

## Strategic Planning Sessions with Providers funded by Children's Services Council of Martin County

The information that follows summarizes the highlights of the qualitative information garnered from six field-testing sessions that were held during August and September 2013 with CSCMC's funded providers. Provider agencies were asked to designate staff with the experience and knowledge of specific service delivery systems to attend the sessions regarding the emerging issues. The meetings, in general, lasted three hours each and focused on "What is working?" and "What needs work?" for each of the emerging issues. This information, along with the research – the quantitative, and qualitative data from *The Childhood Connection* – was utilized in developing the goals and strategies listed under each Priority Area.

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Please note that the following Appendix contains abbreviated references to organization names and program names as follows:

**Big Brothers Big Sisters** = Big Brothers, Big Sisters of Palm Beach and Martin Counties, Inc.

**Boys and Girls Club** = Boys & Girls Club of Martin County, Inc.

**CASTLE** = Exchange Club Center for the Prevention of Child Abuse of the Treasure Coast, Inc.

**City of Stuart** = City of Stuart Community Services Department (East Stuart Youth Initiative programs)

- ALTOSS (Tykes & Teens' Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension Program (ALTOSS) through the City of Stuart's East Stuart Youth Initiative)

**CDC** = Centers for Disease Control

**Dunbar Center** = Dunbar Center, Inc.

**Early Learning Coalition or ELC** = Early Learning Coalition of Indian River, Martin and Okeechobee Counties, Inc.

**Easter Seals** = Easter Seals, Florida, Inc.

- Early Steps = Treasure Coast Early Steps Program (TCES)

**FCHC** = Florida Community Health Centers

**Health Department** – Martin County Health Department

**Healthy Start Coalition** = Martin County Healthy Start Coalition, Inc.

- Prenatal Care = Prenatal Care Program for the Uninsured

**Helping People Succeed or HPS** = HPS, Helping People Succeed, Inc.

- BRAIN = Building Readiness Among Infants Now program
- Healthy Families = Healthy Families Martin (Match)

**MHS** = Martin Health Systems

**Parks & Recreation** = Martin County Board of County Commissioners-Parks & Recreation Division

- S.P.L.A.S.H. program = Swimming Provides Learners with Aquatics Safety and Health

**Tykes & Teens** = Tykes & Teens, Inc.

- ALTOSS (Tykes & Teens' Alternative to Out-of-School Suspension Program (ALTOSS) through the City of Stuart's East Stuart Youth Initiative)
- YES = Youth Enrichment Services (formerly known as Adolescent Substance Abuse Program - ASAP)

**Whole Child Connection or WCC** = The Whole Child Connection, Inc.

**WIC** = Women, Infants, and Children

**YMCA** = Young Men's Christian Association of the Treasure Coast, Florida, Inc.

- YReads = YREADS! Wrap Around After School Program
- S.P.L.A.S.H. program = Swimming Provides Learners with Aquatics Safety and Health

## Planning Session: Healthy Children - Key Findings

In August and September 2013, CSCMC-funded Provider agencies were convened to conduct field testing of the priorities and emerging issues, specifically to identify what members of the agencies providing the services identified as “What is Working?” and “What Needs Work?” Appendix A provides the Key Findings for Priority Area One: *Healthy Children*.

### Healthy Children

1. Children are born healthy and thrive during the first year of life.
2. Children have access to insurance and medical care.
3. Children maintain a healthy weight and practice healthy behaviors.
4. Children practice oral health care and have access to dental care.
5. Children are free from alcohol and substance use.

### Key Findings

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#### 1. *Children are born healthy and thrive during the first year of life.*

##### **Positive Outcomes**

We are one of ten counties in Florida with the best indicators around birth outcomes. We have a strong continuum of care for children, ages 0-5. There are consistent referrals for all ages of children. Martin County can provide immediate support, links to parent support, and links to physicians.

##### **Disparities Still Exist**

The largest number of pregnancies is to un-wed women, ages 19–25. Large disparities in birth and health outcomes exist across race/ethnicities. Poor birth outcomes are generally 2-3 times higher for the black population. Even with improvements in overall outcomes and black birth outcomes, the disparities continue to exist.

##### **Early and Regular Prenatal Care**

Eighty percent of pregnant women who are served by private OB/GYN providers enter into prenatal care during the first trimester as compared to only sixty-five percent of pregnant women served by the Martin County Health Department/Florida Community Health Centers (FCHC). The most frequent reasons given for not entering early care are “I didn't know I was pregnant” and “I moved from out of the area.” Some of the uninsured misunderstand the coverage and wait until the last 45 days to enter prenatal care. Healthy Families enrolls women prenatally and assures they are getting early and regular care.

##### **Prenatal Care Program for the Uninsured**

What works is the safety net with the FCHC and the Prenatal Care for the Uninsured program. The Prenatal Outreach Center has been a major source of education since 2007. It is primarily known by the community via word-of-mouth and is recognized for providing a neutral location where people feel comfortable, and no one is turned away.

### **Perinatal Depression**

A Post Partum Depression Task Force has been in existence for the past two years and is in the early implementation phase. FCHC administers the Edinburgh Scale for perinatal depression to all women receiving prenatal care.

### **Breastfeeding**

There is consistent education regarding breastfeeding between MHS, HPS's BRAIN program, and WIC. Martin County has a higher percentage than the state of Florida of women still breastfeeding at six-months.

### **Teen Parents**

There was a concern that teen parents enrolled in the teen parent program in the school system are less likely to get prenatal education. Martin County had better outcomes when we had a teen parent center, and the education for the parent and the services for the child were integrated. There was better service utilization in the past, per the attendees.

