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Bridges for Research

University-Community Research: An Introduction

by Laura Bloomberg, Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota

In an era of declining fiscal resources and increasing risk factors for children and families, establishing working relationships among families, service providers, educators, and other professionals is crucial. This belief has been a driving force for many Consortium activities. One example is emphasizing the importance of building collaborative relationships between the University of Minnesota and community agencies for conducting research.

While it is common knowledge that doing research is a central part of the University's mission, the role of community practitioners and the relevance of the research to practice is seldom very clear. The Research Workgroup of the Consortium is addressing this and other barriers to building University-community links for conducting research.

Last spring, the workgroup brought University and community-based agency personnel together to address barriers and identify strategies for fostering collaborative research endeavors. The meetings pointed out the need to improve communication between community professionals and University faculty. Frequently it is difficult to access the "University system" with a research question. Conversely, University faculty often seek community settings for conducting research without knowing all of their options. The potential for the Consortium to act as a catalyst in facilitating increased communication is great.

The role of clearly understood, applicable research is an issue of importance for both University researchers and service delivery professionals. The role of the Consortium and the Research Workgroup in the coming years will be to help shape new University-community research relationships and to support those that already exist.

This issue of *Consortium Connections* will focus on some projects currently underway that can serve as models for fostering future collaborative research efforts between the University and the community. For example, the Institute on Community Integration (ICI), housed in the College of Education at the University of Minnesota, has established several collaborative research projects with community service providers across the state. Currently, ICI is working with the Minneapolis Public Schools to study family-school partnerships and their effect on preventing young adolescents from dropping out of school. Also, ICI is conducting a national study of the effects of prenatal drug exposure on young children. With the help of a community liaison, this project has established collaborative relationships with over 40 agencies and service providers addressing the needs of young children and families who may be at risk. Examples of other collaborative efforts are highlighted in the following articles. ■■■

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Mission Statement

The Consortium was established in fall 1991 in an effort to bring together the varied competencies of the University of Minnesota and the vital resources of Minnesota's communities to enhance the ability of individuals and organizations to address critical health, education, and social policy concerns in ways that improve the well-being of Minnesota children, youth, and families.

Changing Times, Changing Families: Minnesota Early Childhood Family Education Parent Outcome Interview Study

by Betty Cooke, Minnesota Department of Education

Early Childhood Family Education (ECFE) is a program for all Minnesota families with children between the ages of birth and kindergarten. It is currently offered through community education in 397 school districts and the four tribal schools in Minnesota, encompassing 98% of families with young children in the state. More than 220,000 young children and their parents participated in the program during the 1991-92 school year.

ECFE program staff recently worked with Michael Q. Patton, University of Minnesota, and Betty Cooke, Minnesota Department of Education, on an evaluation project to study the effects of the program on parent participants. Dr. Patton has been involved in evaluating ECFE since the program pilot days in the late 1970s.

The Evaluation Plan

The concept for the ECFE parent outcome interview study was arrived at through joint discussion between Patton and members of the State Early Childhood Family Education Evaluation committee. A key criterion of the study was to make the evaluation process part of the regular program and involve program staff in data collection and analysis. Patton worked with staff from 24 programs to develop a set of interview questions to be asked of parents new to the program prior to and at the end of participation during the 1990-91 school year.

The Outcomes

The study revealed five overall changes in parent responses to interview questions before and after a year of participation:

- Increased feelings of support from others.
- Increased confidence and self-esteem as parents.
- Increased knowledge, awareness, and understanding of children and child development and the parental role in relation to child development.
- Changed perceptions and expectations for themselves as parents for their children
- Changes in behavior in themselves and their children.

The Process

Evaluation has been a priority from the inception of ECFE. The program has had ongoing contact with various University faculty and departments for over 15 years related to research and evaluations as well as training and staff development.

