

**NCIC Regional Forum**  
**May 6th, 7th and 8th, 2009**  
**Omni Parker House, Boston, MA**

In May 2009, the Northeast and Caribbean Implementation Center (NCIC) hosted a Regional Forum in Boston, MA. Sixty-three participants attended the Forum: fifty-three participants from ACF regions 1 and 2 state/territory child welfare agencies and ten from the Children's Bureau (CB), ACF regional offices or the CB's T/TA Network.

The theme for this Forum was *Growing Stronger: Creating Sustainable Change in Child Welfare*. With that theme in mind, NCIC identified two goals for this Forum:

1. To have conversations and learn about what effective systemic change looks like. How do we plan for, implement and sustain change that results in improved outcomes for children, youth and families? How do we create opportunities to move an organization forward given the complexity and public nature of this work? How do we engage the key stakeholders? How do we measure and evaluate the impact of the change?
2. To become acquainted or, in many cases reacquainted with, the multiple resources available to help child welfare agencies achieve identified organizational and family outcomes. Those resources include the Children's Bureau T/TA Network, other external supports and, most importantly, Forum participants.

Over the course of the three days, participants had many opportunities to network with peers, to explore proven strategies for change through presentations, small and large group discussions, and to share what has worked for them and what has been challenging as agencies have undertaken practice and organizational improvements.

The remainder of this report provides highlights of the Forum as well as handouts and power point slides organized by the agenda.

**Day 1**

**Introductions & Sharing Successes**

The Forum opened with welcoming remarks and introductions followed by each state and territory team sharing success stories from recent experience in their own work on implementation / systems change. There was a diverse array of successes across the two regions, indicating a reservoir of experience and expertise among peer agencies. Success stories include: implementing Structured Decision Making, reducing the use of residential care, developing and deploying a statewide web-based reporting system for contracted

service providers, establishing strong relationships with the courts focused on permanency, recruiting foster and adoptive families to improve placement matches, launching workforce development initiatives, establishing a centralized intake system, adapting the Homebuilder's Model, and making significant investments in parent training programs.

### **Supporting Organizational Change: Tony Hemmelgarn, Ph.D. University of Tennessee Children's Mental Health Services Research Center**

Dr. Hemmelgarn joined us to share what the research can tell us about the organizational context for supporting change; the characteristics of successful implementations; common challenges to implementation and strategies for addressing them; and the organizational culture and climate that creates a readiness for change. Following his presentation, he led a discussion among Forum participants who raised questions about what to consider when targeting interventions; the importance of and strategies for involving front line staff in designing solutions and interventions; the critical skills for leaders to have; and managing the uncertainty and emotional impact of change.

[Power Point Presentation by Tony Hemmelgarn: \*Supporting Organizational Change: Assessing & Changing Social Contexts.\*](#)

[Article: \*Organizational Culture & Climate: Implications for Services and Interventions Research\*](#)

[Article: \*Effects of the ARC Organizational Intervention on Caseworker Turnover, Climate, and Culture of Children's Service Systems\*](#)

[Article: \*Assessing the Organizational Social Context \(OSC\) of Mental Health Services: Implications for Research and Practice\*](#)

[Article: \*The Big Five: Basic "Truths" That Should be Omnipresent in a Leader's Mind When Trying to Create "True" Organizational Change\*](#)

### **Wrap up Evaluations (Day 1):**

NCIC conducted "quick evaluations" at the end of each day of the Forum. This helped us make immediate adjustments to better meet participants' needs. The feedback indicated that participants found the presentation and discussion about organizational change to be a great beginning and a good foundation for the rest of the Forum. Participants commented that the information and discussion was very relevant to their needs, noting that they could apply it to their organizational change plans. The participation in the discussion with Dr. Hemmelgarn by many in the room was reflected in the comments about the presentation being both effective and entertaining.

### **Day 2**

#### **What the NCIC Team Learned During Outreach Visits**

Prior to the Regional Forum, NCIC staff visited each mainland state agency at their central office. We met with the teams from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands on the morning of the first day of the Forum. The purpose of our visits was to begin building relationships with each agency leadership team, learn about current initiatives and strategic priorities, and understand each child welfare system's strengths, areas needing improvement, and external dynamics. NCIC shared what we learned from our site visits and organized small group

discussions around four common themes that emerged from these visits: Enhancing Supervision; Supporting Emerging Leaders: Working with the Provider Community; and Engaging Families throughout the Life of a Case.

[Power Point Presentation by Susan Maciolek: \*Northeast & Caribbean Child Welfare Implementation Center\*](#)

### **Small Group Facilitated Discussions**

In each of the small groups, participants addressed four questions:

1. What is the current state of your agency's practice in this area?
2. What are your agency's next steps and potential opportunities and challenges in this area?
3. What will you take from Tony Hemmelgarn's presentation / discussion to help you with this work?
4. What do you hope to learn from /discuss with Jeff Lawrence to help you with this work?

The following summarizes highlights of the rich discussions that occurred in each small group.

#### *Enhancing Supervision*

- View support for supervisors as ongoing – not just an event
- Good supervision is top-down. Supervisors need to be supervised.
- Positive modeling & reinforcement of supervision – Leadership communicates belief that supervisory team can be best in nation & works w/supervisors to make it happen.
- Supervisors across units need to see themselves as team
- How do you avoid/address fear-based practice?
- Conflict avoidance – How do we avoid it? (worker w/family, supervisor w/worker, etc.)
- How do we turn super-workers into supervisors?
- Bring together “nay-sayers” & charge with problem-solving, sharing accountability.
- Data as a tool to manage conflict and problem-solve toward better outcomes.

