



**Children's
Bureau**

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FINAL SYNTHESIS AND SUMMARY REPORT GRANTEE INTERVIEWS



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Center for Children and Family Futures (CCFF) would like to offer a special Thank You to the eight grantees selected to represent the 53 Regional Partnership Grants (RPGs) in this interview process. The lessons garnered from these in-depth interviews will help to further the knowledge and practice of jurisdictions working to improve the lives of, and permanency outcomes for, children and families affected by methamphetamine or other substance abuse. The eight grantees interviewed were:

1. Children's Friend and Service – Providence, RI
2. Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma – Durant, OK
3. Lund Family Center – Burlington, VT
4. Mendocino County Health and Human Service Agency – Ukiah, CA
5. On Track, Inc. – Medford, OR
6. Sacramento Department of Health and Human Services – Sacramento, CA
7. Travis County Health and Human Services – Austin, TX
8. Westchester County – Westchester, NY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 reauthorized the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program, and provided funding over a five-year period to implement a targeted grant program to regional partnerships for the purpose of improving permanency outcomes for children affected by methamphetamine or other substance abuse. In October 2007, the Children’s Bureau, in the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, awarded 53 Regional Partnership Grants to applicants across the country. Grants funded under this initiative—termed the Regional Partnership Grant (RPG) Program and ranging in size from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per year—supported states, tribes, and communities across the nation in developing regional partnerships “to provide, through interagency collaboration and integration of programs and services, services and activities that are designed to increase the well-being of, improve permanency outcomes for, and enhance the safety of children who are in an out-of-home placement or are at risk of being placed in an out-of-home placement as a result of a parent’s or caretaker’s methamphetamine or other substance abuse.” The legislation required the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to submit annual reports to Congress detailing services and activities provided through the grant, performance indicators established under the grant, and progress made by grantees in addressing the needs of families and achieving the goals of child safety, permanence, and family stability. The reports can be viewed at <http://www.cffutures.com/projects/rpg>.

The lead agencies for the 53 grants spanned 29 states and included six tribes. The majority of the grantees (72 percent) provided services both to families with children who had been placed in out-of-home care and those whose children were at risk of removal, but who were still at home in the custody of their parent(s) or caregiver(s). The remaining grantees focused primarily on either in-home or out-of-home cases. The legislation required funding is allocated to partnerships that included, at the minimum, the state child welfare agency and one other agency. At the forefront, all 53 grantees established regional partnerships that extended well beyond the two-partner minimum required by the law, and greatly expanded these partnerships throughout program implementation.

The authorizing legislation required technical assistance (TA) to be provided to grantees. The Center for Children and Family Futures (CCFF) of Lake Forest, California, with partners Planning and Learning Technologies (Pal-Tech) and ICF International were awarded the contract to develop and implement a TA program to support the grant program. Under this contract, and in collaboration with the Children’s Bureau, the TA team developed a performance measurement and reporting system, conducted site visits with all 53 grantees, and provided programmatic and evaluation-related TA to grantees. CCFF operates the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW), a national resource center supported by the Children’s Bureau and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Programmatic TA was provided through the NCSACW as well.

The RPG Program represents the broadest federal program ever launched to assist states, tribes, and communities across the nation to improve the well-being, permanency, and safety outcomes of children who are in, or at-risk of, out-of-home placement as a result of a parent’s or caregiver’s methamphetamine or other substance abuse.

This report was developed using information gathered via in-depth telephone interviews with eight grantees' program directors. The primary goal was to highlight the voices of the individuals working within the RPG collaboratives to capture information on the experiences and lessons learned from working across multiple systems. Additionally this report offers qualitative reflections usually not included in more formal reports and reports to legislative bodies. These interviews focused on the accomplishments and lessons learned through the collaborative process rather than on specific programmatic outcomes. Critical topic areas are highlighted below and summarize these grantees' reflections on the essential ingredients needed in forming collaborative partnerships to strengthen services and improve outcomes for children and families. While these interviews represent only a subset of the 53 Regional Partnership Grantees, based on CCFF's experience in working with well over a hundred sites over the last 15 years, the following prominent themes are representative of successful cross-systems collaboration and practice. Throughout this report, the term RPG sites will be used to reflect the experiences of the eight sites interviewed.

LEADERSHIP

The regional partnerships were large, cross-agency collaboratives comprised of diverse groups of agencies working with children and families via a variety of methods and philosophies. Several key leadership characteristics emerged from these RPG sites, including the importance of having consistent, strong partnership leaders who were empowered to make decisions. It was beneficial to have stakeholders and leaders external to the project who were successfully engaged and who championed the project to reluctant partners and local and state leadership. Engaging strong leadership was essential for keeping collaboratives focused on working toward a mutually defined goal, changing practice, and addressing systemic barriers that arose when working together to improve outcomes for children and families.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Active engagement of key partners from child welfare, substance abuse treatment, courts, and other services was critical to program collaborative success for the RPG sites. The identification and engagement of the right partners for these collaborative efforts was both essential and challenging, and needed to be reevaluated continuously throughout implementation. Engaging and convening critical partners during planning of the grant submission had a significant impact on the success of the collaboration. This front-end effort to develop a grant proposal together was seen as pivotal to establishing trust, developing common goals, working through differences in values and practices inherent in cross-system work, and achieving successful outcomes.

Several critical collaborative components were found to increase successful outcomes at the direct practice level. Co-location of staff was an effective strategy for cross-agency communication and service provision: promoting improved access to services as well as understanding of each other's systems, facilitating sharing of information, and promoting trusting relationships. Having processes and protocols in place that defined roles and responsibilities of partner agencies, and explained processes for working through disagreements, was instrumental in supporting conflict resolution and moving a collaborative forward.

SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Throughout RPG Program implementation, there was an increase in the amount of attention and resources paid to children of parents with substance use disorders, as well as a focused effort to provide family-centered services, resulting in several significant changes in practice. RPG sites identified a significant change in how parents were viewed by providers outside of the substance abuse treatment system, citing a shift from “villainizing” parents to understanding that they had a disease and that with the proper supports, could return to successfully parenting their children. Early childhood service providers were engaged to support efforts to break generational cycles of addiction and poverty and provide services to children in treatment settings. Trauma-focused services were highlighted as a critical component in improving outcomes for children and families.

IMPACT ON BROADER SYSTEMS

Regional Partnership Grantees worked to extend changes beyond their specific projects to address larger system-wide barriers to effective collaboration. Through their efforts to ensure that families received treatment and reunified with their children as quickly and safely as possible, RPGs were successful in shifting their systems to prioritize child welfare clients in need of substance abuse treatment services. Additional system-wide change efforts targeted cross-agency information sharing and increased recognition that the same clients were seen across systems. There was an increased understanding that the multiple, complex needs of families were not able to be met by one agency alone. In working together agencies were able to reduce or eliminate redundancies, wasted resources, and conflicting timelines.

EVALUATION AND DATA

RPG direct service providers and clients benefited from the use of data to inform practice. Shared clients were identified, assessment tools and processes were streamlined to eliminate redundancies for clients, and previously unengaged populations were identified and engaged. Additionally, data on agency and client-level outcomes was utilized to facilitate broader system change by informing others of program and client successes. Data was seen as an asset in helping to engage leaders across communities and states, as it provided concrete evidence of programmatic success and cost-savings.

While RPG sites agreed that data collection and evaluation were critical to their programmatic and systemic success, they also experienced challenges in this area. Ensuring that qualified staffing was available to manage data collection and evaluation was essential to successful information gathering. Technical assistance was seen as critical in helping sites identify what data points should be collected, access the data from substance abuse and child welfare systems, and manage the uploading of information to the RPG databases.

