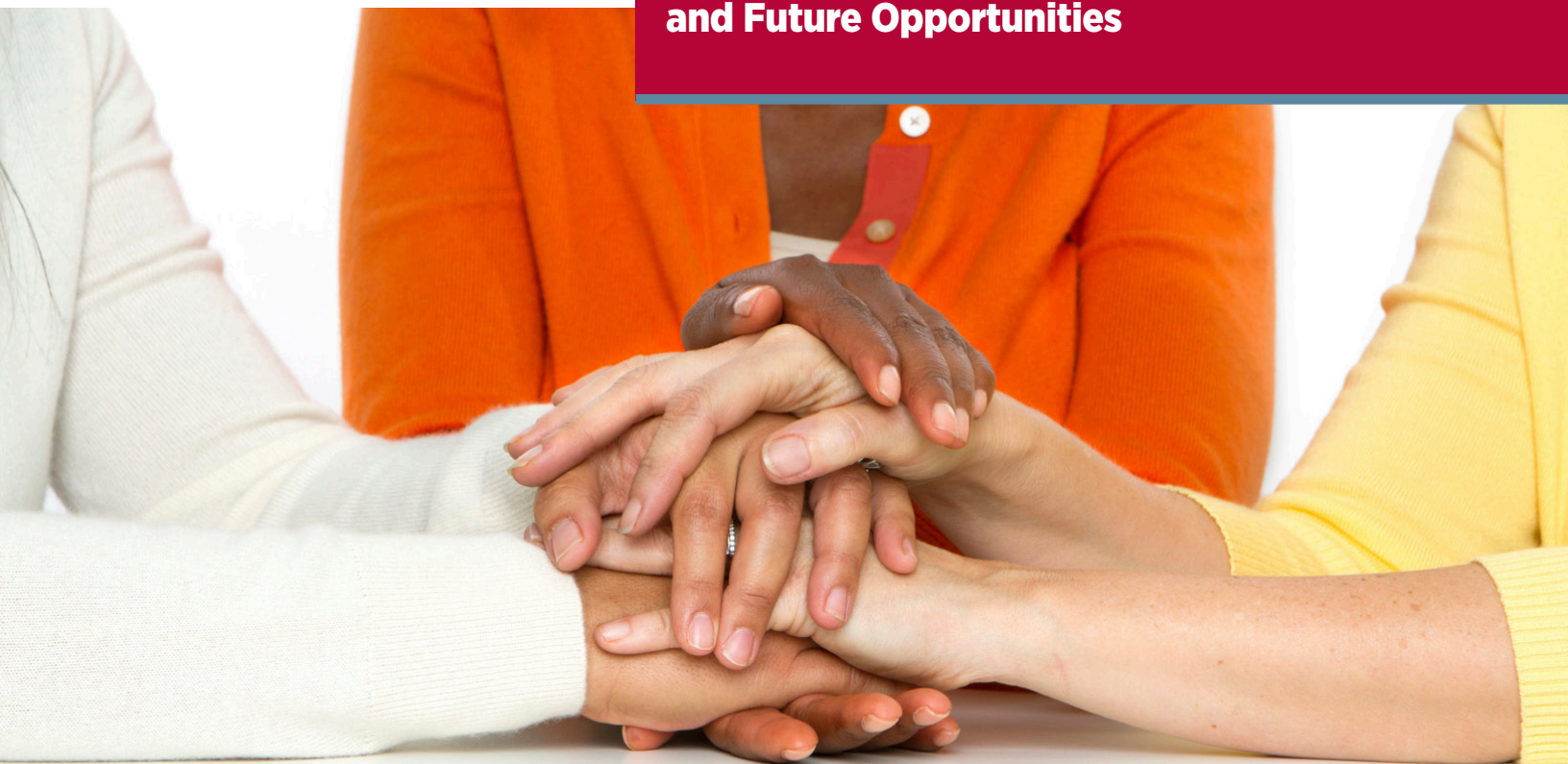# Natural Supports: A Scan of Current Use and Future Opportunities

PREPARED BY

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Allegheny County Department of Human Services

The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) is dedicated to meeting the human services needs of county residents, particularly the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of prevention, intervention, crisis management and after-care services.

This report was prepared by the Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE), an office within DHS. DARE supports and publishes research related to the activities of DHS in a number of categories, including: Aging; Basic Needs; Behavioral Health and Disabilities; Child Development and Education; Children, Youth and Families, Crime and Justice; and Innovation, Reform and Policy.

DHS research products are available for viewing and download at the DHS Research and Reports webpage at **www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs/research.aspx**.

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ACRONYMS

AAA	Area Agency on Aging
ACJ	Allegheny County Jail
AIMS	Office of Administrative and Information Management Services
CYF	Office of Children, Youth and Families (Child Welfare)
DARE	Office of Data Analysis, Research and Evaluation
DHS	Allegheny County Department of Human Services
FCM	Family Case Management
FGDM	Family Group Decision Making
FSC	Family Support Center
FSP	Family Support Partner
FSS	Family Support Specialist
FTC	Family Team Conferencing
HFW	High-Fidelity Wraparound
ISP	Individual Service Plan
KIDS	Key Information and Demographics System
OBH	Office of Behavioral Health
OCR	Office of Community Relations
OCS	Office of Community Services
OID	Office of Intellectual Disability
SOCI	System of Care Initiative
YSP	Youth Support Partner

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Natural supports are described as the personal associations and relationships developed in the community that enhance the quality and security of life for people. These supports are typically unpaid and may include family members, extended family members, friends, sponsors, mentors or community members. The use of natural supports is becoming more common in association with human services such as child welfare, criminal justice, intellectual and physical disability, behavioral health and aging. The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) actively promotes the identification and use of natural supports in many different program areas as a method to improve and support an individual's or family's progress toward their goals. The following are examples of programs through which DHS has utilized natural supports:

- **Aging Waiver:** The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) at DHS makes services available to eligible Pennsylvanians over the age of 60 to enable them to continue to live in their homes and communities with support and services. The importance of natural supports is reinforced in and required by the Aging Waiver's Individual Service Plan (ISP), a formalized care plan mandated and approved by the state.

- **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM):** The first pilot of Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) in Pennsylvania was launched at DHS in 1999. The FGDM meeting is designed to strengthen the natural care-giving system for the children. Participants include family members, extended family members, family-identified natural supports, CYF Case Managers and other service providers.

Executive Summary
(continued)

- **Family Support Centers (FSC):** FSCs are a community-based prevention strategy designed to nurture, protect and strengthen families. They provide parents and neighborhoods with the resources and supports they need to raise healthy and happy children. Of the 32 Family Support Centers in Allegheny County, 27 receive funding from DHS. FSCs have been connecting families to natural supports since their inception.

- **High-Fidelity Wraparound (HFW):** A team-based collaborative process for developing and implementing individualized plans for children who have behavioral health challenges and their families. DHS introduced HFW as part of a system integration plan that included revamping direct services in order to produce continued improvement of outcomes. The core principles of HFW call for a team-based approach, intentionally guided by the family's view of its needs and priorities, recognizing and building on the family's strengths. HFW incorporates reliance on "natural supports" such as relatives, extended family, community resources and places of worship.

- **Family Team Conferencing (FTC):** DHS is currently in the formative stages of implementing FTC as the core case management practice across all service delivery areas. This approach aims to coordinate and sequence all services that a family receives around a common plan established by the family with the support of a facilitator. Natural supports are typically an integral part of the family plan.

- **System of Care Initiative (SOCI):** In 1999, DHS began formalizing the use of natural supports through three grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that became collectively known in Allegheny County as the SOCI. These community-based demonstrations employed "wraparound" as the primary practice model for service delivery and the framework for values implementation within DHS. Designed for children with serious emotional disturbance who were involved in multiple child-serving systems, the intervention provided comprehensive and coordinated mental health services that included family- and community-based supports emphasizing family strengths. This initiative is one of the first examples of systematic use of natural supports at DHS.

Given the extent to which natural supports are involved in DHS case management and service planning, it is important to understand how to engage and utilize them when working with individuals and families across all areas of DHS.

A review of the literature demonstrates that the use of natural supports leads to positive outcomes for individuals and families. Studies have shown that individuals with a greater diversity of relationships and/or involvement in a broad range of social activities have healthier lives and live longer than those who lack such supports.[1] For example, natural supports may foster empowerment, independence and growth, and reduce the need for individuals to rely on professional services. A meta-analysis of 148 studies found a 50 percent increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships. Further, the influence of social relationships on the risk of death is comparable to smoking and alcohol consumption, and

[1] University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration. *Community Integration Tools: Natural Supports*. National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. Retrieved from http://tucollaborative.org/pdfs/Toolkits_Monographs_Guidebooks/relationships_family_friends_intimacy/Natural_Supports.pdf.

Executive Summary
(continued)

[2] Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., and Layton, J.B. (July 2010). Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review. *PLoS Medicine*, Volume 7 (Issue 7). Retrieved from www.plosmedicine.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pmed.1000316.

[3] Family Finding was created in 1999 by youth and permanency expert Kevin Campbell to find family members of children in out-of-home care. This approach is inspired by techniques used by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations for reuniting families separated by war, political conflict or natural disasters.

exceeds the influence of such risk factors as obesity and physical inactivity.[2] For these and other reasons, natural supports are one of the 10 core principles in all wraparound processes and play an integral role in FGDM, a strength-based, family-focused intervention process for families involved with the child welfare system. While there is currently no single best method for locating and engaging natural supports, a strategy called Family Finding is being used by some child welfare agencies to connect children in foster care with estranged family members.[3] This approach can be used as a model to locate and engage natural supports in other human service areas.

This report serves as an initial step in strengthening our commitment to the inclusion and promotion of natural supports in all DHS programs. It is based on the results of a literature review, an employee-wide survey and an in-depth look, through interviews with key informants, into programs and processes at DHS that are utilizing natural supports (see Appendix C for these narrative descriptions). The employee-wide survey (broadly defined to include in-house contract staff) was aimed at gauging knowledge and opinions about natural supports, as well as gathering information on areas of success in working with natural supports. In addition to the survey questions, employees were given the opportunity to share examples of programs demonstrating exemplary work with natural supports and to suggest ways in which DHS can be more successful in collaborating with natural supports. The answers to these questions helped guide the concluding recommendations for future work both in examining the role of natural supports within DHS and in continuing to improve upon case practice.

Some of the greatest challenges in working with natural supports included: 1) identifying natural supports in a timely way; 2) engaging natural supports in the process; 3) resistance by some individuals and families to using natural supports; 4) geographic and physical barriers; and 5) a lack of knowledge about available resources in the community. Each challenge presents an opportunity to identify ways in which to work with and expand the use of natural supports; these opportunities look different for each program area or process. Across DHS, common areas for growth include supporting efforts to identify natural supports, evaluating the effectiveness of natural supports and providing formal training for natural supports.

METHODOLOGY

DHS's utilization of natural supports was assessed in three ways: literature review, survey and interviews.

Literature Review

A literature review was conducted to provide a base for comparison and to illustrate best practices.

Survey

An employee-wide survey was conducted to: 1) assess familiarity with the term "natural supports" and its definition; 2) ascertain opinions about the effectiveness of DHS in working with and in communicating a commitment to working with natural supports; 3) find DHS offices and/or programs that currently utilize natural supports, along with suggestions for improvement; and 4) identify recommendations for improving the use of natural supports, including recommendations about employee training.

Due to the anticipated volume of responses, a self-administered, Web-based survey was determined to be the most efficient collection method. The initial request to complete the survey was sent on February 15, 2011, via email, by the Executive Director of DHS. The deadline for completion was March 1, 2011. Two subsequent email reminders were issued—the first, one week prior to the deadline, and the second, one day prior to the deadline. The request and reminders were sent via email to all DHS staff (1,454 recipients). The survey was voluntary and anonymous; responses from small bureaus/units were combined to prevent identification of an individual or a small group of individuals. A total of 507 employees participated in the survey for an overall response rate of 35 percent.

