



## **Report to the Legislature**

### **Whatcom County Family and Community Networks Pilot Project**

Chapter 564 Laws of 2009  
ESHB 1244 Sec. 202(18)

November 1, 2009

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## **Executive Summary**

Chapter 564, Laws of 2009 Sec. 202(18) requires the Children's Administration to contract for a pilot project with family and community networks in Whatcom County and up to four additional counties to provide services. The pilot project will be designed to provide a continuum of services that will reduce out-of-home placements and the length of time that a child stays in a placement outside of their home.

The children and families that will be served by this pilot(s) will be families that reside in the DSHS Children's Administration's geographic Region 3 and up to four additional regions in Washington State. The families will include those families that are currently engaged in Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS), youth that are in out-of-home care, and youth that are at the imminent risk of being removed from their home and placed in out-of-home care.

The Children's Administration and the community-based Whatcom Family and Community Network have worked together over the last several years to create a strong partnership. This partnership has produced exciting and promising community-based strategies to engage the full community with families that have historically remained socially isolated and at risk of re-abusing or neglecting their children.

This strong partnership and collaborative work have produced many of the concepts that will be used in this pilot(s) as to how a local community and state can effectively partner in providing key services to children and families involved with the child welfare dependency system. These new concepts include how the state could contract and work differently with the local community in a way that could help reduce the barriers that these families face when attempting to reunify their family or in preventing the need to remove a child from their home.

The strategies to achieve these results includes linking formal and informal support to families that will create a network of social supports that can help move families out of the dependency system and that will support families in sustaining a healthy, supportive home where the child and the entire family can thrive.

As a way of measuring the success of this pilot(s), parents, relatives, and kin providers will be evaluated by measuring a demonstrated increase to their skills in providing a safe, supportive, and nurturing home for their child.

**Whatcom Family & Community Network and the Children’s Administration  
Community Navigation Pilot**

Chapter 564, Laws of 2009 Sec. 202(18):

*“Within the amounts appropriated in this section, the department shall contract for a pilot project with family and community networks in Whatcom county and up to four additional counties to provide services. The pilot project shall be designed to provide a continuum of services that reduce out-of-home placements and the lengths of stay for children in out-of-home placement. The department and the community networks shall collaboratively select the additional counties for the pilot project and shall collaboratively design the contract. Within the framework of the pilot project, the contract shall seek to maximize federal funds. The pilot project in each county shall include the creation of advisory and management teams which include members from neighborhood-based family advisory committees, residents, parents, youth, providers, and local and regional department staff. The Whatcom county team shall facilitate the development of outcome-based protocols and policies for the pilot project and develop a structure to oversee, monitor, and evaluate the results of the pilot projects. The department shall report the costs and savings of the pilot project to the appropriate committees of the legislature by November 1 of each year.”*

There were no appropriated funds in the budget for this pilot project. The Whatcom contract for the navigator and community-building portion of the contract is budgeted for approximately \$88,000 of state funds this year to serve 22 families. The Whatcom County team is discussing additional supports and training costs for the model which would add an additional \$30,000 to the first year’s contract in Whatcom County. The Children’s Administration recently revised the second year plan for use of the Stuart Foundation funding to support sites identified in the 2009 legislative budget proviso. This would provide \$28,000 each for Whatcom County and three other sites to help fund the Network/Children’s collaboration and to hire a “navigator” to work with families.

This report provides an overview of the work completed over the time-period of June - October of 2009. The legislative budget proviso requirement of reporting costs and savings on the implementation of the Whatcom pilot program will be contained in the November 1, 2010 version of this report.

## **Community Navigation Pilot June - October 2009**

The Whatcom Family & Community Network and the Region 3 and Bellingham DCFS offices have been working together on Family to Family, an Annie E. Casey Foundation initiative, since 2007. This strong collaborative partnership has produced many of the concepts that will be used in this pilot(s) as to how a local community and the State can effectively partner in providing key services to children and families involved with the child welfare dependency system. These new concepts include how the state could contract and work differently with the local community in a way that could help reduce the barriers that these families face when attempting to reunify their family or in preventing the need to remove a child from their home.

The intent of the pilot(s) is to develop and implement new approaches to service delivery in up to four additional counties in Washington State. The overall goal is to have the community and residents step up as the primary sustaining support for these families so that the State can step back and safely return the child to their home. Family Policy Council Community Networks that are prepared to engage residents to achieve this goal, in partnership with the Children's Administration's Family to Family Initiative, will constitute the core team for pilot design and oversight.

