

# EVALUATION OF FAMILY TO FAMILY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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### Introduction

This report assesses progress toward the objectives set forth by the Foundation when it embarked on FAMILY TO FAMILY. The information compiled in the evaluation provides a firm basis for some general conclusions about the impact of the initiative on the operation and impact of the child welfare systems in which it was implemented. It does not describe the many “how to” lessons learned during the past four years. These facets of FAMILY TO FAMILY are described in a variety of materials developed by technical assistance contractors and the evaluation team. We begin with three sets of summary observations:

1. ***Where FAMILY TO FAMILY has been most successful, and where the potential for even broader impact still exists, are sites in which the focus has been on reconstructing family foster care in the most vulnerable neighborhoods of large urban areas.*** Grantees that maintained this focus and sought to apply key principles enunciated by the initiative demonstrated that facing the child welfare system’s greatest challenges head-on can produce the desired changes in outcomes:

***Neighborhoods in which child-placement rates are high also are capable of supporting families in which children are at risk of placement.*** Foster parents, both those related to the children entering care and others who are not, can be identified and recruited to serve if they are treated with respect and supported in their efforts. However, the same principles must be applied across the local jurisdiction to ensure replenishment of the *entire* system’s foster care resources. Otherwise, resources developed for the most vulnerable neighborhoods will be drawn off to meet needs elsewhere.

***Shifting to assessment approaches that emphasize group decision-making helps identify resources for families and communicates the child welfare agency’s openness to building a new relationship with families and communities.*** Assessment approaches such as Family Team Meetings or Placement Review Teams engage participants with diverse perspectives and provide access to new, mostly informal, resources. The impact of these new ways of assessment is indicated by changes in patterns of placements and the location of placements. In addition, it reinforces the community’s awareness of its responsibility to help ensure the safety and well-being of children.

***Formal ties to neighborhoods vary from site to site and remain relatively immature, but could grow if child welfare agencies maintain a commitment to moving in this direction.*** Some child welfare agencies were ambitious in undertaking geographic assignment of workers, although actual out-stationing was minimal. Some child welfare agencies attempted to forge relationships with settlement houses and other community-based organizations, either directly or through partnerships with private child caring agencies that received special contracts to work in particular neighborhoods. These efforts, in conjunction with the changes in casework practice described above, show promise in building the neighborhood-based child welfare

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system promoted by FAMILY TO FAMILY.

2. ***Experience in FAMILY TO FAMILY suggests that achieving enduring reform in the child welfare system is difficult, but can be accomplished.*** Grantees varied in the degree to which they were able to incorporate changes into policy and practice that would outlive the initiative. No single strategy or combination of strategies, however, proved to be the key to institutionalizing reform. Examples of the diverse strategies sites used to achieve this end include:

***Extensive revamping of existing processes so that they embodied FAMILY TO FAMILY ideals.*** In some sites, the child welfare agency used the contracting process with private child care agencies to encourage neighborhood foster care in the least restrictive setting. It is likely that the changes made by the private provider agencies will endure because they involved some extensive structural changes to the way they provided services for child welfare clients.

***Geographic assignment of social workers began the movement toward neighborhood foster care.*** The effort that would be required to reverse such an extensive structural change probably makes it resistant to future reorganizations. In contrast, another mechanism used in some of the FAMILY TO FAMILY sites to develop neighborhood-based foster care programs was to allocate project resources to fund community-based services within the neighborhood. It remains to be seen whether support for these distinct community-based programs will continue once the flexibility of project funding is no longer available to the agency.

***Changes in legislation sometimes occurred in conjunction with FAMILY TO FAMILY.*** One state grantee modified the children's code to incorporate principles of the initiative, such as shortening timeframes for case review and enabling workers to begin concurrent planning when termination of parental rights is likely. In another state, data produced by the self-evaluation process was used to halt legislative action that would have formally recognized "long-term foster care" as a permanency option.

***The experiences of all of the FAMILY TO FAMILY sites highlights the difficulty of achieving and maintaining shorter lengths of stay for children in out-of-home placement.*** External factors, such as judicial decision-making, and firmly established agency timeframes for case reviews have a significant bearing on the amount of time a child spends in custody. As a result, enduring changes in lengths of stay are unlikely to be achieved without the cooperation of judges and modification of case review schedules.

***In the face of determined political opposition, even changes that have the force of law can be thwarted.*** Contrary to widespread belief that court-mandated reforms are likely to endure, even this route was problematic in one site. In open opposition to an established consent decree, officials in a new administration sought to modify and reverse the policies negotiated by the previous administration with the courts. Although the state continued to implement the reforms required by the consent decree, the new administration's opposition caused delays and disarray in the reform efforts.

