

Partnerships for Success



"An initiative of the Geauga Family First Council"

Needs Assessment Report Work Group I Gauga County, Ohio

Table of Contents

Collaborating Partners and Participants.....	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction.....	6
Research and Data Collection.....	8
Risk and Protective Factors for Identified Targeted Impacts.....	10
Targeted Impact: Decreasing Substance Abuse	12
Targeted Impact: Enhancing Emotional and Mental Health Development	15
Targeted Impact: Barriers to School Success	18
Targeted Impact: Delinquency	20
Targeted Impact: Teen Pregnancy	21
Targeted Impact: Violence.....	23

Partnerships for Success - Geauga County, Ohio Needs Assessment Report

Collaborating Partners and Participants

➤ **Geauga Family First Council President: Betsy Griffin**

Jim Adams, Vice President	Gary Fusco	Terri McIntee-Larenas	Michele Schroeder
Craig Albert	Matt Galemmo	DeAnna Moore	Karen Simpson
Ella Banks-Fuggs	Jane Hayman	Alison Nakanishi	Tim Taylor
Helen Drake	Laura Hopkins	Deborah O'Connor	Bob Weisdack

➤ **Work Group I (WGI) Chairman: Karen Lackey**

Ann Bagley	Christie Chicotel	Dan Itschner	DeAnna Moore
Martie Ballish	Patricia Cooper	Karen Lackey	Linda Toth
Bob Ballish	Kevin Giguere	Dave Lubecky	Linda Stone
Amy Buresch	Sharon Holmes	Linda Miller	Carol Varga

➤ **Participants/resource advisors at WGI meetings:**

Mary Alice Bell	Sharon Knotek	Beth Matthews	Michele Schroeder
Melanie Blasko	Leslie Linsky	Alison Nakanishi	Linda Stone
Vicki Clark	Dave Lubecky	Tom Royer	

➤ **Work Group II (WGII) Co-Chairman: Teresa Morris, Sheila Heller**

Gail Bundy	Tami Setlock	Pamela Weisel
Ruth Carlton	Sandra Sibley	Brad Welch
Gina Schultz	Thomas Stone	Susan Zettl

➤ **Work Group III (WGIII) Co-Chairman: Lee Imhof, Tim Taylor**

Betsy Griffin	Beth Matthews	Jane Neubauer	Dave Stang
Lynn Kempf	James Millet	John O'Donnell	Barbara Wallace
Karen Lackey	Teresa Morris	Joanne Randall	

➤ **Planning Team Members Chairman: Bill Repke**

Jim Adams	April Kallay	Keith Melugin	Karen Simpson
Betsy Griffin	Karen Lackey	Teresa Morris	
Sheila Heller	Dan McClelland	Kathy Mrsnik	

➤ **Advisory Members:**

Wendy Bartolovich	Matt Galemmo	Jeff Mendrala	Michele Schroeder
Vicki Clark	Susan Hallums	Allison Nakanishi	Mark Simone
David Cseplo	Amy Harker	Alicia Paulsey	Doug Yoder
Matt Dolan	Jeff Lox	Barbara Rakes	Ruth Zollinger
Susan Dupstadt	Terri McIntee-Larenas	Mary Samide	

➤ **Geauga Community Impact: Kimm Leininger, Project Director; William Conway, Chairman; Ruth Zollinger, Vice-Chairman; Marlene Stoiber, Project Consultant**

➤ **School District Liaisons:**

Amy Harker	Dan Itschner	Kathy Mrsnik	Linda Stone
Robert Hunt	James Millet	Alicia Paulsey	Thomas Stone

PfS Project Coordinator: KC Henry

Geauga Family First Council Coordinator: Nancy Seelbach

PfS Academy Resource Development Coordinator/Geauga County Advisor:

Erin Galloway



"An initiative of the Geauga Family First Council"

Executive Summary

Partnerships for Success – Geauga County, Ohio

Needs Assessment Report from Work Group I

March, 2005

In July 2004 Geauga County's Family First Council received a state grant to implement a progressive initiative titled *Partnerships for Success* to address the needs of Geauga youth. Partnerships for Success (PFS) is comprised of four stages of work over a two-year period. The model followed in this process includes: 1) Identifying youth issues and needs – tasked to WGI; 2) Assessing existing youth resources in the county – tasked to Work Group II; 3) Establishing an aggressive plan addressing the identified service gaps – tasked to Work Group III; and 4) Implementing the completed plan throughout the second year.

The Needs Assessment WGI began meeting in December 2004 to begin the first step in the PFS process – collecting information about current trends and problem behaviors as they relate to six potential **Targeted Impacts**. Potential Targeted Impacts are identified issues that seriously affect the healthy development of a community's youth, and that instill communities with a sense of urgency for change, such as: **reducing delinquency, enhancing emotional and mental health development, reducing teen pregnancy and/or related issues, reducing violence, reducing substance abuse and reducing barriers to school success.**

WGI developed a data-informed profile of these Targeted Impacts and then identified significant factors (Risk Factors and Protective Factors) of influence related to them. The Needs Assessment conclusions are based on a thorough review of input obtained from Geauga families, youth, professionals, advocates and leaders through research, surveys, interviews and focus groups, and statistical data.

