Child Safety Forward

A National Initiative to Reduce Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities and Injuries Through a Collaborative, Community-Based Approach

Evaluation Brief:
Strategy to Elevate Families into Relationships of Power

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Evaluation+

During the planning year, Child Safety Forward took a developmental evaluation approach that included building a theory of change that would lead to a strengthened child and family well-being system. This approach elevated learning from the technical assistance team as well as through the demonstration sites' qualitative and quantitative data-informed implementation plans.[1] Based on this learning, the refined version of the theory of change included greater intentionality around three core conditions we believe are necessary to having this impact:

- Elevate families into relationships of equal power within systems

- Build intentional strategy to systematically assess and address racism

- Sustain communications strategy

This is one of three briefs that takes a deeper look at each of these conditions through the lens of Child Safety Forward learning during the first year of implementation. It is designed to highlight how Child Safety Forward is defining this condition, the strategies and approaches it believes will advance this condition, and the intermediate outcomes from those strategies. While not mutually exclusive, the purpose of this brief is to further define what Child Safety Forward means by *elevate families into relationships of equal power within systems* based on early learning during the first year of Child Safety Forward and create a roadmap for this strategy. These roadmaps will be refined through the implementation study conducted at the end of the second year of implementation.

Learning Approach

The learning on how to elevate families into relationships of equal power relied on data collected during the planning year at the demonstration site level, discussions and relevant observations from biweekly strategy meetings with demonstration sites, technical assistance team monthly meetings, review of demonstration site implementation plans, literature used to inform Child Safety Forward technical assistance (see Resources), and outreach to sites to share their learning about parent engagement efforts. Additionally, the first design thinking convening in August 2021 focused on this condition, and the technical assistance team dedicated its monthly meetings in October and December to defining and measuring power (see the Technical Assistance Team Reading List).

Defining Elevate Families into Relationships of Equal Power within Systems

Child Safety Forward defines its larger impact around families sharing responsibilities with child protection agencies, community partners, and neighborhoods for the future well-being of children. This broader vision can only be reached through the strengthening of families and rebalancing of power within child and family well-being systems. However, implementing the practices that underpin the idea that parents, caregivers, and youth can hold power in a child

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[1] The five demonstration sites are: Cook County Health in Illinois; Indiana Department of Health; Michigan Department of Health and Human Services; St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut; and Sacramento County, California's Child Abuse Prevention Council.

and family well-being system is challenging for both parents and systems. Parents do not have good reasons to trust systems, and systems are designed to be adversarial.

A few definitions and concepts of power surfaced during Child Safety Forward discussions that are relevant to shifting current systems.

The first comes out of the collective impact space where power is defined as:

> *The ability or authority to influence others, to decide who will have access to resources, and to define reality or exercise control over oneself or others. In the context of social change work, it is helpful to understand the ways in which power operates, how different interests can be marginalized from decision making and the strategies needed to increase inclusion.*

The other definition comes from Lead Local, where community power is defined as:

> *The ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision-makers that change systems and advance health equity.*

While the first definition helps recognize power, the latter definition speaks to the need to rebalance power to achieve large scale systems change. While both definitions address influence, Child Safety Forward discussions also surfaced the need to understand power through the lens of who determines what power is, if it is wanted, and for what reason.

Early Learning to Inform Framework

Parent participation and engagement were foundational to the Child Safety Forward original design. There is strong leadership on the technical assistance team from the Children's Trust Fund Alliance to provide resources and support around necessary shifts in communities to elevate parent voice. Through the technical assistance, demonstration sites are learning that strategies that give voice or create space for participation are important, but do not go far enough to correct for the current constraints on full parent, youth, and caregiver participation. It is not just about elevation of power, but a rebalancing of power that is necessary.

The roadmap at the end of this brief is informed by insights gathered through Child Safety Forward's first year of implementation and technical assistance:

- Disruption of power in child and family well-being systems is necessary to achieving equity and to assess and address racism. Differentials in power exist not only between parents and caregivers, and systems, but within systems.

- There is shared awareness through the demonstration sites that strategies need to disrupt and rebalance power at all stages of the initiative, from planning and design to implementation and evaluation. At the demonstration site level, implementation strategies focus on: 1) building opportunities to bring more parent and youth voice to the conversation to better understand data and inform prevention strategies, 2) leveraging existing parent and youth groups differently within collaboratives, and 3) implementing specific strategies based on data to strengthen families.

- A strong grassroots approach supports conditions for rebalancing of power. Approaching parents, caregivers, youth, and members of the community as full partners in a collaborative or coalition helps move initiatives closer to a structure where parents are more visible and can influence agenda setting.

- Trust and psychological safety appear to be necessary conditions for parent, youth, and caregiver "power" in child and family well-being systems. Using outside facilitators, balancing attendance so that parents are in the majority or at least predominantly represented, allowing parents to drive the agenda, and leaving space for professionals and parents alike to be vulnerable and genuine all work to mitigate power.

- There is a lot of literature that outlines concepts relevant to community power and less that focuses on parent power in child protection systems. Child and family well-being systems need to understand that power is relational and contextual. Furthermore, rebalancing power requires transformative strategy to address three types of power:

  o Invisible power: Works by controlling the narrative and rules around parenting and blame. Collaboratives need strategies that will reverse bias, shift narratives, and reduce stigma associated with help seeking.

  o Hidden power: Works by controlling agenda setting and decision making. Creating space for the voices of parents, youth, and caregivers begins to unearth hidden power but does not go far enough in reaching full participation. Strategies should assess and address who is making the decisions and who benefits from those decisions.

  o Visible power: Visible power includes the policies and practices that give or remove access to full participation (e.g., fair compensation, holding majority at the table, and full participation in decision making). Systems, collaboratives, and funders need to work together to put in place the policies and practices that support power sharing.

