Developments

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National Site Review

Experts Examine Family Support, Give County Centers High Marks

Allegheny County's 30 family support centers received high marks from a panel of national experts, who praised the strength and scope of the county-wide movement and the impact the centers have on the lives of children and families.

The level of parent involvement in centers, the support the centers receive from community leaders, and their ability to remain flexible in order to respond to the changing needs of families were also characteristics that impressed the Family Support National Site Review team, whose final report was released in September.

"Allegheny County has built a system of family centers in its highest risk communities whose reach within the targeted communities is as extensive as any in the country.

This alone is a tremendous achievement," the site review team wrote.

The report also identifies several challenges facing family support in the county as it expands, including the need for developing operational standards for family centers.

The site team was asked to assess family support in the county and recommend ways to strengthen it. On the site team were some of the nation's leading family support experts, including: Charles Bruner, Executive Director of the Child and Family Policy center in Iowa;

Arts Alive

Initiatives Promote The Arts As Key Early Learning Tool

It is impossible to miss the children's paintings, drawings, sculptures, and shoebox installations. They are impressive in number and quality, and brighten every room at the Shady Lane School with colorful expressions of early childhood imagination.

The work and the way it is respectfully displayed are the most visible evidence of Shady Lane's embrace of the arts as an integral part of the early learning experience.

"Exploring with art touches in a strong way all of the learning modalities of children," said Linda Ehrlich, Director, Shady Lane Resources. "It supports individualism, open-ended learning, and provides wonderful opportunities for language enrichment."

It is such a view that Shady Lane Resources and its partners are promoting through Arts Alive, an umbrella for several projects to bolster support for art in early childhood education and to help centers and preschools tap its development-enhancing potential.

Research suggests that the visual and dramatic arts and music support cognitive, social, and emotional development in a number of ways. The arts serve as creative languages through which children can express their understanding of the world. The arts are outlets for spontaneous creativity and opportunities for children to approach problems in a variety of ways. The arts also encourage children to risk trying something new.

Nilofer Ahsan, research fellow for Family Focus in Illinois; Linda Ramsey, Director of Curriculum and Technical Assistance for Friends of the Family; and Judy Langford, the former executive director of Family Support America who is recognized as helping create the national family support movement.

Parent Involvement

One of the county family support movement's strengths is the level to which parents have participated in their centers, the movement itself, and as advocates for issues important to children and families, the report said.

Parents are involved in the governing of their centers and several have participated on the county-wide Family Support Policy Board. The movement also established Community Voices, a coalition of family support parents that examines and addresses child and family issues. In 1999, for example, Community Voices lead an effort to educate communities and the Pennsylvania state legislature about the changing needs of children and families and the role the centers play in strengthening families.

The site team reported that the "creation of a critical mass of engaged parents" in the county has set a standard for what parent involvement can and should be in centers across the county. "The level of parent involvement – at the centers from program development to governance, at the county level through Community Voices and the Policy Board, and even at the state level through the Harrisburg 6 – is exemplary," the site team wrote.

A Flexible System

No fewer than 14 community organizations serve as lead agencies of family centers in Allegheny County. It is one mark of a diverse, flexible system that site reviewers noted as another of the movement's strengths.

The system that has evolved is one that draws financial support from diverse funding sources, allows a number of different voices to share ownership of the centers, has expanded the number of stakeholders invested in family support, and has benefited from not being bound by a preconceived plan or narrow vision.

"The diversity of agencies underscores the goal of avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions and forces creative thinking to continue to meet the unique needs of different neighborhoods," the report states.

The report identified several other strengths and exemplary practices of the family support movement in the county, including:

● *The role of the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development as a facilitator and in providing technical assistance and best practices information to family centers.*

● *The level of support family centers have attracted from community organizations and leaders, including foundations, the private sector, university, other organizations, and government.* Reviewers noted the support shown by the county Department of Human Services, including an increase in funding for family centers. "The sustainability of family centers ultimately will be dependent upon the sustainability of such leadership and the development of new leaders from the government and private sector, augmented by the emerging parent leadership."

