



Strength in Numbers: King County Service Organizations Pool Their Money and Resources

Mental Health Services Program for Youth Replication

SUMMARY

Starting in May 1996, the King County Blended Funding Project was a cooperative effort to create a system of care to meet the needs of the most difficult-to-serve and high-cost children, youth, and their families in King County.

It involved the King County Division of Mental Health, Division of Children and Family Services, Seattle, local school districts, and parents.

The systems of care agreed to take a new approach by blended funds¹, creating a single care manager, managing costs and services at the child and family team level and tracking outcomes.

The project was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) *Mental Health Services Program for Youth Replication* (MHSPY) national program.

Key Results

- **An agreement was signed to pool funds from the systems of care involved in the project (mental health, children and family services, and school districts) and to establish an Administrative Service Organization.** The Administrative Service Organization contracted with two care management entities and with service providers to provide needed care.
- **During the planning stage, there was a concerted effort to have families involved in the development of the project.** The families became advocates for children in multiple systems and the family group became integral in several areas of operation.

Families were heavily involved in the evaluation design and helped create tools to measure the following outcomes.

¹ **Blended funding (also pooled funding):** Funding from different sources that has been consolidated. Often each source is "categorical"—funds that otherwise can only be used to pay for a particular category of services.

- Functioning of children and families.
- Satisfaction with services.
- Cost-effectiveness services as compared to historical services.
- Outcomes for children.
- Ability to make decisions and carry out a plan.
- Fit of care to family need.
- Coordination of planning and care giving across systems.
- Motivation for change on the part of the care provider, family, and child.
- Community locus of support.
- Dependence on formal systems.

The Evaluation

The evaluation also compared the costs of care in the new system with historical costs of traditional services.

The evaluation was being conducted by an independent organization, the Washington Institute for Mental Illness Research and Training, Spokane.

Preliminary conclusions were that "the significant improvements in all process measures are quite remarkable and encouraging.... However... the number of children on whom we have made a follow-up assessment is small. The possibility that these results are not based on a random sampling of the Blended Funding participants must be examined."

Funding

RWJF provided a \$75,000 grant between May 1996 and September 1997. The project received additional support from the following: King County Mental Health Division contracted with Puget Sound Educational Service District for \$48,000 to support the initial development of the project.

Puget Sound Educational Service District contributed \$70,000 to maintain the planning effort prior to the beginning of the RWJF grant and to finish the planning after the grant ended.

The University of Washington Department of Psychiatry contributed \$3,500 for the development of the evaluation design for the project; and the Washington Institute for Research provided \$45,000 for the initial evaluation of the project.

Prepared by: David Kales

Reviewed by: Molly McKaughan and Marian Bass

Program Officer: Michael Beachler

Grant ID# 28673

Program area: Quality/Equality

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