Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP)

Year One Evaluation Summary Report

Expanded Executive Summary

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Background

Scope of the Initiative

On February 26, 2008, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP) as a $5-million one-year child abuse and neglect prevention project. Twelve community-based organizations that lead or co-lead local networks in each of the County's eight regional Service Planning Areas (SPAs) direct PIDP activities. The network design was intended to facilitate the creation of a comprehensive, strengths-based, locally relevant child abuse and neglect prevention system extending beyond County government and beyond the jurisdiction of any one County department (Los Angeles County Department of Family and Children's Services, 2008).

DCFS deserves substantial credit for working closely with leading community-based organizations (CBOs) to frame the vision that led to PIDP and for encouraging, supporting, and investing in community-based ideas about how prevention should work in different parts of the County. In contrast to previous contract arrangements, DCFS did not predetermine what PIDP services should be but relied on local partnerships between community leaders and administrators of DCFS Regional Offices to develop approaches that fit the needs of eight different regions in this very large and diverse county. The full evaluation report describes the background for developing PIDP, the rationale for how a broad-brush approach to prevention supports and enhances child safety, differences between SPAs in terms of demographics and resource availability, and the evolving prevention partnerships between public and private sectors that support this complex multi-faceted initiative.

Each of the PIDP networks focuses on achieving outcomes associated with the prevention of child abuse: decreased social isolation, decreased poverty and lack of resources, increased protective factors, and more effective collaboration between the County's public child welfare system and community-based organizations. To do so, all of the eight PIDP networks are implementing three braided and integrated strategies: (1) building social networks using strengths-based and relationship-focused community organizing approaches; (2) increasing economic opportunities and development; and, (3) increasing access to and utilization of beneficial services, activities, resources, and supports.

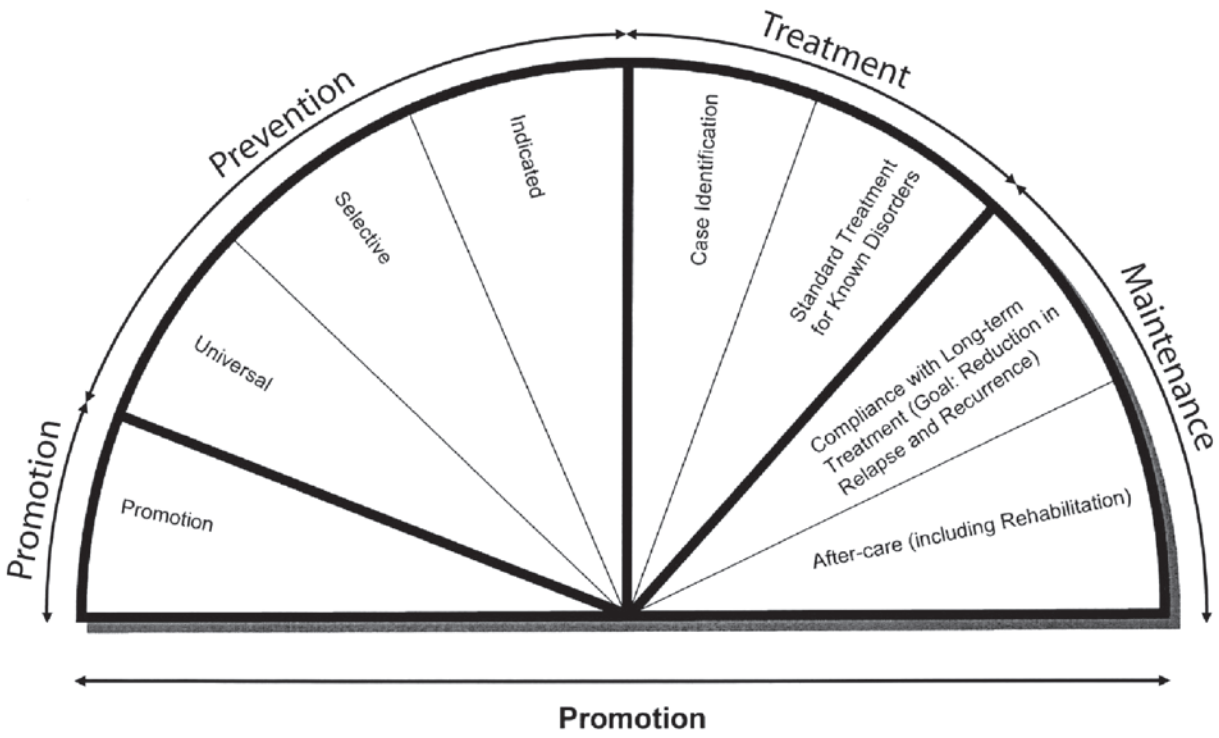
The three strategies rest on theories of change that suggest that increases in social capital resulting from social connection and network building strengthens family systems; relationship-based community organizing enhances community capacity for self-management and self-care; and enhancing protective factors associated with strong families increases children's safety and ability to thrive. While each of the PIDP networks was asked to incorporate all three broad strategies, they were not required to implement them in the same way. Instead, during this first year, they were encouraged to develop approaches and activities that fit the needs of different communities, considering the demographic, social, and economic conditions of different regions and building on local resources to maximize the existing capacity of CBOs, faith-based and grassroots community groups, and other local institutions.

Braiding the three strands into a welcoming, flexible, and accommodating neighborhood-based web means that families can choose to engage on their own terms. In addition, relationships can be nurtured through civic engagement and community improvement projects, and network navigators can help people who need additional help accessing local services. This "no wrong door" approach to delivering services for families and children means that families can find what they want and need when they want it, DCFS workers can find the right kinds of help for the families they serve, and community organizations can help families navigate through a confusing array of programs and agencies. Perhaps even more important, however, is the fact that service delivery can be embedded in a public health approach that strengthens the web of social connections in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County.