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***A common element that influenced the course of the initiative across all the sites was the presence of a strong child welfare leader who championed the reforms of FAMILY TO FAMILY.*** In the few sites with stable leadership throughout the initiative, changes were more readily incorporated into the policy and practice of the agency. It is clear from the experience of FAMILY TO FAMILY sites, however, that it is unrealistic to rely solely on the durability of a charismatic leader to ensure that reform is ongoing. Agencies must make maximum use of all avenues open to them including legislative, judicial, agency, and community channels to increase the likelihood that reform efforts result in lasting changes to the child welfare system.

3. ***Many FAMILY TO FAMILY sites report that enhanced capability to produce, analyze, and interpret data was one of the most significant benefits of their participation.*** Grantees used data to understand more clearly the characteristics of children entering care, to track changes in how they were serving children and families, and to monitor changes in outcomes related to these efforts. It soon became apparent, however, that performance measurement in child welfare involves moving targets because success in one area can make it appear that, according to the numbers, change is not occurring or even that performance is declining. In some instances, countervailing pressures within the agency or community obscured the magnitude of real achievements by grantees:

- Improved response to maltreatment reports increased entries to care, even as community outreach and gatekeeping efforts reduced placements;
- Reduced entries to care resulting from effective gatekeeping increased median length of stay for those children who did enter care;
- Policy changes seeking to improve an agency's response to drug-exposed infants increased entries to care as the agency instituted community-based efforts to reduce placements.

***The interdependency of outcomes highlights the need for a dynamic performance monitoring process that not only tracks outcomes but is informed by contextual changes at the policy, program management, operational, and community levels.*** Sites that pursued the self-evaluation strategies encouraged by FAMILY TO FAMILY found that they were better prepared to identify and respond to events that affected the actual or apparent results of their efforts.

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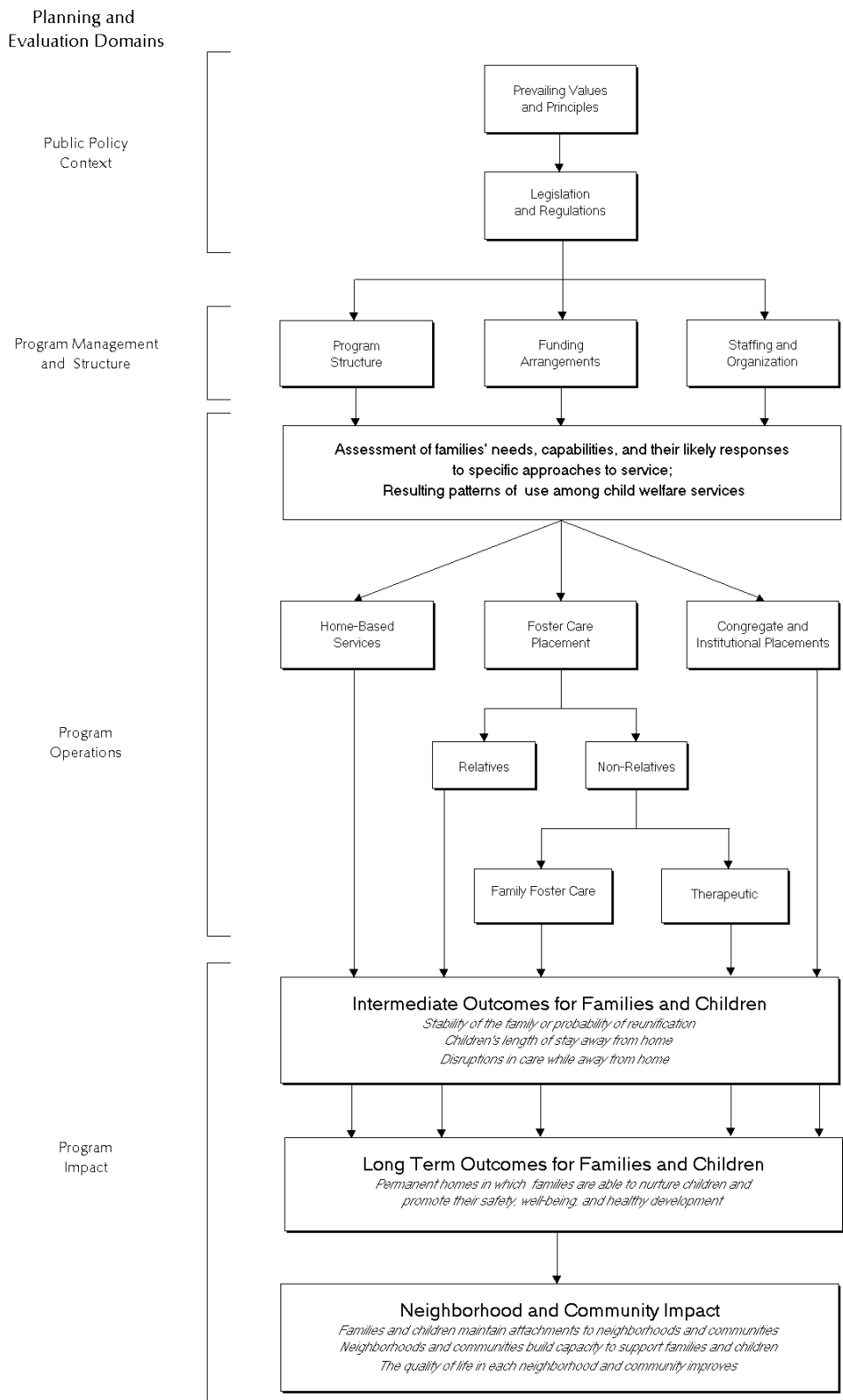
## Background

