

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
CHILD WELFARE-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP DATA SYSTEMS

Report commissioned by the Foundation Consortium in collaboration with the
California Family Resource Association

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“Differential Response” seeks to ensure that all families referred to the child welfare system, whether or not they are formally determined to be a child abuse or neglect case, get connected to the services they need. Developing data systems to track services and outcomes for Path One and Path Two families (those for whom a case is not formally opened) is critical to determine if Differential Response is having an impact and how much it costs. This requires the involvement of Family Resource Centers in the development of these data systems in collaboration with child welfare agencies.

In July of 2005, The Foundation Consortium for California’s Children and Youth convened a group of child welfare services community partnership stakeholders to develop a set of criteria against which data systems serving Path One and Path Two Families could be assessed. A total of 16 different data systems and vendors were assessed and they fell into the following categories: 1) County-based systems, 2) Data systems serving a network of family resource centers (FRCs), 3) software vendors, and 4) Data systems developed by individual FRCs and non-profit agencies. Of the 16 assessed, MetSys, Social Solutions, and Children’s Network of Solano County met the highest number of criteria.

Contra Costa and San Mateo Counties use the Special Projects field of CWS/CMS and link it to a database for services provided by community-based organizations. Los Angeles County Family Preservation Program integrates information from County Children and Family Services and from community-based family preservation programs.

The following Family Assessment/Outcome measurement tools are being used: Family Development Matrix, Family Assessment Form, Nexus G, North Carolina Family Assessment Tool, and California Structured Decision making Risk Assessment and Family Strengths and Needs Assessment. There is quite a bit of similarity and overlap among them.

Keys to successful data system development and implementation include: 1) getting effective buy-in early in the process, 2) having adequate technical skills, capacity, and training, 3) thinking through the elements of your data system in advance, and 4) effective project management.

The costs for development and training vary widely. It is much more cost-effective for a non-profit social services agency to build on someone else’s platform than to create its own data system, and it will reduce its costs considerably by purchasing its software as part of a consortium of agencies.

If you are part of a network of Family Resource Centers, you may want to contact FaCT in Orange County and the Children's Network in Solano County to learn about two different models for developing your data system. If you want to learn about the process and criteria for selecting a vendor, consider contacting Placer County Child Abuse and Prevention Council (who chose Vision Link), Families and Communities Together (FaCT) of Orange County (who chose VistaShare), and Contra Costa County, Children and Family Services, who chose MetSys. Each selected their vendors in mid to late 2005.

There is clearly a vital role for the California Family Resource Association to play in data system development by providing technical assistance, being a clearinghouse for information exchange, and for providing leadership to the field. In order to rigorously evaluate the impact of Differential Response, it would be ideal for family resource centers to agree to use a uniform family assessment tool. *What is most critical is that there be agreement on what should be measured—the outcomes to which Family Resource Centers want to be held accountable.* If CFRA is able to work with its members to collect and aggregate data across counties, it will be well-positioned to demonstrated the impact of FRCs in general, and of Differential Response in particular, thus enabling CFRA to support the sustainability of its members and to play a critical intermediary role with state government.

For a copy of the full report, please visit the California Family Resource Association web site at www.californiafamilyresource.org.

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Introduction

According to the Foundation Consortium for California's Children and Youth What Works Policy Brief, Choosing the Path Less Traveled: Strengthening California Families Through Differential Response, "more than 90% of calls to child abuse hotlines do not qualify to become official child abuse cases or neglect cases." Yet these children and families could benefit from services and support. Connecting these families with community services, the policy brief argues, can serve to strengthen and stabilize their relationships, reduce re-referrals and head off instances of child abuse and neglect.

