The Field Center convened a follow-up session to their 2007 Child Welfare Summit on Information Technology in Child Welfare in March 2008. Funded by the Hite Foundation, key leaders came to the table to advance the discussion on potential implementation of a pilot model of a management information system that would provide real-time access to critical information for both child welfare case-workers and management as well as the sharing of data across child and family-serving systems.

continued on page three

ONE CHILD, MANY HANDS:
A MULTIDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE ON CHILD WELFARE,
the Field Center’s biennial conference, is coming in the Spring of 2009.

The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia will serve as the conference’s Lead Sponsor.

Details will be posted on the conference website: www.sp2.upenn.edu/onechild
HOW ARE WE DOING IN RESPONDING TO CHILD NEGLECT?

In 2000, there were approximately 2.8 million reports of child maltreatment in the United States, of which approximately 862,455, or 31% were confirmed as cases of child maltreatment at some level. Those confirmed cases represented approximately 1.2% of the entire population of children under the age of 18.

In 2005, when the population of children in the country had fallen by 5% (more than 3 million), there were approximately 1,988,514 reports of child maltreatment, of which approximately 1,112, 886 were confirmed. Those confirmed cases represented approximately 1.6% of the total population of children under age 18.

In Philadelphia, the results of those somber statistics can been seen in between 3,000 and 4,000 new cases filed in the Juvenile Dependency Court annually, and the current caseload of approximately 9,000 cases.

Although physical abuse and sexual abuse get into the news, and therefore into our consciousness, neglect, characterized by parents’ omission of responsible care and denial of the essential needs of their children, represents more than 60% of the substantiated cases of child maltreatment.¹

Apparently, we have not been able to figure out how to reduce the incidence of child neglect or, perhaps, simply refuse politically to do so.

Having failed as a society to prevent child neglect, how do we do with cases that are substantiated and families are brought under court supervision?

The federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), passed in 1997, identified as the goals of the federal effort to prevent and respond to child maltreatment: Safety, Permanency and Well Being of Children and Preservation of Families.

ASFA directs states to aim for permanency for children within a year, and mandates that, with certain exceptions, if a child is in care for 15 of 22 consecutive months, the local child protective service agencies (CPSA) must file a motion to change the goal from re-unification to some other goal. Yet, no state has met those goals. Indeed, research indicates that it is the unusual case where a child placed in out-of-home care is returned within 18 months, let alone 12 or even 15.

It is estimated that 40% of the homeless population in the United States are “graduates” of our foster care system. In 2005, 311,000 children joined the other 513,000 children already placed in foster care. During that same year, only 287,000 children left placement—only half of those children returned to a primary caretaker; over 23,000 (8%) aged out at the age of eighteen.

Children in the dependency system have worse health care – especially mental health care - than their non-dependent peers. They have a disproportionately high need for special education – which they don’t get. Thus they fail to graduate from high school at disproportionately high rates, are far below average in obtaining any post secondary education, far above average in being unemployed, or at the very least underemployed, and all too likely to be part of what one of my former students refers to as the school to jail pipeline—starting with the juvenile delinquency system, and disproportionately graduating to the adult criminal system.

Moreover, recent research reveals that where a cause of the case being brought to court is neglect, it is likely to remain open longer, and the child has a lower likelihood of reunification with her or his parents than is the case when the originating cause of the filing is physical or sexual abuse.²

continued on page four
CHILD WELFARE TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVE TAKES CRITICAL STEPS

(continued from page one)

Gathered at New York’s Penn Club, along with the Field Center’s interdisciplinary team, were Bill O’Leary, Director of Health and Human Services for Microsoft Corporation, Martin Elisco, Systems Engineer for Motorola Corporation, Richard Jacobsen of the Institute for Social Capital at the University of North Carolina and former Director of Mecklenberg County (NC) Department of Social Services, Daniel Stein, Michael Smith, and Gerry Pape, principals of Stewards of Change, Lynette Hassinger, Director of Information and Data Management and Cathy Utz, Director of the Bureau of Policy and Program Development for the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Office of Children, Youth and Families, Laurie O’Connor, Director, and Frank DiDomizio, CFO/CIO of the Montgomery County (PA) Office of Children and Youth, and Joseph Roynan, Director of Human Services for Montgomery County (PA).