In 1992, the Annie E. Casey Foundation awarded planning grants to six state child welfare agencies to assist them in developing plans to implement an initiative called FAMILY TO FAMILY. After evaluating plans submitted in June 1993, the Foundation offered implementation grants to the states of Alabama, New Mexico, and Ohio. Approximately six months later, grants also were made to Maryland and Pennsylvania. Although important aspects of the initiative were statewide in focus, efforts in each state were concentrated in urban areas—Birmingham, Alabama; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Cincinnati and Cleveland, Ohio; Baltimore, Maryland; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania—because they accounted for a large proportion of the children who were entering foster care. A number of smaller localities in several of the states also made a commitment to the principles of the initiative and sought to implement changes in policy and practice associated with it.

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for FAMILY TO FAMILY emphasized that changes had to occur in four areas of the child welfare system if the initiative was to achieve its outcomes--the public policy context; program management and structure; program operations; and program impact. The planning of changes in policy and practice and our evaluation of the impact of those changes were generally organized around the sets of issues depicted in Exhibit 1. Findings in each area are summarized below.

Exhibit 1: The Policy and Program Context of Child Welfare Services



Source: C. L. Usher, D. A. Gibbs & J. B. Wildfire. (1995). A Framework for Planning, Implementing, and Evaluating Child Welfare Reforms. *Child Welfare*, 74: 859-876.

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## Evaluation Design

The FAMILY TO FAMILY evaluation used a quasi-experimental approach that can be characterized as a nonequivalent control-group design. It relied on pre- and post-implementation comparisons between matched demonstration and comparison sites in those states where comparable sites were available and data systems made such comparisons feasible. This design offered a significant degree of control for most threats to internal validity while offering a high degree of implementation feasibility.

The evaluation incorporates a series of baseline comparisons across multiple years within sites, and between demonstration and comparison sites. Pre-implementation data captured experiences of children entering child welfare placement for the first time prior to 1994, the first year of implementation of FAMILY TO FAMILY. The actual number of years in which data are available varies slightly from site to site, but pre-implementation data were available from 1989 or 1990 in most sites. Data pertaining to the period in which the initiative was being implemented are consistently 1994 through 1996. Thus, the analyses presented in this report compare FAMILY TO FAMILY outcomes across multiple years and multiple sites.

The evaluation sought to capitalize on the vast amount of data that are collected in child welfare agencies and that would continue to be produced after the initiative formally ended. Using existing administrative data about custody experiences of children and payment records for caregivers, the evaluation team built a series of data files that described the experiences of children entering out-of-home placement for the first time. These files essentially tracked children from their initial placement in out-of-home care through subsequent placements, termination of custody, and re-entry into care.

Another type of information used in the evaluation were program operations data that are collected by child welfare agencies. For example, during the course of FAMILY TO FAMILY many sites implemented systems to collect information on the recruitment, training, and licensure of foster parents. Additionally, evaluation team members interviewed stakeholders at three times during the FAMILY TO FAMILY planning and implementation periods. Stakeholders included child welfare agency staff, staff from other child and family serving agencies, such as departments of juvenile justice and mental health, foster parents, members of child advocacy groups, and community representatives.

Finally, focus group discussions were conducted at two different time points during the evaluation. Midway through the implementation period, the evaluation team convened separate focus groups with foster parents and social workers, in both implementation and comparison sites. During the last year of the project, focus groups were organized with foster parents and social workers in most implementation sites.

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## Findings

The following sections provide a summary of findings in each of the initiative's major evaluation domains, as well an assessment of grantees' efforts in self-evaluation.

### The Public Policy Context

A variety of changes in the political and social environment impinged directly on FAMILY TO FAMILY, including: the tension between "family preservation" and "child safety" became an issue of public debate; new resources for family support and preventive services became available through the Family Preservation and Support Services Act of 1993; elections in 1994 changed the make-up of Congress and many state legislatures and brought into office some governors who did not share the objectives being promoted by FAMILY TO FAMILY. Whereas the initiative in several states began as an integral part of a governor's broad agenda for improving outcomes for families and children, it was ignored by subsequent administrations, or in one case, viewed with hostility.

