

2004

Family to Family community outreach

Kimberly Char
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes

Recommended Citation

Char, Kimberly, "Family to Family community outreach" (2004). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 186.

https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes/186

This Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. Unless otherwise indicated, this project was conducted as practicum not subject to IRB review but conducted in keeping with applicable regulatory guidance for training purposes. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Kimberly Char
CHHS 400/496
Senior Capstone/ Field Seminar

May 19, 2004

Senior Capstone Project
Family *to Family* Community Outreach

Family to Family Community Outreach

Description of Agency

My senior field placement for the last nine months has been with the Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services (DSES). Their mission is to promote the social and economic self-reliance of each individual and family in Monterey County. The DSES provides over seventy programs to Monterey County residents from all backgrounds, culture, ethnicity and age. These services include a variety of public assistance programs, employment services, and programs for disabled adults and older individuals.

My internship placement at DSES was with the Family and Children's Services division. This division is more commonly known as Child Protective Services. One of the main responsibilities of social workers in this department is to investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect. Emergency Response social workers are obligated to either substantiate or dismiss these allegations. Based on their determination, they may choose to remove a child from his or her home. In this situation, Family and Children's Services' social workers are responsible for finding a stable, loving foster home for the child and offer services to the birth family. The ultimate goal is to reunify families if it is in the best interest of the children. The work this agency provides to the community is invaluable. They help create and maintain strong, healthy families; a service the community could not do without.

Within the Department of Social and Employment Services is a new child welfare initiative called *Family to Family*. My main focus was to provide support to this initiative. *Family to Family* is part of the California Child Welfare Re-design and is intended to change the current system of foster care. This initiative brings four key strategies that are designed to better support Monterey County's foster children.

Family to Family is a community-based approach to foster care that aims to recruit, train, and support more locally based and culturally sensitive foster homes in Monterey County. By doing this, more foster children will have safe places to live within their own communities. Building strong community partnerships is a component for this initiative's success. *Family to Family* seeks to collaborate with community services to create a stronger network of support for foster children and their families. Team Decision Meetings (TDM) is a unique way for *Family to Family* to make decisions about a foster child's life. Staying congruent to the community-based approach, *Family to Family* brings social workers, birth and foster families, relatives, community leaders and any other stakeholder to the table to discuss issues surrounding a child in foster care. The idea behind a TDM is to give everyone an opportunity to voice his or her opinion, share information, and to make the most informed decision.

History of the Problem

The problem is the lack of adequate foster services to accommodate the large foster child population in California. Since the 1970's, there has been a significant increase in the number of children entering into state care. Today, the nation has roughly 1.5 million children in foster homes and institutions, with over 100,000 in California (Jue, 2002). Approximately 16% of substantiated reports to Child Protective Services result in child removal. The issue presents a paradox, for although the children's home settings may be determined as unsafe, inadequate service delivery in foster and institutional care settings has created a system that often harms the children more (Jue, 2002). The current system often fails to address the needs of foster parents, foster children, and birth parents, which fragments families and children.

One of the biggest problems with appropriately caring for foster children is the lack of qualified homes. As the number of children needing foster homes has increased, the number of

qualified foster parents has dropped (Bartholet, 1999). There are not enough people willing to provide foster care, which has resulted in more lax regulations and requirements for foster parents. The qualifications of caring for a child are being minimized, arguably increasing the risk to the child of having a poor placement, and possibly even an abusive one. This is just one of the reasons the state of California has implemented a Child Welfare Re-design and the *Family to Family* Initiative is underway in Monterey County.

The Need

The *Family to Family* Initiative was brought to Monterey County after discovering how many children entering the foster care system were being placed in homes outside of their own communities. This is absolutely devastating to foster children. Foster children already experience an incredible amount of trauma being removed from their birth families. When they are forced to live in homes outside of their own neighborhoods and communities, this trauma is dramatically increased. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2001) states that foster parents from other cities or communities are not always familiar with the child's strengths, culture, or roots. Because these children are removed not only from their homes but also from their familiar surroundings, they are often at a higher risk for depression, aggression, impulsiveness, anxiety disorders, and other mental health and behavioral problems.

Placing children outside of their original community also causes more obstacles for the birth parents in the reunification process. When children are placed outside of their own communities, parents have an extremely hard time making consistent visits to see them. As a result, the parents and the child's attachment bonds can slowly and painfully break, leaving the child feeling more confused and alone.

Statistics from the Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services in the year 2003 show that out of 44 children being removed from the Salinas 93905 community, only 6 were placed in foster homes within the 93905 community. This means 38 children were forced to move away from their family, friends, schools, and churches. In Marina, year 2003, 17 children were removed from their homes and only 8 were placed in Marina foster homes (MC, 2003). Again, 9 children experienced the unnecessary trauma of leaving their family, friends, schools, and churches, in addition to being at a higher risk of never being reunified with their birth families. These shocking statistics are the same across the board. Every community in Monterey County is facing a shortage of qualified foster homes for their children.

