



# Assessing and Enhancing the Service Array in Child Welfare

## How We Can Help Assess the Service Array

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement (NRCOI) can help jurisdictions assess and develop a plan to expand accessibility and improve the quality of the services provided to children and families in the child welfare system. The assistance was developed and field tested by staff and consultants of the Resource Center. It is a five-part process:

- ◆ Creating a Community Stakeholder Collaborative or Building on an Existing One
- ◆ Completing the Service Array Instrument
- ◆ Reporting the Results of Using the Instrument
- ◆ Preparing a Resource Development Plan
- ◆ Monitoring the Effectiveness of Plan Implementation

## Rationale for the Service Array Process

The goal of the process is the assessment of current status of a jurisdiction's service array and the preparation and implementation of a Resource Development Plan. The Service Array Process can help jurisdictions determine what services and supports are available for their families as well as what additional services might be needed.

## What Is the Service Array in Child Welfare?

Jurisdictions (states, state regions, counties, cities, neighborhoods) are required to have a continuum of services to meet the individual needs of children and families served by their child welfare system. The array of services includes: preventive and voluntary early intervention services; early intervention services for children who have been identified as maltreated or at risk of maltreatment; services for families and children who become part of the child welfare system, including an individualized plan of services and supports that will ensure that the family's children are safe, that they can remain permanently in their home, and that the family members' well-being is enhanced; as well as services and supports to help the child and family exit the system, including family reunification services, services that help establish permanency for the child with an alternate family when reunification is not possible, and post-adoption services.

The Service Array Process may be used for the following purposes:

- ◆ To create a service directory for the jurisdiction
- ◆ To assist states in preparing for the Child and Family Service Reviews, in conducting the Statewide Assessment of the Service Array Systemic Factor, and/or in developing a Program Improvement Plan around the Service Array
- ◆ To help states receiving Federal CAPTA grants meet the requirement to conduct and submit an annual inventory of services in the state
- ◆ To help jurisdictions understand and improve the adequacy of their child welfare service array
- ◆ To improve collaboration between service providers, or ideally, to create a functioning community stakeholders collaborative as a partner with the public child welfare agency in sharing the responsibility for child safety, permanency, and well-being.

## Community Stakeholders: Key Participants in the Process

For the full process to result in improved child welfare services in a given jurisdiction, community stakeholders must be involved throughout all the steps. Key community stakeholders can include:

- ◆ Public and private sector providers of child welfare services
- ◆ Providers of mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence services
- ◆ Educators
- ◆ Health care providers
- ◆ Court, legal, and law enforcement officials, including CASA volunteers
- ◆ Consumers (clients, former clients, youths, foster parents, birth parents)
- ◆ Other key providers (housing, food resources, transportation)
- ◆ Representatives of the business, faith, and labor communities
- ◆ Elected officials

The group needs to be committed to the needs of the community's most vulnerable families and be broad enough to ensure knowledge of the jurisdiction's resources. An existing community group, for example, could be a community collaborative or a group of providers who meet regularly. If such a group does not exist, using this process is a way to start a productive, collaborative discussion. Ideally, this collaborative has some authority and legitimacy to change or influence the service array in the jurisdiction.

### **Completing the Service Array Instrument**

The actual service array looks different from state to state and community to community. The Assessment Instrument is organized around a continuum of services required in child welfare—from prevention to exiting the child welfare system.

There are more than 90 services that fall within one of five categories:

1. Community/Neighborhood Prevention, Early Intervention
2. Investigative, Assessment Functions
3. Home-Based Interventions
4. Out-of-Home Reunification/Permanency Services
5. Child Welfare System Exits

No state or community has all of these services, and while all of the services in the array are good strategies, they cannot all be funded. The purpose of beginning with an assessment of the full service array is to define the range of possibilities and create a community-level discussion about the service array.

To complete the instrument, a group of community stakeholders meets and, by consensus, rates each of the services by answering five questions. (A sample of a "Completed Service Sheet" is available from the Resource Center.) This process is an educational experience as participants learn about child welfare services previously unknown to them.

### **Preparing a Resource Development Plan, Implementation, and Monitoring Effectiveness**

The third, fourth, and fifth steps in the process are to describe the strengths and gaps in the service array and prepare and implement a resource development plan to improve availability, accessibility, and quality of services. This resource plan also includes a description of ongoing monitoring of effectiveness.

### **For More Information**

Contact the staff at the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Organizational Improvement.

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