This systematic needs assessment process determined that although all the targeted impacts are perceived by the community as important, the most pressing needs identified at this time are:

1. (Tie) Reduce Substance Abuse

Enhance Emotional and Mental Health Development

2. Remove Barriers to School Success

Next steps – not ranked in priority order:

Reduce Juvenile Delinquency

Reduce Teen Pregnancy

Reduce Violence

From our needs assessment it is clear that many children who are having significant problems with school success also have issues closely related to emotional and mental health development and/or substance abuse. It is believed that by addressing the two priority impacts, **Barriers to School Success** will be impacted. Because PfS is an on-going process it is planned that **Reducing Delinquency, Reducing Teen Pregnancy and Reducing Violence** will be addressed as “Next Steps” as PfS evolves.

However, for the remaining fifteen months of this state grant, **Reducing Substance Abuse and Enhancing Emotional and Mental Health Development** will be the focus of PfS in Geauga County. These issues surfaced as the priority concern of community members and professionals. The statistical data collected showed alarmingly negative trends regarding emotional and mental health of our youth and issues relating to substance abuse. WGI also found nearly unanimous agreement among the youth, parents, professionals and community members who were approached that emotional and mental health development and substance abuse often go hand in hand. With this in mind it was determined that these two Targeted Impacts should be combined.

The next step in the assessment process was to identify the **Risk and Protective Factors** that are affecting the health and development of our children in the identified areas. **Risk Factors** are those elements within an individual or community which are associated with elevated levels of problem behavior. **Protective factors** are those elements within an individual or community that serve as buffers against risk and enhance positive youth development. WGI’s systematic review also determined which protective factors appear to be specific to our communities and to the present generation of youth. These are the common themes that were identified:

Family: Family proved the most important theme identified. Families have a major positive impact on a youth’s development when they provide:

- a stable, caring environment,
- an adult influence that is available and effectively encourages and models appropriate behavior, standards and values,
- and strong support of children’s involvement in school (places strong value on education) and after-school activities.

For the purpose of the PfS process, we want the definition of family to be as inclusive as necessary to most accurately reflect the supports/resources needed to raise a child. This could include one or two parents, extended family, foster and adoptive parents, etc.

Constructive use of time: Constructive and positive use of time by youth , i.e. developing hobbies, special interests, volunteer opportunities, and activities they care about significantly impacts their well-being.

Adult support: An adult who is close to, regularly involved with, and expresses an interest in a child tremendously influences his/her well-being.

Resilience: A child who has developed strong coping skills, who feels empowered and who has developed a set of positive personal values has the resilience to adjust to a wide variety of risk factors.

Most importantly, the community perception is that most of the identified Targeted Impacts are interrelated. Each Impact is seen to happen along with, or as a result of, other Targeted Impacts. The cause, effects and results are difficult to separate. It is very significant that the above Protective Factor trends are nearly universal to all the Targeted Impacts affecting Geauga youth. The PfS focus on these trends will enhance the overall development and health of our children.

The presence or lack of a healthy, involved and caring family was consistently identified as a primary risk/protective related factor with *every* Targeted Impact. It is very evident that strengthening positive family influence, or when that is not possible, replacing it with factors that would offer similar protective influence, should be a primary focus in the remainder of the PfS Initiative.

This needs assessment phase of the PfS process identifies a direction and focus for action planning over the next fifteen months. The PfS team also acknowledges that it is apparent that many extremely important issues related to the healthy development of our youth exist. At this time PfS is attempting to identify the one direction and focus that most concerns our community and significantly affects our youth. Many other issues exist that should ideally be addressed simultaneously. The PfS team also enthusiastically acknowledges the caring and responsive support and service network in our community that is already capably addressing so many youth issues, and encourages the community to support these services in every possible way to ensure their success.



"An initiative of the Geauga Family First Council"

Introduction

In 1998, Ohio was chosen as one of five original participants in the United States Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders Initiative. Comprehensive Strategy used a process focusing on community mobilization, assessment, and planning that proved to have enormous potential. The early successes of the **Ohio Comprehensive Strategy** counties led state leaders to invest in the development of a new generation model, **Partnerships for Success (PFS)**, sponsored by the **Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council**.

Partnerships for Success is a holistic and strategic approach to building a community's capacity to prevent and respond effectively to child and adolescent problem behaviors while promoting positive youth development. Communities implementing the PFS model learn to effectively mobilize and focus their efforts on identifying the risks affecting children and youth in their community and the protection and assets necessary to successfully transition these children and youth into adults who are able to lead productive lives.

Helping Ohio's children succeed in life and in school is the focus of the **Ohio Partnerships for Success Academy**, created as part of the Center for Learning Excellence at The Ohio State University. The Center received the contract to operate the Academy in support of the new **Ohio Family and Children First Partnerships for Success Initiative**.