● *The willingness to examine work and be accountable.* Development of a management information system, reviewers said, will help centers develop better quality improvement systems and set overall expectations based on documented experiences.

Perhaps most important, the report finds that after nearly a decade of steady growth, the impact of the network of family centers in Allegheny County is beginning to be felt county-wide.

Challenges Ahead

One of the most critical challenges ahead for family support in Allegheny County is to define what it means to be a family center and develop a set of standard operational characteristics, the reviewers concluded.

Family centers currently embrace four "core standards" – management information system, evaluation, quality as-

*(**Arts** continued from Page 1)*

But too many early childhood centers and preschools fail to integrate the arts in a meaningful way. To some, art is simply a craft-like activity that takes children away from real learning. "There is a need to help early childhood professionals understand the value of art and its implementation," said Cindy Bahn, Project and Training Coordinator, Shady Lane Resources.

In an effort to strengthen the arts in early education, Shady Lane Resources has taken the role of coordinating partner in three projects under the Arts Alive umbrella, which is funded by the Heinz Endowments: Celebrating Those Who Care, The Early Childhood Collaborative for Arts and Literacy, and the Pennsylvania Alliance for the Arts in Early Education.

Campaigning For The Arts

Celebrating Those Who Care uses the arts as the unifying theme in its efforts to support and inform a spectrum of caregivers so that they are better able to provide preschool-aged children with high quality care and education.

Shady Lane's partners in the project include the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development and the Margaret Shadick Cyert Center for Early Education at Carnegie Mellon University.

The project is launching a public education campaign around the importance of support and training for caregivers. It commissioned regional artist Mary Hamilton, who created a colorful print for the campaign.

Hamilton's print, in poster form, will be sent to all licensed child care centers and family support centers in Allegheny County, along with general information about how children grow and develop, and information about how art can support developmental milestones from ages birth to five years. The centers will also be given suggestions for activities that support the visual and dramatic arts.

Hamilton's work is also being sold as a limited edition series, in addition to notecards, to establish a Quality Enhancement Fund, which will offer early childhood education centers and staff mini-grants to enhance the quality of their programs.

Working With Centers

The Early Childhood Collaborative for Arts and Literacy, operating in 11 Pittsburgh-area centers, works with educators and staff to encourage interactive, open-ended daily exposure to the arts to replace the commonly-found "one-shot teacher-directed craft approach," Ehrlich said.

A collaboration between Shady Lane School and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, the project looks for new ways to use the arts to stimulate children's learning and to link art activities with literacy development.

Among the project's objectives are to increase the knowledge and skills of educators in engaging children in developmentally-appropriate arts and literacy activities, and to help children use the arts as a means of expression, to stimulate creativity, and as a way to acquire literacy skills and build self-esteem and competence.

To that end, a team consisting of an artist and an early childhood specialist visits the centers, offering services such as demonstrations of art and literacy activities. Centers are provided resources such as reimbursement for staff attending training, art supplies, consumables, cameras, and other equipment. The project also publishes a newsletter and organizes open houses and other activities to engage parents as partners in their children's early care and education.

Statewide Initiative

A third project, the Pennsylvania Alliance for the Arts in Early Education, is coordinating a statewide initiative to raise awareness among policymakers and educators to the importance of integrating and supporting the arts in early childhood education.

Shady Lane Resources is joined in the project by Changing Directions, Settlement Music School, Northhampton Community College Early Childhood Programs, and the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts.

As part of the campaign, the initiative gathers and distributes information regarding current views and practices related to the arts and young children, builds on efforts to increase awareness and action to promote arts programming, and attempts to increase the number of preschool-age children who have access to the arts.

The first step was to survey early childhood centers about how they view their use of the arts and what they think they need to improve their arts programming. The centers reported their most pressing need is training for staff in using the arts more effectively.