SUSTAINABILITY

Program sustainability is a critical element of programmatic success and should be addressed at the forefront of collaborative partnerships. The most successful RPG partnerships focused on sustainability at the outset of grant implementation, explored, and utilized a variety of funding strategies, including establishing or expanding third-party billing capacity, and continued to look for additional resources and funding streams on an on-going basis. Obtaining leadership and/or stakeholder interest in sustaining the programs beyond the primary partnership required that all members of the partnership saw program sustainability as benefiting their respective systems. When addressing sustainability, collaborative partnerships benefited from shifting their thinking from “my dollars” and “your dollars” to “our dollars.” Reaching a level of collaboration across the partnership that had system change impacts resulted in better sustainability outcomes.

RPG PROGRAM AS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The program directors identified the RPG Program as a learning experience for providers, and stated it benefited them as well as the clients they served. Bi-annual national meetings that included all 53 grantees were seen as a tremendous asset by grantees. RPG sites viewed these meetings as enhancing the RPG experience since grantees were able to share innovations, challenges, and successes. Technical assistance provided to RPG grantees by the NCSACW, and support from the Children’s Bureau federal project officers, were considered invaluable components of the process, without which the RPG sites would not have felt as empowered to take the necessary risks and make the changes needed for real, systemic changes.

The implementation of these elements of successful collaborative practice required active engagement of key partners, lead agencies that were willing to reach beyond their agency and respective system boundaries, and an intentional and consistent focus on evaluating how the partnership were functioning in meeting the needs of children and families. These program directors viewed the programs as broader than their role as lead agencies. They were able to see these partnerships as agents for broader systems change. They were able to use the primary collaborative processes described in this report—increased trust based on relationships across agencies and increased accountability through data—to achieve better client outcomes and systems change. It was the interaction and interrelationships of these key processes that resulted in successful programs for the eight RPG sites highlighted in this report.

This report provides an important contribution to the field by reflecting these program directors’ experiences and key lessons in implementing services in partnerships that included child welfare, substance abuse, courts, mental health, and other human services systems. The commentary and insights from these project leaders are not usually found in more formal progress or evaluation reports. These interviews provide unique insights about the importance of working collaboratively across multiple systems to challenge business as usual and facilitating and sustaining policy and practice changes that improve outcomes for children and families.

INTRODUCTION

The Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006 reauthorized the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program and provided funding over a five-year period through the Regional Partnership Grant (RPG) program. The RPG Program's purpose was to implement a targeted grant program to regional partnerships for the purpose of improving permanency outcomes for children affected by methamphetamine or other substance abuse. Funding through this program was to be used to address a variety of common systemic and practice challenges that serve as barriers to optimal family outcomes. The challenges include:

- Recruitment, engagement and retention of parents in substance abuse treatment
- Differences in professional perspectives and training
- Conflicting timeframes across the systems to achieve outcomes
- Chronic service shortages in both child welfare services and substance abuse treatment systems.

In addition to direct funds being allocated to grantees, the reauthorization language called for technical assistance (TA) to be provided to the grantees. The Center for Children and Family Futures (CCFF) of Lake Forest, California, with partners including Planning and Learning Technologies (Pal-Tech) and ICF International were awarded the contract to develop and implement a TA program to support the grant program. Under this contract, and in collaboration with the Children's Bureau, the TA team developed a performance measurement and reporting system, conducted site visits with all 53 grantees, and provided programmatic and evaluation-related TA to grantees. CCFF operates the National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW), a national resource center supported by the Children's Bureau and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Programmatic TA was provided through the NCSACW as well.

The RPG Program represents the broadest federal program ever launched to assist states, tribes, and communities across the nation to improve the well-being, permanency, and safety outcomes of children who are in, or at-risk of, out-of-home placement as a result of a parent's or caregiver's methamphetamine or other substance abuse.

In October 2007, the Children's Bureau, in the Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services, awarded 53 Regional Partnership Grants to applicants across the country. Grant awards ranged from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 per year. The legislation required the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to submit annual reports to Congress detailing services and activities provided through the grant, performance indicators established under the grant, and progress made by grantees in addressing the needs of families and achieving the goals of child safety, permanence, and family stability. The reports can be viewed at <http://www.cffutures.com/projects/rpg>.

The lead agencies for the 53 Regional Partnerships Grants spanned 29 states and included six tribes. The majority of the grantees (72 percent) provided services both to families with children who had been placed in out-of-home care and those whose children were at risk of removal, but

who were still at home in the custody of their parent(s) or caregiver(s). The remaining grantees focused primarily on either in-home or out-of-home cases. The legislation required funding is allocated to partnerships that included, at the minimum, the state child welfare agency and one other agency. At the forefront, all 53 grantees established regional partnerships that extended well beyond the two-partner minimum required by the law, and greatly expanded these partnerships throughout program implementation. Seventy percent of the partnerships consisted of 10 or more member agencies and organizations working together to provide services to improve outcomes for families. The service areas represented in the RPG partnerships included: child welfare; substance abuse treatment; courts; mental health; health; criminal justice; education; early childhood development; employment; housing; and other community-based organizations.

The RPG Program period ended in 2012, though 32 grantees continued to operate past this date due to no-cost extensions approved by the Children's Bureau Grants Management Unit.

This report provides a summary and synthesis of interviews conducted with program directors from eight of the 53 grantees. The interviews attempted to capture and document accomplishments and lessons learned by these eight grantees. Grantees were invited to participate in the interviews for reasons that included:

- Leadership shown by program staff
- Implementation of innovative program strategies
- Use of data to drive decisions and improve services
- Exceptional efforts to develop and maintain the cross-system collaborative
- Sustainability of services
- Services to children

This report provides an important contribution to the field by reflecting these program directors' experiences and key lessons in implementing services in partnerships that included child welfare, substance abuse, courts, mental health, and other human services systems. The commentary and insights from these project leaders are not usually found in more formal progress or evaluation reports. These interviews provide unique insights about the importance of working collaboratively across multiple systems to challenge business as usual and facilitating and sustaining policy and practice changes that improve outcomes for children and families.

METHODOLOGY

This report was developed using information gathered via in-depth telephone interviews with the program directors of eight RPG sites selected to represent the 53 funded RPG sites. Conducted over the course of two months, these structured interviews gathered personal insight from the RPG program directors, and in some cases, other members of the local RPG team.

Senior staff from CCFB and Children’s Bureau developed a set of questions designed to elaborate on, or enhance the information gathered through the RPG grantees’ Semi-Annual Progress Reports (SAPR). Interview questions (Appendix A), focused discussions primarily around the key topics presented in the Key Findings section of this report.

Prior to the interview with each site, the interviewer conducted a review of each site’s Final Progress Report and most recent SAPR. The interviewer made reasonable attempts to ensure that efforts were not duplicated by asking for information that was not found in the SAPR and Final Reports. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. CCFB staff organized the transcripts into the key topics areas and summarized the feedback from all of the program directors. Direct quotes from the interviewees are included to represent the voices of the people who are working hard to address challenges and barriers to services and improve outcomes for children and families.

INTERVIEWED SITES

The eight RPG sites interviewed are listed below in alphabetical order by the RPG grantee’s lead agency name:

1. Children’s Friend and Service – Providence, RI
2. Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma – Durant, OK
3. Lund Family Center – Burlington, VT
4. Mendocino County Health and Human Service Agency – Ukiah, CA
5. On Track, Inc. – Medford, OR
6. Sacramento Department of Health and Human Services – Sacramento, CA
7. Travis County Health and Human Services – Austin, TX
8. Westchester County – Westchester, NY

KEY FINDINGS

Several key topics areas were prominent in the eight in-depth interviews. These were:

1. Leadership
2. Collaborative Practice
3. Services to Children and Families
4. Impact on Broader Systems
5. Evaluation and Data
6. Sustainability
7. RPG Program as a Learning Experience

1. LEADERSHIP

The RPG projects required outstanding leadership from each of the 53 sites. For some projects, leadership was exercised from the state level, whereas in other projects it was within a single county, region, or community. Regardless of where leadership was derived, it was an essential component for the RPG projects. Many of the sites that emerged with sustainable projects had a charismatic program director. Additionally, many had a team with the ability to communicate and work across multiple systems, engage and retain other key stakeholders, develop consensus and gain community support. Without exception, there were dedicated resources allocated to lead the RPG initiative. The most common themes interviewees identified in regards to leadership were:

- The collaborative needs a strong leader
- Engage leaders who are decision makers in their own organizations
- Identify a Champion
- Address and lead sustainability planning

“It’s all relationship based and based on trust. And we had five years to develop that sort of trust and support and we needed it!”