### **Health Literacy and Utilization**

The Whole Child Connection (WCC) finds that many women do not have a history of health care utilization. WCC teaches them utilization and gets them enrolled and into a medical home. Navigators are being selected and in-depth training will be delivered soon.

### **Pre- and Interconception Care**

It was suggested that the Women's Wellness Profile in the WCC survey could be better utilized. It is critical that women be healthy at the time they conceive to increase the likelihood of positive birth and health outcomes. The Healthy Start Coalition offers health literacy training, as well as interconception care to women who have had poor birth outcomes and/or high risk factors during pregnancy.

## **2. *Children have access to health insurance and medical care.***

### **Navigation**

Health navigation for KidCare and Medicaid is a component of what WCC offers. There has been an increase in applications with an average of 120-130 applications per month for Medicaid and 15 for KidCare. If a family is referred, there is a quick intake by WCC to get them KidCare/Medicaid. They are working to increase awareness of insurance availability among parents, as well as providing assistance with renewal and paperwork.

Other agencies, such as Tykes & Teens, several elementary schools, and the Early Learning Coalition also provide information and referral for KidCare. The Florida Community Health Centers and the House of Hope can also assist with navigation to clients without health insurance. School Health assistants steer parents in the direction of the Whole Child Connection particularly if they see a child frequently.

### **Lack of Insurance Due to Reauthorization**

Many families do not have insurance for their children because they miss the reauthorization date or miss making a payment. This is a major issue that the state is trying to address by having uniform dates for reauthorization, rather than every six months for school-age children and twelve months for their younger

siblings. The state is also exploring more user-friendly means to reauthorize, as education efforts have had limited success with reauthorization.

Easter Seals' staff noted that they make ongoing efforts to make sure insurance is up to date for their clients.

### **Emergency Assistance**

Children's Emergency Resources offers vouchers for childhood medical emergencies or one-time use to help get them address a crisis. This is an important community resource.

### **Case Management**

Each agency has a form of case management, but that is not necessarily each agency's primary focus. Case management may be a true need in our community. House of Hope has identified that they have a primary focus on case management. However, there are eligibility criteria to be served by the House of Hope, such as an unexpected emergency.

Attendees thought that Martin County would benefit from additional agencies that can provide case management for families. If follow-through is needed, the Whole Child Connection system can assist by offering information on whether a referral to another agency was acted upon.

### **Lack of Awareness**

People need to be made aware of these services/issues in ways other than print media. Suggestions include places like soup kitchens, churches, the Dunbar Center, and other child care centers. Agencies are having a difficult time financially, which makes it difficult to commit to service via the Whole Child Connection Community Advisor Model. The WCC is trying to reach out to these communities, but the follow-through with agencies that would like to partner is not there.

### **Transportation**

Transportation is a major concern, particularly with getting parents to their appointments. They may not have their own transportation, or the taxi doesn't arrive on time, if at all. Medicaid reimburses the taxis, but it was questioned if perhaps the reimbursement rate is too low. There is also a systems issue in that parents may schedule the ride to an appointment but neglect to schedule the return trip with the taxi company.

## **3. *Children maintain a healthy weight and practice healthy behaviors.***

### **Martin Health Systems Program**

Martin Health Systems (MHS) has a weight loss program for children pre-disposed to diabetes. MHS receives referrals of children, ages 5-15, who are diagnosed with a health risk. Most are insured via Medicaid. They have had only 10 recipients to-date but are working to expand to 20 children this year. There is a family component addressing mental health this year via Tykes & Teens. Although the children did not lose significant weight, MHS reports that the participants are healthier than they were. MHS wants to partner, and they are participating on the Childhood Obesity Task Force.

### **Childhood Obesity Task Force**

Twenty-two people attended the first childhood obesity task force meeting in September. The task force reviewed what currently exists in Martin County. The offering of MHS is an example of one program that was reviewed.

There was significant discussion regarding the correlation between mental health and childhood obesity.

The Childhood Obesity Task Force will explore what the University of Miami is doing via the connection with the Fitness Director at MHS. The task force is trying to identify and then pilot an evidence-based program in Martin County, most likely in Indiantown.

### **Healthy Behaviors Components in Afterschool/Summer Programs**

Agency staff observed that children are open-minded about tasting new foods when they are physically active and have an appetite. It helps to teach them to make healthy life decisions.

There is success in promoting healthy behaviors with younger children in the afterschool programs. Extended Day offers the CATCH program. There are similar programs at the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club (Healthy Habits), and Parks & Recreation (Mr. Brian's Fitness Camp). The President's Physical Fitness Test is a form of physical activity focused on improving physical activity across all afterschool programs.

With younger children, there is about one hour of active, directed physical activity in these programs. However, as children get older there is a drop in involvement. Middle and high school students have dwindling interest in afterschool activities.

Providers suggested that a variety of activities like hip-hop dancing, soccer, etc. be offered simultaneously so that there are multiple choices to increase participation, especially of different age groups.

The concern regarding these programs is that there is not usually a family component. The long-term success of programs promoting healthy behaviors often hinges on parent buy-in and family involvement.

### **School Lunch Program**

The Martin County School District is working to offer more healthy choices for the meals they serve. There are considerable improvements to the foods offered, but providers noted that healthy choices are expensive. A provider noted that one of the high school students that their program serves, chooses chips and cookies because they are more affordable.

The school district offers an on-line application (app) for parents to see what is available for lunch and its nutritional content, so they can exercise some control over what their child can and cannot select via the app.

### **Consistent Community Messages of Health and What the Affordable Options are for Family Centered Activities**

People may not be able to afford the gym, but sidewalks and parks are options for getting healthy. Recreation needs to remain affordable, perhaps through offerings like *Fitness in the Park*. We need more activities for parents to do together with their children.