This kind of holistic braiding adds some important new layers to the existing professionalized service delivery system where "clients" are identified as having problems, professionals assess and develop case plans, and people are referred to services that may or may not be integrated, accessible, or affordable. In addition to linking families to specific services in a time of crisis or need, the PIDP networks offer help with employment and family finances, navigating the maze of community services and supports, and empowering families to solve their own problems. Following the idea that three strands braided together are stronger than the separate strands, the intent of DCFS and the PIDP networks is to purposefully achieve a synergistic and exponential impact using all three complementary strategies.

LA's approach to prevention is consistent with findings from the emerging science of prevention that place various services and other strategies along a continuum of health programs that incorporate promotion, universal, selected, and indicated prevention (National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, 2009). As depicted in Figure 1, promotion refers to strategies designed to encourage or nurture good health. Universal is the term applied when a prevention program is helping all populations. Selective is the term applied when the prevention program is focusing on only vulnerable or high-risk populations. Indicated is the term used when prevention programs focus on working with individuals with early symptoms or a problem of illness (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994). Congruent with this conceptualization, PIDP network approaches and activities span multiple levels of prevention.

Figure 1
Continuum of Promotion and Prevention Strategies for Mental Health



Source: National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2009). Preventing mental, emotional and behavioral disorders among young people: Progress and possibilities. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12480 Reprinted with permission.

The community-level change model underlying much of the PIDP work in LA shows a series of concentric circles, at the center of which are children and families. (See Figure 2.) During the extensive discussion leading to implementation of PIDP, several leading organizations in LA developed consensus around a "community-level change model" that reflects the community perspective on prevention. The group included a regional collaborative of PIDP networks from SPAs 2, 4, 7, and 8; the Children's Council; and First 5 LA.[1] This community-level work is aimed at improving the same five outcomes for children and families that were adopted over a decade ago by the Board of Supervisors as guiding all of the County's efforts: Good Health, Safety and Survival, Economic Well-Being, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and Education/Workforce Readiness.[2]

This ecological orientation shows how social networks and relationship-based approaches can enhance traditional social service delivery systems that focus on intervention for those identified as being "in need." In this scheme, protective factors work to strengthen social connections, sense of community, and civic engagement, which leads to enhanced networks, more assets, and improvements at the community level. The core values that inform this approach are the following: (1) empowerment is the key to self-sufficiency; (2) collaboration is about equal relationships where people share power and money; (3) organizing is

1 First 5 LA is a unique child-advocacy organization created by California voters to invest tobacco tax revenues in programs for improving the lives of children in Los Angeles County, from prenatal through age 5. www.first5la.org

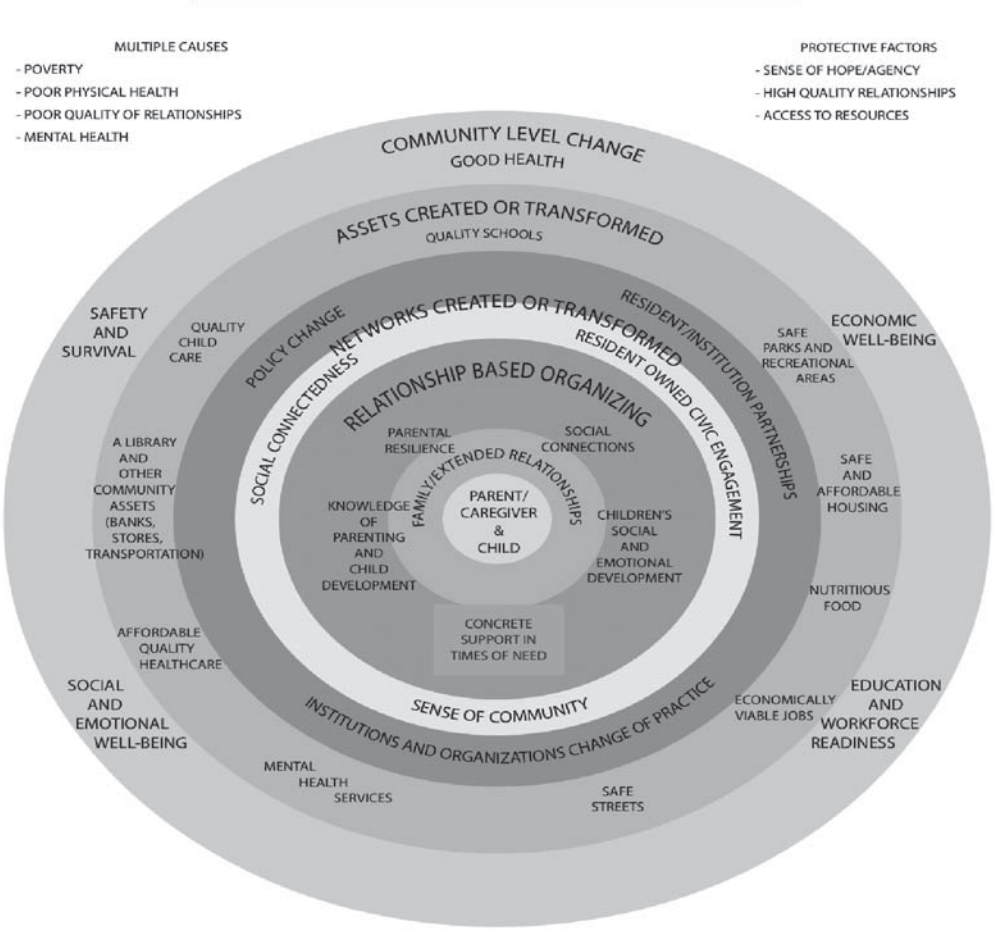
2 These outcome areas were developed by the Children's Council (then the Children's Planning Council) and adopted by the Board of Supervisors in 1993; they have been reflected by a series of biannual LA County Children's ScoreCards beginning in 1994.

the most effective way to change neighborhoods; (4) given the opportunity, neighborhood residents will make good decisions and choices for themselves, their families, and their communities; and (5) adequate resources need to be available so residents have the practical ability to act on their own behalf.