Family to Family seeks to change all of this. The key strategies focus a lot of attention on gaining support from the community. But for right now, *Family to Family* administrators have their attention focused on getting DSES staff and foster families on board. Left to the wayside for the time being is the general public. Besides short television commercials and individual efforts, there has not been widespread outreach to the community. Community members will be the “glue” for *Family to Family*. They are the ones who will step up and take foster children into their homes. Community organizations will provide the much needed services for foster children and their families.

Project Description

The title of my Capstone is *Family to Family: Community Outreach*. My Capstone project addressed the need for the general public to get informed and involved with *Family to Family* and to recruit more “cluster groups”. Cluster groups are groups of three families who provide support to a foster child and each other. The cluster consists of a Resource Family, the primary care giver, a Respite Family, a family who provides respite to the Resource family by

temporarily caring for the foster child, and a Support Family whose purpose is to provide support to the other families and foster child. My Capstone project consisted of a series of community outreach events whose purpose was to raise awareness of the need for more foster homes and to elicit interest from community members. I collaborated closely with the *Family to Family* Marina Coalition to stimulate this interest. I also created a PowerPoint presentation for the coordinator of *Family to Family* to use in future recruitment efforts countywide.

My intention for this project was to assist in the implementation of *Family to Family* by focusing my attention on the community members. I did outreach for *Family to Family* at a variety of community events and informational sessions. I began by holding two informational meetings about *Family to Family* at the Marina Public Library. These meetings were open to any community member who wanted to learn more about the initiative. I created a flyer and posted them all over Marina to advertise for this event. I also collaborated with the library staff to ensure a quiet and adequate space for community members to feel welcomed.

The second outreach event was held at St. Jude's Catholic Church in Marina. *Family to Family* coordinator, Valencia Thomas, executive director of Catholic Charities, Martina O'Sullivan, *Family to Family* community liaison, Begonia Campos, and myself were all part of the effort to recruit foster families from this parish. Ms. Thomas and Mrs. O'Sullivan both spoke during the services about the needs of Marina's foster children and Mrs. Campos and I continued outreach in the hall after the services. We spoke one on one with interested parishioners, answered their questions, and invited them to take the next steps in helping foster children by attending a *Family to Family* coalition meeting. This outreach event was extremely successful.

My next outreach event was held in Pacific Grove at the Good Old Days Celebration. This street festival brings thousands of community members from across the peninsula and

beyond. This was a great place for *Family to Family* to generate community interest. A *Family to Family* booth was set up and I spoke with the passer-bys about the initiative and shared with them the shocking statistics in our community. A lot of flyers were given out and *Family to Family* was well received by the patrons of this festival.

The Marina Farmers' Market is a lively weekly event that draws a large crowd of Marina residents. I was able to reserve *Family to Family* a table at the market to continue my outreach efforts for the community's foster children. At this event I met a couple of community members who were very interested in the possibility of fostering a child and even someone who wanted to know how the organization she works for could help. *Family to Family* and the Marina Farmers' Market have the potential for a great future partnership because of the success of this initial effort.

I continued my Capstone project outreach by presenting to the Kiwanis Club of Marina. This service club places a high priority on families and children so *Family to Family* is something I thought they would be interested. I arranged to make a presentation at one of their meetings and *Family to Family* was well received by them. Kiwanis members were awed by the statistics of Marina's foster children in comparison to the number of foster homes in Marina. I encouraged the Kiwanis to either get involved as a group or individually to support the initiative in their community.

In East Salinas, there is also a tremendous need to recruit more foster families. I collaborated with the East Salinas *Family to Family* community liaison, Rosario Aguirre, to do outreach in that community. I helped prepare two presentations for the Alisal Union School District Migrant Family Program. This involved creating a Spanish version of the *Family to Family* PowerPoint and creating informational handouts. Though I do not speak Spanish and

could not deliver the presentation, I was there to support the community liaison, help answer questions, and evaluate the event. The families at these presentations seemed to genuinely care about their community's foster children.

My last outreach event was the two-day Festival of the Winds in Marina. This is an annual festival that draws large crowds of families and children. I was fortunate to secure *Family to Family* a booth at the busy event and attended several meetings to make it happen. Hundreds of community residents visited the *Family to Family* booth and most of them took flyers and give away items to share with their friends and families. This weekend event was very long but it served as a great way to build awareness and stimulate interest in the foster care system.

Evaluation

The evaluation of this project was important. How would I know whether my outreach to the community made any difference? I evaluated my project based on three pieces of criteria. The first was the number of interest forms I received at my outreach events. When I spoke to people about *Family to Family*, some people were not interested, others were interested enough to take a flyer, and others were very interested and completed an interest form. These interest forms contained their contact information and what they were specifically interested in. Interest forms I received from events held in Marina were given to the *Family to Family* lead agency, Catholic Charities to follow through. At the end of my outreach project I received ten completed interest forms from community members who wanted to take the next steps in becoming involved with *Family to Family*.

