

Foster Care Redesign in Duval and Alachua Counties

An Implementation Assessment and Research Chronicle



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Executive Summary

The Foster Care Redesign project (Redesign) is a mixed-methods evaluation focused on the following key objectives:

1. **Implementation Assessment.** Describe the Redesign's implementation components and activities, including the extent to which each jurisdiction is implementing these efforts as intended.
2. **Child and Family Outcomes Tracking.** Document whether and how Redesign efforts appear to be making a difference for children and families.
3. **Key Component Analysis.** Identify key components or elements in Redesign efforts, including perceived strengths and challenges that are consistent across sites and those places where there are unique differences.

We found that both Duval and Alachua Counties in Northeast Florida have made impressive gains in preserving families and limiting trauma to children by providing effective, family-centered services to children and families in their own homes. Both jurisdictions have successfully reduced the number of children in out-of-home care without increasing the number of children who are re-referred for child abuse and neglect.

During the evaluation period from January 1, 2007 to June 30, 2010, Duval County reduced the number of children in care from 2,107 to 824 (a 61% reduction) and the rate of removal of children from their families from 18.5 per 100 reports of child abuse/neglect to 8.5 per 100 reports (a 54% reduction). During approximately the same period, the number of children who were reported as re-abused or neglected within six months of the original report remained essentially the same at 6.3% in December 2006 and 7.0% in June 2010. The percentage of children reunified with their parents who re-entered foster care within 12 months of reunification initially increased from 8% in January–March 2007 to 14.5% in January–March 2009, and has since declined to 9.6% in April–June 2010.

Alachua County reduced the number of children in care from 475 in December 2006 to 335 in June 2010, a reduction of 29.5%. The rate of removal of children from their homes also declined from 12.8 per 100 child abuse/neglect reports in December 2006 to 9.3 per 100 reports in June 2010, a 27% reduction in the rate of removal. Alachua County has produced these results without an increase in re-referrals of children due to child abuse or neglect. The percentage of children who were reported as re-abused/neglected within six months after the initial report was 6.7% in December 2006 and 6.5% in June 2010. The rate of re-entry of children into care has been greatly reduced. In December 2006, the rate of re-entry of children into care within 12 months of reunification was 13.9%. In June 2010, the rate of re-entry within 12 months was 4.4%, a reduction of 67%.

The strategies employed in both jurisdictions to achieve these results focused on the provision of intensive services early in the child welfare system's involvement with a family to assure the safety of

the child, mitigate risks, and engage the family in services to strengthen their capacity to provide safe and nurturing environments for their children. This work was supported by a federal Title IV-E waiver that allowed flexibility in use of foster care funds and a partnership with Casey Family Programs, which provided extensive technical assistance and supplemental funding for the Redesign effort.

The Redesign required both programmatic and organizational changes to redirect the child welfare system from a reliance on placement of children as a first option to the new direction of family preservation through family-centered services. Although specific strategies varied by county, nine categories of strategies were included in the Redesign effort in both jurisdictions: Family Preservation, Use of Specialists, Cultural Changes, Early Assessment Teams, Leadership Support, Safety of the Child Is Paramount, Family-Centered Practice, Community Collaboration, and Communication Planning. Numerous specific strategies within the nine categories were employed to achieve the desired changes, and staff at all levels were involved in workgroups, training sessions, and other activities to create the new approach and achieve better results for children and families.

The comprehensive and inclusive nature of the Redesign has successfully resulted in support for the programmatic direction of the Redesign and for the specific strategies employed by staff, agencies who partner in the provision of child welfare services, and the community. This support is reflected in responses to the survey of focus group participants. In Alachua County, 27 of the 38 specific strategies employed in that county were rated as highly important to the Redesign effort; the other 11 were rated as moderately important. In Duval County, 17 of the 26 specific strategies included in the Redesign were rated as highly important to the effort, and the remaining nine strategies were rated as moderately important. No strategies were rated as being of low importance in either jurisdiction. In focus group discussions, participants reported that not only had the outcomes for children and families improved but that services to families were more respectful, empowering, and effective. The broader array of services available to families allows for more targeted interventions.

The extensive, successful change of the Redesign in both counties has been created and sustained through consistent effort, dedicated leadership, and the flexibility to confront challenges. The demands of the redesign effort upon the time of staff, especially direct service and supervisory staff, have been especially challenging as workers strive to provide excellent services to children and families, and to incorporate into their schedules the meetings and training sessions required to implement the Redesign. An issue closely related to the concerns of staff regarding time demand is the timing and sequencing of the Redesign initiatives so that each contributes optimally to the success of the overall effort.

Other states and counties across the United States who are implementing child welfare reform efforts have also noted that the needs of the children and parents being served have become more challenging as foster care placement rates have declined. The need for a coherent overall practice model, ongoing coaching of supervisors and workers, celebration of implementation successes, strategic communications planning, and positive agency leadership have been emphasized.



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table of contents

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	6
Evaluation Purpose and Approach	7
Evaluation Objectives and Research Questions	8
Data Collection and Analysis	8
Limitations	9
Duval County	10
Impact on Children and Families	10
Foster Care Redesign Implementation Activities	13
Implementation Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Improvement	18
Alachua County	23
Impact on Children and Families	23
Foster Care Redesign Implementation Activities	25
Implementation Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Improvement	31
Cross-Jurisdiction Comparisons: Duval and Alachua Counties	35
Reference Notes	40
Information and Acknowledgements	42

Introduction

Child welfare systems around the country have long struggled with the challenge of managing the foster care system in a way that meets the needs of children and families. Alachua and Duval Counties located in Northeast Florida share some of these challenges in that they were experiencing high rates of out-of-home care, high staff turnover, low staff morale, high caseloads, high-profile child deaths, a negative public perception, disproportionate numbers of children of color in care, an organizational culture of removing children from families, and a lack of consolidated resources for families. It was clear that the systems of care needed comprehensive change.

In 2007, in alignment with state policy, both counties began a major overhaul of their foster care systems. Their efforts were enhanced by obtaining Title IV-E waivers from the federal government that allow for flexible use of foster care funds in order to create more nimble and effective program responses to children and families. In addition, the counties partnered with Casey Family Programs and through additional resources and strategic consultation were able to swiftly move the local work forward. The goals of this project were to:

- Safely reduce the number of children in foster care through intensive family support and diversion services.
- Meet or exceed Florida's goal of a 50% reduction of children in care by 2012. (Note: Duval started its redesign project before this became a state goal.)
- Assure a safe and permanent home for every child who comes to the attention of the child welfare system.
- Address service or outcome disparities that were found.
- Align results with Casey Family Programs 2020 Strategy on safe foster care reduction.

The Foster Care Redesign effort has shifted the service paradigm from one of considering placement of children as a first option to one of working intensively with families to resolve issues that place children at risk of abuse or neglect in order to both protect children and strengthen families. This is not just tinkering around the edges of the foster care system but is truly a “redesign” of the system.

This evaluation brief borrows from and builds upon internal documents prepared by Casey Family Programs Knowledge Management team from a Common Knowledge project series aimed at learning what is working on a systemic level to achieve better outcomes for children. In particular, the project investigates how jurisdictions like Alachua and Duval Counties have achieved safe reduction of the number of children in the child welfare system. Through site visits and interviews with agency leaders, the Common Knowledge project has identified common elements and strategies that have led to safe reduction, including:

- The presence of an important driver of reform
- An intentional change process

- Strong leadership
- Values to practice
- Building the will/influencing policy
- Data-driven
- Financing
- Maintaining and refocusing momentum

The 2009 Common Knowledge reports on Alachua and Duval Counties described the presence of these elements in their efforts in the Foster Care Redesign project (Redesign). They also reported reduction trends from 2004 to 2008 and discussed early challenges including communication, line-staff resistance to the system redesign, stakeholder concerns about child safety, ambitious timeframes and deadlines for providers, data collection for diversion programs, and overall evaluation challenges such as isolating the effects of the plethora of intervention services employed in the Redesign. This current evaluation chronicle provides important updates to the trend data, including rates of recurrence and re-entry that were not available at the time the Common Knowledge reports were written. Additionally, this brief examines aspects of the Redesign experience to date from the perspective of multiple stakeholder groups, including some of the challenges mentioned above as well as the strengths and opportunities of the Redesign moving forward.

Evaluation Purpose and Approach

This is not a summative outcome evaluation study. The purpose of this tightly focused evaluation study was to continue to document and describe the Redesign work in Alachua and Duval Counties in a way that can be shared externally with jurisdictions who might benefit from knowing more about the approaches taken, successes realized, challenges faced, and lessons learned as they lead the nation in this type of reform and reduction work. Equally important, the evaluation was designed to actively engage the major stakeholder groups in both counties in the evaluative and analytical processes in order to reinforce their respective cultures of continuous quality improvement and organizational learning and to concretely – and in real time – inform their internal strategic planning efforts. Third, we envisioned that this relatively small and descriptive study might help lay the groundwork for future evaluation efforts to more squarely tie efforts to outcomes (e.g., use the multiple-methods data to help inform logic model development, to help define future evaluation questions, and/or to help create new data collection instruments).

To achieve these objectives, we adopted and adapted elements from a developmental evaluation (DE) approach. DE has emerged as an alternative to the more traditional formative evaluation approach (e.g., process evaluation and evaluation for program improvement purposes) because the latter is meant to apply to static and fixed program models. In contrast, DE is meant to bring data to bear on innovative initiatives in order to inform and guide emergent choices. This approach is geared toward interventions that are at work in highly dynamic environments where leaders are trying to figure out what works while continually adapting to complex and changing circumstances. The dynamic and complex context of child welfare service delivery and reform certainly applies in this case.

Evaluation Objectives and Research Questions

Three evaluation study objectives and seven underlying evaluation questions guided the evaluation inquiry:

1. Implementation assessment. Describe the Redesign's implementation components and activities, including the extent to which each jurisdiction is implementing these efforts as intended.
2. Child and family outcomes tracking. Document whether and how the Redesign appears to be making a difference for children and families.
3. Key components analysis. Identify key components or elements in the Redesign, including perceived strengths and challenges that are consistent across sites and where there are unique differences.

