institutional racism ▶ cultural competence

fiscal instability ▶ funding adequacy

staff burnout ▶ renewed enthusiasm

▶battered
AGENCIES

marginalized ▶ respected

Supporting
Those
Who Serve
Low-income
Communities

low morale ▶ optimism

Diane F. Reed
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Douglas Quiett

frustration ▶ satisfaction

organizational insecurity ▶ capacity-building

battered
AGENCIES

Supporting
Those
Who Serve
Low-income
Communities

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Douglas Quiett

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This document introduces a new concept to the field of family support work. We have coined the term "battered agency" to explain some of the challenges that thwart local or indigenous agencies striving to serve low-income communities. Drawing on intensive field experience and relevant research, we put forward the notion that these agencies are hindered by risk factors remarkably like those facing the families they seek to help, chief among them:

- lack of economic stability,

- limited social support,

- crowded or impermanent housing,

- lack of respect from peers, and

- less-than-positive relationships with local institutions (i.e., schools, county and city government offices, funding agencies, and other social service agencies).

We have found these conditions to be particularly prevalent among social service agencies located in low-income communities, especially in communities of color. These conditions are accentuated when the service agency is seen by outsiders as part of the community it serves and its culture. For those who work in these agencies, such conditions often lead to anger, frustration, hopelessness, depression, heightened sensitivity, and even physical illness. When overlooked or ignored, as they often are in creating services for low-income communities, the result is that many efforts flounder. Collaboration among local agencies in low-income communities and agencies and funders from the broader community are particularly vulnerable to failure when these issues are not addressed.

This document examines these conditions, their causes and effects, then looks at possible solutions. In the following pages we will:

- review literature dealing with causes of effective and ineffective social service intervention efforts,

- provide information from our working experience in Marin County, California, to more completely describe the "battered agency" concept, and

- recommend ways of dealing with the causes and symptoms of battered agencies.

Because the concept "battered agency" is new, we hope that this document will stimulate the reader to test and expand thinking on the issues raised. We also hope the concept will lead to new approaches to interventions and collaborative initiatives involving low-income communities.

J. Ronald Lally
Co-Director
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I. INTRODUCTION

During the last decade, WestEd, through its Bay Area Early Intervention Program, has worked closely with community-based agencies in Oakland, San Francisco, and Marin City, California, to develop a comprehensive community intervention model. In 1993 we implemented this model in Marin City, an isolated, predominantly African American community where 36 percent of families live below the poverty line and two-thirds reside in public housing. The intervention, called Marin City Families First (MCFF), served 30 local families.

Designed by WestEd and Marin City community leaders, MCFF took a comprehensive, community-based approach to providing ongoing support for children living in high-risk environments and their families, beginning in pregnancy and continuing until the children reached age three. At the heart of this approach was a family-focused case management system through which flowed all services to MCFF families. The program used a two-pronged strategy: While dealing directly with families, it also sought to develop capacity and collaboration among the community agencies serving them. A family advocate working with each of the families collaborated with a clinical coordinator to develop appropriate in-home interventions, orchestrating community service agencies around the particular needs of program families.

Just two years into implementing MCFF, WestEd realized that, much like the families they served, many of these Marin City agencies were themselves in crisis, struggling to function with inadequate support and minimal respect. A 1994 MCFF report noted what we came to recognize as a previously unnamed phenomenon: "In Marin City, the underfunding of existing agencies creates an especially difficult environment for creating change because the families served by the agencies are so often in crisis. A vicious cycle of working through crises is never-ending for both the families and the agencies" (Scott, Lally, & Quiett, 1994, p. 24). The term "battered agency" emerged from some striking parallels between the kinds of stressful issues faced by both the agencies and their client families. Families struggle with financial uncertainty, homelessness, substance abuse, parenting, family relationships, and lack of skills and employment. Agencies strive to cope with funding uncertainty, burnout, anger, isolation, and lack of training and resources for staff development. Families and agencies both need a lot of practical and emotional support to deal with these conditions. (For a detailed table comparing these parallels, see Appendix A.)

In this document we make the case for an important shift in the way interactions and collaborations are conceptualized and conducted with agencies that may be over-stressed. The stresses we describe are not limited to Marin City. While the concept of a battered agency is new, the contributing factors apply to agencies working in impoverished communities everywhere:

- When an agency is understaffed, underfunded, and overworked, continually stressed staff, at all levels of the agency, may exhibit problems similar to the clients they serve, such as depression, denial, despair, withdrawal, and isolation.

- Cultural and class differences impede interactions and collaborations between local and outside social service agencies, as well as agencies and the funding communities.

- While the local community and its agencies may be minimally involved in communitywide program planning, the suggestions of local providers and residents who know the community are often not valued or taken seriously.

- Community-based agencies' dependence on the changing policies of funders not only makes them financially vulnerable but can contribute to dysfunctional relationships throughout the social service community.

The first part of this report takes a closer look at the day-to-day challenges that hamper the ability of frontline agencies to serve their client families. The second part of the report offers recommendations, based on firsthand experience and the literature, for meeting these challenges, including ways to build the capacity of local agencies, create supportive environments, nurture healthy collaboration, and prevent burnout.

Methodology

Our findings are based primarily on our intensive work with agency staff over a number of years, observing firsthand the day-to-day problems with which they cope and working with them to find ways of resolving stressful issues. We tested these findings against relevant research and expert opinion. Using four major databases (social welfare, psychology, business/organization, and public health), we reviewed the literature to discover the extent to which researchers have identified factors that contribute to the phenomenon we call battered agencies. We also drew on previous reports prepared by WestEd. *Barriers to Implementing Common Principles of Interagency Collaboration: Lessons Learned From the Marin City Families First Program* (Scott et al., 1994) offers insight into the complex environment in which MCFF was operating and documents numerous barriers to collaboration faced by Marin City agencies. *Marin City Families First: Three Case Studies* (Bremond, Piske, Scott, & Benard, 2000) provides in-depth studies of relationships between clients and caseworkers, and between caseworkers and their supervisor. We also conducted focus groups and interviews with members of the Marin City social service community, former Marin City Project board members and other key informants from outside Marin City, as well as with MCFF representatives. Successive drafts went through a careful review process. The process included a two-day roundtable WestEd hosted for a small group of researchers, evaluators, and community-based agency directors with experience in collaborative projects, and a final review process with many of the original roundtable participants.