Interviews

Employees of programs that were experienced in the identification and use of natural supports were interviewed to determine: 1) how they define, identify and use natural supports; 2) challenges they face when involving natural supports in their work with clients; and 3) their recommendations for ways in which the use of natural supports can be improved and expanded throughout DHS. These employees were selected from the following programs:

- **Aging Waiver:** The Area Agency on Aging (AAA) provides support and services to eligible Pennsylvanians over the age of 60 through the Aging Waiver to make it possible for them to remain in their homes and communities. Natural supports are required to be included in the mandatory Individual Service Plan (ISP).

- **Family Group Decision Making (FGDM):** Launched in 1999, FGDM is designed to strengthen the natural care-giving system for the children. Participants include family members, extended family members, family-identified natural supports, CYF Case Managers and other service providers.

- **Family Support Centers (FSC):** FSCs are a community-based prevention strategy designed to nurture, protect and strengthen families. They provide parents and neighborhoods with the resources and supports they need to raise healthy and happy children. FSCs[4] have been connecting families to natural supports since their inception.

[4] Of the 32 Family Support Centers in Allegheny County, 27 receive funding from DHS.

- **High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW):** HFW is a team-based collaborative process for developing and implementing individualized plans for children who have behavioral health challenges and their families. The core principles of HFW describe a team-based approach, intentionally guided by the family's view of its needs and priorities, recognizing and building on the family's strengths and incorporating reliance on natural supports such as relatives, extended family, community resources and places of worship.

- **Family Team Conferencing (FTC):** DHS is currently in the formative stages of implementing FTC as the core case management practice across all service delivery areas. Natural supports are an integral part of the family plan, created by the family with the support of a facilitator.

- **System of Care Initiative (SOCI):** DHS's use of natural supports began with SOCI, three grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services designed to serve children with serious emotional disturbance who were involved in multiple child-serving systems. Collectively, the interventions provided comprehensive and coordinated mental health services, which included family- and community-based supports emphasizing family strengths, to children of all ages. These community-based demonstrations employed "wraparound" as the primary practice model for service delivery and the framework for values implementation within DHS.

Four of these programs (Aging Waiver, FGDM, HFW and the Jail Collaborative) were determined to have had the longest experience with natural supports and were therefore selected for further in-depth interviews. The specific interview questions are provided in Appendix A. Narrative descriptions of the findings from these interviews can be found in Appendix C.

FINDINGS

Literature Review

Defining Natural Supports

In 1988, Nesbit and Hagner first used the term "natural supports" to describe the "resources inherent in community environments that can be used for habilitative and supportive purposes."[5] The meaning of natural supports has broadened since 1988, as evidenced in the expanded definition used by the Welfare and Institution Code in Sacramento, California:

> *Natural supports means personal associations and relationships typically developed in the community that enhance the quality and security of life for people, including, but not limited to, family relationships; friendships reflecting the diversity of the neighborhood and the community; association with fellow students or employees in regular classrooms and work places; and associations developed through participation in clubs, organizations, and other civic activities.*[6]

The use of natural supports in service delivery has historically been associated with supported employment; however, in line with the expanded definition, the use of natural supports is becoming more common in association with services in child welfare, criminal justice, intellectual and physical disability, behavioral health, and aging.

Regarding permanency and wraparound services for youth in foster care, Pack and Kelly write, "Natural supports are individuals and resources a family can access 'naturally,' independent from formal services. These supports are a significant source of culturally relevant emotional support and caring friendships for children and families."[7] Natural supports usually involve relationships with family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors and acquaintances, and are of a reciprocal nature, whereas formal supports usually involve some form of payment for services and may include relationships with service providers, such as counselors, therapists, line staff and care managers.[8] Natural supports often mirror naturally occurring relationships and are frequently referred to as informal supports. Bruns notes that "professionals and paraprofessionals who interact with the family primarily offer paid support; however, they can also be connected to family members through caring relationships that exceed the boundaries and expectations of their formal roles. When they act in this way, professionals and paraprofessionals too can become sources of natural support."[9] Other examples of natural supports may include extended family members, mentors, tutors and sponsors in 12-step programs. Ideally, natural supports are the people associated with the settings in which a person lives, works and socializes.[10]

5 Allen, J.B. Jr. (n.d.). *Enhancing Recovery through Linkage with Indigenous Natural Supports*. Retrieved from www.power2u.org/downloads/Local_Communities_and_Natural_Support_Systems_2a-Mental_Health.doc.

6 California Lanterman Developmental Disabilities Service Act. Welfare and Institution Code, Part (e). United States of America.

7 Pack, S. and Kelly, E. (2011). *Natural Supports: Why they are Essential to the Success of Permanency and Wraparound*. Retrieved from http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/resource/uploadfiles/Natural%20Supports.pdf.

8 University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration.

9 Bruns, E.J., Walker, J.S., Adams, J., Miles, P., Osher, T.W., Rast, J., VanDenBerg, J.D., and National Wraparound Initiative Advisory Group (2004). Ten principles of the wraparound process. Portland, Ore.: National Wraparound Initiative, Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health, Portland State University. Available at www.oregon.gov/DHS/mentalhealth/wraparound/wraparound042707.pdf.

10 Department of Developmental Services. *How to Develop Natural Supports.* Sacramento, Calif.. Retrieved from www.dds.ca.gov/Publications/docs/Natural_Supports.pdf.

[11] University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration.

[12] Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T.B., Layton, J.B. (July 2010). Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-Analytic Review. *PLoS Medicine*, Volume 7 (Issue 7). Retrieved from www.plosmedicine.org/ article/info%3Adoi%2F10. 1371%2Fjournal.pmed. 1000316.

[13] Department of Developmental Services, p. 2.

[14] University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration.

[15] University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration.

[16] Pires, S.A. (2002). Building Systems of Care: A Primer. Health, ed. Washington, D.C.: Center for Mental Health Services Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

[17] American Humane Association (2008). Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare: Purpose, Values and Processes. Retrieved from www.americanhumane.org/ assets/pdfs/children/fgdm/ purpose.pdf.

[18] Issadore, T. and Mosby, P. (2010) *Natural Supports: They're all around you.* Institute of Family Involvement, Family Involvement Center, Phoenix, Ariz.

Benefits of Natural Supports

The consensus in the literature is that the use of natural supports leads to positive results. A number of studies have shown that individuals with a greater diversity of relationships and/or involvement in a broad range of social activities have healthier lives and live longer than those who lack such supports.[11] A meta-analysis of 148 studies found a 50 percent increased likelihood of survival for participants with stronger social relationships. Further, the influence of social relationships on the risk of death is comparable to smoking and alcohol consumption and exceeds the influence of such risk factors as obesity and physical inactivity.[12] According to the Sacramento Department of Developmental Services:

> *Natural supports allow a person to gain confidence by contributing toward a meaningful association or relationship. Developing natural supports is based on what the consumer wants, not on what "professionals" recommend. This enables consumers to be who they are, allowing their lives to grow and (perhaps) causing existing problems to lessen. But most important, natural supports allow for an environment that fosters laughter, attention, respect and love.*[13]

According to the University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration, natural supports help individuals develop a sense of social belonging, dignity and self-esteem.[14] The Collaborative believes that natural supports foster empowerment, independence and growth, and reduce the need for individuals to rely on services. "The support provided by informal community relationships cannot be taken for granted. Research has shown that people… consider these relationships significant sources of support."[15] In *Building Systems of Care: A Primer,* Pires asserts that natural helpers or supports sustain individuals on various levels, including skills building, emotional support, resource acquisition and general day-to-day aid.

Using Natural Supports

The ways in which natural supports are utilized is determined by the specific needs of the individual and/or family. Natural supports are frequently one component of a comprehensive treatment plan; for example, natural supports are one of the 10 core principles fundamental to all wraparound processes.

Additionally, natural supports play an integral role in the FGDM process in which participants assist the family in constructing and implementing plans that support the safety, permanency and well-being of children involved in the child welfare system. The FGDM meeting is designed to strengthen the natural care-giving system for the children. Participants include family members, family-identified natural supports, child welfare Case Managers and other service providers.[17] Issadore and Mosby believe that natural supports help with the brainstorming process, help keep the child and family team honest, support the choices of the individual, provide a safety net when things go wrong, bring a history and unique perspective of what works and what does not, play a natural role in assisting with the prevention portion of crisis planning, and are present before formal supports arrive and stay long after they move on.[18]

Locating Natural Supports

Connections to natural supports can be made through a variety of sources, and especially through existing supports. According to the Sacramento Department of Developmental Services:

> *There is no single method or easy answer for developing a system of natural supports. It's a matter of supporting and assisting consumers to be in a position to develop associations and relationships. The activity of someone assisting in developing natural supports for a consumer is in devising strategies to bridge the gap between the opportunities for, and development of, natural supports. It may require considerable time to develop and nurture natural supports.*[19]

One study found that two-thirds of relationships with natural supports began in formal institutions such as school, work and church.[20] Natural supports were also reportedly accessed through an individual's local neighborhood or through other friends. Some ways for individuals to build up natural supports include participating in community activities and projects, joining groups and clubs, volunteering, socializing with one's immediate and extended family and neighbors, and getting a job.[21] In FGDM, family members identify the natural supports with whom they will work to develop a plan for keeping their children safe. In other instances, Case Managers may identify natural supports, such as community centers, churches and support groups, where the individual or family can participate in an already-established community of support.

Connections to natural supports are also made through professional service linkages. Often, Case Managers and other professionals assist with advice and information to help individuals smoothly integrate into the community. They may also serve as advocates for locating natural supports and networks. Professional organizations have integrated natural supports into recovery or treatment programs by hiring or consulting with individuals who have been through similar experiences. For example, in HFW, Youth Support Partners (YSPs), young people who have had direct personal involvement with the child welfare system, engage with other youth in peer-to-peer relationships. Through the development of trusting relationships, they can encourage the inexperienced youth to participate in planning and to follow up on recommendations made by the team. YSPs can also help youth identify other natural supports. Similarly, the Family Support Partner (FSP) is an adult who has raised a child or youth with complex emotional needs and provides support to another parent. This is especially effective because they are "part of the communities in which they work, ethnically, socioeconomically and experimentally. They possess an intimate understanding of the community's social networks, strengths and health needs."[22]

[19] Department of Developmental Services, p. 3.

[20] Griffith, J. (1985). *Social Support Providers: Who Are They? Where Are They Met? and the Relationship of Network Characteristics to Psychological Distress.* Basic and Applied Social Psychology 1985; 6(1): 41–60.

[21] University of Pennsylvania Collaborative on Community Integration.

[22] DiClemente R.J., Crosby R.A., and Kegler M.C. *Emerging theories in health promotion practice and research*, 2nd ed. San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

In child welfare services, some agencies are using a strategy called Family Finding to connect children in foster care with unfamiliar family members. Family Finding was created in 1999 by youth and permanency expert Kevin Campbell to find family members of children in out-of-home care. This approach was inspired by techniques used by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations for reuniting families separated by war, political conflict or natural disasters. The model is particularly applicable to areas that have high rates of poverty or out-of-home placements.[23] Family Finding includes six stages: 1) discovering at least 40 family members of the child using tools such as Internet searches and genealogical archives, 2) learning more about the child through close connections; 3) planning for the child's successful future with family members and others important to the child; 4) decision-making for the future, including plans for legal and emotional permanency; 5) evaluating the permanency plan; and 6) following up with the child and family.[24] The model has yet to undergo a rigorous evaluation, but appears to be successful and has garnered national media attention. The Family Finding approach could serve as a model for locating and engaging natural supports in other human service areas.

