



Within Our Reach

In October 2019, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office for Victims of Crime launched Child Safety Forward (CSF), a three-year demonstration initiative to develop multidisciplinary strategies and responses to address serious or near-death injuries resulting from child abuse or neglect and to reduce the number of child fatalities.¹ The efforts were intended to produce models and practices that are responsive to a 21st-Century Child Welfare System as envisioned by the federal Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities.

Five demonstration sites participated in CSF, with technical assistance led by Social Current. The five participation sites in this initiative are:

- St. Francis Hospital in Hartford, Connecticut
- Cook County Health in Illinois
- Indiana Department of Health
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services
- California's Child Abuse Prevention Council of Sacramento County

As part of the final implementation study, each site identified a practice or policy change advanced through their work with CSF for a dialogue on how to impact system change. This dialogue was facilitated by a team of two to three external evaluators with approximately five to seven local partners involved in the implementation of the policy or practice. This brief delves into the design of the site's policy or practice and suggests recommendations for similar initiatives based on the site's experiences and lessons learned.

Accelerating Multi-Sector Collaboration on Child Safety

Background

In 2015, Sacramento County conducted a retrospective review of child maltreatment fatalities based on a recommendation from the Within Our Reach report. Findings from this review affirmed that in Sacramento County there was/were:

- Limited data available to highlight system contributions and understand the risk and protective factors surrounding fatalities and near fatalities.
- Systems serving children and families that did not have adequate policies and practices to support coordination.
- An absence of leadership structure to drive intentional strategies that align systems around needed changes that sit outside of any one system.

¹ Four of the five Child Safety Forward demonstration sites applied for and received a no-cost extension for the initiative into a fourth year.

- Limited focus on prevention as a strategy to address child abuse.

Practice Change Solution

In 2019, Sacramento County created the Sacramento County Prevention Cabinet (Prevention Cabinet) as the result of a statewide convening sponsored by the California Office of Child Abuse Prevention, the Child and Family Enrichment Cabinet, and Strategies. The initial Prevention Cabinet included ten local systems leaders. Being selected as a participating site for the CSF initiative that same year served as a catalyst to further grow the Sacramento County Prevention Cabinet and develop strategies to support their overarching vision to eliminate child abuse and neglect deaths and critical injuries by 2030.

The Prevention Cabinet leveraged the [collective impact model](#) to help shape the collaboration. While Sacramento County has an existing foundation for successful multisystem partnerships, the CSF approach allowed for greater capacity building and resources in the form of expertise and funding to be intentional about systems-level change. Collective impact also encourages increased data sharing that links action to decision making and leveraging of partnership networks outside of the collaborative.²

Supportive Practices

Shifting the way people think and understand the connection between prevention and child safety takes time. It requires moving decision makers and practitioners from focusing on how to work within the constraints of their current system to envisioning a new way for the system to operate. There were core elements of the CSF design that helped accelerate some of the necessary transformations that may take newer collective impact models longer to adopt.

Strong, Resourced Technical Assistance. Having a strong “backbone organization” is a fundamental component of collective impact. For example, the Child Abuse Prevention Council of Sacramento (CAPC), which sponsors the work of the Child Death Review Team in Sacramento County, had the human and financial capacity to coordinate monthly meetings, manage outreach and communications, conduct surveys, and centralize information to keep momentum going. They also served as a neutral facilitator between systems leaders due to the lack of competition they experienced compared to other organizations and agencies. These are all core functions of a collective impact approach.

With the support of the CSF grant, CAPC Sacramento had access to a technical assistance team to coach those functions and lend credibility to more innovative concepts like systems thinking, data-driven strategy, and collaborative development. They also had access to a peer network of sites working towards similar goals.