The research questions were as follows:

Objective 1: Implementation assessment

1. What are the (major) strategies/elements that each jurisdiction is implementing as part of its redesign efforts?
2. To what extent have they been implemented to date?
3. What are the perceived importance and/or impact of specific strategies/elements? Do the perceived importance and/or impact vary across stakeholder groups?
4. What are the current challenges in this work and how can they be addressed?

Objective 2: Child and family outcomes tracking

5. Do the redesign efforts appear to be making a difference for children and families served as observed by trends in management information system data over time?

Objective 3: Key component analysis

6. Across the individual strategies employed, what are the common mechanisms at work that might be leading to the perceived and observed changes/improvements in child and family outcomes?
7. What are the common strategies and/or mechanisms between the two sites and what are the local variations that seem to be effective?

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through a review of official reports, focus groups with multiple stakeholder groups, and a survey of focus group participants. Data were reviewed from official reports produced by the Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the non-governmental lead child welfare agency

in both of the counties. These reports provided de-identified grouped data regarding the number of children and families served and the disposition of cases during the period covered by the evaluation: January 1, 2007 to June 30, 2010.

In addition, nine focus groups were conducted with key stakeholder groups including the Redesign leadership teams, community partners, program managers, and supervisors as well as investigators and case managers. The four focus groups in Duval County included a total of 41 participants; 43 participants comprised five focus groups conducted in Alachua County. Each focus group lasted two hours, included between 7-12 participants, and was co-facilitated by two members of the evaluation team. A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis activity during each focus group. After brainstorming a list of Redesign strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, every participant voted for her or his top three priority items in each quadrant. Evaluators tallied all votes to understand shared and differing priorities among stakeholder groups within each county as well as similarities and differences between the two counties. Focus groups were audio-recorded; transcripts were produced and referenced in order to pull out conversations and quotes that illustrate the main themes and priority areas that emerged from the focus groups.

Finally, focus group participants completed a survey to provide their perceptions of the specific Redesign strategies that have been employed in their jurisdiction to date. Survey respondents (n = 84) rated each strategy on a 4-point scale with respect to level of implementation and importance. Survey responses were entered into Excel and analyzed to produce a rank order of the specific Redesign strategies on perceived importance and implementation. Within-site rankings of importance and implementation were compared to understand the level of agreement or mismatch (i.e., were those strategies rated as highly important being highly implemented at each site?). Between-county comparisons of perceived implementation and importance of the Redesign categories also were considered.

Limitations

This developmental evaluation study was not designed to answer questions about which of the many Redesign strategies are specifically leading to reduced foster care rolls in Alachua and Duval Counties. Rather, it focused on presenting trends in administrative data that depict changes in outcomes for families and children since the beginning of the Redesign in 2007 so that they could be shared with an external audience along with a description of Redesign strategies. It also provides an assessment of the implementation of those strategies to date in terms of the perceptions and experiences of the main stakeholder groups responsible for implementing the Redesign in each county. An important limitation is that family perceptions were not gathered. However, the Ounce of Prevention research staff are talking with parents as part of a Family-Centered Practice evaluation they are engaged in with the state and these counties.

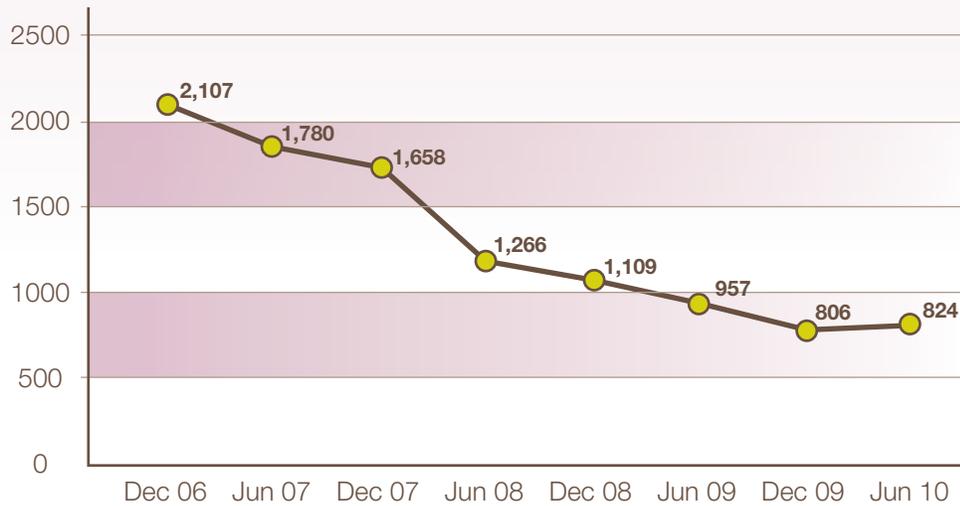
Duval County

The child welfare system in Florida is a public/private agency partnership in which DCF conducts child protection investigations and contracts with private child welfare agencies for provision of services to children and families. Under this model, DCF contracts with one lead agency, which then sub-contracts with other agencies to provide services within a certain geographic area. In Duval County, the lead agency is Family Support Services of North Florida (FSS). The Redesign was planned and implemented through a partnership between DCF and FSS with leadership provided by Nancy Dreicer, DCF northeast regional director and Jim Adams, CEO of FSS. The overall direction of the Redesign in Duval County was primarily based upon two considerations. The first was research findings that children who are safely maintained in their own homes while receiving services have better life outcomes than children who are removed from their families. These data suggested that the placement of children was counterproductive when other, less intrusive services may resolve family issues related to child safety. The second was the practical reality that the practice of placing children in out-of-home care as a first option had resulted in an overwhelmed system without adequate placement resources so that children coming into care were not well served.

Impact on Children and Families

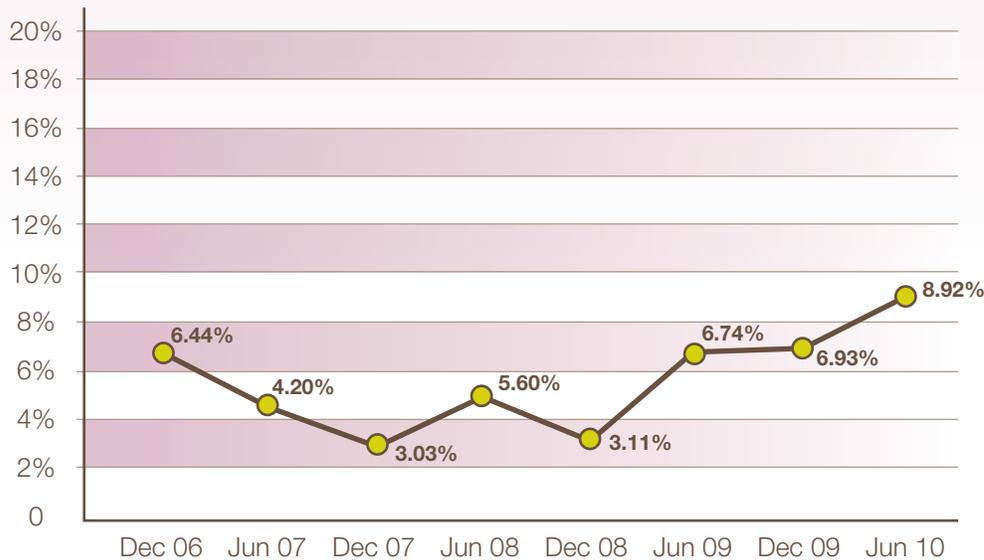
Duval County has made impressive progress toward achieving its goals of safely reducing the number of children in foster care through intensive family support and diversion services. In fact, Duval has exceeded Florida's goal of a 50% reduction of children in care by 2012 and providing a safe and permanent home for every child who comes to the attention of the child welfare system. When the Redesign was launched in December 2006, 2,107 children were in out-of-home care in Duval County. In June 2010, 824 children were in out-of-home care, a reduction of 61%. Figure 1 depicts the reduction of children in care over this period. As the number of children in care declined, the rate of removal of children from their families also declined. In December 2006, the rate of removal of children was 18.4 per 100 reports of child abuse/neglect. In June 2010, the rate of removal was 8.5 per 100 reports of child maltreatment, a reduction of 54%.

Figure 1. Total Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care in Duval County



Review of the data regarding re-abuse of children suggests that the decrease in children in foster care and the decrease in the rate of removal of children reported to protective services have been accomplished in Duval County without a significant increase in re-abuse of children who have been maintained at home with their parents. The percentage of children who were re-abused/neglected within six months after the initial report was 6.4% in December 2006 and 8.9% in June 2010 (see Figure 2). Although data regarding re-entry of children into foster care after having been reunified with their parents showed an initial increase, more recent data suggest a reversal in this trend with rates nearing those at the beginning of the Redesign. More specifically, the percentage of children reunified with their parents who re-enter foster care within 12 months of reunification initially increased from 8% in July–September 2007 to 14.5% in January–March 2009 and has since declined to 9.6% in April–June 2010. As is typical with these types of trend data, there are fluctuations up and down every month. A two sample z-test of proportions was calculated to determine that the increase in child foster care re-entries between July–September 2007 and January–March 2009 was significant ($z = -2.22, p < .05$). However, the difference in foster care re-entries between July–September 2007 and April–June 2010 was not significant ($z = -.58$).

Figure 2. Percentage of Children Re-Abused/or Neglected within 6 Months in Duval County



Duval County included moving children for whom reunification with their birth families could not be safely achieved into adoptive families as an important aspect of achieving the Redesign goal of a safe and permanent home for every child who comes to the attention of the child welfare system. A total of 1,088 children have been adopted since the beginning of the Redesign with an average of 350 children adopted annually the first three years of the redesign efforts. This number decreased dramatically in the last six months of the evaluation period with only 38 children adopted from January to June 2010. The reduction in adoptions occurred amid an overall reduction in the number of children placed in the foster care system. As fewer children are brought into care, fewer children exit care. However, the percentage of children exiting care who were adopted increased from 3.9% in January 2007 to 17.3% in June 2010. Children were being adopted somewhat more quickly at the end of the evaluation period in that the average length of time in care prior to adoption declined from 23.5 months in July–September 2007 to 22.1 months in April–June 2010.

The reduction in the number of children in care without an increase in the number of children who are re-abused within six months of case closure is a major accomplishment, and suggests that the large number of children and families being served through programs such as Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (STEP), Family Assessment Support Team (FAST), and other in-home services are receiving effective assistance to mitigate risks and keep children safe. The emphasis on the safety of the child as paramount (as reflected in the focus group discussions and survey results discussed below) is being put into action.