The Collaborative Needs a Strong Leader

Collaboration at the scope of which the RPG Program was working to achieve—including practice and systems level changes—truly needed a strong and effective leader to keep all partners moving toward their mutual goals.

While the collaborative itself can function as leadership, one grantee noted that there needed to be an individual, who was a strong leader,

“...someone that's going to bring them together and help address the issues and keep the group healthy and solid, moving forward. It seems like a small thing, but it is a huge thing. If you don't have someone who owns that role and responsibility, your group will drift and fall apart.”

This person should have respectability within the community and be able to facilitate getting people together. As one grantee noted, the leadership was “bringing all the voices to the table.”

Another grantee focused on a “two-pronged” approach to leadership. “I had to look at this with a two-pronged approach, top-down and bottom-up. I made sure there was a parallel process at both the top levels and case worker level.”

Engage Leaders Who Are Decision Makers in Their Own Organizations

Several grantees noted the importance of engaging individuals in the collaborative process who were top leaders and decision makers in their own organizations. This was important for their projects because engaging these leaders, “keeps them engaged in the process, they can make decisions at the table, and they can disseminate a view, a philosophy that has to sort of permeate the partnership.”

The voices of the clients helped some sites engage leadership in the collaborative. A great strategy was,

“...showing them what's been happening on the ground through the voice of the children of the parents who can stand up at the end of their court process and say, ‘This is what this meant to me, and this is how my life has changed as a result of what you guys are doing.’”

This grantee felt that including the voice of the client, “creates absolute energy, and fuels people wanting to do more, participate more, because of what they hear.”

“What we were trying to accomplish was a sea change in terms of attitude, practices and values and so we really needed top down.”

Identify a Champion

The RPG sites interviewed each identified a champion in their community and reported that this helped move the attitude of other people, particularly those in the same field as the champion. One grantee experienced success with a champion who was a judge. A champion at this level was able to support the program and outcomes for children by recommending placement of the children with the mothers when the grantee was able to convince the judge the children would be safe.

Another grantee identified a grass roots group that served as their champion. They found that this organization had a strong voice in the community and were already successful in moving policy change. This champion was able to support the grantee in accessing legislators to inform them about their program.

A champion can also be the person to push the collaborative to address challenging partners or situations. One interviewee explained that they were having trouble engaging the defense attorneys in the collaborative. “There were philosophical issues...and it was tough for some of the partners to really get their mind around that.” They stated that their judge was a champion and told them, “Figure it out! Get them to the table and figure it out.”

“Once you get your foot in the door, people did not disagree with the message, but you actually had to get in the door. In order to get in the door, you had to find someone who could get that appointment, and we were able to find people who were able to do that.”

Address and Lead Sustainability Planning

A common theme throughout the interviews was the importance of the leadership in beginning and continuing the conversation regarding sustainability. One grantee stated, “We talked a lot about sustainability from the get-go. We thought about sustainability, not about let's keep the money.” In this case, the grantee leadership introduced sustainability early on and was able to continue it over the course of their project.

Another grantee stated that they had five years to develop the trust necessary to sustain the program, but the conversation about sustainability needed to start early. They also spoke about the need to promote the collaboration rather than the services being provided. “We’re not trying to keep the agencies alive; we’re trying to serve families.”

Lack of leadership was a significant challenge to sustainability planning for one site. “We've always had discussions about sustainability, and they've just never stepped up to the plate...the final piece about let's figure out a way to make this happen just wasn't there.” They identified staff turnover and cuts as another challenge to successful sustainability planning.

2. COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

The RPG Program required that child welfare agencies work in a collaborative manner with at least one other partner agency to address the needs of the shared families they served. By the end of the grant period, 75 percent of the regional partnerships had 10 or more partners involved in the collaborative.

Interviewees spoke about the importance of understanding each other’s roles and responsibilities, having regular meetings with partners to discuss what was working and what was not working, how the referral process was going, and what each partner knew they needed to do to improve the outcomes for children and families.

RPG sites participating in these interviews identified many strategies they utilized in order to support collaborative practice. These included:

- Engage and convene stakeholders/partners during the planning of the grant
- Identify and engage the right partners
- Establish trust at all levels
- Formalize the partnership
- Identify the goals of the collaborative and revisit these goals
- Eliminate the silos
- Develop a process for conflict resolution

Engage and Convene Stakeholders/Partners During the Planning of the Grant

The RPG sites that were most successful in making sustainable changes were those that worked hard to bring all key partners to the table at the very beginning—during planning and preparation of the grant proposal. While involved partners sometimes changed throughout grant implementation, having the key partners involved at the outset was seen as key to a collaborative’s success.

The development of an Advisory Board prior to the grant was identified by one grantee as one of the most important decisions of the grant process. “We captured their interest and what was important to them from the beginning. And then we gave all partners equal say at the table regardless of how much of the work in the grant they were doing.”

Another site explained that in a previous grant they could not engage a community partner, but that they took a very different approach with the RPG grant.

“I think that the most important decision we made was the amount of time and effort that was put in at the initial planning phase of this project. We did focus groups and met with our planning partners and said, ‘We are interested in applying for this grant, what do we think our greatest needs are?’ We began the collaborative process with the writing of the grant. But I still think that the most important thing we did was at the kick-off meeting that day, the level of effort that really needed to be invested at the front end of the project.”

Identify and Engage the Right Partners

Program directors spoke about retaining and recruiting partners throughout the RPG grant. At times grantees had to engage new partners to be able to meet the needs of families, while at other times they realized that there were partners who no longer needed to be at the table.

Grantees explained that getting the right partners involved was challenging and required time:

“We decided that although we knew it was going to be difficult, that we were going to set out to make a real collaboration of partners and services for our target population. I think that has been

one of the biggest lasting legacies of the RPG grant. Because many times those directors and departments did not talk with each other and definitely did not share a vision for the work that we were doing.”

Successful RPG sites made efforts to reach out to a variety of agencies and organizations who were working on behalf of children in their communities, including CASAs, foster care organizations, and Guardian Ad items. One grantee stated,

“The Foster Care Association was another one we brought in. The president of that organization was incredibly helpful in helping to change and support us in the trainings that we did to change the way foster parents viewed the biological parents; to see them as somebody that the child is going to return to, not to "villainize" them. We taught them to build on their strengths and keep them involved and mentor them and their children. It’s not just their foster child but the entire family that you’re mentoring. We also brought in the District Attorney. We had the DA assigned to juvenile cases on the team along with the Public Defender and they handled the dependency cases. And though they’re adversarial at times, they did what was best for the children. They worked out agreements while supporting the safety of children and the best interest of the client at the same time. They learned how to work within those boundaries because they recognized that the family is best served by strengthening the family, not punishing it.”

Establish Trust at All Levels

Throughout the RPG sites, there was often a pre-existing level of distrust across agencies and service providers. Interviewees spoke to trust being both a critical component and outcome of the RPG collaborative.

The essential element of trust that was needed among each and all levels of the collaborative partnership was described by one interviewee:

“The biggest hurdle that we needed to overcome was developing that relationship of trust. When we started the project we had buy in from leadership, but we all recognized that our staff was not just going to follow because we thought it was a great idea. So, we knew that we were going to have to stay the course, and build that over time. I think that we've done that.”

