

INTRODUCTION



The Comprehensive Community Plan for Children and Families for the six year period from 2008-2014 documents the work of more than 250 individuals and organizations who gathered in small and large groups over the past year and a half to develop the plan.

People from diverse sectors of the community shared their perspectives about the status of children, youth and families, their needs and issues, existing services and delivery systems, what strategies could be effective in a variety of settings and communities to address concerns, and how to strengthen our capacity as citizens, schools, and community organizations to support the positive development of all our children and families.

Washington County worked to assure that the planning process was broad-based and inclusive. The Strategies Committee, convened by the Commission on Children and Families to guide the planning process, was composed of representatives from major partner agencies and constituencies.

The Strategies Committee sought, through the planning process, to engage people through their local communities and to have the plan reflect the diversity of the unique geographic communities of Washington County, and through this community-driven approach identify the county-wide concerns and areas of focus.

INTRODUCTION

The resultant plan has a county-wide focus which summarizes key findings and priorities in four major focus areas which emerged from our discussions with communities, along with individual chapters for each of the major communities in the county that captures the unique attributes of each community, the concerns residents have for their children and families, and their ideas about how to begin to address their concerns at the local level.



There was considerable effort made throughout the process to assure that participation in the planning was representative of all segments and sectors of the county, and the diversity of perspectives is revealed throughout the plan document.

We have learned that there is much commonality throughout the county in terms of what we seek for our children and families and how we see ourselves moving forward.

While there is reason to be concerned about the status of many of our children and families, there is also reason for hope.

We can celebrate our many strong and deep partnerships and commitment, and a solid basic infrastructure of services and supports that provides a foundation to make Washington County a great place to raise our families.

There is a strong spirit of community and a sense of shared vision and optimism as we look towards implementing strategies identified through the planning process.

There is recognition that there has been strong leadership from multiple sectors, and significant progress in terms of infrastructure development and assuring a community based system of supports for our children and families since the first plan was completed in 2002.

VISION & GOALS

This provides a foundation of success upon which to build in the next six years.

In the plan document we present our work of the past year and a half in a way that reflects and honors our community process and the countless hours spent by volunteers and community representatives to explore the issues facing our children and families and to develop the recommendations which are set forth.

VISION AND GOALS

In March, 2006 the Commission on Children and Families sponsored a Community Breakfast to provide an update on the Comprehensive Community Plan for Children and Families, and to initiate the process leading to the new Comprehensive Community Plan.



In spite of a surprise snow storm that led to many cancellations of school and other community events that day, more than 70 people from throughout the county attended, representing a wide range of stakeholders: school personnel, law enforcement, juvenile justice, mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment, health care, early childhood, business and faith communities, and elected officials and citizen advocates.

Those in attendance told us that while there had been significant progress in the county in building critical service and support systems for children and families, the next plan should build on the existing plan, working from the same vision and goals to continue to build our infrastructure and capacity to broadly engage all sectors in the community to improving conditions for our children and families.

With this in mind, the Strategies Committee, charged by the Com-

VISION & GOALS

mission on Children and Families with guiding the comprehensive planning process, reviewed and refined the Vision and Goals from the previous plan.

VISION

Every child and family reaches full potential through the active involvement of all members of our Washington County community.



GOALS

- Children and families are healthy, economically secure and able to meet their basic needs.
- Individuals and public and private organizations in the county are responsible for and actively engaged in recognizing and building strengths of our children, youth and families.
- Our community is committed to promoting healthy behavior and lifestyles through investments in prevention.
- Parents are supported in nurturing their families.
- We invest in education and building a community of curious, creative life long learners and teachers.
- People feel safe in our communities.
- We embrace our rich and growing diversity as a visible part of civic life.

The vision and goals provide the foundation for the plan, and are reflected throughout the plan and the four focus areas that emerged from our community conversations.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

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Beginning with the Community Breakfast in March, 2006 the Commission on Children and Families and the Strategies Committee sought to engage people through their communities of interest in the planning process, be that the geographic community where individuals live and work, their cultural communities, or service communities (e.g. early childhood, mental health, prevention coalitions, etc.).

At the community breakfast, attendees were assigned to geographic based discussion tables based on where they lived and/or worked.

At the community breakfast and with every community group that Strategies Committee members met with over the next 18 months, the following five questions were posed to learn about communities and gain multiple perspectives and insights about our children and families, their needs and issues and our capacities to support them:

- How has the community changed in recent years?
- What are the major issues / concerns facing children and families?
- What are some strategies that could help resolve these concerns?
- What has been going well, what are your communities strengths?
- Who is working on these issues in your community?



The Strategies Committee developed community profiles for the county and each of the major cities and towns in the county, which were shared during meetings with community groups where the planning questions were posed.

THE PLANNING PROCESS

Community profiles provided population data and data in key social indicators available at the community level.

The Strategies Committee, whenever possible met with existing community groups, ranging from service clubs (e.g. Optimists), to family resource center advisory committees, to prevention coalitions, to cultural community coalitions, service area planning committees, and many others.



Representatives from the Strategies Committee met with some 25 community groups during this period, representing well over 250 individuals from all sectors of the community.

Summaries of each of the community conversations were prepared, and over the summer the Strategies Committee began reviewing the results to identify themes and trends, in issues facing children and families, strategies that could help resolve concerns, and strengths and successes in communities.

Data related to the goal areas were also reviewed by the Strategies Committee.

Based on the review of the trends from community discussions and related social indicator data, the Strategies Committee determined four key focus areas that emerged:

- Expand access to and availability of health care, mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Enhance and build parenting and family support systems

THE PLANNING PROCESS

- Enhance and strengthen supports for youth to be successful in school and productively engaged during non-school hours.
- Expand efforts to improve school readiness.

The Strategies Committee then planned a Community Forum for the fall to identify long term outcomes, intermediate outcomes and key strategies in the four focus areas for county-wide work.

In keeping with feedback that this new plan should build on the existing plan, working from the same vision and goals to continue to build our infrastructure of service and support systems and capacity to broadly engage all sectors in the community to improve conditions for our children and families, information packets were prepared in advance for attendees.

These included benchmark and social indicator data relevant to each of the four areas, a summary of the related concerns and issues which emerged from the community discussions, a review of the existing services and supports in the county, along with a brief strategy analysis.

The next section of the plan provides a thorough discussion of these elements for each of the four focus areas.

More than 80 people representing a broad cross section and the diversity of the county attended the Community Forum in November, and two areas of focus were identified for immediate action and impact analysis.

The final section of the plan discusses the initial priorities that emerged in each of the focus areas and next steps to finalizing action and measurement plans for all the focus areas.

