

The Erie County Policy & Planning Council for Children and Families:

A Decade of Contributions



MERCYHURST COLLEGE
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Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families

MISSION

The Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families (PPC) is a county wide collaborative where members share information and work together to promote a flourishing, asset rich community. The PPC supports sound decision making and research-based programs providing opportunities for youth and families to grow and thrive.

HISTORY

In the early 1990s a variety of factors converged to focus the attention of the Erie community on the plight of some of our children and families. Research conducted by the Erie County Office of Children and Youth and the Mercyhurst College Civic Institute identified that Erie County ranked 66 out of 67 Pennsylvania counties in births to single teens (higher rankings indicate more serious problems). Erie ranked 65th in delinquency placements, 63rd in children in single parent homes as well as 63rd in children receiving welfare. The situation for minority children in the City of Erie was even worse. In 1992 the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) issued a report on poverty among children in the nation's 200 cities with a population of 100,000 or more. According to that report, the City of Erie had the worst poverty rates in the nation for Black children (62%) and Hispanic children (69%). These reports served as a call for action. As a result, the Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families (PPC) was established on September 11, 1996 by Erie County Resolution #44. The Council was initiated by the Erie County Office of Children and Youth as an attempt to provide comprehensive planning on important issues facing families and children in Erie County. Over 60 community human service leaders and community representatives, including grass roots leaders, non-profit organizations, government agencies, consumers of service, and educators are represented on the Council. This collaborative effort, which had its origins with the State's Communities that Care and Family Service System Reform initiatives, coordinates a wide variety of projects within the Erie community.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Over a decade after being established the PPC has made significant inroads in improving the lives of children and families in Erie County through grants, initiatives, and programs they have developed and/or supported within the community.

The Council has brought in over \$5.1 million in grant funds to Erie County under Communities That Care, Family Service System Reform, Juvenile Accountability Incentive Block Grants, and Violence Prevention and Research-Based Programming Grants over the past decade. The programming and processes established through that funding have serviced countless children and families in Erie County. Much of the work of the PPC is conducted through committees. The purpose and activities of the committees are outlined below in addition to the programs which have been implemented through the PPC.

COMMITTEES

Healthy Youth Development (HYD)

Healthy Youth Development (HYD) of Erie County is a committee of the PPC that has grown into a county-wide



collaborative that utilizes the 40 Developmental Assets framework. The Assets framework consists of preventative measures, positive experiences and personal qualities that young people need for growing up to be healthy, caring, and responsible persons. The mission of HYD is to activate communities to create healthy, caring and responsible individuals by promoting developmental assets, the building blocks of healthy youth development.

HYD is comprised of an executive committee, advisory board, and several task forces, including Parents, Religious Institutions, Media, Schools/Risky Behaviors, Youth Development Organizations and a Youth Board. Presently, there are over 90 agencies and community representatives serving on the HYD Advisory Board and its task forces.

Initially, this collaborative was established to reduce teen pregnancy in Erie County, but eventually adopted a more holistic approach to the problem by focusing on healthy youth development through adoption of the 40 Developmental Assets approach.

HYD is working to mobilize communities and people from all aspects in Erie County to participate in positive youth development and to implement the 40 Developmental Assets approach. Currently, there are two primary sites of intensive interest: Union City, which encompasses the community of Union City; and Central City East, which encompasses The Booker T. Washington Center and surrounding area. More sites will be added through the coming years.

The HYD Committee has been engaged in a number of activities in Erie County. The Positive Passions Youth Media Challenge has been offered annually with different themes, challenging youth to develop healthy youth messages for public distribution. HYD also has embarked upon a campaign to promote awareness of youth activities throughout Erie County by launching the www.youtherie.com website. HYD continues with these projects in Erie County to increase the awareness of the language and meaning of the developmental assets.

