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## MODELS FOR PRACTICE

### FOCUS AREA: EDUCATIONAL AND COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMS

**Program Name:** Connect for Healthy Kids

**Location:** Platteville, Wisconsin

**Problem Addressed:** Educational and Community-Based Programs

**Healthy People 2010 Objective:** 7

**Web Address:** [www.connectforhealthykids.org](http://www.connectforhealthykids.org)

#### SNAPSHOT

Connect for Healthy Kids (CFHK) is a network that coordinates health, nutrition, family support, and education programs for the children and families in Grant County, Wisconsin. Grant County is a rural area with a farming and agribusiness economic base. There is no public transportation system, and the nearest interstate highway system is located 70 miles away. Travel is often hazardous in the four-to-five month winter season due to snow and ice on the secondary roads and highways.

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Children and families in Grant County face barriers in accessing health and related services because of a variety of geographical, social, and economic problems. Centralized coordination of services is necessary to maximize limited resources and to prevent fragmentation, duplication, and gaps in services. The network coordinates a variety of health services and programs for children, families, and adults. It also serves as a resource and referral service to other local, state, and federal services.

Connect for Healthy Kids provides services for a diverse population that is predominantly Caucasian but also includes African American, Latino, Rwandan, Amish, Hmong, and Mennonite populations.

#### THE MODEL

**Blueprint:** Connect for Healthy Kids is composed of nine network participants including the Southwestern Wisconsin Community Action Program, Inc. (SWCAP), Grant County Health Department, Southwest Health Center (local hospital), Even Start Family Literacy Program, Head Start, Southwestern Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral, Grant County's Family Resource Center, Grant County University of Wisconsin (UW)-Extension, and the University of Wisconsin-Platteville School of Education. The nine network partners comprise an advisory board that conducts monthly meetings for monitoring and planning purposes. The administrative agency, SWCAP, is a private non profit 501(c)(3) organization offering programs financed through federal, state, and local funds. The executive director of SWCAP serves as program director of Connect for Healthy Kids. The program coordinator, administrative

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assistant, and the finance department are also employees of SWCAP. The program contracts with an outside evaluator for the program. The directors of the nine network partner agencies contribute their time in-kind to the program's planning and activities. Many volunteers provide valuable services within each of the network partner agencies to support programming activities.

Adult and family-focused services coordinated by Connect for Healthy Kids include adult basic education, GED courses, and English as a Second Language classes. Additional parent and family-support programs are coordinated including toy and book-lending libraries; home visits; child care resources and referrals; and referrals to other local, state, and federal services.

A wide range of services for children and families are also coordinated. This includes prenatal health and nutrition education programs such as the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Supplemental Nutrition Program. In collaboration with a local hospital, parents with newborns are referred to agencies that conduct home visits. Additional services include early childhood developmental and physical screenings, and preventive health services including immunization clinics and early childhood education programs. A unique feature of Connect for Healthy Kids is a strong collaboration with the University of Wisconsin–Platteville School of Education. Health Education and Early Childhood Education pre-service teachers provide volunteer assistance through practicum experience with the partner agencies.

Through joint planning and shared resources, agencies are able to expand their programs and services. Three agencies—Head Start, Even Start, and the Family Center—are located in one central site and share facilities; they also share staff, marketing, and materials. In addition to health services, the three agencies collaborate to provide playgroups and family fun nights. At this central site, the Grant County Health Department conducts Health Check and WIC clinics. The UW-Extension nutrition program conducts nutrition activities and programs at the central site as well.

Funding for the network is derived from various sources including the American Academy of Pediatrics, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Office of Rural Health Policy, Department of Workforce Development, Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, and Wisconsin Department of Transportation Safe Community Program.

Outreach and promotion of the services provided by Connect for Healthy Kids is accomplished through numerous channels. A website provides information about available services and links to county resources. A toll-free information line connects families to services and programs. Brochures and schedules of programs/services in the county are distributed to agencies

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The network coordinates a variety of health services and programs for children, families, and adults.

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serving potential clients. Local media are also used, including radio, television, newspaper articles, and school newsletters. Network members also participate in local resource fairs and conferences. Members deliver presentations to local groups, funders, and to state and national legislators.

**Making a Difference:** Connect for Healthy Kids network partners recognize that programs must be designed and implemented to include ongoing evaluation, participant feedback, and agency input. To accomplish this, CFHK uses both internal evaluations and a formal external evaluation process directed by a professional evaluator.

