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Edward Waters College Schell-Sweet and Library Partnership Community Resource Centers: Executive Summary

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Overview of Two Florida Community Resource Centers: Observations and Comparison

Executive Summary

Introduction

The community partnership approach to addressing a wide variety of needs among families at risk of economic, social, and emotional challenges has been established in the Library Partnership (LP) in Gainesville, Florida, and the Edward Waters Schell-Sweet Community Resource Center (EWC-SSCRC) in Jacksonville. The LP and the EWC-SSCRC represent two among several community partnerships that have been supported by Casey Family Programs. Casey has committed to developing these kinds of strategic collaborations as part of its Communities of Hope, an initiative informed by those who have supported families in child welfare by improving relationships within neighborhods and communities (e.g., Bowie, 2011; Hawkins, Catalano, & Arthur, 2002; Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000). Casey Family Programs advocates for this approach as a model of change. As stated in their recent document *Building Communities of Hope* regarding those who work in the child welfare arena:

> Their collective wisdom has taught us that we cannot be satisfied simply to move children out of harm's way, from an unsafe home into a safer one. Instead, we must extend our hands and guide children into a place where hope prevails and a community of caring adults surrounds them (Casey Family Programs, 2012, p. 7).

This focus on community partnerships included the preparation of two chronicles, one on the LP and the other on the EWC-SSCRC. The chronicles provide a description of several primary features of each center, including a description of each center's purpose, programs and services offered at and through the center, their organizational structure and governing or advisory bodies, participation and performance expectations, and the funding or other resources that have contributed to the establishment and growth of each center. The chronicles also highlight several successes that have been part of each center's development. As part of the sharing of success, select programs and activities that were particularly well received among center participants as well as the broader community were identified. Some of these highlights captured innovative achievements. Each chronicle closes with sections on challenges that have been addressed, challenges that remain, and lessons learned. This document draws material from each of the chronicles to provide an overview of each community center and a comparison of the two centers

Library Partnership (Gainesville, Florida)

Since the initial concept of a community center began to take hold in 2007, the Library Partnership (LP) has made great strides in establishing its presence as a resource center meeting a diverse set of needs. Two community partners, the Partnership of Strong Families (PSF) and the Alachua County Library District (ACLD), joined hands to plan, fund, and develop the center. The location of the center was based on information regarding child abuse and neglect, the presence of other neighborhood resources (a public elementary school), and the need for library services. The fit between the two community partners was ideal due to convenience of location, appeal to those in the neighborhood and community, and the capacity of both partners to respond to emerging needs.

At this time, the LP provides a variety of services and programs, including family support/child development, health and safety, self-sufficiency, legal assistance, and technology (primarily computer access). The programs are coordinated by PSF and ACLD staff at the center in order to use the space wisely, to maximize coverage by staff, and visibility to the community. Among the programs offered by PSF, incentives have been valuable in attracting participants and ensuring their completion of programs.

Funding required for the LP is split 50/50 between the two community partners. Additional funding for operations and personnel has been provided by Casey Family Programs. A wide network of other community partners in the public sector and the business community has strengthened the resource base and provided opportunities to offer more diverse services and programs.

Use and performance has been a keen interest at the LP. The number of visitors to the LP from July 2011 through February 2012 averaged 864 per month. Children are about 18% of the participants served at the LP. The recent focus has been the satisfaction of the providers and the center visitors with the LP. Surveys among community partners have indicated that satisfaction with several different aspects of the LP was 92% or higher. Among the LP patrons responding to a survey, 94% were pleased with the LP services and 96% indicated that they would return to the LP for additional services. A logic model was developed early in the operation of the LP and has guided efforts to monitor progress and performance. In 2010 and 2011, compilation of data corresponding to outputs and several short-term outcomes in the LP logic model was completed and comprehensive. A comparison of the 2011 data with more recent data has not occurred yet, and long-term outcome indicators have not yet been measured.

