



Learning Session: Strengthening family-focused community resource hubs through innovative contract management tools

Communities across the country are reimagining how to better support families before crises emerge, and many are expanding investments in community-based, prevention-oriented supports such as Family Resource Centers. On Thursday, December 9, 2021, the Government Performance Lab (GPL) led a [discussion with practitioners](#) exploring how real-time, data-driven, collaborative relationships with providers can improve outcomes at these family-focused community resource hubs. Featured speakers included:

- Octavia Shaw, Families First Program Manager, DC Child and Family Services Agency
- Theresa Zighera, Interim Executive Director, First 5 San Francisco
- Shelli Rawlings-Fein, Family Support Program Officer, First 5 San Francisco

Over the course of the conversation, participants elevated *three key takeaways*:

1. Family Resource Centers can support child and family well-being by providing easily accessible, preventative services that are tailored to a family's needs

Speakers described their approaches to setting up Family Resource Centers – community-based hub that offers a range of preventative services, such as home visiting, parenting education, play groups, health screenings, and food banks. While families may come to a Center for support with one issue, staff can help connect them to a range of additional services that they may benefit from. The Centers offer a holistic, whole-family approach (serving multiple generations) designed to support families to be strong and successful.

“Regardless of what brings a parent or family in to a Family Resource Center, community providers are able to develop that relationship, determine what’s going to work best for them in that moment... while also having an eye to what might be some other things, over time as the family is ready, that they might offer... It’s really an art form.”

- Theresa Zighera,
First 5 San Francisco

Family Resource Centers are judgement-free zones open to all families, designed to destigmatize the need for assistance as a parent and build communities of peer support. By inviting families to participate as leaders in their communities, and creating space for family input in designing service delivery, Family Resource Centers can more effectively support families before crises occur.

“At each of the Family Success Centers, [families are] intricately involved in the decision-making process, which is kind of rare because a lot of times decisions are made from the government or with a top-down approach. We have the families at the table with us.”

- Octavia Shaw,
DC Child and Family Services Agency

2. Tracking real-time data can improve the performance of services offered at Family Resource Centers and lead to better family outcomes

Strategically using Family Resource Center program data allows agencies to: 1) set consistent goals and clear expectations for providers; 2) identify areas of greatest need to inform funding and service delivery decisions; and, 3) enable real-time problem solving to improve outcomes for families. Key to the strategic use of data is an explicit focus on action steps, making sure that collected data is being used to inform decision-making and drive improvements in service delivery.

In San Francisco, program data is organized within a common evaluation framework, which enables continuous quality improvement across the entire Family Resource Center network. Participating agencies use this framework to track progress towards program goals and monitor family outcomes. By utilizing a single evaluation framework, it is easier to link services across centers for families with wide-ranging needs. The evaluation framework aligns providers around key goals but does not prescribe a specific set of activities, allowing the flexibility to tailor services to community needs.

“[With the evaluation framework], we did not take away the agency’s ability to meet the unique needs of their community and their populations that they served. [It] is a framework, it’s not a box. So [Centers] can really tailor their services to meet the needs of who they’re working with, and yet we can still have these evaluation standards to look towards.”

*- Shelli Rawlings-Fein,
First 5 San Francisco*

In Washington D.C., Families First staff use a strategy of [active contract management](#) that involves frequently meeting with Center providers to monitor family outcomes, flag challenges, and implement potential solutions. Every month, the team meets one on one with each provider and as a group to analyze trends, figure out what the data is saying, and then create a concrete action plan for next steps. The types of metrics the team monitors include the number of families served, the service requests that are met, external connections to other services, family satisfaction survey results, and protective factors survey results. While using real time data, the team’s strategy emphasizes real time action.

“We don’t take our information, our data, and do nothing with it. We look at our data, we hypothesize, we analyze the information that’s collected by all of our providers... we look at what’s happening across all of our Centers...and then we have conversations with each provider, looking at trends and patterns, what the data is telling us, but also the active part - what do we do with it? It’s not just for the sake of compliance.”

*- Octavia Shaw,
DC Child and Family Services Agency*

3. Data-driven changes that lead to concrete ‘wins’ for families can help build provider buy-in for consistent, high-quality data collection

Using data to improve service delivery can help reinforce to providers the importance of data collection and monitoring, underscoring that these processes are not a waste of time. In Washington D.C., for example, the Families First team used active contract management to identify and address a need for food supplies during the pandemic (see the text box below).

Using active contract management to address food shortages in Washington, D.C.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, D.C.'s Families First team noticed (in their data monitoring) that food had consistently been the number one requested service for nearly nine months. The team knew from prior data analysis that the affected neighborhoods had limited food access. For example, Ward 8 had over 80,000 residents but only one grocery store. Staff and community providers came together to discuss options for improving food access and security, and set out to provide more services to the families in need. One of the providers, which owned a market, began offering fresh food to the Centers, and another generated a space where families could come and get the fresh food. These actions (and the ongoing need) drew the attention of a philanthropist who donated \$100,000 to the Centers, as well as the DC government, which provided \$500,000 for nutrition and education programming, as well as concrete supports to provide families with food.

Learn more in our [Innovator Interview](#) and [Policy Brief](#).

Demonstrating a commitment to using only the data that actually impacts family outcomes can encourage providers to consistently collect and report high-quality data. The mantra used by First 5 San Francisco, 'if we don't use it, we're going to stop collecting it,' has helped the team build provider buy-in for their data collection processes.

Starting data collection efforts by asking providers what data they want to reach their strategic goals can be a useful exercise that facilitates buy-in and demonstrates a collaborative commitment to improving services for families. In addition to tracking real-time performance with the agency, providers use the data for a range of purposes - in their communications with families, in grant applications for additional funding, and to report out on their impact - so robust data collection processes can benefit everyone involved (the agency, providers, and families). Applying a strength-based lens, rather than a competitive or punitive lens, to the data collection process can enable collaborative conversations that benefit all provider partners.

"One of the main ways the we create [provider] buy-in is by asking them what data is helpful for them to use for families. What do they need to be able to do their services? What is important for families? What is important as they think forward in their strategic planning? So that the data we're asking for is actually useful. We try not to ask a lot of questions that aren't useful in the clinical practice of family support."

*- Shelli Rawlings-Fein,
First 5 San Francisco*

For more, listen to the [full conversation](#) or visit the GPL's [Children's and Families](#) webpage.

The Government Performance Lab is grateful for support from Bloomberg Philanthropies, Casey Family Programs, the Corporation for National and Community Service Social Innovation Fund, the Dunham Fund, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the Pritzker Children's Initiative, and the Rockefeller Foundation. © Copyright 2021 Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab.