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## Findings from the Safe Kids/Safe Streets National Evaluation KIDSAFE, Kansas City, Missouri

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PREPARED BY WESTAT, NATIONAL EVALUATOR FOR THE PROGRAM

Many studies suggest that child abuse and neglect are risk factors for the development of juvenile delinquency and other problem behaviors. The Safe Kids/Safe Streets (SK/SS) program, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs (OJP), was designed to break the cycle, by reducing child abuse and neglect through comprehensive, multifaceted strategies involving a wide array of community partners. Five demonstration sites were selected to implement the program, which began in 1997. The five communities hosting the program were Burlington, VT; Huntsville, AL; Kansas City, MO; Sault Ste. Marie, MI; and Toledo OH.<sup>1</sup>

The Kansas City KIDSAFE project resides within the Heart of America United Way (HAUW). HAUW has served the metropolitan Kansas City region for more than 85 years. Each year it funds numerous nonprofit health and human services agencies and is a leader in administering and implementing communitywide initiatives. HAUW has a long history of involvement in child maltreatment issues. Prior to KIDSAFE, its primary child abuse initiative was the Metropolitan Child Abuse Network. The KIDSAFE project took over the Network's role as the central planning, coordinating, networking, and advocacy body on child abuse issues for the community.

KIDSAFE received a total of six grants. The first two grants were for \$924,000. For the third, fourth, and fifth grants (beginning in July 2001), funding was reduced to \$500,000. In 2003, OJP decided to provide an additional \$125,000 per site to cover a final year of transition to non-Federal funding. Total funding for the SK/SS program in Kansas City totaled \$3,473,000.

### Planning

Formal planning for KIDSAFE began in late spring 1997, shortly after Kansas City received notice of its selection. To plan the project, Heart of America United Way (HAUW) reconvened the collaborators who had worked to prepare the proposal. The core group consisted of the Public Sector Partner (PSP) agencies—Division of Family Services (DFS), the Family Court, Kansas City Police Department (KCPD), and the

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<sup>1</sup>For more information about this program, see Gragg, F., Cronin, R., Schultz, D., Eisen, K., *National Evaluation of the Safe Kids/Safe Streets Program: Final Report. (Volumes I – IV)*. Rockville, MD: Westat, 2004.

Prosecuting Attorney's Office (PAO). Through most of the planning period, various planning committees met monthly to develop the project's implementation plan.

Because the Kansas City site was funded by Executive Office for Weed & Seed (EOWS), it faced unique challenges related to the EOWS requirement that KIDSAFE coordinate with the local Weed & Seed effort. KIDSAFE submitted an Implementation Plan after an 8-month planning process that included several visits from EOWS consultants and staff. The Federal review process took months longer than expected, largely because EOWS was not satisfied with the plans for integrating local Weed & Seed efforts. While negotiations continued, OJP released a small portion of the implementation funds, allowing the project to begin recruiting staff. KIDSAFE received final approval for its Implementation Plan on September 30, 1998, after extensive discussions and correspondence between the Federal and project staff.

## **Collaboration Development**

KIDSAFE's formal governing body convened for the first time in August 1998 with representatives from all key stakeholder groups. The membership of the KIDSAFE Council included high-level decisionmakers from public and private agencies, foundations, and community groups. Despite some turnover in the individual representatives, there were no major changes in the agencies and organizations with seats on the Council during implementation. The Council met quarterly with KIDSAFE staff, with the Council co-chairs setting the agenda. Council meetings were largely seen as broad strategy sessions focusing on the project's goals and objectives. KIDSAFE staff used the Council as a vehicle for sustaining connections between key agencies and groups, exchanging information, and soliciting advice. KIDSAFE staff engaged the Council in decisionmaking through working committees.

