

Study Identifies Multiple Strategies and Critical Factors for Integrating Human Services

by Mark Ragan

Many families need multiple benefits and services, such as child care, job training, access to health care, and counseling, in order to succeed in the labor market. The desire to simplify and streamline client processes—often called “service integration”—is frequently cited as *the* solution to the often confusing, sometimes redundant, and generally uncoordinated mix of programs that exists at the local level to help these families.

But service integration is not a simple stand-alone project that involves something as seemingly straightforward as collocating staff from multiple programs. And it is about more than making a few procedural changes.

According to findings from a 12-state study begun in late 2001 by the Rockefeller Institute of Government and funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, service integration occurs where a complex combination of strategies is employed in an environment that facilitates their implementation. It is about institutional change to create a more coherent, holistic, human service system, and it is not easily accomplished.

For many years, human service program administrators have expressed a strong interest in developing service delivery systems that better meet the needs of vulnerable families. Welfare reform legislation in 1996 provided additional impetus to craft more coordinated service delivery systems to enable families to leave and stay off welfare. Under the current cash assistance welfare program known as TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families), parents are expected to seek employment; cash benefits are now time-limited; and self-sufficiency is the goal.

In the study, field research in local offices in the 12 states (see table on page 2) attempted to answer the following questions: Where *has* service integration occurred, and what does it look like in the real world? How much progress has been made developing coherent human service systems? If good examples of service integration can be found, what were the factors that contributed to the success of these efforts? Do the experiences of local prac-

Note from the Director—Barbara B. Blum

Integrating human services is an extraordinarily important and timely subject. Mark Ragan, a Senior Fellow at the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government—the public policy research arm of the State University of New York—has been directing research on management systems for human services and was formerly the Director of the Office of State Systems for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. In this issue of *the forum*, he points out that there are multiple strategies to integration and many critical factors affecting successful outcomes. As flexibility is advocated for states and localities and as resources for human services have been reduced, understanding the complexities of integration is crucial to sound policymaking.

tioners provide lessons for others interested in comprehensive service reform?

Client Is Best Judge If Services Are Integrated

But what *is* service integration? There is no single answer. Based on observations at the sites visited for this study, service integration is a *combination* of strategies that simplify and facilitate access to benefits and services. Each site has implemented a distinctive mix of strategies, processes, and partnerships (see figure on page 5).

While integration of services is not uncommon within program groupings such as TANF, Food Stamps, and Medicaid, much less common is integration *across* program groupings, such as income support programs, health-related programs, and child welfare programs. The most comprehensive examples of service integration occur in locations where the division between income support and child welfare programs is addressed (see sample on page 2).

How does one determine whether services are integrated? The key, at least for this study, was to look at

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Service Integration Study Sites

CALIFORNIA	05/02	Local offices in San Mateo County
COLORADO	04/02	Local offices in Mesa and El Paso Counties
GEORGIA	02/02	Local offices in Bibb County
KENTUCKY	09/02	State offices in Frankfort and local offices in Jefferson County
MINNESOTA	07/02	Local offices in Anoka and Dakota Counties
NEBRASKA	04/02	State offices in Lincoln; local offices in Lincoln, Gage, and Seward Counties
NEW JERSEY	01/02	State offices in Trenton; local offices in Atlantic and Ocean Counties
OHIO	06/02	Local offices in Montgomery County
OREGON	12/01	State offices in Salem; local offices in Coos and Jackson Counties
PENNSYLVANIA	02/02	Local offices in Allegheny County
VIRGINIA	03/02	Local offices in Fairfax County
WISCONSIN	07/02	Local offices in Racine and Kenosha Counties

More detailed information regarding many of the sites visited for the study can be found at: http://www.rockinst.org/quick_tour/federalism/service_integration.html.

Service Integration in San Mateo County, California

The Human Services Agency (HSA) of San Mateo County is a large organization that includes a wide range of human services programs in a single administrative unit. Income support programs, employment and training programs, youth and family services, housing programs, vocational rehabilitation services, and alcohol and drug services are the responsibility of a single director of human services. But the story doesn't end there. HSA has implemented management and staff processes designed to facilitate the delivery of services to county residents. Examples of these processes include:

- **Regionalization.** HSA offices are located throughout the county. Staff and managers in these offices have flexibility to implement policies in ways that meet local needs.
- **Matrix Management.** Managers have dual responsibility. They are responsible for office operations within a region and for policy in areas of individual specialization.
- **True One-Stop Access to Services.** Clients have access to a broad range of programs in a single location.
- **A Common Intake Process.** Staff trained in multiple programs use a comprehensive screening and assessment tool to determine client needs.
- **Family Self-Sufficiency Teams.** Multi-disciplinary teams that include county staff representing multiple programs as well as service providers meet weekly to review cases and recommend appropriate services and benefits.
- **Information Systems Support.** A common case management and client tracking system (SMART), which is linked to a data warehouse that provides information for management decisionmaking, is accessible to all staff.
- **Collaboration with Community Partners.** HSA works closely with 17 Family Resource Centers and seven Core Service Agencies that provide a range of services to county families, all of which are connected to HSA via the SMART system.

human service systems from a client's perspective. How difficult is it to obtain multiple benefits and services? Do families with multiple needs interact with many offices and caseworkers? Is there coordination or communication between program offices?

Finding the best examples of service integration meant locating sites where a number of strategies had been implemented to eliminate navigational barriers and bridge gaps between programs and service providers. The best place to look was at the local level, where clients interact with service providers, and where much of the real work of service integration is occurring.

Reforming Services Takes Collaboration, Integration, Consolidation

Strategies designed to improve the delivery of services can be characterized broadly as *administrative* and *operational*. Administrative strategies are behind-the-scenes changes that enable improvements in client services, including changes in the structure of human service agencies, blending funding streams, and integrating client data in shared information systems. Our study found local sites using the following administrative strategies:

- ▶ **Consolidating governance structure.** In many of the sites, efforts to simplify the service delivery system began with or were supported by reorganizing government agencies at the state level, local level, or in some cases both. Many of the counties visited for this study consolidated multiple county-administered program offices into one large, human service office.
- ▶ **Collaborative planning, management, and oversight at the local level.** In many localities, a board or similar body composed of community leaders and local program managers meets regularly and is involved in planning, setting goals, and developing strategies to meet the needs of the local population.
- ▶ **Collaborating to provide additional services.** TANF and other funds are being used to support community-based service organizations. These organizations offer a range of services, such as family crisis intervention and youth mentoring programs that complement services provided by state and county governments.
- ▶ **Integrating funding streams.** The ability to combine TANF and other funds gives local managers the flexibility to simplify administration and to provide services that might otherwise be unavailable if each funding stream had to be segregated.
- ▶ **Integrating a wider range of service providers in local systems.** In many locations, private nonprofit and for-profit providers are being integrated into what have traditionally been governmental processes.
- ▶ **Integrating information and information systems.** Two common complaints about information

sharing are privacy concerns and limitations of current information systems to share data across programs. One low-tech solution is to secure an information release from clients that allows programs to share information. Information systems present more complex challenges, but there are encouraging developments on this front as well.

Operational strategies, which more directly affect casework practices and client-related processes, include collocation of multiple programs in "one-stop" offices and integration of staff from multiple agencies into service teams. The 12 study sites exhibited several operational strategies:

- ▶ **Consolidating the location of client services—collocation.** The majority of sites visited have developed one-stop offices to improve service delivery. Collocation is, in many instances, a critical step in facilitating the strategies identified in this study. Indeed, many people associate the concept of service integration with collocation. Managers and staff suggest that collocation improves formal and informal communications, facilitates client-related processes by simplifying access to programs and services, and creates bonds between staff from different organizations.
- ▶ **Integrating client intake and assessment processes.** In many sites, collocation was one step in a larger effort to simplify and streamline client processes. For instance, staff can use a standardized assessment tool to determine the need for a wide range of programs and services.
- ▶ **Integrating staff from multiple organizations and programs in teams.** One of the advantages of collocation is the ease with which staff from multiple agencies can work together. In many locations, managers have taken the opportunity to move beyond collocation to create multidisciplinary teams.
- ▶ **Coordinating case plans.** In order to ensure that case plans for different programs do not conflict, many sites hold regular cross-program team "staffings." At these meetings, staff present individual cases, discuss strategies, and share information about clients to ensure that all programs involved in a case are working together.
- ▶ **Consolidating staff functions.** In many locations, staff responsibilities have changed to reflect a service-oriented approach by combining staff functions that were previously separate.
- ▶ **Consolidating case management across programs.** One of the most challenging operational strategies is consolidating case management functions across a broad range of programs, where a single caseworker is responsible for ongoing casework that spans traditional program groupings, such as income support and employment and training programs.