The emphasis on physical activity in the schools varies by school and falls off in middle and high school in terms of what the requirements and dosage are. In middle schools, students must sign up for physical education that they take for a maximum of nine weeks. In high school, physical education is required only one out of four years. Providers believe that students can fulfill requirements online.

Providers feel that a community approach is needed to solve the issue of promoting and practicing healthy behaviors as a family.

### ***Economic and Socio-demographic Issues***

The price of healthy food is an economic issue – families who can't afford it buy the foods that tend to be higher in sugars, additives, and calories.

Schools with the highest obesity rate are those with families that have the lower economic status. The mother's education level correlates with a number of issues with childhood outcomes.

## ***4. Children practice oral health care and have access to dental care.***

### ***Number of Providers***

Access is limited since there are a limited number of providers in the community that accept Medicaid and/or work with children. Although Florida KidCare/Medicaid covers oral health care services, the low rate of reimbursement for Medicaid clients is an issue in recruiting and keeping dentists signed on. The FCHC in Indiantown will see children, although they only have one or two dentists. There are a few dentists in town who will also accept KidCare/Medicaid. There are questions about whether the dental services that had been based at the Martin County Health Department will continue, dependant on whether the FCHC will be able to take on that program. It is our understanding that the FCHC is seeking funding to operate that program.

All of the children attending the Dunbar Center's Early Head Start program are required to see a dentist. A Stuart dentist sees all of their children. He offers four different plans and is accepting every form of Medicaid insurance. Dunbar Center has had no complaints about his services.

The Whole Child Connection reported that two offices offer pro bono services as well - one in Palm City and one in Salerno. However, those are mostly for extractions and emergencies, not preventative care.

### ***Fluoridation***

The City of Stuart currently adds fluoride to the water. The County has not added fluoride to the water, although the measure passed several years ago and subsequently was voted down. The CDC and Department of Health recommend fluoridation as an effective way to reduce the incidence of cavities in children.

### ***Lack of Awareness of Importance of Oral Hygiene***

At the Dunbar Center, the children brush their teeth every day. The teacher looks at their teeth so they can make any needed referrals.

However, there have been children served by the Health Department's dental program for the extraction of rotting teeth. Healthy eating, oral hygiene, and bottle mouth cavities may all be part of the problem.

Poor oral health is connected to many chronic diseases although people don't realize it.

Pediatricians need to help educate parents, especially during the first year when parents have monthly visits. We need more education about the importance of on-going oral health care for all people.

Oral health care is addressed during the first visit of the BRAIN program when parents are instructed how to care for their infants gums and teeth as they erupt. At one point, a small washcloth was provided for parents to use to clean the newborn's gums.

### ***Economic and Insurance Barriers***

Providers feel that because of the economy, people aren't taking care of their teeth the way they should. The Whole Child Connection staff noted that families usually must obtain a dental plan separate from their medical insurance plan. Dental care is not included in the mandatory affordable care act. Dental care is included in the KidCare insurance packages for children, however.

### ***Funding Requirement for Early Learning Coalition Subsidized Centers***

The Early Learning Coalition (ELC) is no longer permitted by the state to make requirements around personal care; however, ELC's staff noted that most centers still make brushing after lunch part of the center's culture.

## ***5. Children are free from alcohol and substance use.***

### ***Increase Awareness of the Problem***

Providers shared that there is easy access to alcohol and marijuana for resident youth. Youth are getting alcohol from older friends, siblings, and from the liquor cabinet at home. It is not as easy to get alcohol or tobacco at stores; however, since the Sheriff's Department emphasized to convenience store owners that they should not sell these substances to youth.

The general population has little idea of what is being offered in the schools regarding alcohol and substance use education. The school nurses are very concerned for the students, but they are not sure that the school administration is embracing this issue. The providers indicated that they believe there is an increase in use of heroin at schools.

### ***Prevention Programs***

Tykes & Teens' Prevention Services/Project Northland is an effective program for substance use prevention for middle school students. However, there is a need to expand this program to Indiantown Middle School. There is an increase in Hispanic youth drinking based on the most recent data. South Fork High School suspension rates are related to alcohol and drug use. Martin County needs a prevention program for the high schools.

Other prevention programs effective at reducing high-risk behaviors include SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions), SWAT Clubs, Tobacco-Free Partnership, Project Graduation and the NOPE Task Force.



Tykes & Teens' Youth Enrichment Services (YES) program (formerly the Alcohol Substance Abuse Program-ASAP) is a prevention program offered at all Boys and Girls Clubs. It serves late elementary and early middle school students. The staff is trained to utilize the Phoenix Curriculum.

Martin Health Systems has a prevention division. It was recommended that they participate in the Shared Services Network prevention efforts.

### ***Delivering Prevention Messages***

How do you get the important messaging into existing programs? The YMCA has been successful getting teens at the Friday night skate at SportsWorld. However, drug-free messages or messages that there is help available are not being conveyed.

Parks & Recreation is willing to partner to deliver messages, noting that they draw substantial numbers of teens for their events. Tykes & Teens has the Parent E-Mail Distribution List that can reach over 1,000 people. Dunbar also can distribute flyers.

The current school policy that does not allow sending information home through the kids has been problematic. The information can be left at the school lobby or sent home with a principal's permission, but there are many schools and it is time consuming to reach each one individually. Businesses can help to get the prevention messages out.

### ***Include the Faith-Based Community***

The role of the faith-based community is very important in reaching teens, especially through the youth groups and the youth pastors. The churches have a strong place in the community. The service providers need to figure how to build the relationships with the churches. The collaboration between the local Synagogue and the Baptist church has been an excellent example of what can be done.