Strong leaders, typically state and local child welfare officials, championed the adoption of FAMILY TO FAMILY and promoted its implementation in the early stages. As those individuals ceased to be involved in many states and some communities, momentum was lost. If changes in policy and practice had been incorporated into legislation and regulation some losses of early gains might have been avoided. Yet, even in the face of an established consent decree, officials in one state sought to reverse policies and practices being promoted under the initiative.

Federal efforts to establish reporting standards through AFCARS and to enhance child welfare information systems under SACWIS created an atmosphere that was receptive to capacity-building objectives of FAMILY TO FAMILY. The timing of the initiative was opportune in that refinements of some state systems were made with lessons from the initiative in mind. Still, most states involved in the initiative (like their counterparts elsewhere in the country) did not take full advantage of the opportunity to expand and enhance their information systems. This is attributable to an unfavorable climate created by electoral changes and the challenge states faced in resolving state and local interests that made it difficult to meet federal requirements for adopting a statewide design.

### Program Management and Structure

FAMILY TO FAMILY shifted very early from top-down strategic planning to a planning process that gave equal or greater emphasis to neighborhood- and community-level work through parallel top-down and bottom-up efforts. In state-administered systems and in county-administered systems in which state officials have more authority, progress toward a community-based foster care system hinged on state officials' perception of the desirability of such a shift. Some localities involved in the initiative made significant strides toward decentralization of staff, including establishing geographically assigned units and integrating child welfare workers with other staff and community-based workers involved in family supports and services.

While it is challenging to change the operations of any public bureaucracy, the challenge

seems even more daunting and skepticism is reinforced when the commitment to change is not clear and consistent. One of the frustrations for frontline participants in FAMILY TO FAMILY in some states was the change in direction that occurred after two to three years of aggressive implementation. Public pronouncements by new political leaders and agency managers sent messages that ran counter to the philosophy of the initiative. Reorganizations, reassignments, and resignations eliminated mid-level supports that had been vital to establishing FAMILY TO FAMILY and that might have contributed to its expansion and perpetuation.

The situations in these states, where those committed to the approach represented by FAMILY TO FAMILY had to work with one hand tied behind them, stands in sharp contrast to sites in which there was a consistent and persistent commitment to the new direction. While our findings indicate that staff and foster parents in such sites are not uniform in their commitment to the principles of the initiative, those who were more directly involved through training or experience felt that they are on the right path. Moreover, while the development of neighborhood-based foster care has been slower than expected, there are clear indications that it is feasible, but that trust between the agency and community requires time and experience. Indeed, it cannot occur without a firm and consistent commitment by agency managers and staff.

In most states and localities, FAMILY TO FAMILY came to be perceived as "foster care reform" rather than a broader reform of all family and children's services. In the early stages in most states, and persisting throughout the initiative in perhaps two states, it was an integral part of a broader program to improve outcomes for families and children. As a result, efforts to encourage collaboration across agencies and organizations at both the state and local level were pursued largely through these pre-existing programs rather than using FAMILY TO FAMILY as the vehicle. While one state grantee tended to treat the initiative as merely one more "project," another state crafted a broader reform package that featured FAMILY TO FAMILY, but also integrated it with other complementary initiatives, such as family resource centers.

### **Program Operations**

Our assessment of changes in program operations revealed both the challenges grantees continue to confront and the promise of their accomplishments. Data from several states indicate that the child welfare system can be redirected to achieve the objectives of reducing the number of children entering care and using less restrictive forms of care. Some of the clearest changes across sites were increased use of kinship care and reduced reliance on shelters, group homes, and other forms of congregate care. In at least one site, these shifts were accomplished through joint efforts by local child welfare managers and the operators of child caring agencies who reprogrammed some of their operations from group care to foster family homes located in or near the neighborhoods from which children were being placed. Experience in a number of sites also suggests that creative and enthusiastic approaches to recruitment, training, and support can increase the number of foster parents and avoid attrition among them.

When and where commitment to the FAMILY TO FAMILY vision has existed, grantees demonstrated that the changes in operation called for by the initiative can be accomplished

and that they can produce the intended results. For example, Placement Review Teams, Family Team Meetings, and special agency staffings represent different approaches to assessment and decision-making, but share the feature that they engage more and diverse participants. The result in all settings was that fewer children entered out-of-home care and those who had to be removed from their homes were placed in less restrictive forms of care.

Similarly, although grantees used different forms and approaches to training, a number were able to identify and recruit foster parents who are more likely to express a commitment to the partnership role model called for by FAMILY TO FAMILY. The change in orientation led to a recruitment process that seeks to communicate to potential foster parents how much they are valued, and demonstrates the importance of nurturing a relationship with applicants as the first step in developing an ongoing working relationship. Collectively, approaches that facilitate contributions by interested persons from target neighborhoods can help establish the foundation for community-based child welfare services.