In a county as large as Los Angeles, it is virtually impossible for programs to keep up with the demand for services to address the problems of individuals and families. It is even more challenging to couple meeting this service need with achieving community-level change that can impact individuals beyond those "touched" by a specific service. Thus, investment in the development of social and organizational networks affords the best opportunity to address the scope and scale dimensions necessary to ensure child safety, support families, and build on personal and community assets.

Network approaches help to analyze, build, and use connectivity among people and organizations to bring about socially desirable ends. Social networks help people overcome isolation, instilling confidence and self-worth by broadening the personal, material, and informational resources on which individuals and families can rely (Bailey, 2006). In a similar fashion, organizational networks play a critical role in helping organizations spread innovation and adapt to change. Having the capacity to adapt to change means having the ability to harness knowledge and creativity to fashion unique responses, stimulate organizational learning, and sometimes embrace and successfully achieve transformational change (Sussman, 2003).

Figure 2
Community Level Change Model



Development facilitated by Patricia Bowie and Cheryl Wold in partnership with
The Children's Council, the Magnolia Place Network, and First 5 LA

Evaluating PIDP

To address the diversity of Los Angeles, the specific programmatic approaches used in each network, the activities offered to families, the network partners, and the arrangements made to operate each network varied widely. The purposes of this evaluation were to understand the *value-added* by PIDP networks in the complex multicultural communities of the County and to identify areas for improvement. The value-added approach taken by the evaluation team recognized that PIDP was not an entirely new or stand-alone initiative, but rather that it was designed to build on programs already in place, adding new ideas, approaches, and layers to the existing system. To accomplish this, the evaluation team implemented a *mixed methods* and *place-based* evaluation approach to collect different kinds of data from multiple informants.

The overall study design includes methods that (1) assess network development, (2) track changes within DCFS offices and relationships between DCFS offices and community partners, (3) describe responses from participating families, (4) assess promising approaches, (5) test outcomes for children, and (6) provide contextual information on the interactions and synchronicity of multiple prevention-oriented strategies.

Additionally, evaluators affiliated with local efforts conducted several special studies with funds from PIDP network lead agencies. These special studies focused on local approaches deemed by network leaders to be of particular importance, describing network development, family visitation centers, economic development, and collecting data from the perspective of community residents.

Study Limitations

Readers should note that other than the use of comparison groups formed by using nearby zip code areas for the child welfare management information system data, this evaluation study was not able to employ randomized assignment of neighborhoods to PIDP and non-PIDP networks or to use extensive baseline data for longitudinal analyses. Furthermore, some of the networks and PIDP strategies are fairly new, and so the impact of PIDP networks could not be fully ascertained. But as mentioned above, the study team, DCFS, and the PIDP networks were able to implement successfully a *mixed methods* and *place-based* evaluation approach to collect different kinds of data from multiple informants. In addition, comparison groups are being formed by using nearby zip code areas so that differences in child abuse referrals and out-of-home placements can be described using DCFS child welfare management information system data.

Persons Served

Despite the fairly recent launch of the PIDP initiative, nearly 20,000 persons were served via these collaborations and agency/family networks.[1]

Table 1
DCFS Clients and Community Residents Served by PIDP Networks in 2008 and 2009[a]

2008 (March to December)			2009 (January to June)		Total for 2008 and 2009
SPA	DCFS Clients	Community Residents	DCFS Clients	Community Residents	
SPA 1	136	2,304	173	477	3,090
SPA 2	485	1,689	1,079	1,604	4,857
SPA 3	183	964	309	332	1,788
SPA 4					2,727
SPA 5	13	391	16	329	749
SPA 6	206	1,237	563	1,521	3,527
SPA 7	113	246	252	506	1,117
SPA 8	390	924	780	1,959	4,053
Total	**1,526**	**7,755**	**3,172**	**6,728**	**21,908**

[a] Note: These service delivery statistics reflect a duplicated count because these statistics count service recipients in more than one category.

1 In February 2008, DCFS received Board of Supervisors' approval for the PIDP initiative. SPAs 1, 2, and 8 began reporting PIDP participants being served in March 2008. SPAs 1 and 2 reported PIDP participants being served in June 2009. The CBSD office requested the data in June 2008, so most of the PIDP agencies were able to provide data up to the previous month of May 2008, as the PIDP agencies were still capturing their data during that month of June 2008. Although the data in Table 1 include duplicate counts of individuals who participated in more than one kind of activity, they give a sense of the scope of PIDP activity during 2008-2009.

Organizations Involved

Nine interactive PIDP network "maps" (one countywide and eight SPA maps) were designed as Web-based visual graphics that could keep up with changes in organizational participation in these networks as they evolve over time. These maps display information about the organizations participating in PIDP overall, participants in each SPA-level PIDP network, the DCFS Regional Offices served by each of the SPA-level networks, and funding received by network participants from DCFS and First 5 LA. The maps highlight connections between PIDP agencies and other county-wide initiatives funded by DCFS and First 5 LA, illustrating the ways that the 89 organizations involved in PIDP are working to leverage the financial resources provided by two different funders. The maps show that many of the PIDP-funded agencies also receive additional funding from DCFS to provide Family Support services (n=20), Family Preservation services (n=13), both of which are key components of the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program. Fifteen network agencies also received Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention, and Treatment (CAPIT) funding through DCFS. Organizations receiving First 5 LA support primarily receive funds from two initiatives: Partnership for Families (n=20) and the School Readiness Initiative (n=18).

It is also interesting to note that about half of the PIDP lead agencies received funds primarily from DCFS and the other half received funds from both First 5 LA and DCFS. These patterns suggest the potential for more purposeful partnerships between DCFS and First 5 LA to better leverage available funding. While key initiatives may have different goals overall, there appears to be an agency-level connection or synergy between them. This connection could offer an opportunity to leverage resources around common goals in different parts of the County. From a sustainability perspective, it could be assumed that the more versatile an agency is in its funding streams, the more stable its presence in a community. These findings also suggest that there may be opportunities to bring in and support other organizations that received only PIDP funds. Since these maps did not include all of the sources of funding available to support agencies serving families and children in LA County, they only begin to illustrate how funding partnerships might contribute to the sustainability of such services over time.