Clarification of Terms

We are aware that the phrase "battered agency" may be controversial because of its traditional association with victimization and its possible implications of deficit or weakness. Our use of the term in this document, however, is meant to describe agencies that struggle, often heroically, under traumatic and uncertain conditions: being underfunded, resource poor, highly stressed, and working with clients experiencing ongoing crises, only to be blamed or scapegoated for not fixing all the social ills of the community.

Using the term "organizational dysfunction" is obviously not meant to blame community-based agencies that, despite trying their best, are genuinely frustrated by the conditions we've cited, such as funding pressure, exclusion from planning and decision-making, and race and class differences that hinder both collaboration and organizational functioning. We know that the working context can contribute to seemingly unresolvable problems. We also recognize that this issue is quite complex since, regardless of the environment in which they operate, some organizations would be weak due to such factors as incompetent leadership.

We also frequently distinguish between "local" and "outside" agencies. "Local" agencies, the subject of this report, are indigenous to and culturally grounded in their ethnic communities, often growing out of grassroots efforts to serve specific populations or neighborhoods. While well-suited to serving low-income communities of color, local agencies are underfunded and not well-connected to or respected by the "mainstream" service structure. "Outside" agencies refer to the larger well-established social service agencies — such as Catholic Charities, Family Service, or Jewish Family Services — often citywide in scope, that are better connected to the powers that be, and financially more secure, in part because of their ability to compete well in the funding process.

II. CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS
FACING SMALL SOCIAL SERVICE AGENCIES WORKING IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES

Social service agencies working on the frontlines in low-income communities confront complex social, health, and economic crises among the families and individuals they serve on a daily basis. As noted above, many of these agencies also face multiple troubling internal and external conditions that, if not addressed, can threaten the health of the agency and its staff, and even its ultimate survival. These factors include:

- unpredictable and insufficient funding,

- inequitable ratio between depth of services needed and services offered,

- racial and class tensions with other agencies, partners, and/or funders,

- limited role in developing, implementing, and evaluating programs intended for their community,

- lack of support for organizational capacity building, staff training, and development, and

- the assumption that organizations can meet all of their funders' requirements without additional resources or capacity building.

This section describes these challenges. In doing so, it draws on extensive research, as well as on our firsthand experience with the Marin City Project. The Marin City Project is an umbrella agency initiated by a local funder — The Marin Community Foundation — to merge a variety of local social service agencies that had previously operated autonomously and now operate as programs under one board of directors and administrative structure.

We begin with a look at how agencies have had to adapt to a less supportive funding environment. This is followed by discussions on race, class, and cultural competence; the myth of community involvement in planning and decision-making; and the burnout, low morale, and depression often seen in stressed agencies. We then examine how challenges at the individual agency level can become even more overwhelming when a community-based organization becomes a part of a collaborative effort.

Funding

Within the past two decades, community-based nonprofit service agencies have had to adjust to a profoundly changed fiscal climate (Reed & Collins, 1994), including sudden, negative changes in funding and increased complexity due to multiple funding sources with different fiscal cycles, institutional expectations, and reporting requirements (Mulroy, 1997). In the 1980s, federal aid for social services, and for employment and training services, was cut by as much as 60 percent (Stoesz & Karger, 1992) and low-income housing was reduced by 80 percent (Goetz, 1993). Community-based agencies, traditionally dependent on public funding and relatively protected from the outside free market environment, were suddenly told that to survive, they would need to become more self-reliant — even entrepreneurial. Typically staffed and administered by practitioners (e.g., nurses, social workers) rather than managers trained in private sector methods, direct service organizations tend to put their clients first — often at the expense of their agency (Posey, McIntosh, & Parke, 1987). Unprepared for the loss of revenue and lacking substantive guidance to cope with funding changes, many of these agencies were thrust into unfamiliar territory that created considerable stress and instability.

The recent shift in funding requirements from demonstrating need and delivering community-based services to demonstrating outcome in the form of community benchmarks or report cards has also put new pressures on community-based agencies (Stokley, 1996). As a condition of continued funding, many agencies are now

required to show evidence of meeting outcome expectations by increasing their evaluation and reporting efforts, with little or no additional support for these activities.

At the same time, public and private funding sources are increasingly interested in the concept of interagency collaboration as a more efficient and comprehensive approach to address the complex social and economic problems common to low-income communities. Scores of initiatives have been funded nationally to coordinate neighborhood job creation efforts, promote the development of new business enterprises, prepare residents for work and self-sufficiency, and help them gain access to support services (Pitt, 1998). These initiatives provide incentives for community-based agencies, anxious about inadequate funding and uncertain future funding, to participate in collaborative efforts (Mulroy, 1998).

Funding patterns among community-based agencies vary enormously. Some agencies receive most of their resources from one or two funders, while others obtain financial support from multiple sources. The tendency to underfund creates a hand-to-mouth existence for agencies. Organizations typically have just enough to meet minimal client needs but lack the resources to create an infrastructure that adequately provides the wide range of comprehensive services the community needs (Pitt, 1998). Conflicting or additional demands from funders can unintentionally create havoc for agencies. While funders usually require capacity building, resources to increase the capabilities of the agency staff may not be budgeted. Under these circumstances, agencies that do provide staff training may have to use resources earmarked for program implementation, eventually increasing stress for staff who are still expected to achieve the outcomes promised to the funder. One key informant commented, "If corporate executives were not allowed to use their contacts and resources, but actually were forced to operate under similar conditions, we might be surprised at the level of 'dysfunction' they would demonstrate."