Ehrlich said that a little training and understanding of the benefits young children reap from the arts often go a long way. "We've seen teachers redesign their whole room once they were willing to acknowledge that there should be art materials available to children all of the time."

FOR INFORMATION, contact Linda Ehrlich at 243-4040; fax: 243-0504; email: lindashady@aol.com.

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Announcements

Grants Available To Study Pediatric Brain Disorders

Three federal institutes invite exploratory/developmental grant applications to encourage novel research in applying fundamental neurobiology to pediatric brain disorders of anomalous development, neurodegeneration, and injury.

The grants are being offered by The National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the National Institute of Mental Health.

Examples of possible research include studies that identify pre- and/or postnatal brain developmental mechansims linked to the pathophysiology of mental disorders, and studies identifying genes involved in anomalous development, degeneration, or injury processes.

The grants are offered to public and private for-profit and nonprofit organizations. Deadlines for applications are February 1, 2001, and June 1, 2001.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Giovanna Spinella, NINDS, telephone (301) 496-5821, fax (301) 402-0887, email: gs41b@nih.gov; Felix De La Cruz, NICHD, telephone (301) 496-1383, fax (301) 496-3791, email: fd14a@nih.gov; Douglas Meinecke, NIMH, telephone (301) 443-5288, fax (301) 443-4822, email: dmein@helix.nih.gov; or visit the web site: http://grants.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PAS-99-080.html. ■

Summer Institute Offered For Family Researchers

The Family Research Consortium III, supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, is taking applications for a 2001 Summer Institute for family researchers.

The theme of the 2001 Summer Institute is "Public Policy, Socioeconomic Disadvantage and Child Development." It will be held June 21-24, 2001 at the Lake Tahoe Resort in South Lake Tahoe, California.

The Institute offers a forum for dissemination, evaluation, and discussion of important new developments in theory and research design, methods, and analysis in the field of family research. The Institute accepts a limited number of junior and senior researchers as participants and allows for intellectual exchange among participants and presenters in addition to the more structured program of presentations. Minority family researchers are particularly encouraged to participate.

Deadline for applications is March 23, 2001.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Dee Frisque, Center for Human Development and Family Research in Diverse Contexts, Pennsylvania State University, 106 Henderson Bldg., University Park, PA 16802; telephone (814) 863-7106; fax (814) 863-7109; e-mail: dmr10@psu.edu; web site: www.hhdev.psu.edu/chdfrdc.■

Several NIH Institutes Offer Predoctoral Research Fellowships

Five federal institutes are offering predoctoral research fellowships related to health. The National Institutes of Health has announced that a new expanded program is making fellowships available from the following: the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

Applicants must be citizens or nationals or permanent residents and must have a baccalaureate degree and be enrolled in a program leading to a research doctorate or combined research/clinical doctorate or equivalent degree.

The annual stipend for the predoctoral fellowships is $15,060. NIH reimburses 100% of the cost of tuition up to $3,000 and 60% of the cost above $3,000.

Each institute has different interests and programs. Applicants should review each institute's Internet web site for more information. Program guidelines are also available at http://grants.nih.gov/training/nrsa.htm.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, consult individual contacts listed in the solicitation at http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-00-125.html. ■

AN IDEAL EARLY CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Special Report

A variety of early childhood development programs for low-income children seek to promote mental, academic, social, and emotional development and to prepare competent children for school and to lead productive lives. These programs come in many shapes and may differ in approach and other characteristics. However, certain characteristics appear to be particularly important to the effectiveness of early childhood development programs. The research and best practices literature suggests that one ideal system might have the following characteristics:

❗ **The program starts early in the lives of the target children.** Starting early is important not so much because earlier is better for the children, but for the parents. The program would provide comprehensive services to deal with parent basic needs that interfere with parenting *(see below)*. It is also important to get the parent involved with the child and the child's development early because parents likely produce many of the longer-term benefits for their children in such programs.