In this particular evaluation, the process used was as significant as the results themselves. The completion and success of the study depended on the combined efforts and expertise of the University evaluation consultant, ECFE local program staff involved in the project, and the Minnesota Department of Education specialist who was able to oversee the project and compile the report. Not enough can be said for the critical role played by the staff from local programs who helped design the study, conducted the interviews with parents, and analyzed the results. This process allowed for the development of a group of "inside experts" who understood the program philosophy and practice and developed additional skills as interviewers and evaluators that will be useful to them and the program beyond this study.

*For further information contact Betty Cooke, Minnesota Department of Education, 992 Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street, St. Paul, MN, 55101, (612) 296-6130.
Fax: (612) 297-5695.*



A Community Moving Forward— Le Sueur County

by Marlene Stum, Family Social Science, University of Minnesota

Collaborative efforts are underway in Le Sueur County to empower community leaders to be proactive and address priority issues facing families with youth. Leadership is being provided by the Minnesota Extension Service and a local steering committee composed of county residents and professionals working with families. The community action process included phases of helping diverse community members explore *what is, what can be, and what will be* for children, youth and families in their communities.

- Phase 1: The first part of the community action process involved linking community leaders with existing research tools and methods to examine what it is like for children, youth and families in their communities. The research design included:
 - 1) Search Institute's Profile of Student Life focusing on identifying assets and deficits to gather information about teenagers in four school districts; and 2) a written survey to discover how adult participants assessed strengths and concerns of youth and of families and to gather information about their attitudes regarding who is responsible for action.
- Phase 2: Data specific to their local community was then available to present for discussion at a community forum on youth and families. This localized data was invaluable in moving community members beyond the denial—"such problems don't exist in my community." Community members participated in focus groups to further identify strengths and concerns and then to prioritize issues facing families with youth which needed to be addressed in their communities.
- Phase 3: A second community forum was held in Le Sueur County to focus on four priority areas which emerged:
 - 1) building strong, healthy families; 2) holistic community development; 3) promoting community chemical health and well-being; and 4) understanding and coping with unhealthy behaviors. Focus groups developed shared visions for what it could be like for youth and families and began forming action plans for the community. The process is continuing, and additional community forums will follow to assist the citizens in determining their direction and moving forward.

***What is, what can be, and what will be
for children, youth and families.***

Development of the process and research assistance has been provided to Le Sueur County by three state extension faculty: Marlene Stum, Family Social Science; Ron Pitzer, Rural Sociology; and Diane Flynn, Extension Home Economics.

Interagency Initiative on Children's Mental Health

by Gary Cox, Minnesota Department of Human Services

A model currently being designed by a statewide, interagency task force would integrate services delivered to Minnesota's emotionally disturbed children and the funds that pay for them.

The Children's Integrated Fund Task Force was created by 1991 law to study whether an integrated children's mental health fund would be feasible. Members—who represent state and local agencies, providers, parents, and advocates—quickly determined that an integrated fund would work only if service collaboration existed, so they went forward to design an integrated system. The Task Force will report its recommendations to the legislature by February 1993.

**An integrated fund would work only
if service collaboration existed.**

The crux of the problem is that mental health, social service, school, and juvenile justice systems are all serving the same children, and their efforts are uncoordinated. Children and their corresponding costs are passed from one system to another. Disorders are detected only after they have reached a crisis stage where treatment costs more but is less likely to succeed.

**Changes would constitute
fundamental restructuring.**

In contrast, the task force is considering an "hour glass" model which would integrate assessment, service planning, and case coordination for children whose need for mental health services has been identified by one of the agencies. Children would be referred to existing providers treatment and support services. Emphasis would be placed on early intervention and mandatory comprehensive assessment criteria. This local-level interagency collaboration would be supported by a flexible pool of state, federal, local, and private dollars with expenditures based on a child's needs rather than the current hodgepodge of eligibility criteria. Changes would constitute fundamental restructuring of the ways services are provided to children whose needs cross service disciplines and agency boundaries.

An integrated fund addresses need for a more flexible funding structure but also could assist with the other primary fiscal problem—funding levels. The pooling of multi-agency dollars under the auspices of mental health would expand resources used to leverage federal medicaid reimbursement.