Community-based agencies commonly struggle with year-to-year funding cycles that increase instability and anxiety about organizational security. Funders who want to see dramatic changes often have unrealistic expectations about how much and how long it takes to really help distressed families (Scott et al., 1994). Agencies, on the other hand, often find themselves in a mismatch between funders' expectations and the level of funding provided. The lack of adequate resources to accomplish what they were funded to do was one of the biggest complaints among Marin City program directors. "I haven't seen an organization yet that's had the staff to function at the capacity of what its mission is," said one program director. "I've been here 13 years and there's been me, or me and two people, where other programs have secretaries and outreach workers. We take $5 to do a $25 job. And they expect you to do it, but you can't. You're not even band-aiding, you're just cleaning the wound and hoping it doesn't get infected." One key informant put the dilemma this way: "When you are starving, do you refuse to eat what is offered because it is nutritionally unsound? Rarely. So it's the same with organizations struggling to survive while having to address these issues."

In addition to being chronically underfunded, many community-based agencies face uncertainty about continued funding over time. An evaluation of 47 Oakland, California agencies receiving community development block grant funding found that nearly two-thirds experienced funding uncertainties. Of those, 44 percent reported that funding uncertainties lowered both staff morale and functioning "a lot" or "quite a lot."[1]

For agencies that are already barely surviving, the pressure is intensified by the common funder requirement that at the end of the funding cycle, agencies show how they will achieve self-sufficiency. A startling similarity is evident between the difficulties resource-starved agencies face in predicting their future fiscal health and the difficulties experienced by clients trying to move from welfare to work with inadequate resources.

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[1] Final Evaluation Report for Oakland Community Development Block Grant Program Year 2000-2001, by Gibson and Associates.

Race, Class, Power, and Cultural Competence

As fundamental as race and class issues are to the outcome of neighborhood-based initiatives, their relative absence as topics in the literature reflects Americans' ongoing reluctance to face and deal with these major national concerns. The importance of providing culturally competent services in multiethnic client populations is becoming more widely accepted among health and social service providers (Legault, 1996) and is nearly always expected by funders. Yet culture, race, class, and power differences among agencies, funders, and community members can be serious barriers to effectively working together.

Two decades ago, Jenkins (1980) noted that the growth of ethnic agencies providing unique and effective services in low-income communities of color had become much more than a political response to movements for minority rights. Indigenous agencies tend to take a more integrated approach in responding to the complex needs of their clients, with particular emphasis on culturally competent service delivery. This approach clearly has greater potential for success than traditional mainstream service-delivery methods that often alienate clients of color by missing subtle cultural cues, inadvertently communicating disrespect, and making clients feel "talked down to."

The ways in which agencies in low-income and minority communities use family, extended family, religion, and other culturally specific community assets may not be recognized or valued in traditional social service delivery systems that operate on mainstream, white middle-class values and expectations (Stokley, 1996). People from outside a community often judge these types of services to be less professional and effective than the more mainstream organizational norms with which they are familiar and comfortable, and they expect local agencies to change to a more traditional, "professional" approach. But the racial dimensions present in already difficult power relationships tend not to surface or be discussed, except privately (Stone & Butler, 2000). According to one Marin City service provider, "People don't want to take the time to learn about diversity, to learn about my culture and my values. Instead, they would rather take the stance that there's something wrong with your thinking. So you constantly get these 'you're-less-than' messages."

Yet cultural competence is essential for effective service delivery in communities of color. The experience consistently reported by Marin City program participants is that agencies whose staff are knowledgeable about their communities or are of the same racial/ethnic background have easier access to building relationships with the people of the community and are more likely to be successful in serving them. Research confirms local experience. Agencies that do not hire culturally competent staff find that their staff tend to be uneasy providing services to non-white communities and less successful in engaging residents (Jones, 1992).

An organization's level of cultural competence can also have a strong effect on collaboration, determining, for example, whether its staff are willing to attend meetings in low-income communities of color where partner agencies might be located. Use of euphemisms like "inner city" can reflect the fear people have in dealing with low-income communities of color where reports of crime and violence create the impression that the community may not be safe. Safety is a legitimate issue for residents and other people coming into the community. But overly sensationalized media coverage and internalized stereotypes about the population can cause inordinate fear among social service staff working in the community and can even be used as a reason not to expand or deliver services. A key informant described the difficulty of getting outside service providers to attend meetings in Marin City: "Basically there was a lot of fear. It's not that they didn't know the agencies and the people, and some of them did feel comfortable. It's just that meeting in Marin City wasn't their first choice. If they could go someplace else, that was easier. There was no bridge back and forth even though it was the same county."

Racism can be manifested in very subtle ways and may more likely be expressed through decision-making processes, institutional practices, body language, and tones of voice than through blatant behavior (Scott et al., 1994). On an interpersonal level, racist behavior, language, and attitudes are not only emotionally debilitating but can create an environment of defeat in communities of color; at a structural level, racism re-creates and enforces power elites, economic disparity, and persistent poverty (Stone & Butler, 2000). Having witnessed interactions between outside agencies and Marin City providers that demonstrated how interpersonal dynamics and people's individual discomfort make it nearly impossible to talk through problems at a structural level, one key informant observed, "The cultural competency issue was a major factor. Outside agencies would get involved, but they wouldn't realize they were being offensive or that they weren't being effective."

Cultural competency is also a pertinent issue for funders who have little or no direct experience working with low-income communities and communities of color. Some funders seek to become more involved as partners with low-income communities through the initiatives they fund. These efforts, however, can be complicated by the obvious power imbalance and racial differences between the wealthy (and predominantly white) foundation and the community of underfunded institutions and predominantly poor residents of color (Stone & Butler, 2000). A Marin City Project board member commented that, as happens in the broader society, funders tend not to "deal with their own personal stuff, and no one is there to influence them. That results in funders having inaccurate visions and false expectations due to their lack of understanding about how the community actually works."