❗ **The program provides or coordinates and refers to a comprehensive, integrated set of adult- and child-focused services**. The more risk factors and problems a family has, the worse the outcome for parents and children. The program needs to be able to arrange for appropriate services to meet any major need identified by a family. Also, parents have difficulty finding time or motivation to focus on parenting and child goals if major adult needs are present, unmet, and producing stress. It is important, then, to address major needs such as food, clothing, shelter, medical care, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, mental health services, education and job training, employment, child care or early education, and transportation.

❗ **Parents should identify their own goals and service needs with structure, support, guidance, referrals,** facilitation, and advocacy provided by the program. Services should be used by parents, not done to parents. Without parental initiative, choice, and responsibility, services may not be matched to family needs; parents are less likely to use and benefit from specific services; and parents are less likely to learn that initiative and responsibility are useful traits to acquire.

❗ **Services such as an educational preschool must be provided directly to children, not solely through the parent, to produce the most benefits for children.** Parent training and education produce more benefits for children when they are part of a more comprehensive set of services that includes early childhood programming for children, rather than when they are conducted alone.

❗ **The more intense and the longer lasting the program, the better the outcomes**. The more home visits per month, the more hours of early childhood programming per day (i.e., full- versus half-day), and the more years in the program, the greater and more permanent the benefits for parents and children. "Lite" programs in terms of intensity and extent often do not even produce "lite" benefits.

❗ **A combination of family support and early childhood education, <u>plus</u> extensions of similar specialized services into the first three years of primary school, can increase the magnitude and permanence of the benefits of early childhood services.**

❗ **The better the quality of the program, the better the outcomes.** Quality of program is reflected in several characteristics:

▪ **Staff should have higher levels of general education and more education and training specifically in the focal areas emphasized by the program.** An

early childhood center program, for example, should be directed by a professional with a graduate degree in child development and early childhood programming, and primary staff should have as much previous and continuing education and training as possible. Community staff can bring valuable social-cultural knowledge to the service, and they also should be trained in child development and early education.

■ **Staff should be closely supported, monitored, and supervised by a trained professional**. Staff knowledge and training produce a quality program only if they put that knowledge to work in their behavior and practices, which well-trained, attentive, and supportive supervisors encourage.

■ **Fewer children per staff member or smaller caseloads are associated with better outcomes**. Staff need time beyond routine caregiving responsibilities to listen, teach, encourage, and accommodate to individual needs and interests of children and families to promote their development.

■ **Early childhood programming that emphasizes developmentally-appropriate practices and direct tuition of cognitive, social, and emotional skills and behaviors is more likely to produce benefits in each area of emphasis than strictly adult-centered programming.** Primary school curricula and methods are not appropriate for preschool-aged children who benefit most from a better balance of child-centered, child-initiated, and teacher-child mutual activities versus fewer teacher-directed activities. Also, early childhood programming needs to be more balanced in topic, with more emphasis on social and emotional development and behavior and less on cognitive and academic skills than in primary school. Balance among these general developmentally-appropriate emphases is more important for positive outcomes than which specific curriculum strategy (e.g., didactic versus direct instruction, open versus traditional classroom, interactive versus cognitive-developmental) is employed.

■ **The greater the involvement of the parents in the direct programming of the early childhood service, the better short-term and long-term outcomes for children.** Involvement must go beyond attending open houses or driving on field trips. Parents need to be involved with, and support at home, the lessons the early childhood program is attempting to promote and teach the children.

❗ **Deliberate attempts should be made to improve the persistence of early programming**. This can be done in several ways:

■ **Improve the quality of the schools** that low-income children will attend after the early childhood program.

As with other commodities, you get what you pay for in human services.

■ **Provide extended services in the primary schools** that are similar to those of successful early childhood programs.