Participants in this day-long session discussed the need for systemic culture change to embrace interoperability. A consumer-centric model of technology development will bridge traditional silos and result in a truly interoperable system that can share critical information across systems of care. By merging business thinking with technology, child welfare systems are able to access needed data that will ultimately inform decision-making. Software capability currently exists that can address the broad needs of child welfare interoperability. In addition, hardware is available to meet the real-time needs of caseworkers and their supervisors, including the soon-to-be required documentation of visiting children in care.

The Field Center is convening experts and leaders, led by Stewards of Change, to develop a replicable model of an interoperable management information system with real-time capability to be piloted in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. By providing caseworkers and managers with key, timely information, informed decision-making and better accountability can only benefit the children that are served.
In short, whatever we are doing through the legal system to provide safe and timely permanency and well being for victims of child neglect, preferably in their families of origin, has failed.

Why?

One possibility is that we are in such a rush to fix the problems that beset dependent children and their families, and have such large caseloads of children and families needing services that we act without doing our homework, and lack evidence to support our belief and hope that the interventions we employ will bring about the desired goals. Also, there does not seem to be any system of accountability. For more than a decade, respected scholars and many practitioners have argued that the system reacts with cookie-cutter remedies, undifferentiated to the specifics of the case (i.e., “one size fits all”), and un-proven treatment modalities by CPSAs.3

Consider two programs, one—parenting classes—widely used both in Philadelphia and elsewhere to help parents after they have been identified as having maltreated their children or placed them at grave danger of harm, and the other—Family Group Conferencing—being readied for implementation by the Dependency Court and the Department of Human Services in Philadelphia to prevent the need for extended dependency litigation or, hopefully, the need for filing dependent petitions at all.

1. Parenting classes: A recent report showed that while 90% of the counties surveyed used parenting classes to strengthen parents’ ability to properly care for, nurture and discipline their children, they used approximately 20 different parenting class models, only one of which had been scientifically validated.

2. Family Group Conferencing: A report distributed to the child welfare community in Philadelphia in the fall of 2007 by the Court and DHS to support their plan to institute family group conferencing—heralded as an intervention that could reduce by half the dependency court caseload—contained data that purported to show that in other jurisdictions that had installed it, families had, overwhelmingly, thought that it was a good thing, and made them feel more welcome and part of the process. Yet there was no data that related to whether the intervention reduced the number of cases that had to be filed in court, improved the safety or well being of children, shortened the time to permanency for the children in the system, or reduced the incidence of permanency achieved by placing the children with persons other than their biological parents.

Each of these sounds like a good idea, but, at least so far, each lacks meaningful evidence of validity in achieving safe and timely permanency and well being of children in their families of origin.

**OUR APPROACH – LET’S LOOK AT THE EVIDENCE**

We decided to address the issue of “what to do about child neglect,” from the post-petition perspective, once the forces of law, child welfare, medicine, etc., had identified a child as neglected or at grave risk of neglect, and sought court intervention, and the court had determined that the child was dependent, i.e., lacking in adequate parental care, neglect, and sought court intervention, and the court had determined medical, etc., had identified a child as neglected or at grave risk of neglect. They were assigned to us relatively randomly, leading us to believe that they represent a fair sampling of all cases filed.

Our methodology was as follows:

1. Review the case files to identify (a) demographic factors, collected by the DHS, (b) events and factors that have been identified as relevant to the filing of the petitions, and (c) the initial court orders which may (1) confirm or disprove the presence of child neglect, (2) clarify and correct information in the Petition, (3) add to the knowledge of reasons for the apparently neglectful situation, and (4) identify the initial interventions ordered by the court.