Agencies of color often have trouble trying to effectively function, do business, and converse in the vastly different worlds of clients, mainstream agencies, and funders. Staff often complain that organizations outside their communities do not understand the dynamics of working in low-income communities. A Marin City Project staff member found the lack of cultural competence on the part of outside agency staff made her feel that they really didn't know what her agency was doing or understand how, to a great extent, the culture of a community drives the way services are provided. According to one key informant, the choice by staff of outside agencies to stay uninformed keeps Marin City programs marginalized and perceived as not worth the effort, as hopeless. "Outside agencies are okay letting ethnic agencies work with their own, with 'those' people. We are allowed to function not because of any positive evaluation of our competency as an agency but because of who we serve."

Marin City providers also felt that, as agencies of color, they were automatically suspect in a number of ways. According to one key informant, outside agencies felt that Marin City programs were not honest, that they used funding irresponsibly, and that they had their own rules. "They felt there were some people heading agencies who had been buttering their own bread for a long time, just taking care of themselves and not really getting the job done. That was the perception, and it was very hard to disprove." Echoing that view, a Marin City program director expressed the belief that one reason programs didn't get enough money was because funders "think you're going to mess it up anyway."

The critical issue here is that to be successful, providers — whether from a local agency or an outside agency — must be competent in the relevant content area and able to provide services or support in a way that honors the cultural traditions of the community they are serving. Equally important, to be fully effective, funders themselves must develop cultural competence about the community being served and its indigenous service providers.

The Myth of Community Involvement in Planning and Decision-Making

Many funders now require evidence that the community is involved in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs intended to serve it. Yet, in practice, community participation tends to be more superficial than meaningful. Noting the poor success rate of social service agencies' past efforts to include community residents

in program planning and policymaking, Cohen (1976) argues that these failures stemmed in part from the residents' distrust and their belief that the agencies and their programs were not relevant to the problems and needs of the community. "Since the downtown bureaucrats are viewed as distant from the community, both physically and emotionally, area residents may give up [participating in a planning process]. As a result, the people and the experts who serve them muddle on as usual in their separate worlds" (p. 357).

Newer neighborhood-based agencies of the 1990s are still viewed suspiciously by residents whose memories of past broken promises and disappointments prevail over current promises of change. In low-income communities and communities of color, many residents complain about being exploited even as they are "studied to death." While their participation in neighborhood meetings is necessary to obtain funding, residents feel the programs that get the funding ultimately do not benefit them. "We get nothing [while project staff] get a job; we're nothing but someone else's numbers" (Colby, 1997, p. 2). To residents, being involved in a community initiative does not necessarily mean having control over decisions made in the name of their community (Stone & Butler, 2000).

Thus, the possibility of working effectively within low-income communities is remote when:

- the climate does not promote trust,
- there is no process to promote good communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution, and
- those doing the work are not culturally competent.

Those working for community-based agencies often feel similarly disenfranchised when decisions are made about the community in which they work and may well live. Historically, Marin City providers felt discounted when decisions affecting their community are made. Outside agencies would develop funding proposals using Marin City data to demonstrate need, but would fail to consult local agencies or involve the community until late in the planning process. Local organizations would then need to decide whether to become involved — even though some decisions had already been made — or to remain uninvolved, knowing that services would continue to be planned and delivered without their input. This treatment created reservoirs of distrust and suspicion among local agency staff and directors. For the sake of their community, which desperately needed services, they felt they had to cooperate with outside agencies that got the new staff positions to serve local families, even if it meant being bypassed themselves as the provider of those services.

The contrast between involving the community in a planning ritual as opposed to giving people actual leverage to make policy decisions eventually leads to alienation (Seeman, 1959). Many indigenous agencies find that even when brought into the planning process, their ideas are not respected or taken seriously. Their opinions, knowledge, and experience are consistently disregarded. "No matter what our program people came up with, it was never viewed as being the right thing," recalled one Marin City program director.

Funders generally have their own ideas about community problems and solutions. Thus, service agencies often need to modify their mission and goals to serve funder-defined agendas as opposed to need-defined agendas, even if they disagree with the funder's priorities. A major sticking point for the Marin City Project was how differently Marin City providers and their major funder assessed the needs of families who were trying to move from welfare dependence to economic self-sufficiency. While Marin City programs advocated a comprehensive service base (including, for example, child rearing education, drug treatment, family counseling) that would help families learn more effective ways of functioning and develop constructive ways to make the transition to work, the funder's primary focus was on job training and employment. As one program manager put it, "In the end, the idea of providing social services to a total community was left by the doorstep."

Over time, community members and local service providers who feel exploited become angry, apathetic, and cynical (Dean, 1961). Only rarely do local residents and service providers feel acknowledged for their experience and accepted as equal partners to work with outside experts in planning and implementing new forms of service delivery (Colby, 1997). It is equally rare for collaborative partners outside the community to truly understand and appreciate the realities of providing services in impoverished urban neighborhoods (Mulroy & Shay, 1998). Rather, key informants consistently reported that ethnic agencies and communities of color do not feel their experience, opinions, and abilities are valued.

A former Marin City Project board member said it was a mistake not to ask local program directors to help conceptualize, design, and implement interventions or develop an evaluation system that engaged and informed the community. "I would have allowed the community to develop its own type of evaluation system that was equated to quality of life values, or other personal indicators," he said. From such a process, he added, both the community and the funder would have learned not only what the community wished for itself but also how the community really operates.

One Marin City Project service provider recalled the especially divisive experience of not being valued for her expertise in working with the community, and not seeing her views represented in the way programs were planned and developed. "The ideas that we come up with and the programs we want funded are not given any credence," she said. Instead, the foundation hired outside consultants who were perceived to have arbitrarily changed the focus of programs without bringing the community into the process. Marin City program directors felt that the consultants didn't have the background or experience to understand the community or evaluate their programs, which nullified the best work of both the funder and program staff and seriously compromised the project. "It didn't matter how many times you said it's not going to work like that, even quoting best practices, or what the research has shown," the service provider added. "They went ahead anyway."