Foster Care Redesign Implementation Activities

Nine categories of strategies have been developed to achieve the goals of the Redesign. Duval County has developed 26 specific strategies within the nine strategy categories that focus primarily, but not exclusively, on the front end of the child welfare system. Programs were initiated at various times, and so the timeframe for data related to various strategies also varies. The strategies employed in Duval are described below, followed by a summary of survey respondent evaluations of the importance and the level of implementation of the strategies. These ratings are supplemented by administrative data related to implementation when available.

FAMILY PRESERVATION

This strategy category focuses on programs and services to keep children safely within their families and prevent their entry into the foster care system. Duval employed the following three specific approaches as components of the family preservation strategy:

Strengthening Ties and Empowering Parents (STEP): STEP is a prevention program for low- risk to moderate-risk families. STEP workers are co-located with the Child Protection Investigation (CPI) unit, which refers the family once a decision is made not to detain the child. The program provides in-home intervention to prevent families from entering the foster care system and to help them work toward stabilization. STEP workers have five days to contact the family and complete an assessment. Depending on their risk level, families receive between one and three home visits per month, for an average length of service of four months. The whole community of Duval County is eligible for STEP, but DCF cases have first priority.

From January 2007 to June 2010, the STEP program served 5,027 families involving 11,199 children, an average of 119.7 families and 266.6 children per month. During this period, 57 children (0.5%) being served by STEP were placed; thus 99.5% of the children served were maintained within their own families. Data regarding safety of children served by STEP after case closure are available from October 2009 to June 2010. These data reveal that during the nine months for which data are available, 72 families (an average of 8 per month or 4%) with closed STEP cases experienced re-abuse within six months of case closure. This rate is consistent with the re-abuse rates reported over time for youth in out-of-home care in Duval County (see Figure 2). This is promising, but without a comparison group study, it is not possible to determine the relative effectiveness of this program compared to other services.

Family Assessment Support Team (FAST): FAST is a diversion program for families that involves cases that are at higher risk than STEP cases. This program is for cases where there is legal sufficiency for detainment, but the caseworker and supervisor believe that the child can be diverted from entering the system. The case is immediately transferred to the prevention specialist who provides a certified FAST worker to conduct a joint investigation with the CPI unit within 24 hours. Immediately following, there is a family team meeting where the assessment and case plan are developed; this must happen within 15 days. There is a full-time therapist on staff, and all FAST workers are certified within child protection. Data available for the FAST program cover the period from September 2008 to June 2010. During this period, 518 families involving 1,169 children were served. Of these, 5.2% (61 children) were

placed in foster care, and 94.8% were maintained with their families. Data regarding outcomes for children after case closure by FAST were not available at the time of data collection.

Resource Specialist: This position has been created to facilitate referrals and links with appropriate services. Data available from September 2008 to June 2010 show that during this period 2,133 families involving 5,012 children were served by the community resource specialist.

Survey respondents saw the strategies in this category as critical to the success of the Redesign in Duval County. These strategies were ranked as the three most important strategies in the Duval redesign effort. They were also ranked as the most highly implemented.

USE OF SPECIALISTS

This strategy category focuses on contracting with, and making available to direct service staff, professionals who possess expertise in specific issues frequently affecting families who are referred to child protection services. Specialists are made available to staff for consultation and to provide specialized services for families in four categories:

MSW: This specialist is available to provide services in cases with mental health issues that require advanced clinical skills.

Domestic Violence: This specialist is available for services in cases where domestic violence is an issue.

Adoption: This specialist has specific expertise in facilitating adoptions.

Other Case Management Organization (CMO): Specialists can be made available to address the specific issues presented in a family situation, for example, substance abuse.

The adoption specialist was rated as highly important to the Redesign and as highly implemented. The domestic violence specialist was rated as highly important but moderately implemented. The MSW and CMO specialists were rated as moderately important and as moderately implemented. However, use of the MSW specialist was ranked the least implemented strategy of the entire Duval Redesign.

CULTURAL CHANGES

This strategy category focuses on training and skill development for staff designed to instill and operationalize values, norms, and competencies that enable the safe maintenance of children within their families. Efforts to shift the culture within the foster care system toward a strengths-based, family empowerment model focused on these three aspects:

Training of staff: A variety of training programs were offered to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to practice within the family-centered service paradigm. Each training program was identified

as an individual strategy. Training was provided for staff on family-centered practice, domestic violence, and cultural sensitivity.

Communication and Leadership Reinforcement: This strategy involves leadership efforts to support implementation of the Redesign and keep it on track through communication with staff and other stakeholders.

Use of Data to Inform Programmatic Decision Making: While DCF does consider itself to be data-driven, the goal is not to use the data primarily to reduce their numbers of youth in out-of-home care. Rather, it tells the story of what is happening in the system. The DCF staff analyze data to identify why certain youth languish in the system and to identify any gaps in existing services along the way. The project manager efficiently packages data so that the information is accessible and consistent for all staff. Work units use data strategically, meaning data use is less about benchmarks and numbers of children in care and more about performance of the unit. FSS now utilizes data from their subcontractors in order to be more outcomes-oriented.

The training on family-centered practice and domestic violence as well as communication and leadership reinforcement was rated as highly important to the redesign but as moderately implemented. The PRISM training on cultural sensitivity and the use of data were rated as moderately important and moderately implemented.

EARLY ASSESSMENT TEAMS

This strategy category focuses on joining service workers with child protection investigators in order to identify the needs of families and initiate services to address those needs early in their involvement with the child protection system. One specific strategy was employed, the integrated practice team, which is described below.

The Integrated Practice Team: This strategy was designed for complex cases with a potential for removal of the child or where a child has been removed; these cases require a team of individuals to determine the best case direction. The purpose is to identify the needs and resources for the families and to establish creative safety plans. The Integrated Practice Team has a core standing membership, including a team lead (MSW); mental health, substance abuse, and domestic violence advocates; housing and education specialists; an ACCESS (Automated Community Connection to Economic Self-Sufficiency) worker; a medical services nurse; and a family advocate from the CPI office. Decision team consultants are integrated into these team processes to provide leadership and facilitate the teams. Data available from September 2009 to June 2010 show that 457 families involving 983 children were assessed during that period. Of these, 77 (7.8%) of the children were placed in out-of-home care, 64 (6.5%) children were referred to STEP, 42 (4.3%) children were referred to FAST, and 10 (1.0%) were referred to the High-Risk Newborn program.

The Integrated Practice Team was rated as both highly important and one of the ten most highly implemented strategies in the Duval Redesign efforts.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

This strategy category focuses on the roles of leaders from DCF and FSS in supporting the goals of the Redesign and the strategies to accomplish those goals. The three specific strategies employed to maximize the impact of leaders are as follows:

Reinforce Message: This strategy focuses on the role of leaders from DCF and FSS in communicating the goals of the Redesign and strategies to achieve the goals. Leadership in Duval County emphasizes that “culture change is a constant process” and has worked to find an ideological point of agreement that all stakeholders can embrace and then has developed the policies and practices around that point. In this case, leaders did not promote the new mission as reducing the number of children in care but rather as safely keeping families together.

Leadership Time Commitment: This strategy focuses on leaders committing the needed time to solve problems, attend meetings, communicate with key actors, and complete other tasks associated with the redesign efforts.

“Servant Leadership”: This strategy focuses on a philosophy of leadership that emphasizes that effective leaders operate from a strengths and empowerment perspective rather than behaving autocratically.

Time commitment by leadership was rated as high in terms of the level of importance and implementation. It was ranked among the top ten strategies in both dimensions. Reinforce message was rated of high importance and ranked among the 10 most highly implemented strategies although it was rated as moderately implemented. Servant leadership was rated as moderately important in terms of both the level of importance and implementation, and it was ranked among the ten lowest strategies in both importance and implementation.

SAFETY OF THE CHILD IS PARAMOUNT

This is both a principle and strategy that emphasizes that the safety of the child must be the most important factor in every decision and action by child welfare staff. “Safety of the child is paramount” was rated as highly important and highly implemented. It was ranked among the three most important and most highly implemented strategies of the Duval Redesign. These ratings suggest a very high level of awareness across all staff levels of safety issues and the need to make decisions and provide services that assure child safety.

FAMILY-CENTERED PRACTICE

This strategy category focuses on engaging the families of children referred to protective services as partners in assuring the safety of the child. It recognizes that services are more effective when they are provided from a strengths and empowerment perspective. Emphasis is on providing services that

are available, accessible, affordable, timely, and culturally responsive. This strategy category has five components:

Neighborhood Center: This center is a model neighborhood center operated by FSS and funded by the Title IV-E waiver. It provides access to a full array of services and support for families in their community. It is located in the heart of Jacksonville, in the ZIP code from which the majority of the DCF reports are received. The goal was to make the center friendly and comfortable for the families that it serves. It is designed to be a “one-stop shop” for families; there is a laptop for families to use to apply for benefits, employment, or housing. In addition, many other agencies such as substance abuse treatment providers, support groups, and housing specialists also use the center.

Co-Location of Services: An ACCESS worker from Florida’s cash assistance program was placed in the CPI office to help reduce the barriers that kinship caregivers encounter when a related child is placed with them. These workers help relatives expedite the access to services they need, such as Medicaid and child support assistance.

Rocket Docket: This strategy refers to expedited hearings, whose purpose is to review and explore a specific issue affecting a child’s permanent plan in a timely manner. There were many cases identified in Duval County that could have been closed by the court; however, the pending hearings were often many months away. In Duval County, rocket dockets are used to expedite reunification with families immediately, rather than waiting until the next court hearing.

Collaboration with Courts: When reunification is not possible, permanent placement through adoption is immediately pursued. The courts and DCF collaborated to significantly increase the number of completed adoptions. In an effort to speed up the adoption process, the courts have increased the frequency of hearings, set staffing for adoptions on specific days, required more detailed and comprehensive case files from caseworkers, and hosted mass finalization days, which motivate case workers and adoptive parents to work toward a hard deadline.

Focused Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families: This strategy is designed to recruit families with the willingness and ability to meet the needs of children entering care, including the ability to address racial diversity and meet special needs. The desired result is moving children who cannot be reunited with their birth families to appropriate adoptive families more quickly.

