

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Review of Models for Change in Pennsylvania Prepared by Tom Dewar February 2009

Introduction

The overall purpose of this review is to provide an independent look at the current work supported through the Foundation's Models for Change Initiative in Pennsylvania. In this summary of the report I will summarize the main findings.

It should be remembered that Pennsylvania was selected as the first of four states to participate in Models for Change. It was chosen because it was perceived as being well-positioned to move forward. Thus, the core idea here was "to accelerate the rate of change" already underway and to increase the likelihood that innovations in practice and policy would be introduced, tested, and adopted on a more wide-spread (or even system-wide) basis. The other states are Illinois, Louisiana and Washington.

Core Questions for this Review

- How well is the overall strategy working?
- What are the most important challenges to emerge thus far, and how are they being addressed?
- What kinds of specific progress and impact are being achieved?
- How resilient does the strategy appear to be?
- What is being learned here that might be useful for Models for Change work ahead, both in Pennsylvania and elsewhere?

To address these questions I interviewed a diverse sample of 40 people; made site visits to both participating and non-participating counties as well as to the lead entity in Pennsylvania (Juvenile Law Center in Philadelphia), and sat in on various Models for Change discussions, meetings and conferences. It was done in the second half of 2008.

1) Is the overall strategy working in Pennsylvania?

Overall, it appears that the choice to start the Models for Change Initiative in Pennsylvania was a wise judgment, both in terms of Pennsylvania as a place to do the work and in terms of the Juvenile Law Center as the lead entity. Although not without some surprises and challenges, the range of work supported by Models for Change grantmaking has managed to build on and reinforce the capacity of a wide range of key players, professional networks, and organizations. Many key forces and people were already in place and working before Models for Change began, but its arrival has added some new elements as well as giving the on-going work an even stronger footing and focus. As intended, the work is moving both from the bottom up and from the top down in the sense of seeding and growing new programs and approaches as well as changing the policy and resource environment within the state. The Juvenile Law Center is perceived as a being good "leader," as well as a capable "manager" for this work.

The work in Pennsylvania has also tapped into existing leadership cadres in (almost) each area relevant to this work (including probation, judges, public defenders and prosecutors.) It is important to note that Pennsylvania is a decentralized system with respect to juvenile justice, more so than most other states, with each one of its sixty-seven (67) counties representing its own “mini-system” within an overall state system. This is another reason these various leadership cadres are so important here, and why the work has fanned out and gotten picked up in different ways in different places.

A key element of the overall strategy is improved data. Data is indeed beginning to circulate, and there is a growing appreciation of its value in both practical and political terms. Many participants express an appetite for better evidence about what works, and recognize their own role in helping to generate such an evidence base. Although data gathering and analysis process always creates pressures, especially in terms of frontline workers who usually bear the brunt of getting the information and reporting it out, there has been progress here.

In each state, the Models for Change Initiative identifies three issues or “targeted areas of improvement” as priorities for concentrated work. These are chosen in consultation with state and local stakeholders. In Pennsylvania the selected targeted areas of improvement are aftercare, mental health and disproportionate minority contact.

Of these three, *aftercare* (or re-entry) is the one with the most initial activity and momentum to build on. A consensus-based policy statement was adopted early, and has been consistently and effectively used to specify a comprehensive action plan that provides both accountability and a menu of specific options for those looking to do more or better work on aftercare in their local county-based system. The work on aftercare features a wide range of practical steps to pursue and growing support for using programs that are demonstrated to work. It represents a good example of “accelerating the pace of reform.” Tools, training and technical support are being applied here in an effective way.

The second area is *mental health*. Work emerging here also created a policy framework and worked to achieve a consensus in support of it. It began more slowly, and with some self-described caution by some mental health stakeholders came from “outside” the juvenile justice system. Considering how “new” the connections and attempts at integration of mental health into the juvenile justice system really are, the mental health work has had to play “catch up” (in contrast to aftercare where many of the relationships and options to consider were already seen as being “on the table”.) This area also shows the value of operating at both state and county levels. In many ways, the mental health work is demonstrating more new and different practices to the field than either of the other two, and represents a good example of creating openings and then moving on them in meaningful and specific ways.

