

# *Collaborating 4 Better Futures*

## *Formation*

Community leaders from local child welfare agencies began meeting in 2008 to try to address the many issues plaguing the local area. Community mapping for the local area indicated serious issues related to poverty, unemployment, access to healthcare and violent crime. They recognized that there were many services available for a family after a crisis but that for many this was just too late. They recognized that family centered interventions, community building and parent education are the cornerstones of effective practice. United for Families, Children's Home Society and Hibiscus Children's Center agreed to move forward with a collaboration that would deliver additional prevention/early intervention services in the local community. The three agencies provided "startup" funding to establish an independent not-for-profit agency to deliver primary prevention services in the community. Exchange Club Castle was unable to contribute the \$5,000 startup funds and withdrew from the collaborative. Together, they established Collaborating 4 Better Futures. A significant amount of time was spent researching and planning the most appropriate model of service delivery. The Social Development Strategy interventions are designed to strengthen the relationship between children, families and the community by providing them with opportunities for active involvement, the skills to participate successfully, and rewards or recognition for their efforts. The center seeks to strengthen the community and increase protective factors in children and youth. When bonds are strong the communities expresses clear norms against unwanted behaviors such as violence or substance misuse. Community resource centers are one of several community approaches focused on improving the well-being of residents. The development of family support programs fits closely with the move towards evidence based practice in child welfare (FRIENDS, 2008, Children's Bureau, 2007). These changes build on family strengths and create a partnership with the family. Services are responsive to family's cultural backgrounds, community values and individual preferences. Our mission is to "provide a community resource center through collaboration and partnerships which will advance and enrich the physical and emotional well-being of residents of Okeechobee and the Treasure Coast. The first Shamrock Community Resource Center opened in Saint Lucie County on January 2010 and a second is due to open in July 2010 in Martin County. This approach reduces duplication and fragmentation of services. It also enables the program to continually respond to emerging community needs. It improves efficiency by maximizing the use of existing resources. Each of the founding partners nominated two members of staff to the Board of Directors. Individual roles and responsibilities were identified in writing. The independent role in the new agency enabled the board members to feel free of their agency constraints and facilitated opportunities to develop the services in different ways. The board spent a considerable period of time developing their shared vision of how services could be delivered in the community. The board has been able to respond quickly and effectively to concerns and issues identified during the establishment of the Shamrock Center.

# *Collaborating 4 Better Futures*

## *Management*

The Board of Directors consists of two representatives from each of the founding agencies. They meet on a monthly basis. They have extensive knowledge of the child welfare system and have multiple skills in problem solving, conflict resolution and marketing. They have extensive experience working in partnership with local agencies who have demonstrated their commitment to the resource center by co-locating staff and providing a range of services on-site. The center is managed by the Executive Director, Maureen Simmons who works part-time in the program. She is a Certified Addiction Professional and a Certified Mental Health Professional and holds a Master's degree in the Administration of Criminal Justice. She reports to the Board of Directors on a monthly basis. The role requires extensive experience in personnel management, budget planning and administration, research, fundraising, grant writing, data analysis as well as experiences with collaborative program development. The center facilitator, Nell Wilkins work's full-time in the program. This includes evenings and weekends. The facilitator is responsible for the coordination of services, development of partnerships and community outreach.

## *Challenges*

The impact of the current recession has impacted the availability of funding both locally and nationally fundraising events we have focused our effort on building relationships with local faith based groups.

We have collaborated with other agencies to apply for federal funds. We have also completed substance misuse licensure to enable C4BF to be eligible to apply for funding. The Board is actively seeking local community leaders to participate on the board.

## *Impact*

The center has serves 1,100 children and 3,813 adults since it opened in January 2010. A total of 28 partner agencies now deliver services within the center. The center has facilitated 486 referrals to other local agencies for services not available within the center. C4BF facilitated a health fair for the community that provided information and free health screenings to over 500 residents. The program also enhances the community's capacity to support the growth and development of all its residents. Services are designed and delivered at the community level. It encourages families to connect with their communities and the communities to link with their families. The center promotes community leadership and involvement through volunteer opportunities. It also facilitates community input in the planning and delivery of services.

Family support is about investing in the promotion of the positive things that families want for their children. In the long term, family support is a societal investment in the creation of happy, healthy, productive citizens. This investment has an impact on the families who participate in services, and on society as a whole.

# *Collaborating 4 Better Futures*

## *Model*

Collaborating 4 Better Futures is working in partnership with key local providers to provide a range of services within the center. We are working to empower and transform families and communities to create an environment where all children can experience success. We believe that involving and engaging parents as partners will lead to future successful parents, children and communities. Our model reflects the principles of working in partnership with families, the provision of services that enhance family's capacity to support the growth and development of their children and affirms the cultural, racial and linguistic identity of community members.