Goals:

- Philosophy - the program has clearly defined goals and objectives
- Staff - wages are consistent with professional status
- Monitoring and Evaluation - the staff develops a plan for monitoring and assessing the program
- Fees, if charged, are reasonably waived for families unable to pay
- The program budget accounts for all ECFE aid, levy, and other funds and is on file with both the program coordinator and the district administrator
- The program maintains clear and complete records to document participant characteristics, program participation, and service delivery data for local program use and state record keeping

- The program gathers and uses participant satisfaction data for program development and improvement
- The program participates in studies of program outcomes
- The program conducts periodic self-assessment of program components by using this document

The quality indicators form is a useful model. It highlights the importance of stating program goals and assessing their achievement. Once these are clear, you can decide upon the method for meeting both sets of goals.

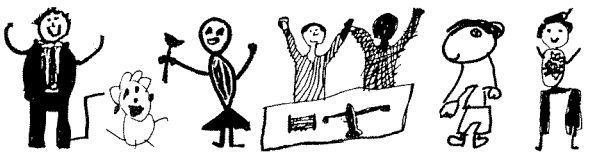
Newer family support and education ventures attempt to change both the way services are delivered and the systems that coordinate these services. An evaluation capturing these elements will include both descriptions of the implementation process and service delivery, as well as the effects of participating in either a single-service, multiservice, coordinated, or collaborative program. Multisite interdisciplinary programs often share tracking and monitoring data, especially when computerized systems are available.

Model 2: Collaborative Programs

Combining comprehensive services with community involvement can produce more promising results than solitary programs. There are several projects now underway examining this hypothesis, including New Beginnings in San Diego, Caring Communities in Missouri, and New Futures in four states. As with earlier initiatives, evaluation strategies to assess these collaborative efforts must keep pace with the ongoing innovations these programs produce.

The New Beginnings program in San Diego, California is a cross-agency school-based initiative sponsored by the city of San Diego, San Diego City Schools, the county of San Diego and the San Diego Community College District. Set up as a comprehensive collaboration, the need for a flexible evaluation strategy was clear from the beginning. Connie Busse, director of the New Beginnings center, explained that frequently the initial "vision" of a program differs from the ultimate "reality" of its implementation, and that an evaluation should consider the latter.

One of the most innovative efforts of this evaluation is to explore the issue of systems change and the effect of the collaborative effort upon the delivery of integrated services to families and children. In order to assess this element of the initiative, the degree to which modifying the system actually affects the delivery of services will also be measured. Even though New Beginnings' long-term



evaluation plan was designed to be flexible as the program evolved, it was conceptualized from the outset as a stage four collaboration.

Evaluating collaborations such as New Beginnings involves many challenges. The following example outlines the features to consider when evaluating comprehensive programs.

Challenge #1: to assess the services already available in the community and determine additional services needed.

Questions:

- *How many families receive services from county, city, or community agencies?*
- *What services do they receive?*
- *Are they eligible for services they are not currently receiving?*
- *Is there a relationship between a family's use of social and health services and the academic and social success of their children?*
- *What barriers are encountered when trying to get help from the present system?*
- *What do agency staff members see as barriers to service?*

Methods include interviewing families, students, and frontline service providers, studying site family migration patterns, doing case-management study, determining how multiple agencies serve the same families, and setting up agency liaisons.

Challenge #2: to devise an evaluation plan, assess intermediate outcomes, and describe the day-to-day provision of services to determine levels of service required to meet unique family needs.

Questions:

- *Are agencies increasing their information sharing?*
- *Is there evidence of greater worker satisfaction?*
- *Does the staff have better knowledge of the services available?*
- *Have steps been taken to resolve service gaps?*
- *Has parent involvement in the school increased?*
- *Is the local community aware of collaborative programs?*
- *Is there an improvement in school attendance rates?*
- *Have suspension rates declined?*
- *Are more children participating in preschool programs?*

Methods include interviews, database review and analysis, and forms and document review.

Challenge #3: to determine whether the program is cost effective and what actually works; to assess ultimate outcomes (such as positive child development, improved parenting skills and development, and increased community support for families); to explore the evaluation of collaborative efforts and continue monitoring service delivery.

Questions:

- *Has parent employment increased?*
- *Have parents reduced their reliance on public assistance?*
- *Have adult and juvenile arrest rates declined?*
- *Have school promotion rates improved?*
- *Has the percentage of low birthweight babies declined?*
- *Are more children entering school willing and able to learn?*

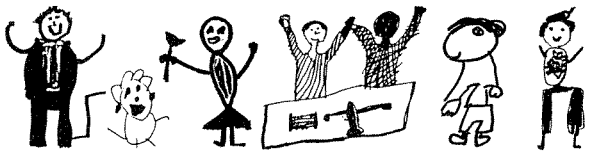
Methods include document review, database review and analysis, interviews, surveys, and comparison group studies.

Challenge #4: to explore and verify systems change within the schools and program center, look at the degree of service delivery integration, and check the efficiency of governance structures.

Questions:

- *Do advocacy activities influence the system of service delivery?*
- *Has the school governance system changed in any discernable way?*
- *Have barriers and gaps in services been identified and addressed?*

Methods include surveys, interviews, document review, and focus groups.



In California, one purpose of the evaluation for the Ventura County Mental Health Department was to obtain "very pragmatic, simple, straightforward kinds of answers," according to the evaluation chief, Dr. Daniel Jordan. He found that "by having the evaluation, you can kind of get your head up a little bit and look around and discover trends and patterns that you did not know were there."

2

Key Aspects of an Evaluation

There is a wide range of evaluation methods available for you to choose from. One of the challenges you will face in planning for evaluation is tailoring an "evaluation package" to your program's unique needs and circumstances.

EVALUATION CAN HELP YOUR PROGRAM

Evaluation is an ongoing process that can adapt to your evolving program needs. You determine the approach that best fits your needs now, and then alter your approach as necessary. It is a way of "taking the pulse" of the program and exploring its impact on your community.

Evaluation can provide immediate feedback, which is used to create solutions and innovations, ask more questions, prompt more evaluation, receive feedback, etc. It's a forward-moving process parallelling program development.

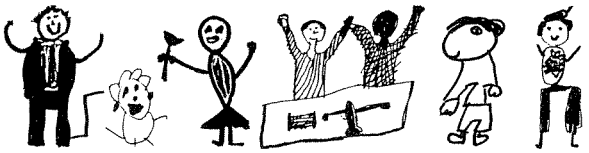
Your evaluation package should encompass the following goals:

Understand both the resources in your community and the need for additional services. Current evaluation approaches seek to capture a community's uniqueness.

Understand the services you provide and who you provide them to. You want to know if your program is operating the way you hoped it would and if you are reaching those you wanted to serve.

Improve upon what you are doing. An evaluation assists ongoing program management by keeping your participants actively involved and providing relevant feedback in a timely fashion. This in turn can build both morale and motivation. Keep thinking in terms of bettering the program.

Describe and measure the impact of your services. We are no longer limited by simple statistics on participation or services. Your evaluation efforts can let you both describe a process as well as validate your effectiveness.



Almost 80 percent of a sample of 400 family support and education programs who conducted some form of evaluation had no money specifically earmarked for this activity. They elected to go ahead anyway, recognizing the value in the process.

Involve participants. Evaluation efforts can engage as well as enlighten the families in your program, thereby sustaining their interest and action. Together, you learn about the strengths of the program, as well as the areas needing improvement. Any evaluation is an ongoing, interactive process.

Involve the community. By this we mean funders, supporters, board members, legislators, and those directly involved in working with families (staff members and volunteers). Asking the community to take part in the evaluation process indicates respect for its members.

Plan. You want to assess where you are now in order to think about where you are heading. One of your strategic planning goals is to use evaluation findings in your efforts to secure future funding so that your program can expand. In a time of scarce resources, assessment activities allow you to verify your successes. Often you need evidence showing that your program works in order to protect it as more and more programs vie for less and less funding. You will want to show your community that your program is worth the effort!

In Appalachia, Vanderbilt University program developer Barbara Clinton was able to complete a study that focused on listening to both participants and staff members of their home visitor program. She notes, "if you're interested in improving the program or strengthening the program through evaluation, [listening] provides a more direct route, because it not only derives information from participants and staff, but it encourages them to think about it in a way that they might not have thought about it before." Evaluators let the interviewees know they cared about what they said. Clinton said at first her staff hated the idea of evaluation. But by the time they were done, and saw that the program was having some impact, they felt much more positive about it because they could use the results right away.

GETTING STARTED

There is no one recipe for evaluation. It is up to you to decide the best approach, one suited to your program's level of development, the needs of your participants and community, and your sponsors' expectations. No matter how simple or complex your evaluation scheme, you will need to follow these steps:

- formulate a set of questions for the evaluation to answer
- decide the most useful way to collect the information you need
- analyze data, then summarize results
- incorporate new knowledge into the program and document what you have discovered

Here we present a series of questions to help a team to plan program evaluation. Although these are laid out in a linear fashion, we recognize the questions and their associated tasks are interrelated and are often dealt with simultaneously.