### ***Changing Social Norms***

Positive social marketing is needed to change the social norm about drinking such as the message "Parents who host lose the most" or the poster displaying the information about how many teens do not choose to drink. We are dispelling the myth by telling them how many kids are choosing not to use alcohol (Character Counts posters).

### ***Substance Abuse Treatment***

Schools do not seem to want to get involved with this issue. Currently, service providers are experiencing resistance to the efforts to provide services for middle and high school students.

Project L.I.F.T. provides treatment on-site to get and keep teens sober. This allows them to develop emotionally and socially since kids stop growing in that domain once they start using alcohol and drugs. The teens learn that there is something larger in life than themselves, and at the same time teens experience that there is value to their life.



## Planning Session: Strong Families - Key Findings

In August and September 2013, CSCMC-funded Provider agencies were convened to conduct field testing of the priorities and emerging issues, specifically to identify what members of the agencies providing the services identified as “What is Working?” and “What Needs Work?” Appendix B provides the Key Findings for Priority Area Two: *Strong Families*.

### Strong Families

1. Children are free from abuse and neglect.
2. Parents are engaged with their children.
3. Families and parents have constructive options to address stress.
4. Parents have access to education and training of positive parenting skills.

### Key Findings

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#### 1. *Children are free from abuse and neglect.*

#### **Rich Resources**

Martin County is rich in resources. Those include many non-profit organizations, churches, grassroots organizations, foundations, and funders. Martin County is known for the excellent collaboration between these organizations. The religious community, youth groups, and member families are also strengths in this county.

Healthy Families focuses on this goal. Healthy Families, a voluntary, evidence-based program, is considered a prevention arm of the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and has an excellent track record with a three- year post-graduation success, whereby 95% of children are free from abuse and neglect.

Having organizations like HPS and CASTLE in place helps to address any gaps or shortcomings of our child welfare system, particularly with at-risk families.

#### **Lack of Resources for substance abuse/mental health services**

We lack resources for substance abuse treatment and mental health services for adults.

Neglect is the most frequent issue, followed by physical abuse and then sexual abuse. Neglect occurs via an omission, so Martin County’s resources that help to meet basic needs is crucial. However, providers report that Martin County has issues with parents providing inadequate supervision for their children, often connected to a parent’s substance abuse.

#### **Faith Community**

We know the churches and youth groups are helping, but the non-profit agencies have difficulty engaging them. Providers noted that autism, mental illness, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and post-traumatic stress disorder could be hot topics to bring agencies and the faith community together.

### **Parent Education**

Parents can't give what they don't have was a prevailing thought. If the parents grew up with abuse, it is difficult for the parent to provide a different environment for their child unless someone teaches them. It takes time to learn new patterns of behavior. Unplanned children are also a factor if the child is not wanted.

### **Incarcerated Parents and their Children**

One group at risk is the children with incarcerated parents. CASTLE had programs in place to work with families in jail and with unification, as well as the Diversion Program. The provider reported that they had great success with these programs, but funding was lost.

### **Domestic Violence and Bullying**

Domestic violence and bullying are not discussed as much as other types of abuse. Both have significant impact on a family. Domestic violence often occurs with blended families when a boyfriend or new husband does not like the child from the previous family.

### **Task Forces**

United Way of Martin County recently started a Strengthening Families Task Force. The chair is an attorney. He may be able to involve more of the legal, judicial community.

Martin County had an effective Teen Pregnancy Task Force and a Domestic Violence Task Force in the past. We have lost some of these groups over the past few years. Agencies have been focused on their survival instead.

### **Life Skills Education for Children**

Martin County youth, particularly those in middle school, need life skills related to problem solving, coping, and communication. All those skills strengthen family connections.

## **2. *Parents are engaged with their children.***

### **BRAIN Program**

HPS's BRAIN program is a home visiting program in Martin County that reaches almost all new parents following the birth of their child. New parents are very vulnerable and open to suggestions. It is an incredible time to affect change. The high uptake on the Ages and Stages Questionnaire does illustrate engagement of parents early in their child's life.

### **Father & Child Resource Center**

*Take Your Dad to School Week* has worked very well. More than 2,000 fathers attended Martin County schools during the last event. That event has spawned the Dad's Clubs in seven schools.

Childbirth classes are working. The Father & Child Resource Center educates many fathers together with the mothers. Only seven counties in Florida have a father component in place in the childbirth education series. Provider agencies frequently refer parents to the Father & Child Resource Center.

### **Divorce and Blended Families**

Engagement between a parent and child is often lost due to divorce, particularly when one of the parents moves away or finds another partner and begins another family.

CASTLE's High Hopes for Kids Program for children of divorcing or separated parents is no longer funded in Martin County. The schools are requesting these services again for their children. CSCMC is working with CASTLE as they explore Partnership Funding opportunities.

### **Developmental Assets**

We need to build protective factors so children are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. Developmental assets could assist with this.

CASTLE exposes every client to the developmental assets and reports that the Shared Services Network training is excellent. CASTLE is going to work with developmental assets, focusing on the areas that score low.

Providers suggested that the faith community could help us do a better job of teaching and promoting the developmental assets.

### **Parent Education**

Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) is a research-based program that could be very helpful in engaging parents. They provide important skills during the early years of a child's life.

HPS offers Children's Music and Movement to 300-400 parents per year.

CASTLE teaches Positive Parenting Skills to parents who are eligible. Group settings are utilized for attendees who are eligible, most of whom have had a child removed.

Many parents want to be engaged but don't know how, particularly if they were not parented well themselves. They have many barriers to overcome first. It is a lot of one-on-one education to make those changes. Healthy Families and Healthy Start offer home visiting throughout the first three years of life, with a range of professionals available. Those programs are able to make a positive impact with parents.