Communities that improved their recruitment and retention of foster parents often realized two achievements. First, the availability of these resources served to dampen demand for more restrictive and expensive forms of out-of-home care. Second, in addition to maintaining or expanding the number of foster parents, the role of foster parents changed. Specifically, discussions with foster parent focus groups suggest that many foster parents adopted the perspective promoted by FAMILY TO FAMILY and viewed their role as facilitating the reunification of children with their families of origin.

The net effect of changes in program operations associated with FAMILY TO FAMILY, again tempered by the time when the assessment is made and the place in which it is made, is that fewer children entered less restrictive forms of out-of-home care. Yet, it is equally apparent that child welfare programs operate in a dynamic environment and that changes in direction must be made sometimes in response to environmental pressures or new information. In one site, for example, a substantial increase in the number of children entering care in 1997 resulted from a combination of factors—more newborns with positive tests for toxic substances, a change in agency policy regarding the custody status of older siblings of such children, increased reliance on kinship care, and a formal assessment of agency risk-assessment procedures.

Data from several sites also indicate that there can be a rebound effect in response to the changes in program operation of the magnitude associated with FAMILY TO FAMILY. This effect is partly a statistical artifact; for example, if fewer children come into care, those for whom out-of-home care is the only means to ensure their safety and healthy development are also those who are more likely to experience longer lengths of stay. Another source of this rebound effect is the adjustment of the system to new decision-making parameters—if the emphasis is on avoiding out-of-home care, the tendency initially will be to adhere firmly to that guideline. Eventually, the data suggest, there is likely to be a period of readjustment that is based on changes in the environment as well as feedback about initial experiences in trying to avoid out-of-home care and restrictive placements. The result is sometimes an increase in admissions, but the characteristics of children entering care and the type of care they receive differ substantially from the baseline period.

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## Program Impact

The impact of FAMILY TO FAMILY should be apparent in the lives of individual families and children, and in the ability of neighborhoods and communities to care for their own children. For some families, as indicated above, it meant that needs were met by some means other than out-of-home care. For children for whom no such alternative was available or appropriate, the quality of their care should have been better—placement closer to their family (as appropriate), less disruptive care, shorter lengths of stay, a better chance of reunification or other permanent placement, and less chance of re-entering care after achieving a permanent placement.

While it was possible to compile information describing progress toward other FAMILY TO FAMILY outcomes, measuring the proximity of placements to the child's home proved to be the greatest challenge. Almost no child welfare information systems retain the address of the home from which children were removed, thereby making it very difficult to make an assessment of progress in this area. Although a few sites are now improving their capacity to capture such data, the only information that was available (in a few sites) pertained to the placement of children outside the county. In one county, for example, 579 children were in placements outside the county in non-contiguous counties on December 31, 1996, compared to 728 on December 31, 1992.

One of the most consistent findings with regard to program impact was a reduction in the number of placements experienced by children in care. FAMILY TO FAMILY sites varied in baseline levels of disruption, but improvements were apparent in most sites. In one site, for example, 30% of the children who entered care for the first time in 1995 and who left care after one year, but before two years, experienced three or more placements. In contrast 68% of similar children who had entered care in the same county in 1989 had that many changes. Among the same group of children in another county, the percentage who had three or more placements declined from 48.5% of the 1993 cohort to 31.7% of the children who entered care in 1995.

The children entering care in some sites experienced reduced lengths of stay, but this was often followed by an increase for subsequent cohorts. Generally, few FAMILY TO FAMILY sites experienced substantial changes in length of stay, partly because of the targeting of out-of-home care on fewer children, and presumably, those with more serious needs. The pattern of findings in this area suggests that the schedule for case reviews established by state policy, local practice, and court requirements strongly affects when children leave care. In light of this consistent finding, any substantial change in length of stay is unlikely to occur without an explicit adjustment of the review schedule that prevails in a community.

It appears that two changes in patterns of permanent placements occurred in FAMILY TO FAMILY sites. First, sites that expanded their use of kinship care, also increasingly placed children in the guardianship of relatives when they left custody. Second, some sites improved the rate of reunification of children with parents. For example, the percentage of children reunited with their families in one state rose from 64% among those entering foster care in 1990 to 81% of those entering care in 1996. It should be noted, however, that data limitations affect the analysis of permanent placements because, in varying degrees across sites, a significant proportion of cases are coded "other" or in vague terms simply signifying

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custody termination action by the court.

Re-entry rates among most FAMILY TO FAMILY grantees were relatively low prior to the initiative, consistently about 15% or less, although a few had rates nearly double that level among certain groups of children. Re-entry rates remained unchanged in most sites, but improvements were made by a few grantees. As in the case of unchanging lengths of stay, this may be encouraging given the targeting of out-of-home care on children with more serious needs. Also, it is noteworthy that a consistent finding with regard to re-entry to care was that children placed in the guardianship of relatives were even less likely to re-enter care than children reunited with their parents.