WHAT IS YOUR PHASE OF PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT?

In order for programs to endure and attend to families and the community effectively, your evaluation design should take the stage of your program into account. How you choose to evaluate and the aspects you focus on will be a function of whether you are a single-service, multiservice, coordinated-service, or collaborative program. You have many options, but remember, a relatively new program is not in a position to assess outcomes, regardless of its level of service coordination. Here we simply offer examples of choices that can be made at different stages. Keep in mind that how long your program has been established also factors into your plan.

For instance, a single-service stage one program with the goals of improving prenatal care and infant health, increasing knowledge of child development, and improving opportunities for infant stimulation might carry out an intraagency assessment. If the program operates by sending paraprofessionals to visit rural expectant mothers monthly during pregnancy and the infant's first year and then six times during the child's second year, evaluators can:

- collect extensive demographic data on program participants
- assess information on pregnancy outcome and prenatal care
- examine the home environment
- closely document the program's development and client and worker impressions

A stage two program with formalized interagency linkages and some common planning procedures will evaluate its multiple services. If a program's goal is to provide a community-based system for encouraging the development of teen mothers and their children, the evaluation could:

- track demographic data and monitor program services
- compare program teens with national data on pregnancy, school enrollment, and employment
- interview program participants, examining school, employment, contraceptive use, and parenting issues
- describe the use of coordinated services and outcome effects

A stage three school-based comprehensive program developed under public and private auspices would evaluate its coordinated services. If its goal is to restructure the way services are provided and to involve the community in a culturally sensitive, inclusive process focusing on the family, an evaluation might:

- assess community needs and identify family risk factors
- describe the implementation of the program and the obstacles faced in developing a collaborative model
- study data from school records on academic outcomes
- track referral and case-management services as well as information on individual families
- collect home placement and juvenile justice data from the appropriate governmental agencies and use this data to gauge program success

A stage four program that truly collaborates at the systems level can evaluate systems change in addition to program effects. A multisite, school-based program offering comprehensive services through linkages to local- and state-sponsored agencies can:

- document program services and describe their operation
- examine the evidence of genuine systems change and the effects of these changes, particularly at the community level
- measure the degree and success of interagency coordination
- assess parent, family, and child outcomes, including employability and school readiness
- look at advocacy activities

WHAT IS YOUR PROGRAM TRYING TO DO?

Defining Your Goals

One of the initial steps in any evaluation is to define your program goals and how your services aim to meet them. (This information should also be in your mission statement or statement of purpose.) Clarifying goals together helps the staff specify program content and intentions.

In California, the Ventura County collaborative effort had team members sit down and track the prototypical child as she made her way through this multi-faceted system. Dr. Daniel Jordan, the evaluation chief for the mental health department worked with team staff to create a flowchart illustrating the ways children travel through different parts of the system. One useful technique is using index cards to represent each point of decision or service, moving them around as needed. Dr. Jordan notes that this not only allows providers to "fill in the gaps," but the process itself is a real "eye-opener."

The Urban Families Program in Detroit aims to "strengthen the ability of young parents to guide their children's development by providing them with 'rules and tools' for their own behavior and with help in raising children in a difficult and challenging environment." Their mission is to develop new and effective approaches to meeting family needs and building family competence.

Goal setting is an important part of conceptualizing your program. This subject is treated in more detail in the overview to the *Building Villages* series.

Pre-Assessment

Pre-assessment determines whether program goals are well articulated, whether the program is sufficiently clear and uniformly delivered, and whether the requisite resources are available.

Some programs choose to complete a pre-assessment or "evaluability" assessment to determine the feasibility of an evaluation. The point is to see if the program is ready to start an evaluation. If you decide you are not ready, then you should find out what you need to do in order to be ready at a later date. If you decide the program is ready, the next step is to determine how to proceed with the actual evaluation.

Pre-assessment organizes the feedback you receive from program staff members and participants, your funders, and the community. Program goals and where the program stands in relation to them are made explicit. Recommendations are made about future evaluation actions.

Consider the following questions when completing a pre-assessment:

- *Are your program goals clear?*
- *Are your planned program activities logically related to the outcomes you strive for?*
- *Do you have the available resources to adequately implement your program as intended?*
- *Are you ready for a meaningful evaluation?*

WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO SERVE?

You may want to serve a specific population in your community, for example teen mothers, or you may address the needs of a broader population. You might focus only on the child, or you might want to examine how your program can provide services to the whole family. Even if you have decided that your program will serve everyone in the community, you still need to determine who actually uses the services provided.

Essentially you are asking, "What do we know about the people who use our program?":

- *Are some groups overrepresented?*
- *Are others underrepresented?*
- *Are you serving people you never expected your program to attract?*
- *How are your resources allocated among different participant segments?*

WHAT DO YOU ALREADY KNOW?

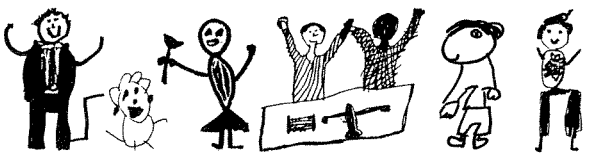
You start the evaluation process with more than you might think. You may already have acquired valuable feedback from a previous evaluation. Indeed, during an earlier effort, you may have acquired constructive criticism about the evaluation itself; use this information in planning how best to proceed with future evaluations. You might, in addition, now have detailed data about the needs of your community and the services currently being offered. Thus, your current evaluation will build on the knowledge you gained from the previous undertaking.

If you have a computer system, it probably contains a wealth of information. A thoughtfully designed management information system (MIS) can assist in program operation and assessment. An MIS consists of building a database that captures client and program information. It is a way to efficiently store and retrieve data in a computer. Use of a databases is especially important to collaborative efforts due to the volume and diversity of information collected. At New Beginnings, in San Diego, California, two consultants developed a system incorporating the evaluation team's needs and the needs of the frontline staff. Having both groups review the database format "reflected their reality... they were involved in designing the MIS so that it became easy for them to work with and collect the appropriate data." In California, the Ventura evaluation staff developed a local database to keep track of all the children in residential placements. This helped the clinical staff also determine where each child was on a day-to-day basis, and assisted managers in tracking trends over time.

At the Better Babies Project (BBP) in Washington, DC, which focuses on prenatal services, data from participants are entered into the computer and used for canvassing neighborhoods and for follow up. An initial form notes information on potential enrollees and includes basic demographic data as well as data about pregnancy and prenatal care. Reports can then be generated and are used by the staff to track whether or not eligible women actually enroll in the BBP. The tracking system is an aid in "assertive recruitment" and in sustaining appropriate subsequent contact.

In addition, the amount and type of participant contacts made by the staff are recorded and then analyzed monthly. Staff members and supervisors thus have a tool that assists their time management. Because this program involves much out-of-office contacts, the computerized system allows for "the difficult task of managing staff who must be fairly autonomous...and keeps track of an effort which can easily become unnecessarily duplicative if not monitored properly."

Data generated from the MIS includes annual contacts and enrollments by month, pregnancy and prenatal care characteristics, and outreach effectiveness.[4]



"Be clear at the outset about what you want to do. Spend the time getting that in place *before* you get started, or you're going to end up with a real mess."

Mary Lassen, Executive Director
Committee for Boston Public Housing

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO KNOW?

Think about what you expect your evaluation to accomplish. Each program has unique resources and constraints, and therefore will develop a unique evaluation plan. Consider these points:

- *What is the impetus for the evaluation? Do you simply want basic facts about who you are serving? Or are you required to complete a more extensive evaluation for funders and the community?*
- *Are you required to follow a specific format?*
- *How much time do you have?*
- *How can you generate support for this evaluation from those involved in all levels of your program? How will you involve them, and who will be involved?*
- *How can you generate information that is useful to your program?*

Here are some areas to think about:

IN ORDER TO:	ASK:
• Respond to participant needs	• How can you better serve your families? • How do they view your program?
• Respond to your key players	• How do community members perceive your program? • Why did your public relations efforts work?
• Understand the resources in your community and the need for additional services	• Is your community satisfied with your efforts? • In what ways can your program affect your community?
• Understand the services you provide and who you provide them to	• Who are you serving and how often? • What is the most useful amount and type of service?
• Improve upon what you are doing	• In what ways is your program tailored to unique family circumstances? • Are families satisfied with the services you provide?
• Describe and measure the impact of your services	• Are there certain types and amounts of services that are more useful for your families and your community? • Are you providing services that will help sustain your program over time?
• Determine the costs of your program	• How much do your programs cost and are you providing services efficiently? • Is there a way to market your successful strategies to ensure future financial support?
• Plan for the future	• Which services can you add to better serve families? • How can you coordinate these efforts?