Planning and strategizing for KIDSAFE occurred through monthly Management Team meetings attended by KIDSAFE staff as well as key representatives from the KCPD, the PAO, Family Court, and DFS. The meetings allowed those involved in the project to share information, present problems, and maintain their focus. The Management Team set up strategies and timelines for project activities. To help with strategic planning, KIDSAFE held periodic retreats where the Management Team identified issues related to accomplishing the goals and objectives of the four SK/SS program elements.

The KIDSAFE Council considered several alternative structures to sustain the collaborative's vision and goals after the Federal funding ends. While community stakeholders showed little interest in creating a new structure to continue the effort, there was consensus that some type of organizational body was needed. Rather than maintain the KIDSAFE Council, however, KIDSAFE plans to sustain project activities by institutionalizing them within existing community organizations. This involves several organizations that KIDSAFE has partnered with over the past 7 years of planning and implementation, including the Child Protection Center (CPC), the Community Quality Assurance Committee, which is involved in planning DFS' exit from a consent decree, and HAUW. Under this proposal, following the end of federal funding in September 2005, KIDSAFE would no longer exist as a separate entity. The project's efforts would be folded into the work of these other organizations that already share a similar vision, members, and goals.

## **Project Implementation**

Throughout implementation, KIDSAFE worked on all four of the program elements required by OJP—system reform and accountability, continuum of services, data collection and evaluation, and prevention education and public information. While the emphasis shifted somewhat over time, the project maintained a strong focus on system reform throughout. The reductions in KIDSAFE's budget from mid-July 2001 onward necessitated cuts in each area, nonetheless KIDSAFE made substantial progress across all the program elements.

**System Reform and Accountability.** One of KIDSAFE's major system reform efforts was the formation of a multidisciplinary team (MDT) to review serious child maltreatment cases from a target area encompassing 3 high-need ZIP codes. KIDSAFE began by organizing and directly convening a Case Review Team. When problems with this case review process forced KIDSAFE to suspend the team, KIDSAFE used the experience to help plan a new MDT formed as part of the community's response to a series of child fatalities in Jackson County in 1999. By mid 2001, the team (later named the Investigative Collaborative), with representatives from DFS, Family Court, KCPD, and PAO, met regularly to share information and decide how to proceed with specific cases. KIDSAFE played a facilitation role, helping the Investigative Collaborative develop new policies and procedures for bringing cases to the group and for following up on information requests. Over time, the case conferences evolved into a

forum for the involved parties to get information and support from each other and better coordinate their investigations.

As part of its system reform efforts, KIDSAFE maintained a strong focus on professional development and training. The professional development agenda centered on four key priorities—PSP roles and responsibilities, medical aspects of child abuse and neglect, investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect, and relationship-building with the domestic violence community. Annual reviews and updates to the project’s training plan show that KIDSAFE remained committed to these areas throughout implementation.

Another big part of KIDSAFE’s efforts in the area of system reform involved working on policy and procedural changes within specific agencies. Two of the larger activities involved DFS. KIDSAFE provided financial support to a structured decisionmaking project for the Jackson County DFS. This project resulted in new procedures and policies related to two critical points in the system: handling hotline calls and screening reports on child maltreatment. KIDSAFE also financially supported the state’s ongoing effort to receive child welfare accreditation. The goal of the accreditation process is to implement high-quality, best practice standards for child welfare agencies. KIDSAFE also worked to develop multidisciplinary responses to certain types of cases through the development of protocols or practice guidelines. For example, KIDSAFE helped draft protocols for filing court cases on drug-exposed infants and for co-investigating child sexual abuse.

**Continuum of Services.** Most of KIDSAFE’s efforts in this area came under the project’s Neighborhood Services Initiative (NSI). KIDSAFE designed this initiative to enhance services for at-risk families in the target area. After issuing a request for proposals, KIDSAFE involved the community in the selection process by recruiting representatives from community-based agencies and neighborhood residents to serve on grant review teams. In September 1999, KIDSAFE made awards ranging from \$20,000 to \$50,000 to 14 NSI projects. The grantees provided a wide range of services, including grandparent support programs, counseling and support groups for children and parents, academic tutoring, parenting classes, and youth activities. All of the services were offered in the KIDSAFE target area. Later, KIDSAFE refunded 8 of the 14 original grantees. KIDSAFE also added two ZIP Codes to the target area covered by the NSI to

incorporate the entire Weed & Seed area. KIDSAFE issued a second RFP during the project's third grant period and funded nine grantees with 1-year awards.