"Differential Response," a strategy that was enacted in 2001 as part of State Law (Assembly Bill 636, Steinberg, Ch. 678, Statutes of 2001), the Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System, sought to ensure that all of these families, whether or not they are formally determined to be an official child abuse or neglect case, get connected to the services they need. Differential Response involves three different paths:

- "Path One" is for those families where the child welfare agency determines there is a relatively low risk of harm. Families are formally referred to agencies in the community, and those agencies offer support and services to help strengthen families.
- "Path Two" is those families where the agency believes the child is at some risk of harm. Instead of formally referring the family to the community, families work with representatives of county child welfare agencies, other county agencies and community-based organizations to identify their risks and strengths and to participate in services for improvement of child and family well-being.
- "Path Three" is for those families where the child welfare agency finds that the children are unsafe. An actual case is opened and the court system may be involved.

Prior to implementation of Differential Response, Path One and Path Two families may or may not have received services. Only those families that were designated as child welfare cases (now referred to as Path Three) were certain to receive services. Differential Response offers the opportunity to provide preventative community services to Path One and to Path Two families so that hopefully they don't ever become Path Three families.

There is already a system in place for tracking Path Three Families-- the Child Welfare Services-Case Management System (CWS/CMS). However, because Differential Response is relatively new, data systems for tracking Path One and Path Two families are still in the early stages of development.

Developing data systems to track services and outcomes for Path One and Path Two families is critical to determine if Differential Response is having an impact and how much it costs. This report takes a look at data systems that collect information on these populations and other related data systems in order to promote knowledge exchange and to help family resource centers--the primary community providers who receive referrals from Child Welfare Agencies-- to develop their own data systems to track these families.

Background and Methodology

In July of 2005, the Foundation Consortium for California's Children and Youth convened a group of child welfare services community partnership stakeholders to develop a set of criteria against which data systems serving Path One and Path Two Families could be assessed. The stakeholders consisted of representatives from family resource centers and county child welfare agencies (CWA) that are at various stages of developing data systems to track families that have been referred by a CWA to a community provider (or visa versa), and the California State Office of Child Abuse Prevention. The full list of stakeholders is in Appendix 5.

From their different perspectives, the stakeholders came up with the following criteria that they thought were necessary for these data systems to be able to track family progress, support family engagement in services, track costs, and evaluate impact:

Criteria for Assessing Data Systems

Client Data

- Identifies (commonly agreed upon) characteristics of Path 1 and Path 2 families and demographics of these families
- Keeps information collected about families secure

Service Data

- Tracks services families receive from multiple agencies & progress they are making in defined problem areas or domains (i.e., anger management, transportation, health).
- Tracks whether a family needs to be re-referred to CWS and how many times re-referral has occurred.
- Tracks geographic location of services, and as data become available, availability and accessibility of services.
- Produces family service plan.
- Tracks client satisfaction, family engagement, and barriers to engagement in services.
- Is able to integrate with the CWS/CMS system so that the FRC data system can automatically make referrals to CWS and track service provision for clients who may be served by both CWS and the FRC/CBOs.
- Displays service delivery targets for staff performance reviews by supervisors
- Provides information about CBOs (staffing, quality of services, etc) to help clients make informed decisions about where they are referred.

Cost/Finance Data

- Meets reporting requirements of CBO/FRC funders (e.g. county First Five, foundations) and be able to add additional data elements required by future funders (e.g. MediCal, Targeted Case Management).
- Is able to capture funding sources and how dollars are spent.
- Tracks costs of services associated with Path 1 families from various systems, including CBOs, FRCs, and/or the county and are able to capture data, services and costs for Path 2, when the FRC or CBO is jointly working with County response.

Outcome Measurement, Case Management, and Reporting

- Incorporate a tool for measuring family outcomes (a family assessment tool) that is flexible/compatible with the tool used by the county child welfare agency (e.g., Family Development Matrix).
- Has user-friendly case management system (e.g., consistency of hard and electronic forms), be simple and clear on how it functions, and be web-based.
- Produces reports at the individual & aggregate level for families identified as Path 1 or Path 2.
- (Measures performance of the FRC)¹

The stakeholder group also came up with the following critical considerations for FRCs and CBOs when developing data systems for Path 1 and Path 2 Families:

- Confidentiality/security
- Staff capacity for ongoing training on system/dedicated staff that are knowledgeable and can do cross-training.
- System should be built with ongoing input from the FRC, CBO, and county, and should be easy to modify once it is built.
- Investment or support by county for a secure server, hardware, software, training, and maintenance. Some counties would maintain the data system for CBO (FRC) input and reporting; the data would not be part of a federal or state-wide database but would meet standards for tracking services and outcomes for Path 1 families.
- The need for consistent practices across sites and a web-based “data central” for data collected by multiple sites on the same clients.
- Any kind of performance measurement must take into account the difficulty of individual cases so as not to create disincentives to work with challenging clients.