2. Enter each data point into a database.

3. Examine the file at each subsequent court hearing identifying the date of the hearing and the time since the immediately preceding hearing, and capture from the court order information concerning whether the case is to remain open, and certain other data related to court interventions, and whether the child’s and family’s situation appears to be improving, getting worse, or remaining unchanged in the areas of physical health, mental health, substance abuse, visitation between parent(s) and child, child’s education, child’s health care, and likelihood of reunification or termination of parental rights.

4. Place this information in the database.

5. Perform various statistical tests on data in the database to ascertain what, if any, significant correlations exist between the events leading up to the filing of the dependent petition or the court ordered interventions, and the experienced outcomes at points approximately six (6) months, one (1) year, eighteen (18) months, twenty four (24) months, thirty (30) months, and thirty six (36) months after filing.

**THE HALF WAY POINT—SOME INTERESTING DATA**

Thus far, we have completed the detailed examination of 63 cases, approximately half of our goal. However, many of the cases have missing or unclear data for various factors we have identified. Consequently we have performed only bi-variate, rather than multi-variate analyses, and considered the effects on only three dependent variables: discharge within 18 months, discharge to parents within 18 months, and discharge to parents at any time for as long as we have data on the case. Even with these limitations, we have discovered a number of interesting, statistically significant correlations—some not surprising, some quite surprising. We are continuing to complete the file analysis and then will do a much more thorough statistical review of the entire body of data that we collect.

Here are some of our initial findings:

1. While information about biological mother (non-deceased) almost always is present, there is very little information about fathers, usually too little to permit meaningful analysis.
2. The higher the age of the mother at the time of the child’s birth, the higher the likelihood that the case would be discharged with the child and mother re-united, and also that discharge would be within 18 months. (Significant: >95%) (i.e., Younger mothers are more likely to lose their children in dependency cases.)

3. The greater the number of children in the home of the parent from whom the child was taken, regardless of the parentage, and whether the children are all subjects of the dependency petition, the lower the likelihood that the child would be returned to that parent ever. (Significant: >95%)

4. If there were 3 or more prior contacts between anyone in the family and the CPSA, it was unlikely that the child would ever be returned to the biological parent. (Significant: 90-95%) 

5. Prior Inpatient treatment for substance abuse indicates that it is not likely that child will be returned to biological parent, ever (Significant: >95%; however, with prior Outpatient treatment for substance abuse, it is statistically significant (>95%) both that the child would be returned to biological parent, and that this would occur within 18 months.

6. If parenting classes were ordered at the first hearing, there was a statistically significant likelihood that the child would not be returned to the parent within 18 months, or at all. (90-95%) Moreover, if parenting classes were ordered at the second hearing the likelihood the child would NOT be returned to the biological parent INCREASED to more than 95% certainty. 

TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

No doubt, these findings are preliminary, and we must both complete the study to encompass the data from all 130 children, so that we will have more reliable and powerful conclusions. And someone with access to a far more complete universe, and therefore a larger and better sample, should conduct a similar, perhaps even more sophisticated study of the history of court and child welfare system involvement in the lives of these children and families to ascertain what works and what does not work. Critically important, in addition, will be to develop theories to explain the data*, and then to back test those theories against the real-world data. Only then will we have the evidence we need to make significant improvements in the way the courts respond to children and families in the face of findings that the children are dependent, and in need of court intervention.

Although these data are preliminary they do tell us some things. For example, unless we can scientifically support the argument that interventions, such as parenting classes, actually do significantly help the parents whom we order to attend, we should do away with them. They cost money, and perhaps more importantly, not only do not help the children and families but may actually interfere with their ability to achieve safe and timely permanent reunification.

* For example, there may be several theories that explain the data with respect to parenting classes, including, but not limited to the following: 1) The classes are not valid, that is, they simply don’t help the parents to become better at parenting. 2) Only the most disorganized and unprepared parents are sent to the classes, so the demonstrated outcome can be expected. 3) The parents who get ordered to attend parenting classes are also assigned several other “services” / “hurdles” to accomplish as pre-conditions to getting their children back. The more that they are required to do, the more likely that they will fail at one or another, and thus be found to be non-compliant, and not deserving of getting their children back. Under this theory, it may be that parenting classes, or some of them, are valuable, so that if they are to be ordered, the parents must not be required to do so many other things that their chances of failure, rather than success, are increased. Unless each potential theory is tested, we cannot know what change from the present is most likely to produce the most desirable results.