❗ **Continuous monitoring and evaluation is useful to improve the quality of the services.** Policymakers should not expect the first one or two cohorts to demonstrate benefits until the program has been developed, implemented, and improved over several cohorts. Also, some program benefits for children may not be realized until years after they have left the program, and then those benefits may be in terms of preventing costly disasters in a few participants (e.g., grade failure, unemployment, criminality) rather than improvements in the average performance of the entire group of participants (e.g., grade averages or test scores).

❗ **Programs must be funded at a level sufficient to pay for the extent, duration, and quality of services needed to produce benefits for both parents and children.** Because "lite" programs often do not even produce "lite" results, they are a waste of money, at least in terms of achieving the specific child and family results discussed here. Government has often funded service programs at

only a fraction of the cost of the model program that was demonstrated to be effective, and it sometimes has preferred to provide funds to enroll more children rather than to improve program extent, duration, and quality. It makes little sense to provide ineffective services to massive numbers of children or to expect champagne benefits on a beer budget. As with other commodities, you get what you pay for in human services.

■ **Families with the most social-demographic-economic risk factors are likely to have the worst outcomes without services and also benefit most from early childhood and family services, and thus services could be targeted to fewer children and families**. More focused targeting of services than simply to those eligible by income alone is at least possible under conditions of limited resources.

■ **But there may be benefits to parents and children to have universal early childhood programming**. Children from diverse backgrounds can learn from each other. Greater public, parental, policy, and financial attention and support might be paid to the quality of such programs if they are provided for all segments of society. With PWORA and TANF in place, the need for childcare cuts across all economic levels, and the additional cost to provide a better quality program is relatively modest once custodial-level care for working parents is provided.

■ **Funding of low-income children should be tied to the child, not the neighborhood**. Low-income families are moving out of concentrated inner-city neighborhoods, making neighborhood funding less effective and less fair. If universal programming is offered, funding for low-income children might be modeled after the free-and-reduced-lunch program or sliding scales tied to family income.

■ **The public schools represent a potentially cost-effective vehicle for administering and housing early childhood services**. The public schools are well distributed geographically, they have (or could be renovated at less cost to have) the required physical facilities, they have a financial and administrative infrastructure in place, and use of their physical facilities would eliminate transportation problems and the frequent cobbling together of diverse service arrangements that families now often make. But early childhood, extended day, and vacation day program services may be best "outsourced" by the schools to independent agencies but operated on school premises to deal with the need for specialized training, hours, and salaries of staff.

■ **Given the burgeoning need for early childhood programming and nonschool-hour care, policymakers should consider creating integrated systems of care, not just independent services.**

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OCD Offers Courses In Program Evaluation

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development Planning and Evaluation Project is offering human service agencies three training courses designed to develop and enhance evaluation skills and information management techniques to improve service delivery.

The training, conducted in small group sessions, provides hands-on learning so participants can apply the concepts to their own agency.

Courses Offered

- **Survey Design**: This four-session course introduces staff in human service agencies to basic survey design, focusing on question development and data collection methods. Participants will develop a survey for one of their selected programs and complete work on the survey instrument between sessions.

- **Needs Assessment**: This two-session course provides basic instruction in how to design and conduct a needs assessment. Topics focus on methods to collect information and strategies to draw conclusions from the data collected.

- **Choosing an Evaluation Instrument/Tool for Outcome Measurement**: This one-session course provides guidance in how to find and select appropriate evaluation tools to measure outcomes. Since this course will focus on instruments relating to outcomes for family functioning and youth development, we recommend that only staff from these types of programs attend.

Who Should Attend?

The workshops are designed for directors, program staff, and board members of human service agencies.

Schedule

The courses are held from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursdays at the Commissioner Tom Foerster Training and Resource Center located in East Liberty at the corner of Penn and Negley. The center can be reached by bus and free parking is available.

Survey Design, a four-session course, will be held on February 22, March 8, March 22, and April 5, 2001. C.E. credit: 12 hours. The fee is $180.

Needs Assessment, a two-session course, will be held on April 26 and May 10, 2001. C.E. credit: 6 hours. The fee is $90.