Four of the strategies in this category were rated as highly important to the Redesign: the neighborhood center, co-location of services, collaboration with the courts, and focused recruitment of foster and adoptive families. However, these strategies were rated as implemented at a moderate level, with the neighborhood center and focused recruitment of foster and adoptive families ranking among the ten least implemented of all strategies in the Redesign. The rocket docket was rated as moderately important and as moderately implemented; it was ranked as the least important of all strategies in the Redesign efforts and as the third least implemented.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

This strategy category focuses on efforts to engage the broader community in the Redesign in order to draw upon the competencies of diverse segments of the community; develop creative, non-traditional services for families; and gain community support for child protective services and the Redesign efforts. Two specific strategies were employed: (meetings with 80 opinion leaders to solicit feedback, and community meetings professionally facilitated by a third party.

The meetings with 80 opinion leaders to solicit feedback were rated as highly important to the Redesign. However, the four groups differed in their assessment of the degree to which this strategy has been implemented; two groups rated it as highly implemented, one group rated the level of implementation as medium, and one group rated it as low.

Community meetings professionally facilitated by a third party were rated as moderately important and implemented although this strategy was ranked as the fourth least important of all strategies in the redesign efforts.

COMMUNICATION PLANNING

This strategy category addresses efforts to engage media and thought leaders within the broader community in order to inform the public and stakeholders of the goals and progress of the Redesign and to gain the support of the community for child protective services and the new approach introduced through the redesign efforts. Two specific strategies have been employed: a quarterly newsletter to over 700 community members, and meeting with media and editorial boards.

The strategies in this category were rated as moderately important and moderately implemented. They ranked among the 10 least important and least implemented strategies in the Redesign. The low ranking of these strategies may be due, at least in part, to the fact that many stakeholders are not aware of the efforts leadership is making to communicate with the broader community and the media.

Implementation Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Improvement

The strengths and challenges of the Redesign discussed here are those that were voted the most important across stakeholder groups from the SWOT analysis completed in the four focus groups held in Duval County and the focus group participant survey.

STRENGTHS

The strengths of the Redesign identified as most important by focus group participants and survey respondents are grouped into two categories: (1) the programmatic direction of the redesign efforts, and (2) the organizational changes that support the new program direction.

The success of any organizational change process depends upon the support of the leadership and staff at all levels. A major strength of the Duval Foster Care Redesign is the high level of agreement among leadership and staff within DCF, FSS, and other partner agencies in support of the direction of the Redesign. Focus group participants expressed a strong belief in the validity and importance of the goals and strategies that are components of the Duval Redesign. Direct service staff and community partners alike saw the emphasis on family preservation as bringing many positive benefits to the children and families served by the child welfare system. One of the most significant advantages is avoiding the trauma to the child and family incurred by separating the child from the family. Participants in focus group discussions referenced research that found that children who were maintained with their families with services had better life outcomes than children who were brought into foster care, and they saw this as a major impetus for the reforms undertaken by the Duval Redesign.

Achieving family preservation through family-centered practice was identified as central to the success of the Redesign. The greater involvement of families throughout the service delivery process, which is fundamental to this approach, has empowered families to identify their own strengths and resources and to design strategies to address issues of concern. This ownership of the process is essential if families are to confront the issues that are placing their children at risk and make the necessary changes.

Working with families in a way that helps them make fundamental change so that they can provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children was seen by participants as a strength that will reduce recidivism. Fewer children will re-enter the foster care system when their parents are helped to parent them appropriately.

Throughout the focus group discussions, and reflected in the survey results, was a very strong awareness of the importance of ensuring the safety of the child. Direct service staff were especially articulate on this point as they feel the personal responsibility to assure the child's safety in all aspects of their work. While they expressed the concern that some staff might compromise child safety in their enthusiasm about keeping families together, they confirmed that they operate with child safety as a priority by identifying this priority as one of the most important strengths of the Redesign and rating it as one of the most important and one of the two most highly implemented strategies in the redesign efforts.

The transformation from an organizational culture of placing children as a first option to one of family preservation and family empowerment required a shift in thinking on the part of both staff and families. The fact that this shift in thinking was acknowledged by focus group participants as one of the most important strengths of the Redesign suggests that staff members have indeed changed their perspectives regarding child protection and have embraced the new model of service delivery.

Four organizational factors that support these programmatic changes were identified as major strengths of the Redesign in Duval County. First, the team approach to decision making has made a critical difference in the service delivery process. Through this process, critical decisions have the benefit of different areas of expertise, and the CPI investigator and other direct service staff are not left alone to carry the responsibility and accountability for the results of decisions. Another effort to enhance

collaboration among staff includes the co-location of child protection and service staff so that they have access to each other and can work in a way that better supports families.

Creation of a diverse array of services to address the needs of families has enabled many of the programmatic changes cited above. Staff expressed reluctance to leave children in their own homes without adequate services to address the problems and ensure the safety of the child. One participant stated, “Protective Investigators want to feel confident [that] if they don’t remove, there are real good services. In the past they did not have prevention services to provide. The prevention services have been huge.”

Along with the expansion in the array of services, the Redesign has involved creation of new ways of managing and maximizing resources. Some of these include new community partnerships. One focus group participant said, “We are bringing in people we would never have thought about forming partnerships with in the past, business people, store owners, and others.”

Underpinning all the strengths identified above is a very strong commitment by leadership in DCF and FSS to the Redesign. Leaders expressed their strong conviction in the importance of the programmatic direction of family preservation and limiting trauma for children and families by safely keeping families together. The commitment of leadership is seen in the dedication of time and resources to carry out the redesign efforts.

CHALLENGES

The reduction outcomes realized by Duval County to date have been achieved through enormous effort, including culture and practice change at all levels. This type of successful change and improvement does not come without accompanying challenges. The long-term success of any change process requires that challenges be identified, acknowledged, and addressed. The challenges identified through this evaluation as having the greatest importance for Duval County have to do with the Redesign process itself and the attendant impact on direct service and supervisory staff.

Focus group participants across all stakeholder groups identified staff burnout and turnover as the single most important challenge to the success of the Redesign. Focus group participants observed that the Redesign has created too many demands on and expectations of caseworkers, and those demands have increased the level of stress in an already stressful job. This creates a situation that is less than optimal for delivery of high-quality services.

A second challenge to the success of the Redesign is the concern that available services do not address some important needs of families. Participants pointed out that many of the families referred to child welfare services are struggling economically and are in need of employment, adequate housing, and childcare, as well as substance abuse and mental health services. Many of these needs are outside the purview of child welfare services. Lack of appropriate services is also an issue for some groups of children referred to child welfare services, for example, limited services are available for ungovernable youth ages 11 to 18.

A related service challenge is that child welfare policies do not have the flexibility to meet individual family needs. Especially of note are the timelines set forth in policies in which change is to occur. Participants pointed to the treatment process for substance abuse and mental illness, which often require much longer timelines than those within which child welfare services must occur. This poses a major conflict with family preservation and family-centered practice.

The Redesign has created programs that emphasize engaging families in voluntary services. Participants suggested that when families do not engage in these services and significant safety risks remain, an option for court-ordered services is needed. The lack of such an option leaves children at risk.

The use of data to inform service delivery and decision making, while useful, can become a quest for numbers. Participants expressed the concern that families do not always fit into performance measures and data. Therefore, measures are needed for quality of services that meet individual family needs that are outside the established performance measures.

Community partners identified punitive contracting policies and procedures as a threat to the success of the Redesign, in that often the agencies that need additional resources most have resources taken away in the performance-based contracting process.

A number of issues outside the control of DCF or FSS were identified as threats or challenges to the success of the Redesign:

- The current national economic situation
- The possibility of reduced or inadequate funding for the program
- Definitions and interpretations of child abuse by the state hotline that do not account for the new family preservation services
- The possibility that changes in court personnel, especially judges, could derail the family preservation service model
- Concern that a high-profile child tragedy could elicit reactions from the media and community that would impede the Redesign

OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges bring opportunities. Moving forward, the opportunity of the Redesign efforts that was identified and rated most important by the majority of focus groups was the possibility to create a dynamic, meaningful, and satisfying child welfare job. The new programmatic direction allows for true engagement of families in a meaningful way. What is needed in addition is providing practical help to workers around workload and administrative tasks, as well as providing a level of compensation commensurate with the skills and responsibilities associated with the job.

Focus group participants felt the Redesign in Duval County could be improved by a thorough review of the impact of new program demands on the field. Likewise, greater collaboration between groups of staff with different functions could be fostered by having child protective investigators and service

workers shadow each other. Participants also suggested the Redesign could be expanded by seeking and securing additional funding opportunities, and by reaching out to encompass more agencies and resources.

The midpoint in the Redesign provides an opportunity to identify populations within the child welfare caseload whose needs are not being met or for whom not enough services are available and to initiate new programs to address those needs (for example, families with substance abuse and mental illness, including adult case management). The reduction of the number of children in care provides the opportunity to be more selective in the recruitment and development of foster and adoptive families with the requisite skills to meet the needs of children and families with special needs. Finally, the increase in the availability of research and information technology in the field of child welfare provides the opportunity to improve documentation and evaluation efforts and to create evidence-based programs.

