

issue #1

Lessons Learned
Reclaiming Futures
National Advisory Committee
Shares Experiences
In Systems Reform

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RECLAIMING FUTURES
NATIONAL PROGRAM OFFICE

Communities helping teens
overcome drugs, alcohol and crime

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introduction

“Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterward.”

- Vernon Sanders Law

During the Reclaiming Futures’ national meeting in Chicago, October 2-5, 2002, a session called “Lessons Learned” was provided by members of the national advisory committee. The presenters offered their experiences and reflections about keys to systemic reform working in initiatives similar to Reclaiming Futures. Five of these presenters, Emmitt Hayes, Tim Turley, Carolyn Nava, Jan Embree-Bever and Steve Carmichael participated in a federal grant program that was one of the inspirations for Reclaiming Futures. David Altschuler, another successful innovator whose work has focused on effective juvenile justice reform in the area of intensive aftercare, also shared his experiences as a change agent. This session was both well attended and highly praised by attendees. Given the limited time in that session and the considerable interest, the national program office collected additional comments from the presenters in order to provide our grantees with a resource as they move from planning to implementation of the Reclaiming Futures initiative. Our goal is that grantees will find value in the lessons of their predecessors collected in this document and that this will be a valued resource, providing confirmation of local planning and direction while offering caution and perspective about potential barriers and the strategies to address them. Special thanks to Maria Lamb for her assistance in the preparation of this document.

The group’s comments are organized into the following categories:

- Developing a common mission
- Governance and leadership
- Communication
- Family and community involvement
- Local evaluation
- Sustaining the reforms

Our panelists are uniquely qualified to speak on these issues as their experiences cover a variety of areas necessary for successful community coalition building and system reform on behalf of youths in the juvenile justice system with substance abuse problems. What follows is a distillation of the key lessons from experienced practitioners experienced in the struggle and opportunity of system reform.

introduction

David Altschuler, Ph.D., is a principal research scientist at Johns Hopkins Institute for Policy Studies and adjunct associate professor of sociology. He is currently project director and co-principal investigator of a federally funded research and development project that designed the Intensive Aftercare Program (IAP) model. He has been involved in evaluation, national program review and policy analysis, as well as state level social program planning and administration. His work focuses on juvenile justice sanctioning and aftercare, community based delinquency program design, implementation and assessment as well as substance abuse and drug trafficking among inner-city youths.

Stephen Carmichael, M.S.W., was the director of the Lane County, Oregon Department of Youth Services for 12 years. This department is responsible for juvenile corrections in the county and includes a 96-bed detention center, juvenile court, probation and parole. The department has been a leader in the use of a balanced approach to juvenile delinquency. Mr. Carmichael led the community effort to create a juvenile justice center and youth campus that is a national model as well as development of the Youth Intervention Network, a model drug and alcohol treatment program. He also started a drug court during his tenure and has considerable experience in interagency and community-based work.

Jan Embree-Bever, M.A. CAC III worked for more than 10 years with the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Division of the Colorado Department of Human Services and part of her tenure included being director of treatment and quality improvement. The latter involved development of policy, coordinating and implementing public policy for availability, effectiveness and funding of alcohol and drug treatment services. She has considerable experience working in the area of substance abuse treatment and with special populations. From 1995 – 1997 she assisted in the planning and implementation of the Juvenile Justice Treatment Network, funded by the federal Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

Carolyn Nava is the senior family advisor for the national office of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, in partnership with the American Institutes for Research as a technical assistance provider for nearly 200 communities funded to develop integrated systems of care for youth and families. This initiative is funded by the federal Center for Mental Health Services in Rockville, Maryland. Ms. Nava's family has navigated a long intergenerational history of mental illness, fueling her career as a family advocate and mental health professional. She served as administrator of the Day Psychiatric Hospital at

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the University of Colorado Health Services Center for eight years and was the first executive director of the Colorado chapter of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health.