It is not begging the point to say that the full impact of FAMILY TO FAMILY is not yet known—it is clear that *some* of its objectives were accomplished in *some* sites and a *few* objectives were not accomplished in *any* site. More important, however, is recognition that a cut-and-dried, once-and-for-all assessment is not possible at this juncture, nor is it appropriate. Further implementation of this initiative is irrelevant in some states and localities because it is not consistent with the direction being taken by current leaders. In other states and communities, its impact endures in the persistent efforts of state and local leaders to achieve FAMILY TO FAMILY objectives in the face of real-world constraints.

### Efforts in Self-Evaluation

The premise of self-evaluation is that good information is necessary to successfully plan and implement the changes in policy and practice needed to achieve clearly specified and widely endorsed outcomes. Also, it is necessary to have a performance baseline from which to assess improvements and to make mid-course corrections. Two aspects of the experience in FAMILY TO FAMILY reinforce the credibility of these premises. First, improvements in outcomes are indeed possible and some improvements are substantial. Second, in anticipation of such changes, it is essential to invest the necessary time, energy, and financial resources to measure results and to make adjustments in response to them.

Finally, planners and evaluators now have a better understanding of the diverse constraints impinging on reform initiatives and are attempting to adapt models and methods to the complex reality of these initiatives. Similarly, as a result of their experience in FAMILY TO FAMILY, some program managers gained an appreciation of the value of information and the need to create a flow of data to help them develop and implement changes in policy and practice. A number of states and localities involved in the initiative appear to have made a commitment to maintaining a capacity for generating performance data and using it for self-evaluation.

### Summary Assessments by Site

To accurately assess the impact of FAMILY TO FAMILY in each site, it is necessary to interpret specific outcomes both singly and in light of changes in other outcomes, and to assess those outcomes in the context of the grantee's public policy environment and its changes in policy and practice. Indeed, the initiative's impact can only be understood in stories that incorporate the full range of information collected in the evaluation. Thus, for example, while no change in length of stay in a given site does not seem to represent a

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“success,” further examination of all data give a more complete picture of drastic changes that were occurring in that site—the number of children coming into care was increasing; staff turnover was rapid; changes in leadership and policy direction were occurring; and there was a shift away from institutional placements for children toward placement with relatives or in a foster home. Within this context of simultaneous positive and negative changes, avoiding longer lengths of stay in this site might be interpreted as an achievement. The following summaries attempt to provide such perspective on each grantee's efforts:

## Alabama

The FAMILY TO FAMILY years in Alabama were characterized by political upheaval, changes in child welfare leaders at both the state level and in Jefferson County, and rapid staff turnover at the county-level. During this period, Jefferson County officials had to make structural improvements in the abuse and neglect reporting system to ensure the welfare of children in Jefferson county. These changes came on top of the conversion to the new system of care mandated under the R.C. consent decree. Even in this tumultuous environment, state and county child welfare leaders attempted to implement the ambitious policy and practice changes of FAMILY TO FAMILY, using the initiative to bolster the goals of the consent decree.

The outcomes for children and families in Jefferson County are mixed. The number of children entering out-of-home care continued to increase. Among the children who now enter out-of-home care, however, placements are more likely to be in family-like settings, such as agency foster homes or the homes of relatives, rather than shelters. These children also experience fewer placement disruptions. Although there has been no consistent decrease in length of stay, this is perhaps not surprising since children in Jefferson County had some of the shortest lengths of stay in the state at the beginning of FAMILY TO FAMILY. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the length of time that children remain in custody did not *increase* in Jefferson County given the increasing demands on its resources.

As in Jefferson County, child welfare reform in other Alabama counties was driven primarily by the R.C. consent decree. Although FAMILY TO FAMILY goals were complementary to those of the consent decree, the initiative's statewide impact was marginal except in two areas. First, it reinforced the consent decree's mandate to keep children in their own counties by calling for neighborhood foster care and developing community-based services. Second, the state incorporated FAMILY TO FAMILY's self-evaluation approach into the quality assurance mechanism required by the consent decree. It developed a comprehensive data-driven, outcomes-based performance measurement system to monitor the progress toward the goals of the consent decree.

It seems clear that FAMILY TO FAMILY contributed to a change in direction for the child welfare system in Alabama and to some improvements in the quality of care for children entering out-of-home care. The values and principles enunciated by state and local leaders, sometimes in the face of strong political opposition, are now reflected in a number of areas of policy and practice. Continuing improvements in

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certain key outcomes suggest that the application of those values and principles may have an enduring impact.

