EVALUATION REPORT ON PARTNERING FOR CHANGE: A PILOT PEER LEARNING PROJECT SUPPORTING THE DELIVERY OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES

Partnering for Change (PfC) was a pilot peer learning project conducted by First 5 Alameda County (F5AC) to support the work of community partners in delivering culturally responsive services to young children and their families. The 13-month project, which ran from December 2007 through December 2008, was designed to provide a learning laboratory for a small group of community agencies working to strengthen the cultural competence[1] of their organizations. The intent of PfC was to advance the agencies' work in this area through a combination of peer support/learning and agency-specific consultation. PfC was jointly facilitated by F5AC's Cultural Access Services Administrator, Ann Chun, MPA, and Laurin Mayeno, MPH, a consultant with experience supporting agencies to become more culturally competent.

This report provides a brief overview of the project and a synthesis of project results. The synthesis draws on:
- The PfC consultant's report to F5AC
- Results from a focus group and two individual telephone interviews conducted with PfC participants in January and February 2009 by an F5AC Evaluation Specialist. The purpose of the focus group and telephone interviews was to solicit feedback from the participants regarding their experiences with the project.
- Verbal reports from the PfC facilitators about project implementation and outcomes

PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Participation in the PfC pilot was open to all F5AC contractors and grantees. Interested agencies applied by submitting a proposal. Seven agencies were selected to participate:

Children's Hospital and Research Center of Oakland   Lifelong Medical Care
Davis Street Family Resource Center   Luna Kids Dance
Family Support Services of the Bay Area   The Link to Children
Habitot Children's Museum

Each agency received a small stipend of $3,000. Although all of the agencies serve children 0-5 years and their families, they differ from one another in a number of ways including size, focus and the kinds of services provided (e.g., health care, parent-child activities, early care and education, family support services, mental health consultation to child care centers).

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[1] "Cultural competence" is defined in part as having "a defined set of values and principles, and [demonstrating]…behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable [organizations]…to work effectively cross-culturally" (National Center for Cultural Competence, adapted from Cross et al., 1989).

COMPONENTS OF THE PILOT PROJECT
The major components of the pilot project are described below.

1. **Partner-Led projects**
   Each agency had done prior work on developing cultural competency within their organization. In their proposals, the agencies identified outcomes they hoped to achieve by participating in PfC. These outcomes fell into one or more of the following areas: community engagement, workforce diversity, staff training, and organizational resistance to change. Examples of desired outcomes include:
   - Increased diversity in agency's governance, workforce and families served
   - Enhanced capacity of managers and supervisors to integrate cultural competency into their work
   - Establishment of effective evaluation mechanisms to measure the success of cultural competency efforts
   - Integration of cultural competency perspective into all strategic priorities

2. **Bimonthly meetings**
   Participants met bimonthly for 3 hours to share challenges, lessons learned, and resources with one another. They also received support and training from project facilitators and reported back on "homework" assignments and on progress made in achieving outcomes. Meeting topics were identified based on common interests and emerging challenges experienced by the community partners, as well as the consultant's assessment of what would help participants achieve their outcomes within the time frame of the project. Topics included:
   - Frameworks and approaches for addressing culture and difference
   - Assessment and action planning tools
   - Organizational buy-in
   - Training and organizational capacity building
   - Creating a safe environment for open communication
   - The role of leaders in multicultural change
   - Power issues

3. **Agency-specific consultation services**
   The PfC consultant provided up to 19 hours of individual consultation to each agency to assist them in achieving their outcomes. Consultation varied depending on the needs of the agencies and included:
   - Assistance in assessment and planning processes (e.g., help in designing staff and client needs assessment surveys, narrowing priorities and identifying possible strategies)
   - Facilitation of staff dialogue (e.g., facilitation of meetings with managers to establish a common language, vision, and approach to cultural competence)
   - Training for staff
   - Mentoring and coaching staff (e.g., on providing leadership in modeling multicultural communication)

PROJECT DIRECTION AND COORDINATION
F5AC's Cultural Access Specialist provided general support and oversight for the project.

1. **Creating a Peer Learning Environment**
   One aim of the pilot project was to create a peer learning laboratory to support culturally responsive service delivery. It was hoped that the group meetings attended by community partners would be an effective way to foster the sharing of tools, resources and lessons learned and would promote the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.

   Successes
   Both community participants and the PfC facilitators felt the pilot succeeded in supporting partner organizations and providing a learning laboratory for enhancing cultural competence. One participant remarked, "We got more than we hoped for!" Commenting on the success of the peer learning component, one person said, "You get it sooner, better, faster as participants of a group." Others said they highly valued the opportunity to meet on an ongoing basis with individuals from other agencies working toward similar goals. One participant commented:

   > "[The group meetings were] a place to try out ideas with people doing similar work… It helped me appreciate that this is a process, a progression, a journey, [and] not a destination…. I really loved the group meetings!"