Interviewees spoke to how working collaboratively and receiving TA allowed them to understand each other’s systems, timelines, and mandates. These opportunities helped them develop trust in those other agencies and workers, and fostered a culture of providing collaborative services for families. This shift in trust and collaboration was described by one grantee who stated there was, “...a lot more, okay, this family is struggling with addiction stuff. I know that that's not my area of expertise, and I need to ask for help...I need to get this case to [substance abuse provider], and then we'll figure out what we're going to do.” This was a substantial shift in the way many of these jurisdictions had been operating.

One interviewee explained how the results of the RPG collaborative changed perceptions about, and trust in, service providers within their jurisdiction:

“I’ll give you an example. So historically our behavioral health department, probably prior to

five years ago, didn't have the best reputation within our [jurisdiction] or within our local service providers. So [another provider] and I are in D.C., and there are some people there that are from our own [jurisdiction] that work for social services. They are sitting around a table, and they don't really know who we are and we don't really know who they are, and they start bashing behavior health and then they said, 'Those [RPG grantee] people, now they follow through with what they say.' We are sitting there at the table and that made me feel pretty good because we had changed. We'd changed the way that business was done in collaboration with their programs. They said, '[RPG grantee]', they are good people. They do what they are supposed to do.' And now, several years later, we've been able to translate that to all of behavioral health, which makes me feel proud."

This change in perception across agencies was also evident in the following description. "On the local level we have seen a change in attitude by our primary substance abuse provider. When we started, they dreaded the child welfare clients coming in because of the way they had to interact with child welfare. Now they are fully supportive of our population and... they hired a case manager specifically to help our participants connect with resources. I think they are probably committed to that as well. That is an amazing change for them."

"I can tell you that when I started my career in the district office as a child abuse investigator, there was no way that I would have thought of bringing in someone from the treatment world out on an investigation with me. You just wouldn't do that, because we needed to make sure kids were safe."

Formalize the Partnership

The importance of formalizing the collaborative partnerships was highlighted throughout the interviews. One grantee spoke to the importance of developing Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and explained how their jurisdiction created a charter for the collaborative:

"...developing really strong MOU's that are well defined, that we can return to if we need to. That has been useful to us on at least a few occasions. The other thing that we did locally was creating a charter that brought together a vision and a mission for the drug courts and for parenting recovery as it supports the drug courts, so that everyone was marching to the same drum beat, so to speak. Everyone was moving in the same direction and had the same values. It also articulated or documented the structure of how our court was going to function and how our grant was going to function in relation to that. Creating an operations committee, and advisory committee, the charter outlined who would comprise those committees and it resulted in signatures of agencies showing their level of commitment to this project. This was a way to bind everybody together and the process itself was really rich and meaningful, might I say laborious and hard. It let us air out some of the issues, differences and concerns that came with bringing together various entities with differing mission statements. It helped us work through some of that so we could come together as a group."

Identify the Goals of the Collaborative and Revisit These Goals

It was seen as important for partners to not only identify the goals of the collaborative, but also for leadership to be flexible enough to revisit those goals as necessary. One interviewee spoke to the identification of a collaborative goal that was broad enough to ensure buy-in from all partner agencies, so that they could work together toward this collaborative goal while also serving their individual agency or organizational goals.

“What I think people should be cognizant of is you create a goal, a sort of an overarching goal that all of these disparate partners have an interest in. You know, increasing the treatment gets you part way, increasing mental health, increasing domestic violence services—but everyone will buy into the promise that you can change the lives and histories of children who are disadvantaged. Maybe it is reducing foster care in general, whatever it is, you get your principle wide enough that DAs and PDs and CASAs, everybody can buy off on it. It really is developing goals that they can’t reach by themselves. I mean, child welfare needs to reduce foster care but they can’t do it without us. We can’t do it without them. We can’t return children more quickly without the court’s involvement...and so I think it’s really important to come up with something that people can enthusiastically buy off on and helps them reach their agency goal while they’re reaching their partnership’s goal, because that keeps them invested in it.”

Revisiting these goals continued the engagement process and provided encouragement for new partners as well.

Eliminate the Silos

Prior to the development and implementation of these regional partnerships, many jurisdictions were working in silos. There was no cross-agency communication or even acknowledgement that they were serving the same families. This insular mode of operation could result in conflicting requirements and timelines, missed opportunities for families, duplication of services, and wasted resources. The RPGs broke down these silos.

“We are no longer operating in a silo. We now have a level of communication, cooperation, and mutual respect between the different disciplines that didn’t exist before. You just see the openness and a desire to understand and work together that did not exist before RPG. I think that comes from the idea that everyone has their nose to the grindstone, working really hard to do what they are obligated to do and they don’t have time to look up. I think what people here found when they looked up was that they are not alone. Working in isolation is really hard.”

At least two of the grantees described co-location as one effective strategy for reducing silos. They explained that co-location promoted improved access to services and understanding of other systems, facilitated sharing of information, and promoted trusting relationships, which resulted in free exchange of information across systems.

One interview spoke to the bonds forged between workers across agencies,

“...on a basic, individual, grassroots level in terms of working in one system, working with another worker in another system, I think we have forged a stronger bond. Our cross systems

training has allowed us to get a better understanding of each other's role, in what we do and how we work with a family. So, there's an increased appreciation...There is a better understanding of the child welfare system. A better understanding of family dynamics and how it plays into recovery, and a willingness to do things differently."

Develop a Process for Conflict Resolution

Interviewees spoke to the need for working through differences in opinion and values. They stated that having processes and protocols in place helped to reduce conflict, support conflict resolution, and move the collaborative forward.

One grantee noted that seeing families fight through their court battles made them realize that there were other ways to address the conflict and that this had to be applied to the collaborative as well.

"By building this partnership, people work with each other very, very differently. There are definitely disagreements, and there are definitely pieces of things that we struggle with, but we worked hard to develop a process for conflict resolution— really sitting down and saying that when we disagree, what are we going to do? How are we going to make sure that we can move beyond this?...It is not good enough to just say that we value that, and it will be fine. We need to actually have a process and we literally mapped out flowcharts of how information was going to flow. I do think that one of the most critical components is that planning."

3. SERVICES TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Interviewees all agreed that there was a growth in the amount of attention and resources paid to children of parents with substance use disorders over the life of their projects. They also recognized the need to align services and change practices to meet the needs of everyone in the family. Services had to be family-centered, which required providers to collaborate across disciplines to address the concurrence of domestic violence, homelessness, developmental delays, and mental illness.

Interview themes addressing services to children and families included:

- Change practice
- Partner with early childhood service providers
- Maintain and strengthen bonds between parents and children

Change Practice

Working to provide collaborative, family-centered services required a significant change in practice for many RPG sites. This change in practice often required a shift in thinking about the families being served.

In one county, the grantee spoke about a huge change in practice, stating that, "The fact that we are letting moms take vulnerable babies with them into treatment, I mean this did not happen before the grant, it just didn't happen. The babies went to foster care and didn't get to see their

moms. Moms had to have clean drug screens and be successful in treatment. So you have these babies removed at birth and their mom is thinking I'll never see them again. Now, they are actually in the hospital with their babies, learning how to be clean and sober, learning the steps to recovery and learning how to bond and connect with their children - which is a huge change in practice."

Another grantee stated, "We had a hard time figuring out what to do with the babies [of substance abusing women in the treatment program] and how to integrate them into treatment with moms. We thought that babies were a distraction from the mother's treatment. We didn't realize that effective treatment included both mom and baby. Our treatment teams are bending over backwards to meet those needs. We have done a complete shift."

Expedited referrals were noted as one of several positive programmatic changes in one RPG site. The interviewee stated, "Within [our jurisdiction] we have seen big changes. We improved our relationship with the community health center because we rely on them for crisis stabilization. Pre-RPG, a referral to substance abuse [treatment] could take weeks. That has changed. Our turnaround times have steadily improved each year. Even the billing categories they have put in place support treating the entire family."