Having to deal with outside consultants — who were brought in to provide technical assistance and get the project on track but instead were perceived as bringing chaos — only intensified the powerlessness Marin City Project staff already felt. Program directors were given little opportunity to provide input into decisions that significantly altered their goals and directions. They were forced to use approaches imposed from the outside rather than building on the knowledge and experience gained by providers working in the community. According to one program director, "Things were changed because they don't see it working the way they think it should work, instead of looking at why it isn't working or, if it is working, what portions are working. When you're changing all the time, you never know what's happening, it keeps you off balance, and it makes you look like you're not really doing anything."

Externally imposed strategies not tailored to the realities of the community itself inevitably fail. One collaboration in neighboring San Francisco lost its funding when its funder finally realized that the model it had mandated, over protests from participating agencies, was too complex and cumbersome for the intended population. Yet that project's funder concluded that implementation of the intervention had failed when, in fact, the intervention had been inappropriate for that community.[2]

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[2] In July 1999, funding for the Marin City Project abruptly ended for similar reasons. Personal communication (March 2000) with Geraldine Oliva, MD, MPH, Principal Investigator of The PHREDA Project and Director of the University of California, San Francisco's Family Health Outcomes Project.

Burnout, Low Morale, and Depression

Competition for resources, lack of capacity building, poor communication, lack of a process to settle differences, and lack of training for boards and staff all take their toll on agencies serving low-income and minority communities. Like poor families living from one check to the next with no extra money to help advance their children educationally, agencies struggling from payment to payment lack the training resources to help staff hone and develop new skills. And like welfare agencies that have the power to hold up benefits checks if recipients fail to meet certain requirements, funders at times also use punitive tactics, such as delaying payment, to control programs.

Funding uncertainty and job insecurity create tension among program staff who, like the clients they serve, worry about how they will pay their bills, rent, and child care. The more insecure the funding, the more agencies feel a loss of status and influence among other agencies with whom they work and partner. Not surprisingly, staff living with such uncertainty and rapid change experience higher than normal job-related stress and poor health (Friesen & Frey, 1983). Lawton and Magarelli (1980) found that up to two-thirds of child welfare caseworkers reported stress-related health problems. One Marin City Project program director observed that "what has happened over the years has been more and more bad health. I have never seen so much illness in service providers."

When not addressed, work-related pressures can lead to burnout, a distinct type of occupational stress characterized by emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and cynical attitudes and negative feelings toward clients (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Marin City Project staff describe a work environment in which burnout is inevitable. "In the beginning, there was a certain amount of excitement that we were going to do something that was really going to make a difference in people's lives," recalled a former staff member. "Then we were faced with some realities that things weren't moving the way we had anticipated. There were accusations of mismanagement, questions about where the money went. Staff morale was often at a pretty low point." Stress levels were sometimes so high that staff dreaded going to work. "Low morale affected staff efficiency," said another staff member. "You got to a point where you didn't care."

The risk of burnout is higher with the dual stresses of working under difficult workplace conditions while serving clients with multiple problems. According to one Marin City Project program director, "You need to keep yourself up while you're dealing with a population who … have feelings of hopelessness, and you have to put on a whole different face. If you're down yourself, it's really hard." Some workers, knowing their ability to help is so limited, become angry and cynical, even rationalizing as normal the dysfunctional behavior of families with whom they work. (Such reactions may, in turn, affect funders, policymakers, and other gatekeepers who become skeptical that change is possible.)

To be effective in their work, social service professionals strive to create meaningful and helpful relationships with clients, relationships that are by nature draining (Kahn, 1993). In the course of those relationships, staff are exposed to emotional demands from clients, may find themselves in personally risky situations or receive personal threats, watch clients backslide, deal with the effects of severe abuse or neglect, find themselves in no-win situations, and must detach from clients (Barrett & McKelvey, 1980). Burnout among these professionals is most likely to occur when work-related pressures erode one's sense of purpose in the job (Bramhall & Ezell, 1981), and when the energy, involvement, and efficacy one has experienced with work converts to exhaustion, cynicism, and ineffectiveness (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

According to researchers, certain institutional stressors can overwhelm and demoralize caregiving professionals (Barrett & McKelvey, 1980; Bramhall & Ezell, 1981; Cournoyer, 1988; Heaney, 1991). Among the stressors are:

+ unpredictable and constantly changing policies and procedures,

+ low salary,

+ insecure funding,

+ inadequate resources to meet clients' needs,

+ accommodating to new administrative officials and supervisors,

+ increased pace of work required,

+ changes in staff,

+ lack of organizational support for workers,

+ poor peer relationships,

+ excessive workload, and

+ overtime and long shifts.

Marin City Project staff were exposed to all these organizational pressures, as well as to divisive issues related to culture and race. For directors of small agencies who are both service providers and administrators, it can seem overwhelming to constantly handle funding problems and other pressures. "It wears you out because you're constantly thinking about that at the same time you're trying to provide a service," observed one program director. "It means that your days and weeks are extraordinarily long because you're so busy going to meetings and trying to help pull things together, but yet you've got services to run." The lack of clarity around funding and program design issues undermined the ability of Marin City agencies to function, inevitably causing resentment, anger, and burnout. "It was hard, it was demeaning," said one Marin City provider. "I'm still learning to deal with my anger. I haven't mastered that yet." "It burns you out, frustrates, you," reported another. "And if you're not careful, you begin to be critical of yourself."