While the LP has experienced substantial success and has several strengths as a community resource, there have been challenges and several lessons learned. Obtaining ongoing input from the neighborhood on needs and suggestions for improving the services or redirecting resources has been a challenge. Recently, there has been some success obtaining input from younger residents, and this has shifted attention to programs that address bullying and other upgrades in children's programming. Scheduling programs at times convenient for families has been another challenge. Continuing efforts through the media to communicate with the neighborhood and the community has been difficult due to insufficient funds. However, the LP's websites (http://www.pfsf.org/library-partnership and http://www.aclib.us/library-partnership), email updates (listserve), postings on Facebook, and coordination between PSF and the ACLD in preparing a calendar of programs that is distributed to visitors have kept some channels of communication open and active. Volunteers are vital to the operation of the LP and are an important part of any center's plans. Long-term planning to ensure the viability of the center remains an essential ongoing task.

Edward Waters College Schell-Sweet Community Resource Center (Jacksonville, Florida)

Since the EWC-SSCRC was established in 1995, it has made its mark as a resource center meeting a diverse set of needs in the immediate neighborhood and surrounding area. Three community partners, Edward Waters College (EWC), the City of Jacksonville, and Family Support Services of North Florida (FSSNF), have joined hands to make this a viable and appealing place to receive services. The location of the EWC-SSCRC on the EWC campus allows the center to blend the goals and missions of two well-established entities that also have independent identities in the broader community. The center's mission recognizes that academic, social, and health needs are incorporated in their goals. The

convenience of the center's location, the attractive façade and welcoming atmosphere of the facility, the committed staff and volunteers, and the selection of programs that serve a wide range of ages and needs have been a positive combination for EWC-SSCRC.

At this time, the EWC-SSCRC offers a variety of services and programs, including family support/child development, health and safety, and self-sufficiency. The programs operating at EWC-SSCRC serve families, young adults, and seniors. Use of the center space is coordinated by the center manager and a combined calendar is prepared for general dissemination. The family practice clinic has an assigned space at the EWC-SSCRC and operates as a separate but vital unit at the center. There is interest in offering services and programs that cover the entire life span, from birth to senior status. In addition, opportunities for participants to pursue entrepreneurial ventures have been mentioned as a need and interest for future program development.

Funding required to operate the EWC-SSCRC relies primarily on EWC and FSSNF. Operating expenses and several staffing positions are covered by each of these entities. The City of Jacksonville owns the land where the center is located. Additional funding for operating expenses and personnel is provided by Casey Family Programs. Several programs in the community offer their services and hold classes at EWC-SSCRC. Donations from other agencies have been notable; for example, desk-top computers that are used for multiple purposes at EWC-SSCRC were donated by the Florida Department of Children and Families. More innovative fund-raising has occurred at EWC-SSCRC as well. A play titled *Choices* is an example. Talent at the center and on the EWC campus was brought together to produce the play and raise funds.

Improving resident use and performance data have been of interest at EWC-SSCRC. An estimate of the number of visitors to the EWC-SSCRC, not including the family practice clinic, was 480 in March 2012. A profile of the visitors at the center that was developed by EWC-SSCRC indicated that around 90% are African American, 75% are female, and 80% are from the immediate neighborhood. At this time, performance and satisfaction with the services at EWC-SSCRC have not been measured. With advances in the data collection and sharing mechanisms, it is possible that these measures will become part of the knowledge base that will be available to the EWC-SSCRC for planning and improving services.

While EWC-SSCRC has experienced substantial success as a community resource, there have been challenges. For example, obtaining ongoing input from the neighborhood on needs and suggestions for improving the services or redirecting resources has been a challenge. Scheduling programs and services at times that are convenient for and complement the needs of participants has been challenging but is a priority. The adequacy of efforts for outreach to the neighborhood and the community has been a concern among center staff. Signage at and in the general area of the EWC-SSCRC has not been sufficient to communicate with the neighborhood and the community at large. However, the website (http://www.schellsweetcrc.org) and coordination between EWC and FSSNF in preparing a calendar of programs that is distributed to visitors have kept some channels of communication open and active. Volunteers are vital to the operation of the EWC-SSCRC and continue to be part of the center's plans. Long-term planning with a memorandum of agreement among program partners and planning for sustainable funding are also essential to ensure the viability of a center.