Key Evaluation Findings

PIDP has added value to the existing system of children's services and supports for families by providing three new and key prevention elements

The initiative is based on the hypothesis that child abuse and neglect can be reduced and child safety enhanced if:

- **Families are less isolated and able to access the support they need.**
- **Families are economically stable and can support themselves financially.**
- **Activities and resources are integrated in communities and accessible to families.**

Efforts to decrease social isolation speak to the first and third elements. The PIDP networks developed an array of activities to decrease social isolation; this variety reflects the different conditions in each region, the different resources available, and the logic models developed by the networks. Additionally, all networks have worked to develop community-level change models that recognize the strengths of all families, including those who are involved with DCFS as well as those who are not. The idea of universal access—not based on referral or eligibility criteria—presents some challenges in a system that has primarily been driven by referral-to-services processes, but PIDP participants and their DCFS office partners are seeing the value of this additional layer of support for families that focuses on enhancing protective factors, building competence and resilience, and decreasing isolation. Rather than focusing on remediation of problems, the networks focus on family and community strengths, thus giving all families opportunities for social connections and community engagement.

PIDP also required that networks provide economic supports to families. Family economic success activities varied across the PIDP networks. Some of the approaches included adult education, financial literacy workshops, access to emergency food and housing, and access to reduced-price home furnishings and clothing. A few networks took on the challenge of providing employment preparation leading to living wage jobs—clearly the most effective long-term anti-poverty strategy. For example, the SPA 6 PIDP network provided employment training and support for residents interested in fiber optics, medical billing, and other careers. At least half of the PIDP networks joined forces to address the immediate needs of families by enhancing access to tax benefits. These approaches included creation of the Greater LA Economic Alliance (GLAEA) under the leadership of the South Bay Center for Counseling (SBCC) in SPA 8 in partnership with other SPA councils, Quantum Community Development Corporation, and the SPA 7 PIDP network. Other PIDP networks worked with United Way of Greater Los Angeles to create Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites.

Each PIDP network reported strengths in certain areas of collaboration

PIDP agencies have a long history of working in their respective communities. Most of the agencies (87%) have been working in the community to support families and protect children for more than 10 years, with more than half (53%) working in the community for more than 25 years. The majority of responding agencies believe current efforts to encourage coordination and collaboration in their respective collaboratives are succeeding, and they identified the following cross-collaborative strengths:

- **Favorable political and social climate**
- **Mutual respect, understanding, trust**
- **Appropriate cross-section of members**
- **Members see collaboration as in their self-interest**
- **Members share a stake in process and outcomes**
- **Flexibility**
- **Shared vision for the community**
- **Skilled leadership**

Agencies benefited from their participation in PIDP

Virtually all (99%) of the respondents to the Agency Staff Survey reported that their organization's involvement in the PIDP collaborative has benefited their organization through an increase in resource awareness, a strengthening of existing partnerships, support that enables them to better serve families, the empowerment of families, information and knowledge sharing, and the development of new relationships and collaboration.

The SPA-based PIDP networks add value to the existing array of services and supports for families and children by leveraging existing resources, and identifying new resources and partners.

As illustrated in the PIDP network maps in the full report, participants have demonstrated creativity in blending funding from several sources, enhancing their own capacity to assure that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Existing program infrastructure and cross-agency collaboration facilitated identification of additional resources for individual families, as well as leveraging of multiple funding streams. Leaders of many PIDP networks reached out well beyond the "usual" CBO players to include faith-based and community groups, businesses, and other partners. As a result, many networks also include unfunded members along with funded members.

PIDP planning and implementation processes varied considerably across DCFS offices

DCFS staff were asked about their participation in PIDP planning and familiarity with current operations. The majority of administrators interviewed—both Regional Administrators (RAs) and Assistant Regional Administrators (ARAs)— reported that they, or a designated person on their team, had been directly involved in planning with the PIDP lead agencies. Most interviewees also reported sharing information with staff in their offices to prepare for the development of office-specific and community-specific PIDP strategies. Planning processes included identifying high-need communities based on CWS/CMS management information system, SPA, zip code, and community-specific data as well as identified problems, such

as disproportionality or domestic violence. DCFS offices that had long-standing collaborative relationships with community partners had an advantage in working with those service providers to plan for PIDP. This advantage led particular offices to move more expediently from planning to implementation.

Front-line staff at the DCFS offices had the least knowledge about PIDP

Given the involvement of mostly high-level DCFS staff in PIDP planning and implementation, lack of knowledge about PIDP found through interviews with front-line staff was not surprising. There was also some confusion about the meaning of "prevention" because the term is so global and may not have been defined specifically when used in conjunction with various PIDP communications.

Though DCFS staff members were not always clear about what prevention meant in a DCFS context, reactions to the idea of prevention were quite positive.

DCFS staff members who were familiar with PIDP reacted very positively to the initiative, saying that they need all the help they can get to serve families and protect children. Not surprisingly, workers reacted most positively when they could see immediate benefits for families.

Key challenges include replicability, sustainability, and solidification of new relationships

Regional conditions and resources are different enough that it may never be possible to require "fidelity" to a particular "model" of prevention across LA County, and PIDP started with the understanding that local approaches should be developed to build on existing capacity and fit the needs of different communities. It should be possible, however, to identify key elements or approaches that could be more widely replicated. This report supports this process.

Publicizing the resources available through PIDP has met with some challenges. DCFS staff, families, and other partners do not always know what kinds of resources are available through PIDP networks. While it is more important that families know where to go for local assistance regardless of the name of the program or funding stream, it is also important that DCFS staff, particularly front-line staff, recognize that their department is providing resources for all families, and that they know where and how to help families access the PIDP networks.