¹ This is in parenthesis because what was meant by “the performance” of an FRC was not clearly defined.

The data systems and vendors the stakeholder group chose to assess against these criteria are listed below:

<p>County Data Systems Santa Clara County</p> <p>San Mateo County Human Services Administration</p> <p>Contra Costa County, Children & Family Services</p> <p>Los Angeles County, Family Preservation</p>	<p>FRC Network Data Systems Families and Communities Together, Orange County</p> <p>Children’s Network, Solano County</p> <p>Vendors MetSys Inc Social Solutions Trilogy IR Pangea Foundation CS & O</p>	<p>JMPT Individual FRC or Non-Profit agency Data Systems Children’s Bureau of Southern California</p> <p>Placer Co. Child Abuse and Prevention Council</p> <p>Jewish Family & Childrens Services</p> <p>Caminar</p>
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From the onset, it should be noted that this is not a complete list of data systems or vendors that are tracking services and outcomes for Path One and Path Two Families or families at risk for being referred to the child welfare system for abuse and neglect.² Nevertheless, among this cohort, there are several examples of innovative data systems that are breaking new ground. A lot can be learned from this group that can inform the field and provide guidance for family resource centers that are beginning to develop their own data systems.

The individual assessments of each data system against the criteria as well as a completed questionnaire that provides a summary of key features and the “story” behind the development of each data system can be found in the appendices. Before turning to Key Findings and Lessons learned from reviewing these data systems, what follows is a brief orientation to how the data system descriptions and assessments are organized in the Appendix.

- The county system summaries (Appendix 1) start with the county that is in the beginning stages of developing the parameters of its system (*Santa Clara*) and continue along the continuum to the data system that has been in place the longest (*LA County Family Preservation*) and is the most developed. (A criteria template for Santa Clara was not completed because they have not yet determined the specifications of their data system.) The *Santa Clara, San Mateo and Contra Costa* county data systems described in this report were developed to implement Differential Response.
- The Family Resource Center Network Data Systems (Appendix 2) are presented in no particular order. *Families and Communities Together* of Orange County chose to work with a vendor, Vista Share, which was not interviewed separately for this report, and “went live” with their system in mid-November, 2005. *Children’s Network* of Solano

² For example, towards the end of my research, I learned of three additional vendors which could have been interviewed for this report if time permitted: Community TechKnowledge (CTK), The Rennselaerville Institute, and Helix (Canadian firm that created ANDAR).

County has had their *Child Net Results Manager* in place for over years, and developed it in-house.

- For data systems developed by FRCs and individual non-profit agencies (Appendix 3), begins with the *Children's Bureau of Southern California*, which developed their software so that the *Family Assessment Form* (an outcomes measurement tool similar to the Family Development Matrix) could be used electronically. *Placer County Child Abuse and Prevention Council* is in the early stages of developing their data system for Differential Response. They are working with a vendor, VisionLink, which was not interviewed separately for this report. *Jewish Family and Children's Services* developed one of the first family resource centers in the country some 30 years ago and its data system has evolved over with years with its FRC, called Parent's Place. *Caminar* is the name of a psychosocial rehabilitation program and the name of the software it developed. The assessment tool that is linked to its software is being used to track outcomes for people with serious mental illnesses across the state of California. Its application has lessons for how an assessment tool can be used to bring accountability to an industry and draw state funding (AB 2034 and potentially for Prop 63)
- Among the vendors (Appendix 4), *MetSys* and *Social Solutions* each seem to have the most capacity and flexibility built into their systems to do performance management, case management, and track costs. Several of Contra Costa's Children and Family programs are about to contract with MetSys. (I was able to experience each of these web-based software solutions first-hand through a customized on-line demonstration.) *Trilogy IR Network of Care*, *CS&O's Evaluation Station software*, and *Pangea Foundation* are designed for case management and also have the capacity to do performance management. *Trilogy IR* is focusing on developing client-centered care through its "middleware" that connects different data systems that are working with the same clients to one another. *Pangea Foundation* has developed software for the American Association of Service Coordinators that may have some application to family resource centers. *CS&O's OCERS software* and *JMPT* each have developed performance management software, which could be further customized to provide case management.