Embedded Learning and Evaluation. How we understand data and evaluation in the child safety sector is very transactional and output-oriented. Early collective impact efforts benefit from emphasizing a learning role during the strategy development process. CAPC Sacramento, through CSF, was required to have an evaluator serve as a core contributor to the initiative. CAPC Sacramento had a trusting and longstanding relationship with a local evaluator, who understood the goals of CAPC Sacramento and could step into the collaborative with that shared understanding. In their neutral role, the evaluator supported data gathering and interpretation, and led the facilitation and creation of the Prevention Cabinet’s strategic plan and evaluation plan. In their strategic learning partner role, the evaluator also provided a skillset to help Prevention Cabinet partners think and learn about emerging

² The Child Safety Forward Sacramento final Child Safety Forward report provides rich detail on the development of their collective impact effort.

critical systems questions that use evidence to guide future direction. The entire Prevention Cabinet, as well as the evaluator, engaged in ongoing learning as the process progressed.

Systems change is hard as an evaluator. We set out with a plan of what we thought, but this innovative way of collaborating across the county is not straightforward to evaluate in the same way you evaluate programs. It's been a big learning curve for that.

– CAPC Sacramento Partner

Centered Community Engagement. One of the three subcommittees formed during the initiative was a Community Engagement Subcommittee. In working with technical assistance there was growing interest in approaching community engagement, not just as good practice coming out of strategic planning, but also as a critical opportunity to ensure community members were key partners within the strategic planning process. With the aim to more intentionally and authentically center community voice and share power, the subcommittee instituted community partner and community representative protocols and practices intended to recruit, support, and sustain community representatives to serve on the Prevention Cabinet.

The engine of the Cabinet is this commitment to involving community representatives.

– Community Member

Getting to a true community partner model requires an infrastructure, not just intent. The Prevention Cabinet set up an infrastructure that included developing a community representative application, defining the roles and responsibilities for its partners and community representatives, and creating a matrix to help align the needs assessment with the potential for wider representation of lived expertise. They also included budgeting stipends for participation, creating formal onboarding processes, and ensuring appropriate and multiple community feedback touchpoints. The community partners also helped community representatives acclimate to the work of the Prevention Cabinet so they could navigate and effectively engage in conversations.

Sustainable Implementation and Impact

CSF enabled Sacramento County to create a robust governing structure for this work and the strategic plan will continue to be implemented and evolve over time. Members of the Prevention Cabinet have already started the process of applying for funds that support different components of the strategic plan and are exploring where dollars may be available from existing funds that align with specific goals.

Sacramento County CSF now consists of more than 40 cross-systems leaders that come from public systems, private nonprofits, and the community who have come together to co-create a strategic plan focused on systems change that promotes positive outcomes for children and families. This multidisciplinary team of diverse system actors have assumed collective accountability and responsibility for taking action to promote positive outcomes, including advancing equity in which power is authentically shared with community.

The Prevention Cabinet will continue to build an intentional and inclusive culture that shares power with community, implementing and continuing to enhance its community engagement protocols as it moves forward. It will also present its strategic plan to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors. Buy-in from the Board of Supervisors will create an even wider network and may bring more opportunities to the table that align with the outcomes the Prevention Cabinet defines in its strategic plan.

There is a common commitment to the cause that allows us to find capacity to do this work. None of us are in it for the money. The cabinet gives us a powerful voice to accomplish the things we are deeply passionate about. – Prevention Cabinet Member

Recommendations

This approach to collective impact helps system leaders see child safety as a collective responsibility and positions the strategic plan developed under CSF for future funding. While not all efforts have the advantage of support from a technical assistance team and dedicated funding, there are practices and norms collaborations can adapt to help advance their goals. The following are recommendations for practitioners who seek to create and promote a collaborative approach to child safety:

- Engage community leaders from the outset of the work as co-designers who make decisions on what the work will aim to achieve and how it will get there.
- Authentically and intentionally engage and support community representatives as equal partners in the process.
- Create and use an inclusive language that allows for all partners to engage productively.
- Adopt a learning orientation towards evaluation and embed the role of evaluator from day one. Do not wait until you are ready to measure outcomes.
- Build upon existing collaborations and partnerships, recognizing that strong relationships take time to develop, and ensure every partner understands how they influence outcomes.
- Leverage and blend existing initiatives and resources to support impact.
- Use existing data to reflect on and understand the past, present, and future.
- Have a neutral backbone entity that partners trust, can keep the momentum of the collaborative moving forward, and helps to hold all parties accountable.

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