Children's Lives in a Minnesota Community

by Ronald L. Pitzer, Minnesota Extension Service

The project was designed to increase our knowledge about children and to foster a "child and family friendly" community. Our interest was in how children perceive their community and how they spend their time in the community during summer vacation. The results will be reported to the county extension office, community schools, and city administration, with recommendations regarding community support for children and families.

The impetus came from a 1992 spring meeting with Isanti County extension agents interested in conducting a community visioning forum on children, youth, and families in the fall of 1992. In previous forums, teenagers, families, and community had been studied in cooperation with the Search Institute. This project examined information provided by children.

■ The Study

Subsidized by a grant from the human ecology program of Minnesota Extension Service, community involvement was elicited, and data were collected in July and August.

Data were gathered by interviewing and observing children (ages 7-13), having them draw community maps and keep a log of daily activities, interviewing identified "community leaders," and observing goings-on in the community. A local teenage girl and the project graduate assistant conducted the interviews and observations.

Any field study requires community involvement in addition to the obvious cooperation of research subjects. A research project involving children as subjects requires greater community support and involvement, especially in today's climate of concern about child safety. This project required more involvement because of its applied intent of fostering "child and family friendliness" in the community.

■ Community Support

The U of M extension agents took the major role in gaining the support of school officials and city officials. They also helped locate a teen interviewer and people willing to solicit prizes for participant incentives. Finally, the extension staff arranged an ice cream social at the close of the project to thank the community for its participation.

Community involvement was extensive:

- The school provided the list of children from which the sample was selected and the list of parents to receive mailings. The school also helped legitimize the project to parents and children.
- City administration also helped legitimize the project to parents. City council and police knew who we were and why we were driving around town and could answer questions raised by parents or other community members.
- The business sector supported the project by providing prizes and refreshments for an end-of-the-project ice cream social celebration and prize drawing for participating children.
- The community education director agreed to be an official co-sponsor of the project. Local churches distributed flyers to their congregations early in the project explaining the plan. Also, one of the churches provided a pleasant room to conduct interviewer training.
- Interviews were held in a popular downtown cafe with a neutral location. The room was convenient for interviews—quiet and private. Refreshments were available, parents or guardians had a pleasant place to wait, and the owner of the cafe charged a very nominal fee for rental.

This project demonstrates that it is possible to procure sound and theoretically interesting data and, at the same time, promote community action. The planning and implementation of this project stimulated thoughtful consideration of the children's place in the community. ■

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Guest Editor: Erna Fishhaut
Assistant Editor: Ellen Smart

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity employer and educator.

Consortium Calendar of Events

■ October 9: Dr. Alicia Lieberman of the University of California, San Francisco, will speak about "Working with Children at Risk and Their Families." Sponsored by the Minnesota Psychological Association and Metropolitan State University, in cooperation with the Consortium, the symposium will be held at the Earle Brown Heritage Center, Brooklyn Center, Minnesota. For information, call the Minnesota Psychological Association, (612) 489-2964.

■ October 9 & 10: The Minnesota Association for the Education of Young Children (MnAEYC) will hold its annual conference, "Making a Difference for Children," at the Minneapolis Convention Center. Keynote speaker Robert L. Veninga will present "Making a Difference: How to Stay Motivated In All Seasons of Your Life." For information, call MnAEYC, (612) 646-8689.

■ November-December: The Consortium, the University Athletic Department, and Chi Psy, the Child Psychology Student Organization, will be conducting their second annual book drive, "Food for Thought: A Gift that Keeps on Giving." Books will be distributed to needy families during the holiday season. For information, call the Consortium at (612) 626-9582.

■ November 5 & 6: A conference entitled, "Creating, Connecting, & Caring," sponsored through the joint efforts of PACER Center, Inc., the Consortium, and the Minnesota Committee for the Prevention of Child Abuse, will be held at the Mount Olivet Retreat Center in Farmington. The conference is designed for the preservation of care givers and will use humor, drama, storytelling, music, self-reflection, and networking. Space is limited. Deadline for registration is October 1. For information, call Deb Jones, (612) 827-2966.