The PFS Academy helps counties assess the risk factors that affect their children as well as the strengths and assets that help them succeed. All counties receive support from the PFS Academy as they work with public and nonprofit partners and community families to make the biggest impact possible for local children.

Principles for the PFS Success Initiative:

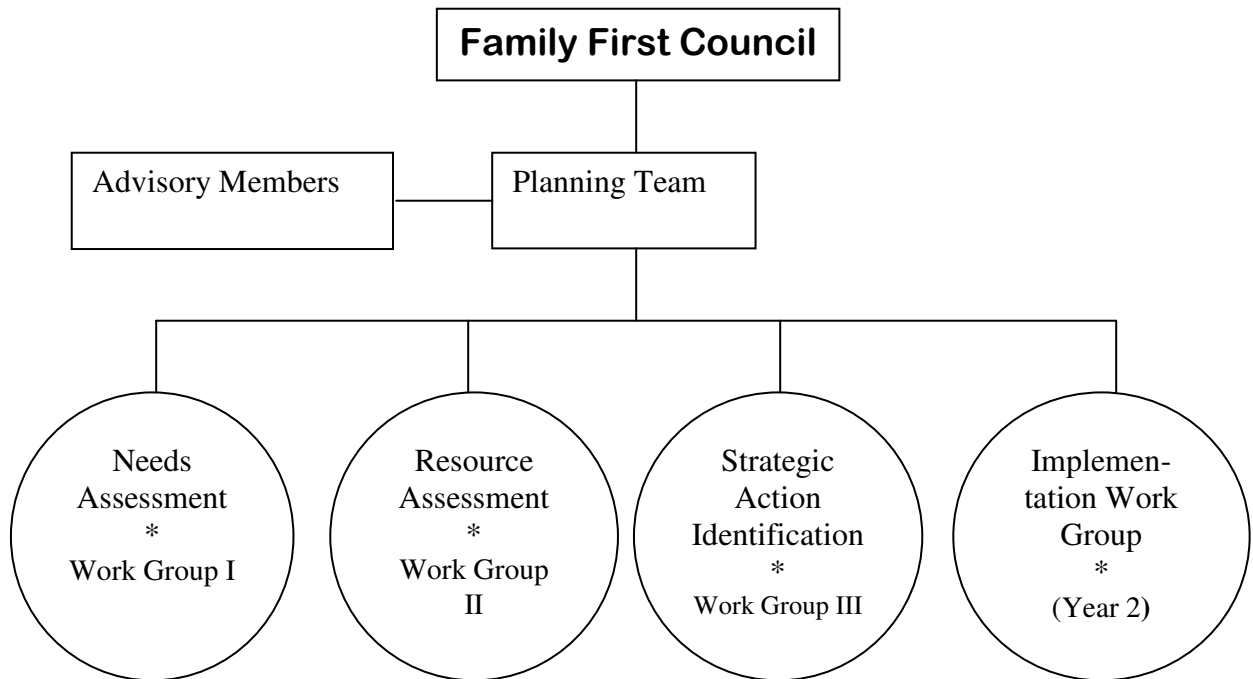
- **Involve the whole community.**
- **Plan all PFS activities around informative data.**
- **Give attention to both risk and protective factors in PFS planning.**
- **Consider evidence and feasibility in PFS decision making.**
- **Develop and enhance a comprehensive continuum of services and activities.**
- **Specify outcomes and the approach to be used in evaluation.**

In July of 2004, Geauga County was selected as one of five counties to receive a two-year FY 2005-2006 Partnerships for Success (PFS) grant. This funding was to be used by a collaboration of agencies and organizations to assess the community and produce a strategic plan for Geauga County by June 30, 2005. The plan will then be implemented

the following year with additional funding that is provided to execute and evaluate programs included in the plan.

Work Groups and Responsibilities

- 1) **Needs Assessment Work Group** (WGI) is charged with developing a profile of the needs of children and adolescents within the community. This group makes recommendations about the Targeted Impacts, Risk Factors and Protective Factors that should be addressed based on relevant data and existing community values.
- 2) **Resource Assessment Work Group** (WGII) is charged with developing a profile of all of the organizations, programs, and activities dedicated to youth development in the community relative to the selected Targeted Impacts. This work group also must summarize this information in a manner that facilitates the identification of gaps between community needs and available community resources.
- 3) **Strategic Action Identification Work Group** (WGIII) is responsible for comparing the community needs with the available community resources, identifying gaps in services, developing recommendations for addressing those gaps, and drafting the PfS Strategic Plan.



"An initiative of the Geauga Family First Council"

Research and Data Collection

The first step in the process of the Geauga County PfS Initiative was to collect information about current trends and problem behaviors in Geauga County as they related to six potential Targeted Impacts. **Potential Targeted Impacts** are identified issues that seriously affect the healthy development of a community's youth and instill communities with a sense of urgency for change.

Targeted Impacts:

Enhance Emotional & Mental Health Development - Suicide, depression, self-injury, and other issues such as stress, aggressive behavior, and self-control or coping problems that may lead to the more serious conditions (diagnosed or undiagnosed).

Remove Barriers to School Success - Issues related to safety in school, parent involvement, reading skills, bullying and school resources.

Reduce Substance Abuse - Issues related to use of alcohol, drugs (illegal or prescription abuse), inhalants, or other gateway substances such as tobacco and caffeine overuse.

Reduce Juvenile Delinquency - Law breaking that results in Juvenile Court appearance, such as theft, unruly behavior, assault.

Reduce Teen Pregnancy or Related Sexuality Issues - Issues and behaviors that lead to sexually transmitted diseases and/or pregnancy.

Reduce Youth Violence - Issues related to gang violence, fighting, bullying, child abuse and date rape.

Over the course of three months, from December 2004 to February 2005, the **Needs Assessment Work Group (WGI)** worked to obtain local, state and national data on the six potential Targeted Impacts. This information was analyzed, the Impacts prioritized, and WGI recommended the selection of two Targeted Impacts as the PfS focus for the remainder of the two-year grant cycle.

The Targeted Impacts were assessed in several ways.

- A community-wide survey has been conducted in every school district in our county for 6th – 12th graders. The survey, **Communities That Care**, will provide significant, reliable results that will shed clarity on many aspects of youth needs in Geauga. The results will not be available until April 2005, but will be carefully reviewed by the entire PfS team and will impact PfS future planning and direction. This survey was jointly funded by a federal grant through Lake-Geauga Center on Alcoholism and funding from the Geauga Board of Mental Health & Recovery Services, Geauga Family First Council and The Geauga County Educational Service Center.

- A county-wide **household survey** was conducted and analyzed by Geauga Community Impact (GCI). GCI partners include United Way Services of Geauga County, Geauga County Board of Mental Health and Recovery Services, Geauga County Department of Aging, Geauga County Family First Council and Geauga County Job and Family Services. These organizations have joined together, obtaining the services of a research consultant, to assess community needs and to develop an action plan to address those needs. The GCI survey is based on a weighted sample of adults and households responding and references the percentage results of the youth segment of this survey only.
- **Anecdotal evidence** was collected by interviewing community professionals and from other local sources.
- **Focus groups** made up of groups of middle school and high school students, teachers, parents, professionals and other community members were conducted to gather community input and assess community values.
- **‘3x3’** national, state and local statistics inclusive of 3-year trends that relate to the Targeted Impacts were collected and assessed.

Special Populations

Amish: Eight percent of Geauga County is Amish, but this community is regrettably not well represented in this PfS assessment. This closed and conservative community was not responsive to our efforts to communicate through traditional means, such as focus groups, surveys, etc. It is believed that the Amish youth have similar issues to non-Amish youth. An on-going effort will be made by PfS to identify ways we can help meet the needs of Amish youth. It is also notable that the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board and the Geauga County Commissioners have been providing matching funds for the Amish DARE program since 1993. The DARE program has been utilized in approximately 24 of the 60+ Geauga County Amish schools.

In addition, the Mental Health and Recovery Services Board undertook an extensive needs assessment process within the Amish community in 1999 with follow-up in 2001. That initial report has extensive information about the Amish community, with specific recommendations. While with most similar reports validity and reliability diminishes after 5–6 years, the Amish population doesn’t change as rapidly as other cultures so the work is likely to still hold some validity and will be reviewed by the PfS strategic planning work group.

Minority representation

Less than 2% of Geauga County’s population is represented by racial/ethnic minorities. Most of this population lives in a small community in the Chagrin Falls Park area of Bainbridge. PfS and GCI each hosted a focus group of representatives from this community. WGI encourages the PfS teams to continue to identify potential special needs through collaboration with the Chagrin Falls Park community as well as with staff from the Park’s community center (which does have representation on WGI). Programs developed as a result of the PfS Initiative should take a special look at ensuring accessibility to the Amish and to the Chagrin Park Community members.

Risk and Protective Factors for Identified Targeted Impacts:

As a result of the PfS Needs Assessment, **Reduced Substance Abuse** and **Enhanced Emotional and Mental Health Development** have been identified as the top priority Targeted Impacts. To address these issues WGI first identified the factors that most influence these Impacts - factors that are divided into two areas: Risk Factors and Protective Factors.

Risk Factors: Those elements within an individual or community that are associated with elevated levels of problem behavior.

Protective Factors: Those elements within an individual or community that serve as buffers against risk and enhance positive youth development.

Common risk and protective factors for each researched Targeted Impact can be found in PfS RPA matrix (see PfS web site or report appendix). After careful study of the risk and protective factors recognized nationally by PfS, and then assessment of the risk and protective factors most relevant to Geauga County, the themes listed below were identified as most common for Geauga youth. It is very significant that the risk and protective factors have tremendous commonality. The risk and protective factors that were identified are not only relevant to our two top Targeted Impacts, but also relevant to all the Targeted Impacts originally researched.

