2.5 COMMUNITY IMPACT

The Community Impact Study examines the implementation of the Title IV-E Waiver within the broader context of community well-being. This study seeks to illustrate the mutual impact that this new service-provision strategy and several community indicators have upon each other. Changes over time in the community indicators can affect the population entering the foster-care system. Likewise, changes in the foster-care system may affect the overall well-being of the community.

In the first two years of the evaluation, the Process Implementation study team concentrated on identifying the most relevant measures of community well-being that had data regularly available at the county level. The study team explored a wide variety of indicators that are used by other agencies serving children and families to monitor their own success. By exploring changes in a wide variety of factors that may impact PCSA clients in a community, the study team will be able to see if the Waiver has a more far-reaching impact than simply on the PCSA service population.

For example, one county level indicator that the study team will track over time is the number of clients on welfare in each county. Previous research has shown a correlation between reductions in welfare grant eligibility and Child Protective Services (CPS) reports. As OWF timelines are reached and OWF clients become permanently ineligible for welfare benefits, CPS reports may increase. Since early OWF results will begin to become evident during the Waiver period, it will be critical to explore any correlation between the number of clients being sanctioned and the number of reports of abuse and neglect within each demonstration and comparison county.

Data for each variable was gathered by county and for the state as a whole when available. The tables in Appendix IV show the data for each county. The graphs on the following pages show either totals or averages for both the demonstration and comparison county groupings. When the figures used are averages, they are *averages of the county-level data* rather than rates for the demonstration and comparison groups. This gives each county, regardless of size, equal weight in determining the trends in community well-being in demonstration versus comparison groupings. This difference is significant since the population of all demonstration counties totals over 800,000 *more* than that of all comparison counties.

Summary: The preliminary data presented in this section illustrates the range of social indicators which may affect PCSA caseloads and, simultaneously, draws attention to factors upon which PCSA reform efforts can be expected to have an impact. In general, little difference is apparent between demonstration and comparison counties on the selected measures of underlying community trends, infrastructure, or community well-being. This is not surprising, since the demonstration counties have only recently made substantial changes in their mode of operation. The logic model underlying the evaluation (see Section 2.4.1 above) argues that structural changes in the PCSA and in the local human services community will gradually lead to changes in child and family outcomes, which in turn will manifest as changes in broader community-wide social indicators. Nonetheless, it is important to begin to track county-level performance on key indicators, to establish a solid baseline against which to compare changes in future years of the evaluation.

2.5.1 Methodological Considerations

The impact that a specific service provision strategy has on the community can be seen in part by looking at statistics for variables related to overall community well-being. As the Title IV-E Waiver has only been in effect for a few years, the study team has chosen to use annual statistics to illustrate trends in demonstration versus comparison counties. However, many sources offer figures at irregular intervals or at intervals of two or more years. Also, many sources collect data continuously but only make new figures available every few months or years. For these reasons, this section presents a select number of data elements that will be expanded as more data becomes available in the future.

The great majority of the data presented in this section was retrieved from the internet. The sources range from private data collection agencies to government offices such as the U.S. Census Bureau. Appendix IV contains raw data tables, documented sources, and any calculations that were made.

2.5.2 Community Impact Findings

The Community Impact data elements are organized into three categories. The first category groups together data on underlying community trends. The elements in this category are Population, Per Capita Income, and Poverty Rate. The raw data tables for these elements can be found in Appendix IV, Table 1 through 3. The second category groups the data elements related to infrastructure. These include unemployment rate, net business change, educational standards, and expenditures per pupil. The raw data tables for these elements can be found in Appendix IV, Table 4 through 7. The elements in both these categories are unlikely to be directly impacted by the implementation of the Waiver, but do have a significant effect on the community and, therefore, on the population entering the foster care system. Reforms in the foster care system may in turn influence these large-scale measures in the long term.

The third category includes direct measures of community well-being on which the Waiver may have a more substantial effect. These data elements are OWF recipients, school dropout rate, teen birth rate, infant mortality rate, and out-of-wedlock births. The raw data tables for these elements can be found in Appendix IV, Table 8 through 12.

The following pages show highlights from all but three of the data elements listed above. Statistics on net business change, out-of-wedlock births, and educational standards do not materially contribute to the understanding of differences between demonstration and comparison counties, and so are not discussed in the text that follows. However, raw data for these elements is presented in Appendix IV as they are important indicators of community well-being.