Sustainability is a challenge for any new project. However, the general budget crisis and stagnant economy make stakeholders especially concerned about the sustainability of what is developed and learned through PIDP and its networks. Concerns about sustainability are fueled by the depth of need identified during the first year. These community networks have come far, and the promise is great, so their loss, even at an early stage, would be felt. An agency director said, "The demand is deep. My staff, including me, is only 11 people. That's not enough. I'd like an outreach coordinator, two navigators at each site instead of one, plus administrators, plus more legal help." A navigator added, "You're trying to help one person, and the couch is filled with people waiting. And you don't want to lose them. You need to spend at least an hour with each person to listen to their story. It takes time to figure out what they need."

Lastly, collaborative planning and solidification of relationships between a government agency and multiple community organizations is a challenge anywhere, but especially in Los Angeles County. In some cases, an SPA had to create a new network from which PIDP could operate, and this required forming new relationships. Other DCFS offices delayed planning with lead agencies, perhaps because they did not know each other or were not sure about who they would be working with until funding was in place. In these cases, implementation was delayed, PIDP activities got a late start, and there was varied progress across the SPAs.

Parents and youth are benefiting from participation in PIDP activities

Data collected from both surveys and focus groups highlight the benefits that both parents and youth feel they have received from PIDP. Benefits cited by parents included greater involvement in their community, more desire to engage in community activities, and feeling less lonely or isolated.

Notable Approaches

Each of the PIDP networks implemented approaches reflecting the integration of all three prevention strategies. Based on data from multiple sources, the evaluation team and the PIDP leadership team believe that it is the integration of the three strategies, universally available, that is producing positive outcomes. The following section highlights ***some examples*** of practice approaches based on the three strategies:

1. **Building social networks using community organizing approaches**
2. **Increasing economic opportunities and development**
3. **Increasing access to and utilization of beneficial services, activities, resources, and supports**

The following examples of "notable approaches" help to illustrate the creativity of the PIDP networks, providing examples of concrete activities that can help to ground consideration of the recommendations that follow. It is important to note that these examples are based on special studies carried out by evaluators affiliated with and funded directly by PIDP networks. This set of five examples by no means covers all of the prevention approaches being used across this large and diverse region. However, they do provide laudable examples that make it easier to visualize how the diffuse notion of "prevention" is being brought to life in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles County.

Family Resource Centers

SHIELDS for Families, the lead PIDP agency in SPA 6, worked with five collaborative partners, chosen not only for their expertise but also for their locations in different areas within the SPA and their ability to partner directly with three DCFS regional offices. They developed four Ask, Seek, Knock (ASK) Family Resource Centers, including one faith-based navigation site. At each resource center, English- and Spanish-speaking navigators provide linkages and referrals to families seeking community resources. They also provide direct service through vocational and educational classes, supportive services, transportation assistance, and legal referral services.

Resource Center navigators work with DCFS cases as well as clients referred and recruited from other community sources. There is no differentiation of services for DCFS-referred or walk-in clients in accessing these no-cost services. The ASK Centers were designed to present an alternative to case management so that clients are able to have a say in what they need and what services would have the most impact in their families. ASK Center staff become partners with families in achieving outcomes and they follow up with them to see if they have encountered any barriers or need additional resources. Navigators also reach out to agencies outside the immediate collaborative on a regular basis. This allows for continued interaction with families who might otherwise remain isolated. Other activities that target social isolation include Community Resource Fairs, Days of Dialogue, the Book Club, the Men's Support Group, Parenting Workshops, Scrapbooking, Women's Empowerment Group, Stress Management, the Community Library, and Family Planning.

Through June 2009, ASK staff had worked with 1,515 families. Navigators identified and verified over 1,000 community resources to link clients with. Information on these resources is stored in a database accessible by area of need or zip code. A kiosk was also developed where the public can anonymously access the resource data. Approximately half (n=769) of the families served were referred by the three SPA 6 DCFS regional offices. While 374 of these families were linked to services that addressed their needs, others could not be contacted or refused assistance. It is perhaps not surprising in this region where almost 40% of children live in families with incomes below the poverty level that many of the top requests for assistance were for concrete resources. The top request from non-DCFS families was for assistance with housing, and the top request from DCFS families was for assistance with food.

Families wanting to improve their family's economic situation could choose to participate in a vocational certification program, high school equivalency and basic-skills classes, financial literacy workshops, entrepreneurial education, job readiness/development, legal services, and job placement. Vocational classes included Business Office Communications, Emergency Medical Technician, Medical Billing, and Fiber Optics. They engaged 758 adult students in employment-oriented workshops and classes during the first year of PIDP; 595 classes were offered through June 2009, and students logged 27,839 hours in classes.

The PIDP network in SPA 6 also identified a strong need for legal aid services to remove barriers to employment. They engaged the services of a Legal Services Coordinator to help link families with attorneys and legal aid entities in the community that offer pro-bono or sliding-scale counseling. To date, nearly 400 referrals have been made. Through collaboration with various entities such as Public Counsel Law Center, Los Angeles County Region V GAIN office, Los Angeles County Child Support Services Department, and others, ASK has been able to provide legal workshops in the following areas: Criminal Record Expungement, Child Support Services, Special Education Law, Homeless Court Legal Advocacy, and Immigration Law. Legal aid provides an unforeseen yet essential compliment to vocational and basic skills training. Many community families are held back from economic stability or advancement because of legal barriers. The need for these services has been so great that ASK is planning to hire a part-time attorney in the upcoming year.

In addition to developing and partnering with other community agencies to implement the ASK Centers, SHIELDS secured additional funding through partnering with AmeriCorps to provide additional staff and volunteers to support the implementation of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program in SPA 6 for the 2010 tax season. As noted above, leveraging resources provides some program stability to secure services for families in a stagnant economy. For example, SHIELDS for Families linked PIDP with funding from First 5 LA to leverage resources among core partners. Out of this collaboration developed a partnership with California State University, Dominguez Hills to implement an on-site Master of Social Work program for partner agency staff, addressing the professional workforce shortage in the SPA 6 community.