Leadership, Training, Relationships Are Critical Factors

It would be a mistake to assume that policy changes, devolution, and the flexibility of TANF funds in and of themselves ensure that local systems are improved. Managers at the study sites suggested several other factors that are critical to an integrated service system.

- ▶ **Leadership.** In the majority of the sites visited, managers traced efforts to improve service delivery to one or a small number of leaders who were able to enlist the support of the human services community.
- ▶ **Experienced managers.** Senior managers in most of the sites visited had many years of experience working with human service programs, usually within the same community. The experience of these managers both as program administrators and members of the local human service community facilitated efforts to develop connections between programs.
- ▶ **Staff training and development.** A common issue mentioned repeatedly is the need for continual staff training and development. Cross program training is conducted at regular intervals in almost all of the sites.
- ▶ **Willingness to take chances, experiment, and change.** Managers frequently spoke of their independence from higher-level bureaucracy. They value the flexibility inherent in the TANF program that has provided the means to implement innovative and untried strategies.
- ▶ **Clearly defined shared mission.** Although the specific language varies significantly from site to site, the constant is that each site has a clear mission statement developed by representatives of agency management, staff, and community partners.
- ▶ **Community involvement.** The community has to be actively involved in providing services beyond those available through government programs and to ensure buy-in for service delivery improvements.
- ▶ **Strength-based, client-focused processes.** Another common characteristic of service integration efforts is client and family strength-based assessment and case management processes. In addition to the focus on client strengths, expectations, and goals, a number of sites include the family when their case is discussed by cross-program teams.
- ▶ **Stability.** A common characteristic of many of the sites is the longevity of local leadership. Some of the sites have been working to integrate service delivery for a decade or longer. In many of these sites, the leaders who shared the original vision continue to be involved with the project.
- ▶ **Measuring performance.** Managers pay close attention to performance indicators required by state and

federal agencies as well as locally developed performance and outcome measures.

- ▶ **Personal relationships.** Managers at the study sites emphasized the importance of relationships with their peers. Accomplishing the many tasks associated with comprehensive service reform demands frequent interactions between agency managers and staff.
- ▶ **Teams, teams, and more teams.** As should be apparent from the descriptions above, staff at the study sites participate in teams—particularly management teams, team staffings, teams focused on specific client populations, and teams that set agency goals and priorities.
- ▶ **Resources.** In many of the sites, resources beyond federal and state program funds were needed to initiate and support local efforts to improve services.

Success of Institutional Change Measured in Attitude Change

Based on information gathered at the study sites, it is clear that comprehensive systems designed to better meet the needs of clients and improve program outcomes have been developed in a number of locations.

The nature and extent of integration varies greatly, influenced in no small part by such factors as governance structures and the people who run local programs and staff local offices. Service integration is happening where strong leaders and able managers, as well as motivated staff, share a clear vision and have the energy and patience to make the vision real.

Direct evidence of the impacts of service integration is hard to come by. Anecdotes of how families were helped and positive performance measures within individual programs are commonly quoted to show that service integration makes a difference.

But perhaps the most obvious evidence is the attitude of staff and managers at the study sites. They were universally enthusiastic, proud, and anxious to talk about their experiences. They believe that service integration makes a significant difference and say that they would never go back to the old ways of doing business. Their enthusiasm and support is particularly noteworthy, given the increasing caseloads and decreasing resources during the past year.

Unfortunately, the most recent interviews for this study suggest that budget problems in the states are beginning to have a significant negative impact. Program rolls are swelling and funding is being cut, forcing some agencies to reduce staff or completely pull out of collocated sites.

More tough choices are ahead for local program managers, and deciding whether to continue efforts to integrate services will be one of them. There are those who believe that state budget crises present opportunities for

further reform, that the need for greater efficiency will spur efforts to better coordinate and integrate services.

Managers and staff at the study sites are convinced that this new way of doing business will endure. The lessons learned during the 1990s, when resources were more abundant and welfare rolls declined, may prove even more valuable in these challenging times.

Strategies and Critical Success Factors in Integrated Human Service Systems



Integrated client services occur where critical success factors facilitate the implementation of multiple operational and administrative strategies

RESEARCH FORUM ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND THE NEW FEDERALISM

The Research Forum, an initiative of the National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, encourages collaborative research and informed policy on welfare reform and vulnerable populations. The Research Forum's ultimate goal is to identify and promote strategies that protect and enhance the well-being of low-income children and their families.

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