WHAT DO YOUR FUNDERS EXPECT?

You might already have certain requirements for an evaluation. It could be that as part of a grant you have been told to collect certain statistics about your clients and the services they receive. Perhaps you are under contract to have this information available within a set time frame, or to complete an outcome assessment by a specific date. You may also be expected to produce certain reports and disseminate the results through predetermined means. Consider the following strategies when negotiating with funders about the evaluation(s) you will give them:

- Work with your funders to clarify what information they expect and when they expect it. Keep up an ongoing dialogue about the kind of information they're interested in and find useful.
- Try to allow for start-up time, when needs assessment data and client characteristic data can be collected.
- Together, think creatively about effective strategies. Remind them that there are other ways to evaluate besides formal outcome assessment.
- Be explicit about reasonable time frames; for instance, you can't get information on long-term results after only one year of the program.

Finally, try to negotiate separate funds for your evaluation component. Be sure to note any additional staffing and resources needed for your evaluation. A rule of thumb is to expect one percent of a program's operating budget to be available for evaluation.[5]

HOW CAN YOU MAKE EVALUATION WORK FOR YOU?

Resources

There are no absolute right or wrong evaluation options. You make the choices. You will make trade-offs between the assessment you need and the resources available to you now. Resources are finances, and early on you need to determine precisely what funds are available. Resources are also time, training commitments, staff allocation, as well as technological aids such as personal computers.

In planning your evaluation, consider in advance these frequently voiced resource barriers:

- *Time — don't you already have enough to do?*
- *Money — you can't afford to hire anyone, you can't afford to pay your people more to complete additional tasks, and you can't afford a computer to analyze all this.*
- *Expertise — where do you begin and where do you go once you have your information? If you hire an outsider, will you lose control of your evaluation?*

- *Funders and community — how do you know what they need?*
- *Consequences — in what way are you going to intrude on your families and how will this affect them? Will your families tolerate these intrusions? Will the staff find these intrusions justified or acceptable?*
- *Validity — what constraints do your evaluation resources impose on the scale and type of evaluations that are possible?*

Fortunately, you can always start small and tailor your evaluation to the number of people you have to complete the evaluation activities, the funds available, and the all important time commitment. In fact, sometimes a small evaluation has the benefit of providing feedback quickly and thus allows you to make necessary changes in a timely fashion. As your program expands, you can then expand your assessment activities as people, training, and time allow.

Barbara Clinton of Vanderbilt University offers this example of how one local grass roots organization tackled issues of time, money, and staff simultaneously: the group, in working with perpetrators of domestic violence, wanted to know, "Who are these men?" They kept data on age, income, and employment. But staff members were so busy working with the men that they could not work on the data. As it turned out, the university has a program to "lend" students to community groups as research assistants. The domestic violence program requested that students analyze the data they had and put together a perpetrator profile. This information was then used by the program to analyze its individual treatment approaches.

Your Evaluators

Your evaluators, the people with the skill and experience needed to implement your evaluation, are a vital resource. When you start to look for them, however, you may be surprised at the extent of their availability. There may be skills and experience available right at your fingertips: staff members may have taken relevant courses or have related job experience. When enlisting employees, try to allow them to schedule in time for evaluation activities, preferably by decreasing other responsibilities. This signals the importance of their assistance in this activity and alleviates additional time burdens on the staff. You might also reach out to the community and recruit the skills of board members, spouses, and

friends as evaluators. Businesses are often eager to provide volunteers. Students at local colleges and universities are often anxious to gain valuable "on-the-job" training by assisting in an assessment. Keep in mind, however, that additional training and supervision needs of volunteers may make this option less appealing. Materials will also be available locally from your state board of education, public libraries and college campuses, and public service organizations.

There are times, however, when you will need the design and analysis expertise of a "hired hand" if staff members do not have the requisite time or skills to function as the evaluation team. Some funders subtly suggest all facets of the evaluation be completed by an "objective" outsider, while other funders explicitly demand this. There are advantages and disadvantages to consider should you hire an evaluator not affiliated with your program:

ADVANTAGES

- Can actually be cost effective if an in-house evaluator would extend the process because of inefficiency or inadequate time and expertise
- A new person can provide a fresh perspective, with new ideas
- They can focus sole attention on the evaluation
- Their loyalty lies with the process, not particular people in the organization
- Potentially better at conflict resolution, due to outsider perspective

DISADVANTAGES

- Can be costly, especially if terms of the initial arrangement are renegotiated
- You might need to bring in someone from an entirely different locale who lacks familiarity with the families served and/or the community
- May take a long time for the person to get to know the program and its people
- May inadvertently focus on issues that aren't essential to the evaluation
- May lack necessary trust to keep lines of communication open and effective
- Absence of loyalty to the program can create conflict

Of course, you always have an in-house team or subcommittee to articulate your evaluation issues. You can then develop a comprehensive list of your expectations and needs, regardless of who actually acts on them. Remember, be explicit about what you need.

First consider your options in terms of available resources:

- *Does your community have access to knowledgeable evaluators?*
- *How much time can your staff allocate to additional evaluation responsibilities? Be realistic!*
- *Does your program have the staff resources with which to develop its own forms for evaluation purposes?*
- *What type of expertise do you really need? Can you document client contact yourselves? Can you conduct your own interviews?*

Then think about finding an evaluator who can:

- observe the normal day-to-day activities of your program at length
- be sensitive to the needs of participants, both families and staff members
- be willing to communicate, and do so in a way that is easily understandable
- inspire change and assist in assessing processes to implement change
- be able to help you determine what it is you need to know, rather than dictate your needs
- promote site ownership of the evaluation

A public housing program was looking for an evaluator who would promote their concept of community empowerment. Although their funder did not demand they hire an outsider, there was a strong hint that they do so, especially since they were located in a city where such expertise was abundant.

The program assembled a committee to write the request for an evaluation proposal. This same group worked with the selected evaluation team from start to finish. Although this was a major time commitment for these committee members, the committee wanted to ensure a commitment to their tenants. And because it wanted its "consumers" involved in the evaluation, tenants were included on the committee.

The committee observed how evaluation team members related to each other during their first meetings to see how a team interacted. They also noted team composition: did a team represent the diversity of the population being studied? Did team members seem to be equally involved? The committee chose the evaluation team with an eye for how well people reflected back on what the program's goals were, and whether or not they could grasp what the public housing community was all about. They also wanted an evaluation team that could "engage in an interactive process with [them]."

Effective communication is integral to a successful evaluation. Whether it is carried out using in-house staff or outside assistance, there needs to be someone in the program acting as the link between the evaluation team and those who request the evaluation.

EVALUATION AND EMPOWERMENT

Tell me and I'll forget;
Show me and I may remember;
Involve me and I'll understand.

Gwen Koehler and Sheri Langendorf of Project Read developed an evaluation instrument for CHOICES, a family literacy project located at a domestic abuse shelter. This goal-setting tool encompasses both individual and family educational and survival skills. The form includes goals such as learning about your child's abilities, reading to your child, learning computers, and getting job training.

The instrument is used for individual goal setting and also to document program services and provide feedback in order to improve services. Because of the number of services available to program participants, the format and content of the form allow individuals to get a sense of the CHOICES program and their own unique situation. Staff members who review each woman's goal-setting tool also then get a picture of individual needs and aspirations.

This tool was intentionally developed as "an appealing, colorful brochure that the participant would keep." Completing the goal-setting task helps women focus on their future and the steps they can take to achieve each goal. A primary concern for the staff was to ensure that the participants could use the tool in building self-esteem; thus the form was also designed with the idea that completing this form is itself a positive step toward self-improvement.[6]

> An evaluation regarded as something done *by* others *for* others is done from a thoroughly disempowering perspective. If, on the other hand, the evaluation is at least partly conducted by the project itself, and also "owned" by it, then it can become part of the empowerment process.[7]

Remember to address community involvement early, whether soliciting help from business people, practitioners, or program participants. In order for your evaluation to succeed, those doing the actual research tasks must always respect the needs of practitioners, community members, and program participants. A practitioner listening to the voices of the community and families in a program that he or she is studying can feel empowered. Similarly, speaking and being heard is an empowering experience for those being interviewed. Sometimes, simply redefining an experience can be empowering; for instance, in an Illinois study, when program mothers were interviewed as part of the evaluation, the women were invited to participate in the data collection, paid a small sum for their time, and were called "program consultants."

The Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker (MIHOW) program operating in rural Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia actually designed an evaluation to directly measure the feeling of empowerment.[8] The questions they put together apply to many other programs as well. In terms of parent empowerment they asked:

- *Do the program activities enable participants to see themselves as having more power, ability, or confidence in parenting?*
- *Do parents identify themselves as the first teachers of their children?*
- *How does the self-esteem of the participant affect the program?*
- *How is it affected by the program?*
- *Are participants proud of their parenting?*
- *Do groups and home visits reduce isolation, improve self-esteem, and create openness to new ideas?*
- *How do program interactions compare to other key relationships in participants' lives?*
- *When does participants' dependency on home visitors affect their ability to help themselves?*

The MIHOW also weighed the empowerment level of the home visiting staff:

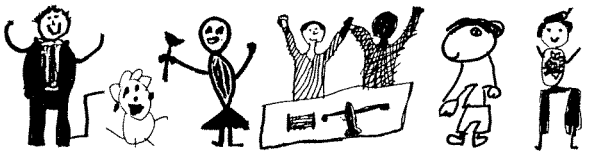
- *How do home visitors feel about the role they play in participants' lives?*
- *Are they proud of their work?*
- *How does this work compare to their other work and life experiences?*
- *What are the rules of the relationship between participant and home visitor? What is special or unique about it? Is it a burden for either party?*
- *How do home visitors use their relationship with participants strategically?*

A program experienced tremendous resistance to its evaluation plan since this effort required a huge amount of paperwork and record keeping for site staff, little of which contributed directly back to the quality of their work. Thus the program received very little feedback for the outcome study.

And so a second study was undertaken, primarily to evaluate the known strengths of participating families. It turned out that a good way to illustrate this was by letting people speak for themselves. Staff members and participants now were asked not to devise evaluation questions, but simply to tell the research team about their lives. It took a long time and much effort to listen to the participants in the study. Yet, over 18 months, it was done. An interesting discovery was made through this experience: because the workers and families were directly involved, they felt gratified. They also benefitted from and enjoyed the discussions. Staff members now took pride in the evaluation and were increasingly satisfied because now they had a forum to discuss issues very important to them. And when discussed as a group, employees listened to each other, and could see what was easy and what was hard, and which things families liked, and what wasn't working as well.

FOSTERING COMMUNITY COMMITMENT

Involving the community in the evaluation process is not only a way of collecting information, it also fosters a sense of ownership and increases the likelihood of program assistance. Working with people who are outside the strict lines of the program opens another resource door.



Key players in your community include anyone with a vested interest in your program, such as:

- program staff and participants
- your administrative agency
- your board members
- business executives
- funders
- citizens groups
- policy makers, local, state, or federal
- other programs like yours

Think about this interlocking community network around you and how to sustain members' interest in and commitment to your program. Ask how best to meet their needs and interests:

- *Who are the interested parties for this evaluation?*
- *Whose interests take priority?*
- *What information about your program does the community require or need?*
- *Are interested parties solely concerned with specific types of evaluation information? For instance, do some want outcome results while others expect you to provide experimental research?*

Fostering community commitment allows those involved in the evaluation to feel ownership, understand the purpose behind the evaluation, and not feel threatened by it. Here are several guidelines about including your community in the evaluation process:

Include the different elements of your community in some way from the outset: everyone is a potential player. Try to recruit a diverse group of community participants in terms of gender, ethnicity, income, occupation, and relation to the program. Their sense of ownership and affiliation can translate into useful evaluation activities. Then you can narrow the focus so that different disciplines and populations are represented. Stress that ongoing feedback is still valued and encouraged from everyone, however, even if they are not directly involved in the evaluation committee.

Plan for keeping everyone updated on the progress of the evaluation. Make evaluation meeting schedules available to those interested, but also be sure that as a team you develop appropriate ways to keep everyone updated on progress and problems, whether through meetings, newsletters, or bulletin postings. This ensures inclusion without further burdening everyone with more mandatory meetings.

Orient all program workers to the goals, objectives, and methodology of the evaluation venture. Include details about how an evaluation will benefit the staff of the program, the families the program serves, and the community in which it operates. Beyond any training needed in order to carry out evaluation tasks, plan sessions to explain key facets of the process. Provide updates on how the evaluation is proceeding, including interesting experiences and unexpected consequences. Troubleshoot.

Set up a review process to deal with how to use the information gained from the evaluation. Although funders may specify certain information, and a final formal report may be one product, a plan should be developed to integrate research findings into the present program and to work on appropriate adjustments. Be sure again to involve key players in your community in this task.[9]

In general, the more connected community members feel to your program, the more likely they will be active advocates for it.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

When considering how to tell people about your program and its effectiveness, take your audiences into account:

- your families
- your staff
- your administration
- your director and board
- local policy makers
- community leaders
- key media

Depending upon expectations of funders and community members, you might be required to produce specific information. You may also be limited by financial constraints, in which case you need to allocate your resources wisely. During the course of your evaluation, many of you will have collected not only facts and figures, but case examples and feedback from families as well. Here are some ideas from programs that have tried to go beyond issuing the traditional report:

- Include testimonials from satisfied families.

- Use drawings and graphs to portray activities families engage in over time.
- Produce brief videos with the help of experienced community volunteers or local ad councils.
- Give out periodic newsletters for families and community members.
- Have a community volunteer photograph families — and the staff — and include these in your report.
- Develop press releases.
- Encourage media coverage of your success stories.

The Maternal Infant Health Outreach Worker (MIHOW) program in Appalachia worked for six years on an initial quantitative evaluation. They then published a second report devoted to a subsequent qualitative evaluation involving listening to participating families and letting them tell their stories. This narrative study is "by far our most widely requested publication," says Barbara Clinton of the Center for Health Services at Vanderbilt University. She describes the value in "letting people's words speak for themselves." This second report included photographs. Clinton said of the first study, "Actually, nobody asks us about that now. But the later qualitative evaluation, we've had to do three printings of it, it's been written up in a number of places and we get a lot of calls about it...the qualitative evaluation is easier to read, too. It's more inviting than the quantitative one. There's a whole lot more interest in it, and I think the reason is because it shows the people, and talks about people."

She says that although including photographs in an evaluation report may seem unusual, "we were trying to convey who the people were and their strengths. It's a way to demonstrate the age range of the mothers and their diversity. But it also conveys one of our major themes: the love between parent and child; it's mediated by all kinds of terrible things that go on in their lives but the love is very strong and that's what you try and build on and the pictures convey that pretty nicely. The moms are proud of it."[10]

3

Choosing an Evaluation Starting Point

Assessing your program strengths and weaknesses is an opportunity to closely observe and reflect upon the details of how your program works. An evaluation gives you the chance to systematically gauge the success of your program and defines your next move.

AN EVOLVING EVALUATION STRATEGY

In order to make program evaluation more accessible to practitioners, as well as to redirect the field from a strictly effects-oriented approach to one that captures program development and operation, Fran Jacobs, professor of early child development at Tufts University, devised a series of incremental evaluation strategies. One point of this series is to show that all programs are able to complete at least some evaluation. The series also recognizes that a program's needs evolve as a program develops; consequently, the purpose and methodology of a program's evaluation change too. A third intent of the series' outlook is to promote evaluation as an ongoing, iterative process — feedback from an evaluation will enhance a program, and earlier evaluation efforts influence subsequent evaluations.[11]

According to Jacobs, there are five steps or aspects of evaluation:

1. Assessing needs
2. Documenting the service
3. Comparing program intent to actuality
4. Fine-tuning program services and evaluation methods
5. Producing evidence of effectiveness

Keep in mind that the step you start with will depend on the developmental stage of your program. Moreover, the level you choose to focus on builds on the prior steps. For instance, a new program might begin by assessing needs and creating service forms. An older program that has already taken those steps might focus on refining the service and disseminating program results. An established program looking to introduce a new service would start again with a needs assessment.

> The process of identifying capacities and assets, both individual and organizational, is the first step on the path toward community regeneration. Once this new "map" has replaced the one containing needs and deficiencies, the regenerating community can begin to assemble its assets and capacities into new combinations, new structures of opportunity, new sources of income and control, and new possibilities for production.[12]

The following sections discuss the purpose of each step and the challenges associated with each.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

"Need" can be defined as "the gap between the problem and the existing efforts, resources, and programs to deal with the need."[13] When assessing needs, you want to acknowledge the services already available and find those that could potentially be of help if provided to your community. Needs assessment is important, as the only way to move beyond currently available resources is to recognize the necessity for additional endeavors. Too often a program provides families with services it can easily offer instead of services families need, simply because planners overlook the idea of creatively filling a gap.