#### *Supporting Emerging Leaders/Building the Bench*

- Mentoring capacity in organization; states sharing information on how to build and operate an in-house mentoring program.
- In some states, there is public manager training available across state government.
- Manager training to be available through NCWWI
- Rotating supervisory staff into training roles and back to field supervision.
- Central Office positions that could be rotational positions to build more skills in the field. Also provides exposure to management.
- Potential new collaboration: explore University of Puerto Rico partnering with the Virgin Islands to provide MSW education on the islands.

#### *Working with the Provider Community*

- Using performance data to measure meaningful outcomes & engage providers in shared practice discussions.
- Strategies for developing common ground with providers.
- Public agency consolidation & budget reduction, closer review of pricing policies & finances.
- Decrease in funding for innovations from private foundations is a concern.
- Tapping provider expertise & perspectives.

#### *Engaging Families throughout the Life of the Case*

##### *Examples of Family Engagement:*

- Family Group conference.
- Differential response.
- Family care community partnerships
- Advanced assessment of family engagement.

##### *Challenges:*

- Pockets of good practice.
- Lack of skills, clear message, and measures.

##### *Strategies:*

- Certified facilitators of FGC.
- Private/Public partnerships.
- Family time coaching.
- Center for professional excellence.
- Training all staff.
- Family involvement in policy.

### **Leading in the Public Sector in Tough Times: Jeffery Lawrence, Cambridge Leadership Associates**

Jeff Lawrence spent the afternoon of the second day leading a lively discussion about the challenges of leading in the public sector. He organized his conversation with the group around three main themes:

- There is a difference between leadership and authority
- There is no such thing as a broken system... your system is perfectly aligned to produce the outcomes it is getting.
- It is critical to understand the difference between adaptive work and technical work

Following his talk, he led the Forum participants in an exercise to understand their own individual leadership challenges. NCIC provided each participant with a copy of *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World*, published by the Harvard Business Press in 2009, which we highly recommend. It can be order at: [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com).

#### Summary

Leadership behaviors when facing an adaptive challenge

- Identify the adaptive challenge-name it.
- Orchestrate *healthy* conflict-use your authority to define boundaries
- Provide a holding environment-while folks experience loss of competence, the familiar
- Hold steady-don't back away from discomfort while leading the change

[Article by Harvard Business Review: \*A Survival Guide for Leaders\*](#)  
[Document: \*Personal Leadership Activity\*](#)

### **Wrap up Evaluations (Day 2):**

Forum participants appreciated hearing what NCIC learned from our site visits as well as the opportunity to further discuss the common themes in small groups. The afternoon workshop with Jeff Lawrence was thought-provoking and challenging. Many participants noted: Great discussions! Great ideas! Great presenter!

### **Day 3**

#### **Introduction of the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network: *Linda Mitchell, Federal Project Officer***

NCIC, and our four sister Implementation Centers, are members of the Children's Bureau Training and Technical Assistance Network. Information about the T/TA Network and its services was presented at the Forum to ensure that participants are aware of the full array of services funded by the Children's Bureau.

[Power Point Presentation by Linda Mitchell: \*The Children's Bureau Training & Technical Assistance Network\*](#)

[Handbook: \*2009 Children's Bureau T/TA Network\*](#)

[Video: \*Child Welfare Information Gateway\*](#)

#### **Intensive Project Application and Timeline**

One of the ways in which NCIC supports systemic change is through supporting long-term intensive implementation projects with selected states, territories, and tribes. The first Request for Applications that NCIC issued (in April 2009) is provided here. We plan to issue an RFA again in January 2010.

[Document: \*Request for Application and Timeline\*](#)

#### **Evaluating our Work:**

NCIC has a user-friendly, collaborative approach to evaluating our work so that adjustments can be made along the way and not after the project is over. Our project evaluator described this approach to Forum participants. In addition, the Children's Bureau has funded James Bell Associates to conduct a cross-site evaluation of the T/TA Network. This work was also shared at the Forum.

[\[Document: \*NCIC Evaluation Approach\*](#)

### **Moving Ahead: State/Territory reports on work planning and next steps**

NCIC left time at the end of the final day for each of the states and territories to do work planning and then to share with the group their next steps as well as some requests of NCIC. Several of the states and territories expressed interest in submitting an application for an intensive implementation project, some during this cycle and others in a later cycle. The focus of their intensive efforts ranged from practice model development and implementation, to differential response, to improving supervisory practice, to integrating the use of data in management activities. Across these potential projects, there was a focus on involving frontline staff and local office leaders in designing systems changes, engaging stakeholders and contracted providers, and providing coaching in local offices to ensure changes are sustained.

The states and territories also provided several suggestions for Peer Networking topics:

- Practice Models, Family Engagement, Family Centered Practice, Permanency Planning and Secondary Trauma
- Integrating Child Welfare with Juvenile Justice
- Implementing Evidence Based Practices
- Leadership Skills, Emerging Leaders, Mentoring, and Supervisory Effectiveness
- Implementing a System of Care
- Performance-Based Contracting
- Data Driven Supervision, Using Data
- Conflict Management/Healthy Conflict

### **Wrap up Evaluations (NCIC & Regional Forum):**

The Forum ended with participants completing evaluations of the Forum and NCIC outreach and the regional office attendees joining in a focus group to provide feedback to NCIC staff about its activities to date.

[Document: NCIC Forum Evaluation](#)