Natural supports are often referenced as a component of comprehensive treatment plans, and the benefits are noted throughout the literature. However, there is currently no agreed-upon definition of natural supports, and there are challenges to engaging natural supports with individuals. The following survey and employee interviews will highlight areas of success, challenges, and ways to improve and expand the use of natural supports across systems at DHS.

Survey Findings

A survey was distributed to DHS employees[25] to:

- Assess their familiarity with the term and definition of "natural supports."

- Determine their opinion about DHS's effectiveness in using natural supports.

- Convey DHS's commitment to working with natural supports, and identify areas in which natural supports are already being used.

- Solicit suggestions for additional uses of natural supports and improvements in the ways in which this use is occurring.

- Identify areas in which additional employee training would be beneficial.

Results

Response Rate

Thirty-five percent of DHS staff from different offices (507 of 1454) participated in the survey; rates of participation by office varied from 20 percent to 63 percent. As demonstrated in Table 1, response rate did not correlate with the program offices' use or knowledge of natural supports.

[23] The Duke Endowment (2009). Family Finding. Retrieved from www.dukeendowment. org/families/family-finding-strategy?Itemid=388.

[24] The Duke Endowment.

[25] Broadly defined to include all DHS staff, including county employees (68 percent) and contracted staff (32 percent).

TABLE 1: **Response Rate within Individual DHS Offices**

DHS OFFICE	NUMBER EMPLOYED	NUMBER OF RESPONSES	RESPONSE RATE
Area Agency on Aging (AAA)	212	87	41%
Administrative and Information Management Systems (AIMS)	201	40	20%
Data, Analysis, Research and Evaluation (DARE)	16	10	63%
Executive Office	53	23	43%
Office of Behavioral Health (OBH)	169	64	38%
Office of Community Relations (OCR)	39	19	49%
Office of Community Services (OCS)	105	38	36%
Office of Children, Youth and Families (CYF)	604	164	27%
Office of Intellectual Disabilities (OID)	55	34	62%
Did not specify an office	—	28	—
Total (DHS-wide)	**1,454**	**507**	**35%**

Employee Characteristics

Job Function
Forty-two percent of survey respondents provide direct consumer services, a percentage that reflects the large number of direct-service employees in CYF and AAA.

[26]Totals exceed 100 percent as some respondents selected more than one primary job function.

TABLE 2: **Primary Job Function Reported by Respondents** (n = 427)[26]

PRIMARY JOB FUNCTION	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
Direct Consumer Services (including supervisors)	42%
Administrative/Clerical	21%
Other	13%
Management	12%
Planning/Programs	8%
Information Services	7%
Fiscal/Budgets	5%
Evaluation/Research/Data	5%
Communication	3%
Contracts	3%

Length of Employment
Thirty-two percent (n = 155) of respondents have been employed at DHS between one and five years.

FIGURE 1: **Percent of Responses by Length of Employment (n = 483)**
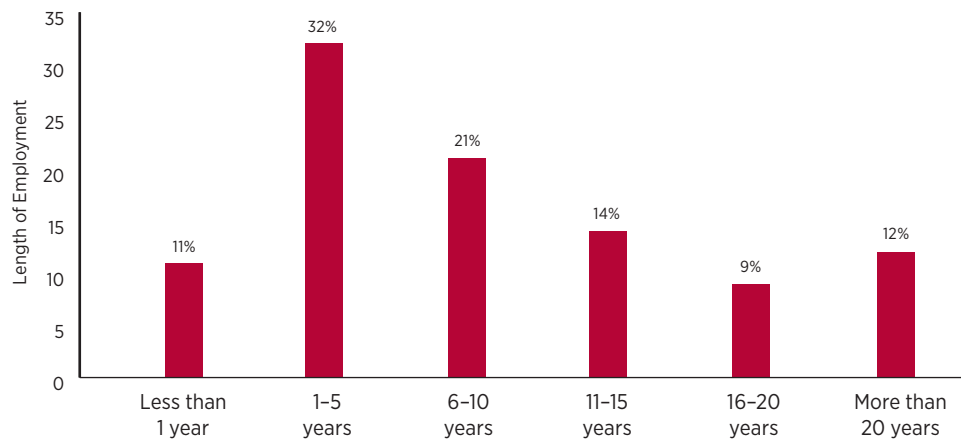
Answers to substantive questions were analyzed by length of employment. No notable trends emerged across groups of employees with different tenures.

"Natural Supports" Term and Definition

Figure 2 indicates variation among program offices in awareness of the term "natural supports," although overall, nearly six in 10 respondents (58 percent, n = 279) had heard the term prior to taking this survey.

FIGURE 2: **Awareness of the Term "Natural Supports" by Office**
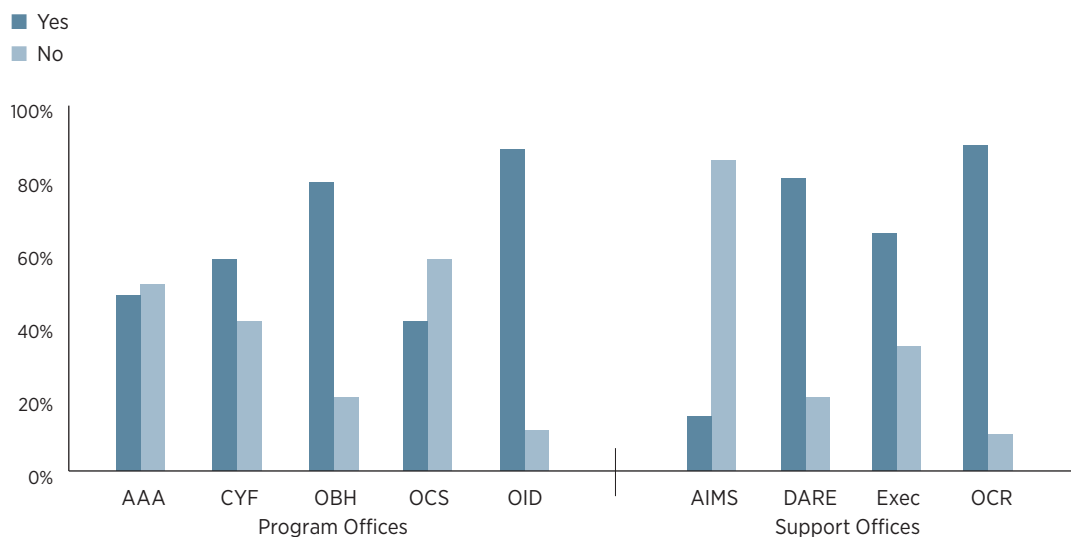
To the surprise of the surveyors, there was greater familiarity with the *definition* of "natural supports"; the majority of employees across all offices were familiar with the definition. One possible explanation for the disparity between familiarity with the term and knowledge of its definition is that employees are familiar with the concept of natural supports but not the term.

FIGURE 3: **Familiarity with the Definition of "Natural Supports" by Office**
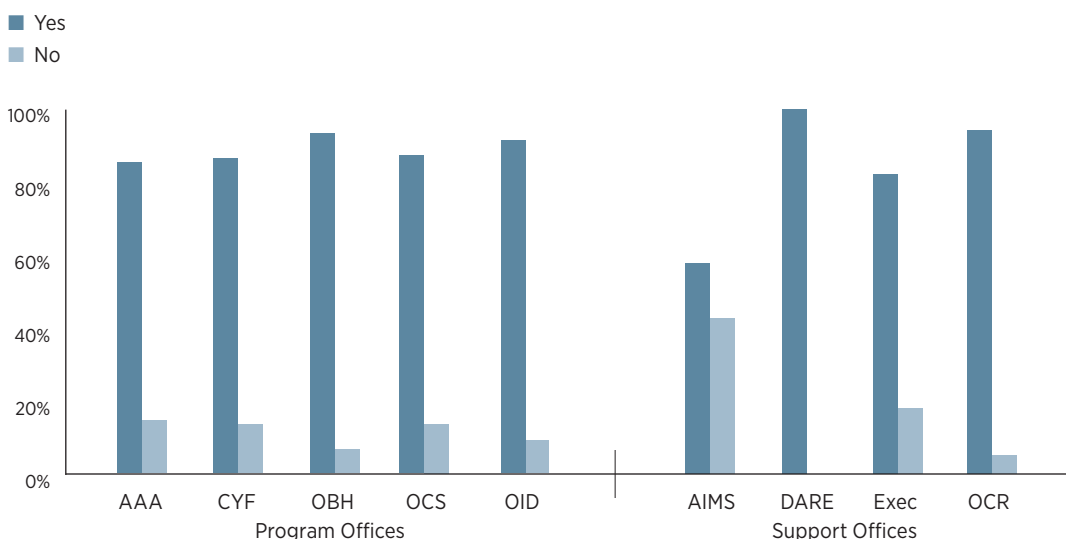
Respondents were also asked how often they hear the term being used in the workplace. Even though 58 percent of respondents have heard the term, fewer (49 percent) answered that they hear it used in the workplace. (It should be noted that DARE's response pattern might be influenced by the primary staff on this project being assigned to DARE. That is, the term was used more often in DARE due to this project.)

TABLE 3: **Frequency of Term Use in Workplace by Office**

	TERM NEVER USED	TERM USED ONCE PER MONTH	TERM USED ONCE PER WEEK	TERM USED THREE TO FOUR TIMES PER WEEK	TERM USED AT LEAST ONCE PER DAY
PROGRAM OFFICES					
AAA	63%	13%	7%	10%	7%
CYF	47%	14%	14%	16%	9%
OBH	25%	16%	16%	25%	18%
OCS	65%	35%	0%	0%	0%
OID	18%	24%	12%	33%	12%
SUPPORT OFFICES					
AIMS	93%	8%	0%	0%	0%
DARE	20%	40%	20%	10%	10%
EXECUTIVE	30%	4%	17%	22%	26%
OCR	50%	22%	11%	17%	0%

One possible explanation for this discrepancy is the frequency with which alternate terms are used to describe natural supports. While it varied by program office, agency-wide, 49 percent of respondents reported having heard a different term used to describe natural supports.

FIGURE 4: **Use of Alternative Terms by Office**

DHS's Commitment to Natural Supports
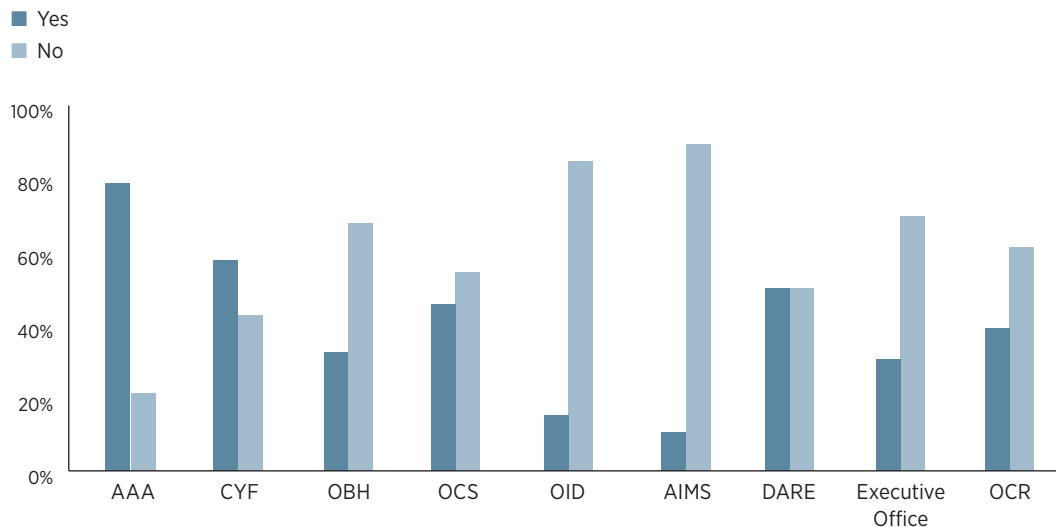
Terms with which employees were familiar fell into one of two categories: alternative terms (e.g., "informal supports") and specific examples (e.g., "life coach"). The most commonly cited term was "informal supports." The image below represents a summary of the alternative terms that were listed. It is important to note that the size of the font in the image (known as a "wordie") directly relates to the frequency with which the term was identified.