Another grantee focused their efforts on improving the connection to service providers rather than adding of more services. This partnership used available data to increase and improve service utilization. The grantee stated, "We kept saying, why aren't these kids getting PCIT (Parent-Child Interaction Therapy) or other parenting classes, and we discovered that we have lots of providers. We weren't getting the kids out there and getting the [caseworkers] to use the services they had." Because these children were covered by Medi-Cal, these services were billable services.

"I also know that before I knew anything about treatment, and I was doing child abuse and neglect, I wrote treatment plans all of the time that set-up a family for failure, because I didn't understand that substance dependence was a chronic relapsing disease. And I didn't understand that people could parent their children and still struggle with addiction. Both things could be true."

Partner with Early Childhood Service Providers

Several grantees identified the importance of partnering with and learning from early childhood education providers. Many noted that the shift to mothers entering treatment with infants required them to seek more information about the needs of infants specifically, and the 0-5 year old population more generally. One grantee had been working with children 0-5 for some time and stated, "I think for me seeing how we have been able to really impact children of those ages has been huge." They have continued to work with this population and identified significant impacts on families and the children.

Another grantee engaged partners with expertise in early childhood development who initially responded with reluctance:

“For us, it was really important for the earliest childhood partners to be engaged, and I think initially they felt, ‘This isn't really about us, why do we need to be there?’ But it is about them, because we were serving the children of these families, and we really did some important work there with that project, because we did get them to the table, and they did see their investments.”

The involvement of these partners was important as prevention for the children, “...if we're truly going to break generational cycles of addiction and poverty.”

Partnering with a crisis relief nursery that provided developmental services to the children receiving services at the treatment center, was a new strategy employed by another site. This grantee also identified that future planning included bringing services on-site so that the child services would also be provided within the treatment center.

Maintain and Strengthen Bonds Between Parents and Children

A large component of providing family-centered services was working to maintain and strengthen the bonds between parents and children. According to one site,

“The premise of our work was the separation of children from parents to whom they're going to return. The separation is traumatic, even if short-lived. If they're going to go back anyway, let's try to keep them together. If they have to be temporarily removed, then keep the biological parents not only in substantive involvement with the child...and mentoring and teaching them how to parent. Teach them so there is consistency between what the foster parent does and what the biological parent does when they take the child home. For example, when they were raising their kids in one church or another or not eating meat and they go to a foster home where they did both of those things. In the new model they were allowed to substantively stay involved and help make more decisions in their children's lives, which really helped and CASAs support that. Now CASAs visit and they encourage biological parents to be involved with foster parents, which is really different than it used to be.”

Providing trauma-focused treatment was identified as an important component in supporting families in the child welfare and substance abuse systems. One grantee explained that, “As a part of the RPG grant we were able to do a lot of training. And so we did a lot of trauma-focused training, we did a lot of training on the impact of parental substance abuse on children and their development. We were really able to increase our understanding of that as a program immensely, and I do believe that providers are a lot more aware of that...That was a piece we didn't have previously and I think that we're going to see way better data that has an improved outcome.”

4. IMPACT ON BROADER SYSTEMS

The grantees that participated in the interviews reported a number of ways in which they were able to impact the systems that they worked with and within. They also identified successful strategies for impacting system reform as well as suggestions for other grantees working with families affected by substance abuse.

One grantee spoke to the impact upon other systems when stating, “I think through this opportunity and through this RPG, in addition to helping families—which was the primary goal, we’ve been able to really change the way things are done. Not just within our program, our staff, this RPG, but within the whole behavioral health department, within health services as a whole in our [jurisdiction]. And then also with local providers, with state providers, with private practice providers.”

The broader systems impacts made through the RPGs are summarized in the areas detailed below:

- Prioritize child welfare clients in need of substance abuse treatment services
- Impact child welfare policy regarding reunification timelines
- Influence the system through additional requirements in contracts
- Increase recognition that the same clients are seen across systems
- Increase availability of evidence-based programs
- Facilitate statewide engagement

Prioritize Child Welfare Clients in Need of Substance Abuse Treatment Services

Prioritizing child welfare clients for substance abuse treatment services has been a significant piece of the work for the RPGs. They worked to ensure that families were able to receive treatment and reunify with their children in as timely a manner as possible, and they used various approaches to shift the system to this prioritization. For one grantee, this prioritization happened as a result of, “...really specific efforts on the part of the treatment system to find other resources or to make sure that beds are a priority for women and children versus any other folks who need services. It shows the treatment system’s awareness of the need for women with dependent children to get services in a prioritized way.”

This prioritization happened in the local office for another grantee who stated that it required constant training but, “...when child welfare is working with a family that has substance abuse, they know who they can call, and they can hand that to somebody, and feel okay about that. So, the families are getting much more access to family treatment. And the kids are getting screened and into treatment much quicker. That is, without a doubt, what is happening in our county, and that's what we're working to spread across the state.” The grantee also reported that the Human Services agency was working with the Deputy Commissioner of Drug and Alcohol Programs to identify a more formal process for prioritizations.

Another interviewee highlighted the commitment of their child welfare agency to families with substance abuse issues. “Locally we have seen that our child welfare group created a specialized unit to support the Drug Court, and has maintained that through the course of the grant and has committed to maintaining it after the grant is no longer there. For us, this means they are dedicating positions to this work. It’s a pretty big commitment to do that and maintain it.”

“If you are involved in the child welfare system, and you have a substance abuse issue, you are at the top of the list to be served. That certainly helps, because there is not enough money at all to reach the demand we have in our state.” The grantee noted that they are able to serve about 25 percent of what they perceive to be the need in the state so the prioritization is important to this region.

Impact Child Welfare Policy Regarding Reunification Timelines

One grantee was successful in working with child welfare to shift thinking about the safety and placement of children involved with the family drug court. The grantee reported that this shift was challenging for all partners and involved the timelines that began once a child was reunified. Per state law, “...if a reunification occurs it can be called a returning monitor which means there [are] only six months left in the lawsuit, if the state has taken custody.” This represented a challenge for the program as it worked to reunify children quickly and also develop a family court model that required 12-18 months of participation from the parent. With this timeline in place, many parents were not successful in completing the program. The grantee decided that it would be most effective to work with child welfare to impact their policy regarding child removals as this is where the process of reunification began. The grantee was able to work with child welfare to develop a plan for the children not to enter state custody.

“CPS does not have custody of the children initially and we won’t take any cases where that is the case. So if the children or child is placed outside of the home initially, it has to be with a relative that is a court ordered placement or a voluntary safety plan placement. Most of our families do have relative options and do have family support. All of the cases start as court order services and then continue in that manner. This permits for the longer timeline, and allows the family to participate in the drug court program model as designed. The grantee reported that this shift was difficult and required trust between child welfare and treatment providers. “We are going to go ahead and place these children in treatment with their mothers and trust that the moms will keep them there safely and that the treatment partner will manage and oversee that.”

Influence the System Through Additional Requirements in Contracts

At one RPG site, the grantee was able to create system change in their region by requiring the identification of a performance measure for family-focused treatment in contracts with each of their contractors. The grantee reported that they asked contractors to identify specific activities that they would be implementing.

Examples of these family-focused services included providing more trauma groups and implementing a Pediatric Symptoms Checklist. The grantee reported that they intended to “raise the bar” as the years progressed.

Increase Recognition That the Same Clients are Seen Across Systems

As noted above, prior to the RPG Program—when many jurisdictions had agencies working in silos—there was little or no discussion of how the agencies and organizations were often working with the same families. The individuals being served were viewed as “my

client/family” or “their client/family,” rather than as “our client/family.” The RPG projects changed this myopic view of the client.

One grantee stated, “People are at least talking. There is at least a mutual identification that our families are your families, and your families are our families.” This increased communication about these shared families facilitated the identification of the high resource users and allowed for better planning and identification of their needs.