Parent and Provider Partnership (Formerly the Integrated Children's Service Plan Committee)

The Parent and Provider Partnership (PPP) Committee was established in order to promote parent and consumer voice in service delivery and development. The committee has established three primary points of focus: education/training, mentoring/advocacy, and service improvement. The first step in addressing those issues was taken in 2007 when the committee brought the Parents as Presenters training to Erie County parents and consumers. This training provided an opportunity for parents and consumers to learn from one another and practice effectively sharing their stories of receiving services with the anticipation of presenting their stories to future service providers at local colleges, as well as through trainings to existing service provider agency staff. A coordinator was identified to handle presentation requests as well as to oversee ongoing training for parents. Since the initial Parents as Presenters training in May of 2007, the parent presenters in Erie County have provided training and information at over nineteen events, including eight college classes.

Community Planning Committee

The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, among other state entities, look to local collaboratives to assure grant endeavors are addressing the true needs within communities. As noted early in the report, the PPC has supported grants received in Erie County totaling over \$5 million, money that may not have come here if not for local collaboration. Another such way funds are attracted to Erie County is through ongoing community planning.

The Community Planning Committee was developed in Spring 2006 as a Ad Hoc Committee for the PPC and was formally created as a standing committee for the PPC in the Fall of 2007. The charge of this work group was to collect and analyze county data on youth risk and protective factors and prioritize them for the implementation of prevention programs. Data was collected on adolescent youth problem behaviors such as; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use (ATOD), signs of depression, gambling and bullying while additional data was collected on protective factors such as pro-social activities, family support, and positive rewards for positive behavior. This risk-focused approach is part of the Communities That Care prevention planning model and is one component of the CTC process that includes:



1. Development of a Community Prevention Board made of key leaders that represent the community or county (which is the Erie County Policy & Planning Council for Children and Families).
2. Collection of data on risk and protective factors for youth (Pennsylvania Youth Survey).
3. Analyze data and list the priority risk and protective factors for youth.
4. Implement evidence-based prevention programs that reduce risk and raise protective factors in youth at the school, community, family and individual levels.
5. Expand existing prevention efforts that have shown promising outcomes for youth in Erie County.
6. Identify gaps in services and programs that reduce adolescent risk factors.
7. Evaluate program outcomes for success and possible expansion efforts.

The Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) is the assessment instrument for the community planning process and was administered in Erie County in 2005 and 2007. The Erie County Department of Health, under the supervision of Charlotte Berringer and Valerie Bukowski, initiated the Pennsylvania Youth Survey (PAYS) in four school districts countywide in 2005 making it the first time in Erie County history that the PAYS survey was utilized as a data indicator instrument as part of an assessment.

The Community Planning Committee reviewed the PAYS results of 2005 and identified the following that were elevated in Erie County when compared to state and peer county averages:

- *Poor Family Discipline*
- *Transitions and Mobility*
- *Family History of Anti-Social Behavior*
- *Favorable Parental Attitudes & Involvement in the Problem Behavior*
- *Early & Persistent Anti-Social Behavior*

The Mercyhurst College Civic Institute received a \$35,000 grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency on behalf of the PPC to promote Erie County participation in the 2007 PAYS in order to begin establishing trend data pertaining to youth behaviors. Nine school districts in Erie County participated in the 2007 PAYS with an anticipated 5,000 students completing the survey. The results from the survey are anticipated to be released late spring of 2008. The Community Planning Committee is currently waiting on the results of the 2007 PAYS survey to analyze data and look at trends in youth behaviors that need addressed for prevention planning throughout the county.

The Community Planning Committee is comprised of key leaders and citizens throughout Erie County who have a vested interest in the future of our youth. The committee receives support from many local and state agencies including; the Erie County Department of Health, Mercyhurst College Civic Institute, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency (PCCD) and the Center for Juvenile Justice Training & Research (CJJTR).