Of the three targeted areas of improvement, *disproportionate minority contact* represents the area where progress has been slower and more difficult, although recent work in several counties appears to be getting some results.

A fourth important part of the overall approach is the **National Resource Bank**. A great deal has been learned here and is still being learned in Pennsylvania about how to make these interactions between national resource organizations and local work effective. For example, it appears to take both time, and in the words of one interviewee, “some practice,” to figure out how to make the kind of expert help being offered by these various national resource people useful to local practitioners and program sites.

An important finding on technical assistance is that while some of what is now provided has been well-received, other parts have been difficult or less effective than hoped. Some would like something that is more like a “flexible” or discretionary money account, or quick access to “mini” grants to pay for assistance (to pay for meetings, travel, or incidentals in support of planning and data gathering and reporting.) All this suggests that while these resource organizations and people can indeed be helpful, they must be introduced in the right way, and perhaps more importantly, they should demonstrate the right style and bring the right experience and content into the mix.

2) What are some of the most important challenges to date?

This work has faced many challenges. A few stand out.

- Expectations about *money*, and who can get it, have led some to feel short-changed or left out. It appears that many on the edges of this work, or just outside its reach, wonder why more is not being done to directly support program costs, in particular. In relation to money, and perceptions about gate-keeping, the role of Juvenile Law Center staff in Models for Change has evolved. While this *role shift* to grants manager makes sense, it has meant that Juvenile Law Center staff has had to learn new roles, rules and rhythms.
- State *budget shortfalls* are on everyone’s mind. It will no doubt get even worse. The state and local context for this work is tightening and appears headed toward some serious service cuts, job loss and possible policy shifts that will directly affect system reform prospects.
- In essence, by its choice of lead entity, the Foundation has chosen to support both an “*inside*” and “*outside*” game on systems reform in Pennsylvania. As the work has unfolded here, there has been an understandable (and largely desirable) growing emphasis on the “inside game.” To be sure, there have been some strategic investments in “outside” players, such as the state Mental Health Association, and the Latino Juvenile Justice Network, but these have been relatively few. In the longer run, systems changing work requires a balance of both inside and outside players and pressure. To be effective these must be in a kind of balance that must necessarily change over time as conditions change, and opportunities emerge. Achieving this balance is clearly a challenge.
- An issue of long-term importance that is not clearly being addressed at present is the variation in *program provider quality*. There are between 500 and 600 different private providers in Pennsylvania, and about 80-90% of all kids will end up in one of them. How is all this Models for Change work improving provider quality?

The development and implementation of the Single Plan has helped provider practice become more consistent, and accountable. The Plan's central premise of having "one agreed upon plan that starts immediately at disposition and is shared with all who interact with a given juvenile" is clearly a strong step in the right direction. At the same time, the genuine challenge for anyone (from judges to probation officers) of keeping up with a large, dispersed, and often rapidly changing array of providers must be recognized.

- An area where there has been both considerable progress and serious challenge is ***data gathering and analysis***. Many directly involved with it continue to struggle with what the Foundation can reasonably expect in terms of reporting given the degree of actual support for that specific activity.
- A final challenge that should be acknowledged is **sustainability**. It is widely recognized and is already being addressed in a variety of ways. The Foundation has tried to make it clear that it does not provide support to operate programs directly. This is the right position. It helped people focus early on how to get useful new ideas and programs picked up by "regular" or on-going budgets. At the same time, though, there may be some tension between strongly publicizing the "Models for Change" supported work and efforts to get those elements integrated into the "system" going forward. The time and energy spent "branding" the components of Models for Change may make sense when the Initiative is up and running, but it can create a sense that certain products and results are "old" once that same Initiative has been completed.

3) Is the work starting to show measurable impact on key outcomes?

There are a broad range of measurable impacts starting to emerge. Examples include:

- In aftercare work, key long-term goals include: reduced length of stay in placement, reduced dollars spent on placement, reduced recidivism, increased percentage of youth placed in aftercare upon release from placement, improved connections to school and work, and improved immediate engagement (with relevant people and resources) following release from placement.