The purpose of needs assessment is to:

- assess your community's strengths
- document community needs
- plan your program by prioritizing components
- involve your village from the outset

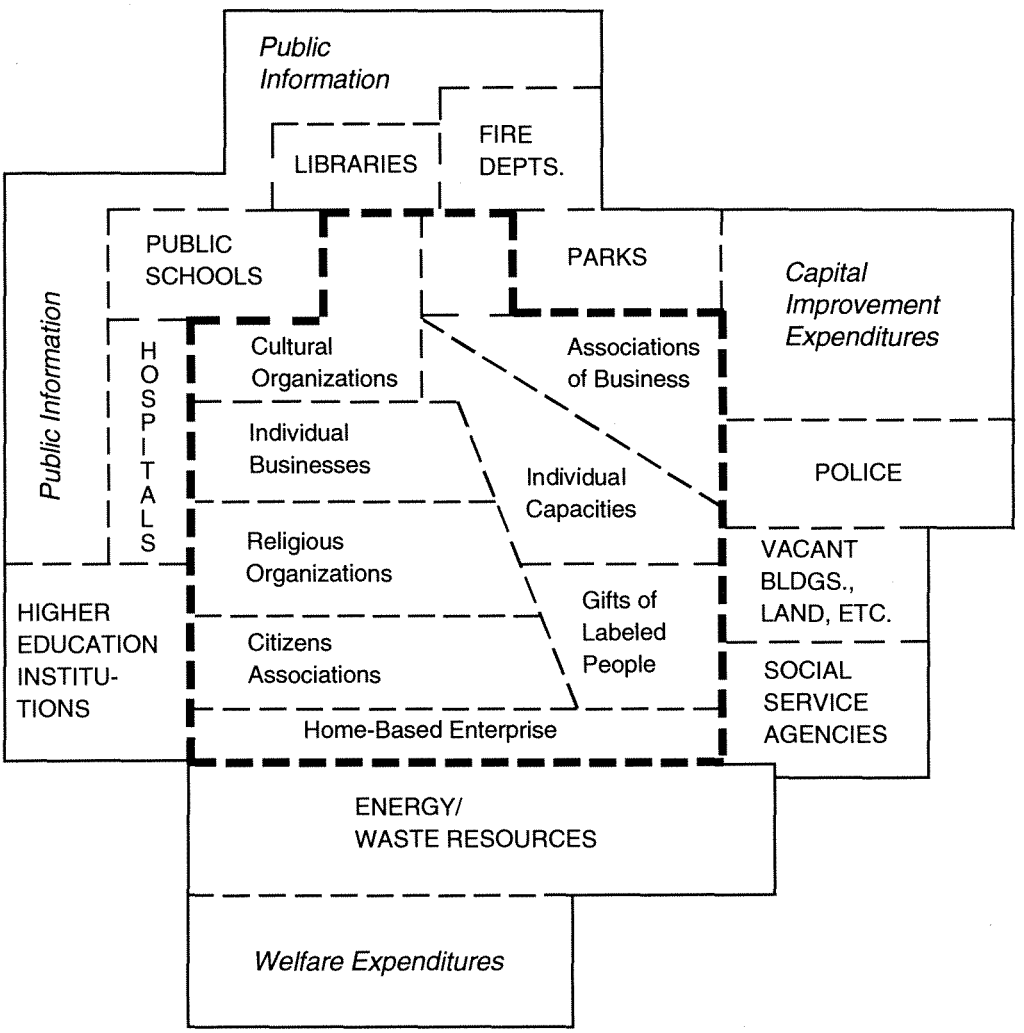
Note that we emphasize stating neighborhood and community *assets*. On the next page, we illustrate how you might "map" the strengths of a community. Even though you want to identify a problem or need, see how it manifests itself in your community, and search for ways to resolve it, an approach that focuses on assets as opposed to deficits engenders more support. Directing attention at deficits only can provoke the ire of your community, as well as result in a wholly inadequate overview of what works and why. Regarding a local idiosyncracy as a potential strength, rather than a flaw, is a useful strategy. It is hoped that by deliberately focusing on strengths and potential resources, groups in the community can work together to achieve their goals.

In planning a needs assessment, consider these questions:

- *Does the program have the time to commit to a thorough assessment?*
- *Can you free up staff time for this effort?*
- *Are you taking away funds from other aspects of your evaluation?*
- *Have you interacted positively with your community leaders?*
- *What are the issues you wish to address?*
- *Who can you interview about these issues?*

(continued on page 36)

Neighborhood Assets Map



Legend

Primary Building Blocks: Assets and capacities located inside the neighborhood, largely under neighborhood control.

SECONDARY BUILDING BLOCKS: ASSETS LOCATED WITHIN THE COMMUNITY, BUT LARGELY CONTROLLED BY OUTSIDERS.

Potential Building Blocks: Resources originating outside the neighborhood, controlled by outsiders.

Source: McKnight, J.L., & Kretzmann, J. (1990). *Mapping community capacity.* Chicago, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University

- *Where can you find information already gathered about serving children and families in your community?*
- *Who will participate in the program?*
- *What are the specific program elements you will offer?*
- *How much will it cost?*
- *What benefits can the participants and community expect?*
- *Can you reassess your needs as your program evolves?*

The spectrum of questions indicates the challenges associated with needs assessment. The concept of needs assessment is also relevant to programs that are already underway. Although successfully established programs have, by definition, already accomplished some of the tasks of this phase, even those that are up and running may want to take a step back and determine if their planned services have adequately addressed the needs of the community. In so doing, programs can raise awareness about a problem and garner additional support before attempting to alleviate it. An established program might have a slightly different emphasis in that it includes itself in the overall needs assessment.

Be sure to obtain relevant information others have collected. Perhaps community organizers have already completed some of the research you need about an area's strengths and capacities. Consider these sources of information when assessing your community's preexisting services: local colleges and universities, public schools, hospitals, social service agencies, police and fire departments, libraries, and recreational resources.

Acknowledging those who have a stake in the program from the outset is important. In a sense, you are continually assessing their needs as well. These interested parties — funders, community members, staff, and participants — can influence your program and affect its future significantly. Involving these key players in this and all stages of evaluation is important, because how you interact with them now will influence how they respond to you later.

Needs assessment looks at potential participant recruitment, public awareness of specific social issues, and how the community perceives your program goals and activities. It also measures the sense of program ownership or "buy in" by the community.

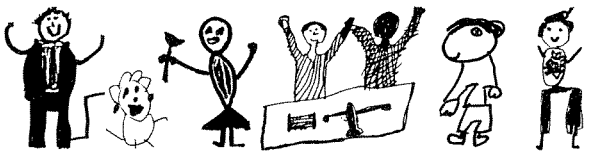
In 1991, a Florida county conducted three surveys to look at the human services needs of those in the community. First, a questionnaire was sent to 3,000 local households (12.5 percent completed and returned them). These respondents named the top five major problems in the county (crime, inadequate public transportation, affordable medical care, unemployment, and shortage of recreation facilities or programs). They stated their personal problem areas (anxiety/stress/depression, difficulties in budgeting, lack of medical insurance, inability to afford legal and medical help). And they listed the top five barriers to service use (ineligibility, inability to pay, lack of information on what is available, assumed service too costly, and concern about service quality).

Then, community leaders from the local government, the school board, religious groups, and businesses were asked to identify the most serious unmet community needs (transportation, employment assistance, drug abuse prevention, housing assistance, outpatient care, and delinquency prevention). They also listed the barriers to service as lack of transportation, the long wait, and lack of information about available services. They felt the groups most in need were minorities, the elderly, children, and the poor.

The third survey asked service providers to note what services their agencies had available, the number of people on their waiting lists, and their opinion of the seriousness of needs for county minorities, elderly, children, and poor.[14]

Here we suggest ways to carry out a needs assessment:

- survey residents
- contact community organizations and leaders
- talk to people on a formal and informal basis — businesses, cultural organizations, and religious associations
- examine statistics already available, such as census data or department of education information



- find information in the library and from other service providers in the area
- review the current literature on the problem areas under discussion
- use newspapers and other media to help identify needs
- enlist the expertise and support of community members

DOCUMENTING YOUR SERVICE

Monitoring your program by systematically documenting the service you provide enables you to gather information that can be reported to your funders, community, and participants. Indeed, some funding agencies expect this type of data. Even when not required, however, the information is useful: you can use this accumulated data to see if you are reaching those people you intended to reach and to justify continued funding. Service documentation can also be the foundation upon which later evaluations are built.

In general, devising a workable intake form is an extended process. But functional forms facilitate the information gathering already required and result in additional data — at no extra cost. Keep the form as simple and complete as possible. You do not want to hamper either your staff or the families filling out the forms. Increased monitoring duties can be burdensome and cause the staff to rebel. If you end up with missing data, you will incur higher evaluation costs in the long run. The challenge is to find that delicate balance between comprehensiveness and practicality.

The purpose of documenting your service is to:

- describe the frequency, content, and quality of your intervention activities
- justify expenditures

Scott Gordon of the Arkansas Children's Hospital is in charge of training and technical assistance for the state's Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY); before designing any forms, he suggests you ask:

- *What do you want and need to know about your program, children, and families?*
- *What are the kinds of questions you can ask that will give you this information?*
- *How can you develop a specific set of questions that you can then ask simply and consistently for every family?*

Dr. Daniel Jordan of Ventura County Mental Health Services in California notes the original intake form was "a monster" but has been improved over time. For more than a year he worked directly with clinical and supervisory staff members so that, together, they could define the information they needed from each participant.