SIGNIFICANT COMMON THEMES IN RISK AND PROTECTIVE FINDINGS:

Family: Families proved the most important theme identified. Families have a major positive impact on a youth's development when they provide:

- a stable, caring environment,
- an adult influence that is available and effectively encourages and models appropriate behavior, standards and values,
- and strong support of children's involvement in school (place strong value on education) and after-school activities.

For the purpose of the PfS process, we want the definition of family to be as inclusive as necessary to most accurately reflect the supports/resources needed to raise a child. This could include one or two parents, extended family, foster and adoptive parents.

Constructive use of time: Constructive and positive use of time by youth, i.e. developing hobbies, special interests, volunteer opportunities, and activities that they care about, significantly impacts their well-being.

Adult support: An adult who is close to, regularly involved with and expresses active interest in child, tremendously influences his/her well-being.

Resilience: A child who has developed strong coping skills, feels empowered and has developed a set of positive personal values has the resilience to adapt to a wide variety of risk factors.

Targeted Impact: Decreasing Substance Abuse Rank: tied #1

Trends and Data:

- Alcohol use has been stable in Geauga County over the past three-year period; however abuse (5 or more drinks at a time) has increased.
- Geauga County's alcohol use and abuse trends and rates are slightly higher than both state and national averages.
- Alcohol and drug offenses are the only delinquency offenses that trended up each year, over the past 3 years.
- Tobacco use is trending down over a 3-4 year period.
- Marijuana use is up slightly over the same period.
- Illicit drug use is up slightly.
- Drug use is on average with national and state numbers.

Data Quality:

WGI felt somewhat high confidence in gathered data, although state and national comparative data are not "defined" the same as in Geauga County. General trends are accurate.

Community Values:

Community Survey (GCI): Rank #1 - As many as 33% of adults responding to the survey perceive that teen alcohol and substance abuse is a primary issue. A significant number also perceives that youth using inhalants is a primary issue. Other related GCI concerns: Many surveyed perceived that there are insufficient activities and recreational facilities available. Also, emotional issues and behavior problems of youth were perceived as important concerns which also contribute to substance use and abuse problems.

Focus Groups: Rank #1 - In the 20 focus groups that were held, 60 of 177 individuals, primarily from the middle school and young adult focus groups, felt substance abuse is the priority issue.

Marijuana was perceived as the most used substance, followed by tobacco and alcohol and then 'other drugs' (crack, heroin, roofies, household products, etc.). All groups agreed that substance abuse starts in middle school or earlier and becomes a significant problem in high school. After school, summer and weekends are prime times for substance abuse. A common theme was the perception that "many classmates sell drugs at school."

Focus group participants said that common reasons for the substance abuse are: "Everyone else is doing it" (including peers, parents, TV, movies, video games), to deal with family issues, out of boredom or for thrills, and because it's the only way to have fun.

Nearly all 20 groups felt substance abuse is closely tied to other Targeted Impacts and related issues (depression/loneliness, delinquency, sexual activity, school issues.)

A strongly voiced, nearly unanimous opinion was that substance abuse problems often can be traced to: (1) a family's inability, or lack of effort, in encouraging positive values and behaviors; and (2) to ineffective parenting skills.

Twenty-six individuals (15% of all individuals participating) from adult parent and professional groups created the category of 'parenting' (lack of parental supports, lack of parental involvement, and lack of both supervision and parenting skills), and designated it as their primary issue. Comments were that parents aren't available, parents are absent-minded/unskilled/selfish and that admitting problems in parenting is difficult, and almost unacceptable. Many stressed that 'hands off' parenting is not working, that parents are enabling behavior by not saying "no" to their children, and that parenting problems are often multigenerational. All adult groups remarked on a lack of resources to help develop parenting skills, and that parenting is an issue schools can't touch. Other comments were that whatever is expressed on TV, by media, etc., is accepted by parents and their children. One professional group estimated that 65-75% of parents are in urgent need of help.

Anecdotal information: In many Geauga communities use of alcohol by minors has become a very acceptable behavior, not only by youth, but also by permissive adults.

Alcohol is not perceived as a gateway substance by adults, or in many cases as unsafe or unhealthy. Common perception is "I'm glad they're just drinking."

SAMSHA research concludes that parental influence is the number one determinant in a child's decision-making process.

Conclusions

- Community values – substance abuse by youth is a priority concern of our community members.
- The young age of first use and percentage of middle school users are of extreme concern.
- Substance abuse is strongly linked to emotional and mental health development and school success, as well as an influence on all other Targeted Impacts.
- There is a strong link between parental use/abuse and offspring use.
- Common times of occurrence for substance abuse (after school, weekends, summers) coincide with times during which parents and students would like to see more structure and supervision (they stated a need for recreational opportunities and other activities).

Rationale for Ranking:

Substance abuse was identified as the most significant concern in our communities. Professional and community members alike also felt that substance abuse and emotional and mental health development could not be separated.