## Maryland

The progress of FAMILY TO FAMILY in Maryland was slowed during much of the implementation period by inconsistent commitment from state leadership, as well as frequent turnover in critical positions. Within this context, it is particularly noteworthy that committed staff in each of three sites—Baltimore City, Anne Arundel County, and Prince George's County—were able to develop and implement plans based on community organization, gatekeeping, intensive reunification models, and comprehensive training for foster parents. Similarly, although the state's information system could not support self-evaluation efforts as well as in some other sites, Maryland was eventually able to produce both longitudinal and cross-sectional data files that enhanced the resources available for program planning, management, and evaluation.

Pilot efforts in each site focused on dedicated FAMILY TO FAMILY units, which in Baltimore City involved a single target neighborhood. While both Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties eventually expanded their practice changes countywide, Baltimore City's pilot site was discontinued after 18 months. Given the difference in effort, outcomes among the sites are mixed. Entries to out-of-home care remained steady statewide and rose in Baltimore City, but declined significantly in Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties, where entries for 1997 were roughly half of 1993 levels. Not surprisingly, reduced entries in these sites were accompanied by increased time in care for those who were placed in out-of-home care. Length of stay in Baltimore City during the same time period increased, driven by increasing time in care among the substantial proportion of children who are placed with kinship caregivers.

Achievements in Anne Arundel and Prince George's Counties in reducing entries to care and associated costs generated renewed interest in FAMILY TO FAMILY among state policymakers as a strategy for addressing a budget deficit at the Department of Human Resources. The Department is currently supporting statewide expansion of the initiative, with the expectation that each of Maryland's 24 jurisdictions will be participating to some degree by the year 2000.

## New Mexico

New Mexico's FAMILY TO FAMILY effort was among those most affected by the 1994 elections. The state level policy environment, while shifting its emphasis from supporting families and children in need to accountability and results, remained supportive of improvements in services and data-driven decision-making. However, the personnel changes and agency reorganization that accompanied the new administration resulted in the loss of those staff who had been most involved in the FAMILY TO FAMILY planning process, as well as distraction from the momentum developed during the planning year. Early implementation efforts slowed dramatically as staff in both central and county offices adjusted to the

changes.

FAMILY TO FAMILY was implemented in the state's largest jurisdiction, Bernalillo County (Albuquerque) and eight smaller counties. Although county office managers eventually assumed ownership of the initiative, the implementation process remained a local one. There was little sense of a common programmatic approach, and few opportunities for local managers to share experiences. Employing varying strategies, efforts focused on gatekeeping, foster parent recruitment and support, intensive reunification and community outreach.

Outcomes for the FAMILY TO FAMILY counties reflect the emphasis placed in many counties on gatekeeping and foster parent recruitment and support. Between 1990 and 1996, entries to care declined substantially in Bernalillo County as well as the other FAMILY TO FAMILY counties, while increasing in the rest of the state. Depending on the county, the shift is attributable to reductions in short-term placements in emergency shelters, use of community resources identified within Placement Review Team meetings, and community outreach efforts in schools and other locations. In Bernalillo County, as many short-term placements were diverted to in-home care, length of stay for those children placed in out-of-home care increased somewhat, while declining in other FAMILY TO FAMILY counties, and to a lesser extent, statewide. Placement stability remained unchanged, while re-entry to care appears to have increased slightly in FAMILY TO FAMILY counties in recent years.

It is generally felt that New Mexico's decentralized implementation process produced some innovative practice changes worthy of implementation in other sites, such as the Placement Review Teams. Some FAMILY TO FAMILY objectives, such as foster parent retention, have become statewide priorities as a result of the attention focused on them during the implementation period. State and local leaders cite the increased use of data within decision-making as one of the more lasting effects of FAMILY TO FAMILY participation. In part as a legacy of the self-evaluation process, the state has both enhanced resources for data management and analysis within the agency and changed the organizational culture to one that relies on data for performance measurement and planning.

## Ohio

FAMILY TO FAMILY at the state-level in Ohio was seen primarily as a complementary initiative to the statewide *Family and Children First* program. State-level child welfare leaders consistently expressed support for the values and principles of FAMILY TO FAMILY, but their restricted level of involvement reinforced perceptions that FAMILY TO FAMILY was but one of a number of primarily local projects being implemented throughout the state. Since child welfare services in Ohio are funded primarily through federal and local sources, it is not surprising that the participation of state administrators in county-level initiatives, and their influence on those initiatives, are limited.

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**Hamilton County.** During the early years of FAMILY TO FAMILY, Hamilton County experienced leadership changes, agency reorganization, and budgetary crises. The combination of these events significantly affected early progress of the initiative in that site. The geographic reassignment of social work staff to neighborhood units, while a time-consuming process, highlighted the agency's commitment to developing a system of neighborhood based foster care, an overarching goal of FAMILY TO FAMILY. Throughout implementation, the initiative's resources supplemented those of the agency in developing and supporting community-based services for the neighborhood sites. In Hamilton County, FAMILY TO FAMILY made it possible for the agency to begin this transition to a neighborhood-focused child welfare system. Other changes in practice, such as Family Team Meetings in which social workers, foster parents, and family members build a partnership around children who have been removed from their homes, are emerging, but are slow in reaching full implementation.