   The PfC consultant identified factors that contributed to the success of the peer learning component of the project, based on a group discussion she had with participants toward the end of the project and on her ongoing conversations with the F5AC Cultural Access Services Administrator. These included:
   - Group composition and the quality of interaction. "Participants represented a diverse grouping of organizations of different sizes and with different areas of focus…[and] different…experiences and approaches to cultural competence. This enabled participants to learn from commonalities as well as differences. They were also extremely open to sharing both their lessons and challenges, which provided rich opportunities for peer learning. [Finally, several participants]…were Executive Directors, Co-Directors or people in top management" which gave them decision-making power in their organizations.
   - Maintaining a balance between training and peer learning. Each meeting of the group "included a component for peer learning and sharing and a component in which the consultant introduced frameworks, tools or information. The training aspect of the sessions decreased in proportion to the peer learning aspect over the course of the project."

   An unintended benefit of the peer learning component was that agencies began sharing information and resources in other areas of their work not directly related to developing cultural competence.

Challenges

More than one participant said that there could have been more clarity at the beginning of the project about particular aspects of the group meetings, such as whether sharing among participants should be focused on "technical" matters or on personal issues and feelings, and which staff should represent the agency at the meetings.

Suggestions for Future Projects

Community partners suggested that:

- Key conceptual resources (e.g., frameworks for addressing culture and difference) should be introduced sooner
- More time could be spent on learning and planning before implementing agency-specific plans. To accomplish this, participants suggested lengthening the time frame for the project to 18-24 months.

2. **Individual Consultation to Support Partner-Led Projects**

The second major aim of the project was to provide individualized consultation to community partners to support their efforts to increase the cultural competence of their organizations.

Successes

The participants felt the consultation they received from the PfC consultant provided strong guidance and support for the implementation of their projects. One participant commented, "I loved the consultant, I think she was great… She helped us with narrowing our focus… We did several projects with her." Another person said, "[The consultant's] skill was to break this huge idea into measurable chunks. You didn't feel open and vulnerable." More than one agency used their own funds to pay for additional consultation from the PfC consultant to work on activities supporting their cultural competency outcomes.

Desired outcomes were modified and refined during the course of the pilot project in response to shifting circumstances, information gleaned through needs assessments, and a more realistic sense of what could be achieved during the time frame (see Appendix for a list of each agency's original and revised outcomes). Information on the extent to which community partners were able to achieve their revised outcomes is based on:

- The PfC consultant's observations during site visits
- Participant report and feedback provided at group meetings, during conversations with the PfC consultant, and during focus groups and interviews

3. **Project Outcomes Achieved**

Several of the revised agency outcomes were achieved. For example:

- One agency increased the diversity of its staff by hiring two African American providers, added cultural competency to its training for all new employees, and established a mechanism for reviewing staff and client ethnicity data to identify areas for improvement (e.g., conducting increased outreach to specific populations)

- Another agency created a cultural competence plan for 2009 and began integrating cultural competence goals and perspectives into policies, procedures and practices for staff recruitment, hiring, orientation, management and performance evaluation.
- A third agency conducted an agency assessment of cultural competency, identified areas for improvement, developed guiding principles for working with diverse groups of people, and integrated cultural competence perspectives and objectives into case presentation and hiring procedures.

4. **Project Outcomes in Process or Unclear Results**

With some outcomes, agencies had begun to make important changes that would take more time to complete   With other outcomes, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the outcome was achieved given the nature of the outcome, e.g., create a safe environment to talk about race.   However, according to the PfC consultant, "in every case, the participating organizations made substantial progress in moving their cultural competence processes ahead."

Some of the factors identified by the PfC consultant that contributed to the agencies' progress include:
- An opportunity to build upon existing cultural competency efforts. "The selection of organizations that were already doing cultural competency work allowed the project to have an impact with limited resources. The program supported existing efforts rather than trying to catalyze efforts where none existed."
- Combination of group sessions and consultations with each partner. While both components of the project—peer support/learning and agency-specific consultation—were well-received by community partners, it was the combination of the two types of support that was felt to be especially valuable.

Challenges

While participants highly valued the consultation they received, a couple noted instances when they needed additional support, for example, in "translating" ideas and concepts into words that would be understood by staff members who had not received much training in cultural competence, or when staff discussions about cultural competency generated a lot of strong feelings.

Other challenges included:
- Changes in organizational staffing patterns (e.g., one community partner was unable to survey its clients to gather information on cultural competency due to staffing changes which left no one available to conduct the survey)
- Difficulty in implementing changes within the time frame given the complexities of the situation (e.g., in some cases, the organizations needed more time to address staff differences in perspective and build consensus around cultural competency)

Suggestions for Future Projects

Community partners suggested that:

- To avoid "opening up a can of worms" during staff discussions on cultural competency, an assessment of the "developmental readiness" of the organization for such work could be done first
- It would be helpful to have access to consultation services for another year or so after the group meetings have ended, to help sustain and expand on the changes that were made

SUMMARY

The results from the PfC pilot, which required a relatively small investment per agency, suggests that the model of combining peer learning and support with individual consultation to agencies is a potentially promising approach for supporting the development of cultural competence.

LESSONS LEARNED IN DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SERVICES

The PfC consultant identified several key lessons in developing culturally responsive services, based on her experiences with the PfC pilot and other projects. These included:

"**Collaborative communication and trust are essential for developing culturally** competent **programs and services**…. Several partners recognized the importance of communication and utilized their participation in the project for training on communication guidance and skills."