Another part of KIDSAFE's community service strategy involved using neighborhood hubs in the target area. When implementation started, KIDSAFE already had two hubs selected. Early in implementation, these hubs received a modest amount of funding to provide neighborhood residents with an opportunity for involvement, decisionmaking, and support. Once the NSI started, the hubs played a much less prominent role in KIDSAFE's services strategy, and the project eventually stopped funding them. Instead, KIDSAFE began coordinating with the Weed & Seed Safe Havens. Starting in 2001, Weed & Seed provided \$20,000 for two Safe Havens that were located within organizations in the target area. With their designation as Weed & Seed Safe Havens, these organizations hired staff, continued existing programming, and developed new programs for family support and youth development.

**Prevention Education and Public Information.** KIDSAFE's prevention education and public awareness efforts started on a small scale with the project's participation in community and neighborhood events. A turning point came when KIDSAFE devised its Community Grant Program, which had two components. The Prevention Grant Program gave small awards to community organizations to conduct a prevention or public education event. The Grassroots Capacity Grants provided funds for small grassroots agencies to develop prevention programming in the target area.

KIDSAFE also found ways to offer training and technical assistance to community agencies and grassroots groups. In 2001, KIDSAFE partnered with the local Council on Philanthropy to develop a series of Primer's Training sessions for grassroots groups. All of the recipients of Grassroots Capacity Grants were required to attend the Primer's Training series, which covered topics such as collaboration, fund-raising, grant-writing, and outcome evaluation. KIDSAFE also invited all of the NSI grantees to participate in the training sessions.

**Data Collection and Evaluation.** KIDSAFE's partnership with a local evaluator when submitting the original proposal helped make the data collection and evaluation component of the KIDSAFE project strong from the beginning. Conforming to the formal evaluation plan submitted with the Implementation Plan, the local evaluation gathered information on each major component of the project. In the area of

system reform, the local evaluation monitored changes in agency policies and procedures on an ongoing basis, surveyed participants from different systems to look at relationships between agencies, and conducted brief surveys of training participants to get feedback on the quality and usefulness of each training session. The local evaluator also completed a multi-system case analysis of sexual abuse cases from the target and a comparison area for a baseline period and a followup period. For the NSI, the local evaluator produced periodic reports showing the number and types of services provided and the demographic characteristics of the individuals served. For the prevention grants, she documented the number of attendees, described the activities, and discussed their perceived impact in the target area. She also conducted a Community Impact Survey that gathered resource information on the agencies providing services in the target area and the types of services available.

KIDSAFE's MIS efforts originally focused on improving inter-agency access to databases and e-mail. Early on, these efforts progressed under the leadership of the Family Court director and a Family Court judge who worked to overcome several obstacles to integrating different databases. By the end of 2000, the electronic databases of DFS, Family Court, and the PAO were accessible to each other's staff. KIDSAFE also helped organize training for PSP agency staff on using the databases and prepared protocols for accessing the databases. While these efforts removed some of the barriers to information sharing, KIDSAFE's agency partners later reported that staff did not really use the cross-agency access to databases, for reasons that are not clear. At this point, the KIDSAFE Council expressed renewed interest in a broader MIS. KIDSAFE received some additional funding from the SK/SS's national TA coordinator to develop an integrated MIS for the PSP agencies.