The second criterion I used to evaluate my Capstone project was to measure the increase in Marina Coalition membership. Whenever I spoke with interested community members, I invited them to come to *Family to Family* coalition meetings to get “plugged in” and obtain more

information about what *Family to Family* is doing specifically in Marina. Our coalition began as a very small group with approximately four or five members, all of whom were social workers at DSES or staff from Catholic Charities. There were no community members in the coalition. But after several months of outreach, there were three new members to the Marina coalition and all of them were members of the community. I thought this was a fantastic improvement. Not only did they want to become part of the coalition, but they were also interested in becoming part of a cluster group for foster children.

The third evaluative criterion was an evaluation form. I only used this form for the presentations made to the Alisal Union School District. I wanted to see if the presentations the East Salinas community liaison and I were making were effective for the participants. Were they learning anything about *Family to Family*? Had they heard about *Family to Family* before this presentation? If so, from where? These were some of the things we wanted to know besides whether or not they wanted to become involved with foster care. These evaluation forms were completely voluntary and after two presentations, we had collected 14 of them. The East Salinas community liaison and I reviewed these forms and found that we were on track with providing comprehensible information during our presentations. These evaluation forms revealed that 7 out of 14 people had never heard of *Family to Family* before the presentation. This tells us that outreach and awareness efforts need to be stepped up in the East Salinas community. The information is not reaching many people.

After the overall evaluation was completed, the result is that 10 people from the Marina community showed strong interest in supporting their community's foster children and 3 community members joined the *Family to Family* Marina coalition. This seems like a small number but if these 13 people follow through with their support of foster children, then there

could potentially be 13 more foster homes in the city of Marina. This would impact Marina's foster children in such a tremendously positive way. In addition to this small success, hundreds of other community members took flyers and are at least aware of *Family to Family* and the need for more foster placements.

Major Learning Outcomes

My Capstone Project incorporates three of the Collaborative Health and Human Services Major Learning Outcomes. The MLO's this project will address are Personal and Professional Communication, Knowledge of Health and Human Services- social work, and Information Management. These outcomes will be addressed in a number of ways.

Making presentations on *Family to Family* to members of the community will be evidence of my knowledge and skill in the Personal and Professional Communication MLO. By maintaining a flow of information to my audience through the use of oral and written communication and the ability to articulate basic and complex ideas about *Family to Family*, I will certainly be able to accurately inform the community about this initiative. Using my communication knowledge and skills effectively will give *Family to Family* a better chance of gaining support from the community. Speaking one on one with individuals will also require a great deal of personal and professional communication.

Knowledge of Health and Human Services in the social work field is definitely addressed through this project. Before I can fully understand why and how *Family to Family* is being implemented, I must first understand how the Department of Social and Employment Services operates. I gained experience and observed social workers in all of the DSES units with the goal of human services competency in mind. Understanding the current foster care system will aid me in advocating for change with the new foster care approach *Family to Family* brings.

Lastly, the Information Management MLO will be addressed with this Capstone project. I am going to gather and have to manage a great deal of information about *Family to Family* and need to organize and present it effectively as to demonstrate my information's reliability. The use of Microsoft Word and PowerPoint was necessary to complete this project. Reviewing evaluation and interest forms, as well as creating a recruitment PowerPoint was evidence of my information management competency.

Aspects of my Capstone project can be directly linked to the California State University, Monterey Bay vision statement. Part of the vision of CSUMB is to serve the diverse people of California. It also states that the university's identity will be framed by community partnerships and commitment to multilingual learning. I believe that bringing awareness of *Family to Family* and recruiting more foster homes affects the entire community and is a service for the residents of Monterey County. They will gain knowledge about *Family to Family* and hopefully make the decision to become part of it. Preparing my material in English and Spanish will serve a larger body of Monterey County residents who are of multicultural and multilingual backgrounds.

I will present this capstone in PowerPoint format at the Capstone Festival.

Conclusion

This project has benefited the Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services by beginning the much needed community outreach efforts. This outreach project helped the *Family to Family* implementation process and enabled many Monterey County residents to know what the foster care system in the county is doing. In the long run, I would like to hope that this Capstone project will help future foster children find good homes in their community. Maybe next year statistics will show that a majority of foster children, rather than a minority, are placed in good homes within their own neighborhoods.

I have lived in Monterey County for four years now and am glad to have this opportunity to give back to my community. By bringing awareness to the community about this new foster care initiative, my goal was to help the Department of Social and Employment Services find more homes for foster children and ultimately provide them with a brighter future.

Archiving Information

This Capstone was archived at the California State University, Monterey Bay library on Wednesday, May 19, 2004.

References

Bartholet, Elizabeth (1999). Nobody's children. Boston: Beacon Press.

Jue, Glenn (2002). California research section: Stats. In CPS Watch [Online]. Available: <http://www.cpswatch.com/oldsites/> [2003, September 22].

Monterey County Department of Social Services, 2003. First time placement statistics.