FIGURE 5: **Alternative Terms for "Natural Supports"**

DHS's Commitment to Natural Supports

Respondents were asked for their opinion of DHS's commitment to using natural supports with four different audiences: consumers, DHS staff, the provider community and the broader community. Results are reflected in Figure 6.

FIGURE 6: **Effectiveness of Communication, All Respondents** (n = 465)

- Very effectively
- Effectively
- Neither effectively nor ineffectively
- Ineffectively
- Very ineffectively
- I don't know/don't have an opinion
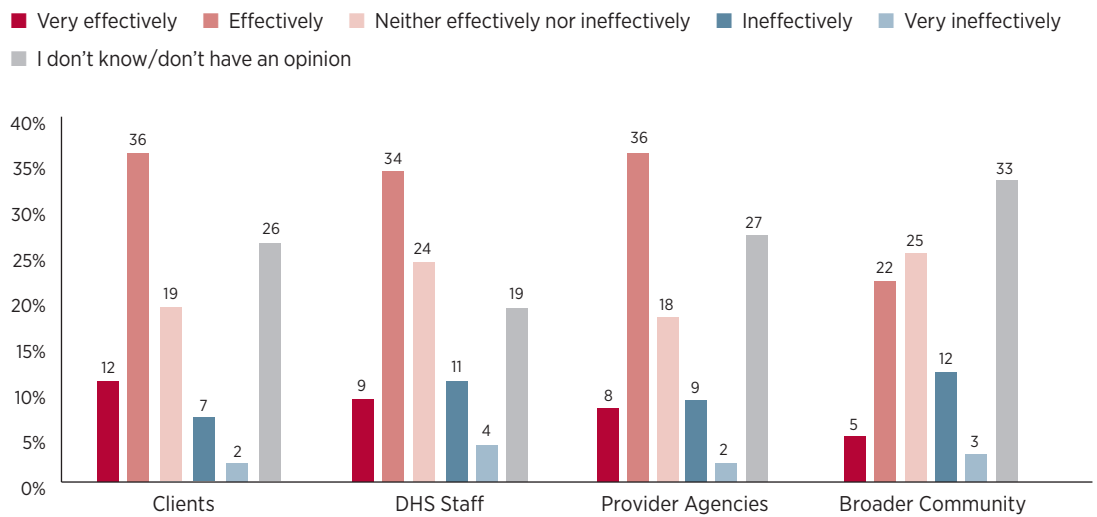
DHS's Effectiveness in Utilizing Natural Supports

Respondents were asked about their opinions of their unit's and DHS's effectiveness in utilizing natural supports. As demonstrated below in Figure 7, when a response was provided, employees always rated their own work environment as better or at least equal to DHS as a whole.

FIGURE 7. **Effectiveness of Working with Natural Supports, All Respondents** (n = 465)

- Very effectively
- Effectively
- Neither effectively nor ineffectively
- Ineffectively
- Very ineffectively
- I don't know/don't have an opinion
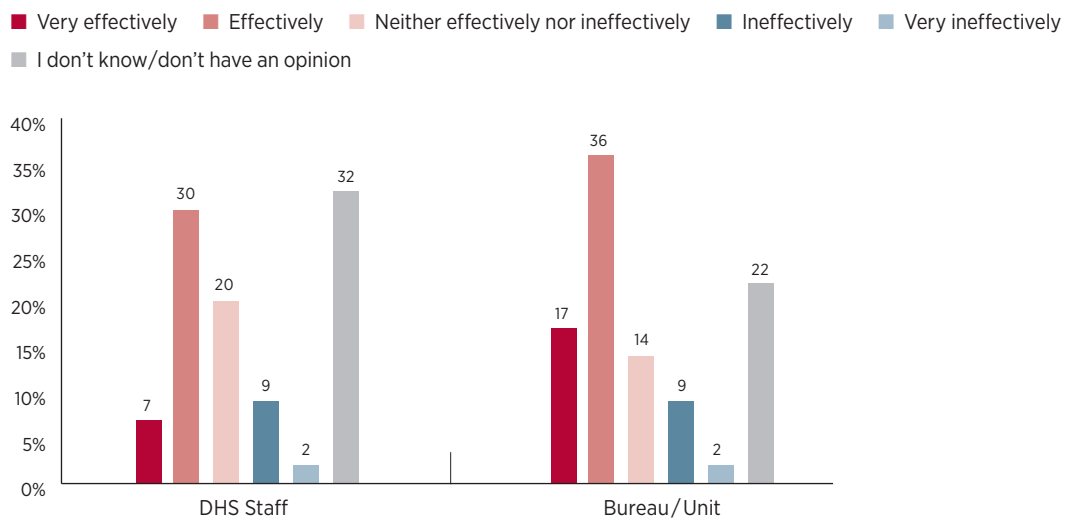
Contribution to Consumer Success

Eighty percent of respondents believe that natural supports contribute to a consumer's success either to a very great or a great extent.

FIGURE 8: Extent to which Natural Supports Contribute to Consumers' Success

Very small	**1%**
Small	**2%**
Somewhat	**17%**
Great	**39%**
Very great	**40%**

Programs/Initiatives Currently Working with Natural Supports

Asking respondents about programs/initiatives in which natural supports are currently being used provided information about ways in which to get more detailed information about how they are being implemented and ways in which expansion and improvement could occur. The 200+ responses are pictured in the wordie below.

FIGURE 9: DHS Programs and Services in which Natural Supports are Used

Twenty or more employees mentioned the following programs/initiatives:

TABLE 4: **Programs in which Natural Supports are Used, by Number of Staff Mentions**

PROGRAM/INITIATIVE	NUMBER OF MENTIONS
Family Group Decision Making (FGDM)	80
High-Fidelity Wraparound (HFW)	27
Children, Youth & Families (CYF)	24
Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Waivers	20
System of Care Initiative (SOCI)	20

Employee Ideas for Increased Success

Almost half of the respondents included suggestions about ways in which DHS can improve the quality of its work with natural supports. The following outlines the most common themes:

Education and Communication

1. Increase training on topics such as:

    a. the importance of natural supports

    b. concrete skills and strategies for engaging and working with natural supports

    c. how each DHS office succeeds with natural supports

    d. how to support and empower natural supports once they are engaged

    e. local resources and cultivating natural supports within communities

2. Provide training for families, communities and natural supports.

3. Provide community-wide education and communication about natural supports through media outlets, community forums and other methods.

    a. Outline general concepts and understanding of the importance of natural supports.

    b. Provide information about specific resources and organizations consumers can refer to, specific to each community.

    c. Work with OCR to identify possible ways to highlight natural supports, through the DHS newsletter or other communication mechanisms.

4. Improve communication:

    a. to the general public about existing programs

    b. within DHS about how we work with natural supports

    c. with the natural supports themselves

    d. create a DHS Web page dedicated to natural supports

e. with consumers about the purpose and importance of their natural supports (some felt that this would also contribute to efforts to decrease the stigma of mental illness)

f. with DHS staff

g. identify and acknowledge an employee who has been an essential support in the improvement of family services and provide him or her with public recognition

h. with providers

i. acknowledge providers who increase partnerships with and use natural supports in planning

Agency Support

1. Legitimize the work that agencies are doing with natural supports.

   a. Add natural supports to the DHS vision statement and guiding principles.

   b. Develop policies regarding communicating and working with natural supports, especially as related to confidentiality issues.

   c. Insist that direct-service professionals include natural supports in care/case planning and that natural supports are included in the work with the individual/family.

   d. Create a more uniform model of working with natural supports.

Collaboration

1. Increase collaboration with local providers, agencies and organizations.

   a. Reach out to religious institutions, schools, community centers, health care facilities, universities and local businesses to expand DHS's referral network.

   b. Increase collaboration among DHS departments and encourage the sharing of information about how each incorporates natural supports.

Engagement

1. Provide opportunities that encourage natural supports to be active in individuals' treatment and services.

   a. Maintain engagement with natural supports throughout the entire service process.

   b. Encourage individuals to identify important natural supports that exist in their lives and/or community, and promote participation from those individuals while monitoring how they are influencing the process and/or consumer.

   c. Include these individuals in care plans.

   d. Clarify ways in which to work effectively with natural supports while maintaining confidentiality.

2. Standardize the process of identifying the natural supports.

Additional Suggestions

1. Include specific questions pertaining to natural supports in all DHS applications for services.

2. Increase focus on natural supports at resource fairs.

3. Inventory consumers' natural supports early in the process so that they will have been developed and/or identified prior to a crisis situation.

4. Allow for more creativity.

Employee Interviews: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Employees in the following DHS programs were interviewed to determine: 1) how they define, identify and use natural supports; 2) the challenges of incorporating natural supports into these programs; and 3) opportunities to expand the use of natural supports throughout DHS:

*   AAA Aging Waiver

*   FGDM

*   FSCs

*   FTC

*   HFW

*   SOCI

Natural supports are loosely defined because defining them can be a double-edged sword; what seems natural to Case Managers may be unnatural to the family.

Given the extent to which natural supports are involved in DHS case management and service planning, it is important for DHS to understand how to engage and utilize them effectively. Because they were named most frequently in the employee surveys, the Aging Waiver, FGDM, HFW and the Jail Collaborative were selected for further examination. Each of these programs can serve as a model for the continued use and implementation of natural supports, and their experiences can be used to inform future practice. Key people from each program area were interviewed using a set of questions about natural supports; these questions are included in Appendix A. The following is a summary of highlights from their responses; a full narrative about the interviews can be found in Appendix C. Challenges and opportunities are presented to draw attention to areas for improvement.

Defining Natural Supports

Similar to findings in the literature review, a common definition of natural supports does not exist among the program areas at DHS. However, the differences are small and relate to the ways in which DHS staff work with individuals.

- The *Aging Waiver* refers to natural supports as "informal supports." These "informal" or natural supports are described as any unpaid individual who is involved with the consumer or is supporting the consumer in the community.

- *HFW* defines natural supports as "resources and supports that families are able to access." It is important to note that "extended family" as defined by the family might include close friends who are not actually related to the family.

- *FGDM* uses the language "family supports" to refer to natural supports. FGDM does not specifically define natural supports because the family decides what "natural supports" means to them.

- Similarly, the J*ail Collaborative* defines natural supports based on what the inmate and/or his family feels are his natural supports. Natural supports, or family supports, are loosely defined because defining them can be a double-edged sword; what seems natural to Case Managers may be unnatural to the family. Therefore, natural supports are discussed, but not defined.

Identifying Natural Supports

Natural supports are typically identified by the individual or family receiving services. In HFW and FGDM, individuals are always asked to identify the people in their lives whom they view as natural supports. For example, the HFW facilitator asks, ***"Who is important in your life that you would call in a crisis or emergency?"*** Those are the people that the facilitator wants to engage. Unfortunately, there are families with limited natural supports who require introductions to community and support groups and encouragement to re-engage with old friends and supports with which they might have lost contact. Brainstorming sessions and utilizing the connections of YSPs and FSPs are other ways in which natural supports can be identified.

Family Support Specialists (FSSs) with the Jail Collaborative ask the inmate, "Who are your natural supports? If you got out tomorrow, who would be there for you?" They explore the natural supports with the inmate and then seek out those natural supports to assist with the assessment and re-entry plan.

In the FGDM process, the family creates an invitation list, and the advocates make phone calls to invite those individuals into the process. Phone calls are followed up with a formal invitation to the family conference. As part of the process, FGDM facilitators and case managers are beginning to use the Family Finding approach to locate family members of children in care.

In addition to helping locate natural supports that are familiar to the individual or family, staff also research and compile lists of additional resources and supports that are available in the community.