Through the regional partnerships, jurisdictions were able to both discuss the complex needs of shared families and work together to ensure that the competing needs and timelines were mitigated. A grantee spoke to the complexity of the service needs in saying, “I kept hearing it echoed throughout the whole five years was the fact that these families don’t fit in nice neat boxes. They are complicated, they are very complex, they have multiple needs, competing needs, competing timelines, etc.”

Recognizing and identifying the shared clients highlighted the need for shared tools and procedures when working with families across multiple systems. As one interviewee explained,

“...having tools that are shared, so we are not making the families do similar things over and over again. We have to develop something at the front end that works for all for the systems, so it’s an assessment that meets all of the criteria that we need for treatment, but also gives the family support, and the family educator, and the case manager, the information they need. Developing those at the front end, I think that not only helps to alleviate the redundancy of work that we ask families to do, it also clarifies communication, which helps everybody down the road.”

Increase Availability of Evidence-Based Programs

The use of evidenced-based programs to serve children and families increased over the course of the RPG Program. Interviewees spoke to how the RPG helped sites learn more about, and train others in the use of, evidence-based practices. Grantees were able to implement new evidence-based programs in their jurisdictions, most frequently in the areas of trauma services and parenting.

One grantee noted that they were able to impact the local service delivery system by increasing the availability and training around evidence-based programs. “We have trained a lot of our providers in the evidence based program Seeking Safety, [and have assisted] them in implementation. We have four or five that are offering that curriculum to their client population. Not just to women, but to men.”

The fiscal climate, and resulting budget crisis, was a catalyst for one grantee to focus attention on evidence-based programs.

“...child welfare and all of the budget crises in [our state]...I’m going to try and find the silver lining here, but it has helped us as a state. Particularly child welfare really tried to start taking a look at, everyone is taking a look at the evidence-based practice, and looking at effective practice. We may not all be using the same measuring sticks, but I think five years ago, we

would say we were evidence-based right from the beginning, and people would be like, ‘Yeah, but so what?’ Now it carries a lot different kind of weight than it used to.”

Facilitate Statewide Engagement

Obtaining leadership and stakeholder interest in sustaining the programs beyond the primary partnership required that all members of the partnership saw program sustainability as benefiting their respective systems. Statewide efforts required portability and participation from all areas of the state. Many of the RPG sites were successful in engaging state leaders, and at least one site involved the Child Welfare Central Office. Others engaged leadership support from regional or community-specific areas including that of judges, physicians, and commissioners.

One grantee spoke to the process of statewide engagement, “We knew to get teeth, and to do the best for [our jurisdiction’s] children and families. We needed to make this something that was portable and could be rolled out state-wide, and the legislation around it needed to make that clear from day one so that we could bring people on board from across the state.”

The challenge of engaging the state leaders was evident in one jurisdiction. “In hindsight, I wish what we would have done is create a better partnership from the local to the state level. In our community and our state it is not easy to do so we were really pulled in many different directions while managing this grant and getting the project running and being successful. In hindsight it would have been time well spent to establish that relationship and see if we could try and change some of the funding patterns at a state level. I don't know if we could have, but that is going to be a challenge for us down the road.”

5. EVALUATION AND DATA

Data collection and evaluation were a critical component of the RPG implementation. Sites were required to submit data pertaining to 23 performance indicators two times per year, as well as to submit Semi-Annual Progress Reports and Final Reports. This prioritization of data collection from the federal funders resulted in the largest data set ever gathered in the United States for this population. Interviewees spoke to the following aspects of the RPG’s focus on data collection and evaluation:

- Use data to inform direct practice
- Use data to facilitate broader system change
- Recognize the challenges of data collection and evaluation

Use Data to Inform Direct Practice

The comprehensive information and evaluation data gathered by the RPG sites provided important evidence of families’ challenges and the RPG projects’ role in improving the lives of children and families. Interviewees spoke to how data collection and sharing helped to streamline services, shape and change practice and engage participants.

One grantee discussed how data informed direct practice in their jurisdiction:

“It also helped us go into a direction that we wanted to go in, knowing that we were able to make some changes. Data-collection, there was so much emphasis on how to collect data across systems in a much different way...The emphasis on data helping to shape practice, and practice shaping how we collect the data. The back and forth relationship was substantial too. It was something that was incredibly helpful in our project...It was great to have the data given to us.”

A mandate for electronic health records helped another site sustain services in their jurisdiction. The grantee noted that the system made it easier for both clients and administrators. “Everyone is on there, everyone is sharing information. It makes the process so much simpler for clients coming in, you know to different programs, because they are not going to have to repeat that information over and over again.”

The new emphasis on data collection was pivotal in helping one grantee realize that they needed to do a better job of engaging and targeting services to a group they had previously not been reaching. “Initially we had a very challenging time engaging fathers in this process. So the data piece was very huge with that. How do we make changes in our process to make improvements in engaging men and dads?” The interviewee went on to say that even during a time of tremendous budget reductions, “...adding the father services is a commitment to keep as much there as possible. What funding and such can be rearranged to make sure it's still there?”

Use Data to Facilitate Broader System Change

The comprehensive information garnered through data collection by the RPG sites was seen by interviewees as an asset to broader system change. The grantee who benefited from a shared electronic record system noted how this system will provide data that can be pivotal in the development of future grants and program improvements.

Sharing the data collected through the RPG Program helped one site engage the leadership in their jurisdiction. “The other effective strategy was to publish the data. We called them One Pagers, so we used forms that just had data points, and they were pretty graphic and nicely laid out, and we made sure that they kept knowing what we were doing and what the data were showing.”

Finally, one grantee spoke to how the RPG data collection component helped them to, “...see the benchmarks that we were achieving because of the data collection, and the areas that we needed to shore up.”

“We made sure that they kept knowing what we were doing and what the data were showing.”

Recognize the Challenges of Data Collection

While data collection was viewed as an asset in many ways, grantees also noted the challenges that came along with the data collection and evaluation components of the RPG Program. Some of the challenges included:

- Identify the data to be collected
- Dedicate sufficient staff and funding to collect and upload data to the RPG data collection system, and conduct program evaluation

One grantee discussed the importance of determining what data would be used at the local level, when explaining how this was not something they were attentive to early enough in the process.

“We would have established local data from the very beginning. This is an area of deficit for us that I think other sites are much further along than we were. We had the federal evaluation and that was the only evaluation we were really focusing on or spending any time around. We had the control group, which was and is a lot of work, then our experimental group. It wasn't until probably year three that we figured out what we are going to get back from the federal level isn't going to help us tell our story locally, in a way that our local funders will be able to relate. We wished we would have created our database in a way that we could have had local data, as well as federal data, and been able to pull information out so we have had to go back and do things.”

Staffing the evaluation component of the grant was also noted to be critical to success.

“The evaluation component was and is a huge responsibility and I think the second wave of grants better understood that than the first. We underfunded the people power to support the evaluation. We should have had a half time [research assistant] or someone to assist our evaluator. What happened was we were assuming our partners would be doing a lot of that data entry and supporting us in the collection, especially among the control group and because of turnover rates and workloads, it didn't happen. So now we have our program director spending a lot of time doing data entry to maintain the evaluation, because we didn't fund the evaluation to the level we should have.”

6. SUSTAINABILITY

Under the section on Leadership, grantees spoke to the need for the collaboratives' leadership to lead and guide sustainability planning as early in the process as possible. Further discussion around how the sites worked to plan for sustaining the collaborative services funded under the RPG Program included:

- Formalize infrastructure
- Consider all funding strategies for sustainability
- Identify billable services

Formalize Infrastructure

Several grantees spoke about the importance of creating a structure for on-going support and sustainability. For many, the development of an advisory-type board proved to be essential in ensuring broad community, political and fiscal support. Interviewees discussed the importance of identifying the right people to serve, understanding their interests (i.e. what is important to them, their organizations and/or constituents) and taking the time and effort to build and maintain a relationship with each member.