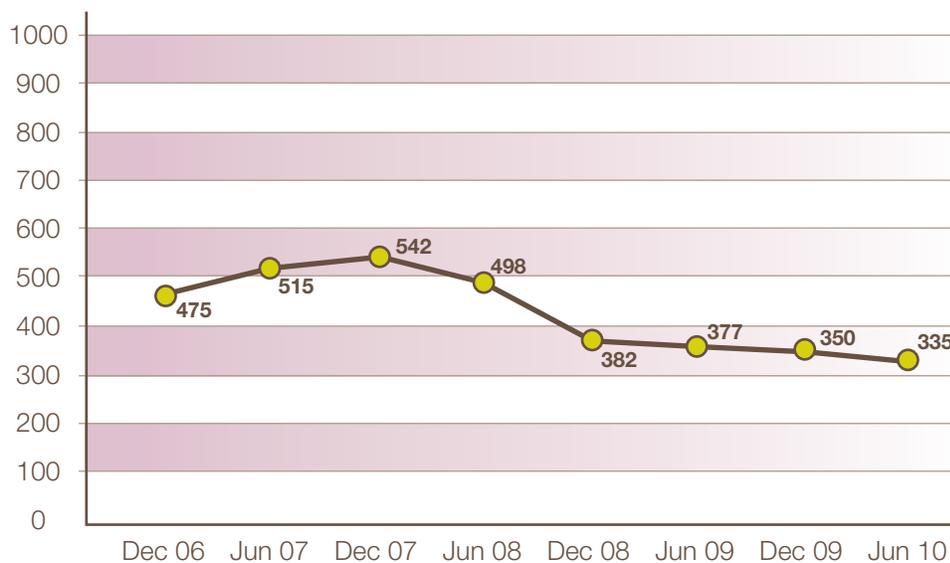
Alachua County

As mentioned, the child welfare system in Florida is a public/private agency partnership through which the DCF conducts child protection investigations and contracts with private child welfare agencies for provision of services to children and families. Under this model, DCF contracts with one lead agency, which then often sub-contracts with other agencies to provide services within a certain geographic area. In Alachua County, the lead agency is Partnership for Strong Families (PSF). The Foster Care Redesign in Alachua has been planned and implemented through a partnership between DCF and PSF with leadership provided by Ester Tibbs, DCF circuit administrator, and Shawn Salamida, president/CEO of PSF. Multiple workgroups composed of a mix of staff from DCF, PSF, and other partner agencies have been formed to address various Redesign program areas. These workgroups develop and help implement the new programs, monitor progress, and make changes as needed through routine monthly meetings. Each workgroup chair is a member of the Foster Care Redesign Executive Planning Team and attends a monthly meeting where they report on their progress to date.

Impact on Children and Families

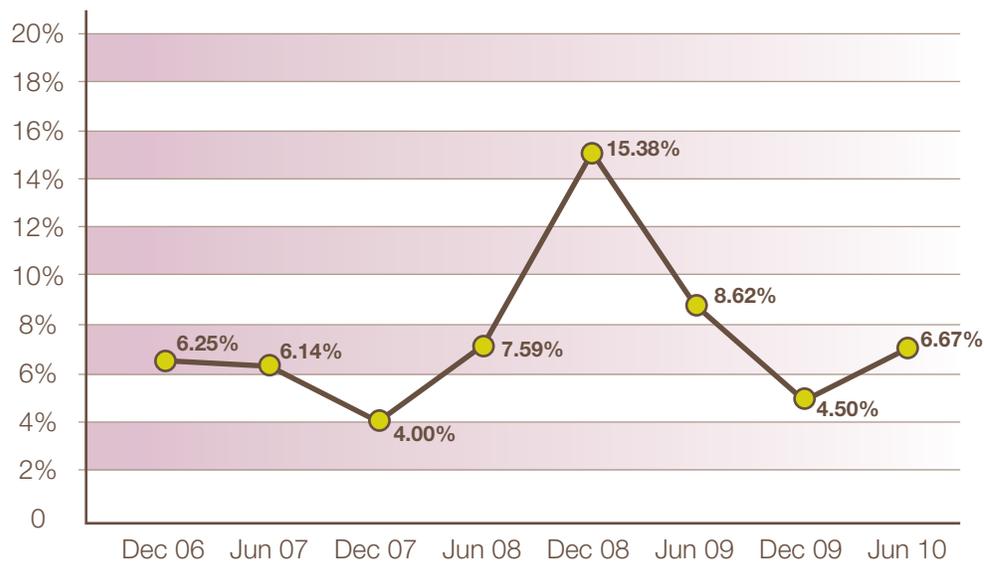
Alachua County, like Duval County, has also made impressive progress toward achieving its goals of safely reducing the number of children in foster care. When the Redesign was launched in December 2006, there were 475 children in foster care in Alachua County. In June 2010, the end of the evaluation period, there were 335 children in foster care, a reduction of 29.5%. Figure 3 below shows that after a small increase in 2007, the number of children in care has steadily declined. As the number of children in care has declined, so has the rate of removal of children from their homes. In December 2006, the rate of removal of children was 12.8 per 100 child abuse/neglect reports. In June, 2010 the rate of removal was 9.3 per 100 reports of child abuse/neglect, a 27% reduction in the rate of removal during the evaluation period.

Figure 3. Total Number of Children in Out-of-Home Care in Alachua County



A review of the data regarding re-abuse of children maintained at home and re-entry into foster care of children who have been reunified with their parents revealed that the decrease in number of children in foster care and the decrease in the rate of removal of children reported to protective services has been accomplished without a statistically significant increase in re-abuse of children or re-entries into foster care. The percentage of children who were re-abused/neglected within six months after the initial report was 6.3% in December 2006 and 6.7% in June 2010 (see Figure 4). The rate of re-entry of children into care has fluctuated over the study period. For example, the rate of re-entry of children into care within 12 months of reunification was 13.9% in July–September 2007, decreased to 1.52% in October–December 2008, and was at 4.35% in April–June 2010.

Figure 4. Percentage of Children Re-Abused/Neglected within 6 Months in Alachua County



The data in Figures 3 and 4 support two important perceptions of the focus group participants (discussed below). First, child safety is the paramount consideration in all decisions and services provided by child welfare services. Second, the front-end services developed through the Redesign have increased the options for children and families so that children can be safely maintained at home, and their families can be helped to provide safe and nurturing environments for them.

Note the spike to 15.4% in child maltreatment recurrence in December of 2008. In 2008, PSF had done an analysis of the percentage of Voluntary Protective Supervision (VPS) cases that were closed as non-compliant (meaning the family did not engage in services and because the case was opened to services “voluntarily,” PSF was not able to do much but close the case). The analysis showed that close to 50% of our voluntary cases were closed non-compliant. Because many of these families would have been considered “high risk” but they didn’t engage in services, many came back into the child welfare system again, with sometimes an even higher level of risk.

Based on this analysis, Alachua began the following reforms:

- Looked for ways to truly engage families in services and support at the front end of the system.
- Developed the decision team consultant position (which Casey has funded and supported since that time).
- Developed an early engagement process (which includes a joint visit between the CPI and family care counselor and expedited referrals for services for all VPS cases).
- Applied for the Federal Family Team Conference grant.
- Brought all the County partners together to create the Library Partnership.

They knew child maltreatment recurrence was a problem in their system, and the staff and community partners worked hard to find ways to address it proactively and to effectively engage families at the front end of the system.

Foster Care Redesign Implementation Activities

Nine categories of strategies have been developed to achieve the goals of the Redesign. Alachua County has developed 38 specific strategies within the 9 strategy categories, which focus primarily, but not exclusively, upon the front end of the child protection system. Programs have been initiated at various times; thus, the timeframe for data related to various strategies also varies. The strategies employed in Alachua are described below, followed by a summary of the survey respondents' rankings of the importance and the extent of the implementation of the strategies.

FAMILY PRESERVATION

This strategy category focuses on programs and services to keep children safely within their families and to prevent their entry into the foster care system. Alachua employed the following four specific approaches as components of the family preservation strategy:

Diversion Services: Diversion Path 1 is a program that serves families with lower to moderate risk and safety concerns that can be addressed without removing the child from the home. The goal of the diversion services is to engage families quickly with the appropriate services in order to prevent entry into the foster care system. The PSF's diversion staff members are co-located at the CPI office in an effort to streamline services and improve communication between the two agencies. A family service facilitator connects families with resources in the community.

In-Home Services: Diversion Path 2 is a program for moderate- to high-risk families who need assistance quickly and require longer-term case management but for whom placement is not necessary. The family is contacted within 24 hours of the referral and the follow-up services may be daily, weekly, or monthly, depending on the family's needs. The child protective investigator follows up with the family at two weeks to ensure that the family is engaged. This program served an average of 20 families each month from August 2008 to the end of the evaluation period.

Early Engagement: This strategy was designed to expedite case assignment for the more serious in-home service cases and to ensure a smooth case handoff from the child protective investigator to the family care counselor (FCC). There is an established single point of access for the CPI office to initiate service, and a joint home visit by the child protective investigator and FCC is scheduled within two days. Case management is transferred to the FCC once the visit is complete. If the family does not engage in services within 30 days, the child protective investigator and FCC review the case to determine a necessary course of action.

The Mobile Crisis Response Team: This team is available to respond quickly for high-risk families in crisis that need short-term help to prevent removal. The team arrives at the site within two to four hours of the call and provides de-escalation, assessment, and safety planning assistance.

Diversion services, in-home services, and early engagement were ranked by survey respondents as three of the four most important strategies in the Alachua Redesign. They were also ranked among the 10 most highly implemented strategies. The mobile response crisis team was also rated as being of high importance to the Redesign, but its implementation was rated as moderate.

USE OF SPECIALISTS

This strategy category focuses on contracting with, and making available to direct service staff, professionals who possess expertise in specific issues frequently affecting families who are referred to child protection services. Specialists are made available to staff for consultation and to provide specialized services for families in three categories:

1. Domestic violence service providers who work directly with families for whom domestic violence is an issue
2. Domestic violence subject matter experts who are available at DCF and PSF for staff consultation
3. Substance abuse and mental health service providers who are available for all families, including those who also need domestic violence services

Strategies to make available domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health service providers were rated as highly important to the Redesign efforts but were rated as moderately implemented, and the availability of domestic violence subject matter experts at DCF and PSF was rated as highly important but the third least implemented strategy of the Redesign. Data were not available regarding the frequency of use of these specialists.

CULTURAL CHANGES

This strategy category focuses on training and skill development for staff designed to instill and operationalize values, norms, and competencies that enable the safe maintenance of children within their families. Efforts to shift the culture within the foster care system toward a strengths-based, family empowerment model focused on the following three aspects:

Training of staff: A variety of training programs were offered in Alachua to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to practice within the new paradigm. Each training program was identified as an individual strategy. These included training programs on family-centered practice, solution-based casework, family team conferencing, cultural sensitivity, structured decision making, concurrent planning, as well as cross-system training on mental health issues and substance abuse by provider agencies, cross-system training on domestic violence by provider agencies, and training by David Mandel on domestic violence for PSF and DCF subject matter experts.

Communication about the Redesign to reinforce goals: This strategy involves leadership efforts to support implementation of the Redesign and keep it on track through communication with staff and other stakeholders.