Neighborhood Action Councils

The establishment of Neighborhood Action Councils (NACs) is a strategy for primary prevention implemented by a regional collaborative, including the PIDP lead agencies in SPAs 2, 4, 7, and 8. (In SPA 2, they are called Community Action Councils.) NACs are groups of residents in a specific neighborhood who come together through a process identified as relationship-based community organizing. Groups of residents who share the same geography and many daily life experiences come together, forming personal bonds and strengthening connections in community through their relationships and the collective actions they choose to take. Relationship-based organizing operates from an asset-based perspective, focusing on the gifts and talents of individuals and families, supporting each person's capacity to contribute to the NAC and the community.

In the context of PIDP, relationship-based organizing and the establishment of NACs are a foundational approach that braids the three key PIDP strategies together. These integrated strategies include (1) relationship-based community organizing, (2) economic development, and (3) access to a broad array of services, supports and resources for families. In the theory of change model associated with relationship-based organizing, the impact of the creation of a NAC results in changes in the way individuals in the NAC see themselves, in increased feelings of connectedness and support, and in the competency and capacity to have impact in their lives. The presence of a NAC will affect the way members feel about the group in which they participate, a group of neighbors they can rely on, relate to, and count on. The presence of the NAC will change the way group members feel about their families. It will create opportunities for increased intimacy, shared values, and opportunities for shared experiences of civic engagement. The NAC will impact the way members feel about their neighborhood and their capacity to impact the quality of daily life in their neighborhood through their own efforts. For example, when this approach is applied in a high-risk neighborhood identified by DCFS as having a significant number of reports to the hot line, it is expected that the NAC will build and support protective factors associated with a reduction in rates of child abuse. These protective factors include parental resilience, social connectedness, concrete support in times of need, and knowledge of parenting and child development.

An Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) campaign was also developed to utilize the capacities of the residents' relationships through the NACs. Work on EITC helped to ensure that NAC members and their neighborhoods were connected to this concrete reallocation of resources (money from EITC filings) for themselves and the other members of their communities. That same strategy applied to the utilization of services and supports. NAC members and their respective neighborhoods were specifically targeted so that they would be able to have multiple impacts on the same population, namely members of NACs in high-risk neighborhoods.

Participants reported that the NACs impacted their lives in a variety of ways. First and foremost, there was a positive change in how they defined and/or saw their community. As one member stated, "I guess the community is where I live. I live in Hawthorne. I used to only see the negative, but now I see the strengths in the community and how everyone is connected to it." Resources gained through the NACs also enriched the lives of participants. One NAC member commented, "We are already getting a lot of stuff in terms of working with the NAC and support and all of that but what I appreciate also is the real information that we are able to get. I feel like I know things now about things and that is worth a lot." The NAC became more than an action group for participants—it was "family" and a means for providing access to resources.

In addition, the relationship between the NAC and supporting community agencies was seen as a relationship of mutual respect with rapport. Interviews with agency executive directors provided evidence that the NAC framework had great value for their agencies and was a program and philosophy they would continue.

Data collected from NAC participants prior to and following their participation in the NAC affirmed the value of NACs in concrete ways. The survey assessed several related areas: changes in sense of community, changes in connectedness and support within the NAC, changes in the family, and individual changes. In all of these areas, both adults and youth reported that the changes (gains) they experienced were all positive. These results support the findings that participation in the Neighborhood Action Councils increased reported feelings of connectedness among members as well as between individuals, families, and the communities in which they live. When combined with findings from the focus groups and interviews, the data form a powerful body of evidence supporting the utility and power of relationship-based community organizing (Franke, 2009).

Earned Income Tax Credits and Other Family Economic Strategies (FES)

Enhancing economic opportunities and development for families and communities requires a strategy that focuses on creating access to capital by utilizing effective partnerships that generate revenue for residents and their neighborhoods, increasing employability, decreasing roadblocks to employment, and increasing family financial literacy. EITC has been acknowledged as one of the most powerful programs in the U.S. today in terms of increasing cash in hand for families (Plotnick, 2009). As part of PIDP, networks in SPAs 2, 4, 7 and 8 joined forces, under the leadership of the South Bay Center for Counseling and the SPA 8 Children's Council, in creating the Greater LA Economic Alliance (GLAEA). GLAEA provided free income tax preparation for individuals with a maximum gross annual income of $50,000, free workshops on earned income tax credits and childcare tax credits, small business tax preparation, Individual Taxpayer Identification Number application preparation, and banking services. The EITC campaign was seen as a test of the Community-Level Change Model described earlier. The coalition built upon the social supports, resident action, and networks of connection embedded in the NACs.

NAC members reached out to their neighbors and friends—encouraging many people who had never used such services before to receive benefits. Participants were also able to open bank accounts. According to participating PIDP networks, this campaign is an on-going demonstration of the potential of relationship-based organizing to reach disenfranchised, marginalized populations and connect them to resources that impact their daily lives.

GLAEA's tax preparation campaign provides an excellent example of how the PIDP networks have worked together to maximize impacts. During the EITC campaign, GLAEA assisted residents in completing nearly 5,000 tax returns and generating almost $5 million in refunds[1]—dollars that went directly to residents and their communities (Greater Los Angeles Economic Alliance, 2009). This collaborative EITC campaign demonstrated that resident and community relationships created through the NACs build social supports, provide linkages to resources, and strengthen economic stability. Next steps will focus on how to continue building upon the NAC groups and networks to strengthen economic development strategies.

PIDP networks in some SPAs approached the issue of expanding access to tax benefits by working through Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. For example, SPA 4 reported a total tax refund amount of $323,254 for residents working between February 1 and April 15, 2009. The SPA 6 network secured additional funding through partnering with AmeriCorps to provide additional staff and volunteers to support the implementation of the VITA program. More specifically, SHIELDS for Families, lead agency for SPA 6, secured additional funding through partnering with AmeriCorps to provide additional staff and volunteers to support the implementation of the VITA program in SPA 6 for the 2010 tax season.