Comparison of the Community Centers

Two additional project evaluation activities involved developing a list of observations of each center and then comparing these observations. These activities included a review of background materials from each center by two members of our evaluation team. Both evaluators also visited each center. After the visits to both centers in April 2012 (Library Partnership on April 13 and Schell-Sweet on April 17), each evaluator listed observations of each center. Next, the observations that were similar across the evaluators for each center were identified; then the similarities and differences between the two centers were identified. The following two tables list the observations for each center and the observation frequency across evaluators and centers. The tables are followed by a summary of the comparison of the two community centers with features that were similar across centers and features that were different or unique to each center identified. At the end of this comparison section, a list of *essential* features, functions, or capacities that should be considered when developing and/or operating community centers is presented. The document ends with a brief summary.

Table 1: Library Partnership Key Observations

Site Visit – April 13, 2012
Neighborhood Resource Center and Library

Observations at the Center	Observation Frequency by the Evaluation Team
1. Operation of the center depends on a partnership with the library system. This partnership includes sharing space in the facility as well as coordinating programs and services offered to the community residents. The two maintain a very solid, supportive collaboration.	✓✓
2. Functions performed and services provided at the center depend on partnerships with a network of other social service agencies as well as businesses in the community.	✓✓
3. The support of community leadership is important and this support is evident in Partnership for Strong Families (PSF) as well as the library system.	✓
4. Center offers a variety of services and benefits for a wide range of community residents. The majority of services and benefits are free.	✓✓
5. Center includes a focus on client employment and maintains contact with a network of employers interested in hiring clients.	✓✓
6. Center is interested in learning more about clients, identifying their needs, and identifying ways they can help them.	✓✓
7. Center is interested in improving the self-esteem of clients.	✓✓
8. Center relies on part-time staff who are also assigned to other projects not at the center.	✓
9. Center relies on volunteers and student interns. Careful selection of interns is important.	✓✓
10. Knowing what the community needs and wants the center to	✓

Observations at the Center	Observation Frequency by the Evaluation Team
provide is important. Efforts have been made to obtain this information (also part of the initial development of Southwest Advisory Group or SWAG).	
11. Center does not have an active advisory group currently (community advisory council) but has identified an option for establishing an advisory group with members who are younger.	✓✓
12. Center location is considered "awesome."	✓✓
13. Center would like to know about subsequent success experienced by the clients who are served (i.e., those who find employment) and is looking into more outcome-oriented data collection.	✓✓
14. Marketing the Center is a challenge. Resources are not available to market the center using radio spots and bus placards (techniques they have used in the past).	✓✓
15. Program materials for the library include those organized and sponsored by the center.	✓
16. Separate website is available for the Library Partnership.	✓✓
17. As part of plans for the future, the Center would like to add programs and expand the space in the facility. Identified program needs concern working with fathers.	✓✓
18. Center has conducted satisfaction surveys to assess performance.	✓✓
19. Center has maintained on-going records of number of residents served.	✓✓
20. Job fair/other employment services (resume building, job board, etc.) have been shown to have the highest level of interest and participation.	✓✓
21. Other programs that see a great deal of interest and participation are the Clothing Closet and legal clinics (child support, expongement of records, etc.).	✓
22. Center is oriented toward serving young families and caters to children (for example, providing childcare during program/events).	✓
23. Center offers more structured programs, often organized into time-limited classes.	✓
24. Center uses relatively sophisticated technology and social media efforts (e.g., electronic counters, Mailchimp, email listserves and e-blasts, exploring Facebook presence).	✓
25. Employees/volunteers bring in a great many of their own networks and professional and personal contacts to benefit the Center.	✓
26. Center could benefit from a more inviting exterior and landscaping.	✓
27. Center conducts a considerable amount of community outreach in low-income housing developments/complexes, community events such as art festivals that draw in the people they would like to serve. Center staff recognize the importance of going out and being "personable" in order to market the programs.	✓

Observations at the Center	Observation Frequency by the Evaluation Team
28. Center works hard to ensure a minimal amount of initial paperwork is required to participate and connect to services. Collecting a "life story" during the initial client visit to the center is not necessary because clients will willingly provide information later once they feel comfortable and trust the organization.	✓

