

2008 Innovations Awards Program APPLICATION

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ID # (assigned by CSG): 08-M-23MN

Please provide the following information, adding space as necessary:

State: Minnesota

Assign Program Category (applicant): Health & Human Services: Children & Families

- 1. Program Name:** Parent Support Outreach Program (PSOP)
- 2. Administering Agency:** Minnesota Department of Human Services
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- 9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.**

The Parent Support Outreach Program is a child abuse and neglect prevention program being piloted in 38 of 87 Minnesota counties. Families are identified through community- or self-referral and receive family support services that address child maltreatment risk factors and promote child safety and family well-being.

- 10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 1, 2008 to be considered.**

The Parent Support Outreach Program began April 1, 2005, and will continue as a pilot program through December 31, 2008.

- 11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?**

In 2005, more than 3.3 million allegations of child maltreatment were made nationally involving 6 million children. The significant resources needed to respond to these reports often preclude the

possibility of acting early to prevent child maltreatment. In 2005, Minnesota counties, as part of a state-supervised, county-administered social service system, responded to approximately 19,000 reports of child maltreatment but screened out an additional 36,000 reports. Many of the screened-out families share the same child maltreatment risk factors as the families that enter the child protection system. For many of these families, it is only a matter of time or circumstance before children are harmed.

The Parent Support Outreach Program was developed to respond early to these high-risk situations and prevent associated negative outcomes for children and families. Lessons learned from Family Assessment Response (previously known as Alternative Response), a rigorously evaluated and nationally regarded Minnesota program serving families in the child protection system, have been applied to the Parent Support Outreach Program. Service principles include early engagement, identification and application of family strengths, families treated as partners, and access to a broad range of services and resources including those that responded to emergency basic needs (i.e. food, clothing and shelter).

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services issued a Request for Proposals for interested county child welfare programs to develop early intervention services for families at risk of child maltreatment, focusing on the large volume of screened-out reports. Thirty-eight counties were selected to receive implementation grants and began serving families in the spring and summer of 2005. A total of 5,000 families will be served over the life of the pilot (3,146 have been served to date). Grant awards to the 38 pilot counties totaled \$5 million with an estimated average cost of service per family at \$1,000. County and community agency social workers were trained in the service protocol and strength-based models of intervention. Advanced training is provided periodically throughout the life of the pilot project.

Families are identified by the local child welfare agency and offered participation in the program. Over 45 percent of the families contacted choose to participate. Families work with the local agency or contracted community social service provider to identify and address needs or risk factors threatening child safety. Local child welfare agencies use grant funds to provide case management services, counseling and other professional services, parenting education, child care and emergency basic needs. Services are focused on mutually identified needs and are usually short term in duration. Most families are connected with needed services and complete service plans within six months.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

The Parent Support Outreach Program breaks from the long established pattern in Minnesota of investing all available funding in the most serious child maltreatment situations. It moves the availability of services earlier in the continuum of risk to prevent the trauma of child abuse and neglect, and decreases the significant financial costs associated with post-maltreatment services.

The Parent Support Outreach Program is evidence-based and builds on the rigorous evaluation of the Family Assessment Response. According to the Institute of Applied Research's Web site, www.iarstl.org, research found that engaging families early and respectfully as partners and connecting them with a wide range of services and resources significantly reduced the likelihood of subsequent child maltreatment and costs less over time.

Social workers implementing the Parent Support Outreach Program were trained specifically in the service approaches that have been proven effective in engaging families and improving the safety of children and well-being of families.

The Parent Support Outreach Program is being evaluated by the Institute of Applied Research under a professional contract with the Minnesota Department of Human Services. Initial findings are positive and consistent with the Family Assessment Response evaluation while adding to the fund of evidence-based knowledge.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The total budget for the 45-month Parent Support Outreach pilot is \$5.5 million. Of this amount, \$5 million is assigned to counties as grant awards to pay for the costs of client services. Another \$400,000 covers the cost of the evaluation. Social worker training is budgeted at \$100,000.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

The annual operational costs, including evaluation and training, are \$1,466,666. Excluding evaluation and training costs, which will not continue after the pilot period, the annual program costs are \$1,333,333.

16. How is the program funded?

Funding for the Parent Support Outreach Program includes a \$3 million grant from the McKnight Foundation. The remaining funding is drawn from federal family support and preservation funds. Administrative costs at the state and county level are in-kind contributions.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

The Parent Support Outreach Project is voluntary on the part of the state, participating counties and families served. No special legislation or rule changes were required.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Modifications were made in the state's electronic case management system (Social Services Information System) to document enrollment, case planning, services and outcomes for families. As well as documenting the work with families, the case management data system also provides a data base for research and evaluation.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Child Welfare early intervention programs were more common before the dramatic growth of the child protection system over the past 40 years. Many states and counties have systems for information and referral but few provide the financial and service system infrastructure to serve families outside the formal child protection system. Fewer still have attached training and

evaluation components to this effort. Minnesota may stand alone in re-introducing formal early intervention services by a trained staff and followed by an independent evaluation. This program was introduced by multiple staff under the direction of the director (Erin Sullivan-Sutton) of the Child Safety and Permanency Division at the Minnesota Department of Human Services.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Minnesota appears to be unique in building and funding a service infrastructure that targets families referred to child protection but screened out for a formal response. As noted previously, many states have generalized child maltreatment prevention programs or information and referral systems to connect at-risk families with services.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

The Parent Support Outreach Program is being piloted in 38 of Minnesota's 87 counties. Consideration of continuation and/or full state-wide implementation is dependent on the findings of the evaluation, including the cost-benefit analysis, due April 1, 2009.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

To date several findings are of major significance including:

- PSOP families have as great an exposure to child abuse and neglect risk factors as many of the families accepted for a formal child protection assessment. Of PSOP families, 44.9 percent have had a past report of child maltreatment. Families are very poor with a median income from all sources of less than \$13,000 per year. Of the households, 55.6 percent consist of a single parent and their children. Households average 2.3 children with a mean age of 5.7 years. Compared with families served through the child protection Family Assessment Response, PSOP households are younger, poorer, and less educated.
- Families accepting PSOP services have a more significant service history (i.e. past child or adult protection services, child welfare services, child care assistance, disability services, chemical dependency services, and out-of-home placement) identified than families declining services.
- Most (92 percent) families served through PSOP have reported that the services they receive are what they need and 77 percent indicated these services are enough to really help them.
- The greater the intensity of poverty and chemical dependency related services, the more significant the reduction is on the subsequent rate of accepted child maltreatment reports. Targeting these risk factors can prevent child maltreatment.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

Although the majority of families served are identified through screened-out child maltreatment reports, the eligibility requirements were changed to also allow families to self-refer or for referrals to come from the community. The service acceptance rate has grown from the mid-30 percent level to the mid-40 percent level. This represents increased skill in engaging families. The current rate of 45 percent service acceptance is considered very high for a voluntary early intervention program.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Maintaining the fidelity of the service approach would be critical to replicating the experience of the Minnesota pilot. Investments need to be made in training social workers, employing a strength-based service model, investing in a broad range of services and resources, and tracking outcomes for families. States implementing similar programs are advised to remain open to program adjustments as actual experience with families further informs policy and practice.