## **3. Families and parents have constructive options to address stress.**

### **Chamber and Business Involvement**

The Chamber of Commerce could be a vehicle that helps address the issue of stress. Although, the economic factors need to be addressed, much of chronic stress comes from working long hours and work-related stress. Businesses would benefit from education about stress in the workplace, the cost of stress, and ways that they can help to ameliorate stress.

### **Teen Dating Violence**

Teen dating violence contributes to high stress in families. Soroptimists and Tykes & Teens are working together on this issue. It is one of the top issues affecting teens according to the CDC. It may be the emotional violence that precedes domestic violence.

### **Stress of Becoming A New Parent**

CASTLE, HPS, and MHS work with the temporary stress of an infant. It is a prime time for child abuse, given the crying, fussy eating, and toilet training accidents. Those offerings are helping to moderate the levels of stress. For example, *The Happiest Baby on the Block* calming techniques work.

### **Unintentional Stress**

The services for families actually can cause a great deal of stress. For example, DCF requirements can increase stress greatly. The parent must take a class, put the child in childcare, take a drug test, get a job, etc. Families have difficulty coping.

### **Support Networks**

There are people without a network of support in Martin County given all the transition and mobility. Co-parenting with ex-spouses is a huge source of stress with the realization that if you could get along well enough to co-parent, you would not have divorced in the first place. Building a network of support is important – parents helping parents.

The Divorce Care Support Group offered by Covenant Fellowship exposes parents to others with similar issues around finances and co-parenting. Parents don't have to be a member of the church. Children may attend as well and have activities and sharing in another room.

We have a need for a single parents group such as Parents Without Partners. It needs to be a means of meeting people in the same situation who can provide a support group or playgroups rather than just a place to meet a potential spouse.

## **4. Parents have access to education and training of positive parenting skills.**

### **Parent Education**

The Martin County Library System, Tykes & Teens, Character Counts, and CSCMC partner on the parenting series which includes Mapping the Middle, Redirecting Children's Behavior, Ginny Luther's classes, and The Family Place. It was noted that last year, many participated in order to meet training requirements and that the sessions weren't necessarily well attended by parents. Redirecting Children's Behavior would benefit from more frequent offerings.

It was noted that Guardians for a New Future is conducting valuable seminars. However, the seminars seem to be more geared to service providers.

Many parents cannot read, so parent education on DVDs may be useful for some. The *I Am Your Child* series was suggested as a valuable source of information with eleven offerings in the series in a number of languages.

### **Reaching Parents/Advertising Services**

Advertising through the schools has become more difficult. Whereas in the past, the schools would send flyers home, the new policy is that it is up to each school at the principal's discretion. There are many schools, so reaching all of them takes a great deal of time.

Tykes & Teens maintains an email list of 1,000 parents. They send a weekly developmental asset newsletter out. That is one vehicle to reach many parents.

When children enter the Martin County School District there is a lot of parent interest, particularly during the transition years. There is an opportunity for providers to do some education if 15 minutes could be provided at the key orientations such as at the kindergarten, 6th and 9th grade orientations.

### **Family Day and Family Meals**

Tykes & Teens is implementing a Family Day Program that emphasizes eating a family meal together 5-7 times per week. Research shows that this can reduce substance abuse and help family members feel more connected.

“We are too busy teaching about ‘the test’ rather than teaching about life, which is the biggest test there is.” For example, preparing, eating, cleaning up, and working as a team are life skills that can be passed down to the next generation, and the kids are also learning about cooking and nutrition.

Project L.I.F.T.’s model feeds the kids as a means of attracting and keeping the teens, and as a means of creating a new family model. The teens don’t want to leave to go home. It was noted that at mealtimes, you get so much information from the kids. They are eating with “a second family.”

The Boys and Girls Club have this program in three of their five sites. The kids want to be somewhere. The Boys and Girls Club feed them dinner every night and take them home as late as 8:00 p.m. This program happens all year. The food is expensive, so they are looking into government funding for a dinner program.

HPS is sending conversation starters for family meals. They recommend playing games like *Candyland* and *Battleship* that encourage communication rather than electronic games.

## **Planning Session: Safe Communities – Key Findings**

In August and September 2013, CSCMC-funded Provider agencies were convened to conduct field testing of the priorities and emerging issues, specifically to identify what members of the agencies providing the services identified as, “What is Working?” and “What Needs Work?” Appendix C provides the Key Findings for Priority Area Three: *Safe Communities*.

### **Safe Communities**

1. Children are free from unintentional injuries.
2. Children are free from violence.
3. Children remain delinquent-free and do not enter the juvenile justice system.

## Key Findings

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### 1. *Children are free from unintentional injuries.*

#### **Injury Prevention**

Injuries at home and at play may be unintentional but are not accidents. Steps can be taken to reduce the incidences of drowning, falls, fires, and poisonings, thereby helping to ensure that all children live to their full potential.

Injuries pertaining to children in Martin County include:

- Auto accidents as the primary cause of injury/death
- Drowning and near-drowning
- Child maltreatment including neglect/abuse is increasing – 80% percent of child maltreatment is linked to parental substance abuse.
- Alcohol related injuries affect adolescents, sometimes involving cars
- Leaving children in hot cars
- Shaken baby syndrome
- Playground accidents
- The “choking game” - passing out to get high
- Safety in general – not wearing bicycle helmets, seat belts, etc.

#### **Suicide Prevention**

Seven suicides occurred over the past 10 years. At one time Martin County had the highest rate of child/teen suicide in the state. Suicide is a difficult subject to discuss and may not be considered an injury. The local newspaper chooses not to write about suicide because of the “contagion” effect and the negative impact on the family.