Participating organizations function as an evaluation team and work closely with the evaluator to design strategies that measure the overall effectiveness of the network. Network partners are encouraged to use evaluation methods that are the least intrusive to clientele. Various methods are used in the evaluation process including agency records of participation numbers, participant evaluations, staff feedback, pre- and post-session measures, and client-satisfaction measures. In some cases, focus groups are conducted to obtain feedback from agencies and clientele.

Program evaluation allows member organizations the opportunity to identify strengths as well as areas for improvement from the perspective of the participant. Modifications based on such input can result in improved services. Overall network evaluation provides similar feedback but from participating member agencies. Modifications resulting from agency feedback may increase local ownership and value of the services.

**Beginnings:** In 1998, a collaboration of diverse community members and health agencies conducted a comprehensive community needs assessment through UW-Extension's School Readiness Project. The School Readiness Project is a community collaborative funded through the federal Children, Youth and Families at Risk Initiative. The seven-month assessment included parent surveys regarding service and program needs, and focus groups of parent organizations, teachers, and local associations.

Results from the needs assessment indicated limited availability and accessibility of health services and programs for children and families. Families considered existing services to be fragmented and not visible or not accessible. Access barriers identified by families included lack of transportation, inconvenient operating hours, and lack of employer-provided insurance. Families identified work schedules, family schedules, and time spent traveling long distances to scattered services as additional barriers to seeking routine and preventive services. County data show approximately 30 percent of children age two and under were not fully immunized. Between 40–50 percent of children three years and under had not received developmental screenings, and 20 percent of children had not received hearing and vision screening by the age of five. In addition, only 58 percent

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of women and infants eligible for WIC were actually utilizing the program—well below the state participation level of 66 percent.

Seventy community leaders participated in a town meeting to prioritize the key issues identified in the assessment. This resulted in a 12-month strategic-planning process where community and agency members discussed ways to improve current programs. A plan to coordinate health and related services for families emerged; Connect for Healthy Kids was created in 2000 and was implemented the following year.

Eight agencies were the original stakeholders in the network and are still involved. This includes SWCAP, Grant County Health Department, Southwest Health Center, Even Start Family Literacy Program, Head Start, Grant County UW-Extension, the Family Center, and the University of Wisconsin–Platteville School of Education. In 2001, Southwestern Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral joined the network. The nine agencies continue to meet monthly to monitor progress and plan services.

**Challenges and Solutions:** Providing services to geographically isolated families has been a challenge to the network. CFHK coordinates home visits to meet their needs, but the vastness of the county drains the limited travel, time, and staff resources of individual agencies.

While three agencies (Head Start, the Family Center, and Even Start) provide programming at a central site, it has been difficult to identify a site able to accommodate a larger number of programs and services. Centralized coordination from the current administrative site has increased collaboration and enhanced services, but it may take longer than anticipated to select a site for increased co-location. Network partners are considering the need, feasibility, and funding options for constructing a facility.

The involvement of community and network partners throughout the development of Connect for Healthy Kids has established the essential grassroots ownership that will help sustain it. Network partners are committed to sustaining the program and actively seek funding from state and federal grants, local and private foundations, individuals, and from local community capital campaigns. Each agency aims to increase the proportion of eligible families enrolled in state and federal programs such as Medicaid, Head Start, WIC, and community action programs. Increased participation in such programs can allow agencies to allocate more resources to the continuation of the program. Network partners also envision expanding membership to include other organizations such as job centers, food pantries, schools, and churches. Adding new partners with additional resources can increase program sustainability.

In 2001, a CFHK network partner—Even Start Family Literacy—was one of the three adult literacy programs selected throughout the state for the

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“Unique Program Award” from the Wisconsin Technical College System Board. In 2003, CFHK was recognized as a Successful Initiative at the Wisconsin Rural Health State Conference. Connect for Healthy Kids was featured as a county example of Local Collaborations to Enhance Lives of Children and Families for a 2004 UW-Extension Family Living Programs Impact Report. The network was also featured as a showcase project for UW-Madison School of Human Ecology’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2004.

**PROGRAM CONTACT INFORMATION**

Sandy Leibfried, Director  
Southwestern Wisconsin Child Care Resource and Referral  
126 Doudna Hall  
Platteville WI 53818  
Phone: (800) 267-1018