

Using Normative Change to Prevent Child Maltreatment: A Case Study

Robin Kimbrough-Melton, JD
Kempe Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect
University of Colorado School of Medicine

Strong Communities for Children

- Multi-year effort beginning in 2002 to enlist entire neighborhoods in two counties of northwestern South Carolina to increase the safety of children.
- Based on the recommendations of the U.S. Advisory Board on Child Abuse & Neglect (1990-1994) that child protection must be a part of everyday life to be effective in keeping children safe.
- Principal-driven strategy (not a program) to mobilize existing community resources with the goal of generating universal assistance to families of young children and support for families with greater need.

The Strategy

- Community engagement –outreach workers were the linchpin
- Universal assistance to *all* families with young children
 - Using existing voluntary resources
 - Some provided with donated professional time acting differently
 - Offered in easily accessible locations (e.g., faith communities, family resource centers, libraries, parks) where families feel comfortable
- Support to high need families
 - Supplementary support to families experiencing challenges

Overall Goal: Keeping Kids Safe

- Strong Communities is designed to promote *normative change* in perceptions, beliefs, and behavior
 - Caring (e.g., attentiveness, neighborliness)
 - Inclusion (universality of access to family support)
 - Optimism
 - Action

Operationalizing the Vision

- People should be able to get help where they are, when they need it, with ease and without stigma
- Families shouldn't have to become *patients, clients,* or, worst of all, *cases* in order to receive help
- **PEOPLE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO ASK**
- Leave no family outside



What did we think would happen if norms changed?

- Communities would recognize and accept their responsibility for Keeping Kids Safe
- Community resident and organizations would engage in supporting families with young children
- Community members would feel that their community was safer
- Parents of young children would accept help and give help to others
- Parents would feel a stronger sense of efficacy in their parenting responsibilities

How did we do it?

- Spreading the word
- Mobilizing the community to become engaged
- Increasing the resources for families to obtain non-stigmatizing help whenever and wherever they need it
- Institutionalizing the provision of resources so that support is sustained over the long term



Spreading the Word Among Community Leaders and Residents

Two primary goals...

- Build an understanding of the nature of the problem and, with that understanding, a sense of perceived responsibility among community members to Keep Kids Safe
- Create a “buzz” in the service area as the first step in creation of new behavioral norms

Mobilizing the Community

- Primary Goals: Obtain commitments for involvement by organizations
- Implementation of Activities
 - Were tailored to the neighborhood or community
 - Utilized existing resources in the community
 - Were aimed at building connections among parents with young children
 - Were culturally sensitive
- Campaigns: Designed to reinforce the message; to build understanding

Increasing Resources

Goals:

- Implement universal services using community organizations and residents
- Enlist participation of families with young children in universal services

Strong Families:

- *All* families with children 6 years old and younger are encouraged to *join*
- Enrollment usually occurs at points of universal access; e.g.,
 - Initial well child visit
 - Enrollment in kindergarten
 - Attendance at a festival or community recreational event for families
- Community gatekeepers (e.g., real estate agents) are also encouraged to enroll families

Institutionalizing Resources

- Goal: to “routinize” changes in norms and structures
- Examples of change
 - Enhanced pediatric well care as a means of facilitating family support
 - Development of a Latino community center that served as a gathering place for families

The Results

- Extraordinary level of community engagement and volunteer development: hundreds of community organizations and thousands of volunteers
- Fewer founded reports of child maltreatment
 - For children aged 2 and under, 11% decrease in service area and 85% increase in comparison communities
 - For children aged 4 and under, 41% decrease in the service area and 49% increase in the comparison communities
- Fewer emergency room visits and hospitalization for injuries to children
 - For injuries related to neglect, 68% decrease in service area compared to a 19% decrease in comparison communities
 - For maltreatment-related injuries of children aged 2 and under, 23% decrease in the service area and 6% decrease in comparison communities
 - For maltreatment-related injuries of children aged 4 and under, 38% decrease in the service area and 13% decrease in the comparison communities

The Results

- Surveys of teachers, parents, and children: greater safety to and from school; more welcoming atmosphere for parents
- Surveys of parents: less parental stress; greater social support; more frequent help from others; greater collective efficacy; greater parental efficacy; more frequent nurturing behavior; more frequent use of household safety devices; less frequent disengaged (inattentive) parental behavior; less frequent neglect

For more information:

Robin.Kimbrough-Melton@ucdenver.edu