- There is a lot that is not known about how to rebalance power in child and family well-being systems. How to define and measure power is an action item for the technical assistance team in the second year of implementation. The learning questions guiding some of this exploration include:

  o What is the interaction between "power" and psychological safety?

  o Who is responsible for the giving or taking of power?

  o How do we engage families and parents/caregivers in helping us design and scale insights on power?

  o How is power different than agency?

The conversation to elevate parent power with child protection systems is a hard one. However, the future of child well-being depends on parents and caregivers being more than just engaged with systems. Parents need to be viewed as equal partners with systems—those who are critical co-designers and problem solvers. Parents need to be aware of and own the data that describes their communities—their challenges and their assets. This means that parent voice

cannot just be about checking the box but about creating a space where parents and systems come together in the spirit of reciprocity, respect, and connection.

Resources

Children's Trust Fund Alliance (2021). What parents say about advancing equity and support for underserved communities.

Collective Impact Forum. Community Engagement Toolkit.

Collective Impact Forum. Rebalancing power: Examining the role of advocacy and organizing in collective impact.

International Association for Public Participation. IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.

Technical Assistance Team Reading List

An Approach to Understanding & Measuring People Power

Hahrie Han & the P3 Lab team 2021

See also "Reflections on Measuring Community Power," "How Movements Build Power: Measuring Power Shifts in 21st-Century America," and "Prisms of the People: Power & Organizing in Twenty-First-Century America."

Community In Public Health: Measuring the Impact of Building Community Power for Health Justice: What? Why? And How?

The Praxis Project 2018

Page 7, "How Do We Want Our Work To Build 'Community Power' To Be Measured?"

Basics of Studying Power

Domhoff, 2012

Four Power Indicators: Working within this framework, there are four different power indicators that have been used by various researchers down through the decades. They can be called (1) who benefits in terms of having the things that are valued in the society? (2) who governs (i.e., sits in the seats that are considered to be powerful)? (3) who wins when there are arguments over issues? and (4) who has a reputation for power (i.e., who stands out in the eyes of their peers)?

Tools/Frameworks

Power Awareness Tool: A Tool For Analysing Power In Partnerships For Development

The Spindle 2020

Measuring Community Power for Health Equity

Vanderbilt University 2020

In the following reports, we explore the landscape of extant interdisciplinary scholarship at the intersection of community power and health equity and synthesize literature on theories of social change and the measurement of community power.

Empowerment? Ask Them: Quantifying Qualitative Outcomes From People's Own Analysis

Sida 2010

This paper presents the experience of one social movement in Bangladesh, which managed to find a way to measure empowerment by letting the members themselves explain what benefits they acquired from the Movement and by developing a means to measure change over time. These measures, which are primarily of use to the members, have then been subjected to numerical analysis outside of the

village environment to provide convincing quantitative data, which satisfies the demands of results-based management. The paper is aimed primarily at those who are excited by the possibilities of rights-based approaches but who are concerned about proving that their investment results in measurable and attributable change.

Power, Control, Communities and Health Inequalities. Part II: Measuring Shifts in Power

Ruth Ponsford, Michelle Collins, Matt Egan, Emma Halliday, Sue Lewis ...

Health Promotion International, Volume 36, Issue 5, October 2021, Pages 1290–1299

Phases in Organizational Change: Measuring Shifts in Power (from Dancing on Live Embers: Challenging Racism in Organizations)

Lopes & Thomas 2006

Evaluating Social Movement Power: Initial Concepts and Indicators [AEA 2018 Session Materials]

AEA 2018

This session provided participants with a framework and indicators for understanding and assessing how social movements build power and make change.

Action For Global Justice In Practice: ActionAid's Human Rights Based Approach

ActionAid 2020

See section: "Monitoring Shifts in Power." Watch this related webinar by clicking "Register."

Strategy to Elevate Families into Relationships of Equal Power

Child protection agencies, community partners, neighbors and families ("child and family well-being system") operate in a blame-free environment with a shared commitment to prevent further harm and keep children safe.

Intermediate Outcomes

Child and Family Well-Being Systems ...	Parents, Youth and Community ...
1. Policies and practices include parents, youth, and caregivers as full partners in decision making, strategy design, and implementation	1. Have access to and discuss the same information, options, and choices at the same time throughout the entire process
2. Child and family well-being system partners are seen as trustworthy and as safe spaces for parents, caregivers, youth, and community	2. Are equipped with tools to engage families and know how to gift those tools to others
3. The makeup of decision-making tables is balanced in favor of people with lived experience	3. Champion strategies that follow data and address community need
4. The majority of strategies emphasize prevention and protective factors	4. Have confidence that systems will follow through on commitments with appropriate resources to address priorities
5. Keep families together	5. Feel safe and secure in their homes

Strategy to Elevate Families into Relationships of Equal Power

1. Emphasize the diversity of families and talk about them as a unit, not in parts

2. Assess and address constraints in the systems that focus on power conditions; ask who they benefit, and why

3. Develop and grow partnerships and capacities for community mobilization and grassroots leadership

4. Engage in full transparency; clearly communicate the process, choices, and options each step of the way so that families are not surprised by the outcome

5. Provide fully compensated opportunities and supports to people with lived experience on all projects

6. Deploy regular community needs assessments and feedback loops where system partners can genuinely listen and respond to needs and priorities as they surface

Current Conventions
- Families are diverse in needs, forms, and cultures
- Power is not static and is highly contextual and relational; what one needs in terms of power is variable
- Child and family well-being systems are structured to hold power