Some researchers see burnout as an occupational problem that says more about organizational dysfunction and the environment in which employees work than about the employees themselves (Maslach & Leiter, 1997; Bramhall & Ezell, 1981). Instead of viewing burnout as an individual response to job-related stress, they suggest examining the particular organizational conditions in which caregiving professionals are either emotionally supported or drained (Kahn, 1993). Other researchers suggest that organizational problems are, like a hologram, reflected in the people as well as in the system (Schaef & Fassel, 1988). Maslach and Leiter (1997) maintain that burnout is best addressed at the organizational, rather than the individual, level and recommends that the search for the causes of burnout be directed away from blaming the individual and toward uncovering the operational and structural characteristics that create a difficult work environment. This perspective can well be applied to battered agencies whose observed organizational dysfunction might say more about the environment in which the agency exists than about the organization itself.

The damaging effects of institutional racism, while difficult to quantify, also need to be factored into the pressure people of color experience when working in already stressed community-based organizations. A former Marin City Project staff member found that encountering both racism and a dysfunctional workplace created distractions that made it difficult to stay focused on the needs of the clients and community.

In the face of these stresses, the organization itself can act in self-defeating ways. The experience of operating in a community where, over the years, many agencies have been unsuccessful can cause agency staff to be pessimistic or otherwise negative, and unwilling to try new approaches. New staff with different skills can seem particularly threatening to more senior staff members who are invested in their own established way of

operating in the community despite little success. One newcomer's advocacy style caused problems with other Marin City Project staff. "I caught a lot of flak when I went outside the loop to find resources that families needed. With my experience as a community organizer, I was able to mobilize people and get them interested in doing something with their lives. But there were a lot of barriers [inside the agency] whenever I made a move that wasn't part of the program's usual process. From my perspective, people who had been here long before I was felt I may have been infringing on their system and trying to change it."

Agency staff can undermine their own program in much the same way that family members overwhelmed by intense pressure or defeat can make it difficult for other family members to succeed. Some Marin City Project staff believed that because they had tried everything and failed, no one else could do it either. How they acted was complex and confusing. They still wanted to get things to work, but they sometimes acted in ways that set up roadblocks for new staff. The feeling seemed to be that if they couldn't experience success after all they'd done, they'd make it hard for anyone else to be successful.

Unacceptable behavior and incompetence can be perpetuated, tolerated, and normalized when staff and management have been laboring under stress and do not receive adequate support, supervision, or training. This can be a particularly complex dynamic in agencies of color in low-income communities. According to one program director, "Tolerating incompetence is among the vestiges of internalized oppression where there is an inadequate evaluation system created for employees, and no one is really willing to fire someone unless they do something outrageous because of the reluctance to fire another person of color."

When they have a job opening, agencies serving low-income, job-scarce communities of color often feel the need to hire a local resident. An agency may be moved in part by a legitimate desire to hire someone who understands the community and who also comes with established connections that can contribute to an agency's effectiveness with a given population. But it may also be pressured to some degree by the community itself, which naturally wants more local jobs. When an agency finds a well-qualified resident, the decision to hire locally can suit everyone's needs. It's when the qualifications of local applicants are questionable or when a local hire does not pan out as well as expected that an agency can find itself having to make difficult or unpopular decisions: fire a local resident who is not performing adequately and hire a more qualified person, either within the community or from outside; or take no action, which may compromise the quality of services provided to client families.

Organizational reactions to stressful pressures, researchers note, are not unlike characteristics of a dysfunctional family system (Friesen & Frey, 1983; Behn, 1980). Staff working in underfunded, understaffed programs with a highly demanding client pool and limited resources are prone to mirror the dynamics of an addictive family system, characterized by blurred personal boundaries, denial, blaming, defensiveness, and/or confused communication (Sayre, 1992).

Poor communication was a major problem in the Marin City Project, which lacked a system for program information sharing, leaving many service providers in the dark about what was going on or who was doing what. "We rarely had staff meetings, so no one knew what anyone else was doing," said one staff member. "When we did meet, staff never had any input. We just sat there and listened, and then the meeting was over."

The phenomenon of the "battered agency" results from the combined stress factors noted thus far and can be expected when a program has:

   ✈ overextended and relatively isolated staff members,

   ✈ little time to cultivate necessary resources to cope with extreme demands on the time, energy, and skills of staff, and

   ✈ overextension, compounded by a lack of financial resources that limits the amount and quality of training and technical assistance available to staff (Sayre, 1992, p. 68).

These and other stressors mentioned earlier can quickly multiply when community-based organizations try to work with other agencies to provide social, health, or economic development services in a community.

Collaboration

Several converging trends have been pushing agencies to collaborate. First, complex problems in poor neighborhoods are not well addressed by categorical or single-issue approaches (Rubin, 1995; Stone, 1996). Second, the erosion of federal support for social welfare programs left community-based organizations with serious revenue shortfalls, creating incentives to become more cost effective through cooperation and coordination with other service providers (Berlinger & Hall, 1997; Alter, 1990). Third, government agencies and private foundations, the two largest sources of funding for community-based organizations, are increasingly requiring cross-sector and inter-organization collaborative initiatives as a condition of funding (Mattessich & Monsey, 1992, as cited in Pitt, 1998).

Although widely promoted and used as a strategy for community building and local-level problem solving, interagency collaboration, which takes many forms, is complex and can be difficult to implement (Mulroy, 1997; Pitt, 1998). David (1999) notes that a proliferation of collaborations across various funding initiatives within a single community can take a significant toll on local agencies that have to participate in new interagency committees and hold countless other meetings in addition to managing their regular operations. Given that collaboration requires complex governing structures, specialized technical assistance, and ongoing maintenance to maximize effectiveness, he adds, it is not always the best mechanism for concerted action.

Many collaborating agencies have found that while they may have common missions and philosophies, conflicts surface over territorial issues of role and responsibility, and over funding disparities (Mulroy, 1997; Walker, Alvarez, Aquino-Fike, Parks, Polk, & Wiley, 1999). While organizations are generally more willing to work together on activities that do not disrupt existing power bases and control of resources (Pitt, 1998), conflict is almost certain when multiple organizations with diverse mandates interact to provide a service (Fargason, Barnes, Schneider, & Galloway, 1994). This is especially true among agencies serving complex client populations for which there are multiple goals and where administrators and planners are unprepared to prevent conflict (Alter, 1990). Collaborations can cease to thrive and may start to collapse without fluidity, feedback loops, critical assessment, and the ability to make ongoing adjustments as needed.