■ December 1: The first annual KIDS+ Conference, "Connecting Kids and Community," sponsored by the Northeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund and the Blandin Foundation, will take place in Duluth and feature Dr. Crystal Kuykendall and Dr. James Gabarino. For information, contact Barbara Lucia, (218) 723-4040 or (800) 433-4045.

Announcement

Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology: Infants and Children at Risk

■ October 22-24, 1992: This year's sessions of the 27th Minnesota Symposium on child psychology continue the tradition of addressing timely issues by featuring noted experts from around the world. Sponsored by the Institute of Child Development, the Institute for Disabilities Studies, and the Consortium, the symposium will be held at the Coffman Union Theater Lecture Hall at the University of Minnesota. Presentations on this year's topic, "Infants and Children at Risk," reflect the interdisciplinary interests of scholars and practitioners in the field of child psychology ranging from developmental neuro science to developmental psychopathology, to the risks associated with nutritional deficiencies, adolescent motherhood, poverty, and violence. For information, call (612) 624-0526.

Vote for Children

by Richard Weinberg

Chair, Consortium Steering Committee

Every fourth autumn, the American eagle spreads its wings, and the democratic process is once again affirmed. We Americans march to the polls to cast our ballots for the political leadership of our nation. During this election year, 1992, we should be reminded that a major constituency of this nation—its children—cannot vote. There are those who speak for our non-voting citizens. The strongest voice is unquestionably the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) under the capable leadership of Marian Wright Edelman. We are fortunate to have a state office of CDF in Minnesota.

The goal of CDF is to educate the nation about the needs of young people—especially poor, minority, and disabled children—and to "encourage preventive investment in children before they get sick, drop out of school, suffer family breakdown, or get into trouble." This quote comes from a 1991 CDF publication: *An Opinion Maker's Guide to Children in Election Year 1992—Leave No Child Behind*. I think every voter needs to read this document in preparation for casting well-informed votes in the November election. Specifically, CDF raises critical questions regarding children's issues to ask of candidates running for state offices or U.S. House and Senate seats. (To receive this useful pamphlet, send \$1.50 to MN CDF, 550 Rice Street, St. Paul, MN 55103, or call (612) 227-6121 for additional information.)

As responsible Americans we have the inexorable right to elect those who best represent views, our philosophies, our visions, but we also have the responsibility to make informed choices. Remember the children! ■

Connection Corner

The goal of Connection Corner is to share resource information. If you have an item, call (612) 626-9582 or send it to:
N645 Elliott Hall, 75 East River Road, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

■ The Parenting Resource Center

The Parenting Resource Center of Austin, Minnesota, has developed a set of audio tapes to help families new to our country gain a better understanding of customs, laws, and the educational system here in Minnesota. Funded by the Minnesota Technical College System, Human Development Studies, a set includes nine tapes in three topic areas: child care, Minnesota schools, and legal issues (alcohol and chemical abuse). On each tape, side A is in one of three languages, and side B is the same material in English. The playing length of both is about half an hour. Tapes come in Vietnamese, Laotian, and Spanish.

The same material is presented in both English and the other languages to help professionals in guiding families adjusting to American lifestyles. Through listening to the tapes, families may also gain some English-speaking skills.

An introductory offer includes one tape for \$15, \$40 for a set of three tapes in the same language, and \$100 for the entire nine-tape set. Prices include shipping. Contact the Parenting Resource Center, Inc., 1900 NW 8th Avenue, PO Box 505, Austin, MN 55912, or call (507) 433-0692 or (800) 247-5039.

■ Tough Love

Tough Love is a self-help program for parents, kids, and communities. The program provides support to parents who are experiencing problems with their children's behavior by encouraging parents to take a stand against inappropriate behavior and set boundaries which often facilitates a renewed self-respect in the parents. For information, please call Joy Windisch, (612) 432-8066 or (800) 333-1069.