When designing the system of service documentation, ask:

- *Are you keeping too many records, thereby consuming valuable staff time?*
- *Are your forms efficiently designed to collect the relevant data?*
- *Do you actually use the information you collect?*
- *Can the information you collect be used for more than one purpose, thereby conserving both time and money?*
- *Are you doing too little documentation, so that you don't know if you are intervening as planned?*
- *Is your documentation helpful for planning?*
- *Are you expecting so much data that your reporters become careless?*

Monitoring will help you discover answers to critical questions:

- *What services do you offer?*
- *Are you serving the people you want to serve?*
- *Do different people receive different services?*
- *What are the goals of the service?*
- *How are your staff members using their time?*
- *How are you using your funds?*

The most basic way to document your service is to:

- devise a multipurpose intake form (remember that too little data constrains your efforts to paint an accurate picture of your program, but too much information overwhelms evaluators pulling data from the form *and* those who complete it)
- focus on participant characteristics
- describe what you're doing in terms of activities and expenses

Service documentation assists your program in understanding each of the service components and provides valuable information about resource allocation as well.

Scott Gordon of the Arkansas Children's Hospital suggests developing an appropriate intake form by taking the time up front to discover what you really need to know. He describes a stepwise process by which to obtain useful and valid intake information. He calls this approach a "decision support system." To develop such a system, an organization first asks: what decisions do we need to make about our service system in order to enhance delivery and appropriately allocate resources? Only after this step does the team then determine: what information do we need to have to support the decision-making process about our services?

In Arkansas, this process resulted in a set of standardized intake forms used for a statewide initiative. The set includes a form focusing on the family profile, another concentrating on information about the child, and one which describes services the family has received. Forms are computer generated and identifying information common to all of them is automatically printed out for each set of forms.

COMPARING PROGRAM INTENT TO ACTUALITY

This step of evaluation determines if the program is doing what it set out to do. In other words, this is the time to look at your original goals and who you are serving to gauge whether the program has been implemented in the way you intended. This step focuses on how program decisions are made and by whom. It describes what the program looks like in "real life" and analyzes how it operates on a day-to-day basis. Hopefully, by describing the program in detail, others need not "reinvent the wheel" when they try to establish similar programs.

The purpose of comparing program intent to what the program has become is to:

- examine service data to determine if targeted families were appropriately defined
- review and revise program objectives
- provide timely and pertinent feedback to staff members and make program improvements

You will want to ask yourself the following:

- *What were your intended program activities?*
- *Did you skip any of these activities?*
- *Are you offering services appropriate to your target families?*
- *Are you excluding any families?*
- *What did your participants think about these offerings?*
- *Do you empower parents in the process of getting their feedback?*
- *Can you observe your activities in a minimally intrusive way?*
- *How will you use the feedback constructively?*
- *How can you do a better job of serving your children and families?*

Bright Futures, located in Galesburg, Illinois is a family literacy project with an associated early childhood center. Staff members became concerned that few parents from the preschool site were active in the adult education classes. They wanted to know, "How can we better serve the families at Bright Futures and interest them in adult education?"

The staff designed a questionnaire for parents of preschoolers assessing the level of their interest in various program components.

Parents suggested that participation might improve if the program encouraged dads to come in and avoided scheduling conflicts with other school-related activities. They also listed barriers to participation in the adult education classes: they couldn't see the necessity of a high school diploma; health problems or pregnancy prevented participation; they needed more encouragement to attend; or they didn't have time.

From these findings, the principal was able to implement several changes. He set up a program to involve adult learners at the start of the school year. He created a system to collect intake data about parent education needs when a child is enrolled in preschool. A review of the completion rate of these forms suggested they might in fact be too complex and that the intake person should be sensitive to the parents' abilities. He also instituted a regular review of the adult education component with staff members so that they are aware of relevant family information and support their efforts to attend.[15]

There are many ways to compare program intent to its actual form, including:

- asking staff members to observe each other's activities
- requesting staff members and participants to keep a journal of their experiences with the program
- enlisting participating families to give you feedback in small group sessions
- developing a client satisfaction survey

Looking at the differences between what was planned and what happened prepares you to move beyond numbers and statistics and analyze participant and program data through extensive description. By combining qualitative and quantitative data, your data will provide you with a well-rounded perspective on program outcomes.

FINE-TUNING PROGRAM SERVICES AND EVALUATION METHODS

Having answered whether or not your services match intended program goals, now you can begin to fill in the gaps and fine-tune your program offerings.

At this phase of evaluation you can:

- discuss your evaluation data with the staff and brainstorm about program improvement
- document program effectiveness
- begin to consider issues of dissemination

When evaluating ideas for program and evaluation modification or refinement, consider:

- *How intrusive are your evaluation procedures? Can you be sensitive to your families' needs while still fulfilling your evaluation needs?*
- *Should you consider hiring an outside expert to aid in evaluation?*
- *How do you package your success stories so people can absorb your findings?*
- *What have you accomplished?*
- *Are you able to improve parenting knowledge and skills?*

At this stage we suggest you:

- revisit short-term goals and determine what your indicators of success are
- consider how data analyses can reinforce your conclusions
- review the standardized measures you use
- measure community response to the program
- see if family goals correspond to program goals

The Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) program modified its self-evaluation tool. Originally it identified a set of indicators of program quality to be used for program planning and self-assessment.

In 1982 these quality indicators were incorporated into a form assessing community outreach components, parent education, child-centered activities, and program operations. To assess achievement of each indicator, a five-point rating scale ranging from poor to excellent was used. By 1985, Minnesota's ECFE network had vastly expanded, and by 1990 it was determined that a revision in the form was needed. Managers wanted the form to have more detail and to realistically capture the various needs of programs at different stages.

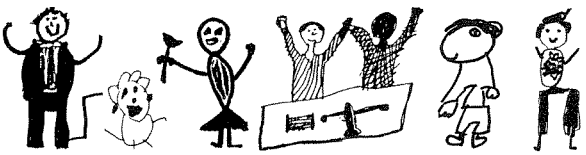
To meet these goals, over 500 ECFE program staff members had input into updating the instrument. The current "Quality Indicators for Early Childhood Family Education Programs" form now contains more detail, yet is very manageable to use. A major change is a replacement of the point rating scale with "needs to be done/planning stage/partially implemented/fully implemented."

The strengths of this final version include the recognition that all programs regardless of their stage of development can make plans to attain goals for program quality; that all programs exercise ongoing self-evaluation; that there is a common language for 398 districts which currently use this instrument.

The program sites find the form very helpful and it encourages them to develop at their own unique pace, adding service components and evaluating them as needed.[16]

PRODUCING EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

When designing an evaluation to verify program effectiveness, remember much time is needed before outcome studies can show results. You will need to make sure you have the necessary time, resources, and expertise. At this point you will want to delve into design and measurement issues.



The purpose of providing formal evidence of your program's effectiveness is to:

- offer evidence of the different effects various program elements have
- identify program models for replication
- contribute your knowledge to the field of family support and education

Ask these questions about your program:

- *Are you sufficiently developed to begin this process?*
- *Does the program work?*
- *Does it work better for some families than others?*
- *How did the content of your services effect change?*
- *Do you see enhanced child and/or parent development?*
- *In what ways has your community benefitted from your program?*
- *How can your findings influence policy decisions?*

Ask these questions about research design:

- *What is the most stringent research design that can be implemented to assess the multiple components of your program?*
- *Is it possible to implement an experimental research design with random assignment to treatment and control groups? Can you consider this design choice for at least a sample of your participants? If not, can you locate a satisfactory comparison group? If not, what other research designs can be implemented and still satisfy the communityand funder requirements?*
- *What kinds of assessments are appropriate for purposes of legislative oversight and accountability?*
- *What kinds of outcomes will prove compelling to public policy makers concerned with preventing or improving public programs?*
- *What types of outcomes will provide evidence useful for local program development?*
- *Can you develop a feasible set of cross-site measures?*

The Prenatal/Early Infancy Project in New York State used a control group experiment to examine the effectiveness of each aspect of its multifaceted intervention program. Families were randomly assigned to receive different service "packages," ranging from simple developmental screening to nurse home visiting for two and a half years. A standard series of topics was covered for all home visits, however. Self-report and standardized instruments were used to evaluate differences among the treatment groups in terms of child intellectual and social development and maternal behavior and vocational achievement. Data were collected regularly over the course of the intervention, and follow-up evaluation was also undertaken. Results were reported in terms of subgroupings by maternal age, marital status, and income. For example, the team was especially interested in how well poor, unmarried teen mothers were faring. Indeed, this group showed the most prominent effect of treatment.[17]

In order to demonstrate your effectiveness, you might:

- delineate your program objectives
- examine appropriate impact indicators
- examine longitudinal data
- identify a control or comparison group
- review records and case notes for pertinent outcome information
- conduct a cost-benefit analysis

This last step is crucial not only to a complete evaluation, but your program's existence may hinge upon it. Showing your program's worth to participants, the community, and funders is the only way to ensure that you will be around for the long term. Since there are many factors to consider in designing an outcome study, we recommend you turn to literature specifically written for this evaluation phase.