The interests of the family or individual are considered when identifying potential supports; for example, if an individual in the Aging Waiver expresses an interest in gardening, the Case Manager will locate a community gardening program and connect the individual to the program.

Locating natural supports was identified as a significant challenge by all interviewees.

Using Natural Supports

All of the programs believe in the value of active involvement by natural supports. ***FGDM speaks to every family having strengths, history and traditions.*** According to Natalie Jones, CYF Regional Office Director, "The FGDM process uses natural supports to address disparity and disproportionality with child welfare. The focus is on strengths."

In HFW, staff members are required to make efforts to access natural supports. Keith Solomon, System Integration Specialist, states, "It's non-negotiable. We strive to get as many natural supports involved with a family's team as possible. The goal is to have 50 percent of the planning team for the family and 50 percent of the action plan composed of natural supports. HFW uses the strengths, resources and supports of the family to address their needs. If the plan is based on natural supports, there is a greater chance that they will continue to use them after paid supports end." The natural supports participate in identifying strategies and ideas to help the family accomplish their goals. They also help identify the strengths within the family. Natural supports then assume responsibility for tasks or strategies included in the plan.

At the Jail Collaborative, the natural supports advise the FSS about the classes that the inmate should be involved in at the jail. They also sign the in-jail and in-community service plans and participate in the re-entry plan. The natural supports, usually family members of the inmate, will discuss their own needs and natural supports with the FSS in order to get support while the individual is incarcerated. Structured family contact visits are developed specifically for inmates who are taking part in the Family Support Program, and coaching in parenting techniques is provided prior to the first visit. The visits are facilitated by the FSS and the part-time family therapist. Unlike most visits with inmates, which take place on either side of window glass, inmates who participate in these visits can get on the floor and play with their children using age-appropriate toys. In addition, the FSS coordinates weekly conference calls between inmates and their families, to assist in reunification and in maintaining bonds with children. The FSS facilitates these discussions, helping family members address issues that are difficult to discuss, plan for the future and practice positive parenting approaches.[27] According to Amy Kroll, Administrator of Re-entry at the Allegheny County Jail (ACJ), the jail has made significant progress in structuring these family contact visits. Currently, 12 families are participating each month, but the goal is 30 families. Additionally, the Jail Collaborative is working with 32 FSCs to get children of inmates involved in a variety of activities after the inmate is released from jail.

Case Managers with the Aging Waiver include family and friends in the ISP, a formalized care plan that includes Pennsylvania's definition of natural supports. Case Managers also identify churches and civic organizations to see what support they can provide (after making sure that

[27] Allegheny County Jail Collaborative (2011). *Annual Report.*

the individual wants to be involved with that organization). Judy Beck, Care Management Supervisor with the AAA, states:

> *Many older people feel isolated. The Case Managers are good at having conversations to include the individual in the process. The kinds of natural supports that are needed change as consumers change. For example, Case Managers are seeing more adults in the 60–65 range, which is a younger population than they have previously seen. Along with this change have come more drug and alcohol issues, so Managers are identifying Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups as supports.*

Challenges

Identifying and engaging natural supports are significant challenges for all programs. In FGDM, one barrier is getting families to believe that they will be permitted to make their own decisions, because many families are more familiar with an approach that does not focus on the family's strengths. In order to build trust, the family advocates encourage the FGDM process as an opportunity to bring natural supports back into the lives of family members. The process includes hosting a meal at which the natural supports have an opportunity to get together to discuss the family's strengths, traditions and history.

Although many CYF Case Managers maintain that their clients have benefited from the inclusion of natural supports, some stakeholders within the system, including some judges and Case Managers, are skeptical about their involvement. However, the mandated Family Service Plan now reflects the FGDM-developed family plan, and CYF is more focused on placing children in kinship care when it is in the best interest of the children. There has been a paradigm shift and a change in mindset at CYF because of the use of natural supports in FGDM.

Some families involved with HFW are hesitant to engage natural supports because of their negative perception of the process. To counteract this, the facilitator emphasizes the strength-based focus of HFW and assures the family that the relationship between the family and the natural supports will be positive and supportive.

Geographical and physical barriers, such as the large size of Allegheny County and transportation difficulties, are addressed in a number of ways, including providing transportation when necessary, arranging for meetings to be close and convenient for the family, and offering alternatives to meeting attendance such as phone or Web conferencing.

At the ACJ, involvement by family and extended family is hampered by the configuration of the building, which makes it difficult for large numbers of inmates to have structured family contact visits.

The Aging Waiver faces challenges such as a lack of familiarity with available resources, consumer resistance to accepting help, and an insufficient number of organizations or resources in some communities relative to demand. Additionally, there is a growing need for non-traditional

services, such as support for grandparents raising grandchildren and mental health issues among the elderly. According to Judy Beck, some of these challenges could be mitigated by providing a list of resources and supports on the DHS website.

Opportunities

Opportunities to overcome these barriers and challenges were identified by program staff. One suggestion involved increasing staff capacity to locate and engage natural supports, perhaps through a newly created staff position dedicated to this role. Increasing families' knowledge of the value of natural supports, and engaging them more in the process of identifying them, emerged as an opportunity to both enhance family involvement and increase the probability of locating natural supports.

Amy Kroll identified several program and policy changes that could maximize the use of natural supports at the jail. These changes include:

- modifying visiting policies so that all inmates can have regular visits (rather than window visits) and more can participate in structured family contact visits
- changing the physical structure of the jail to allow for more structured family contact visits
- training officers and guards about the importance of natural supports
- grouping all inmates together in pods by risk (currently grouped by classification, i.e., charge)
- using all pods (not just a few specialized treatment pods) as a treatment capsule instead of a housing unit

Evaluating the effectiveness of natural supports is another opportunity for DHS. Publication of positive evaluation results can encourage other programs to utilize natural supports. Currently, most of the surveyed programs are collecting data, but are not monitoring outcomes related to natural supports. The Jail Collaborative has been tracking statistics since April 2011; among the data collected are number of contacts listed per inmate, services provided to the family, family visits, and services to which the family has been linked. The Jail Collaborative data has not been analyzed, but there are two goals that lend themselves to analysis: 1) increase reunification of families upon release, and 2) reduce recidivism rates. Other goals that could be evaluated are reducing separation for children and increasing family involvement once the individual returns home.

Other programs keep track of data on natural supports, but have no easy way to determine their effectiveness; they are not currently reporting outcomes related to natural supports.

The training of natural supports is another area for expansion. Currently, training for natural supports is limited. Although the Aging Waiver provides training or preparation for natural supports, there is no formal training for natural supports throughout the rest of AAA other than informing families about the availability of support groups, such as those for specific chronic diseases. HFW informs natural supports of their role in the HFW process when they join the

planning team, but there is no formal training. In FGDM, during the family conference, the team identifies a neutral facilitator, and that person receives training on the FGDM process. However, more formal support and training for all natural supports could improve outcomes for individuals and increase the likelihood that natural supports will stay engaged during the process and after paid supports end.

Staff identified ways to encourage the expansion of the use of natural supports across DHS. These include hosting family events and sharing consumer testimonials, in which the individual or family has the opportunity to tell a story of transformation from beginning to end. These testimonials and stories should include the ways in which natural supports contributed to the transformation and/or successful outcome for the individual or family.

More detailed information about each program can be found in Appendix C.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Natural supports, known by a variety of names, are more widely utilized and better understood than was expected. It is clear that many pockets of excellence exist and that employees have creative and diverse ideas for how to further our work in this area. A number of recommendations were made by DHS staff to expand and improve our ability to utilize natural supports in the most effective way. These recommendations, which were discussed in previous sections of the report, are briefly summarized here.

Recommendations

1. Establish a common language and knowledge base; consider uniformity in the model, while allowing for flexibility and maintaining the unique identity of the services offered by each program office/bureau.

2. Increase the visibility of natural supports, and of the myriad ways in which they are successfully utilized, through a strategy designed with assistance from OCR.

3. Provide education and communication for staff, consumers and individuals identified as natural supports.

4. Provide education, training and staff support to improve the ability to identify, recruit and engage natural supports.

5. Increase family knowledge of the benefits of engaging natural supports and their involvement in identifying and locating natural supports.

6. Design future research to track the evolution of the use of natural supports.

7. Seek ongoing feedback from consumers regarding their experience with natural supports.

APPENDIX A: QUESTIONS FOR EMPLOYEE INTERVIEWS

1. Does your program define natural supports? If so, what is the definition? Is the definition written into any staff training materials or consumer documents?

2. How supportive are the philosophies behind this program in utilizing natural supports?

3. Is program staff encouraged to utilize natural supports?

    a. If yes, what are some examples of how natural supports are included in work with consumers?

    b. How long has this program been using natural supports?

    c. How are natural supports actively involved in the planning process for consumers?

    d. What are ways the program works with consumers to increase or strengthen their natural supports? How are natural supports located?

    e. Does the program have specific strategies to recruit natural supports?

    f. Are natural supports prepared by members of your staff for their role in the process? If so, do they receive training?

    g. What input, if any, does the *consumer* have in locating and using natural supports?

4. Is the program mandated to utilize or attempt to utilize natural supports (e.g., by federal regulations)?

5. Has your office altered any policies or practices based on experiences with natural supports? If so, please elaborate.

6. On a scale of 1 to 5 (with 1 being not at all effective and 5 being very effective), how effective is the program at working with natural supports? Do you believe staff would answer similarly? Why or why not?

7. What barriers, real or perceived, do you or program staff face in working with natural supports?

8. What policy or practice changes would increase or improve utilization of natural supports? Please consider this program, as well as the wider DHS community.

9. Do you track or measure any data related to natural supports (e.g., number of cases in which natural supports are involved, number of cases in which staff have assisted consumers in increasing their natural supports, ways in which natural supports have provided support to consumers and families)?

    a. If so, what does your office measure or track?

    b. How are data stored (e.g., paper copies, treatment plans, databases, consumer surveys)?

    c. If you are not currently collecting natural supports data, do you have plans to do so in the future?

10. Are you aware of any best practices around the inclusion or development of natural supports for the consumers with whom you work? If so, what are they?