The new approaches used in the pilot sites are based on strategies of neighborhood-based community engagement and the expansion of social networks as "core-services." These strategies have been jointly developed by the Whatcom Family & Community Network and the Whatcom County Children's Administration's Family to Family Team. These strategies focus on building a community of natural supports around families where social isolation is a primary cause of chronic neglect that requires, or is projected to require, a long-term dependency in the child welfare and foster care system.

This model of community building was tested January-June 2009 with seven families in Whatcom County. The families were all involved with Behavioral Rehabilitation Services through the Children's Administration. Children were returned home in three of the seven families and plans have been developed for the return home in two other families.

Six of the seven families have expanded their social networks and resources for parenting, six have an increased sense that they have assets to bring to their families and community, and all seven families have a more collaborative relationship with the Children's Administration in achieving their goals according to the initial results as reported by the Navigator. Not all of the reunifications have been smooth, but there is now a clear understanding of the barriers and challenges with the Children's Administration and the family that can now be specifically addressed. All children that have been returned home, most from group care, have severe behavioral issues, but their safety due to family stability and parenting skills has improved. The families now face more typical challenges due to adolescent development, but have an increased support network and an ongoing relationship with the Community Network that links these families to other community-building and neighborhood efforts.

Children and families to be served in the pilot(s) will be:

- Youth currently engaged in Behavioral Rehabilitation Services (BRS),
- Youth in other CA out-of-home placements, or
- Youth who are at imminent risk of out-of-home placement.

Families referred by the Children's Administration to these pilot projects will be identified by social workers when there is a concern that the lack of a healthy social network is or will be a clear barrier to stable and safe reunification of the family. Each pilot site will serve a manageable number based on their identified population and capacity in order to test and locally refine this strategy to fit their community.

### **Description of Services/Supports Families Will Receive**

- Link to a "community navigator." A resident support person will meet with the family and their DCFS and community team and develop a social support plan that will include links to emergent needs, community support services, and opportunities to build a larger, healthy social network. The Navigator will act as a peer coach and community support person to help the parent with the competencies that need development and safety requirements needed for reunification.
- The Navigator will provide coaching, advocacy, and education on child health, safety, and parenting to reinforce the information the family is receiving from other providers. This coaching will be with the parent and the other individuals and systems the family has for support.
- The Navigator and the Community Network will engage the family in neighborhood activities and independently work with local residents to create healthy activities for families to share their skills and interests and participate with other residents.
- Volunteers in the community will be recruited and families will be linked to these volunteers for specific tasks, such as home repair and household items, and ongoing support such as transportation and childcare.
- Navigators will be supervised by Network staff.
- The pilot project uses outcome-focused training and coaching for Navigators, which employs an iterative approach to building skills, knowledge, and behaviors of navigators that produce desired project results.
- There are ongoing discussions with the Planning Team about additional evidence-based and community services that might be used to help achieve the outcomes of this project.
- Navigators will have regular meetings with DCFS social workers to assure communication, alignment of objectives, and a collaborative approach to family support is assured.

### **Outcome Measures**

- Client Outcome measure instruments are being developed by the Department and the local Advisory Team to measure:
  - Increased child safety

- Increased parent competencies, based on MEEERS caregiver competencies (Motivation to keep child safe, demonstrated Efficacy in changing their environment, Experience in caring for and keeping child safe, Enjoyable parent/child interaction, Resources to support and nurture child, and Skills to care for child)
- Increased family success and healthy social network
- Increased collaboration and community engagement with families and DCFS
- These instruments will include survey tools for clients (children and caretakers), social workers, and the Navigator. There will also be exit meetings with families and project staff to assess and evaluate the impact of the pilot on their reunification or maintenance of placement.
- MEEERS measurements instruments are being developed by the Pathways to Reunification project led by Brigid Collins. These instruments will be co-used by this pilot(s). Both projects will also pilot the newly developed WISH Family Journal (from Gates and Allen Foundation grants) as a tracking and communication tool for the family, the navigator, social workers, and other members of the family's "team."

