

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

I. SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

The first year of the ProtectOhio evaluation has been very revealing. Evaluation team members have spent significant time on site in the demonstration and comparison counties, and on the telephone with individual contact people, gathering baseline information about the operations of each PCSA. In addition, some of the information, especially in the Process Implementation study and, less so, in the Fiscal Impact study, gives a hint of changes that are already occurring in many of the counties.

Overall, the first year analysis of process, outcome, and fiscal data points to three conclusions: *first*, the demonstration counties and their comparison counterparts appear to be reasonably similar prior to the start of the Title IV-E Waiver; *second*, both demonstration and comparison PCSAs are making changes to their organizations and to the way cases are handled, with demonstration sites being more active in experimenting with managed care strategies; and *third*, the data limitations which the Participant Outcomes and the Fiscal Impact study teams have encountered are considerable, and must be addressed early in the coming year of the evaluation.

A. Process Implementation and Community Impact Analysis

Chapter 2 described the basic operations of the child welfare systems in the demonstration and comparison counties. The two groups of counties show many similarities and many differences, in the range of services available; in the internal structure of the PCSA; in the financing, contracting, and monitoring methods used; and in the larger community environment of child-serving agencies. The study findings also indicate a significant amount of change already occurring in the counties, from exploring the use of managed care strategies, to embarking on other system reform activities, to keeping steadfast on a change agenda conceived prior to the Waiver.

The major themes emerging from this chapter include the following:

1. Most counties, demonstration and comparison alike, are increasingly focusing on service provision at the “front end” of the system, sponsoring more prevention-oriented activities in the community and providing more home-based services to intact families with children at risk of placement. Accompanying these preventive efforts, counties are also using creative approaches to screening and assessment of children and families referred because of alleged abuse or neglect.
2. Counties are remarkably similar in the types of services that are available in their communities, although variations in the volume and the specific design of service interventions are substantial. There are many innovative interventions in different counties.

3. Counties are experimenting with many different managed care strategies, ranging from capitated contracts and risk-sharing, to restructuring of case management responsibilities and case flow. Not surprisingly, the demonstration counties are much more active in adopting managed care techniques, beginning to take advantage of the flexibility they have in their use of Title IV-E funds.
4. Many PCSAs are struggling to deal with unruly and delinquent youth, who are often placed in PCSA custody. This not only imposes a financial burden on the child welfare agency, but often also creates tension between the Juvenile Court and the PCSA regarding casework decision-making.
5. The counties vary tremendously in the nature of interagency collaboration, although most counties see it as a notable strength in their community. The Family and Children First Councils, which play a major role in most counties, take many different organizational forms, and seem to have varying ability to pull all the major child-serving agencies together for joint planning and financing activities.
6. Counties seem to be giving increasing attention to data management and to quality assurance, with a number of PCSAs developing their own data systems and others expanding the scope of their quality assurance activities.

B. Participant Outcomes Analysis

Chapter 3 described the progress made by Westat in assessing the impact of ProtectOhio on the outcomes of children and families served by the 28 evaluation counties. Described in the chapter is the assessment of available secondary data, especially in the state's FACSIS system. The discussion highlights the strengths and weaknesses of available data, as described in interviews with state and county representatives. The chapter also reports on the variation of data definitions and usage among the counties, and lists additional data required to fill in the gaps.

The chapter includes a preliminary analysis of baseline data. It describes caseloads of abuse/neglect, ongoing services, court results, custody and placement, based on analysis of the FACSIS data files provided by ODHS. Trend data will be reviewed by the participating demonstration and comparison counties.

The report summarizes caseload statistics and outcome indicators using FACSIS data. Topics covered include investigations of abuse and neglect, ongoing caseloads, court caseloads and outcomes, and placement information. The FACSIS data are aggregated by demonstration versus comparison groups, by counties in size groups and by individual counties.

Analysis shows similarities and differences between demonstration and comparison groups. The demonstration group is larger in child population and greater in all described caseloads. Both groups appear similar in the child abuse and neglect characteristics described. The distribution of ages of children in incidents, the distribution of race of children, and indication/substantiation rates are similar. In regard to case type, the

demonstration and comparison groups use protective services most frequently. The demonstration group has a greater use of protective services orders, the comparison group a greater use of voluntary services.

There appears to be evidence of more placements of older children into the child welfare system in the demonstration group by the court and other external sources. There is a higher percentage of older children placed into substitute care and a greater use of delinquency and unruly/status offender disposition type. Duration of care appears to be similar for both groups; however, there is a higher rate of reunification in the demonstration group.

Statistical comparisons will be done on more comprehensive data in year two of the evaluation. However, it appears that the concerns about greater placement directly by the court into more expensive placements, the reason that both attracted and dissuaded counties to participate in the Waiver, corresponds to the primary characteristics that distinguish the two groups.

C. Fiscal Impact Analysis

Chapter 4 discussed the progress that Chapin Hall has made thus far in analyzing the fiscal impact of the Title IV-E Waiver. The limited reliability of revenue and expenditure information at the state level makes it difficult at this time to establish a baseline for the demonstration and comparison counties. The chapter presents comparative analyses of several key state data sources, revealing inconsistencies that will have to be addressed in the coming year. In addition, some preliminary findings are reported on county-level expenditures in four major child welfare activity areas – foster care case management, family support services, training, and IV-E eligibility – which show little change between pre-Waiver and Year One spending percentages, but this is not surprising given the short time period. Similarly, preliminary analysis of Title IV-E administration and training claims do not show a shift away from Title IV-E activities.

II. PLANS FOR THE COMING YEAR

The evaluation team of HSRI, Westat, Chapin Hall Center for Children, IHSM, and MCG will continue to explore the key policy and practice issues of the four evaluation tasks. The site visit team will conduct a second round of visits to the 28 counties, focusing on questions raised in the first round, as well as pursuing issues related to the Community Impact study. Westat will continue to work closely with ODHS staff to obtain needed data files, and will engage selected evaluation counties to review the data issues that have surfaced, and seek to resolve conflicts and omissions in the FACSIS data. Chapin Hall will similarly focus on remedying data problems, by working closely with 14 evaluation counties to develop needed expenditure and revenue information. All the study teams will maintain ongoing contact with ODHS and especially with the ProtectOhio Consortium, to solicit their opinions and to provide ongoing feedback on evaluation activities; and will collaborate on preparation of the Semi-Annual and Annual Report in Year 2.

The following is a description of the new activities that the evaluation team will conduct:

- ❖ Conduct interviews with ODHS regional office staff, to develop a better understanding of the regional office role in supporting and monitoring PCSA efforts;
- ❖ Establish a process and framework for gathering information for the Community Impact study, and develop an initial database as part of the Second Annual Report;
- ❖ Compile a detailed list of individual and system-level outcomes, to be pursued in the Participant Outcomes study. This list would include some outcomes unique to one or a few counties, depending on their expressed “logic models”, which encompasses a PCSA’s philosophy of change and vision of an improved child welfare system;
- ❖ Prepare the Interim Process Implementation Report, detailing the findings thus far from the Ongoing Process Analysis and the Long-Term Process Analysis;
- ❖ Design an integrated approach to the cost effectiveness analysis, linking together data on service utilization, costs, and outcomes; and begin to evaluate the cost effectiveness of the Waiver demonstration.