APPENDIX B: EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATING DHS'S COMMITMENT TO NATURAL SUPPORTS TO CONSUMERS, DHS STAFF, PROVIDER AGENCIES, AND THE BROADER COMMUNITY

FIGURE 10: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, AAA** (n = 86)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 11: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, AIMS**

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 12: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, CYF** (n = 150)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
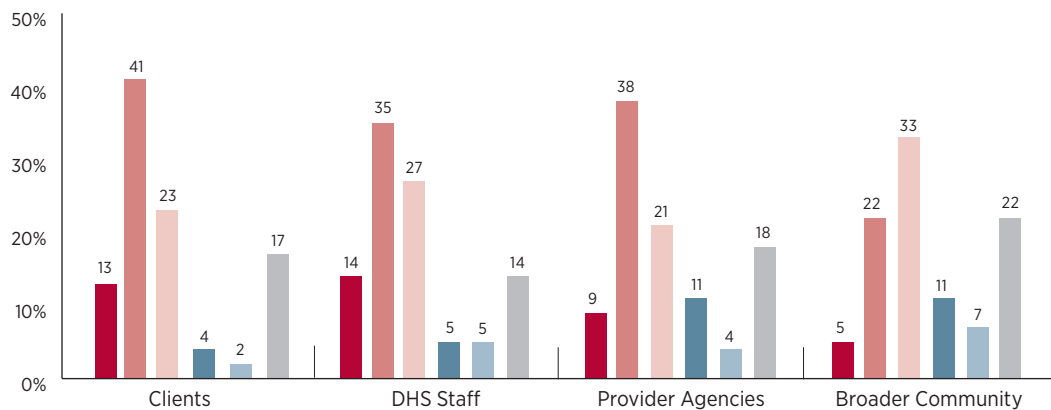■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 13: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, DARE** (n = 9)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
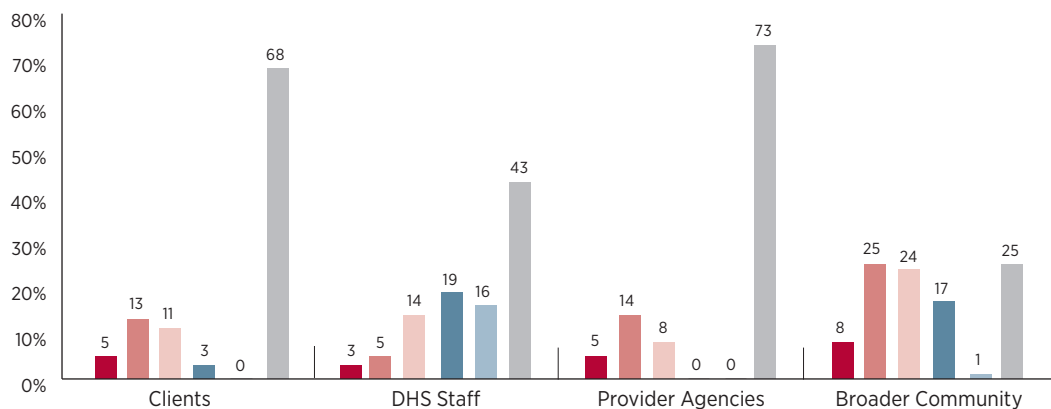■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 14: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, Executive Office** (n = 22)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
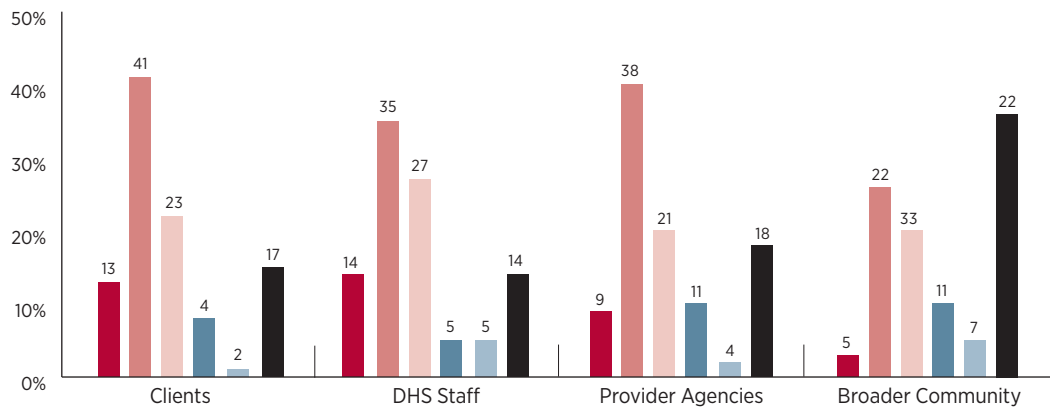■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 15: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, OBH** (n = 61)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 16: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, OCR** (n = 19)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
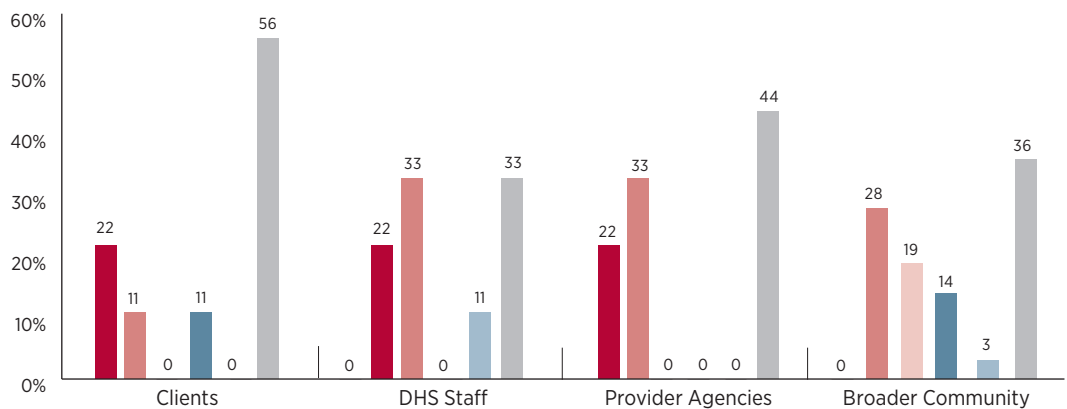■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 17: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, OCS** (n = 37)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

FIGURE 18: **Effectiveness of Communicating Commitment to Natural Supports, OID** (n = 31)

■ Very effectively   ■ Effectively   ■ Neither effectively nor ineffectively   ■ Ineffectively   ■ Very ineffectively
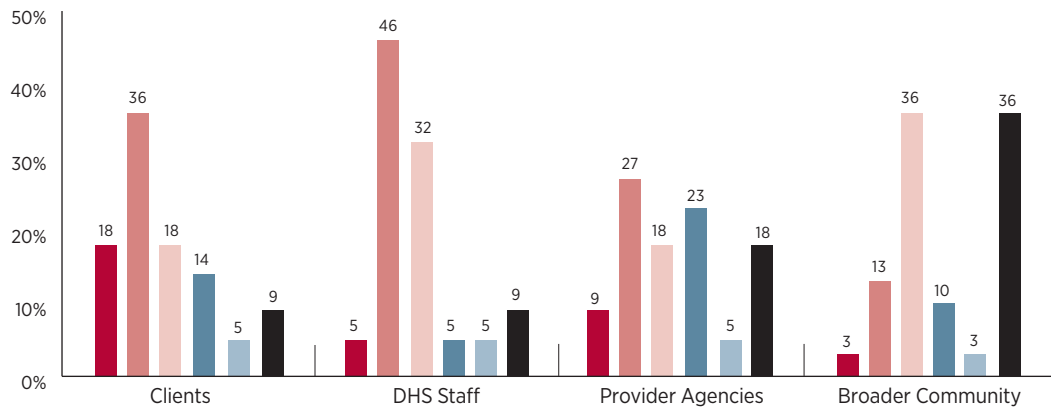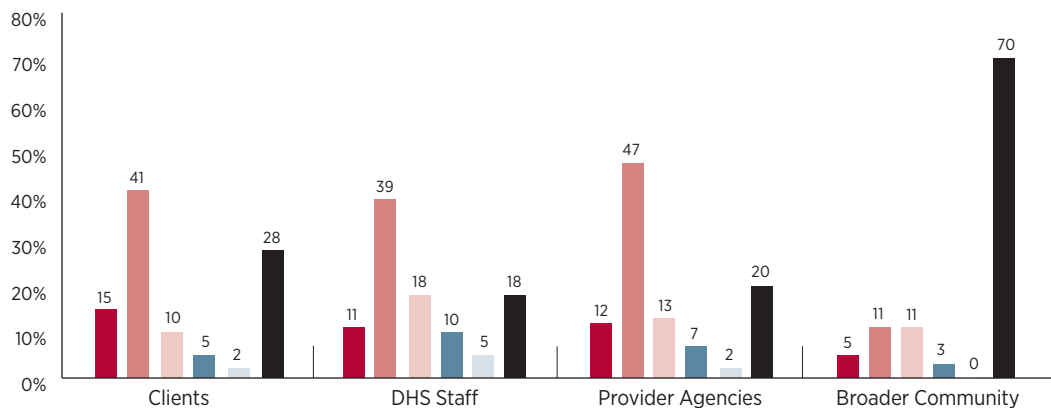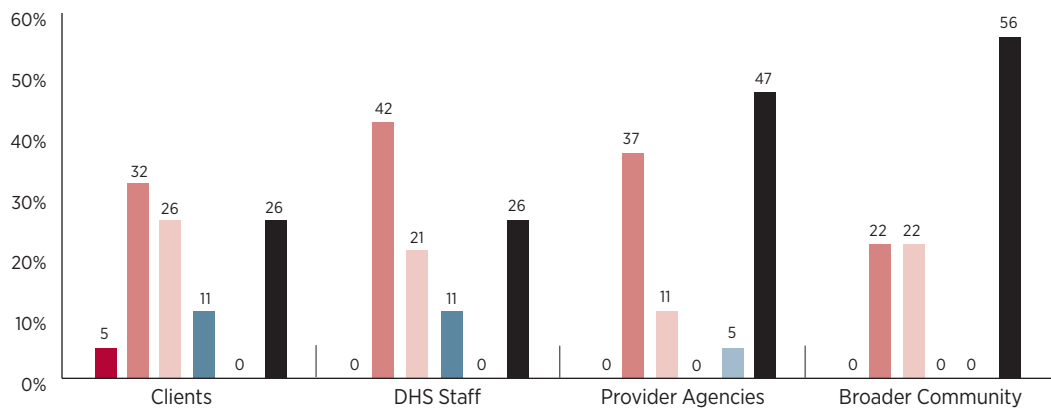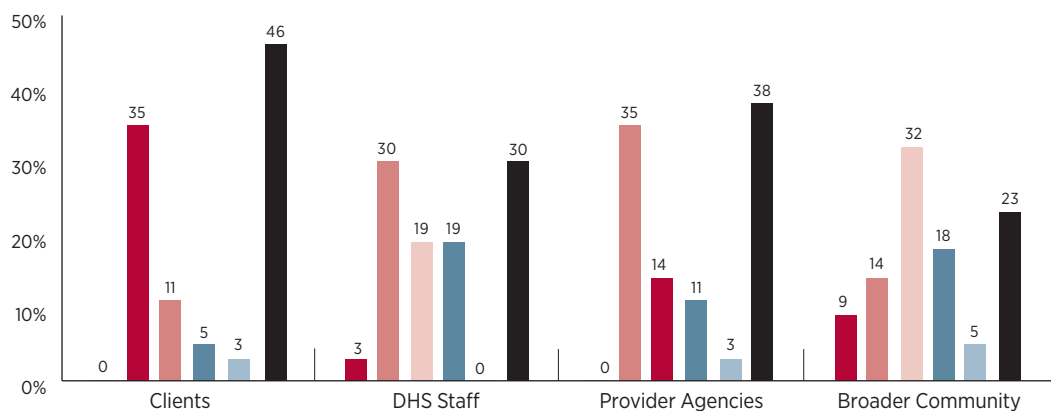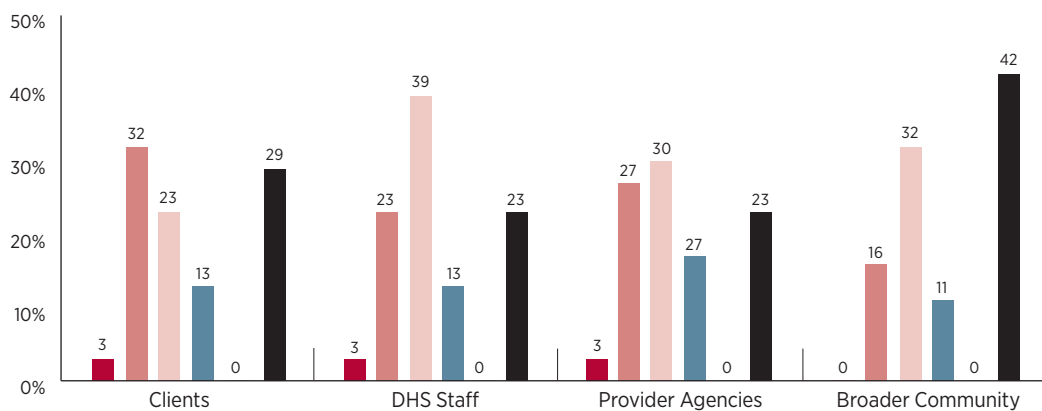■ I don't know/don't have an opinion

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW FINDINGS — NARRATIVE DESCRIPTIONS

Family Group Decision Making

Background

In the survey on natural supports, Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) was named 80 times (out of 200 responses). "FGDM recognizes the importance of involving family groups in decision-making about children who need protection or care, and it can be initiated by child welfare agencies whenever a critical decision about a child is required."[28] The FGDM meeting is designed to strengthen the natural care-giving system for the children. Participants include family members, extended family members, family-identified natural supports, CYF Case Managers and other service providers. The participants assist the family in crafting and implementing plans that support the safety, permanency and well-being of the children.