Table 2: Edward Waters College Schell-Sweet Community Resource Center Site Visit – April 17, 2012

Observations at the Center	Observation Frequency by the Evaluation Team
1. Operation of the Center depends on a partnership with Edward Waters College, Family Support Services of North Florida, and the City of Jacksonville. The City of Jacksonville owns the property and the building. This partnership includes sharing space in the facility as well as coordinating programs and services offered to the community residents.	✓✓
2. Historically, center services were focused on senior citizens. Currently, the Center offers a large number and wide range of programs and services that serve multiple generations, and the Center is focusing on rebranding their "geriatric identity."	✓✓
3. Funding of the center programs and services depends on a variety of grants and sources of funding that are insufficient to cover operating expenses.	✓
4. Several key community partners for the Center were identified with DCF, FSSNF, New Town, Florida State College, St. Vincent's (Brighter Beginnings) on that list.	✓✓
5. Events to raise funds to support the center have been organized and conducted by center volunteers, staff, and clients. (**Choices** play production)	✓✓
6. Special attention was devoted to how the activities and programs compliment and fit together (e.g., pre-GED session was scheduled right before the GED session, which allowed the pre-GED students to stay and observe the GED session).	✓
7. Center depends on the assistance of adult volunteers (*Faithful 40*) and students (e.g., pre-GED).	✓✓
8. Center does not have a comprehensive ongoing record system to monitor number of clients served in all programs and activities.	✓✓
9. A separate website was recently developed for the Center.	✓✓
10. The support of leadership in the community is important. Support from FSSNF is evident. Support of interested residents in the community and those associated with other projects that include the Center (i.e., New Town Success Zone) was evident.	✓✓
11. Food distribution, Senior Wellness, STEPS (In-Home Parenting Services), GED classes, and a family practice clinic were identified as the programs/services with the highest level of interest and	✓✓

Observations at the Center	Observation Frequency by the Evaluation Team
participation.	
12. Center is interested in improving the self-esteem of clients.	✓✓
13. Center has a comprehensive program schedule available for clients.	✓✓
14. Future plans for the Center expressed by center staff included the expansion of physical space in the existing facility (second story), a jobs skill program, a program for pregnant teens, and a dads program.	✓✓
15. Center had part-time accessibility to ACCESS to apply for state and federal benefits.	✓✓
16. Marketing the Center was identified as a challenge. The visibility of the Center with current signage was considered inadequate.	✓✓
17. Has a devout following of participants who can be counted on to support the management with "whatever we want to do."	✓
18. Center is a well-established community fixture (open since 1999) and has the advantage of over a decade in operation.	✓
19. Center offers a great deal of access to technology (via computer lab) and many programs are computer-based.	✓
20. Some partnerships are still developing and need more permanency (i.e., issue of temporary lease agreements and aversion to acting as a "landlord").	✓
21. Center offers more open-ended programs (with the exception of any financial/budgeting assistance), which function with fewer time limitations and more "at-your-own-pace" format.	✓
22. The large number of partnering entities can sometimes slow down progress (since all have to act in unison), and some partnerships are more bureaucratic than others.	✓
23. A key staff person at EWC-SSCRC and funded through FSSNF plays an instrumental role as liaison between partners, constantly working the relationships throughout the Center.	✓

Similarities across Community Centers

Despite the unique organizational structures and other features of these community centers, several similarities merit noting. Table 3 lists the observations that were similar across the centers. Five of the similarities are highlighted here.

Both centers rely heavily on volunteers. The EWC-SSCRC in particular boasts a superb volunteer commitment due to their largely senior population, which make up the *Faithful 40*. They demonstrate an impressive passion for giving back to the community.

Partnerships with other community organizations (both formal and informal) are critical, and often employees bring in their own personal/professional networks and contacts for the benefit of the centers.

The centers are about more than simply connecting people to resources. Extra time is spent consciously incorporating the idea of self-worth and elements of empowerment into work with clients, beginning with the initial meeting. This is not something that employees have developed through formal training. It stems from personal commitment to and compassion for the clients who visit the center.