## **Accomplishments**

**Project Accomplishments.** The KIDSAFE collaborative, anchored by the PSP agencies, brought together a broad spectrum of agencies and organizations that come into contact with maltreated children. The KIDSAFE Council, the formal governing body that guided the project, proved to be a neutral, approachable, and welcoming entity that played a mediating role in addressing child protection issues and served as a forum for the agencies to get to know each other and work together. The Council brought organizations to the table and helped build a sense of shared responsibility for issues

related to child abuse and neglect. Locally, KIDSAFE is credited with providing a forum for dialogue among the PSP agencies and serving as a catalyst for changes in the system.

KIDSAFE's focus on system reform activities resulted in a number of positive and permanent changes in the child protection system. Starting during KIDSAFE's planning phase, a number of agencies in the formal child protection system undertook reorganizations or made structural changes to improve their handling of child abuse and neglect cases. KIDSAFE also worked on policy and procedural weaknesses identified by partners, resulting in the development of formal protocols and guidelines as well as more informal procedures for multiagency responses to specific types of cases. KIDSAFE also played an important role in developing and then supporting the countywide Investigative Collaborative. The MDT provided a forum for discussing and planning responses to individual cases and allowed team members to flag policy or procedural problems. The KIDSAFE collaborative improved informal working relationships across agencies, encouraging staff involved with child abuse and neglect to share information with their counterparts and discuss problems or plans as needed.

Throughout implementation, KIDSAFE's professional training remained a strong piece of the project's system reform agenda. KIDSAFE greatly expanded the training opportunities for professionals in the formal child protection system, including frontline workers and managers. Overall, the professional development activities reached a broad spectrum of public sector agencies and community groups and service providers. To promote sustainability, KIDSAFE was successful in getting other agencies or groups to take ownership of the different training activities.

Some of KIDSAFE's greatest successes came with the project's unique efforts to connect with the community through services, prevention programs, and public awareness activities. The NSI added services, fostered collaboration and networking between service agencies, helped service agencies understand the roles and responsibilities of the PSP agencies, and involved community and agency staff in funding decisions. For the grantees, the project also provided training and TA to improve staff skills in grant writing, recordkeeping, outcome measurement, and evaluation. As for KIDSAFE's Prevention and Grassroots Capacity Grants, and the accompanying Primer's Training sessions, these efforts resonated with the community. The strategy of providing small grants to organizations in the target area proved to be empowering and confidence-building for the participants.

Throughout, the project's local evaluation systematically generated data on all project activities. This helped KIDSAFE staff understand what things worked, guide program development, make funding decisions, and identify needs in the community. KIDSAFE also used information from the local evaluation to guide the collaborative in devising a response to the child fatalities and to inform administrators and policymakers about community issues related to child protection.

Overall, KIDSAFE benefited from having a lead agency that enjoyed recognition and credibility in the community as a facilitator of collaboration on children's issues and had the neutrality to navigate some of the political and territorial issues that arose. With support from the lead agency, KIDSAFE built a strong collaborative that acknowledged the significant problems in the child abuse and neglect system. Perhaps more importantly, from the outset the KIDSAFE collaborators agreed that the solutions to child abuse and neglect problems would have to involve changes in structure, policy, and procedures and better deployment of existing resources. The PSP agencies sent representatives to all of the committee meetings and in some cases, supported staff that spent substantial amounts of time on KIDSAFE activities. Finally, the collaborative's commitment extended beyond the agencies within the formal child protection system to many individuals, agencies, and organizations within KIDSAFE's target area. The project's community initiatives produced a high level of participation and commitment to tackling child abuse and neglect issues.

**Local Perspectives on Accomplishments.** Westat's national evaluation plan included several sources of information that gave a local perspective on the project. Overall, these information sources revealed that the project is credited for providing a forum for dialogue among the PSP agencies. By bringing key stakeholders to the table, the project facilitated communication and networking and worked to establish trust among the different players. Local stakeholders also felt that KIDSAFE provided a responsible and respected voice for children, fostered collaboration within the community, and created an environment for efforts to ripen and grow. Local stakeholders also noted specific results stemming from the collaborative process that KIDSAFE facilitated. On a formal level, KIDSAFE helped develop new policies, procedures, and guidelines for how the partner agencies handle specific types of cases. More informally, the KIDSAFE collaboration improved working relationships so that agency personnel had contacts with their counterparts in other agencies.