According to the American Humane Association, the values associated with FGDM include:[29]

- Children have a right to maintain their kinship and cultural connections throughout their lives.

- Children and their parents belong to a wider family system that both nurtures them and is responsible for them.

- The family group, rather than the agency, is the context for child welfare and child protection resolutions.

- All families are entitled to the respect of the state, and the state needs to make an extra effort to convey respect to those who are poor, socially excluded, marginalized, or lacking power or access to resources and services.

- The state has a responsibility to recognize, support and build the family group's capacity to protect and care for their young relatives.

- Family groups know their own histories, and they use that information to construct thorough plans.

- Active family group participation and leadership is essential for good outcomes for children, but power imbalances between family groups and child protection agency personnel must first be addressed.

- The state has a responsibility to defend family groups from unnecessary intrusion and to promote their growth and strength.

[28] American Humane Association (2008). Family Group Decision Making in Child Welfare: Purpose, Values and Processes. Retrieved from www.americanhumane.org/assets/pdfs/children/fgdm/purpose.pdf.

[29] American Humane Association (2008).

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The first pilot of FGDM in Pennsylvania was launched by DHS in 1999.[30] According to DHS, FGDM relies on rethinking the concept of child welfare. Historically, families identified as at risk for child abuse and neglect were characterized as deficient, and outside forces were brought in to remedy their "problems." FGDM turns that thinking on end and instead sees the predominant strengths of the family as the capability of interceding on behalf of the children to keep them safe.

At DHS, the FGDM process begins when a referral is made to the FGDM unit by the child welfare staff during the intake process or at any point while the case is active. Referrals are also received from the Allegheny County Children's Court. Participation by the family in FGDM is completely voluntary. Upon referral, the family is contacted by the Family Advocate to arrange a time and location for a meeting. During this meeting, the family's immediate needs are identified, and family members are asked to identify those with whom they will work to develop a plan for keeping their children safe. The dedicated involvement of these "natural supports" is the key to the success of the process.

After the initial meeting, the child welfare Case Manager and the FGDM Family Advocate, along with representatives from DHS-contracted agencies, work together to resolve the immediate needs of the family. These services and supports are generally community-based. The natural supports are contacted and interviewed by the Family Advocate. Invitations are sent to these individuals to attend a meeting at a time and location determined by the family. If the need for a child protective services (CPS) investigation is indicated, it is conducted from a strength-based approach. Parents, extended family and community partners enter a private Family Group Conference to develop a Family Plan. Once gathered, the discussion centers on the family's strengths and challenges and ways in which to take those into account to keep the children safe. Each member of the team accepts responsibility for some part of the Family Plan. The family follows through and monitors its portion of the plan. FGDM Family Advocates and contracted agencies provide supports management and intensive in-home services, according to the identified outcomes. The process provides families with the self-confidence they need to take on the long-term maintenance of the health of the family unit.

The vast majority of children whose families engage in FGDM remain at home during and after the process. The majority of those who do require out-of-home placement are placed in kinship care, which includes extended family or others who have a close relationship with the child(ren). For the few children who are not reunited or placed with kin, the team makes recommendations for placement based upon what they believe is in the best interest of the child.

This strength-based approach has proven empowering for the vast majority of the families in Allegheny County who have taken part in it. As stated above, the key to the success of the FGDM process lies in the dedicated involvement of natural supports. Therefore, it is important to understand how to utilize and engage natural supports when working with consumers in

FGDM and other areas of DHS. This case study, along with several others, will serve as a model for the continued use and implementation of natural supports.

To gain a better understanding of the utilization of natural supports in the FGDM process in Allegheny County, a group of individuals, including Dr. Marcia Sturdivant, Natalie Jones, Chandra Stewart, Adella Dixon, Eddie Bell II, Tanisha Perry and Rebecca Thompson, answered the questions provided in Appendix A of this report. The following is a narrative summary of their responses.

Definition

At FGDM, "natural supports" are called "family supports." Family supports are loosely defined in FGDM because defining them can be a double-edged sword; what is natural to the facilitators may be unnatural to the family. Therefore, natural supports are defined by the family.

According to Natalie Jones, CYF Regional Office Manager, "The essence of FGDM is natural supports." FGDM speaks to every family having strengths, history and traditions, and is based upon the belief that families will keep their children safe if given the opportunity.

Locating and Using Natural Supports

The Family Advocates encourage the FGDM process as an opportunity to bring natural supports back into the lives of the family members. The process includes hosting a meal at which natural supports have an opportunity to get together to discuss the family's strengths, traditions and history.

Part of the strategy of locating natural supports involves asking the family who they would identify as their natural supports. The family creates an invitation list, and the advocate makes phone calls to invite them into the FGDM process. The family and advocate then send a formal invitation, including a family photograph, to the family conference. Family Advocates go to great lengths to locate natural supports and resources. They provide a list of resources for those families who may not know what is available in the community, and they will also provide concrete goods, if needed.

As mentioned above, the essence of FGDM is family, and it is the family itself that defines its natural supports. The family conference leads to a family plan; the family plan defines how natural supports will be utilized. No two family plans are alike; however, in all plans, the needs of the children are primary. For example, during a family conference, the first step is to identify the causes for child welfare involvement with the family. The family identifies its own solutions to problems, answering who, what, when, where and why. For example, if a parent requires drug and alcohol treatment, the family decides who will take care of the children while the parent is in residential treatment. Recognizing that relapse is part of recovery, the plan addresses the steps to be taken if the parent is not successful in treatment. The family also has an opportunity to choose the drug and alcohol treatment facility.

The natural supports are prepared for their role in the process, but they do not receive formal training. The family conference identifies a neutral facilitator, often one of the family supports, and that person receives training on the FGDM process.

Challenges and Opportunities

Because so many families are accustomed to an approach in which blame is placed, it can be a challenge to build the trust necessary to convince them that they are allowed to make their own decisions. The challenge of geographic barriers can be overcome by flexibility and by providing solutions such as arranging transportation and ensuring that the meeting is close and convenient for the family. If unable to make it to a meeting, participants can write letters or use technology, such as phone or Web conferencing, to be present.

Overall, DHS has benefited from understanding the utility of natural supports. The mandated Family Service Plan now reflects the family plan used in FGDM. CYF is more focused on placing children in kinship care when it is in the best interest of the children. There has truly been a paradigm shift and a change in mindset at CYF because of FGDM.

Ways to expand the use of natural supports throughout DHS include sharing consumer testimonies and holding family events. In consumer testimonies, the family would have the opportunity to tell a story of transformation from beginning to end. At family events, consumers eager to share their stories would have a chance to do so.

Evaluating the Use of Natural Supports

Information about the family plan, including who attends meetings, is stored in the Key Information and Demographics System (KIDS). KIDS is a fully integrated child welfare management application that supports the records management process from the initial reporting of allegations of child abuse or neglect through the delivery and payment of services. FGDM information is also stored in paper copies, treatment plans, databases and consumer surveys. Currently, the information regarding natural supports is collected but not tracked. A research report on the impact of FGDM on out-of-home placement was recently completed by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. This report will be published on the DHS website in the near future.

Allegheny County Jail Collaborative

Background

The Allegheny County Jail (ACJ) Collaborative, created in 2000, is a diverse group of criminal justice and human services stakeholders, working together to improve public safety by building a better system of re-entry for people coming out of the ACJ.

The ACJ houses approximately 2,600 inmates at any given time. There are 35 living units and/or pods on eight two-level floors. The standard pod has 56 cells on two levels, surrounding a central Day Area where meals are served and leisure time is spent. Medical services are provided within the institution, including hospital and clinic services. The mission of the ACJ is to protect the citizens of Allegheny County from criminal offenders through a collaborative system of incarceration that securely segregates offenders from society, assures offenders of their constitutional rights, and maintains diagnostic rehabilitative treatment programs to enhance the success of offenders' reintegration into society.[31]

[31] ACJ. *Our Mission.* Retrieved from www.alleghenycounty. us/jail/index.aspx.

To gain a better understanding of the utilization of natural supports in the jail, Amy Kroll, Administrator of Re-entry, was asked to answer the questions about natural supports listed in Appendix A. The following is a narrative summary of her responses.

Definition

The Jail Collaborative defines natural supports as what the inmate and/or family identify as his/her supports in the community. There have been fluctuations in the culture of the ACJ in regard to the use of natural supports. For example, the ACJ has had a difficult time instituting the structured family contact visits. Some inmates have children with multiple women, which can complicate the visits with children. However, service providers are very supportive, and the ACJ has been working to increase its understanding of this approach.

Locating and Using Natural Supports

The Family Support Specialist (FSS) asks the inmate, "Who are your natural supports? If you got out tomorrow, who would be there for you?" They explore natural supports in depth with the inmates, so that supports are identified that the inmate might not have thought of before. The FSS then seeks out those natural supports and talks to them about available classes with the ACJ; the natural supports then offer advice about what classes the inmate should take. Natural supports sign the in-jail and in-community service plans and are involved with the re-entry plan. Additionally, the natural supports, usually family members of the inmate, will discuss their own needs and natural supports with the FSS.

The ACJ began recognizing and utilizing natural supports in 2006. In April 2007, the Family Activity Center opened in the lobby of the ACJ to help reduce children's stress as they wait to visit loved ones. This area is solely for children—and their caregivers—who are waiting to visit inmates. The Center offers children healthy snacks and an opportunity to interact with their caregivers in an area of the lobby that has child-friendly features, including a craft area, a video

nook, a book corner and a giant pin screen, providing fun for children and adults. Mock visiting booths allow children to prepare for visits by role-playing. Full-time employees and trained volunteers staff the Center, which also includes a resource area for caregivers. Information on referrals to various agencies and a variety of print materials are also available.

The Discharge and Release Center has been in place since February 2011. Its mission is to ensure an efficient, smooth and safe release from the jail. Inmates released through the Center are offered an opportunity to phone a family member or friend, assistance to secure housing, a three-day supply of medication (if applicable), a bus ticket and weather-appropriate clothing. Natural supports are involved in the process at least six months before re-entry. The main goal is reunification of the family. The FSS follows the inmate for a year after release. The hope is that, when the professionals disengage, the natural supports will still be in place.

The ACJ began using structured family phone calls and contact visits in April 2011. Structured family contact visits are developed specifically for men and women who are taking part in the Family Support Program. Prior to the visit, inmates are coached in parenting techniques for alleviating the children's stress and building parent–child relationships, and family members are supported and prepared for the visit by the Family Support Specialists. The visits are facilitated by one of the FSSs and a part-time family therapist. Unlike most visits with inmates, which take place on either side of a glass window, inmates who participate in these visits can get on the floor and play with their children using age-appropriate toys. In addition, the FSSs coordinate weekly conference calls between inmates and their families to maintain bonds with children and assist in reunification. The FSS facilitates these discussions, helping family members address issues that are difficult to discuss, plan for the future and practice positive parenting approaches.[32]

The ACJ has come a long way with the structured family contact visits. Currently, they happen once a month with 12 families; the goal is 30 families. Additionally, the Jail Collaborative is working with 32 FSCs to involve the children of inmates in activities after the inmate is released from jail.