Key Findings and Lessons Learned

First, it is important to note that the diversity of data systems and vendors reviewed. These data systems develop out of different motivations and under different environments. While some counties and family resource centers are developing their data systems to implement Differential Response (*Santa Clara, San Mateo, and Contra Costa, and Placer Child Abuse and Prevention Council*), others are working with similar families, but not necessarily as part of *Differential Response (Los Angeles Family Preservation, Families and Communities Together in Orange County, and Children's Network of Solano County)*. In addition, there are a couple of data systems that are not tracking families at risk for referral to the child welfare system (*Caminar* and *Pangea Foundation*), yet relevant lessons can be drawn from their experience in working with a different client population.

On the next page in "Summary Table of Data Systems by Criteria," is a summary of information in the appendices. The main categories of criteria that are listed at the top of the table are: Client

Data, Service Data, Cost/Finance Data, Outcomes/Case Management/Reporting, and Web-enabled. The numbers in the table reflect the number of criteria that each data system/vendor met for a particular category. (For example, 5/8 means 5 out of 8 criteria were met.) Of the 16 data systems assessed, MetSys, Social Solutions, and Children's Network of Solano County met the highest number of criteria. The far right column denotes whether cost information for a particular data system can be found in the appendices.

Following the Summary Table, the rest of this section is organized around the following core issues that cut across many of these data systems:

1. Data System Configurations
 - (a) A separate community data system that is linked to CMS-CWS
 - (b) One data system that links county data with community data
2. Family Assessment/Outcome Measurement tools
3. Keys to successful data system development and implementation
4. Costs/Funding for data system development and training
5. Suggestions on where to look depending upon your needs.

1. Data System Configurations

In Contra Costa and San Mateo counties, each county is in the early stages of implementing Differential Response using the Special Projects or Special Characteristics code of CWS/CMS.

Contra Costa County, Child and Family Services, is creating a separate access database for Path 1 and Path 2 families which will be linked to a special projects field in CWS/CMS. The Special Projects codes in CWS/CMS started being used in May 2005, while the Access database will be up in November 2005. Contra Costa will be manually linking their Access database client information with CWS/CMS information to be able to answer questions such as the recidivism rate. The Access DB was developed in house without special money set aside for this project. It is not web-based.

Summary Table of Data Systems by Criteria

Data System or Vendor	Client Data	Service Data	Cost/ Finance Data³	Outcome/Case Management/ Reporting	Web-enabled	Total # Criteria Met	Information on purchase cost
County Systems							
Santa Clara	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
San Mateo	2/2	5/8	1/3	4/4	yes	14/18	N/A
Contra Costa	2/2	1/8	1/3	0/4	no	4/18	N/A
LA Family Preservation	1/2	5/8	0/3	2/4	yes	9/18	some
FRC Networks							
FaCT, Orange Co.	1/2	2/8	2/3	4/4	yes	10/18	Yes
Children's Network, Solano Co.	2/2	7/8	2/3	4/4	Yes, as pilot	16/18	Yes
Indiv FRC or non-profit							
Children's Bureau	2/2	4/8	0/3	3/4	no	9/18	Yes
Placer Co. Child Abuse & Prevention Council	2/2	6/8	1/3	4/4	yes	14/18	NA
Jewish Family & Child. Serv.	2/2	2/8	2/3	2/4	no	8/18	N/A
Caminar	2/2	5/8	3/3	3/4	no	13/18	Yes
Vendors							
MetSys	2/2	7/8	3/3	4/4	yes	17/18	NO
Social Solutions	2/2	7/8	2/3	4/4	yes	16/18	NO
Trilogy IR	2/2	6/8	1/3	2/4	yes	12/18	NO
Pangea Fndn.	1/2	6/8	1/3	3/4	yes	12/18	some
CS and O (OCERS)	1/2	4/8	2/3	3/4	yes	11/18	some
CS and O (Eval Station)	2/2	2/8	2/3	3/4	yes	10/18	some
JMPT	2/2	4/8	2/3	4/4	yes	13	Yes