Emmitt Hayes, Jr. serves as the Travis County (Texas) Juvenile Probation Department as director of the Substance Abuse Services Division where he was responsible for development and implementation of its Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) funded Juvenile Justice Integrated Treatment Network. The Network has expanded to include a drug court, specialized supervision units and a comprehensive continuum of treatment, including day treatment and secure residential programs. Mr. Hayes has served as a deputy assistant director for the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse as well as a consultant to various federal, state and local agencies, universities, and philanthropic organizations. He is a partner in LTBL consultants, a private consultant group that develops human service programs and provides staff development and diversity management training.

Timothy J. Turley, M.A. worked in juvenile probation for nearly 30 years, most recently as the chief probation officer for the Denver, Colorado Juvenile Probation Department. He has directed court services and worked as court administrator as well as probation officer. His most recent work has been director of the Denver Public Schools' Safe Schools/Healthy Students initiative, a local interagency collaborative coordinating the efforts of public schools, juvenile justice, and mental health agencies. He also participated in the Juvenile Justice Treatment Network in Denver and has considerable interagency coordination experience serving youth in the juvenile justice system.

We hope you will find these comments affirming, challenging, and thought provoking. This may be a document to which you will return from time to time, seeing different wisdom in its pages as your own experience sheds light on its meaning.

Laura Burney Nissen, Ph.D., M.S.W.

National Program Director

Elleen Deck, M.Ed.

Co-Deputy Director, Grantee Development

developing a common mission

Building community solutions is one of the primary principles of Reclaiming Futures. In addition to incorporating family and community members into the process, Reclaiming Futures is about creating a community of helping professionals working together to address local problems. Adapting to work in concert with people who may have different perspectives, values and priorities takes sincere effort. Moreover, having the foresight to identify and address specific issues that will likely arise when agencies with different goals come together, before they become unmanageable problems around a particular crisis, can save immeasurable time and energy. These philosophical differences need to be appreciated not as the period at the end of the sentence but rather the capital letter at the beginning of this process.

Key steps:

- Anticipate differences—it is natural for people in the partnership to have different beliefs about how to plan, implement and evaluate change. Don't sweep these issues away and hope they will not resurface—history tells us they *will* reappear
- Talk about it—encourage people to speak up about their perceptions of the current system, including potential barriers to the group's efforts and specific issues they foresee as possibly being divisive in the partnership
- Develop coherent strategies so policies are in place when issues arise

Helpful Hindsight

Signing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) is a good start, but it is really akin to the “wedding vows” of a partnership. Married life will bring differences to the surface and necessitate that agreements and compromises are sought.

(David Altschuler)

governance and leadership

DIVERSE REPRESENTATION

Line Staff

When building these collaborations, it's important to include diverse representation from within each organization. In addition to those with decision-making authority in their agency, line staff also needs to be represented. Buy-in from line staff can make or break system reform and inviting their input will strengthen commitments to change. Reasons for including line staff range from appreciating the value of their perspective to recognizing their abilities to undermine such an effort if they feel it is happening "to them." The message is clear: include them early and often.

Probation

The chief of probation and probation staff will need to be part of this system reform. The changes in procedure and policy undertaken by the Reclaiming Futures sites will likely affect them most directly. Without their input and support, the changes initiated will be significantly limited. They need a voice in the process and support with the changes.

Leadership from Bench

In a system reform that involves juvenile justice or probation, it is essential that the judge be integral and support the reform. It is important to understand and utilize the role of the judge in a specific locale. If great authority is placed there, by statute or by

history, then the governance structure must reflect it. There must also be a place at the table for partner agencies and others, as the initiative requires. Decisions can even be made through consensus if that is the decision of the governance body, but the most critical element to the success of the venture will be the participation and support of the judge, where the structure or culture so dictate. There is great authority there. In some communities, the judge may chose to delegate many tasks, but must still remain a presence in the partnership.

Involving Probation

Probation staff often did not use the services of our network because it took them more time to make a referral, follow up, and work with the treatment provider under the changes made. We found success by placing paraprofessional aides with the probation staff to help handle the network involved youth. The extra burden placed on probation staff was reduced by this assistance and the innovations were more consistently implemented.