New resources have emerged. These include the Pennsylvania Academic and Career Technical Training (PACCT) Project, which has begun to improve career and technical training in the ten largest facilities at which delinquent youth are placed and is linking this to resources in their home communities. It also represents an important new collaboration between the State's two biggest counties, Allegheny and Philadelphia. In addition, the "Probation Case Management Essentials" for youth in Placement has been released, a product of the Aftercare All Sites Group, and written by staff at the National Center on Juvenile Justice. These and other resources have help shape a "cultural shift" in the way that aftercare is perceived and delivered in Pennsylvania. Attitudes and practices are moving toward a greater willingness to plan, promote and follow-up aftercare, and more active roles for key personnel.

- In the mental health work, long-term goals include increased screening to identify mental health / substance abuse disorders; increased referrals for comprehensive

evaluations and to appropriate mental health and/or substance abuse treatment services, and reductions in recidivism among probation youth that have been determined to have mental health and/or substance abuse disorders. Model Counties also show an increase in the number of comprehensive evaluations and services recommended; as well as actual increases in mental health and substance abuse services actually being delivered.

- In Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC), long-term goals focus on reducing the disparities found at key decision points throughout the process - from initial arrest, referral to court, adjudication, confinement, to aftercare. Progress is being made on getting more and better data on these key decision points at the local level.
- Professional roles central to decision-making and outcomes in juvenile justice are also each getting attention through Models for Change. These include judges, prosecutors, probation officers, school officials, public defenders, and police.

In a decentralized system such as Pennsylvania, the Juvenile Court Judges are in a truly decisive role. Work under Models for Change has entered directly into their professional networks. The “Bench Book,” which is distributed to new Judges to guide their work, now features “best” and “promising” practices that are exemplified by Models for Change work. For Probation Officers, the recently released manual “Case Management Essentials,” plays a similar role, and includes specific examples of work that Models for Change has promoted and tested.

At present, there is nothing similar for prosecutors, a key role that is understandably harder to “win” over to some of the goals of system reform; but plans are underway to document the extent to which the goals of public safety are not sacrificed by pursuit of these goals, and indeed, may often be strongly served in the longer run. For police officers – there is only a little, to date, but emerging work on disproportionate minority contact, in particular, may change that.

- Another area where measurable impact is starting to appear is family involvement. This emerging area is now receiving increased attention and has become more integrated into “normal” procedures and indicators of “success.” Progress here is also an important reminder that many of the forces that must be engaged for results are non-professional and “voluntary.” That is, family, friends, neighbors, employers, and the public-at-large will all play crucial roles in achieving outcomes here. Family involvement is an example of emergent work that adds to the prospects for impact in those areas.

4) How resilient is the strategy?

The intertwined strategies at work in Pennsylvania appear to be strongly embedded. They could be made even more so. Reforms under way appear to have gained high-level support and commitment of resources – from the Governor, legislative leaders, Department Heads, and Commissions of various kinds. Sustaining this progress and getting successful innovations adopted remains a primary concern – one that appears to be driven by self-interest rather than by the planned departure of Foundation support.

One indication of the strong work around sustaining progress has been success at getting policy statements for targeted areas of improvement “written into” the Governors Plan. Key department heads and their aides are conversant (and in some cases even comfortable) with Models for Change language, goals and practices.

All of this strong positioning of the work is helped immensely by the high quality of existing leadership cadres – which are impressive and highly relational. These people have often known each other for some time, and thus often bring an important sense of history to this work. They interact often, both during and between meetings; disagree without becoming angry or frustrated; cooperate and follow-through when needed; and show an uncommon degree of respect, understanding and good will toward one another.

At the same time, it is not clear where and how new people will fit in. Not just in terms of new people entering (and staying in) in the juvenile or criminal justice field in the state, but especially in terms of new leadership. There are clearly important issues of leadership *succession* in these networks and professional roles which are central to the strategy’s resilience, and which will only get more serious as time passes. More could be done here.