#### **Injury Prevention Not a Community Priority**

Injury prevention has not been a priority for our community because it's a small number. It is hard to capture the statistics – the numbers are probably higher than we know. When a youth dies, we may not know if it was an accidental or intentional death.

Providers noted that there always seems to be a community response after a tragedy – how do we get the momentum before the next tragedy occurs? After the Cove Road accident, there was a parent meeting. People showed up once and never came back. How can we take advantage of that momentum?

The moral obligation to help someone who is hurt or dying, needs to be taught. There are examples of kids leaving other kids to die, often from an overdose, who are afraid they will get in trouble or are in denial. The NOPE program addresses these concerns.

#### **Current Injury Prevention Activities**

Training in home safety and education is needed. The first visit of the BRAIN program offers a scan of the environment and suggestions for baby-proofing the home. We need additional education and opportunities to talk about safety as a child grows.

Police are frequently observed using radar to check the traffic flow and speed in the school zones which is positive. The school requires bike riders to wear helmets, but it is not enforced. We need to reinforce positive behavior, and reward kids for wearing bicycle helmets, wearing their seat belts, i.e. doing the right thing. Fire stations will correctly install your car seat. That is working, but there is a lack of awareness of this service.

S.P.L.A.S.H. swimming lessons are working. Many children who would not otherwise be able to afford lessons are learning the basics of water safety and swimming, particularly in Indiantown.

## **2. Children are free from violence.**

### **Youth Violence**

Youth violence is a serious problem that can have lasting harmful effects on victims and their family, friends, and communities. The way to prevent youth violence is by stopping it before it starts.

Youth violence includes various behaviors. Some violent acts – such as bullying, slapping, or hitting – can cause more emotional harm than physical harm. Others, such as robbery and assault (with or without weapons) can lead to serious injury or even death. The young person can be a victim, an offender, or a witness to the violence.

### **Increase Protective Factors**

Youth violence prevention efforts should aim to reduce factors that place youth at risk for perpetrating violence, and promote factors that protect youth at risk for violence.

Protective factors buffer young people from the risks of becoming violent. Some individual and family protective factors include:

- Consistent presence of parents
- Ability to discuss problems with parents
- Sharing activities with parents
- Involvement in social activities
- Regular school attendance
- Support of a religious or spiritual group
- Connection to adults outside the immediate family
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### **Youth Violence Prevention Programs and Activities**

Programs that foster social and emotional skills such as goal-setting, decision-making, perseverance, motivation, and self-confidence are most effective in reducing violence among youth.

Educational interventions that are designed to change young people's knowledge, attitudes, and behavior patterns that can lead to violence are effective.

Change individual behavior by teaching problem-solving, assertiveness, conflict resolution, positive communication skills, and empower youth to participate in leadership activities.



### **Teen Dating Violence**

Teen dating violence, although prevalent among young people according to the CDC, is not often discussed nor addressed. Tykes & Teens, in cooperation with the Soroptimists, are bringing attention to the issue via community education.

Teen dating violence includes both physical (e.g. hitting, pushing, kicking) and psychological abuse (e.g. criticizing, dominating, controlling) – either in person or electronically – as well as unwanted sexual activity.

Violence in an adolescent relationship sets the stage for problems in future relationships, including intimate partner violence and sexual violence perpetration and/or victimization throughout life. Early intervention is needed to stop violence in youth relationships before it begins and keep it from continuing into adult relationships.

### **3. Children remain delinquent-free and do not enter the juvenile justice system.**

#### **Adolescent Behavior**

Adolescents and children routinely “act out” due to issues at home, poor school performance, peer pressure, and mental and emotional problems.

Young people with the most severe, unmet needs in their lives are particularly in jeopardy of participating in high-risk behaviors, such as dropping out of school, participating in violent behavior, or using drugs and alcohol. They often live in very poor and high-risk neighborhoods with few opportunities to get the critical experiences needed for positive development.

#### **Delinquency Prevention Programs**

Programs that address delinquency prevention in Martin County include:

- City of Stuart's Police Intervention Program for first time offenders, as well as gang prevention awareness.
- Tykes & Teens' School Suspension Program (ALTOSS) through the City of Stuart's East Stuart Youth Initiative
- Big Brothers Big Sisters Mentoring Programs
- Afterschool recreation programs by the Parks & Recreation programs, Boys and Girls Clubs, YMCA, the City of Stuart, and the school district's extended day programs.
- Project L.I.F.T. addresses mental health and substance use issues in teen males, providing mentoring, relationships, anger management and conflict resolution skills, career skill development, and family meals.
- Programs that keep both parents engaged with their children, such as the Family Law Forum offered by the Father & Child Resource Center and the Paternity Acknowledgement efforts by Martin Health Systems and the Father & Child Resource Center.
- Anti-bullying programs in the schools.

#### **Civil Citation Programs**

Half of youth arrested for a delinquent act will not re-offend and should be diverted from the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) through innovative practices such as Civil Citation.

Martin County's Civil Citation program is for youth that commit first-time, non-violent misdemeanors. The youth's needs are assessed, and they are given appropriate sanctions and services, such as restitution, counseling, victim awareness and accountability (including letters of apology), community service, anger management classes, and counseling.

## Planning Session: Success in School and Life - Key Findings

In August and September 2013, CSCMC-funded Provider agencies were convened to conduct field testing of the priorities and emerging issues, specifically to identify what members of the agencies providing the services identified as, "What is Working?" and "What Needs Work?" Appendix D provides the Key Findings for Priority Area Four: *Success in School and Life*.

