



Champions for Inclusive Communities Star Community

Hillsborough County, FL

The community of Hillsborough County has two large collaborative programs that spur their systems-building efforts forward: the Early Childhood Council of Hillsborough County (ECC) and Children’s Future Hillsborough (CFH). These programs are each unique and contribute in a significant way to the community.

The Early Childhood Council (ECC) is over 25 years old. Its purpose is to increase community awareness and access to services for all young children, including those with special health care needs. ECC has three primary areas of focus: advocacy, education, and innovation. It sponsors a number of local programs such as community events, training, and networking opportunities for over 40 member agencies. Without this organization, many CSHCN in Hillsborough County would be left without information and support.

Children’s Future of Hillsborough (CFH) began five years ago as a merger of two collaborations through the support of the Children’s Board of Hillsborough County, a special taxing district that funds local services for children. As a result, a much larger system of care was created for young, at-risk children with or without special needs. Their mission is to meet the needs of children and families through a network of care founded on family and community partnerships. Today, the CFH network consists of 20 partner organizations. CFH provides early intervention and prevention services to children and their families from birth through 5th grade, with a focus on healthy births, school readiness, and early school success.

Developmental Screening: A Community Banding Together

Question: What kind of a program can attract 60 professionals each month who are willing to provide in-kind time and services?

Answer: The ECC/FDLRS Early Childhood Developmental Screening Program. (FDLRS is the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System, School District of Hillsborough County.)

One of the most successful practices in the Hillsborough community is their unique interagency developmental screening clinics. An astounding number of professionals - over 200 each year - from a wide variety of community-based programs screen children from birth to age 5 for problems in vision, hearing,

motor skills, speech, language, cognition, behavior, and growth. When needed, these children are referred for evaluation or other community services, such as family support, childcare, parenting classes, behavioral support, and health insurance, through the Florida SCHIP program (called KidCare). Faith-based entities also partner with the effort by offering their facilities as a place to conduct the screenings. This is beneficial in many ways, including helping to increase the trust level within the community. As many as 1,000 young children per year benefit from this noteworthy effort. And they reap these benefits for free.

Encouraging a Medical Home

Newborn screening and early linkages to medical homes are critical components in Hillsborough County’s system of care for CSHCN. CFH, in partnership with the local Healthy Start Coalition, provides family support and care coordination to all families whose babies are in area hospital Neonatal Intensive Care Units.

What makes a Star Community?

ChampionsInC has created the Star Communities program to recognize exceptional communities.

Star Communities will show excellence in 6 Performance Measures:

- Families are partners
- A "Medical Home" provides coordinated care
- Children receive early and continuous screening
- Families have adequate funding/insurance to pay for services
- Services are organized so families can use them easily and are satisfied
- Youth receive necessary services to make the

read about other Star Communities at
www.ChampionsInC.org

In addition, ECC has a long history of engaging pediatricians in the community. The ECC listens to medical home providers and try to meet their needs by providing training and education. Unfortunately, the biggest barriers encountered with physicians are time and knowledge of community resources. Pediatricians are busy and don't always have the extra time in their schedule to keep updated about available resources or to communicate with families to ensure they are connected to needed services. To help close that gap, ECC communicates regularly with medical home providers by sending screening results for patients who attended the free clinics described above, along with information about key community programs.

Bridging the Barriers

Hillsborough County has a colorful mix of cultures in its area. As a result, cultural competence is a "guiding principle" for CFH. The community reaches families from different cultures through the use of cultural brokers and "promotoras," or trusted lay members of the community who are usually Hispanic. Along with this approach, Hillsborough County is continually finding other ways to connect with those families from different cultures.

Another barrier for families in many communities is a lack of accurate, up-to-date resource information. In Hillsborough County, the ECC works with 2-1-1 Tampa Bay to provide easily accessible information about a wide range of health and social service programs. 2-1-1 is a number anyone in Tampa Bay can call to find needed services. Families of young children with more complex needs can contact ECC for more intensive help in navigating systems and linking to appropriate services.

The ECC also follows up with families about their experiences in accessing services. This provides a gauge of how the community as a whole is doing. Not surprisingly, family needs have changed as our country deals with economic issues, resulting in an increase in basic needs such as finding a job or keeping a home. ECC frequently refers families to needed financial supports.

Families Helping Families

Service systems for CSHCN can be somewhat daunting for parents and families experiencing them for the first time. That's

why CFH supports a Family Leadership Council and provides leadership training on how to mentor families. In addition, there are opportunities within some CFH programs for parents who are receiving services to be hired as "Family Support Coordinators." These family members receive orientation and a great deal of training before they begin working with other families. Family Support Coordinators help guide families through complex service systems, including physical health, mental health, and education. The school district also provides systems navigators called Parent Liaisons who are, themselves, parents of children receiving special education services.

Giving Families a "Boost"

Hillsborough County families face the same problem as other families face elsewhere: financing their health care needs. CFH gives these families a boost by helping them to access supportive funding through the Children's Board of Hillsborough County's Administrative Services Organization (ASO). ASO is a funding pool available to families in need. These funds are only available on a short-term or one-time basis and are considered the last resort. It can, however, be a lifesaver for many of those in need until they can work out a better solution.

Secrets to Success

Despite many of the typical barriers encountered by organizations trying to provide services to CSHCN, Hillsborough County is making big strides. They have suggested some "secrets to success" that make for great guidelines for every organization to live by:

- Involve families in the decision-making process at every step along the way through Family Support Plans.
- Engage diverse partners throughout the community.
- Success largely depends on mutual respect and support between parties - that is, between families and providers as well as between agencies.
- Remember that a lot can be accomplished with a little money!

Community Contacts:

Donna Prisley
CFH Program Manager
dprisley@achievemangement.com
813-239-1179, ext 206

Mike Cornelius
CFH Family and Community Liaison
mcorneilius@achievemangement.com

Rich Greco
CFO/COO Achieve Management
rgreco@achievemangement.com