> "By the end of April 2009, these combined campaigns had generated nearly $5.5 million in income tax returns for low-income parents across the County."[2]

1 The data source for the 2008 Greater Los Angeles Economic Alliance report is the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Taxwise System. Personal Communication, Mary Hammer, September 3, 2009.

2 Personal Communication, Mary Hammer, September 3, 2009.

Cultural Brokers and Parent Advocates

In SPA 3, the cultural brokers and parent advocates models developed in Fresno and Contra Costa counties were adapted as one approach to decreasing the disproportional representation of African American children seen by DCFS regional offices. During the first year of PIDP, cultural brokers participated in 164 Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings and, as a result, were responsible for significantly fewer detentions of children into the foster care system. Cultural brokers negotiated with DCFS social workers to provide more services and support systems to families instead of detention as the only option. They also maintained the focus on risk and safety issues for families while participating in the TDMs. Cultural brokers also worked to increase the quality of the relationship between the DCFS and the families being served, so that better outcomes are achieved for families. Cultural brokers are community members ideally from the same culture as birth families who help families understand the culture and expectations of DCFS, communicate strengths of families and their community of origin, and when possible, prevent unnecessary removal of children that can occur as a result of cultural misunderstanding.

Parent advocates were assigned to 112 families and assisted them in building stronger community support systems, participating in parent networks that focus on community organizing and self-empowerment, and securing economic stability through linkages to public benefits, financial literacy programs, and job training programs. Parent advocates are life-trained paraprofessionals who have successfully negotiated child welfare systems and provide daily advocacy, leadership, and training for parents. Parent advocates are highly accessible to families and also participate in TDMs in order to help parents understand DCFS case plans, provide transportation, and most importantly, provide social support.

Faith-Based Parent-Child Visitation Centers

One of the most significant challenges facing the child welfare system is the separation of parents from their children. The goal of reunification, though paramount, is filled with many obstacles. One major obstacle to reunification has emerged around the need for additional coaching and support for mandatory monitored visits during which parents are required to demonstrate that they are improving their parenting skills and are capable of regaining custody of their children. Completing visitation requirements can be very difficult for parents, especially when there are numerous competing demands on their time, little or no private space to conduct meetings, and tension between social workers, foster parents, caregivers, and parents.

In order to address these problems, faith-based visitation centers were created, developed, and implemented by the SPA 8 PIDP network in partnership with the DCFS Torrance and South County (formerly called Lakewood) regional offices and two faith congregations (churches). Both centers were established in local churches through partnership with the faith communities. The centers were designed to create a home-like atmosphere with amenities such as a kitchen that would support more home-like activities, aiding family interaction and improving communication.

DCFS regional administrators in both offices explained that they belonged to a region-wide faith-based coalition called the South County Faith-Based Council, which includes churches, agencies, and local community residents. The idea of the visitation centers was introduced to the Faith-Based Council and was very well received. From this original council, the regional offices then partnered with the South Bay Counseling Center (SBCC), which provided support in the form of training and Live Scans for the coaches. The relationship with SBCC and the SPA 8 PIDP network has been one of technical support and initial introduction to the coaches for a two-session training.

The main successes of the visitation centers were establishment of the centers, staffing the centers, the positive reaction of the families that have been able to use the centers, and the commitment of child welfare staff from both DCFS regional offices. Staff in both regions said that the presence of the coaches has

alleviated some of the stress of serving their caseload; it has also served as a general support for their work. The staff reported that they genuinely enjoyed working with the coaches. It is important to note that for the Torrance staff, the "coaches" are primarily paid human service assistants (there is only one "volunteer" coach) and are carefully trained. For the Lakewood staff, the "coaches" are volunteers from the Park Crest Church and have received only training from SBCC. In both Torrance and Lakewood, families being served have been very positive about the visitation centers and the coaches.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Year 2 Program Design and Deliverables

It appears that DCFS and its partners are seeing results from the integration of the three core strategies, no matter the stage of prevention at which participants enter. The approach to prevention should continue to support the braiding and integration of the three strategies (build social networks, increase economic opportunities, increase access and utilization of resources and supports). Data from several sources suggest that the three strategies operate most effectively when they are considered as a holistic approach to building communities, supporting families, and increasing child safety.

Linking public and private services into a flexible array that can be easily accessed by families makes even more sense during a time of economic crisis for families and budget cuts for service providers. Taken together, the three strategies appear to be much more effective than any one strategy alone. Rather than just linking each family to "services" in a time of crisis or need, integrated networks addressing all three goals serve everyone by strengthening the capacity of communities to support all families and strengthening the capacity of families to care for themselves and their children.

1. **All networks need to engage residents and DCFS clients in a strength-based and relationship-focused manner (such as Community Action Groups) as part of their provision of comprehensive prevention services, resources, and supports to participants.**
2. **All networks need to deepen their family economic success strategies to mirror those that have demonstrated the best outcomes for residents, families, and communities as a whole. Effective strategies demonstrated during the first year include job training and placement programs and expanding access to EITC benefits.** The networks need to work in partnership with regional offices to ensure greater access for DCFS families and relative caregivers to these economic benefits.
3. **Some networks need to refine PIDP referral processes with their regional offices for secondary and tertiary supports for families referred by DCFS. Peer consultation and strategies from the PIDP networks that have demonstrated the highest levels of efficiency and timeliness in meeting the needs of these families could help to spread best practices.** During the first year, a good deal of attention was focused on countywide meetings, including monthly PIDP forums, two learning sessions, evaluation work group sessions, and other key meetings. While this was appropriate for the initial development stage, focus should now shift to helping to facilitate and strengthen local conversations.

Time is a critical resource for PIDP network members, and the more time that is spent driving to and participating in countywide meetings, the less that is available for the critical partnership work needed at the SPA level. Best practices need to be shared at the local level. For example, the SPA 2 network and the San Fernando Valley DCFS office created specific referral forms that should be shared across offices in order to make cross-agency referrals less cumbersome. This might involve streamlining internal paperwork and referral processes to reduce the number of forms needed by caseworkers. The San Fernando Valley office has also developed a Memorandum of Understanding with local community partners that outlines shared responsibility for determining which community partners attend Team Decision Making meetings.