(Steve Carmichael)

True cooperation must develop between the judge and the other leaders for any reform to succeed. It is like the scales of justice – they need one another for balance.

Governance

Decisions must be made about how the partnership will be governed—who will have the final word on policy and funding issues? By not establishing this, previous efforts have experienced sessions of drifting

governance and leadership

discussion and debate with no resolve. Two common avenues used by collaborations are to either appoint an executive committee or to use a lead agency as the governing body. An executive committee brings broader and more inclusive representation to the final decisions, but this process can sometimes be time consuming. Governance by a lead agency will often result in that agency's commitment to preserving and sustaining the reforms, but can reduce the shared commitment by other agencies to those reforms.

A new culture of decision-making has to be developed and supported so that when there are changes in leadership, such as through a judge's rotation or a chief probation officer's retirement or replacement, the new culture survives. If new leaders emerge, they must quickly be tutored about how business is conducted through the words and actions of the partnership. The structures that are put in place in a reform effort must be sufficiently solid yet sufficiently adaptable to withstand new leadership. As long as the underlying values and principles remain the foundation, the partnership can adjust the structures, if need be. But without the foundation of common principles and values clearly articulated, mission drift will take over and the reform will be subsumed by the status quo.

Subcommittees

Subcommittees provide an excellent means to tackle specific issues, investigate areas of potential change and address system barriers. As subcommittees form, a key to success is to diversify the representation. It is important to consider the disciplines or agencies represented (treatment, juvenile justice, mental health, etc.) and the positions of employees participating (line staff, supervisors, and administrators).

Strategies for Representation

Our efforts included state representatives who were perceived by some as intimidating because they held a great deal of power. These representatives were asked to participate in subcommittees not as leaders but as equal participants, which helped people get away from the "us vs. them" mentality. The state representatives' presence was valuable because they gained a different perspective and were able to identify certain issues in their processes that were hindering local agencies. Other members benefited as well because this outside perspective provided clarity on historical roadblocks that had kept some agencies from working well together.

(Jan Embree-Bever)

governance and leadership

Policies and Procedures

Understanding current rules, regulations, policies and procedures that exist in the arenas where change is desired is essential. Partnerships attempting system reform need to realize that they must either work within the parameters set or endeavor to change those parameters in order to achieve sustained, meaningful success. When considering policy reform, brainstorm with the partnership to anticipate the ripple effects of the possible changes. Some specific issues to examine include:

- job descriptions
- lines of authority with respect to supervising staff
- training line staff
- standards to manage teams
- leadership training

When changes are made it is important to capture them as protocol from that point forward. Any infrastructure change needs to be documented and implemented as policy or it will disappear when strong personalities leave influential positions. There is a verbal history of reform but a written history supports more lasting change.

Helpful Hindsight

If a group decides that a particular position should be filled by a family representative as opposed to a professional, then that distinction must be made part of the official job description, or the innovation will be gone when that family member leaves.

(Carolyn Nava)

Conflict Resolution

The success of most partnerships is dependent on their ability to resolve conflict effectively. The maturity of the partnership can almost always be measured by its ability to bring disagreements into the open and find ways to resolve them rather than to avoid conflict, allow it to create a schism, or promote posturing. In some partnerships, when negotiation does not bring a resolution, the judge is responsible for making a final decision. To avoid that result, resolve conflict successfully and reach a decision on important issues, the partnership is well served that considers the following:

- Conflict is inevitable between diverse people or groups of people. Conflict is not a bad thing in and of itself; managing conflict within a network is essential to its success.
- Conflict can help the network grow if members will allow it and can forego the natural tendency to avoid or suppress it.
- Be aware of the impact of:
 - *Avoidance* – each member must participate in order to solve problems and develop meaningful solutions. If you don't resolve the conflict, the conflict will dissolve you.
 - *Competition* – move disagreements to a conclusion rather than getting caught in a need to control or dominate while problem solving.

governance and leadership

- *Triangulation* – Work to find the middle ground not to split by taking sides.