AN EVOLVING MODEL: TEEN OUTREACH PROGRAM

In conclusion, we offer this example of the Teen Outreach Program evaluation, which developed over time to encompass innovative methodological and analytic techniques in order to effectively describe many facets of the program's success.[18]

The Teen Outreach Program is a national school-based program serving students from fifth through twelfth grade. By 1989, the program served over 1,000 students at 60 sites in 28 cities. The program organizes small group discussions and emphasizes a community service component. There are, of course, local variations in program delivery, but all programs consist of teen mentoring, volunteer work experience, and peer support. A nationwide evaluation of the program has been underway since 1984.

Like other pregnancy prevention programs, key initial questions included:

- *What is the nature of the problem of teen pregnancy in our community?*
- *What is the incidence, prevalence, and scope of the problem?*
- *Which teens in our community are affected or at risk?*

The initial evaluation examined the following outcomes: school suspension, course failures, dropping out, and pregnancy. Later, data on arrest, skipping school, substance abuse, sexual activity, and contraceptive use, and several indices of school involvement were added. Between 1984 and 1989, results indicated that in general, compared with a matched group of nonparticipating teens, the Teen Outreach Program students had lower pregnancy rates and lower rates of school suspension, course failure, and dropping out.

Another study was then developed to move beyond answering the question, "Does it work?" The next study focused on determining which factors were associated with the successful changes seen among Teen Outreach Program students. At this point, information was examined to explore what kinds of students tended to do well and the conditions under which this program succeeded. In other words, after showing the program produced positive outcomes, evaluators also tried to understand how this process of change occurred.

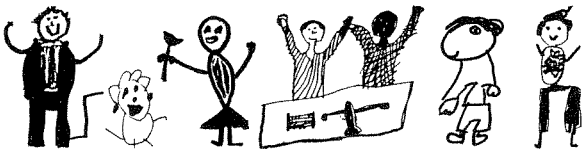
To move beyond simply stating that a program works, a plan was developed to ask:

- *What facets of the program work best?*
- *Does the effectiveness of services differ among different teens?*
- *What conditions are necessary to duplicate past success?*

This next study determined that sites serving older students displayed fewer problem behaviors at program exit, and programs with a more intensive volunteer component had better outcomes. The latter is important in that it supports the theory of empowerment as a component of change; in this case, students were empowered by their work in the community, and giving back to others fostered their own growth. Differential results according to age speaks to considering developmental factors when designing an intervention program.

This second study was also important in showing that success did *not* differ by gender, race, or certain specific program characteristics. In particular, there was no relationship between the number of classroom hours and program success, leading to the conclusion that perhaps it is not the amount of material participants receive that fosters change, but the manner by which the information is conveyed.

Thus, the combination of the two research approaches not only proved that the Teen Outreach Program works, but began to identify some of the underlying principles of effectiveness that will be useful for others when designing new pregnancy prevention programs. They point to the need to specify the developmental factors associated with program success and describe which aspects of volunteerism relate to successful outcomes. The evaluation has given the Teen Outreach Program a substantive base on which to build further progress.



Endnotes

1. Rossi P. H., & Freeman, H. E. (1982). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 19.

2. Fine, M., & Vanderslice, V. (1991). *Qualitative activist research: Reflections on methods and politics*. Unpublished manuscript, 2.

3. A copy of this instrument is available by contacting:

   Early Childhood Family Education
   Minnesota Department of Education
   922 Capitol Square Building
   550 Cedar Street
   St. Paul, MN 55101
   (612) 296-8414

4. Coates, D. (1988). Outreach to pregnant women in an urban low birthweight intervention. In C. J. Morton & R. G. Hirsch (Eds.), *Developing programs to prevent infant mortality and low birthweight: High risk populations and outreach* (pp. 99-123). Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health.

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8. Clinton, 13.

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11. For a detailed review of the "five-tiered" approach to evaluation, see Jacobs, F. H. (1988). The five-tiered approach to evaluation: Context and implementation. In H. B. Weiss & F. H. Jacobs (Eds.), *Evaluating family programs* (pp. 37-68). Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter.

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13. Linney, J. A., & Wandersman, A. (1991). *Prevention plus III: Assessing alcohol and other drug prevention programs at the school and community level: A four-step guide to useful program assessment*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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15. Knell, S., Geissler, B., & Ryan, K. (1991). *The mechanics of success: Evaluation* (Report No. 2). Rantoul, IL: Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center.

16. This instrument addresses the following areas:

    1) Local idiosyncracies are recognized as potential strengths and are accounted for, rather than ignored.
    2) The potential for looking at different program levels and components *simultaneously* is built into this instrument.
    3) Programs can actively set goals and then monitor their progress; in keeping with the goal of empowering your participants, this format allows families to take part in their own goal setting.
    4) The use of this form for providing informative, timely feedback to program personnel.

17. Olds, D. L. (1980). Improving formal services for mothers and children. In J. Garbarino & S. H. Stocking (Eds.), *Protecting children from abuse and neglect: Developing and maintaining effective support systems for families* (pp. 173-197). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

18. For more information on the details of this evaluation, see:

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    Philliber, S., & Allen, J. P. (1992). Life-options and community service: Teen Outreach Program. In B. C. Miller, J. J. Card, R. L. Paikoff, & J. L. Peterson (Eds.), *Preventing adolescent pregnancy: Model programs and evaluations* (pp. 139-155). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

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United Way of America. (1992). *The path to our future: A community-wide needs assessment for human services in Alachua County.* Alexandria, VA: Author.

Wasik, B. H., Bryant, D. M., & Lyons, C. M. (1990). *Home visiting: Procedures for helping families.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Weiss, H. B., & Halpern, R. (1989). *The challenges of evaluating state family support and education initiatives: An evaluation framework.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard Family Research Project.

Weiss, H. B., & Hite, S. (1986). Evaluation: Who's doing it and how? A report from a national program survey conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project. *Family Resource Coalition Report, 5*(3), 4-7.

A Note on Research Methods

This series is based on data collected from a variety of sources. We did an extensive review of the family support literature using the Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC). Using the Harvard Family Research Project (HFRP) database we identified programs that would provide good examples of funding, staff development, evaluation, collaboration, and community outreach. We then wrote to these programs to send us up-to-date information from annual reports, unpublished manuscripts, brochures, and other forms of descriptive literature.

HFRP's *Raising Our Future: Families, Schools, and Communities Joining Together* provided a wealth of information about programs. We did a secondary analysis of the original survey data on 75 programs. We also did a follow-up telephone survey of a sample of these programs to analyze patterns of change in their service delivery.

The series also utilized data collected from telephone and in-person interviews. A number of the series writers were simultaneously involved in field-based case study research. Their research yielded an enormous amount of taped interviews that were transcribed at the HFRP office and coded on Ethnograph software. The coded data as well as notes from telephone interviews with other programs provided a rich source of material. Statements from program staff that are quoted throughout the texts come from these two types of interviews.

Each of the volumes in the series contains a resource guide that provides the reader sources of additional information on a topic. The resource guide lists and annotates references and gives the addresses and telephone numbers of organizations where further information can be obtained.

Resource Guide

PRACTICAL ADVICE

Berk, R. A., & Rossi, P. H. (1990). *Thinking about program evaluation.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Although not specifically focused on programs for families, this book covers key concepts in readable language; some of the text is more technical, but offers an overview of evaluation when starting up a program as well as for those programs already underway.

Herman, J. L. (1987). *Program evaluation kit: Vol. 1-9.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

This nine-volume series is designed to provide a "step-by-step guide to conducting any program evaluation." In nontechnical language, the volumes offer tips, examples of data collection strategies, and sample forms. Titles include: *How to Design a Program Evaluation; How to Focus an Evaluation; How to Measure Attitudes; How to Analyze Data.*

Krueger, R. (1988). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

This book discusses the focus group method of evaluation, distinguishing it from other similar methodological procedures. In the first section of the book, Krueger examines the development of focus group procedures and why they work as well as the characteristics, uses, validity, and limitations of these groups. The second section of the book suggests focus group interview strategies and defines the necessary elements for successful variations of the focus group process and suggests ways of contracting for focus group assistance.

Linney, J. A., & Wandersman, A. (1991). *Prevention plus III: Assessing alcohol and other drug prevention programs at the school and community level.* Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This publication from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is specifically directed at drug abuse prevention; in clear language, however, it does cover goal-setting and general principles for evaluating programs. There are helpful examples and sample forms included.