A major purpose of the Marin City Families First intervention was to strengthen and coordinate support services in the community through formal and informal collaborative networks among agencies that did or could serve Marin City families. WestEd worked with Marin City Project programs, as well as with agencies and organizations outside of Marin City, to create partnerships with social services, education, private organizations, community groups, and family members to plan and provide comprehensive services for client families. However, a number of issues made such collaboration difficult, including the illusion of being an equal partner, inadequate funding, issues of race and culture, longstanding historical barriers, and referral issues.

The Illusion of Equal Partnership. Effective collaboration is nearly impossible without well-defined, mutually acceptable roles for each member. Sometimes economic or political pressures to collaborate force inappropriate mergers. In some partnerships, agency roles are clearly equal; in others, clearly unequal, with primary and secondary positions assumed. These roles should be clear upon entering the collaboration, rather than negotiated afterward, but this is rarely the case. Lack of clarity from the outset of collaboration may stem from either innocent or purposeful role confusion. Sometimes agencies are misled into believing they will have more power in the collaboration than they actually will.

Agencies may be forced into "take it or leave it" collaborations because one of the partners has easier access to the funding sources. Funding for collaborative work generally goes to the lead or convening organization, while other partners are expected to contribute time, staff, and other resources at much lower levels of compensation. The obvious power imbalance can breed resentment and loss of trust. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this funding pattern is not only shortsighted but potentially damaging, reinforcing the sense among partners that some are more equal than others (Walker et al., 1999).

An MCFF program director noted that to have a healthy collaboration, everybody in the process needs to have a secure position. "But programs in Marin City didn't because they were operating from a deficit position. They spent most of their time dealing with survival issues, with funding, and with outside pressures and impressions about what it meant to be identified as a staff member of an 'ethnic' agency working with one population."

The historic role of community-based organizations in neighborhood affairs should make them important members of any collaborative initiative. Because local agencies better understand and have easier access to the community than do outside agencies, their participation in a collaboration means partner agencies have to spend less time orienting themselves to the community and can spend more time developing and implementing collaborative services (Jones, 1992). Indigenous agencies providing services within a specific cultural context are particularly valuable to communities of color because their culturally appropriate approach fills gaps left by traditional methods of service delivery (Jenkins, 1980). Nevertheless, smaller agencies, particularly ethnic agencies with history and credibility in the community, can be overshadowed by larger and wealthier collaborating partners (Scott et al., 1994). There is often genuine disagreement about the value or skills that a particular agency brings to the collaboration. In the MCFF experience, the skills and usefulness of local agencies were often undervalued by collaborative partners that were mainstream agencies from outside Marin City; the collaboration proceeded anyway because it was required by the funders. To begin collaboration this way often dooms them to failure or, at least, to serious difficulty.

Issues of Race, Class, and Culture. The inherent challenges of collaboration can be exacerbated when the managers and service providers from local agencies are culturally and racially different from their counterparts in collaborating agencies, or when these outside agencies have had little experience working in low-income communities of color. Meetings with collaborators from outside the community often left Marin City staff members feeling furious. One African American Marin City program director who attended those meetings described her experience of feeling invisible and powerless: "They'd be sitting around the table and forget that I was there. Something would come up about Marin City, about how you can't get anything done there. Then they'd look at me and say, 'But no, we don't mean you.'"

Marin City program staff also voiced frustration about the lack of cultural competence that workers from outside agencies showed in dealing with Marin City families. Often, Marin City practitioners would find themselves having to mend fences trampled by insensitive communications. They also found themselves having to deal with their own feelings of not wanting to be associated with their collaborative partners in the minds of their clients because of the insensitivity and disrespect these partners had shown to the client families.

Pitt (1998) found that racial and class tensions were prevalent in the neighborhood collaborations she studied. The most pronounced strain was between predominantly white, upper-middle-class business leaders and low-income residents of color living in neighborhoods that were the focus of the collaborative work. One initiative in that study was ultimately sabotaged by unanticipated class divisions. While acknowledged, those divisions were not directly addressed, perpetuating prejudices and misunderstandings that ultimately impaired the collaboration and reinforced the divisions within the community.

The chances of sustaining a collaboration's success over time are low when community initiatives fail to formally assess and address issues related to how race factors into community decline and persistent poverty; how power is held in elite circles; and how policies and practices continue to reinforce color lines. Without question, it is important to have diversity in collaborations, provide translation for non-English speaking clients, hold cultural celebrations, and hire community residents. But these alone are not enough to change the status quo without more formal consideration of race, power, language, culture, gender, and class in carrying out community initiatives (Stone & Butler, 2000).

Historical Barriers. Partnering agencies' history with each other can also contribute to the fragility of collaborative efforts. When forming a new collaboration, partners' past perceptions of one another must be dealt with, not swept under the rug. It became clear to WestEd facilitators that service and funding agencies outside of Marin City saw the community as a closed system resisting well-intentioned help, and that they believed staff from Marin City agencies didn't attend planning meetings. It was also clear that Marin City providers deeply resented being disrespected when they did attend meetings and that they repeatedly felt left "out of the loop" when important decisions were made about services to be provided in Marin City.

When Marin City agencies insisted that health and social services be delivered by local providers who best knew how to serve the community in culturally respectful ways, they considered this a logical and obvious recommendation that would be accepted by all. The message heard by outside service agencies, however, was that Marin City was once again rejecting the services these agencies had designed and were planning to provide with their own staff, and that Marin City agencies did not want or need their help.