Choosing a Tool, a course only for agencies serving families and/or youth, will be held on May 24. C.E. credit: 3 hours. The fee is $45.

FOR A COPY OF THE PROGRAM BROCHURE, contact Charlene Nelson at (412) 624-1188, fax: (412) 624-1187, or email: bobcats@pitt.edu. ∎

Parenting Guide Series Available From OCD

The University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development is offering a series of easy-to-use parenting guides offering information and advice on 50 parenting topics. These guides are available free of charge to parents and organizations, agencies and professionals who work with children and families.

The *You & Your Child* parenting guide series, written and edited by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development, covers topics ranging from how to deal with children's fears, finicky eating habits, and aggressive behavior to getting a child ready to read, setting rules, and coping with grief.

Each guide is based on current parenting literature and has been reviewed by a panel of child development experts and practitioners. The series is made possible by the Frank and Theresa Caplan Fund for Early Childhood Development and Parenting Education.

To receive a printed set of all 50 guides by mail, send a request along with your name, organization, mailing address and telephone number to:

Parenting Guides
Office of Child Development
UCSUR/121 University Place
University of Pittsburgh
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

The *You & Your Child* parenting guides are also available on the Internet for downloading as portable document files at: www.pitt.edu/~ocdweb/guides.htm ∎

New HUD Grant Helps University Expand Work In Neighborhoods

The University of Pittsburgh will receive a major federal grant to help improve neighborhoods near the main campus, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development announced.

HUD awarded the $399,702 three-year grant as one of 16 first-time grants awarded across the nation under the federal Community Outreach Partnership Centers program.

The grants are intended to support efforts by colleges and universities to use their resources and the "knowledge, creativity, and energy of their faculty and students" to build stronger and healthier neighborhoods near their campuses, HUD stated.

In the University of Pittsburgh's case, its efforts will focus on the Pittsburgh neighborhoods of South, Central, and West Oakland, Aliquippa Terrace/Oak Hill, and Hazelwood.

Project co-directors are Tracy M. Soska of the School of Social Work, and Sabina Deitrick of the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

The federal grant will be matched with $483,700 in funds, staff time, and in-kind services from community groups and the university, including $100,000 from the Chancellor's office.

The grant is expected to help coordinate the university's presence in the community. Projects planned include:

- Expanding the university's Housing Resource Center to also serve neighborhood residents. Previously, the Center served mostly students. Services planned include satellite offices and providing loan and grant information related to buying or improving homes.

- Developing education and outreach programs to address community health problems, including asthma, inadequate pre-natal care, and lead poisoning.

- Updating the Oakland housing survey and developing a housing inventory for Hazelwood.

- Recruiting university students as mentors for young neighborhood residents.

The projects were developed by community groups and the university.

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Focus on Foundations and Corporations

Wal-Mart Foundation Supports Programs Related To Children

The Wal-Mart Foundation supports programs for children and families in communities where the company's Wal-Mart or Sam's Club stores are located.

The Foundation supports the development and implementation of programs that support children and families through education, health, and economic development.

Applicants for funds should involve management from the local Wal-Mart or Sam's Club. Deadlines are ongoing.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact the Wal-Mart Foundation at (501) 277-1905. ■

Note to University of Pittsburgh Faculty

It is University policy that foundation and corporate funding sources may be approached only through, in cooperation with, or with the approval of the Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement. Interested faculty should contact Al Novak, Associate Vice Chancellor for Corporate and Foundation Relations at 624-5800.

OCD
FEATURED
PROJECT

Interdisciplinary Fellowship Program in Policy and Evaluation

Fellowships Cultivate New Generation Of Sorely-Needed Program Evaluators

One of the chief obstacles to evaluating human service programs using the most advanced methods available is the shortage of evaluators trained to do so.

As part of its response to the shortage, the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development offers select students instruction in state-of-the-art program evaluation methods through the Interdisciplinary Fellowship Program in Policy and Evaluation, now in its second year.