See page seven for footnotes

A SPECIAL THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS!

We are grateful to the following individuals and corporations for their generous support of the Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research.

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An envelope is attached for your convenience, or you may give a gift online by visiting www.sp2.upenn.edu/fieldctr/support.html. For more information, please contact Director of Development Nadina Deigh at (215) 898-5518 or deighn@sp2.upenn.edu.
FOCUS ON THE FIELD CENTER

FIELD CENTER ADVISORY BOARD PROFILE:
LYNN HUBSCHMAN

Lynn Hubschman is an active member of the Advisory Board for the Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research. She is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and its School of Social Work. For ten years she worked at Jewish Family Service, serving as the Director of Family Life Education and as a marriage and family counselor. From 1971 to 1985, Lynn was the Director of Social Work at Pennsylvania Hospital, instituting many innovative programs over this period of time.

Lynn has also maintained a private practice, taught and lectured, speaking to groups on subjects dealing with family living and human sexuality. Lynn has also trained the Philadelphia Police in crisis intervention and family dynamics.

Lynn has written numerous articles, including a cover article in Redbook. She has also published two books, Hospital Social Work Practice and Transsexuals-Life from Both Sides. She has appeared on most major TV talk shows, including the Phil Donahue show and the Geraldo Rivera Show. Lynn hosted a talk show locally for a brief period.

Lynn and her husband are involved in philanthropic efforts at Pennsylvania Hospital. She has written a screenplay and two TV programs which are currently being reviewed. She enjoys spending time in her apartments in Aventura, Florida, and Toronto.

Lynn has two daughters and is the proud grandmother of three grandchildren.

FIELD CENTER STAFF PROFILE:
DEENA CASWELL

Deena Caswell joined the Field Center in November 2007 and has a joint appointment as the Administrative Coordinator for the Field Center and Event Planner for the School of Social Policy & Practice’s Centennial celebration. She assists in special events and event planning, development, and administrative support.

Deena grew up in West Deptford, New Jersey and graduated from Smith College in 2004 with a BA in Government, with a focus on American Government and political theory. After college, she moved to the Philadelphia area and started working for Wharton Executive Education at Penn’s Wharton School. She began as a Program Coordinator, coordinating programs on marketing, strategy and executive development. She was then promoted as Accommodations and Special Events Manager. Deena joined the Field Center and School of Social Policy & Practice after working for Wharton Executive Education.

Outside of work, Deena likes to spend time at home in West Philadelphia with her partner and bunnies or in South Jersey with her family.

Deena is excited to be a part of the Field Center and assist in work that affects positive change.

FIELD CENTER STUDENT PROFILE:
CAROLINE SPILLANE

Caroline Spillane is a student intern with the Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research. She is a senior in the University of Pennsylvania’s College of Arts and Sciences. Caroline is majoring in Philosophy, Politics and Economics, with a minor in Hispanic Studies. She is involved in many organizations on Penn’s campus, including the Executive Board of the Civic House Associates Coalition, Peers Helping Incoming New Students, and Delta Delta Delta Sorority. Caroline is interested in issues of women’s empowerment and community and economic development. She brings great enthusiasm to her involvement with the Field Center and has contributed to articles in News From the Field. Caroline hopes to pursue a career in public interest law in the future.

FRED WULCZYN SPEAKS ON “BANG FOR YOUR BUCK” IN CHILD WELFARE

Fred Wulczyn, PhD was the featured speaker at the Field Center’s spring Community Symposium on April 9, 2008. His presentation, titled “More Bang for Your Buck: Public Child Welfare and the Pursuit of Accountability,” examined the idea of return on investments as it relates to the funding spent on the child welfare system. An engaged audience participated with Dr. Wulczyn in a Q&A session after his talk that posed questions about the future of financial accountability and quantifiable results in the child welfare systems of Philadelphia and across Pennsylvania.