■ Working on the Dream

The National Association of Counties in cooperation with Intermountain Health Care, Inc., have produced a video for families entitled, *Working on the Dream*. It discusses five family success concepts: strengthening relationships through family activities, establishing reasonable rules and expectations, building self-esteem, setting achievable goals, and evaluating family strengths and needs. Single copies of the videotape may be ordered for \$5, plus \$2 shipping and handling. Larger quantities may be ordered at reduced prices. Copies of the *Working on the Dream* brochure are available for \$20 for 100 copies including shipping and handling. For information, write to: Working on the Dream, P.O. Box 2046, Salt Lake City, UT 84110-2046.

■ Listening

Janet Macy, associate professor in the Department of Family Social Science, is on Radio Aahs (1280 am) each morning at 9:20 am with Robin Blair, where she researches and answers parents' questions.

■ Leave No Child Behind

Leave No Child Behind, a Children's Defense Fund program supported by Congregations Concerned for Children, is conducting a public awareness campaign on how voters can make children's issues central concerns during this election year. Free brochures are available highlighting problems facing Minnesota's children and easy but crucial steps voters can take to insure candidate commitment to children's issues. Call Terri Anderson at Congregations Concerned for Children at (612) 870-3660.

■ Research Funds

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is planning a new grant program to build on past research on causes and predictors of violence and fund projects aimed directly at curbing it. The projected fall 1993 announcement of the new program to translate basic and epidemiologic research into interventions will describe the main goal of the Violence and Traumatic Stress Research Branch: to fund projects that zero in on key factors, either situational or individual, that influence the development of violence. Projects would compare alternative methods and treatments, and early plans suggest expanded prospects for service-oriented and collaborative projects. NIMH may fund research centers or use cooperative agreements or contracts to accomplish some tasks. NIMH's violence program funds are usually received by psychologists, psychiatrists, anthropologists, and nurses, but NIMH is eager to receive more applications from researchers in public health and social work. For more information or to discuss project ideas, contact Ecford Voit, Violence and Traumatic Stress Branch, NIMH, Room 18-105, 5600 Fishers Lane, Rockville, MD 20857, (301) 443-3728.

■ Reading

Two recently published books on issues relating to children, youth, and families have been receiving much attention in the media. *Today's Children: Creating a Future for Generation in Crisis* (Times Books, Random House, NY, 1992) was written by Dr. David A. Hamburg, president of the Carnegie Corporation, and focuses on issues relating to children and education. *Fateful Choices: Healthy Youth for the 21st Century* (Hill and Wang, NY, 1992), authored by Fred Hechinger, is devoted to the problems facing today's adolescents.

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation has published two booklets discussing violence. One is directed towards adults, the other toward children. Entitled, *Peace is a Season, Peace is a Way of Life*, the booklets can be used as a source of discussion in the family or workplace and/or as a tool for personal change. They are available free of charge by contacting Rita Cox, (612) 642-4039, or writing to her at the Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 919 Lafond Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55104.

The Northeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund

The Northeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund is a regional foundation created in 1986 to serve the seven counties of northeastern Minnesota: Aitkin, Carlton, Cook, Itasca, Koochiching, Lake, and St. Louis. The mission of the initiative fund is to improve the lives of northeastern Minnesotans through funding various projects especially relevant to the following areas: connecting kids and community; aging with independence; job creation, business assistance, and diversification; and opportunities for self-reliance.

In 1990, the initiative fund adopted their KIDS+ Campaign with the goal of improving the well-being of children and youth in northeastern Minnesota. The KIDS+ program provides technical and financial resources to support community efforts to better serve young people. The goals of the program are to: raise public awareness of and interest in issues facing young people; create effective coalitions that will nurture children and youth in community settings; assist in designing, implementing, and evaluating imaginative projects; provide necessary technical and financial support for community-based coalitions; and create an information base on program models and sources of support for youth-focused projects. The initiative fund is also sponsoring the first annual KIDS+ Conference December 1, 1992, entitled "Connecting Kids and Community" (see *Calendar of Events* for more information).