Finally, one of the principal lessons from Models for Change in Pennsylvania is the importance of adapting to different contexts, and developing multiple ways of addressing key priorities and challenges. In this sense, it is important to bear in mind that this overall is not *a* model but *models* for change.

5) What is being learned that might be useful to the Models for Change work going forward, both in Pennsylvania and elsewhere?

Clearly, each state selected in Models for Change work is distinctive. Each represents a very different political, economic and social context within which to carry out “systems reform.” In Pennsylvania, this variability also occurs within the state, across counties. Much is being learned here about how to choose sites and use them to advance ideas, practice innovations, and policy change.

These new “models” must be advanced and supported by *local* leaders and not just by those at the lead entity or in key professional circles for field (as important as those clearly are.) Local people must ultimately be found who will step up and fight through the frictions and imperfections of getting these new “models” to work in a particular place, within a particular organizational fabric, and with actual players who have their own interests and (sometimes highly developed) views. This gives the work a dynamic quality with an emphasis on local organizing and organizational change at county and local departmental level. At this level, when key decision-makers and practice leaders identify and adopt reforms, there is a degree of “relentless” trial-and-error about the people and places that manage to create and sustain real change. It is not so much about models as it is about goals, focus, feedback, adaptability and persistence.

It also appears that much is being learned about how the lead entity plays its different roles, as well as how organizations and people in the National Resource Bank can most effectively be utilized at the state and local level. This learning is important and efforts

should continue to help try to identify these lessons for others. I am told that some of the most recent efforts to convene people across the four core states have been more lively and productive than some of the earlier efforts. This cross-state learning effort is worth continuing, and might usefully be crafted to even better reflect the specific learning goals of the various leaders and lead entities in each state.

Another important finding here is that there may be too much “talk” about money and the total amounts being invested when the Foundation’s role and intentions are described, especially in public and in print. While leaders in Pennsylvania highly value the way the Foundation’s designated staff person has dealt with them and their interests, this deep commitment to cooperate and actually “co-design” an approach that fits well with the history, context, culture and current roster of key players in each state is worth taking just as seriously in the future as it has been here. In the absence of behavior to the contrary, most people expect “big” foundations to be bossy and controlling, rather than flexible, clear and informed.

Conclusion

Overall, this review finds the choice to start Models for Change in Pennsylvania to have been a very good one. The work underway has managed to build on and increase the relevant capacity of key players, professional networks, and organizations. It has also succeeded in demonstrating some specific practices and policies that can make a real difference. Much is being learned about how to introduce and manage these changes at the local level. Of central importance, the Foundation has chosen wisely in selecting the Juvenile Law Center as the lead entity in Pennsylvania. It is strong and appears to be getting stronger. It is respected, capable, flexible and tough-nosed when it needs to be. A rich web of relationships and support among key professionals in the field is being managed in a thoughtful and effective way. A growing appetite for more and better evidence about what works is shown across the state, and this sets the stage for continued progress.

Of the three targeted areas for improvement, aftercare (or re-entry) had the most initial activity and momentum to build on. The work on aftercare has deepened and broadened, and shows evidence of progress and impact. It represents a good example of “accelerating pace of reform.” Work on mental health activity has created a consensus based policy framework and featured many useful implementation start-ups. It is demonstrating that screening, informed referrals, and a range of appropriate services can make a real difference both in terms of public safety and outcomes for youth. It also demonstrates the value of bringing in new or “outside” allies and partners. Disproportionate minority contact represents the area where progress has been slower and more difficult. Progress here will require more effective data as well as a greater willingness to pinpoint problem areas and possible remedies.

Models for Change in Pennsylvania is also carefully planned and executed. The reforms in play are well positioned within relevant political and professional circles, and several overlapping networks of strong leaders which are pushing forward in what seem careful and appropriate ways. More could be done to broaden this leadership, especially in terms

of bringing forward younger leaders; and more consideration could be given to the value of also supporting some independent “outside” forces to keep the pressure on; but the broad mix of key people, program and policy innovation, improving documentation, and clear advocacy is indeed impressive. While results-to-date have been good, the prospects for even greater impact in the next few years are even better.