SUPPORTED GRANTS & PROGRAMS

Delinquency Prevention Program (DPP)

The **Delinquency Prevention Program (DPP)** is a program through Perseus House that began in 1995 at Edison Elementary School. Delinquency Prevention Program staff work with students in kindergarten through tenth grade to help teach anger management, build positive social skills and improve moral reasoning. The program is currently operating in Central High School/Alternative Education Program Transition School and Wilson Middle School. Edison Elementary, the initial implementation site, now reports zero incidents of in-school violence and recently received recognition as a Blue Ribbon School in 2007 which honors schools for academic superiority or dramatic gains in student achievement. Since its implementation, the DPP program estimates having serviced over 7,500 students since 1995. Ongoing evaluation of the program has identified an increase in grade point average, decrease in truancy, and a decrease in referrals for disciplinary action of participating youth.



Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS)

In 1998, a state grant was obtained from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime & Delinquency by the DPP Program for Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS). This evidence-based curriculum was implemented in grades K-4 at Edison Elementary School as a pilot project. PATHS is one of eleven Blueprint Programs identified by the Center for the Study of the Prevention of Violence (CSPV) at the University of Colorado and has been shown to improve protective factors and reduce behavioral risk factors in youth. Evaluations between program youth (regular education, special needs, and deaf) and a control group have demonstrated significant improvements for those in the program in the following areas:

- Improved self-control,
- Improved understanding and recognition of emotions,
- Increased ability to tolerate frustration,
- Use of more effective conflict-resolution strategies,
- Improved thinking and planning skills,
- Decreased anxiety/depressive symptoms (teacher report of special needs students),
- Decreased conduct problems (teacher report of special needs students),
- Decreased symptoms of sadness and depression (child report-special needs),
- Decreased report of conduct problems, including aggression (child report).

The PATHS program is currently operating in three schools in the City of Erie School District serving over 500 students in grades K-6. PATHS is staffed and supervised by personnel from Perseus House, Inc. Program components are being monitored for program fidelity and participant outcomes.

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)

The **Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP)** was initiated in Erie County in late 1999 as a result of the PPC identification of the strong community need for juvenile delinquency prevention options in Erie County. The Erie County Health Department, with major support from the Mercyhurst College Civic Institute and members of the PPC, submitted a proposal to the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency for funding for Nurse-Family Partnership. It was funded by PCCD for the first 4 years, with matching funds in years 3 & 4 provided by the Erie Office of Children and Youth. Subsequent funding has been a combination of Erie County Health Department, Erie Office of Children and Youth, HRSA and the Pennsylvania Dept of Public Welfare.

NFP is an evidence-based program of home visitation where nurses work with low-income, first-time mothers during pregnancy and the first two years of the child's life to accomplish three goals:

- **Improve pregnancy outcomes** by helping women improve their health-related behaviors including reducing use of cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal drugs;
- **Improve child health and development** by helping parents provide more responsible and competent care for their children; and
- **Improve families' economic self-sufficiency** by helping parents develop a vision for their own future, plan future pregnancies, continue their education, find work, and, when appropriate, strengthen partner relationships.

Registered nurses each carry a maximum caseload of 25 families. Visits start during the second trimester of pregnancy and continue until the child is 2 years old. Visits are made anywhere from weekly to every other week to once a month depending on the needs of the client and the length of client's time in the program. Nurse home visitors follow visit-by visit guidelines which provide a comprehensive structure for working with families, focusing on 6 domains of content: personal health, environmental health, quality of care giving for the child, maternal life course development, family and friend support, and health and human service utilization. NFP has a documented track record of:



- Improving pregnancies thru such indicators as reducing cigarette use during pregnancy and the number of high blood pressure disorders
- Reducing children's health care encounters for injuries
- Fewer unintended 2nd pregnancies and increases in interval between 1st & 2nd births
- Increases in marriage, the women's school/job training achievements and employment
- Reducing families' use of cash assistance and food stamps
- Increases in children's school readiness by demonstrating improvements in language, attention and intelligence.
- Reductions in child abuse and neglect
- Reduction in mom's behavioral problems due to their use of D &/or A
- Fewer arrests among mothers
- Fewer arrests and convictions among the 15 year old adolescents
- Fewer sexual partners among the 15 yr old adolescents
- Fewer cigarettes smoked and fewer days consuming alcohol among the 15 yr olds
- \$5.70 returned for every dollar invested-RAND study 2005

Since NFP's implementation, over 480 families have been served. Ninety-eight of those families stayed with the program for 2 ½ years until graduation.