Both centers place a lot of emphasis on building trust within the communities they are in and with their clients, mostly through consistency of programming, follow-through on promises, and minimally invasive initial relationships (i.e., not demanding a lot of paperwork in order to connect or participate in the beginning).

Both centers also find many of the same issues challenging:
- Lack of formal marketing techniques (both rely primarily on word of mouth)
- Incomplete data collection (LP with outcomes and EWC-SSCRC with basic participation numbers)
- Inadequate physical space (both seek expansion in the near future)
- Community visibility (despite excellent locations close to the people they aim to serve)

Table 3: Similar Observations at Both Community Centers

1. Functions performed and services provided at the center depend on partnerships with a network of other social service agencies as well as businesses in the community.

2. Center offers a variety of services and benefits for a wide range of community residents. The majority of services and benefits are free.

3. Center is interested in learning more about clients, identifying their needs, and identifying ways they can help them.

4. Center is interested in improving the self-esteem of clients.

5. Center relies on volunteers and student interns. Carefully selecting interns is important.

6. Center location is considered "awesome."

7. Marketing the center is a challenge. Resources are not available to market the center using radio spots and bus place-cards (techniques they have used in the past).

8. Separate website is available.

9. As part of plans for the future, the Center would like to add programs and expand the space in the facility.

10. Employees/volunteers bring in a great many of their own networks and professional and personal contacts to benefit the center.

11. Center conducts a considerable amount of community outreach in low-income housing developments/complexes, community events such as art festivals that draw in the kind of people they serve. Center staff recognize the importance of going out and being "personable" in order to market the center programs.

12. Center works hard to ensure a minimal amount of initial paperwork is required to participate and connect to services; collecting a life story during the initial client visit to the center is not necessary because clients will willingly provide information later once they feel comfortable and trust the organization.

13. Center has a comprehensive program schedule available for clients.

14. Marketing the center was identified as a challenge. The visibility of the center with current signage was considered inadequate.

Unique Aspects of the Community Centers

The EWC-SSCRC benefits from being a more established community asset, with the advantage of about 13 years in operation behind them and a devout following of program participants to support management's decisions. Although the LP has achieved an impressive amount in a short time, they have only been open for about three years.

The LP is more advanced than EWC-SSCRC in its use of computer related applications. This difference was evident in the availability of computers with software suitable for different age categories, participant data collection, evaluation, and social media (e.g., use of electronic counters, Mailchimp, listserves/e-blasts, exploring a Facebook presence, and a well-developed website connected to PSF). Both centers offer access to computers but there are differences in the access. The LP allows access to computers through the library with a focus on selected age categories in separate locations within the library. EWC-SSCRC appeared to offer more access to technology for its clients through its computer lab in a larger space that accommodated use by participants in structured classes as well as open access to others. Tools often used in program evaluation, such as logic models and survey tools, were developed and available for monitoring progress and satisfaction with LP services. Both centers had websites, but the LP was developing other communication options available on the Internet through Facebook and listserves.

The EWC-SSCRC and the LP target a number of the same core issues, but they address them in different ways. For example, a community need for basic necessities (concrete services) is met through Food Giveaways at EWC-SSCRC and Clothing Closet at LP. Employment is addressed at EWC-SSCRC through job skill-building (computer/typing classes, entrepreneurship program, and formerly a certified nursing assistant program) while the LP focuses on linking clients directly to jobs (resume writing and job board).

EWC-SSCRC has a very casual, relaxed atmosphere and community "vibe." Programs/classes are very supportive, open-ended, operate on an "at-your-own-pace" format (with the exception of any budgeting/financial assistance programs) and function with fewer time limitations. The LP has slightly more structured programs that are organized into time-limited classes.

Overall, EWC-SSCRC is very education and health-focused, while the LP is very family/parenting and employment-focused. EWC-SSCRC has primarily served seniors, while the LP is oriented toward serving young families and children. However, both are seeking to expand their client base further, with the EWC-SSCRC in particular taking on a multi-generational approach.