Success Measures:

- Reduce use of illegal substances at all age levels.
- Increase understanding of the impact of gateway drug use (tobacco, alcohol) on future abuse, addiction and illicit drug use.
- Increase use of positive behavior support as well as the understanding that parental influence is the number one determinant in a child's decision-making process.
- Increase community's recognition of the negative impact of adult use on youth.
- Change community norms regarding acceptability of underage alcohol use, sales to minors, service to minors, and related parent permissiveness.

Targeted Impact: Enhancing Emotional and Mental Health Development	Rank: tied #1
---	----------------------

Note: WGI defines “Enhancing emotional and mental health development” broadly, to include such things as stress reactions, ADD, depression and mood problems, attachment issues, severe behavior problems and inability to cope with family or other situations as well as diagnosed emotional and mental health development issues.

Trends and Data:

- Statistically, in Ohio, the number of youth diagnosed with mental health issues has increased over the past three years.
- The number of youth receiving mental health services has increased slightly or not at all, but anecdotal information points to a lack of availability of some services and to existing waiting lists as potential reasons for lack of growth in these numbers.
- Emotional and mental health treatment services are provided for children as young as age five in Geauga County.
- 74 students participate in “Emotionally Disturbed” services in seven school districts. This number is relatively unchanged over the past five years, though the number of children being served in the middle school age group is increasing.

Data Quality:

WGI felt relatively confident that data trends found were accurate reflections of county trends. Specific data on diagnosis is lacking, and data only reflects those served with public money, but common issues and trends were consistent. Strong anecdotal evidence also supported our findings.

Community Values:

Community Survey: 30% of adults responding to the survey perceive that children/youth with serious behavior problems is an issue, and up to 32% perceive that children/youth with emotional issues is a serious problem. There was no question asked in the survey that directly inquires about behaviors related to emotional and mental health development.

Focus Groups: 36 of 177 individuals from professional, parent and youth focus groups qualified emotional and mental health development as the priority issue.

Most youth group participants said they know classmates who say they are depressed and/or have had suicidal tendencies. Professionals who work with this population felt that when emotional and mental health issues permeate families, children are rarely successful in school; dual diagnosis is very common; emotional and mental health issues are consistent factors in all problems observed in children; they are observing increasingly younger children in violent cases; less fortunate and often more troubled children can't afford structured activities; untreated emotional and mental health and substance abuse issues in the parents seem often to lead to emotional and mental health issues and

substance abuse in children; children with IEPs are targeted, but 'average' children fall through the cracks in regard to support or early intervention services. Youth groups felt that depression comes from feeling alone, being bullied, from home issues or from issues with friends. These same groups warned that self-injury should be taken seriously.

Anecdotal information: Poor identification/diagnosis systems leave many children without treatment. These children often turn to negative behaviors such as cutting, having suicidal thoughts, having trouble coping with depression and stress, and failing at their ability to deal with family issues.

There is an increasing number of children in the emotionally disturbed classrooms at the middle school level.

Bullying is of increasing concern to many community members.

Self-injury and aggression is beginning at a much younger age than was observed even a few years ago.

Therapists are seeing an increased acceptance of sexualized behavior, again at a younger age.

There appears to be an increase in the number of parents who are excessively permissive and parents who defend even the most negative behaviors in their children.

The lack of a strong father figure is often seen as an influential factor in the homes.

There is a need for a social/recreation programs for youth with emotional and mental health issues as well as other youth, who have difficulty with social skills.

Conclusions

- Emotional and mental health issues are strongly intertwined with all other Targeted Impacts.
- Emotional and mental health issues are often not understood or acknowledged by families or by the community-at-large.
- Self-injury is a growing concern.
- Age of onset of emotional and mental health problems appears to be getting lower.

Rationale for Ranking:

It was indicated in every aspect of the research that emotional and mental health development and substance abuse were not only the primary concerns of the community, but also that one almost always followed the other. The trends showing that children are experiencing emotional and mental health issues at increasingly younger ages and that these issues can be increasingly severe requiring longer treatment, indicates that this is a priority Targeted Impact.

Success Measures:

- Decrease the number of youth involved in court-related and therapeutic settings related to emotional and mental health issues.
- Increase youth coping skills and frequency of use of those skills.
- Improve the emotional health of youth relative to their potential and to life situations.
- Increase family coping skills and ability to address related issues.
- Increase reinforcement of positive behavior by home, school and community.

Targeted Impact: Barriers to School Success

Rank: #2

Trends and Data:

- Proficiency test scores are improving in all districts, though there is still a wide disparity among schools on actual scores.
- In school year 2002-2003 all schools showed an upward trend in scores.
- Graduation rates and school safety issues (weapons, expulsions) are good compared to state and surrounding counties. Dropout numbers are low comparatively.
- Bullying (mostly verbal/emotional) is the primary issue consistently mentioned in anecdotal responses as requiring intervention in middle and elementary schools.
- Only one district is below state standard in reading/math proficiency scores.
- Number of children utilizing the school lunch program is lower than state average, but has increased 26% over the last 3 years in Geauga County schools, with a wide variation among districts.