Planning for the structured phone calls and family visits started in 2009 when the jail applied for the Second Chance Act grant. Signed into law on April 9, 2008, the Second Chance Act (P.L. 110-199) was designed to improve outcomes for people returning to communities from prisons and jails. This first-of-its-kind legislation authorizes federal grants to government agencies and nonprofit organizations to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victims' support and other services that can help reduce recidivism.[33]

[32] ACJ Collaborative (2011). *Annual Report.*

[33] Reentry Policy Council (n.d.). Second Chance Act. The Council of State Governments Justice Center. Retrieved from http://reentrypolicy.org/government_affairs/second_chance_act.

Challenges and Opportunities

There are many barriers to working with natural supports at the jail, including the physical building, the size of Allegheny County and the lack of funding. Staff would ideally hold regular reunification meetings and an increased number of visits closer to release of the inmate, but it is not easy because of the transportation issues that some families face. In addition, the physical building of the jail makes it difficult to hold an increased number of structured family contact visits.

Recommended changes, which would maximize the use of natural supports at the ACJ, include:

• modifying visiting policies so that all inmates can have regular visits (rather than window visits) and more can participate in structured family contact visits

• changing the physical structure of the jail to allow for more structured family contact visits

• training officers and guards about the importance of natural supports

• grouping inmates together in pods by risk (currently grouped by classification, such as charge)

• using the pod as a treatment capsule instead of a housing unit

Evaluating the Use of Natural Supports

Statistics have been tracked since April 2011 (e.g., classes attended, services to family, family visits and service linkages). The Collaborative also keeps track of the monthly count of families, including how many contacts are listed, how many times they have been seen and services linked to families.

National Models and Best Practices

La Bodega de la Familia is a drug crisis center in Manhattan's Lower East Side that includes addicts' families in the drug treatment process. La Bodega uses Family Case Management in its counseling activities. This approach focuses on the entire family, not only on the substance abuser involved with the criminal justice system. Case Managers help friends and families support their loved ones in outpatient treatment and attend to related familial problems and concerns.[34] The Case Managers engage family members in the development of an action plan. This plan proposes solutions that capitalize on family members' strengths and identifies specific actions that can help a substance abuser under criminal justice supervision remain in treatment. Family Case Management incorporates both prevention and treatment by including services that address the needs of the substance abuser as well as those of the substance abuser's family.[35]

[34] Shapiro, Carol (1998). *La Bodega de la Familia: Reaching Out to the Forgotten Victims of Substance Abuse.* Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice.

[35] Olsen, L.J. (1995). "Services for Substance Abuse–Affected Families: The Project Connect Experience." *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 12: 183–196.

Area Agency On Aging: Aging Waiver

Background

AAA is the DHS program office that provides services for adults age 60 and older. AAA provides a wide range of services designed to help older adults live independent lives, including assisting them in remaining in their own homes as long as they are able and choose to do so. Services under the Home and Community-Based Waiver (the "Aging Waiver") are available to eligible Pennsylvanians over age 60 to enable them to continue to live in their homes and communities with support and services.

In order to gain a better understanding of the utilization of natural supports under the Aging Waiver, Judy Beck, Care Management Supervisor with AAA, answered the questions about natural supports listed in Appendix A of this report. The following is a narrative summary of her responses.

Definition

AAA refers to natural supports as "informal supports." An informal support is defined as anyone who is involved with or supporting the consumer in the community and who is not paid. The philosophy behind this program is to enable the consumer to remain in the community as long as possible, and the importance of natural supports is reinforced and required in the Aging Waiver's ISP.

Identifying and Using Natural Supports

To identify natural supports, Case Managers first ask the individual about his/her goals and existing supports, and then learn as much as possible about the community resources and supports available to underpin those goals. In addition to a senior resource guide, Case Managers keep files on what is available. As an example, one individual was able to travel to California because of the utilization of natural supports. The Case Manager arranged this trip by working with the faith community, which provided an escort at the airport in Pittsburgh; connections in California arranged for an escort on the receiving end.

Family and friends are included in the ISP to identify how they can support the consumer; religious and civic organizations with which the consumer is affiliated are also included, if the consumer so chooses. Because of the high rate of isolation among older adults, it is important to include the consumers in all discussions so that they feel connected to the process.

As AAA has learned about the ways in which the need for natural supports changes over time, Case Managers have also had to learn about a wider variety of available supports. Recent increases in the number of adults in the 60–65 age range, a younger population, and increases in drug and alcohol issues require the inclusion of a wider variety of available supports. For example, Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous groups are increasingly identified as supports.

Challenges and Opportunities

AAA provides no formal training for the natural supports. As appropriate, Case Managers make referrals to support groups such as those for families living with chronic illness.

Some of the challenges of using natural supports are listed below:

• Inadequate information about available resources

• Consumer resistance to the idea of needing help in general and in using natural supports specifically

• Insufficient resources relevant to demand

The following are suggestions to expand and improve the utilization of natural supports at DHS:

• Provide a list of resources and supports that other programs are using on the DHS website

• Provide information and education about services available to support the changing needs of consumers (e.g., grandparents raising grandchildren)

• Increase and expand knowledge about mental health issues among the elderly

Evaluating the Use of Natural Supports

The Aging Waiver is currently not tracking or evaluating the use of natural supports.

High-Fidelity Wraparound

Background

According to the Pennsylvania Youth and Family Training Institute, High-Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) is a team-based collaborative process for developing and implementing individualized plans for children who have behavioral health challenges and their families.[36] HFW has been standardized by the National Wraparound Initiative and is based on specific principles and phases. It is a youth-guided and family-driven planning process that follows a series of steps to help children/adolescents and their families realize their hopes and dreams. The definition states:

> *"Family-driven" means that families have a decision-making role in the care of their own children as well as in the policies and procedures governing care for all children in the community, state and nation. This includes choosing supports, services and providers; setting goals; designing and implementing programs; monitoring outcomes; and determining the effectiveness of all efforts to promote the mental health of children and youth. "Youth-guided" means that youth are engaged in the idea that change is possible in his or her life. Youth feel safe, cared for, valued, useful and spiritually grounded. Youth are empowered in their planning process from the beginning and have a voice in what will work for them.[37]*

[36] Youth and Family Training Institute (YFTI). (2011). *Definition of High Fidelity Wraparound.* Retrieved from www.yftipa.org/.

[37] Youth and Family Training Institute (YFTI).

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DHS introduced HFW as part of a system integration plan that included revamping direct services to produce continued improvement of outcomes. The core principles of HFW call for a team-based approach, intentionally guided by the family's view of its needs and priorities, recognizing and building on the family's strengths rather than focusing on weaknesses, and incorporating reliance on natural supports such as relatives, community resources and places of worship. These natural supports can remain involved with the family long after the professional treatment providers have gone.[38]

HFW's 10 principles:

- Family voice and choice

- Team-based

- Natural supports

- Collaborative

- Community-based

- Culturally competent

- Individualized

- Strength-based

- Unconditional

- Outcome-based

To gain a better understanding of the utilization of natural supports in the HFW process, Keith Solomon, DHS System Integration Specialist, answered the questions about natural supports listed in Appendix A of this report. The following is a narrative summary of his responses.

Definition

HFW is a process that defines natural supports as "resources and supports that families are able to access." Examples of natural supports include extended family, relatives, store owners, church leaders, community organizations, friends, coaches and others who are not paid for their services. It is intended that natural supports will continue to be involved after paid supports end.

The philosophy behind the HFW process is consistent with the use of natural supports. Solomon states, "It's non-negotiable." For example, staff members are required to make efforts to access natural supports. They strive to get as many natural supports involved with a family's team as possible. The goal is to have 50 percent of the planning team and 50 percent of the action plan composed of natural supports. HFW uses the strengths, resources and supports of the family to address its needs. If the plan is based on natural supports, there is a greater chance that the family will continue to use them after paid supports end.

[38] Barron, B. (2010). *Transforming Lives through System Integration: The "Improving Outcomes for Children and Families" Initiative.* Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

Locating and Using Natural Supports

Natural supports already on the team help the family to locate additional natural supports by identifying family strengths and needs, and brainstorming strategies and ideas to address issues preventing achievement of the family's goals. The consumer has a lot of input during the HFW process, as the identification of natural supports is always in the forefront. For example, the facilitator will ask, "Who is important in your life that you would call in a crisis or emergency?" Those are the people whom the facilitators want to engage. Although some families feel embarrassed about bringing people in because they think the process will be viewed as negative, the facilitator, YSP or FSP encourages the family to engage people by providing them with reasons that the process will be positive. They explain that HFW is a strength-based process and that the relationships will be supportive and positive, always focusing on the goal of helping the family achieve its hopes and dreams.

HFW facilitators not only utilize natural supports in the process of developing the plan, they also work with consumers to increase or strengthen their natural supports. Unfortunately, there are families that have limited natural supports. HFW facilitators help these families by introducing them to community organizations and support groups and by encouraging them to re-engage with old friends and other sources of support with which they might have lost contact. Some strategies the facilitators use to engage or increase natural supports include brainstorming sessions with consumers; use of YSPs and FSPs to encourage, introduce and help re-engage natural supports; and connecting the family to natural supports that are available in the community.

Challenges and Opportunities

Natural supports do not receive formal training beyond being informed of their role in the process when they join the HFW planning team. Although some informal training does happen during the process, there is room for growth in this area.

Engaging natural supports is one of the most challenging aspects of the process. It is often challenging because sometimes families have burned bridges with their natural supports. In other instances, families do not want to connect with natural supports because of their negative perception of involving others in their struggles. When able to engage natural supports, HFW is very effective at using them.

Evaluating the Use of Natural Supports

Paper records are kept that compare the number of natural supports and traditional paid supports involved in a particular strategy. Tracking the use of natural supports by outcome is part of the plan for the future.

GLOSSARY

Aging Waiver: Home- and community-based services waiver that enables eligible Pennsylvanians over the age of 60 to continue to live in their homes and communities with support services.

Child Welfare / Children, Youth and Family Services (CYF): Allegheny County's public office mandated by law to protect children from abuse and neglect and to ensure permanency for children. CYF's mission is "to protect children from abuse and neglect; to preserve families, whenever possible; and to assure permanency, that is, to provide permanent, safe homes for children either by assuring safety within the child's own family or by finding an adoptive home or another permanent setting for those children who cannot be reunified with their family."

Family Finding: An approach inspired by techniques used by the International Committee of the Red Cross and the United Nations for reuniting families separated by war, political conflict or natural disasters. Family Finding is particularly applicable to areas with high rates of poverty or out-of-home placements. It includes six stages: discovering at least 40 family members of the child using tools such as Internet searches and genealogical archives, learning more about the child through close connections, planning for the child's successful future with family members and others important to the child, decision-making for the future, including plans for legal and emotional permanency, evaluating the permanency plan, and following up with the child and family.

Family Group Decision Making (FGDM): Strength-based, family-focused process for designing service plans for children and families involved with child welfare systems.

Family Support Partner (FSP): An adult who has raised a child or youth with complex emotional needs, who provides support to the parent during the High-Fidelity Wraparound process.

Family Support Specialist (FSS): Individual responsible for ensuring that quality, comprehensive child/family support services are provided to inmates and their families, pre- and post-release from incarceration. He or she provides coaching and support for inmates about how to have positive visits and how to nurture family relationships; provide similar support to the children's caregivers; and help in coordinating visits between the parent in the jail and his/her child. After release, the program provides opportunities for children and parents to deepen their relationship through family activities and connection to family support centers.

Glossary *(continued)*

High-Fidelity Wraparound (HFW): Team-based collaborative process for developing and implementing individualized plans for children with behavioral health challenges and their families

Individual Support Plan (ISP) : Formalized care plan developed by the state of Pennsylvania for individuals 60 and older served by the Aging Waiver

Jail Collaborative: Created in 2000, a diverse group of criminal justice and human services stakeholders, working together to improve public safety by building a better system of re-entry for people coming out of the ACJ

KIDS: A fully integrated child welfare management application that supports the records management process from the initial reporting of allegations of child abuse or neglect through the delivery and payment of services