The impact of changes in the system on the outcomes for children is evident in some areas. The number of children coming into out-of-home care in Hamilton County in recent years declined while it grew in other urban areas in Ohio. There is also a shift in the agency's response to children who must enter placement. An increasing percentage of children are initially placed in agency foster homes with a smaller percentage initially placed with relatives. Additionally, children in out-of-home placement experience fewer placement disruptions.

The length of time that children remain in out-of-home care in Hamilton County did not change substantially during the early FAMILY TO FAMILY years. However, preliminary data suggest that the length of time in custody for children entering care in 1996 may be on the rise. Since the number of children entering care in 1996 was substantially lower than in 1994 and 1995, the increase in length of stay may reflect the impact of better gatekeeping--children who can be served in their own homes and communities do not enter custody leaving only those children and families with more severe problems to be served by the out-of-home care system.

**Cuyahoga County.** FAMILY TO FAMILY came to Cuyahoga County at the same time that a major leadership change was occurring in the county Division of Children and Family Services. The advent of FAMILY TO FAMILY, in conjunction with the new leadership for the agency, provided a focus for defining the agency's mission, which incorporated the goals of FAMILY TO FAMILY. A hallmark of Cuyahoga County's initiative was a movement toward developing partners to assist the agency in working with the families and children of Cuyahoga County. This philosophy greatly influenced the agency's work with private child caring agencies, community-based service providers, other public child-serving agencies, neighborhood groups, foster parents, and the children and families the agency serves. Using FAMILY TO FAMILY resources, the agency funded five community-based collaboratives whose goals are to develop neighborhood based foster care programs that allow children who must come into out-of-home care to remain in their own neighborhoods.

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The impact of FAMILY TO FAMILY on outcomes for families and children in Cuyahoga County is confounded by several factors. Changes in agency policy and practice, as well as increases in social pressures for the families in the county, influenced the outcomes experienced by children. For example, in the mid-1990's the county experienced a significant increase in the number of infants born to mothers who had positive drug tests, primarily related to the use of crack cocaine. Additionally, the agency modified its policies on the status of the older siblings of drug-affected infants and the use of relative caregivers. These factors contributed to an increase in the number of children coming into out-of-home care during these years.

Even with the increasing numbers of children entering custody, the agency was able to decrease its reliance on institutional and group care. During this period the agency increased its use of relative caregivers and private child-caring agencies that, in partnership with the child welfare agency, developed community-based foster homes that provided more family-like settings for children in their care. Placement stability for children in care increased with a smaller percentage of children experiencing three or more placement disruptions. Although the length of time that children remained in custody remained unchanged, there were distinctly different patterns of exit from care depending on the type of initial placement a child experienced.

## Pennsylvania

Unlike many of the FAMILY TO FAMILY states, Pennsylvania has enjoyed fairly consistent leadership and a comparatively stable policy climate throughout the implementation period, both at the state level and in Philadelphia, the initial implementation site. At the state level, the initiative was viewed as highly compatible with a growing orientation toward family and children's service reform. Indeed, the initiative served as a cornerstone of the Family Service System Reform (FSSR) effort. Through FSSR, the state funds local efforts to develop coordinated responses to the needs of children and families through integrated, coordinated and/or co-located services. Within this reform framework, the state funded several expansion FAMILY TO FAMILY sites, each of which has developed its own strategies to work toward the initiative's objectives.

The implementation strategy chosen by Philadelphia's Department of Human Services (DHS) was shaped by the city's reliance on private foster care providers, which deliver the great majority of home-based and out-of-home care services. In addition to city-wide efforts to improve foster parent training, DHS awarded FAMILY TO FAMILY grants to nine private agencies, each of which targeted one or more neighborhoods chosen on the basis of their high placement rates. Grantees were expected to recruit and train foster families in their target area, as well as develop community resources and support for the initiative. While this strategy appears to have been quite effective in changing foster parent training and practice, results have been mixed in terms of foster parent recruitment and community resource development. In addition, no provision has been made for matching FAMILY TO FAMILY-trained foster parents with placements where early

reunification is achievable. Also, no changes have been made in the contracting process that might create incentives for provider agencies to reduce children's time in care.

Progress toward the outcomes emphasized by FAMILY TO FAMILY was mixed in Philadelphia. Placement stability appears to have improved slightly in recent years, perhaps reflecting improved training and support for foster parents. Also, following a sharp rise in 1992, entries to care decreased markedly from 1993 through 1995, before rising in 1996. A substantial proportion of children entering out-of-home care are still placed in institutional settings, although initial placements into group homes have been substantially reduced. Placements with relative caregivers have declined and lengths of stay remained largely unchanged during the implementation of the initiative.