"**Leaders**hip plays a crucial role in modeling culturally competent communication and creating a climate for open communication…. Directors in several organizations modeled open communication by encouraging staff to give feedback during staff workshops or dialogues. They practiced and modeled non-defensive listening and learning from the perspectives of staff to create an environment of trust."

"Organization-wide engagement in an ongoing process is key for impact and sustainability…. One partner integrated cultural competence into all of the priority areas that came out of its strategic planning process. …they engaged all staff in training and discussion and conducted a special session so that managers and supervisors would be able to address cultural competency in their leadership roles. They emerged from the process with structures, plans and staff capacity to move the process forward."

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APPENDIX: AGENCY-SPECIFIC DESIRED OUTCOMES

Agency 1

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Complete an agency needs assessment 2. Develop a plan that aligns with the agency's three-year strategic plan 3. Develop an agency cultural competency/sensitivity policy 4. Provide training for all salaried staff by June 2008 5. Determine methods for improved staff recruitment and retention with an eye on diversity 6. Develop appropriate methods for collecting racial and ethnic demographic data on employees and clients 7. Increased family/community involvement in agency planning and development 8. Develop strategies to increase the Board's racial and cultural diversity, as well as leadership in this area	1. Develop agency statement of commitment to equity 2. Determine methods for improved staff recruitment and retention 3. Develop a cohesive senior management group to address issues of cultural competency. Develop an agency vision for cultural competency. 4. Develop guiding principles for cultural competency in our agency programs and services.

Agency 2

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Increase in staff's skills to operationalize cultural competency 2. Increase in the diversity of agency's governance, workforce and families served 3. Effective evaluation mechanism to measure the success of cultural competency efforts 4. Improvement to the quality of services and programs	1. Increase in staff's skills to operationalize cultural competency 2. Increase in diversity of agency's governance, workforce and families served 3. Increase in sustainable community partnerships 4. Effective evaluation mechanisms 5. Improvement to the quality of services

Agency 3

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Identify the key areas of growth (3 priority areas) 2. Develop a plan of action to address these key areas of growth (e.g., annual training and support plan for staff, interns, and volunteers, sharing of best practices with staff, interns, and volunteers) 3. Implement the plan and ensure that the plan and implementation are central to the strategic plan for 2009-14.	1. Integrate cultural competency into all strategic priorities 2. Build capacity of managers and supervisors to integrate cultural competency into work 3. Develop a guiding framework for the organization's work around cultural competency

Agency 4

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Action plans developed 2. Recruitment tools and plan in place 3. Training is institutionalized	1. Action plan developed 2. Recruitment tools and plan in place 3. Training is institutionalized

Agency 5

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Additional strategies will be identified to recruit and maintain a diverse staff 2. Strategies to implement more diverse leadership will be identified 3. Innovative approaches to socio-culturally-based service delivery will be developed 4. Strategies will be identified to help staff cope with strong feelings generated by discussions of race, class and culture	1. Recruit and maintain a diverse staff during a time of cutbacks 2. Create a safe environment to talk about race 3. Explore innovative approaches to socio-culturally based service delivery 4. Identify methods for staff to cope with strong feelings about discussions on race

Agency 6

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Strong agency leadership in the area of multilingualism/multiculturalism 2. Total agency commitment to action, not just in words, to cultural competence, with specific steps along the way identified 3. Agency has a stronger depth of understanding of race/class/gender cultural issues 4. Agency is stronger in terms of its hospitality toward and desire to be connected with our fellow human beings 5. Agency is stronger in terms of curiosity in, and integrity and commitment to, learning about each other for the sake of the small children we serve	1. Conduct agency assessment (staff, board, interns) 2. Develop guiding principles for working with diverse groups of people 3. Integrate cultural competency into case presentation 4. Integrate cultural competency into hiring procedures 5. Increase common language for supervision and training on working with diverse groups of people 6. Infuse all agency training with a diversity lens

Agency 7

Outcomes Identified in Proposal	Revised Outcomes
1. Creation of an internal staff space and process where teaching issues related to cultural diversity, competency and oppression are consistently shared and discussed, especially in relationship to the work that is pursued with underserved communities. 2. Create a 2008-09 strategic plan for the program that includes more intentional and targeted outreach to underserved communities in Alameda County, including the African American and Asian & Pacific Islander populations 3. Relationship building and cultivation with at least 3 other social service agencies participating in the PfC project.	1. Creation of an internal staff space and process to discuss diversity issues. Examine existing structures, process and practices and make recommendations for improving alignment to the mission of the organization (as it grows) as well as toward the goal of cultural competency. 2. Adapt guidelines for multicultural interactions and make a commitment to practicing them 3. Build capacity of leaders to model guidelines and accountability 4. Explore potential for increasing accountability and shared ownership of commitment to practices and mission of the organization 5. New strategic plan will reflect goals and direction aligned with the work begun herein 6. Strategic plan for the program will include targeted outreach 7. Relationship building and cultivation with at least 3 other social service agencies.