³ Because of similarity of two criteria in this category, they were combined for purposes of this table. That is why the maximum # of criteria that could be met is only 18, instead of 19 as appears in the appendices.

In San Mateo County, Human Services Administration, initially, basic information, including referral data, goes into CWS/CMS where a screener enters it into the special characteristics field for Path 1, Path 2, or for immediate response. It is extracted on a nightly basis to a web based application called CARE. The following morning, a list of referrals from the night before pops up. Contact information is then shared with CBOs.

In contrast to Contra Costa and San Mateo counties, the Los Angeles County Family Preservation Program has a collaborative database, which is housed at the School of Social Work, University of Southern California (USC). It is jointly created utilizing data from the community-based agencies (CBOs) and from the Department of Children and Family Service (DCFS) system.

Their database imports data directly to their website from the CBOs and from DCFS's databases that are managed by the Information Technology Service (ITS). ITS sends the data from their own Family Preservation database (which includes their Intake Form 800, Structured Decision Making Risk Assessment and Family Strength and Needs forms, billing data and some data taken from the CWS/CMS database relating to prior case openings and recidivism data). The CBOs send USC data on initial service plan, services received from which community agencies, level of participation, and progress toward meeting service objectives (defined as meeting "priority needs" as described on the SDM Family Strengths and Needs instrument).

This raises the question of how to maintain confidentiality in a centralized database that is accessed by (35 (last year) or 66 (this year) sites and is web based.

According to Barbara Solomon, Ph.D., the Principal Investigator for the evaluation of the Los Angeles Family Preservation Program, "It was necessary (1) to make sure that our database imported a minimum of identifying information on families (e.g. we have only numbers and name of primary caregiver, no addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers, etc.); (2) to have the electronic database constructed so each site has its own username and password, that sites may read and have access to their own data but cannot read or access the data input from the other sites; (3) to have our own designated server and to purchase a firewall from a company that guarantees that other internet users will be unable to access data from our website without the username and password."

2. Family Assessment/Outcome Measurement tools

There are several different assessment tools that data systems are using to measure family progress. The Children's Network in Solano County and the Placer County Child Abuse Prevention Council each use the Family Development Matrix (FDM). According to Jerry Endres of the California State University Monterey Bay Institute for Community Collaborative Studies who developed the FDM, "It helps to measure family progress and outcomes by quantifying the qualitative. It documents where a family is thriving as well as where it needs support. The caseworker or family worker can use the FDM to sort out the strengths from client issues, set goals with clients, problem-solve and assess monthly or quarterly progress of the entire family."

The Children's Bureau of Southern California created its own family assessment tool--the Family Assessment Form--which is similar in many ways to the Family Development Matrix.

The Family Assessment Form (FAF) is a practitioner developed, user-friendly tool designed to help child welfare and family support workers assess family functioning, develop meaningful service plans, monitor progress, and to assist agencies in measuring program outcomes. Developed by Children's Bureau between 1985 and 1987, validated through research, and used in hundreds of agencies across the country, the FAF is available in both paper and software versions.

San Mateo County uses NEXUS G, which is similar to the North Carolina Family Assessment tool, another widely used tool. The Los Angeles County Family Preservation Program previously used the North Carolina Family Assessment Tool. Now it is using the California Structured Decision making Risk Assessment and Family Strengths and Needs Tool.