Littell, J. H. (1986). *Building strong foundations: Evaluation strategies for family resource programs.* Chicago, IL: Family Resource Coalition.

This text is directed at service providers and administrators working with family resource programs. It specifically addresses how programs can build in their own evaluation components and includes a step-by-step guide for developing an evaluation. There are additional sections on record keeping and outcome assessment, as well as sections covering other aspects of evaluating family programs.

National Center for Clinical Infant Programs. (1987). *Charting change in infants, families, and services: A guide to program evaluation for administrators and practitioners.* Washington, DC: Author.

This booklet emphasizes the importance of program evaluation as a gauge of program effectiveness. It details the method of process evaluation using a six-step agenda. This resource also provides brief case studies. The appendix identifies "domains of concern" with relation to the service provider and the parties involved. For more information contact:

National Center for Clinical Infant Programs. (1987). *Evaluating service programs for infants, toddlers, and their families: A guide for policymakers and funders.* Washington, DC: Author.

This publication briefly discusses the different kinds of evaluation processes. It also recommends approaches for funders of service programs.

van der Eyken, W. (1992). *Introducing evaluation.* The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.

Readable, well organized overview designed specifically for on-line staff working in the field of early childhood.

ASPECTS OF EVALUATION

FRAMEWORK

Knell, S., Geissler, B., & Ryan, K. (1991). *The mechanics of success* (Reports #2 and #3). Rantoul, IL: Illinois Literacy Resource Development Center.

Although directed at adult literacy programs, these two reports offer examples of how to apply Jacobs' five-tiered evaluation scheme; there are descriptions of how individual programs develop strategies at each stage of their development, with the goal of helping programs undertaking evaluation learn the lessons of these earlier efforts.

Weiss, H. B., & Jacobs, F. H. (Eds.). (1988). *Evaluating family programs.* New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Chapters covering a variety of issues specific to the evaluation of programs serving children; see especially Jacobs' chapter 2: "The Five-Tiered Approach to Evaluation: Context and Implementation."

Weiss, H. B., & Halpern, R. (1989). *The challenges of evaluating state family support and education initiatives: An evaluation framework.* Paper prepared for the Public Policy and Family Support and Education Programs Colloquium, Annapolis, MD, April 26-28, 1989.

This paper presents a three-part framework for states to use in thinking about how to evaluate their initiatives. It also describes and discusses the different evaluation strategies that have been crafted by pioneering states and the problems and constraints they have faced in designing and implementing their evaluation strategies.

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

Schuh, R. G., & Leviton, L. C. (1991). Evaluating referral and agency coordination with a computerized client-tracking system. *Evaluation Review, 15*(5), 533-54.

Detailed description for the advantages of using an MIS when working with coordinated service delivery; the specific example offered is for a prenatal program for chemically dependent women, with design and implementation issues discussed at length.

EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENT

Smith, M. F. (1989). *Evaluability assessment: A practical approach.* Boston, MA: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Step-by-step guide to conducting an extensive and focused pre-assessment.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research. (1988). *Getting connected: How to find out about groups and organizations in your neighborhood.* Chicago, IL: Northwestern University.

Innovative approaches to examining the strengths of a community and connecting with often overlooked local resources.

Wasik, B. H., Bryant, D. M., & Lyons, C. M. (1990). Assessment and documentation in home visiting. In B.H. Wasik, B.M. Bryant, & C.M. Lyons. *Home visiting: Procedures for helping families.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

This chapter details record-keeping concerns for programs and their home visiting staff.

DESCRIBING THE PROCESS

Clinton, B. (1990). *Against the odds: Parenting in disadvantaged communities.* Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University, Center for Health Services.

This narrative offers both an example of an "empowering evaluation" and an innovative presentation format. Through quotes and pictures, the reader learns about the MIHOW program from the perspective of both staff and participants.

COST EFFECTIVENESS

Levin, H. (1983). *Cost-effectiveness: A primer*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Provides basic discussion regarding the best way to document cost savings for education programs. Strives to familiarize evaluators and administrations with the issues of cost analysis. Organized around steps for completing studies of cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, cost-utility, and cost-feasibility analyses. Includes relevant exercises for each chapter.

THEORY AND HISTORY

These works describe the key phases in the development of program evaluation.

Alkin, M. C. (1990). *Debates on evaluation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Cronbach, L. J., Ambron, S. R., Dornbusch, S. M., Hess, R. D., Hornick, R. C., Phillips, D. C., Walker, D. F., & Weiner, S.S. (1980). *Toward a reform of program evaluation: Aims, methods, and institutional arrangements* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Halpern, R. (1990). Community-based intervention. In S. J. Meisels, & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 469-498). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Shonkoff, J. P., & Meisels, S. J. (1990). Early childhood intervention: The evolution of a concept. In S. J. Meisels & J. P. Shonkoff (Eds.), *Handbook of early childhood intervention* (pp. 3-31). New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Travers, J. R., & Light, R. J. (1982). *Learning from experience: Evaluating early childhood demonstration programs*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

SERIES

Numerous publishers produce works on evaluation which are part of a continuously updated series. Here are just two examples; you can locate others through libraries and recommendations from researchers.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

This series of booklets provides short introductions to methodological issues across a range of social science domains. For more information contact:

Sage Publications, Inc.
P.O. Box 5084
Newbury Park, CA 91359-9924
(805) 499-0721
(805) 499-0871 FAX

QUANTITATIVE APPLICATIONS IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

This series on quantitative methodology provides detailed coverage of a wide range of data analysis techniques. Designed for those with some background in statistics. For more information contact:

Subscriptions
Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers
4333 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94104

NEW DIRECTIONS FOR PROGRAM EVALUATION

These texts are published quarterly by the Evaluation Research Society, and include coverage of diverse topics, including measurement, utilization and stakeholder issues.

SERVICES

ERIC: The U.S. Department of Education sponsors this computerized document reproduction service, Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse. Usually accessed through colleges and universities although written information is available. For more information contact:

ERIC
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Education Research Improvement (OERI)
Washington, DC 20208

NTIS: The National Technical Information Service provides on-line access to government sponsored research. For more information contact:

NTIS
5285 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA 22161
(703) 487-4807

PAIS: University-based on-line service of Public Affairs Information Service, Inc., and includes indexed publications for government, public administration, public policy and statistics. Typically accessed through college and university databases. Available for personal computer use via a modem.

ORGANIZATIONS

Family Resource Coalition: National organization geared to developing prevention programs for families. The coalition links those working with families in order to invite innovation and the exchange of ideas among professionals in the U.S. and Canada. The organization produces its own literature, and also offers a clearinghouse of other relevant publications, technical assistance services, conferences and information packets. For more information contact:

Family Resource Coalition
230 North Michigan Avenue, Suite 1625
Chicago, IL 60601
(312) 726-4750

U.S. Department of Education: The U.S. Department of Education can direct you to your local governing organizations and their referral information. For more information call (202) 708-5366.

Center for the Study of Social Policy: This nonprofit organization "assists federal, state and local governments in improving human services for low income and other disadvantaged populations." For more information contact:

Center for the Study of Social Policy
1250 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20005-3922
(202) 371-1565
(202) 371-1472 FAX

National Center for Clinical Infant Programs: Provides professional information concerning children birth to three, including reports on policy-relevant innovative research. For more information contact:

National Center for Clinical Infant Programs
733 Fifteenth Street, NW, Suite 912
P.O. Box 96529
Washington, DC 20077-7359
(202) 347-0308

National Association for the Education of Young Children: This organization of early childhood professionals works to improve services to families and young children. Local affiliate groups provide various services for professionals. There is an information service available and an annual conference provides updated information on a variety of topics pertinent to those working in the field of early childhood. For more information contact:

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About the Harvard Family Research Project

The Harvard Family Research Project was established in 1983 at the Harvard Graduate School of Education by Dr. Heather B. Weiss, who continues as its director. The Project conducts and disseminates research about programs and policies to strengthen and support families with young children.

The Project's mission is to examine and assist in the development of policies and programs to empower families and communities as contexts of human development.

Specializing in applied policy research, the Project's outlook encompasses the view that to educate the whole child, parents, schools, and other community agencies must redefine their roles to include partnerships to support child development from infancy through adolescence. It maintains that to sustain gains, support initiatives must be continuous over a child's life.

The Project is nationally recognized for providing much of the data demonstrating the value of preventive, comprehensive, collaborative, and family-focused services. It has a diverse research agenda, supported by public and private funders, that is designed to inform and shape national policy debates, advance evaluation practice, and encourage progressive program development.

The audience for the Project's work ranges from national and state policy makers to researchers and local practitioners, many of whom have benefitted from the Project's ability to provide new perspectives and suggest creative solutions.