Outcomes will also be measured by:

- Stability of placements for referrals of clients whose families are together at the time of the referral, with measurements as developed by the Network and the Department
- Successful family reunification - Unification for the clients with the child in an out-of-home placement at the time of the referral. This will include measures for the length of time in care and time taken to achieve family reunification and placement stability thereafter, with measurements as developed by the Network and the Department
- Reduced time to achieve permanency - Measured by number of permanency plans per quarter, with measurements as developed by the Network and the Department

Parents, relatives, or kinship caregivers will also be assessed on their demonstrated skill enhancement in several areas including:

- Knowledge and understanding of the mood, behavior, emotional, and educational disorders relevant to the children in their care
- Skill in supporting their children and their biological families in coping with the moods, behavior, emotional, and educational disorders
- Knowledge and skill in navigating multiple systems involved with the care of their children, including government programs, schools, social service agencies, and other community programs
- The ability to connect with and use community supports such as neighborhood groups, other parents/families, support groups, community gatherings and recreational activities, and appropriate faith-based activities
- The ability to access and use appropriate professional services
- The ability to access and use respite care services
- The ability to follow through on treatment plans for children in their care

- The ability to improve communications and quality of family interactions and relationships
- The ability to display a sense of confidence and hopefulness regarding the care of their children along with a decreased sense of isolation, hopelessness, blame, and failure

Evaluation consultants working with the Department and the Networks will review all of the measures for this project for validity and reliability. The evaluation processes and protocols will reflect the collaborative commitment to investigate the effectiveness of this pilot intervention and to consider its impact with all of the participants involved including families, community members, and providers, and to report that impact to the Legislature and other key stakeholders.

### **Whatcom Planning Team and Replication Site Development**

In July 2009, the Network and DCFS convened the Whatcom County Planning Team to further refine the model and the contracting provisions needed to begin implementation. This team has had five planning sessions, one with a facilitator, and continues to meet monthly to finalize the evaluation protocols. The team includes four DCFS Whatcom County and Region 3 staff, two parent participants, one neighborhood resident, and two Network staff. The Family Policy Council staff have worked with the Whatcom County Team to develop replication site criteria for Networks; in June a group of Community Networks and their DCFS partners was convened to discuss readiness for other pilot sites across the state. Four Networks expressed interest: Island, North Shore/Shoreline, Walla Walla, and Pierce. The Family Policy Council staff and a Whatcom County Team member have met with two of these sites to discuss their collaborative interest and capacity. Even though there is no additional funding for this proviso, both sites are enthusiastic about initiating this new project using current DCFS funding and seeking private grants. At least one site should be ready to begin by January 2010.

### **Contract**

By October 2009 the Whatcom County team established a job description and key responsibilities for the peer navigator position, service-reporting forms, and “core service” objectives. A model contract for peer “community navigators” was also developed over the past year. This will be the foundation of the pilot project’s new contract. (Attachment #5)

The Whatcom contract for the navigator and community-building portion of the contract is budgeted for approximately \$88,000 this year to serve 22 families. The Whatcom County team is discussing additional supports and training costs for the model. These funds would be used as a test with a few families to prevent specific out-of-home placements and further build community knowledge and skills to support neighborhood families. These would add an additional \$30,000 to the first year’s contract in Whatcom County. It is recommended that the parent support funding be overseen by a Parent Advisory Group of families currently engaged in the project in collaboration with the Children’s Administration staff.

The budget amounts for other pilot sites will be developed by each local Network and the Children’s Administration based on their local partnership and capacity.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation has been working for the past four years on replicating their successful community-based Family to Family model within the Washington State Children's Administration system. The Stuart Foundation often partners with the Casey Foundation and has provided three-year funding to support the development of the community and Children's Administration collaborations needed for Family to Family in local areas. The Children's Administration recently revised the second year plan for use of the Stuart Foundation funding to support sites identified in the 2009 legislative budget proviso. This would provide \$28,000 each for Whatcom County and three other sites to help fund the Network/Children's collaboration and to hire a "navigator" to work with families.

### **Evaluation**

The Whatcom County Team is developing evaluation indicators and protocols, as well as Children Administration's referral protocols. All pilot sites will be asked to use these protocols to assure fidelity of the core strategies and consistent evaluation. The evaluation protocols will be implemented at the local sites with oversight and review by the Department's and the Family Policy Council's research and evaluation staff.

### **Replication Integrity**

The Family Policy Council, Children's Administration, and the Whatcom County Team will co-develop a training program for representatives from the four prospective sites on model design and pilot implementation requirements. This will assure replication integrity and consistency for evaluation. Replication will take into consideration the reduced revenues available due to budget shortfalls this year. Private funding, grants, and creative local partnerships will be sought by the project to help with resources for pilot start up.