The project's stakeholders also highlighted KIDSAFE's accomplishments in the community through services, prevention programs, and public awareness activities. Local stakeholders recognized that KIDSAFE had a notable affect on expanding prevention programs, educating community residents about child abuse and neglect, and involving grassroots organizations in supporting children and families. Moreover, some stakeholders viewed expanding prevention programs and involving grassroots agencies and community-based organizations as KIDSAFE's most important accomplishments.

**Factors that affected project success.** Several factors appear to have contributed to the success of KIDSAFE efforts:

- **Selection of the lead agency.** HAUW enjoyed recognition and credibility in the community as a facilitator of collaborative efforts on children's issues. HAUW's track record in child welfare and its ability to bring resources to the table made it easier for KIDSAFE to garner respect and commitment from the collaboration partners. HAUW's leadership helped keep child protection issues in the forefront as a community problem that needed attention. Further, HAUW's neutrality allowed it to navigate territorial issues and defuse some of the political issues that arose.
- **Commitment from the four PSP agencies.** From the early stages, these agencies acknowledged that problems in the child abuse and neglect system were significant and worthy of investment. The PSP agencies sent representatives to all of the committee meetings and in some cases, supported staff that spent substantial amounts of time on KIDSAFE activities.
- **Systemic thinking of the collaborative.** From the outset, KIDSAFE collaborators seemed to agree that the solutions to child abuse and neglect problems would have to involve changes in structure, policy, and procedures and better deployment of existing resources. The emphasis on system reform among public sector agencies is noteworthy.
- **Response of the community to neighborhood initiatives.** Individuals, agencies, and organizations within KIDSAFE's target area responded enthusiastically to the project's community initiatives. The level of participation in the community grant opportunities demonstrated a willingness to tackle child abuse and neglect issues with limited resources.

KIDSAFE also faced some challenges while implementing the project. Initially, the obstacles related to KIDSAFE's status as the Weed & Seed-funded site. KIDSAFE's original proposal made only passing reference to Weed & Seed and did not

suggest that it would combine KIDSAFE with the Weed & Seed activities in Kansas City. Yet, its selection as the Weed & Seed-funded site meant that EOWS had certain expectations about blending the two projects. For the first two grant periods, project staff struggled to integrate Kansas City's vision for KIDSAFE with the requirements of EOWS. While EOWS worked with HAUW, the KCPD, and the U.S. Attorney's Office to satisfy the Weed & Seed requirements, KIDSAFE conceded that it had great difficulty understanding these requirements and, in hindsight, could have used more technical assistance earlier in the process. In the end, KIDSAFE worked to formalize the child protection strategy within Weed & Seed and coordinate the efforts of the two initiatives.

KIDSAFE's system reform agenda faced obstacles along several fronts. The administrators of the PSP agencies turned over frequently during KIDSAFE's implementation. Each change in leadership meant starting over to build support and commitment to the project. While such turnover is standard for some of the agencies, it slowed progress on KIDSAFE's planning and implementation. At one point, a change in DFS leadership at the county level meant that some old political and turf issues resurfaced and stalled progress on some fronts.

More broadly, it was difficult to forge collaboration among the PSP agencies. Overall, the collaborative members had trouble giving up historical stances and getting past a sense of territory. Agencies were protective of information and fearful of working together. A conflict with the Local Investment Commission over control of the community response to child fatalities stalled progress on the project's system reform efforts. Despite KIDSAFE's efforts, conflicts also arose when the collaborative partners failed to understand the roles and responsibilities of other agencies. While some viewed the conflicts as painful, others saw them as a natural byproduct of collaboration. Regardless, KIDSAFE learned how to deal with change and carefully navigate both personalities and politics during the course of implementing the project.