Data Quality:

WGI felt data confidence level for data is high.

Community Values:

Community Survey: Of adults 18 years and older surveyed in Geauga County, at least 24% perceive that overcrowded classrooms are a serious issue in the county.

A much smaller percentage perceives that unsafe school environment is a serious issue in the county, although 27% perceive that bullying is a serious issue. A negligible amount of adults perceive that school dropout and/or truancy are significant issues.

Parental involvement has been identified as a contributor to school success, so it should be mentioned that up to 16% of adults perceive insufficient quality child care as a serious issue in the county (3% in their household). 14% perceive that insufficient support for kinship caregivers of children is a serious issue in the county (2% in their household).

Focus Group: Rank #3 - 23 of 177 individuals from parent, professional and youth groups alike felt this is the primary issue. Groups remarked that lack of parental attention and economics (DARE program gone, costs \$150 to play a sport) are the primary reasons for this issue. Several also commented that student success is directly related to parenting prior to school.

Anecdotal information: Negative school environment; lack of responsiveness of school guidance/administration to student problems; bullying issues are more emotional/verbal abuse than physical violence; school success is often viewed as related to poverty, reading readiness/time spent reading, parental involvement and support of education or lack thereof, and time spent watching television.

The main protective factors contributing to school success include: income level above the poverty line, parent availability/involvement in school, parent education level, high reading level/school readiness, good nutrition/health, limited television watching.

In more than one local community, parenting programs offered in the county have not been well attended and are experiencing decreasing attendance (possibly related to lack of child care availability at the sessions).

Issues related to the “modern family” (examples: time-stressed dual working parents, single parent, financially stressed households, etc.) can be a primary barrier to school success.

Conclusions

- Although students are generally succeeding academically, the focus on testing results in less interest and support for youth personally. There is little time focused on students’ special abilities (non-academic), interests, or hobbies.
- There is little motivation, positive reinforcement, opportunity or recognition for the average or low performing students.
- Substance abuse and emotional and mental health development issues are contributors to school success problems.
- Positive parenting and parent involvement during school years greatly affects success of student.
- Education / socialization / parenting prior to school years puts children at an advantage for the future.
- Bullying and safety at school may be tied to school success.
- Television and non-constructive time while not in school can inhibit motivation and creativity.
- Students, parents and professionals agree that the quality of school resources / activities / funding / overcrowding of classrooms / teachers and administrators tremendously impact student success.

Rationale for Ranking:

Compared to regional, state and national statistics Geauga’s school achievement level is very good. However the community values show that even a small percentage of children being left behind causes great concern. It was also identified that the children with the most significant issues in school also, often, experience substance abuse and/or emotional and mental/health problems as well.

Targeted Impact: Delinquency

Rank: Last three TIs are unranked

Trends and Data:

- Delinquent offenses are down overall over the past three-year period.
- Most offenses, especially violent offenses, are well below state average.
- Status offenses, such as truancy and runaways, are low.
- Recidivism for local offenders is less than 10%.
- Alcohol and drug offenses are up, but are included under substance abuse indicator.

Data Quality:

WGI had high confidence in the quality of county data and the comparison trends that extended over multiple years. The Juvenile Court System had exceptional statistics and qualified representatives took the time to assist in interpretation of data and the resulting reports.

Community Values:

Community Survey: Rank #5 - 16% of those surveyed perceive violence / delinquency is a serious issue.

Focus Group: Rank: #5 - 12 of 177 individuals listed delinquency as the priority issue. All believed that these behaviors, including theft, minor assaults, vandalism and truancy, start as early as 7th and 8th grade. They also agreed that delinquency often occurs during idle time with no supervision. The majority of young adults felt that these behaviors occur because middle school students start doing what high school students are seen doing or what they see on TV.

Other comments - delinquency is usually directly related to substance abuse.

Conclusions

- Although the number of delinquency/unruly cases has not increased, there is an increase in the number of delinquency/unruly cases in which the court orders Job and Family Services involvement due to the complexity of the case.
- Delinquency seems to be of relatively low concern to the general community.
- Statistical trends rise and fall according to a relatively small number of individuals who are delinquent.

Rationale for Ranking: Delinquency ranked low in the priority of the community concerns and statistics showed positive trends. Any inconsistency in trends was traced to senior prank type issues that rated low in terms of the community's perception as to urgency.

Targeted Impact: Teen Pregnancy

Rank: Last three TIs are unranked

Trends and Data:

- All indicators are moving in a positive direction over a four-year period.
- Teen births are much lower than national average and Geauga County has the lowest teen birth rate in the state.
- Abortions are down for all age groups except girls under the age of 14 statewide. No local statistics available.

Data Quality:

WGI felt that data was very reliable regarding teen birth, sexual behavior and abstinence. Some sexuality concerns for younger (elementary and early middle school) students may exist, but limited data is available.