Families and Communities Together (FaCT) in Orange County developed their own assessment tool to reflect the goals of their FRC network partners. They set up assessment measurement teams, which included service providers, FaCT staff, and admin staff from the FRC partners. They asked these teams which 5 core services should have outcomes measurements that would send the strongest message and have the most impact. For each of the five core services that were identified, a team was assigned to develop assessment instruments in which they had to identify outcomes relevant to a funder as well as to a practitioner. They gave everyone an opportunity to deconstruct service interventions, and, through the process, services interventions changed. The process was a blending of evaluation and service design.

While there are several tools being used in the field to measure and track family outcomes, it also appears that there is quite a bit of similarity and overlap among them. One suggestion was for the California Family Resource Association to develop a "thesaurus" so that Family Resource Centers could identify which elements of different assessment tools were actually measuring the same things.

3. Keys to successful data system development and implementation

There are at least four critical elements to consider in developing and implementing your data system:

- Getting effective buy-in early in the process
- Having adequate technical skills, capacity, and training
- Thinking through the elements of your system in advance
- Effective project management

Each of these will be discussed in turn.

Getting Effective Buy-In Early In The Process

As one county person put it, "For county agencies that are trying to implement the system on their own, keep connections to family resource centers "close to your heart." Our program manager worked with FRCs and was open about what we could do and what we could not do." A non-profit agency representing a network of family resource centers, made a similar point: "We built the system with the FRCs, not to them." Clearly for implementation to be successful, people who use the system will have to see what is in it for them. Therefore, it is important to

work collaboratively to get ownership of the primary data collection instrument. In LA County's Family Preservation Program, it took them more than a year.

According to one vendor, low commitment and involvement by stakeholders can be lethal at all stages of the implementation process. This includes front-line users, organizational managers, local technical staff, and funding and review boards. Non-participation in planning meetings, poor follow-up on tasks, negative comments and attitudes, absence from training, and resistance to actual system use are key indicators of faltering cooperation.

Having Adequate Technical Skills, Capacity, And Training

Sometimes there is not effective buy-in because people don't have the technical skills or necessary training. For the Children's Network in Solano County, their greatest challenge was overcoming resistance (technophobia) -- convincing agency staff that it was in their best interest to use the database; and giving agency staff laptops, fully loaded, and showing them how to use them. Resistance was also successfully overcome by demonstrating that utilization actually saves time, and provides for more useful reports. Group trainings and on-going technical assistance and training were important elements to their success. Additionally, the system was modified in response to the needs of the FRCs for new data.

Overall, the biggest challenge facing successful data system implementation is lack of technology capacity and knowledge of workers who use the system. To overcome this obstacle, on-site and ongoing training is critical. Many vendors provide practice and technical support through an 800 number. The Los Angeles Family Preservation Program is planning to create this year on-line multi-media training materials that can be easily accessed by new staff in the CBOs. In addition to technology, another content area that is important is training on data availability, validity, and reliability.

Thinking Through The Elements Of Your System In Advance

Carefully think through the questions you want the data system to answer and make sure that the information the data system captures will allow you to answer these questions.

Knowing the reporting requirements ahead of time drives system needs. If you are working with a vendor, it is important to identify, define, and plan responses to special requirements early in the planning process. It is also important to get the vendor to agree to the costs of delivering on these requirements up front.

With the help of the Orangewood Children's Foundation, Families and Communities Together (FaCT) utilized the expertise of a systems analyst, pro bono, which helped them to scan data systems, to select one, to roll it out and implement it. His expertise in how data systems work enabled FaCT to choose VistaShare as their software vendor. His expertise and experience were critical in guiding staff through the process. They learned that having a principal person who is a systems analyst to coordinate the effort was extremely helpful. They decided that a social worker with interest in program evaluation was not sufficient.

Effective Project Management

It is critical to have a clearly identified project management team with the time and skills to track and coordinate the myriad of tasks required to get a system up and running. When implementation deals with multiple organizations and diverse programs, the process can be like

“herding cats”. It is essential that there be an individual or team that can pull things together. For example, FaCT designated a full time data integrity person who is their in-house specialist and liaison to their vendor. One aspect that such an individual or team will likely need to consider is data exchange or integration with other systems. Often, this can be more than just a technology issue. It can become a political challenge to get agreement on using a shared data system among multiple providers who work with the same clients.