Dr. Wulczyn is a Research Fellow at the Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, where he directs the Center for State Foster Care and Adoption Data. He is the recipient of the 2006 Peter Forsythe Award for Leadership in public child welfare, presented by the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators. From 2006 – 2007, he served on Mayor Street’s Child Welfare Review Panel. His recent writings focus on racial disparities in the foster care system, adoption in the post-AFSA era, and fiscal reform. He is the lead author of Beyond Common Sense: Child Welfare, Child Well-Being and the Evidence for Policy Reform.
## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

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| July 13 – July 16, 2008 The Woodlands, TX  | Foster Family-based Treatment Association (FTTA)  
FTTA 22nd Annual Conference on Treatment Foster Care  | Email: shorowitz@ffta.org  
Phone: (800) 414-3382  
www.ffta.org/conference                           |
| July 16 – 18, 2008 Washington, DC  | National Council For Adoption  
2008 National Adoption Conference  | Email: cjohnson@adoptioncouncil.org  
Phone: (703) 299-6633  
www.adoptioncouncil.org                           |
| July 16 – July 20, 2008 Nashville, TN | National Technical Assistance Center for Children’s Mental Health/Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development  
Training Institutes 2008: Developing Local Systems of Care for Children and Adolescents with Mental Health Needs and Their Families  | Email: Institutes2008@aol.com  
Phone: (202) 687-5000  
gucchd.georgetown.edu                           |
The 11th National Child Welfare Data and Technology Conference  
Making IT Work: Achieving Safety, Permanency and Well-being for Youth | Email: nrccwdt@cwla.org  
Phone: (703) 263-2024  
www.nrccwdt.org/nrc_conf/pres_2008_outline.html                           |
| July 27 – July 29, 2008 Portsmouth, NH | University of New Hampshire/Family Research Laboratory  
International Family Violence and Child Victimization Research Conference | Email: frl.conference@unh.edu  
Phone: (603) 862-0767  
www.unh.edu/frl/conferences/2008                           |
| August 3 – 6, 2008 Savannah, GA | National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC)  
NACC 31st National Juvenile and Family Law Conference | Email: advocate@NACCchildlaw.org  
Phone: (303) 864-5359 or (888) 828-NACC  
www.naccchildlaw.org                           |
| August 26 – 28, 2008 New Orleans, LA | The National Children's Advocacy Center  
The 9th National Conference on Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation Prevention | Email: thunter@nationalcac.org  
Phone: (256) 327-3765  
www.nationalcac.org                           |
| September 7 – 10, 2008 Hong Kong | International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (ISPCAN) Against Child Abuse (ACA), Hong Kong  
XVIIth ISPCAN International Congress on Child Abuse and Neglect | Email: congress2008@ispcan.org  
Phone: (630) 876-6913  
www.ispcan.org/congress2008                           |
| September 12 – 17, 2008 San Diego, CA | The Institute on Violence, Abuse and Trauma (IVAT)  
13th International Conference on Violence, Abuse & Trauma | Phone: (858) 527-1860  
www.ivatcenters.org/Conferences.htm                           |
| September 15 – 17, 2008 Portland, OR | Child Welfare League of America Western Region Training Conference  
It Takes Courage and Compassion to Serve Children and Families: Tools for Competence and Confidence | E-mail: register@cwla.org  
Phone: (703)412-2403  
www.cwla.org/conferences                           |
| November 11 – 14, 2008 Sacramento, CA | The Children’s Research Center/The California Department of Social Services  
8th National Structured Decision Making® Conference | Email: anoel@mw.nccd-crc.org  
Phone: (608)831-1180  
www.nccd-crc.org/crc/c_conference_main.html                           |

## FOOTNOTES

**Identifying the Red Flags of Child Neglect to Facilitate Evidence-Based Focused Responses**

*continued from page five*

1. (Department of Health and Human Services, Child Maltreatment, 2000, 2002)
Newsletter Highlights...

Spring 2008

Field Center

for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research

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