Use of data to inform programmatic decision making: PSF has created one of the few child welfare data systems with the capability to track the outcomes of families engaged in prevention services. The system, known as P-Kids, integrates prevention service program data with foster care data from the statewide automated child welfare information SACWIS system and provides timely data to support decision making.

Training on family-centered practice and family team conferencing were ranked by survey respondents as among the ten most important strategies in the Redesign but were rated as moderately implemented. Training on concurrent planning and structured decision making were ranked among the ten least important strategies to the Redesign and were rated as moderately implemented. The following were rated as highly important to the Redesign effort but moderately implemented:

- Training on cultural sensitivity was rated among the 10 most important and as the least implemented of all the Redesign strategies.
- Cross-system training on domestic violence by provider agencies.
- Cross-system training on mental health issues and substance abuse by provider agencies.
- Leadership communication and reinforcement of goals of the Redesign and use of data to support decision making.

EARLY ASSESSMENT TEAMS AND TOOLS

This strategy category focuses on joining service workers with child protection investigators in order to identify the needs of families and initiate services to address those needs early in their involvement with the child protection system. Seven specific strategies were employed:

Diligent Search Specialist: This position was created to facilitate location of missing parents/relatives in order to move children to permanency more quickly.

Decision Team Staffing: Held at the beginning of child protective investigations in which the risk level is high and shelter care may be considered, the decision team staffing process allows a multidisciplinary team to assess a family's situation to determine risk level, identify options, and then arrive at a shared decision on the best approach to insure child safety, mitigate risk, and provide assistance to the family.

Decision Team Consultants: These consultants facilitate and lend their expertise to the decision teams described above.

Initial Staffing: Initial staffing is held within 24 to 48 hours for all shelter cases (children who are placed in out-of-home care) and facilitated by the quality operations manager at PSF. The goal is to assure that the child is placed in the right setting, a diligent search has been initiated to find relatives, services are being put in place for the parents and the child, and any issues are resolved that weren't addressed during removal or need to be addressed now that the child is in out-of-home care.

Structured Decision-Making (SDM) Tools: The SDM tools include the risk assessment tool, risk re-assessment tool, and reunification tool. These tools were designed to facilitate decision making by providing a well-thought-out process for gathering and analyzing information.

Perceptions of staff regarding the importance and level of implementation of these strategies were that the diligent search specialist, decision team staffing, decision team consultants, and the initial staffing were highly important to the Redesign and were among the ten most highly implemented strategies in the redesign efforts. Decision team consultants staffed 464 cases in the final nine months of the evaluation period, an average of 52 cases per month. Data regarding the decision team staffing show that in the same nine-month period, 70.1% of the cases staffed by the decision team were able to be diverted.

However, the structured decision-making tools were ranked among the ten lowest strategies both in importance and extent of implementation. There might be some important underlying reasons for the low value and extent of implementation ratings for these SDM tools. A moratorium was put on the use of the SDM risk assessment in Alachua County, so it is understandable that staff members thought SDM tools were among the least important or well-implemented strategies of the Redesign. Part of the challenge leading to the moratorium was that the County did not implement the SDM safety assessment when the SDM risk assessment was implemented. (The state of Florida mandates that child protective investigators use the DCF Child Safety Assessment, so Alachua did not have an option regarding use of that practice tool.) In addition, Alachua did not use the SDM strengths and needs assessment. Although concerns were raised from the beginning about the usefulness of implementing the SDM risk assessment without the SDM safety assessment, the County did so based on their desire to use an "objective" risk assessment. Currently, DCF and PSF are working with Signs of Safety experts and Casey to strategize options for integrating SDM tools with Signs of Safety tools, or to use Signs of Safety by itself.

The dichotomy of ratings of specific strategies in this category is pronounced, with one group of strategies rated very high in importance and implementation and the other group rated very low. This is not clearly reflected when the mean of the ratings for individual strategies is computed to create a rating for the entire category. The category rating, reported in section IV of this report, "Cross-Jurisdictional Issues: Duval and Alachua Counties," is medium for both importance to the Redesign and level of implementation.

LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

This strategy category focuses on the roles of leaders from DCF and PSF in supporting the goals of the Redesign and the strategies to accomplish those goals. Specific strategies employed to maximize the impact of leaders are as follows:

Reinforcement of Key Messages: Leaders communicate in a variety of ways with staff, other stakeholders, and the broader community to articulate and reinforce the key messages of the Redesign.

Time Commitment: This strategy focuses on leaders committing the needed time to problem-solve, attend meetings, communicate with key actors, and complete other tasks associated with the Redesign.

Support from Senior Leaders to Include Staff Input Throughout Implementation of the Redesign: Leaders accept and use staff input regarding the Redesign.

All three of these strategies were ranked as highly important but moderately implemented by respondents to the survey. In the themes that emerged from the focus group discussions (described in more detail below), staff expressed the desire for input but also stated that the demands of providing services to children and families and the large commitment of time required in attending meetings related to the Redesign presented a conflict for them.

SAFETY OF THE CHILD IS PARAMOUNT

This is both a principle and strategy that emphasizes that child safety must be the most important factor in every decision and action by child welfare staff.

Survey respondents ranked safety of the child is paramount as one of the two most important and the most highly implemented strategy in the Redesign. These ratings suggest a very high level of awareness of safety issues at all staff levels and the need to make decisions and provide services that assure child safety.

FAMILY-CENTERED

This strategy category focuses on engaging families of children referred to protective services as partners in assuring the safety of the child. It recognizes that services are more effective when they are provided from a strengths and empowerment perspective. Emphasis is on providing services that are available, accessible, affordable, timely, and culturally responsive. This strategy category has four components:

Library Partnership Neighborhood Resource Center: This initiative is a partnership between the DCF, PSF, the Alachua County Library District, and Casey Family Programs; and it is supported by more than 20 community organizations. Its purpose is to strengthen families, reduce re-referrals into the child welfare system, and provide support to vulnerable families before abuse or neglect occurs. It shares space with a public library in the area of Gainesville with the highest concentration of maltreatment

cases. This center has been positively received by the community and has seen more than 5,000 visitors between January and June of 2010. This collaborative effort has also received state and national attention as well as awards as an innovative partnership worthy of replication.

Concurrent Planning: Concurrent planning establishes two permanency plans for cases. The goal of the primary plan is usually reunification, while the alternate plan's goal may be adoption or some other permanent status. In the event the primary plan cannot be completed, the alternative plan is already underway, which should shorten the length of time to permanency.

Color of Care Action Plan: This action plan has 14 identified strategies to address the challenges around racial disparity. Some of the strategies to address these issues include training for caseworkers, the use of culturally valid assessment instruments, and recruitment of African American foster and adoptive families.

Focused Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families: This strategy is designed to recruit families that have the willingness and ability to meet the needs of children entering care, including the ability to address racial diversity and meet a child's special needs.

The Library Partnership Neighborhood Resource Center was rated among the 10 most important and 10 most highly implemented strategies of the Redesign. Concurrent planning and focused recruitment of foster and adoptive families were ranked as highly important to the redesign efforts but were ranked as being among the 10 strategies with the lowest level of implementation. The Color of Care Action Plan was ranked as moderately important and was ranked as having been implemented at a low level, one of only two strategies that were rated as having a low level of implementation.

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

This strategy category focuses on efforts to engage the broader community in the Redesign in order to draw upon the competencies of diverse segments of the community; develop creative, non-traditional services for families; and gain community support for child protective services and the redesign efforts. Two specific strategies were employed:

Redesign Meetings and Workgroups: DCF and PSF leaders conducted a series of meetings with key thought leaders and stakeholders to engage them in the Redesign as service providers, workgroup participants, and supporters. Multiple workgroups that are composed of a mix of staff from DCF, PSF, and other partner agencies are the primary mechanism through which the Redesign has been organized and maintained. Most of the new ideas and initiatives included in the redesign efforts originated in these workgroups through identifying system gaps and creating approaches to address them. The evolution of new initiatives was dynamic in that sense.

Community Steering Committee: A committee comprised of community leaders from diverse sectors was established to guide the development and implementation of the Redesign and to secure community support for the approach of strengthening and preserving families.

The Redesign meetings and workgroups were rated as highly important to the redesign efforts and as the third most highly implemented of all strategies. However, the community steering committee was rated as both moderately important and moderately implemented.

COMMUNICATION PLANNING

This strategy category addresses efforts to engage media and thought leaders within the broader community in order to inform the public and stakeholders of the goals and progress of the Redesign, and to gain the support of the community for child protective services and the new approach introduced through the redesign efforts. Three specific strategies were employed:

Strengthening Families Newsletter: This newsletter is produced quarterly, and distributed across Alachua County to keep stakeholders and the community updated on the redesign work efforts.

Presentations on the Redesign Changes by Senior Leaders at DCF and PSF: This strategy involves speeches given at civic and other organizations, media interviews, and other public presentations.

Improved Communication between DCF, PSF, and Community Partners: This involves meetings and other channels of communication that enhance system-wide collaboration.

Improved communication between DCF, PSF, and community partners was ranked as one of the ten most important strategies of the Redesign but as having been implemented at a moderate level. The Strengthening Families Newsletter and the presentations on the redesign changes by senior leaders at DCF and PSF were ranked as among the ten least important strategies of the Redesign by survey respondents and were rated as having been implemented at a moderate level.

Implementation Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for Improvement

The strengths and challenges of the Redesign discussed here are those that were voted the most important during the SWOT analysis completed in the five focus groups in Alachua County.

STRENGTHS

The strengths of the Redesign identified as most important by focus group participants are grouped into two categories: (1) the program direction of the redesign efforts, and (2) the organizational changes that support the new program direction.

For any systems change effort to succeed, it is essential that staff members at all levels understand and support the change. A major strength of the systems change effort in Alachua County is the broad consensus among staff at all levels in support of the goals of the Redesign and the specific strategies employed to achieve the goals. Of the 38 specific strategies implemented in Alachua, 27 were rated as highly important to the redesign efforts by survey respondents and the remaining 11 were rated as moderately important. The factor that was most often identified by focus group participants as a major strength is the family-centered approach. Focus group participants expressed that the new practice

direction is more respectful of families, gives families a stronger voice in the intervention process, and is less traumatic for children; in addition, the early engagement of families allows for more timely intervention. One focus group participant stated, “We looked at removals and realized we were re-traumatizing the children by taking them away. We wanted to do better.”