### Success in School and Life

1. Children are developing on track in five domains: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language development, and approaches to learning.
2. Children are ready for kindergarten.
3. Children are reading on grade-level by the end of third grade.
4. Children graduate within four years of entering ninth grade.
5. Children have access to high quality activities during out-of-school time.
6. Children develop the life skills essential for life success.

### Key Findings

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1. ***Children are developing on track in five domains: social/emotional, physical, cognitive, language development, and approaches to learning.***

### Developmental Supports to Families

We have a strong continuum of care for children, ages 0-5. There are consistent referrals for all ages of children. Martin County can provide immediate support, links to parent support, and links to physicians. Examples follow:

The Healthy Families program and the wide range of services provided promote healthy growth and development. This is an evidence-based program that is offered in the community with a focus on prenatal to age 5 and the prevention of abuse and neglect

Early Steps has a Family Resource Specialist that can engage families on a parent-to-parent level. They link families with support groups and organizations such as the March of Dimes. The services are family-centered.

HPS offers Infant massage as a concrete action that a parent can take to address colic and crying. Massage can enhance the attachment relationship between parent and infant.

HPS assists with social communication problems or lets parents know that the child does not have issues, thereby helping allay common fears. A Denver Early Stages Assessment is utilized. They also offer the Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) to the parents to do with their child.

HPS responds if there are developmental questions or concerns. They are capturing those numbers for CSCMC now. They started the on-line ASQ scoring system. There is high involvement with the ASQ the first year and then a drop-off in participation. It then spikes around year 2. They are able to catch speech delays, diagnosis related to autism, and hearing issues early on.

The Early Learning Coalition offers the ASQ in the child care centers.

### ***Parenting Classes***

It was suggested that offerings in the community include Redirecting Children's Behavior and possibly Ginny Luther's classes. The Martin County Library offers some parenting classes, such as Family Place, but it may not be enough; although, the libraries are great places to hold the classes.

### ***Health Care Providers Lack Training/Understanding on Developmental Issues***

Pediatricians are not comfortable talking to their families about any concerns around development. Pediatricians often say, "We are going to wait and see."

Physicians and child care providers make referrals and parents can self-refer to Early Steps. Easter Seals can offer the on-line screenings with the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) in partnership with the CVS Pharmacy.

The ASQ can be a great tool to break the ice for pediatrician and parent. Issues can be identified early, such as difficulty latching on with nursing and lack of eye contact. Pediatricians are key to reaching very young children and identifying issues early.

### ***Father Inclusion***

The Father & Child Resource Center has had successes with the need to include fathers as a key part of any solution. For example, awareness that massage should be offered when both parents can be present, being aware of the language used so that both parents are referenced, and finally, paternity acknowledgment.

### ***Developmental Assets***

There may be an opportunity to get more information on developmental assets out into the community so that the community as a whole is more comfortable becoming involved with our youth. It could be used for a community promotion.

### ***Eligibility for Services for Children with Developmental Needs Has Changed***

Some children who previously qualified for Early Steps services, due to changes in the eligibility criteria in 2009, now do not qualify as having a special need.

HPS offers the Developmental Intervention Program that addresses the mild delays. They serve 75 children per year and utilize the health assessment. It is mostly very high-risk families who have children with mild delays.

HPS is able to accept more referrals from Early Steps if they don't qualify for Early Steps services. HPS has many services that could be helpful.

## 2. *Children are ready for kindergarten.*

### **Access to High Quality Early Learning/Child Care Centers**

There are approximately 70 providers of childcare services in Martin County. The Early Learning Coalition contracts with 44 centers that offer Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten. Of those, 36 offer services for children infants to age 3.

When people lose their job, they are no longer eligible for childcare services after 60 days. These children lose their childcare slot. It is expensive for parents to keep their child in care. Dunbar Center charges the parents per week if they are not subsidized, and the cost becomes a barrier to continued attendance.

The priorities regarding which children can receive subsidized childcare are changing. These are determined by the state. Homeless children have top priority. This includes children impacted by domestic violence whose parent seeks shelter.

Dunbar Center works with the Martin County School District to provide childcare for the infants of teen parents from South Fork High School. The Early Learning Coalition often cannot provide childcare for children of teen parents if they live at home. The income of the entire family must then be taken into account.

### **Parent Involvement**

Childcare centers that require parent involvement tend to do a better job of retaining their children. Neighborhood schools and centers also have a better record of retaining their children, particularly when they are within walking distance of a child's home.

### **Quality Rating System**

The current accreditation used is the Gold Seal Standard. At this point, this is what the state considers to be a good measure of quality, though that is being reviewed via an Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) study and compared to a Quality Rating Improvement System (QRIS). Early Learning Coalitions can reimburse accredited centers up to 20% more. Currently, the Centers in Martin County receive an additional 18% if they are Gold Seal accredited.

### **Kindergarten Readiness Assessment**

Assessing children as they enter kindergarten is an important way to examine the effectiveness of early childhood programs and identify the additional needs of specific children. Early childhood programs would benefit from receiving the kindergarten readiness results and gain a better understanding of what is needed to improve kindergarten readiness.

## 3. *Children are reading on grade level by the end of third grade.*

### **After School Literacy Programs**

One-on-one tutoring sessions of the YMCA's YReads program is offered to children from Warfield Elementary and JD Parker Elementary. Children are identified by the teacher/principal as having low reading achievement and are typically from low-income families. There is no charge to the family for the program.

Be Read-y is offered at five Boys and Girls Club sites. It is focused on K-3rd graders with the knowledge that if you are not reading on grade level by grade 3 there is increased likelihood that the child will drop out of school. They also offer Homework Help and collaborate with the Humane Society to offer the Paws to Read program.