Parent Child Home Program (PCHP)

The Erie County Policy and Planning Council was the convening entity to coordinate and collaborate the planning and development of the Parent Child Home Program (PCHP) in Erie County, achieving implementation of the program in January 2000. Since its inception with a six-month pilot project intended to serve 20 families, the program has grown to accept 65 children ages 2-4 annually, benefiting nearly 500 children and their families.

Coordinated through the Erie Family Center, the Parent Child Home Program continues as a collaborative effort with referral agreements involving the Union City Family Center, Erie County Department of Health, Head Start, Erie Homes for Children and Adults, and the Mercyhurst Civic Institute.

PCHP promotes early literacy, school readiness, and increased family stability through home-based lessons intended to increase the verbal interaction between parent and child. Families are asked to make a 2-year commitment to the program, beginning when the child is two years old. Along with Parents As Teachers, the Parent Child Home Program is proven effective through long-term research and is among the “Programs That Work” identified through the US Department of Education. The two early childhood development programs, in cooperation with the Erie County Nurse Family Partnership, provide a seamless continuum of early interventions that begins at birth and is based on best practices.

Olweus Bullying Program

The Erie School District was awarded a PCCD grant in 2004 to implement the Blueprint Program, the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program is a school-wide, comprehensive program intended for use at all school levels with the goals of reducing and preventing problems associated with bullying and peer relationships at school.

In December of 2005, the first school (Edison Elementary, with 250 students participating) took the bullying/victim survey to assess the issue within the school. Since that time, the Edison Bullying Prevention Committee has been working with the program and following up with a survey each year. The survey results have been able to provide them information for strategic approaches to address the bullying issue.

To date over 70 staff persons have been trained for seven schools (Edison, Jefferson, Wilson, Pfeiffer-Burleigh, McKinley, Diehl & Emerson-Gridley). More than 2,000 students have been surveyed and that number will continue to



increase with follow-up surveys. The grant has enabled the schools to acquire all of the required materials to successfully implement the program with fidelity to the model.

There are plans to develop a district wide bullying prevention team that will assist in the coordination and planning of Bullying Prevention initiatives. Currently there are two initiatives that may impact upon the program. In the state of Pennsylvania, legislation is being considered regarding bullying in schools and High Mark Blue Cross/Blue Shield is supporting efforts to decrease bullying behavior in Northwestern Pennsylvania.

Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)

Through the support of the PPC, Family Services of Northwestern Pennsylvania received a four-year grant totaling **\$638,740** in 2007 from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency to implement **Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT)**. TF-CBT is based on the SAMHSA model treatment program of the same name developed by Drs. Judith Cohen and Anthony Mannarino of the Allegheny General Hospital Center for Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents in Pittsburgh, PA and Dr. Esther Deblinger of the New Jersey CARES Institute-University of Medicine and Dentistry New Jersey. TF-CBT is designed to help children, adolescents, and their families overcome the many difficulties associated with abuse and trauma. Research has identified that many of the teens involved in the juvenile justice system are trauma survivors who have not been treated or who have been unsuccessfully treated. Survivors of childhood trauma often experience posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and behavior problems. Trauma is also associated with subsequent drug and alcohol abuse.

The primary goals of the proposed program are to (1) identify and screen children in general clinical populations for trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms (2) reduce the symptoms of trauma and related behavior problems (PTSD, anti-social behavior, depression, etc.), and (3) assist caregivers to improve their own levels of depression and emotional distress about their children's trauma, learn to support the child, and develop effective parenting practices.