### **Conclusion**

With the primary goals of child safety and reunification, these pilot(s) are intended to use the flexibility offered by the Legislature's budget proviso to test new ways of building community partnerships that can increase neighborhood and natural supports for families engaged with the Children's Administration. The more people in the community that are engaged with and supporting socially isolated families, the safer children are. This proviso offers the opportunity to engage communities as full partners with the State, both jointly taking responsibility to assure the safety and well-being of our children and their families. We expect to have specific outcomes and cost savings to report to the Legislature by November 2010 that will reflect the results of these projects.

**Attachment 1**  
**Job Description**  
**Community Navigator**

**Job Overview:**

The Community Navigator will work with families referred by the Children's Administration and assist in developing natural and community supports so they can be successful in supporting their children to remain in the home and the neighborhood. The focus of this position is to facilitate a family/community team to develop a Community Navigation Plan with the family and leverage local family and residents to support the plan.

**Job Duties:**

- Meet and engage with the assigned family, identifying key strengths and skills the family has for the family, other families, and the community.
- Discuss with the family key supports needed for the caretakers and youth, discuss convening a "Family & Community Team" and who might be on that team, and begin development of a "Community Navigation and Leadership Plan".
- Become knowledgeable about the immediate neighborhood/community in which the child/family resides for assets and places the family may contribute.
- Pursue valuable community resources within the neighborhood/community that meet the current needs of a specific child/family with other Whatcom Family & Community Network staff.
- Attend Family Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings as necessary to understand the community support needs of assigned youth/families.
- Introduce community services and resources to the family and directly assist them to activate those resources into their lives.
- Actively monitor the families use of community resources in a way that ensures connections are made and are useful/making a positive impact.
- Formally create and monitor a "Community Navigation Plan" for each assigned child/family, documenting the connections made to other natural community resources and their impact on the families well being.
- Directly assist the child's caregivers to understand the mood, behavior, emotional, and educational disorders relevant to the children in their care.
- Directly assist the child's caregivers to understand the current Child Welfare plan and other plans and how to meet the expectations of them in that plan, including support for finding and using appropriate professional services.
- Assist the child's caregivers in finding and using respite services, including the identification of potential respite providers and guiding them through the process of becoming state approved for the care of children, as needed.

- Assist the child/family in finding and using methods to strengthen family communication and improve family relationships.
- Assist the child/family to identify and celebrate their strengths, providing a sense of empowerment and belief that their lives can and will improve. Help instill hopefulness for their current and future lives. Assist them to confront and change risk factors, including unrealistic expectations, self-defeating attitudes, harmful behaviors, social isolation and ineffective coping skills.

**Staff education and experience requirements:**

- Past involvement with child welfare services preferred
- Bachelor's Degree in social services or related field preferred
- 2-5 years of experience providing parent support may be substituted
- Pass DSHS Background Check

**Attachment 2**  
**Job Description**  
**Peer Community Navigator**

**Job Summary:**

The Peer Community Navigator will work with families referred by the Children's Administration and assist in developing natural and community supports so that they can be successful in supporting their children to remain in the home and the neighborhood. The focus of this position is to help develop and to implement the Community Navigation Plan working with the whole family to increase their skills and natural supports to achieve the plan.

**Job Duties:**

- Engage with the child's caretakers in a peer to peer relationship, using experience as a parent and community member to establish trust and rapport.
- Utilize this parent to parent relationship to provide insight to the caregiver on ways to better understand and meet the needs of children in their care.
- Utilize this relationship to decrease the caregiver's sense of social isolation and to believe there are others who share similar difficulties who "have made it through this."
- Assist the child/family to identify and celebrate their strengths, providing a sense of empowerment and belief that their lives can and will improve. Help instill hopefulness for their current and future lives. Assist them to confront and change risk factors, including unrealistic expectations, self defeating attitudes, harmful behaviors, and ineffective coping skills.
- Represent the needs of the family at Team Decision Making (FTDM) meetings as a parent advocate.
- Represent the needs of the family to social service agencies, schools and others as needed to help them successfully navigate systems of care.
- Collaborate with other Network staff to become knowledgeable about the immediate neighborhood/community in which the child/family resides.
- Collaborate with other Family/Community Team members to introduce community services and resources to the family and directly assist them to activate those resources into their lives.