The benefits of contemporary program evaluation have become increasingly clear. Evaluators, no longer limited to issuing report cards on program outcomes, are able to provide insight into other critical aspects of a program, such as obstacles to optimal performance, and what works, what doesn't, and why.

"It is not enough to generate the results of a program. The demand is for more useful, pragmatic information that can be applied directly to program operation," said Hide Yamatani, Ph.D., Director of the Interdisciplinary Fellowship Program in Policy and Evaluation.

In September 1999, the fellowship program, funded by the Heinz Endowments, began providing students with the specialized training evaluators need to address the challenges that evaluating community-based human services programs present and to generate information that is pragmatic, practical, and easily applied to social service settings.

Unique Considerations

When evaluating human service programs, evaluators are confronted with special considerations that traditional approaches do not easily accommodate.

The recent emphasis in human services on integrated collaborative services, for example, requires that evaluators understand the perspectives of a range of disciplines, including education, social work, public health, and psychology.

Also, the selection of sample populations is complicated by ethical considerations that prevent human service programs from withholding services from a group of people for the sake of providing a control group against which outcomes of those who receive interventions can be measured.

"You can do that kind of traditional research in an ar-

tificial setting. But in community research, working with real people, you cannot easily manipulate interventions," Dr. Yamatani said. "If you have people seriously addicted to drugs, how can you exclude them from services just to see if the services worked or did not work for others?

"Applied research is much more challenging and difficult than traditional laboratory-based research or experimental research. Applied research requires more sophisticated sample selection procedures, more advanced research design, and very careful statistical analysis."

Critical Shortage

Demand for program evaluation surged nearly a decade ago when the organizations that fund human services began insisting on greater accountability. Not only has the demand remained strong, but more than ever before, funders and agencies want the kind of empirically-based program accountability, process assessment, and outcome analysis that only sophisticated evaluation can provide.

"Funders need accurate information and want to know how programs are working and what contributes to optimal performance," said Dr. Yamatani. Through evaluations, he said, "we have learned, for example, that a holistic approach is better than an individualized approach, that an empowerment approach is better than just providing services when needed, and that cultural bias exists in certain intervention approaches."

Such benefits spurred a demand that far outstrips the number of professionals trained to conduct advanced applied evaluation research in community settings. In the Pittsburgh area, only a handful of evaluators are knowledgeable about and devoted to working with community-based programs.

OCD first responded to the demand for program evaluation in 1993 by establishing the Planning and Evaluation Project (PEP) to conduct evaluations for community human service agencies. In 1996, PEP developed the Evaluation Technical Assistance Project, which offers community agencies training in the basics of program evaluation. Recently, a Resource and Training Center for Program

surance, and leadership/governance. The report states, however, that those core standards do not address specific operational characteristics of centers that help distinguish family support from other services available in communities.

Some family centers are robust and comprehensive, while others may embrace the family support philosophy, but are only able to provide a limited amount of services. The site reviewers suggested that a set of minimum or "threshold" operational standards be developed for all family centers in the county.

"As Allegheny County moves forward, it will need to think about expansion, both in the number of family centers and in the capacity of existing centers to ensure that all centers can meet threshold standards," the reviewers said.

The reviewers said, for example, such standards might require family centers to offer certain basic services such as a drop-in center that supports activities of interest to families, effective referrals to other programs, parent and child-focused developmental activities, and outreach and community education efforts. Threshold standards might also include a system of governance within the center that includes parents in important decisions, and attention to quality and management.

Overall, however, reviewers gave family support high grades and said that in many respects it stands as an example for the rest of the nation. "Allegheny County," the reviewers wrote, "should be recognized as a national leader in thoughtfully developing a system of family centers and enabling participants at those centers to create a movement that holds promise for dramatically improving results for children, families, and their neighborhoods." ■

Improvement was proposed to increase the capacity of agencies to conduct basic evaluation tasks on their own and make better-informed decisions about purchasing evaluation services.