***Current Programs Promoting Early Childhood Literacy in Martin County***

The two-month home visit offered by HPS's BRAIN program provides a book and information needed to obtain a library card. This service is offered to all families of newborns in Martin County.

Paws to Read is a program offered by the Humane Society's Humane Education Program. Children in kindergarten through middle school are able to read aloud to dogs to improve language fluency. The program targets children with low reading achievement, poor verbal skills, and low self-esteem. It is currently offered at the Blake Library, Felix A. Williams Elementary School, Boys and Girls Clubs, and Sandy Pines.

The Family Place program includes time for parents and children in a developmentally appropriate playroom, art activities, discuss speech, hearing, nutrition, behavior, and music/movement with local professionals.

Martin County Library System has offered a summer reading program, Kindergarten Countdown Campfire Series, for children of parents whose work schedule does not allow participation during the day.

The Early Learning Coalition has literacy specialists. They identify low performing centers that receive Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten (VPK) funds. Participating centers must have a specific number of children who meet kindergarten readiness criteria in order to continue to receive funding. A major challenge is that kindergarten readiness is measured after the summer passes and there is summer learning loss. The child is not learning or using the skills from VPK and loses ground.

***Summer Slide***

Summer slide occurs when students lose academic knowledge and skills over the summer that they had gained over the course of the school year. Low-income students can lose up to two months of reading achievement during the summer, while higher-income students make gains as they participate in various enrichment activities.

The Martin County School District has offered a Summer Strategies Institute (SSSI) for the past two years at no cost to organizations offering summer programs. It consisted of a three-hour interactive session focusing on key strategies to address summer learning loss through reading, writing, math, critical thinking, and communication.

One summer program reported that the kids enjoyed their "Bell Time" reading program. Sometime between 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. each morning, a bell rang and everyone stopped to read for 20 minutes.

#### 4. Children graduate within four years of entering ninth grade.

##### **Engaging and Relevant Learning**

In order for children to stay in school, learning needs to be engaging and relevant. There are many different paths to receiving a high school diploma such as virtual learning. High school students need options, especially our most vulnerable teens. Students need continued access to career/vocational development opportunities - both middle and high school students. College is not for everyone.

##### **Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM)**

Increasing emphasis is placed on STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) in Martin County schools as well as nationally.

##### **Transition Years, Mentors and Alternatives**

It was noted that the transition year from middle school into high school can be difficult for students and their families.

Mentors can have a positive impact on a child staying engaged and succeeding in school.

Alternates to school suspension are in place and offer constructive use of a child's time instead of sending them home where no learning takes place and at times, where there is no supervision.

#### 5. Children have access to high quality activities during out-of-school time.

##### **Afterschool Programs**

Afterschool programs make a difference in our community by keeping kids safe, developing healthy behaviors, improving academic achievement, and helping working families. These programs also help to increase self-esteem and self-confidence, increase social and communication skills, and improve relationships with others including peers, teachers, and parents.

There is a need to integrate programming that is most interesting to the youth. Youth want a variety of engaging and relevant activities.

##### **Transportation a Major Challenge**

There has been discussion about transportation challenges with the school buses for many years. It would be helpful if the school buses would stop at the afterschool program locations located on the bus route. This has not been the case to date.

##### **Middle School Students Lack Programs**

More after school programs are needed for middle school students in all geographic areas. When middle school children are surveyed, they indicate they want more afterschool activities. *The Childhood Connection* surveys noted many unsupervised children in people's neighborhoods. Many times, both parents are working. If these children are not involved in positive activities, they are more likely to engage in high-risk behaviors.

Providers were concerned that apathy in middle school students is an issue because they do not have engaging and relevant activities. Healthy behaviors start to decline, as does social and emotional

development when youth transition to middle school without the necessary supports. We need to give middle school students the support they need since they are transitioning to a bigger world.

Mentoring could help, particularly during transition years. Transitional mentoring is needed from 5th to 6th grade, a difficult transition from elementary school to middle school.

The City of Stuart Community Services Department was very successful getting into Stuart Middle School for Friday Night Basketball and having guest speakers. More afterschool programs and clubs need to be offered at the schools. If the children could stay at middle school until 6 pm the parents could pick them up, as parents are in that habit anyway. The high school has an activities bus, but Providers were not sure if the middle schools have an activities bus.

The Boys and Girls Clubs have teen club at all five sites. Each club averages 40-50 teens participating.

## **6. Children develop the life skills essential for life success.**

### **Most Essential Life Skills**

The skills and attributes considered to be most essential for positive youth development by the providers include:

- Good health habits, including mental health and positive self-regard
- Emotional self-regulation skills
- Good coping skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Sense of personal autonomy/responsibility for self
- Spirituality or a sense of a “larger” purpose in life
- Strong moral character
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery
- Knowledge of essential vocational skills
- Opportunities to make a contribution to one’s community and to develop a sense of making a difference

### **The types of activities that would help build life skills in youth include:**

- Experience the environmental issues through such activities as recycling, composting, etc.
- Money management and financial literacy are important. Wells Fargo Bank, University of Florida Cooperative Extension, and Seacoast Bank, etc. offer these programs for kids.
- Education and preparation for interviews are important, including how to dress and what questions to expect. Role-playing can be helpful. *Passport to Manhood* is one program offered locally.
- Cooking and nutrition lessons are working well. Not only do children learn how to make snacks or full meals, they may go home to empty houses and cook for their younger siblings.
- Small group settings where kids can have talk sessions about morals, values, and current events are important. Character Counts can be integrated.
- There is Street Smart-gang prevention, modeling appropriate social behavior. That model builds positive relationships.
- Tykes & Teens just started WAM - “What an Amazing Member.” The kids make baked goods and present these to the WAM “Child of the Week” voted by the kids.