Focus group participants identified the emphasis on prevention and/or diversion services as a related strength that makes it possible to keep children safely at home with appropriate services and that has resulted in a reduced number of children in care.

Another program strength of the Redesign is the increased array of services offered to families that enables greater individualization of care. Focus group participants spoke specifically about the early intervention and diversion services that have been made available and how these services provide alternatives for child protective investigators that were not available before the Redesign.

In addition to the programmatic and service changes, several management and infrastructure changes were identified as major strengths of this systems reform effort. The consistent attention to the Redesign’s goals through regular meetings and workgroups was seen as a major strength that has supported the success of the effort.

The emphasis on broader inclusion of stakeholders and the community at large through the involvement of partner agencies in planning, communication, and problem-solving across systems and stakeholders, along with the development of working partnerships and collaboration with the community, have increased public support for child protective services. Focus group participants reported that they have been receiving more positive feedback from the community since the beginning of the Redesign. The more positive environment for child protective services includes the perception among focus group participants of greater collaboration between DCF and the lead agency, PSF.

The creation of new positions and/or staffing structures that support the Redesign was identified by focus group participants as important to the success of the effort. Examples of this include the mobile crisis response team, decision team consultant, and the co-location of the CPI unit and service staff. Attendant upon these changes is increased communication between service workers, service providers, and programs.

Finally, the flexibility of funding for programs and services made available through the Title IV-E waiver was identified as a factor that has enabled much of the change Alachua County has been able to create.

CHALLENGES

The reduction outcomes realized by Alachua County to date have been achieved through enormous effort, including culture and practice change at all levels. This type of successful change and improvement does not come without accompanying challenges. The long-term success of any change process requires that challenges be identified, acknowledged, and addressed. The challenges identified

through this evaluation as being of the greatest importance in Alachua have to do with the Redesign process itself and the attendant impact on direct service and supervisory staff.

The theme that recurred most frequently during the focus group discussions was the increased demands on direct service and supervisory staff and the negative impact of these demands on staff. Every focus group that involved DCF and PSF staff rated staff burnout as one of the most important challenges to the Redesign. The concerns raised were that there are too few staff to meet all the demands of providing services to a caseload plus the demands of meetings and training sessions that are part of the Redesign. Focus group participants also expressed that the new service paradigm requires more qualified staff; they noted that some current staff do not have adequate education, skills, and experience to function competently in the new service environment.

One group noted that supervisory staff pose a challenge when they do not provide consistent clinical supervision, and that some supervisors may not buy in to the Redesign and may negatively influence their staff. Conversely, one group expressed that this systems reform had brought too much oversight, thereby disempowering workers. These issues were seen as perpetuating and increasing an already chronically high staff turnover rate. In fact, one group rated the failure of the Redesign to address the chronically high staff turnover rate, as well as other chronic child welfare issues such as legal timeframes that do not correspond with therapeutic timelines as one of the greatest challenges to the redesign efforts.

Focus group participants saw the manner in which the Redesign is being implemented as contributing to the staff burnout and turnover. Participants pointed to the large number of initiatives and the speed of their implementation as major challenges. One participant said, “We cannot finish the things we start. Just as we are getting started on one thing, another initiative is begun, so we are running from one thing to another.”

The speed with which the system reforms have been implemented was credited by focus group participants as contributing to confusion at the direct service level regarding how the specific elements of the Redesign fit together. Participants expressed the need for better mapping that would explain how the various components relate to and complement each other. One example raised during the focus group discussions was the conflicting timeframes between early engagement and family team conferencing (FTC) in which early engagement requires putting services in place immediately and the FTC requires waiting to initiate services until the family buy-in can be obtained through the family conference. Participants from partner agencies expressed that many agencies are only acquainted with the elements of the Redesign that are associated with the specific services they provide and do not have “the big picture.” This was supported by the focus group survey in which respondents in the community partners group consistently rated strategies as “don’t know/not familiar with strategy” more frequently than any other group.

Focus group participants identified two program issues as presenting important challenges to the Redesign. The first of these is that workers are being asked to make important decisions about child safety very early in the case. Participants expressed that they often do not have all the information they need to make good decisions that early. This is not a redesign issue but a fundamental challenge of any child protective services program.

Participants also observed that if diversion services are not effective for the families referred to them, there is not a feedback loop to the CPI office that enables intervention with more intensive services. Rather, the case is closed and children are vulnerable to re-abuse or neglect. As one participant said, “There is no plan B.” In the months since the focus group, written family preservation protocols have instituted feedback loops from service providers to address this critical issue. As of this writing, staff are noting particular progress in this area to their supervisors, and senior leaders are hopeful this will become an “institutionalized” change.

Challenges in the environment that are largely outside the control of DCF or PSF include the possibility of changes in DCF leadership, the large size of the geographical area in which Alachua must implement the Redesign, and the possibility that media headlines could erode public support for the new programmatic direction should a child be maintained at home and then re-abused or killed. The current economic environment was also identified as a challenge, especially the possibility of reductions in funding for child protection and foster care programs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

Focus group participants identified several opportunities for the future success of the Alachua Redesign. An opportunity identified as among the most important by two of the groups was the recommendation to step back, engage in reflective evaluation, and clarify the redesign processes, priorities, and roles. Through this process, leadership can identify those aspects that are working well and those that need improvement and make mid-course corrections. One participant said, “We need to stop trying new things and finish what we’ve started.”

Participants recommended that the realities of child protective work at the direct service level be reviewed, and that the impact of new initiatives on that work be considered, because underlying decisions by management to undertake multiple initiatives simultaneously can be troublesome. Participants recommended that management work to develop a better understanding of contemporary front-line work in child welfare services. This increased understanding would inform future program decisions, including the number and timing of initiatives.

Some of the suggestions for continued improvement in the Redesign are improvements in the communication system so that information reaches all staff across the entire service system, expediting services to families to greater reduce the time from identification of need to initiation of services, engaging the courts in the systems reform, and the use of training dollars to enhance and strengthen partnerships with provider agencies.

On a broader level, participants saw the Redesign as an opportunity to help staff truly embrace the strengths perspective, to impact the entire society by effectively intervening on the generational cycle of child abuse, and to reshape the way the community views child welfare services and families in need of those services. Participants expressed the belief that the Alachua Foster Care Redesign is making an important contribution to the field of child welfare at the local, state, and national levels.

Cross-Jurisdiction Comparisons: Duval and Alachua Counties

Duval and Alachua Counties are located in northeast Florida. Duval County is on the Atlantic Coast and encompasses the city of Jacksonville, the largest city in the state with a 2009 population of 857,000 people, 209,965 of whom were under the age of 18. Alachua County is inland and encompasses the city of Gainesville and the University of Florida with a 2009 population of 243,574, of whom 44,330 were under the age of 18. Both jurisdictions were experiencing similar challenges in their foster care systems that led them to create partnerships with Casey to make comprehensive reforms in their systems. The possibility for a meaningful “redesign” of the systems in Duval and Alachua Counties was made possible through a Title IV-E waiver that allowed the jurisdictions to use federal foster care funding flexibly.

The two jurisdictions pursued similar goals and developed nine categories of strategies to achieve the goals. However, the specific strategies within each category differed. Programs were designed that reflect the population needs and environmental and cultural realities of each jurisdiction.

CROSS-JURISDICTIONAL COMPARISON OF REDESIGN STRATEGIES

Despite the differences in specific strategies developed within the nine strategy categories, the focus group survey respondents produced similar results in their ratings of the level of importance to the Redesign and the level of implementation of each category. As shown in Table 1, two strategy categories were rated as both highly important to the systems reform effort and as highly implemented. These are safety of the child is paramount and family preservation. Four strategy categories were rated as highly important to the Redesign but as implemented at a moderate level in both jurisdictions: the family-centered approach, use of specialists, cultural changes, and leadership support. Communication plan was rated as of moderate importance and as having been implemented at a moderate level.

The two jurisdictions differed in their ratings of only two strategy categories. Duval County respondents rated early assessment teams as being highly important to the Redesign and as having been highly implemented, while Alachua County respondents rated that strategy category as both moderately important and implemented at a moderate level. However, as mentioned earlier, the dichotomy of ratings of specific strategies in this category by survey respondents in Alachua was pronounced, with one group of strategies ranked very high in importance and implementation and the other group ranked very low. Diligent search specialist, decision team staffing, decision team consultants, and the initial staffing were rated as highly important to the Redesign and were ranked among the ten most highly implemented strategies in the systems reform efforts whereas the three structured decision-making tools were ranked among the ten lowest strategies both in importance and extent of implementation. If the three structured decision-making tools were removed from this category, the rating would be high for both level of importance and level of implementation in Alachua. Conversely, Alachua rated community collaboration as highly important to the systems reform efforts and as having been implemented at a high level while Duval rated this strategy category as moderate on both dimensions. The cross-jurisdictional comparison of Redesign strategies is depicted in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Survey Results: Comparison between Jurisdictions

Strategy	Alachua		Duval	
	Implementation	Importance	Implementation	Importance
Family Preservation	High	High	High	High
Use of Specialists	Medium	High	Medium	High
Cultural Changes	Medium	High	Medium	High
Early Assessment Teams	Medium ^a	Medium ^a	High	High
Leadership Support	Medium	High	Medium	High
Safety of the Child is Paramount	High	High	High	High
Family Centered	Medium	High	Medium	High
Community Collaboration	High	High	Medium	Medium
Communication Plan	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium

^a Duval respondents rated early assessment teams as being highly important to the Redesign and as having been highly implemented, while Alachua respondents rated that strategy category as both moderately important and implemented at a moderate level. However, the dichotomy of ratings of specific strategies in this category by survey respondents in Alachua was pronounced, with one group of strategies ranked very high in importance and implementation and the other group ranked very low. Diligent search specialist, decision team staffing, decision team consultants and the initial staffing were rated as highly important to the Redesign and were ranked among the ten most highly implemented strategies in the redesign efforts, whereas the three structured decision-making tools were ranked among the ten lowest strategies both in importance and extent of implementation. If the three structured decision-making tools were removed from this category, the rating would be high for both level of importance and level of implementation in Alachua.