To develop a new generation of evaluators, the Interdisciplinary Fellowship Program was designed to offer students pursuing advanced degrees the kind of training necessary to evaluate preventive, rehabilitative and empowerment-focused programs for families and children.

'Real World' Experience

The fellowship program began in September 1999. Four doctoral students were selected to receive full fellowship funding. Two additional, non-funded graduate students were also admitted. This year, OCD began seeking funds to continue the program and offer training to additional students.

The instruction students receive reflects the characteristics of modern human service program evaluation.

Collaboration, for example, is emphasized, and for good reason. Rather than simply a report card at the end of the evaluation period, contemporary evaluation is an ongoing program-improvement process during which evaluators work with policymakers, funders, agency directors, staff, and program participants to design the program and evaluation, conduct the evaluation, and interpret the data.

"We found that a report card at the end was useless for program operators," Dr. Yamatani said. "They didn't have a chance to learn how to optimize the program or why a program worked or didn't work."

Recent trends in human services emphasize integrated collaborative services, which embrace a range of traditional fields. To expose students to the values and perspectives of diverse orientations, the fellowship program is interdisciplinary in design, offering courses and seminars taught by faculty from Education, Psychology, Social Work, Public Health, and GSPIA, as well as by employed professionals.

Another key aspect of the fellowship program are apprenticeships that provide students with opportunities for hands-on experience conducting collaborative evaluations within communities.

During the first year, students have worked on projects such as the Starting Points "Reading Is Power" Campaign, the Data Integration Project for Allegheny County Family Support Centers, and the Pittsburgh Mediation Center-initiated Victim-Offender Mediation Program. "This experience challenges them to use the content learned in the classroom with real people," Dr. Yamatani said. "They are not in a vacuum."

FOR MORE INFORMATION on the Interdisciplinary Fellowship Program in Policy and Evaluation call (412) 624-1573, or write to: Interdisciplinary Fellowship Program in Policy and Evaluation, 2017 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. ■

Announcements . . .

Available Postdoctoral Positions Focus on Family Processes

The Family Research Consortium III, sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health, is offering six postdoctoral positions beginning June 1, 2001. The program provides research training in theoretical, methodological, and substantive issues related to family processes and child and adolescent mental health in diverse populations.

The positions are for three years. The training is multidisciplinary, involves mentoring from a diverse faculty across the United States, and emphasizes multiple levels of investigation, from the biological correlates of individual adjustment to the social context of family functioning. Each trainee will have a primary appointment at one of the 12 universities represented by the Family Research Consortium faculty and will work with at least two faculty members on a collaborative research project.

Applications close January 12, 2001. Applicants must have completed all requirements for the Ph.D. by the time of appointment and must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact Dee Frisque, Research Center Coordinator, Center for Human Development and Family Research in Diverse Contexts, Pennsylvania State University, 106 Henderson Building, University Park, PA 16802-6504; telephone, (814) 863-7106; fax, (814) 863-7109; e-mail: dmr10@psu.edu; web site: www.hhdev.psu.edu/chdfrdc. ■

Grants Offered To Explore Health Care Quality, Delivery

The Agency for Health Research and Quality is seeking applications for research to improve clinical practice and the health care system's ability to deliver quality services, and give policymakers information to assess the impact of system changes on health care.

In addition to traditional research areas such as variations in clinical practice and related outcomes and strategies to improve service delivery, the agency is emphasizing studies related to improving quality and patient safety, clinical preventive services, minority population, and children and the elderly. Emerging research interests include cost-effectiveness analysis and other methodological advances, ethical issues arising from changes in health care delivery, and research on trade-offs related to resources allocation.

Nonprofit organizations, including colleges and universities, are eligible for the grants. Deadlines are February 1, 2001, and June 1, 2001.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, contact AHRQ Publications Clearinghouse, (800) 358-9295; or visit their web site: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-00-111.html. ■

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