The success of the Travis County Network was directly attributable to the partners' ability to demonstrate:

- *Compromise*: Find a solution that was acceptable rather than optimal.
- *Collaboration*: Seek the satisfaction of all parties involved by working through differences. This means you can identify and solve problems rather than create larger ones. Collaboration promotes the success of the network and cements the relationships of the partners; it is the bedrock of sustainability.
- *Teamwork*: Accept that each partner has a role and function that must be performed if effective solutions are to be developed. This requires trust and the ability to craft effective solutions based on facts rather than personal preferences.

Helpful Hint

The maturity of a network can almost always be measured by its ability to bring conflict into the open and deal with it effectively. Conflict resolution is the bedrock of the partnership's sustainability.

(Emmitt Hayes, Jr.)

communication

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Once subcommittees get underway, a important element that can be easily overlooked is ensuring a frequent and unencumbered flow of information between them. Establishing quarterly training or information sharing sessions will bring everyone together on a regular basis and help keep subcommittees informed about one another's actions.

Communication Strategy

We held regularly scheduled brown bag lunch meetings for new people coming into the project and anyone else who wanted to attend. These meetings were informal question and answer sessions where new folks could foster relationships and begin to grasp the scope of the collaboration. Other members also realized these meetings were a quick and easy way to catch up with activities.

(Jan Embree-Bever)

EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Communicating the accomplishments of the partnership to the local community is essential to sustaining reforms. Hearing stories about how the reforms positively effected someone's life can go a long way toward energizing people, both in terms of public and internal relations. Capturing those stories with either pictures, videos or in some other vibrant way will create an available library for ongoing use. The key is to present the data in understandable, meaningful and consumable ways so community members know who is involved in the partnership, what the group is doing, why it is important and how to support the efforts.

family and community involvement

When professionals *partner* with families to improve the service delivery system, it is an extraordinary change for both parties. For families, it can mean a shift to trusting that people working in the system truly have their best interests in mind. For professionals, it can mean a shift to believing that parents are doing the best that they can and their insights are needed for success. Without addressing this shift, the effects will likely be superficial and relatively brief.

Listening To One Another

We asked family advocacy groups to conduct cross-disciplinary training for professionals working in the system, which was a powerful experience for both groups. The family members often told painful stories about how they were treated, providing the professionals with an opportunity to recognize the potential differences between what they thought they were doing and what they were actually doing. Additionally, family members had a chance to hear from professionals about issues that sometimes limit their abilities, such as people who take advantage of them or legal and procedural constraints.

(Jan Embree-Bever)

The concept of family involvement can materialize in many different ways. It can include one or more of the following:

- 1) A family seeking services or needing outreach;
- 2) A family with a child involved in the program;
- 3) A family advocacy agency providing support to families;

- 4) Family members hired as staff by the agency.

A Simple Solution

We showed good faith when working with families by quickly addressing an easily solved problem. We had received feedback from families about how easy it was to get lost and swept up in the system. Once a child entered, parents did not understand what was happening to them and they could not effectively advocate for their child. We created a brief, easily understandable brochure that outlined the process of a youth entering and moving through the system. It was a simple solution that showed families we were listening.

(Jan Embree-Bever)

These look different but are all considered *family involvement*. Any one of these family members could sit on planning and advisory committees. Ideally, families will be substantially represented in these partnerships for a well-rounded perspective and participation beyond something perceived as token. Anticipate potential barriers that can arise when inviting families to participate, such as:

- Daytime meetings which can preclude family participation;
- Professional jargon being perceived as intimidating or excluding family members;
- Ill-defined roles or expectations of family members that do not allow for their meaningful engagement;
- Including them on committees without adequately informing them about the

family and community involvement

purpose of the committee and their role
as a family or community
representative;

- Inviting only those easy families that are eager to participate or agree with the professionals.

Also, as difficult as it can be, push for more youth involvement, continue to engage them and make sure they represent the diversity of the initiative—including its geography.

Involve teenagers from the cities, smaller communities, and rural areas to ensure that their voice is culturally representative.