4. Costs and Funding for Data System Development and Training

It is important to be clear about the data elements to be tracked and the resources necessary to track them. The costs for development and training vary widely. Some details on costs can be found in the appendices one through four in answer to questions #8 and #11 in the data system questionnaires. In reviewing this information, it is important to distinguish between product development costs that a data system incurs, and the price that a vendor may charge for particular services. One of the challenges in comparing costs is that the products described are very different. For example, some of the more expensive products are quite flexible and require little or no customization to meet the needs of multiple data systems. In contrast, the less expensive products tend not be as flexible. Therefore, while the initial costs may be relatively low to purchase the software, additional costs will likely be incurred to customize the software to meet the data system needs. Costs will also vary according to whether a customer wishes to purchase software licenses for local administration, or use of hosting services (Application Service Provider Model), and the scale and configuration of their desired deployment.

While some pricing information is available in the appendices, it should just be a starting point to give you a general idea of costs. It makes the most sense to determine the needs of your data system and then to do comparison-shopping so that you are comparing “apples to apples.”

Nevertheless, a couple of general points are in order. First, it is much more cost-effective for a non-profit social services agency to build on someone else’s platform than to create its own data system. Second, the non-profit agency will reduce its costs considerably by purchasing its software as part of a consortium of agencies.

For example, FaCT (a network of family resource centers in Orange County) contracted with VistaShare for under \$100,000 for the initial purchase, which includes conversion, training, and transition costs. Enhancements were built based on user feedback and are part of the maintenance costs. Monthly maintenance costs for ongoing maintenance is \$54 per site. They are low because FaCT paid separately for a local system administrator. The costs for this position are shared across two program contracts.

Funding to contract with VistaShare came from augmentation dollars from the federal program for Promoting Safe and Stable families (PSSF). In Orange County, they decided to spend those dollars on FRCs. It was an excellent use of one time funding.

If you are part of a consortium of family resource centers and not working directly with your county, you may want to contact the Children’s Network in Solano County, which developed its own data system, called ChildNet Results Manager, for its network of family resource centers. Their database has been used by Solano County’s Family Resource Centers for many years, and

recently by other agencies as well, and staff from these agencies have contributed valuable input into the current design. They continue to invest their resources and the database continues to evolve as new funding is available and data requirements are encountered.

Another way to think about your data system is how it can help you to generate revenue. Data can be used in proposals to prospective funders and to generate reports required of your current funders. FaCT invested in their new data system because “they needed to have an effective way to report impact of our services, and to raise the credibility of family resource centers as an effective platform for current and future investors.” The ChildNet Results Manager generates and prints reports for Targeted Case Management (TCM) and AmeriCorps by selecting the appropriate report feature.

In terms of funding, partnering with other organizations can be a very effective strategy. For example, several Schools of Social Work in the L.A area are negotiating to develop an Interuniversity Research Consortium that will provide on-going research – including program evaluation- and develop technology to support the effort. Santa Clara County has a staff person in their office, who, because of her pre-existing relationships, has been able to bring other funding partners to the table to support development of their data system for Differential Response.

Finally, one vendor made the case, based on its experience in several states, that a data tracking system is much more likely to succeed if there is a legislative mandate with money attached to it (e.g., Proposition 10).

5. Suggestions on where to begin depending upon your data system needs

This section offers suggestions on where to look, given different data system scenarios. Unless noted below, contact information (including name and phone number) is in the appendices.