4. **Implement Visitation Centers across all SPAs, with a focus on partnering with the faith-based community to develop and implement the centers, recruitment and training of coaching volunteers, and determining ongoing sustainability of these centers, as modeled in SPA 8.**
5. **The demonstrated ability of the lead agencies to significantly expand their network of services and resources indicates that these agencies, with proper support, can grow to meet many of the future needs of DCFS and County government.** This could include activities such as Differential Response Path One and current efforts to implement the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)/Stimulus program in LA County.
6. **Networks in conjunction with DCFS should explore varied sustainability strategies that would leverage and enhance the County's ability to provide ongoing investment in prevention work.** This should be in conjunction with the County's need to maximize matching for prevention efforts (see next section for details). Hopefully, findings from this study will be useful as DCFS continues its work on redesigning County contracts for PSSF and CAPIT programs, a critical opportunity to better integrate a number of key funding sources to assure maximum impact for families in need. DCFS should also continue to explore additional opportunities for enhancing its partnerships with First 5 LA and other funders, as suggested by the first-year PIDP network map.

Recommendations for DCFS Contracting, Procedures, and Practice

Based on these promising findings, PIDP should be continued, refined, and enhanced. To do this, several key issues will need to be considered carefully.

1. **DCFS should assure that second-year contracting processes are aligned with desired goals, outcomes, and processes referenced in the Program Design and Deliverables recommendation section.** Regional offices should continue to be involved in their designed PIDP lead agency's development of the second-year program deliverables.
2. **It is essential that the County maximize drawdown from all possible matching funding sources and that it continue to explore synergies with private grant-making.**
3. **Integration strategies need to be developed between the Chief Executive Office, DCFS, and PIDP network leaders to link other County departments into PIDP networks without overwhelming the limited capacity of these networks.** It is important that conversations about how to work effectively across departments consider the networks'

potential for effective outreach and information sharing in local neighborhoods, as well as direct participation of families in specific activities. It is also important to consider the extent to which the overall outcomes desired for families and children can be enhanced through better integration and alignment. Many of the PIDP approaches and activities should not only be effective in reducing child maltreatment but can also contribute to improving other aspects of the County's five outcomes for children: Good Health, Safety and Survival, Economic Well-Being, Social and Emotional Well-Being, and Education/ Workforce Readiness.

4. **During Year Two, DCFS and the PIDP lead agencies should jointly develop communication and outreach strategies to increase linkages for DCFS social workers to the PIDP networks.** This may require special training for supervisors of caseworkers who need to communicate and support the PIDP message, and it will require strategic thinking in each office about how to communicate the practical benefits of PIDP to caseworkers. Regional office administrators should share success stories at staff meetings, create newsletters, and email these success stories to everyone to reinforce the PIDP message and increase information about the opportunities available to families.
5. **DCFS and PIDP lead agencies should help caseworkers by developing visual case flows and other aids that clarify the different kinds of community connections that are possible for families.** Materials should go beyond the usual terminology of "referral to service providers" to include, for example, participation in relationship-based community support groups, access to free services and supports, claiming tax benefits, and enrollment in early care and education programs. Adapting or refining the DCFS flowcharts to show how PIDP and other community-based services can fit into the regular flow of services would help caseworkers expand the options they recommend to families.

Recommendations for Future Research and Evaluation

Our recommendations involve two kinds of activities: better coordination of data collection and analysis activities, and the need for more rigorous evaluation methods to be implemented in the future. Findings from descriptive evaluation of PIDP during its first year are very promising, suggesting that at least some of the prevention approaches should be evaluated more rigorously during subsequent years.

1. **Better coordination between PIDP network staff, internal DCFS program monitoring staff, DCFS information system staff, and external evaluators would help to assure that data collection tasks are not overwhelming for any one of these parties.** After the first year, it is reasonable to readdress questions about what really needs to be included in regular program monitoring reports. While it is easier to track the numbers served, such data generally do not pay enough attention to the value derived from different levels of effort, or different kinds of effort expended toward different kinds of gain, or the purposeful integration of the three prevention strategies. A workgroup composed of representatives of all parties should be established to revise basic monitoring and data tracking forms in order to get the best and most useful information possible.
2. **A targeted and rigorous evaluation plan should be developed by multiple stakeholders for the next stage of PIDP.** Although it was not possible to closely track child and family outcomes during the first year of PIDP, it will become more important every year to track

traditional child welfare outcomes, and to measure improvements in protective factors, family attitudes, and staff attitudes. The next set of research questions could include the following:

- How does PIDP affect DCFS referral rates in targeted high-need small communities (zip code areas)? How does PIDP affect case openings, foster care, child safety, and subsequent system utilization for the families known to the department who are referred to PIDP networks?
- How does PIDP, including utilization of the new visitation centers (based on a coaching model), impact reunification rates and length of time in out-of-home care?
- To what degree does social network group participation strengthen family protective factors (resilience, concrete support, pro-social connection, and social and emotional competence) in ways that are known to reduce child abuse and neglect?
- What PIDP outcomes can be monetized to document the economic benefits or return on investment (ROI) of this initiative?

Addressing these questions will require that DCFS and community agencies support a rigorous set of comparison group studies, as well as longitudinal data analyses of CWS/CMS and other data over time. By carefully phasing in key practice interventions, it should be possible to use comparison group evaluation designs that will more definitively address the questions above, including what set of prevention strategies works best for what kinds of communities.

In conclusion, Los Angeles has made tremendous strides in increasing access to family supports and decreasing the use of foster care by over 50%. During these challenging economic times, the PIDP networks in collaboration with local DCFS offices have helped to maintain some of these gains. Given this foundation, the County of Los Angeles has an opportunity to help solidify these networks and build on this progress to create one of the most innovative multi-faceted child abuse prevention systems in the country.

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