SHARED STRENGTHS

Perhaps the most important strength shared by Duval and Alachua Counties is strong support from focus group participants for the goals of the Redesign and the strategies developed to achieve the goals. Focus group participants across stakeholder groups in both jurisdictions expressed support for and enthusiasm about the new opportunities to help families afforded by the system reforms. The fact

that staff and other stakeholders have embraced the Foster Care Redesign is critical because support of the individuals who have responsibility for implementing the changes is essential for any change effort to succeed. The level of support for the system reforms expressed by staff and other stakeholders suggests that the efforts of leadership in both jurisdictions to include staff in planning, reinforce the goals of the Redesign, and obtain the buy-in of key actors have been largely successful.

The family-centered approach with its emphasis on building on strengths and family empowerment is seen as a major breakthrough in the delivery of child welfare services. The new programs that emphasize engagement of families early in the intervention process create a different set of dynamics in the worker/family relationship, dynamics that lay the foundation for more positive outcomes for children and their families. This approach to family preservation has been successful in both jurisdictions thus far, and it provides a template for building a renewed emphasis in child welfare services on keeping children safe while reducing trauma for children and families by serving children in their own homes.

Child welfare services are highly accountable to the families served, the courts, and the public due to the intrusive and often coercive nature of the intervention and the weight of the possible consequences of decisions made by child welfare staff. In most child welfare systems, the direct service staff and their immediate supervisors carry the brunt of this responsibility and accountability. The redesign efforts in Duval and Alachua Counties have developed systems of team decision making that bring expertise from multiple disciplines to enhance the quality of decision making and to share the responsibility and accountability for decisions made. This move toward greater collaboration among child welfare service providers is further enhanced by strategic support from Casey Family Programs (see box below) and co-location of staff members who have different functions but who serve the same families, such as child protective investigators and caseworkers who provide services. Locating staff together allows for greater understanding of each other's roles and more seamless service provision.

THE PARTNERSHIP ROLE OF CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS IN THE REDESIGN EFFORT

The Florida Department of Children and Family Services (DCF) and Casey Family Programs have been working together for the past three years. The goal of this collaboration is to safely reduce the number of children in out-of-home care. Casey Family Programs and DCF have developed multiple projects in the state and will expand their relationship in 2011.

Duval and Alachua Counties, in particular, have been the site of some noteworthy and unique practice innovations. The combination of the two sites accounts for a significant geographic area and some highly diverse populations. In Duval, the original site for Foster Care Redesign, the collaboration with Casey led to a sophisticated, interdisciplinary case-review process. As a result, the community-based care agency (CBC) and local partners have been able to divert scores of children from entering foster care. In addition, Casey provided resources and technical assistance so that DCF and the CBC could open a comprehensive community center for families in one of Jacksonville's most challenged neighborhoods. In just a short time, it has proven to be a rich intersection of services for parents, children, and kinship providers.

In Alachua County, there is an equal level of excitement regarding systems improvement. Casey Family Programs and the partners in the Gainesville area have combined their best thinking to develop a unique project called the Library Partnership. Again, located in a community where the data related to child well-being are mixed and/or poor, DCF, the Circuit's CBC, and other stakeholders, along with the county's forward-thinking library system, created a brand-new mini-library geared toward parents and young children. The difference is that this library is also a place where neighborhood residents can access over 30 different types of services and support through the representatives of agencies that share space in the library's side offices. Literally thousands of people have taken advantage of this alternative to the more traditional agency venue. At the same time, children are learning the value of reading and going to the library.

In both counties, there has been a good deal of emphasis on changing the agency culture manifested through the practices, policies, and use of resources. The combination of a comprehensive federal waiver, the development of CBC agencies, transparent leadership, and the willingness of public and private agencies to partner with a national foundation have resulted in significant reductions in the number of children in out-of-home care. This has occurred at the same time that the safety indicators for youngsters have also improved.

SHARED CHALLENGES

As stated earlier, the Foster Care Redesign effort has shifted the service paradigm from one of considering placement of children as a first option to one of working intensively with families to resolve issues that place children at risk of abuse or neglect in order to both protect children and strengthen families. This is not just tinkering around the edges of the foster care system but is truly a "redesign" of the system. As the service structures have changed, the policy structure has remained essentially the same. This has created a situation in which direct service staff are required to carry out their original duties and the new programs and service structures are "added on." The situation is compounded by a sense of urgency to improve services to children and families that has prompted the speedy implementation of multiple programs simultaneously. Participants in all of the nine focus groups conducted as part of this evaluation identified the stressors that direct service staff experience as a result of this situation as a major issue of concern and one that leads to staff burnout and turnover. Participants across jurisdictions expressed concern that increased staff turnover will result in the loss of more experienced staff and a failure to "weed out" poor performing staff due to the need to have workers covering the caseloads. Additional shared concerns are the level of compensation for direct service staff and the need to build staff support and wellness into the system.

The success of the Redesign in both jurisdictions has been enabled by strong and committed leadership from DCF and the lead agencies. These leaders in turn have been supported in the Redesign by DCF leadership at the state level; the courts have also supported the effort. Focus group participants

across jurisdictions identified the potential for changes in leadership in DCF at the local and state levels and potential changes in the judiciary as threats or challenges to the continued success of the Redesign.

SHARED OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE

As Alachua and Duval Counties move forward to extend and improve their Redesign efforts, creative development identified across jurisdictions holds the opportunity to design more supportive and satisfying direct service jobs. Creation of reconfigured direct service positions should be based upon a thorough understanding of contemporary front-line work and an analysis of the requirements of the new service paradigm at the direct service level. Accompanying considerations in designing such jobs are the resources and assistance that need to be in place to support direct service staff and building in a level of compensation commensurate with the skills and responsibilities of the positions.

CONCLUSION

This mid-course implementation assessment and chronicle of the Foster Care Redesign in Duval and Alachua Counties, Florida, has shown that both jurisdictions have made impressive progress toward achieving the goals of the Redesign in that the number of children in care has been reduced, more children are being safely maintained within their own homes with appropriate services, and this has been accomplished without an increase in re-abuse of children. The program direction of the Redesign – family preservation through family-centered practice – is embraced by staff and other stakeholders, welcomed by families, and supported by the community. Key to the success of the program is the commitment of leadership from DCF and the lead agencies, PSF and FSS, who have maintained a consistent focus on achieving the goals of the Redesign from its beginning. An area of concern to be addressed is the impact of multiple, rapid changes on the workload at the direct service level and the resulting stressors for staff.

Other states and counties across the United States that are implementing child welfare reform efforts have also noted that the needs of the children and parents being served have become more challenging as foster care placement rates have declined. The need for a coherent overall practice model, ongoing coaching of supervisors and workers, celebration of implementation successes, strategic communications planning, and positive agency leadership is well documented.

While this study has provided useful information about the achievements to date and the perspectives of staff and community stakeholders regarding the strengths and challenges of the Redesign, there is much yet to learn. Two areas of inquiry for future research are studies that seek to understand which of the many redesign strategies are specifically leading to reduced foster care rolls in Alachua and Duval Counties, and studies that include the perspectives of children and families who are served by the child welfare system.

Reference Notes

1. A two-sample z-test of proportions revealed this slight increase was not statistically significant ($z = -.3091$).
2. Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: The Guilford Press.
3. Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
4. A two-sample test of proportions indicated a significant decrease in number of children in out-of-home care between December 2006 and June 2010 ($z = 24.15$, $p < .05$).
5. A two-sample z-test of proportions was calculated to determine that this slight increase was not statistically significant ($z = .3091$).
6. Florida fiscal year: Q1 (July –September); Q2 (October–December); Q3 (January – March); Q4 (April – June).
7. Being certified within child protection means that caseworkers complete a specific 12-week training program required by the State of Florida. Because the FAST program is staffed by certified workers, it can provide a higher level of services and work with children who are at higher risk for abuse or neglect. In comparison, STEP workers are not certified and therefore provide services only to children who are at much lower risk.
8. Outsourced case management is not a requirement of the community-based care model, though it is most often the case.
9. A two-sample test of proportions indicated a significant decrease in number of children in out-of-home care between December 2006 and June 2010 ($z = 6.84$, $p < .05$).
10. A two-sample test of proportions indicated no significant differences in proportions between December 2006 and June 2010 ($z = -1.08$).
11. Two-sample tests of proportions indicate a significant decrease in the proportion of children who re-entered care within 12 months of reunification between July–September 2007 and October–December 2008 ($z = 2.66$, $p < .05$). The difference in re-entries between July 2006 and June 2010 was not significant ($z = 1.65$).
12. Note that in other jurisdictions, implementation of risk assessment systems has been challenging. Staff become more aware of the utility and importance of safety/risk assessment practice techniques and tools when they are more fully implemented, especially when staff have had time for shared case conferences about their usage. See:

English, D., & Pecora, P. J. (1994). Risk assessment as a practice method in child protective services. *Child Welfare*, 82(5), 451-473.

Munro, E. (2002). *Effective child protection*. London, UK: Sage.

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Turnell, A. (2010). *The Signs of Safety: A comprehensive briefing paper*. Retrieved from www.signsofsafety.net/briefing-paper

13. For a newly released concurrent planning toolkit, see www.nrcpfc.org/cpt/overview.htm
14. See for example: Edgar, J. (2009). *Stories of prevention in Los Angeles County: DCFS and community agencies join hands to support families and children*. Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. Retrieved from www.casey.org/Resources/Publications/pdf/StoriesOfPreventionLA.pdf; McCroskey, J., Franke, T., Christie, T., Pecora, P. J., Lorthridge, J., Fleischer, D., & Rosenthal, E. (2010). *Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP): Year two evaluation summary report*. Los Angeles: LA County Department of Children and Family Services; Seattle, WA: Casey Family Programs. Turnell, A. (2010). *The Signs of Safety: A comprehensive briefing paper*. Retrieved from www.signsofsafety.net/briefing-paper

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About Child Welfare League of America

CWLA is a powerful coalition of hundreds of private and public agencies serving vulnerable children and families since 1920. CWLA's focus is children and youth who may have experienced abuse, neglect, family disruption, or a range of other factors that jeopardize their safety, permanence, or well-being. CWLA also focuses on the families, caregivers, and the communities that care for and support these children.

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