Helpful Hints

In addition to the role of families on policy boards and in decision-making roles in their child's treatment planning, a diverse family voice can come through an advisory committee. This could help provide comprehensive insight to professionals about such issues as assessment, experiences entering and working through the system, and how staff look at strengths and challenges in families. There is a great deal to learn about strengths-based approaches with families and much of what we need to understand only they can teach us.

(Steve Carmichael)

local evaluation

There is an inextricable link between evaluation and a communication strategy and it requires the identification of short-term gains. Although there is obvious value in evaluating the process of the collaboration's efforts, that is essentially the second question to be answered, not the first. The first question needs to address whether the service delivery system is improving in ways that can be measured and is having a positive impact on people's lives. Although not statistically significant, these short-term gains are frequently more relevant to people than showing how much money will be saved years down the line, however important that may be. Some specific short-term measurements that could indicate success include:

- Improved paperwork flow allowing more one-on-one face time with clients and families;
- Decreased discipline problems, incident reports, and behavior management problems;
- Testimonials from family members who are having positive experiences with the system because of changes made.

Obviously, these measurements are not true outcome data, such as relapse and recidivism rates, but they can show a particular intervention is having immediate positive effects on youth and their families, and gain crucial support from the local community. Data from local evaluations can be used to support the project at three different points:

1. To provide the group members with ongoing feedback showing what is working and where changes are needed;
2. To provide the community or internal audiences with meaningful and accessible information about what the project is, why it is important and who it is helping;
3. To provide potential funders with specific data about the project's successes and how it can benefit them.

The added expense of using control groups in evaluations can be challenging, but their benefits should be carefully considered. In the current political environment with funding being slashed in human services, there is a possibility crime and drug rates will increase. This could have a potentially negative impact on Reclaiming Futures' sites. If national rates do indeed increase, a control group could illustrate that Reclaiming Futures' projects were the most successful in reducing recidivism and drug use. There will always be environmental factors that cannot be anticipated or eliminated. With a control group, it is still possible to demonstrate relative success.

sustaining the reforms

FUTURE FUNDING

It is important that the partnership members become experts on agency funding streams related to the target population served. Then all participating partners can bring information regarding money and funding opportunities to the table. But, when seeking funding opportunities from external sources, it is important to stay true to the partnership's common mission, philosophy, and principles. Figure out what makes your collaborative effort unique; develop a grant writing subcommittee that puts time and effort into getting these proposals together and soon they will become very skillful at campaigning for your partnership.

Some examples of potential funding resources include:

- Substance abuse and mental health block grants received by each state as well as ongoing grants from the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention and the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.
- Addiction technology transfer centers around the country that could be used for things like online training in rural areas.
- Children's health insurance funds (CHIP) – do you know your state plan?
- State Medicaid plans
- Edward Byrne grants
- Drug court

It is a natural leap to immediately address continued and future funding when considering how to sustain the reforms made by Reclaiming Futures' sites. Yet it is essential to remember that the current efforts, as well as the lessons shared here by our panelists, play an equally if not more important role in sustaining the reforms. When it comes time to seek future funding, a project that has deep roots in a community—that is perceived as *necessary* to that larger community—will have a significantly stronger case to make in seeking continued funding. All of the lessons shared here will contribute to cultivating those strong roots. Recognizing and working through philosophical differences, building a foundation of clearly articulated principles and values, and acknowledging the significance of all partners in seeking solutions, will establish a framework that can sustain personnel and climate changes. Developing the partnership to include representation that accurately reflects the breadth and depth of the professionals who will be affected by the changes made will result in long term, broad based support for the efforts. Documenting the changes and implementing them as formal policy will ensure the continuation of the reforms. Coordinating a frequent flow of information to the larger population leads to name recognition and will firmly plant the partnership in the minds of community members. Evaluation efforts at the local

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level will keep the partnership in touch with the effects of their work, helping to ground the efforts in the original mission of purpose. And finally, encouraging and fostering active, substantial participation from families and community members will weave the partnership into the fabric of the community, perhaps the most vital factor in sustaining the reforms.

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