- If you want to learn how to use the Special Projects field of CMS-CWS, and link it to a community database, contact Contra Costa and San Mateo counties. (Appendix 1)
- If you want to learn how one database integrated information from County Children and Family Services and from community-based Family Preservation programs, contact the Los Angeles Family Preservation Program. (Appendix 1)
- If you are part of a network of Family Resource Centers, contact FaCT in Orange County and the Children’s Network in Solano County to learn about two different models for developing your data system. (Appendix 2)
- If you want to learn about the process and criteria for selecting a vendor contact (All were selected in mid to late 2005):

Placer County Child Abuse and Prevention Council who chose Vision Link. (See Appendix 3)

FaCT of Orange County who chose VISTA SHARE. (See Appendix 2)

Contra Costa County Children and Family Services chose MetSys.
(May Kay Miller is the contact. Email address: MMILLER@ehsd.cccounty.us)

- If you want to learn how to integrate the Family Development Matrix into your data system, contact the Children's Network which integrated this family assessment tool into their ChildNet Results Manager. In addition to measuring progress over time, it allows analysis of why these changes may have occurred. (See Appendix 2) The *Family Assessment Form* is another family assessment tool, which is now in electronic format. The FAF is an inexpensive, user-friendly tool designed to help child welfare and family support workers assess family functioning, develop meaningful service plans, monitor progress, and assist agencies in measuring program outcomes. To learn more about this tool, contact Sandy Sladen, Consultant to the Family Assessment Form (See Appendix 3).

Conclusion

In 2005, there has been a flurry of data system development activities among a number of California's family resource centers. Several data systems will be coming online as this report goes to press. Given all of this activity, clearly, there is an opportunity for the California Family Resource Association (CFRA) to play several vital roles: provide technical assistance, be a clearinghouse for information exchange, and provide leadership to the field.

Several examples of technical assistance needs and potential products arose from the research:

- How to account for costs of services when multiple funders are involved
- Ongoing issues surrounding confidentiality
- A thesaurus-like tool that would could identify which elements of different assessment tools were actually measuring the same things.

There is a wealth of information on data system development among family resource centers. This report is just the beginning of fostering knowledge and information exchange. CFRA could start a listserv for its members on data system development and devote a section of its website to this topic.

CFRA's leadership, in collaboration with the California Child Welfare Directors Association, is crucial. As this scan of existing data systems demonstrates, we don't yet know what the "Chevy" or "Cadillac" version of a Child Welfare-Community Partnership data system looks like. The "product line" is still in the relatively early stages of development with early developers such as Los Angeles County Family Preservation and Children's Network of Solano County, and several others not far behind. CFRA can help to define with its members what the product line should look like.

In order to rigorously evaluate the impact of Differential Response, it would be ideal for family resource centers to agree to use a uniform family assessment tool. If this is not possible or is premature, a "thesaurus" or glossary could help to cross reference common elements across different assessment tools. *It is critical is that there be agreement on what should be*

measured—the outcomes to which Family Resource Centers want to be held accountable.

Implementation of such an agreement would enable Family Resource Centers to demonstrate the impact of their work to their funders. Furthermore, in the near future, the federal government will be requiring outcome-based accountability for prevention services just as it did for child welfare services. Apparently, the intent is to build upon assessment tools that are already in place. Such an approach offers an opportunity for the FRC provider community to be proactive and decide what outcomes it wants capture (be held accountable for) across the board.

One approach the Association could take would be to develop a relationship with a vendor, an existing data system, or foundation, and jointly create a product that the Association could offer to its members--for those FRCs that haven't yet developed a data system but know that they want to. Pangea Foundation, for example, developed their web-based product in collaboration with the American Association of Service Providers. Caminar and the Mental Health Association of Los Angeles partnered in a similar fashion to develop a case management tool to track services provided to people with serious mental illnesses. (See Appendices for descriptions of each of these data systems) If CFRA is able to work with its members to collect and aggregate data across counties, it will be well positioned to demonstrate the impact of FRCs in general, and of Differential Response, in particular.

A state association of family resource centers can develop a vision for its members, a strategic plan for outcomes management, and standards against which its members choose to be measured. Further, an outcomes management system can be used to demonstrate best practices and improve the quality of practice, in general. This would enable CFRA to support the sustainability of its members and play an important intermediary role with state government.

If you would like to see a copy of the full report with appendices, please contact our office at (916) 338-6633.