**Staff education and experience requirements:**

- Life experience with children with mood, behavior, emotional, educational disorders
- 1 year experience involved in community resource building/collaboration
- Pass DSHS Background Check

### **Attachment 3**

#### **Criteria for Considering Network's Readiness to Implement Budget Proviso with Children's Administration**

Revised August 2009

- 1) Network has a history of engaging local residents and families and developing their leadership to solve problems together and support one another. The Network has a successful neighborhood-based, community-engagement strategy as part of their work.
- 2) Network has a history of partnering with DCFS and has been involved with the overall collaborative model of Family to Family in their Network area.
- 3) Network able to provide leadership on this project (establish an advisory team and find a method to contract with the Children's Administration) and become part of a community of practice with other Networks to support, evaluate, and build Network capacity in this area.
- 4) Network is willing to work with the basic community-based model designed by Whatcom's expanded Family2Family "Project Design" team. Network is able to work directly or oversee work with families.
- 5) Network is willing and capable of evaluating the results for this project with the other sites, based on common indicators.
- 6) Network has a demonstrated track record of working with FPC staff and other Networks, helping and being helped in joint exploration of new ideas and evaluative questions.
- 7) Network has the capacity and willingness to do the pre-design work and take an exploratory role with a pre-contract while designing the process with the regional Children's Administration.
- 8) Network has experience in developing new methods, roles, interactive dynamics within their Network area and spun those out to another organization.

## Attachment 4

Whatcom Family & Community Network  
Community Navigation Plan:  
Informal Supports and Priorities for Reunification

Family & Child Name:

Date

2009

Case Worker:

Navigator:

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Focus for Plan/Tasks</b>	<b>Results To Date</b>
1. Assist in increased and common understanding for family and community about ways to best support child/family.		
2. Assist in building common skills, including communication skills, in family and community to support child and family.		
3. Assist family in navigating systems, accessing services, and getting things they need for reunification - where there are ongoing barriers.		
4. Assist in increasing opportunities for social connections and informal supports for child and family.		
5. Help increase informal supports for respite.		
6. Help as needed for supporting the family to achieve any other goals the family and agencies have identified.		
7. Other		

**Attachment 5**  
**DRAFT LIST OF OUTCOMES/INDICATORS**

<b><i>INCREASED CHILD SAFETY</i></b>	<b>Information Source</b>
Re-referrals to CPS	DCFS
Number and quality/skills of caregivers in child's life	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Re-entry into care (foster/group)	DCFS
Stability of Educational Experience	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Other system/agency contacts	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Social Worker, Parent, & Child's feelings of safety	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Positive changes in physical environment that was unsafe	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Change in parent competencies related to child safety	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Motivation to keep child safe, and	"
Demonstrated Efficacy in changing their environment,	"
Experience in caring for and keeping child safe,	"
Enjoyable parent/child interaction,	"
Resources to support and nurture child,	"
Skills to care for child	
<b><i>REDUCED TIME TO REUNIFY</i></b>	
Amount of peer support/informal support on steps to reunify safely	WFCN/FAMILY
Parent/Team's understanding of steps to reunify	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Track time out of home since WFCN engagement	WFCN/DCFS
DCFS/WFCN/Family reflection on impact of engagement on reunification	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
<b><i>REDUCED OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT</i></b>	
Placement out-of-home during WFCN engagement	DCFS/WFCN
DCFS/WFCN/Family reflection on impact of WFCN engagement in prevention of out-of-home placement	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
<b><i>REDUCED TIME TO ACHIEVE PERMANENCY</i></b>	
Number of permanency plans achieved per quarter/overall & by project	DCFS
Reflections on project impact on time-to-permanency	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
<b><i>CHANGE IN COLLABORATION/SYSTEM BARRIERS</i></b>	
Number of referrals, type (FVS, CPS, DFWS), and presenting issue	DCFS/WFCN
Identification of what does and does not work and any changes made in process (WFCN/DCFS/F2F)	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Changes in neighborhood support and norms for supporting families/ residents/# of volunteers, meetings, events in community related to goals of project & Family to Family	WFCN/F2F/FAMILY
<b><i>INCREASED FAMILY SUCCESS AND REDUCED SOCIAL ISOLATION</i></b>	
Increase in family feeling respected, supported, and that their goals were met	FAMILY
Increase in hope/belief in themselves and that the community can support their child	FAMILY
Increase in family's ability to identify, build, and use informal resources to support their family	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Increase in time and assets of family given/exchanged with other families and the community	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY
Increase in number of informal/social supports family interacts with regularly	WFCN/DCFS/FAMILY