Community Values:

Community Survey: Rank #7

Focus Groups: Rank #4 - 14 of 177 individuals in adult, young adult and middle school groups voiced teen pregnancy as a priority issue. Many of these youth and young adult groups remarked that they were aware of 13-year-olds getting pregnant, but thought pregnancies were more common in the 15- to 18-year-old age category. The same groups felt that these behaviors occur because of lack of parental involvement and moral standards. Reasons for sexual activity and teen pregnancy, as given by all youth and young adult groups, include: a way to rebel; nothing else to do; it feels good / its natural; hormones kicking in; because society allows it now; out of curiosity; "to seem cool."

Pregnancy rate is down and abstinence percentages are up. However, abstinence is still perceived by many as not being achievable. It is also perceived that health class is not always helpful because it does not continue as children age; little information is given at home; many who are getting pregnant / being active are too young to know what they're doing and the significance of the consequences.

Anecdotal information: There were many concerns expressed over earlier sexual behavior, including but not limited to oral sex, at the middle school level.

Media influence at younger ages is dominant. Myths and misperceptions at younger ages about sex, relationships and abstinence are becoming an increased concern.

Older students (juniors and seniors) can benefit from continued age appropriate services as parent communication goes down and access goes up. Abstinence trends go down drastically senior year.

Conclusions

- The present Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program needs ongoing school support and understanding/acceptance of the early age at which sexuality information is needed.
- Teen Pregnancy trends are improving in Geauga County.
- Sexuality issues/concerns are present, especially for middle school and late elementary school students.
- Many issues relate to boundaries, values, parent/family support and participation in positive after school activities, just as in higher rated Targeted Impacts.
- School resources are limited for education on this topic.

Rationale for Ranking:

Geauga County has implemented a very successful Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program that has shown positive impact in identified areas. Although sexuality issues were expressed as a concern by a number of our youth, it is also believed that this highly regarded program will continue to address these issues.

Targeted Impact: Violence

Rank: Last three TIs are unranked

Trends and Data:

- Trends in violence indicators have been consistent over time (school and community).
- Felony offenses, commitments to the Department of Youth Services, school weapons offenses, and sex offenses in Geauga County are well below state averages.
- In 2004 the number of open ongoing cases (cases that require longer-term and often court-ordered involvement on the part of Job & Family Services) per month ranged from a low of 42 to a high of 49. Over the same period the monthly average of new cases being referred to JFS was 37.
- Usually the most critical and serious cases JFS handles are those which requires JFS taking custody of children. In 2002 the average number of children in JFS custody per month was 50, in 2003, 46, and in 2004, 40.
- Over the past three years the total number of child protective cases has remained fairly constant.
- Bullying is the only "violence" offense identified by most community members as a primary concern. However, anecdotal commentary supports that most bullying is emotional/verbal. This item was subsequently moved to Barriers to School Success.
- For the state of Ohio, new reports of child abuse and neglect have steadily gone down over the past five years while in Geauga the reports have steadily gone up. (PCSAO Factbook – 2004).

Data Quality:

WGI felt a high confidence level in child abuse and Juvenile Court statistics are from state and local data bases. Bullying data is based not only on one district's numbers, but on anecdotal information from several schools and professionals. Other related statistics were limited for state and national comparisons.

Community Values:

Community Survey: Rank #5 - A small percentage of respondents identified this as priority issue.

Focus Group: Rank #6 - 5 of 177 individuals from professional and youth groups identified violence as the priority issue. Groups mostly referred to bullying.

Anecdotal information: Bullying was the predominant concern of the general community and involved emotional and verbal incidences.

Child protective cases that are filed in the courts frequently begin as abuse and/or neglect cases. Through plea bargaining with the parents these cases are frequently adjudicated as "Dependency" cases although the vast majority of these cases do involve "fault of the parents." Substance abuse and mental health issues are a reoccurring problem in many child protective cases. Domestic violence and poor relationships are also frequent issues

in these cases. Lack of good parenting skills is another reoccurring theme, as is lack of financial resources.

Child protective services are governed by strict confidentiality laws. A family may be involved in a child protective case and neighbors, relatives and friends all living in the same community would never know. This has consistently been a barrier in terms of community awareness. The community-at-large does not know the extent or proximity of child abuse because public disclosure is not in the best interest of the child.

Conclusions

- This Targeted Impact is of relatively low concern to community members in general.
- The community's lack of expressed concern related to child abuse may, in part, be due to insufficient knowledge about the seriousness of this issue in our own communities.
- Bullying is the greatest public concern, but can be addressed via Barriers to School Success Targeted Impact.

Rationale for Ranking:

Violence was not strongly indicated as a concern by our community members or in our statistical trends. Although bullying was indicated by significant numbers of participants, it was still identified as low in urgency compared to other Targeted Impacts. It remains a concern to many that the extent of children involved in abuse and neglect cases seems to be under-recognized by the community.