According to one grantee, this is how to build momentum and interest for future policy change. “You need time to do this. Five years was barely enough to make state-wide system changes across multiple systems. State government culture does not shift easily. Without dedicated resources, the momentum slows and if not carefully monitored, it stops.”

Consider All Funding Strategies for Sustainability

Throughout the grant, the regional partnerships worked towards program sustainability and considered many funding strategies to ensure that services were continued at the end of the grant period. One grantee noted the need for a “coordinated effort for dollars spent.” They reported that a shift in thinking to “our dollars” rather than “my dollars” and “your dollars,” might help with joint accountability for how it money is spent. Another grantee noted that it was crucial to look at other funding options since they were struggling with Medicaid reimbursement rates in their state.

One grantee reported that changes in reimbursement related to services causes confusion and leads to changes in billing structure. They gave the example of changes to the methadone treatment pay structure and how this required administrators to ensure the right balance of services to match needed revenue. “Previously, you weren't paid for doing an individual [service]. You would just get a weekly rate. Now, you're being reimbursed for each individual service that you do. So, you'd be reimbursed for an individual, reimbursed for a group, and originally our methadone program did not necessarily do a lot of groups, so we had to re-think our overall services design to maximize client outcomes and billing opportunities.”

One success story related to funding came from a grantee that reported they were going to sustain screeners through a cost sharing approach. “They are cost-sharing those two positions, which has never happened before.” This has opened up communication among business offices and staff as they figure out how to adjust the system to address this approach.

Identify Billable Services

Working to find new funding streams or ways of billing for services was an enormous component of sustainability. Under the fiscal climate in which the RPG sites were working, the ability to bill for services was critical.

One grantee worked to sustain their program from the very beginning by working with providers to provide and bill for services. The grantee reported that,

“A big part was getting all of our providers billable, and then getting us all on an electronic

health record so that we would have access to the billing package and be able to bill for our services. That was a big win. If we hadn't been able to get all of our providers billable, and be able show our administration that we could be self-supporting, then we wouldn't be here right now."

Other RPG sites identified services that were not billable at the time of the grant. These services were often significant to the program and presented a challenge for sustainability. For example, one grantee reported that they needed to make some of the family-focused and family-friendly services billable. They first identified case management and collateral services. "We're not able to do off-site services, so everything has to happen in the program in these four walls. You can't bill for a client in their home. The other piece is not being able to bill for outreach or case management services. So, it hasn't really lent itself to the family and the case management work we were talking about." They also noted that there needs to be a shift in billing that reflects family-focused mental health services. "When you're looking at the children's mental health system, when they do case management, it's the one child. And when you look at child welfare, there's a single child that they're focusing on."

7. RPG IMPLEMENTATION AS LEARNING EXPERIENCE

As part of the RPG Program, each site was assigned a Performance Management Liaison (PML) to provide technical assistance support throughout the grant period. Additional TA was provided by the NCSACW through grantee meetings and trainings. The interviewees expressed great satisfaction with the way the RPG Program was implemented at the federal level. They discussed how this grant process was very different from their previous experiences with federal grants and how they felt they were truly supported in their efforts. RPG sites also stated they appreciated the interaction with their Federal Project Officers (FPOs) as well as other sites and learned a great deal through the TA provided to them through the entire TA team. Grantees felt the following aspects of RPG Program support enhanced their efforts:

- Participating in cross-site collaboration
- Receiving technical assistance

Participating in Cross-Site Collaboration

The opportunity to meet and develop relationships with the other RPG sites was seen by the interviewees as a tremendous asset to their RPG efforts. Attending grantee meetings with the other sites, learning about services others were providing around the country, and receiving feedback about their own efforts greatly enhanced the RPG experience for those interviewed.

One grantee stated, "I think the interaction was really one of strong positives. You could talk through the issues and problems and learn what others were doing. So, I think it added a level of richness to what we were doing."

The benefits of cross-site information sharing were described by another interviewee, in saying:

"Every time I went to a grantees' meeting I came back and there was something that changed as a result of that. We heard a good idea like the child welfare housing vouchers. It was just things

we learned. We networked. The cost efficiencies. The starting with sustainability. The data, and the help we got with trying to do all this collection—what we should collect, how we should collect. The research, the websites, all the stuff. I mean, otherwise we probably would have done what we did but it wouldn't be where it is now. It wouldn't have been systemic. We wouldn't have felt this empowered, and it probably wouldn't have been sustained.”

The structure of the RPG Program was seen as role-modeling the collaborative process the funders were looking to support in the funded sites:

“I think the process that was rolled out through the RPG was a very collaborative process. It role-modeled collaboration, and it helped us move to being more collaborative, or thinking through different strategies than we wouldn't have if we were just handed money and told to go forth and do the same. I could call anyone across the United States and connect with them and have a conversation about some idea that they had implemented.”

Finally, another interviewee felt that it was very important to share how beneficial the grantee meetings were to the work of the sites because, we are “...at a time where meetings are getting harder and harder to convene, and there may not be the realization that these actually add a lot of value and they are needed within these grant programs.” This interviewee stated that, “It was absolutely some of the best work... that I had done in my career.”

“...the RPG was a very collaborative process. It role-modeled collaboration, and it helped us move to being more collaborative...”

Receiving Technical Assistance

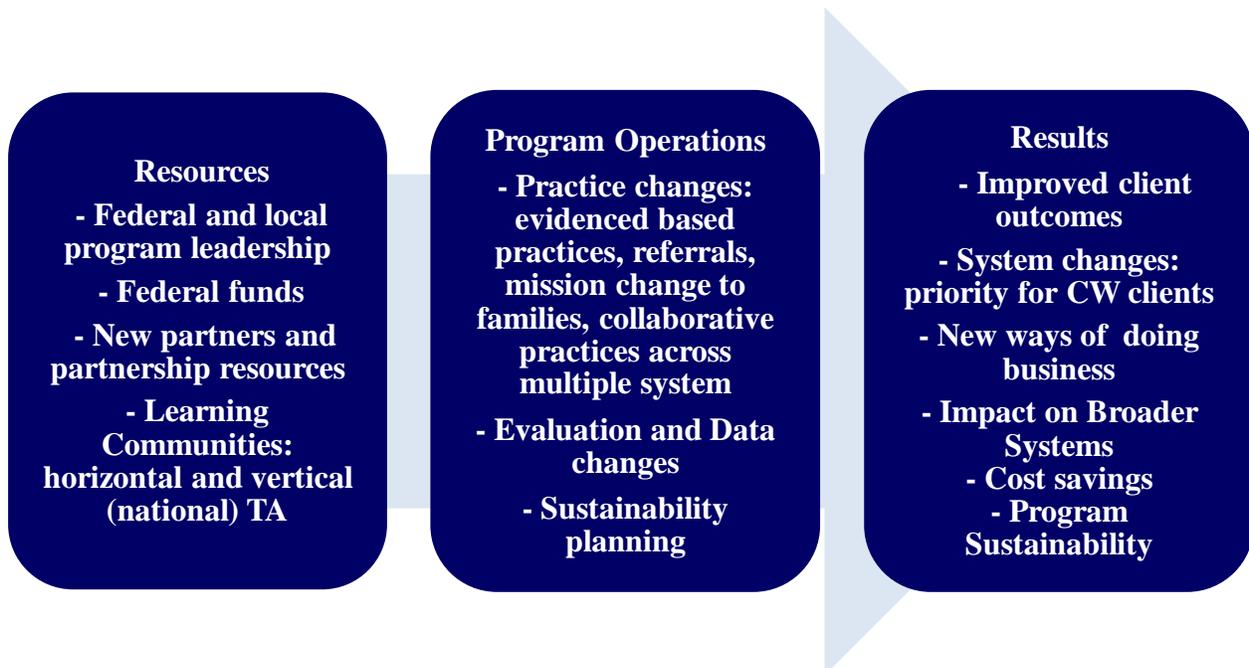
In addition to the benefits of the grantee meetings, interviewees felt that the TA provided through the PMLs and NCSACW was an invaluable piece of the RPG process. The support of the PMLs and the FPOs made grantees feel that there was a “team approach” to their efforts. “It really allowed us to move forward with things, and when we got stuck, it wasn't, ‘Oh gee, we gave you this money, and now you're not producing the way you should.’ It really was a collaborative approach, team approach, certainly with CCFF and our federal officer.”