Community Resource Center Essentials for the Future

Planning for the development and ongoing improvement of a community resource center requires careful consideration of multiple factors. Lessons from the two centers highlighted in this executive summary provide a preliminary list of "essentials" that can augment these planning phases. While there is not a claim that the selection of essentials covered here is a complete set, they are an excellent initial platform for planning purposes.

The center should have an "identity" or presence in the neighborhood and/or community. The neighborhood and community need to be aware of the existence of the center and what the center provides. The need for more advertising and better signage at key locations near the center and in the community were considered important. The development of a center website is another component of an established presence. Links in other websites for other community programs and services that connect to the center website are also helpful.

The community network supporting the center in the initial stages of formation and during its operation needs to be wide, diverse, and engaged. Social service agencies, businesses, residents, and other partners should be contacted, informed about the center, and asked to offer input and support in a variety of capacities. In addition, understanding the needs and opinions of those who will be visiting the center is essential. A process for collecting input from the network is an instrumental part of initial development and ongoing success.

Volunteers are a vital part of the development and operation of the center. It is beneficial for the volunteers to be familiar with the neighborhood, the clients served, and programs operating through the center, and be committed to its purpose. Selection of volunteers was also considered very important with certain skills and expectations being a better match for the needs.

Including an administrative function housed in the center that can coordinate programs and services and maintain counts of participants and visitors at the center is essential. The collection of data necessary for outputs and measures in the logic model facilitates a center's ability to monitor its activities and its impact on participants as well as the community. This function should include calendars that display all of the programs and services offered each week or month. Brochures and other materials about center services and programs augment the efforts to communicate with neighborhood and community residents. As a final administrative concern, part-time staff at the center cannot be expected to perform the responsibilities of full-time staff.

Funding should be sufficient to sustain the center. Ideally, allocation of funding for the center should be more closely tied to programs or services offered. Paying rent for space at the center was not considered by some to be an appropriate way to fund a community center. Funding should be allocated in a manner that contributes to building a center, allowing the programs to interface with each other in ways that are complementary to each program and supportive of serving a broader clientele. Interlocal agreements between key funding partners were identified as a way to maximize what is provided with the available funds. Special efforts to raise funds for a center were also considered very beneficial and opportunities to bring together the supporters of a center for that purpose.

Facilitating some coordination between the regional child welfare agency and the center is another important aspect for consideration. Making sure the child welfare agency has an opportunity to offer input and be a partner in the center will help connect center visitors to important resources that may otherwise be difficult to access.

Summary

Impressive potential for community partnerships to perform a major role in improving the well-being of children and families is evident in the two community centers highlighted in this summary. While demonstrating a number of differences, the Library Partnership and the Edward Waters College Schell-

Sweet Community Resource Center have established a strong connection to the neighborhoods and communities they serve. Partnerships between well-established agencies in the community have been forged to make each center viable and responsive. While ensuring service diversity, coordination across agencies and program providers has been a key aspect of success.

Despite the challenges to progress and success, considering essentials for community centers in the future should be a valuable exercise. There is no substitute for obtaining input from the community network and the residents that a center would like to serve. The importance of a wide network of support in the immediate area and throughout the community is without question another essential ingredient. A pool of skilled and committed staff and volunteers make the center an attractive and caring place. Funding and administrative support add to its dependability in serving the public and in its capacity to monitor its performance and success with patrons. Helping a community center reach its potential is strengthened when the essentials highlighted here are folded into the center's plan.

Preparation of the Chronicles and this Executive Summary

The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida prepared the chronicles and this executive summary with guidance and funding provided by Casey Family Programs. The evaluation team obtained information available on the LP and visited the LP on April 15, 2012. During the visit, the team conducted a tour of the facility and interviewed several staff. In addition, the evaluation team observed two activities at the LP; F.I.R.S.T. parenting-support class graduation ceremony and a class on legal issues in domestic violence that was open to professionals and individuals needing assistance. The evaluation team obtained information available on the EWC-SSCRC and visited the center on April 17, 2012. During the visit, the team completed a tour of the facility and interviewed several staff and volunteers. In addition, the evaluation team observed activities in a program focused on senior wellness and a GED prep class.

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