For more information, contact the Northeastern Minnesota Initiative Fund, 600 Providence Building, 332 West Superior Street, Duluth, MN 55802, (218) 723-4040, or the Iron Range Office, Olcott Plaza, 820 North 9th Street, Virginia, MN 55792, (218) 741-2315.

The Consortium is....

Linda Olson Keller, Public Health Nursing Consultant, Section on Public Health Nursing, Minnesota State Department of Health, who facilitates our Outreach Workgroup and has great ideas about how to meet and support needs for outreach in the community.

Hal Grotevant, Professor and Head, Department of Family Social Science, a Steering and Executive Committee member who not only conducts research on relationships in adoptive families but also chairs the task force for developing the Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse (electronic rolodex).

Candy Kragthorpe, Mentorship Coordinator for the Scott-Carver-Dakota Community Action Program (CAP, Inc.) and student in the Child Abuse Prevention Studies (CAPS) program at the University of Minnesota, whose activities in the Advocacy Group are also serving as a directed study towards her CAPS certificate.

Barbara Leonard, Assistant Professor of Nursing, who will be co-facilitating the Research Workgroup with Dana Fox and helping the group facilitate collaboration between University and community researchers.

Bill Bomash, Extension Educator and Assistant Professor, Minnesota Extension Service--Education Development Systems, who is a key player in developing our Consortium Electronic Clearinghouse.

And the Consortium is you!

Steering Committee Members 1992-1993

Robert W. Blum

Professor and Director,
Adolescent Health Program,
University of Minnesota

Marilyn Larson

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Richard Weinberg*

Chair, Professor and Director,
Institute of Child Development,
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Donald Fraser

Mayor, Minneapolis

*(Members with * also serve on the
Consortium's Executive Committee)*

Harold D. Grotevant*

Professor and Head,
Department of Family Social Science,
University of Minnesota

Martha Farrell Erickson

Consortium Coordinator

Consortium News

- District Juvenile Court Judge Isabel Gomez spoke at the St. Paul Student Theater on October 1. Her talk, sponsored by the Consortium, was entitled, "An Agenda for Action on Behalf of Minnesota's Children." Spike Moss, director of At Risk Youth Service (ARYS), The City, Inc., introduced and spoke in collaboration with Judge Gomez. Afterwards University Regent Elizabeth Craig presented Judge Gomez with an award from the Consortium honoring her dedication and service to children, youth, and families.
- State Senator Jane Ranum has agreed to serve as a member of the Steering Committee. Senator Ranum brings vast experience in public policy and a personal dedication to many of the issues surrounding children, youth, and families and will surely play a pivotal role in helping the Consortium foster collaboration between the University and the community.
- The Consortium theme song, "Together We Can," was written by Marti Erickson and first performed at the Minnesota Round Table by the group Free Spirit. A collection of 15 of Marti's original songs about children and family relationships, *A Place in My Heart*, is available on cassette and compact disc. To order, send \$7.99 (cassette) or \$11.99 (CD), plus \$2 shipping and handling, to One by One Records, PO Box 19004, Minneapolis, MN 55419. Proceeds are dedicated to programs that support families with young children.
- The Consortium participated in the United Way Information Center Open House and Vendor Fair held on July 28 at the United Way. This event marked the opening of the United Way of Minneapolis Area's Information Center, the health and human service information resource for nonprofit organizations in the Twin Cities. Much sharing of information occurred as representatives from many nonprofit organizations in the metro area attended and were able to discover the variety of resources available to them through the Consortium and other organizations.
- The Advocacy Workgroup held a day-long workshop on September 25 to develop guiding principles "In the Best Interest of the Child?" for use by the Consortium and decision makers in the community.
- Welcome back! Marti Erickson returns to the Consortium after a summer leave of absence. We're sure Marti's time away has left her refreshed, energized, and ready to carry on the Consortium's busy fall schedule.

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