One grantee spoke to the benefits of the TA in saying there was a “...reassurance that we are on the right track and maybe what we are doing is going to make a difference. It helped us navigate how to use evidence-based practice. It gave us the courage to apply for different grants, and it gave us the freedom to really use it as a demonstration grant. Which is supposed to be a learning opportunity, and that's what it really was for our site. We really said we are here to learn, which means we have to take a risk, which means we have to make mistakes. If you are going to take that kind of approach, you have to make sure you have someone behind you.”

“We would not be in the same place without our PML...and her leadership.”

EMERGING THEORY OF CHANGE

The implementation of the elements of successful collaborative practice outlined in this document required active engagement of key partners, lead agencies that were willing to reach beyond their agency and respective system boundaries, and an intentional and consistent focus on evaluating how the partnership was functioning in meeting the needs of children and families. It is the interaction and interrelationships of these key processes that resulted in more successful programs for the eight grantees highlighted in this report. The implementation of cross-system collaborative efforts such as the RPG Program are not as linear as illustrated in logic models; however, a theory of change does emerge from this collaborative approach.



The key inputs are resources that lead and support changes in program operations which result in improved client outcomes, broader system changes and program sustainability.

The program directors from these eight RPG sites viewed these programs as broader than their role as lead agencies. They were able to see these partnerships as agents for broader systems change and used the primary collaborative processes described in this report—increased trust based on relationships across agencies and increased accountability through data—to achieve better client outcomes and systems change.

CONCLUSION

This report summarizes interviews conducted with eight Regional Partnership Grantees' program directors. While Reports to Congress and other final progress reports include performance and outcome data, this report intentionally focuses on the reflections of these program leaders in implementing their Regional Partnership Grants. Their experiences—challenges, successes and lessons learned—yielded valuable insights on what it takes to effectively implement collaborative partnerships to meet the diverse and complex needs of children and families in the child welfare, courts, and substance abuse treatment systems. It is widely recognized that individual systems that serve families, whether it be child welfare, substance abuse, mental health, or domestic violence, must not work in silos. They must partner with each other and connect to other community services and supports to successfully engage, retain and improve outcomes for children and families.

Through the course of this in-depth interview process the following key elements to successful partnerships emerged:

- Leadership
- Collaborative Practice
- Services to Children and Families
- Impact on Broader Systems
- Evaluation and Data
- Sustainability

The successful implementation of these elements required active engagement of key partners, lead agencies that were willing to reach beyond their agency and respective system boundaries. They demonstrated an intentional and consistent focus on evaluating how the partnership was functioning in meeting the needs of children and families. These grantees' positive experiences as a learning community, supported by Federal Project Officers, dedicated TA staff and resources, and regular opportunities to meet as a collective group, provides a model for advancing policy and practice improvements through other grant programs. The authors hope that the reflections documented in this report will encourage and advance collaborative policy and practice beyond the scope of discretionary grant programs, to become the standard for how systems work together to better serve children and families.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What were the most important decisions you made in implementing an effective collaborative throughout the course of your project?
2. If you encountered reluctant partners (identify which ones they were), how did you respond? Did that work?
3. Who were the most important participants in the project beyond the core agencies of child welfare, treatment, and the courts? How would you explain their buy-in to the project?
4. In hindsight, which decisions or choices would you want to “do over” if you had the chance?
5. What would you say proved to be the most effective strategies for engaging leadership (e.g. SA, CW, Courts, Community leadership, legislative bodies, etc.)?
6. What is the child welfare and treatment system in which your project operated doing differently now as a result—direct or indirect—of the RPG project?
7. Were there any system-wide changes or did your project have an impact on the broader child welfare and treatment systems?
8. We are trying to ascertain the extent to which the child welfare and substance abuse treatment systems view serving families with SUDs as a priority.
9. Has the child welfare system in your jurisdiction or state ever allocated significant resources of their own or sought treatment funding for families in the CW system with SUDs?
10. Has the treatment system in your jurisdiction or state ever allocated significant resources of their own or sought treatment funding for families in the CW system with SUDs?
11. What other ways besides funding has either of these systems prioritized serving these families?
12. Some RPG projects added enriched services to children where this was not a major area of emphasis previously. Others added an emphasis on parenting skills where this had not been emphasized previously. To the extent your project fits into one or both of these categories, what did you learn about the challenges of adding these components?
13. How likely is it that these components will continue to be provided post-RPG funding, and why?
14. Was either of these changes able to improve outcomes in a convincing way?
15. How helpful was the local evaluation in guiding the operations and direction of the project? Did the evaluation lead you to make any significant changes in the project?
16. How did you approach the sustainability tasks?
17. What additional flexibility and discretion from current regulations, administrative rules, funding, etc. would have enabled you to better serve children and families either during your project, or in sustaining/institutionalizing your project? Why would you have made those changes?

18. From your experience, what are the 3 most critical components that make an effective partnership to better serve children and families?

A final question was added following the first interview. That question was:

19. How was this grant program different than others your agency has been involved with and did the design of the RPG impact the outcomes for your project?

The interviews were conducted by an experienced senior staff member from CCFF. The interviewer had a solid understanding of the RPG Program and was skilled at conducting key informant interviews.

Eight of the 53 RPG sites were selected to participate in the interview for the Final Synthesis and Summary Report. It was important to choose sites that would be representative of the 53. Criteria for selecting the eight sites were:

- Lead Agency (State, County, Community-Based Organization)
- Child Welfare, Substance Abuse, Court
- Grantees not presently involved in the RPG 2
- Grantees with significant lessons learned
- Grantees that met the general requirements for the Children's Bureau, Grants Management
- Willingness to participate
- Other

The Children's Bureau and Senior CCFF staff provided input to finalize the list and narrow it to eight sites. Sites' program directors were contacted via electronic mail and asked to participate in a 60-90 minute telephone interview using the Discussion Guide.

Program directors were informed that the interview would be recorded using the web-based HiDef Corporate audio conferencing service and that their responses would be transcribed word-for-word by an outside entity and reported anonymously in the Final Synthesis and Summary Report. Each interviewee was given a copy of the Discussion Guide in advance of their interview with the CCFF interviewer.

In preparation for the interviews, the CCFF interviewer conducted a review of available data gathered from RPG Final Reports, Semi-Annual Progress Reports, and local evaluations reports. The preparation informed the interviewer about the site and informed the discussions. In particular, the pre-interview review of available resources provided a more comprehensive view for what information was missing.

Once completed by the contract transcriptionist, the transcript resulting from the interview was sent to the CCFF interviewer who then arranged the responses from each site according to question that was being addressed. From there, major themes and quotes were identified and extracted for the purpose of developing this Report.

RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS

RPG SITE	LOCATION	LEAD AGENCY	FIELD
On Track	Medford, OR	Community-Based Agency	Substance Abuse
Lund	Burlington, VT	Community-Based Agency	Substance Abuse
Choctaw	Durant, OK	Tribal	Child Welfare
Sacramento	Sacramento, CA	County Child Welfare	Child Welfare
Westchester	Westchester, NY	County Behavioral Health	Behavioral Health
Children's Friend and Service	Providence, RI	Statewide Community Based Agency	Child Welfare
Travis County	Austin, TX	Community-Based Agency	Substance Abuse Treatment
Mendocino	Ukiah, CA	County Child Welfare	Child Welfare