Multi-Dimensional Treatment Fostercare (MTFC)

Harborcreek Youth Services with the support of the PPC received a four-year grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency in 2007 totaling **\$670,000** to implement **Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC)**. MTFC is an evidence-based program that addresses the needs of severely delinquent youth with serious behavioral health needs for whom in-home therapy is not an option. Youth are placed individually in a family setting for six to nine months, during which they are closely supervised and are taught the skills they need to build constructive relationships with positive-influencing peers. While the youth are in placement, therapists work with the adolescents' biological parents to resolve any issues that may have contributed to the delinquency. Harborcreek Youth Services is in the early stages of program implementation and hopes to accept its first foster clients early next year.

THE FAMILY CENTERS

The Erie Family Center

Although every Family Center is unique to the community it serves, the Erie Family Center and the Union City Family Center share resources and collaborate to strengthen families throughout Erie County, coordinating referrals to assure access to the Parents As Teachers and Parent Child Home Program home visitation services, and the Foundations of Fatherhood support groups to families in the urban and rural areas of Erie County.

The Erie Family Center, implemented in Erie County in December 1994 as a Family Service System Reform initiative, is one of 48 state-funded Family Centers that began in the early '90s as a unique collaboration of the Pennsylvania Departments of Education, Health, and Public Welfare. Under the umbrella of parent involvement and family support services of the School District of the City of Erie, the Erie Family Center supports over 500 local



families annually with a variety of services, improving outcomes each year for approximately 700 children, beginning at birth and continuing into the children's school age years.

The core service of all Family Centers is the Parents As Teachers home visitation and child development program, a research-based program that is proven effective in improving educational achievement scores and promoting positive behaviors in children. Parents As Teachers is also cited by the US Department of Education, Center for Substance Prevention, and in a 2005 RAND report on effective early childhood interventions as a Program That Works to prevent child abuse, reduce childhood injuries, and improve children's health. Since its inception in 1994, the Erie Family Center has provided Parents As Teachers services to well over 1000 families throughout Erie County.

In addition to Parents As Teachers, the Erie Family Center offers the Parent Child Home Program, parent skills training at a number of community sites, a wide range of educational and support services through the Fatherhood Initiative, a resource library for families, parent stress reduction activities, a computer lab for use by families, seasonal family fun activities, immunization clinics, services to bilingual, Spanish-speaking families, and has most recently implemented two preschool classrooms through the PA Pre-K Counts Initiative. Through other partnerships within the school district and the community, an on-site drug and alcohol specialist and a licensed behavioral health specialist also serve the needs of families enrolled at the center.

As a “one stop” support system for parents, the Erie Family Center goals for all families are to:

- Encourage economic self-sufficiency for families through adult education, training, and employment.
- Assure the healthy development and access to healthcare services for children.
- Promote positive development through effective parenting, early intervention and outreach activities.
- Support and preserve the family unit as the children's foundation for success.
- Provide a seamless, comprehensive, and easily accessed network of services for children.

Union City Family Support Center

The Union City Family Support Center provides social and educational services with the goal of empowering families to help themselves. The Center integrates and provides effective community services to help families and their children become healthy, well educated, safe, and economically independent. Services include the Parents as Teachers program, the Parent Child Home Program, and a variety of center-based programs including referrals to other local agencies and social services. The Center has a Human Resources Coordinator that utilizes the Compass Computer Program to process Department of Public Welfare and energy assistance applications online. The Center offers financial literacy programs, parenting classes, kinship support groups, bereavement groups, teen parent programs, the Kids Café and a Community Closet to meet the needs of families and children in Southeast Erie County. The Center also offers community resources in the One-Stop-Shopping for Human Services. The community has access to Family Services, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, J. Randall Peters Counseling, Erie County Office of Children and Youth, the Fatherhood Initiative, St. Benedict Education Center and Adagio Health's Power Up - Eat Right Program.



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