



GEOGRAPHY MATTERS

Consider family and child well-being in the context of community

“Ultimately, our work has to be about building Communities of Hope for all of our children — building strong communities that offer families and children a better chance, viable choices, stronger voices and life-enhancing opportunities. Because all of our children deserve a Community of Hope.”

—Dr. William C. Bell,
President and CEO

Many professionals who work to improve children's lives recognize that children and families must be viewed in the context of their social environments. In turn, solutions to social problems must address the needs of both individuals and the communities in which they live.

Casey Family Programs' 2020: *Building Communities of Hope* initiative draws upon a growing body of literature in child maltreatment and prevention research. This research has demonstrated the influence that community characteristics have on families, children, and rates of child maltreatment in a community. Community-level indicators of disadvantage — for example, concentrated poverty and unemployment and degree of residential instability — often are associated with rates of child maltreatment.

Mapping these and other community-level characteristics can provide child welfare departments with a valuable tool for better serving children and families and preventing child maltreatment. Practical applications of geographic analysis methods and mapping in child welfare include:

- Identifying gaps between family needs and community resources to inform decisions about service provision and resource allocation.
- Isolating concentrations of risk (e.g., poverty, teen pregnancies, substance abuse) and protective factors (e.g., social support, service availability and use), how and where they cluster together, and their association with maltreatment rates.
- Monitoring the performance of child welfare systems in relationship to key performance goals, such as keeping children in out-of-home care close to siblings or families of origin and in their same schools, or recruiting foster parents in these areas.
- Assessing the impact of community- and individual-level interventions over time.

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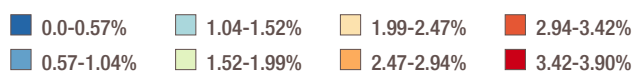
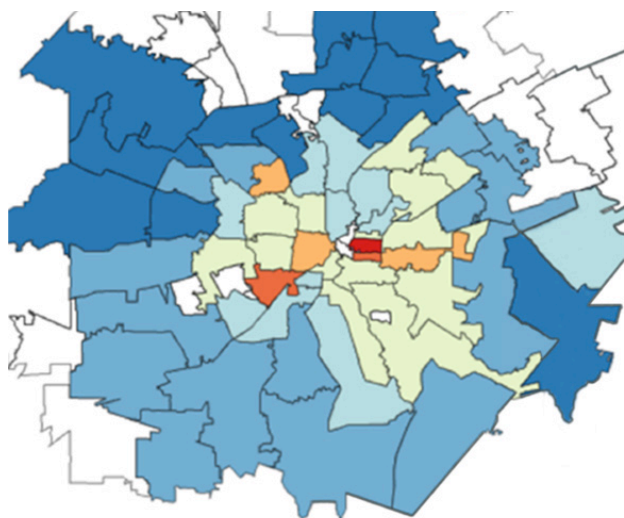
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- Engaging a cross-section of community stakeholders through the use of data to effectively facilitate discussions of solutions to social problems and to inform policy and practice.
- Informing the development of comprehensive and holistic responses to complex family problems that take community and neighborhood into account.

Many communities, within and beyond child welfare, are increasingly turning to geographic mapping tools and analysis methods to better integrate and use data. For example, the map below displays child abuse and neglect rates by ZIP code to identify high-risk areas.

CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT RATES BY ZIP CODE IN SAN ANTONIO, TX (2010)



Screenshot capture of 2010 San Antonio Metropolitan Health District data from Community Information: Now (<http://nowdata.cinow.info/>; accessed October 21, 2014). Data and additional information available from the City of San Antonio at www.sanantonio.gov/Health/News/HealthData.aspx.

Using these approaches

First steps for a child welfare jurisdiction interested in using these approaches include:

- Identifying stakeholders and determining the questions to be answered by looking at individuals within the context of their community.
- Locating public and agency data sources to help answer these questions at a meaningful level of geography (e.g., census tract, congressional district, county).
- Connecting with local agencies or organizations currently using these mapping and geographic analysis techniques. Local public health agencies, police departments, or universities are often great places to start.
- Learning from other communities that effectively use these techniques.
- Establishing data-sharing agreements that ensure data confidentiality and security.

Contact information

For more information on geographic analysis, mapping tools, or community-level indicators of child maltreatment, please contact

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