Reluctance to Refer Cases. The degree to which clients have easy access to any of the multiple services offered by a collaboration's participating agencies is a reflection of the partnership's relative success. Yet creating an effective referral process can be a major challenge for social service agencies trying to work together. One reason for this is that agencies rely on client count to justify their costs, to current funders and in future funding requests. Thus, in a very practical sense, an agency — especially one already at fiscal risk — may fear that referring clients to other agencies will result in a loss of clients and, therefore, funding. In addition, individual agencies, both those in low-income areas and the larger outside agencies serving the same clients, are sometimes reluctant to relinquish control of their clients when there are racial and/or cultural differences between agencies or when, for other reasons, agencies do not fully trust each other. The issue of trust can be especially acute for staff at an indigenous agency who may be expected to refer clients to another agency that they believe is not culturally competent. Such concerns make many agencies unwilling to refer clients even if they themselves are not best suited to serve all the clients' needs.

Agencies that are unwilling to reduce their client numbers or lose clients to other programs can derail referral efforts (Reed & Collins, 1994), and poor communication can also compromise agencies' ability to effectively refer clients to needed services. Issues of institutional survival can lead agencies to give the impression that they provide more services than they actually do or are more competent to provide services than they actually are. Nevertheless, some collaborative efforts manage to work despite organizational dysfunction because inter-organizational relationships among frontline staff are healthy (Alter, 1990).

Over time, WestEd has explored the most effective ways to work with families struggling with financial uncertainty, homelessness, drug addiction, parenting, family relationships, lack of skills, and unemployment. Without intervention, the complex and interrelated nature of these issues can easily overwhelm and discourage individuals from believing that positive change is possible. This can be equally true for battered agencies.

The concept of the battered agency emerged as MCFF tried to collaborate with Marin City Project programs inundated by funding uncertainty, burnout, anger, and isolation. We realized that many characteristics of families living on the edge were also evident in local community-based agencies that were resource deprived, understaffed, over-committed, and working with families and individuals with multiple problems. Marin City providers described feeling trapped by their economic dependence on a single, major funding source, and by their pervasive feelings of being undervalued and invalidated. When asked why they persisted in their efforts to make things work under these difficult conditions, one of the providers, echoing the powerlessness felt by many of the families they serve, replied, "You feel like you don't have any options."

We believe that our experience with the family support interventions pioneered in MCFF can also be useful in helping over-stressed agencies. We now turn to the question of what steps can be taken to better support these agencies.

III. HELPING BATTERED AGENCIES

The previous sections have provided a snapshot of what can happen in agencies, especially agencies of color, when issues of power and control, race and class, staff support, and training are inadequately addressed or not addressed at all. As a new program working in Marin City, MCFF learned how difficult it is to go into a community with a compromised service base and treat that service base as if it were fully functioning and ready to take on new challenges. MCFF staff found that Marin City agencies, like the families with whom they were working, needed a lot of practical and emotional support to overcome daunting conditions and begin to heal.

In this section, we suggest ways to help increase the capacity of agencies working in low-income and minority communities to create supportive environments, nurture healthy organizational and collaborative development, and prevent burnout at the management, supervisory, and staff levels. We begin with issues confronting individual agencies and expand the discussion, as appropriate, to the barriers to effective participation in collaborative initiatives.

Each agency and collaboration will face its own unique set of challenges. The recommendations that follow are intended as tools to help agencies, collaborations, and funders analyze their own particular situation and develop the most effective response(s). Some recommendations will be a good fit, others will not. We encourage using a guided, participatory process that will help agencies and others decide where the problems are and what needs to happen to enable agencies to successfully serve their clients.

Leveling the Field

Problem: Indigenous, community-based agencies usually are not in the power structure and do not have the resources to compete with larger, more mainstream agencies for funding.

Mainstream agencies applying for funding to serve low-income and minority communities tend to discount small indigenous agencies by not including them in the planning and decision-making process that will ultimately affect their community. Mainstream agencies have the infrastructure enabling them to produce well-written, well-researched, competitive proposals. Although these agencies typically use data from the community to demonstrate need, they often fail to consult or involve local agencies and the community until late in the process. Local agencies must then decide whether to accept decisions that have already been made or to remain uninvolved, knowing services will continue to be planned and delivered without their input.

Recommendation: Encourage funders to take concrete steps to facilitate change in the dynamics between mainstream agencies and indigenous, community-based agencies.

Funders can play a unique and invaluable role in persuading mainstream, traditional applicants to bring indigenous agencies into the "loop" by:

- setting priorities in the application guidelines for collaborative proposal submissions that encourage grassroots and mainstream agencies to partner with each other,

- requiring applicants to demonstrate full participation and equal decision-making among the partners, from the pre-proposal planning process on throughout the project,

- establishing funding priorities for providing training and technical assistance to indigenous agencies, enabling them to better compete for grants, and

- establishing more equity by ensuring that the way proposals are reviewed and weighted includes a point system and gives outside reviewers discretion to account for the imbalance between small and large agencies.

Creative public-private partnerships could also be developed. For example, government agencies could request funding from foundations to provide or support training for local agencies in how to write competitive proposals. If proven effective, these trainings could be done annually as one way to ensure a more level playing field for grassroots agencies.

Laying the Foundation

Problem: External and internal factors may compromise community-based agencies' ability to deliver the services they are funded to provide.

A variety of complex and interconnected factors can destabilize agencies working in low-income communities. Among them are:

- lack of powerful and well-positioned board members,

- unequal access to professional and technical resources,

- a legacy of negative relationships with partner agencies, based on racial stereotypes, misunderstanding, and poor communication,

- inadequate opportunities and resources to genuinely support and properly train staff, and

- staff burnout that prevents them from being more effective.

Recommendation: Funders can provide agencies with the resources to conduct a self-assessment.

While most community-based agencies engage in some type of ongoing self-assessment, organizational and staff assessments are rarely funded as a planning tool. Funders need to ensure that funding is available for that purpose, to improve the chances that the agency will succeed in the work for which it is being funded.

An organizational self-assessment should examine all aspects of agency functioning, including:

- organization purpose and planning, mission, vision and values statements, functional by-laws, and work plan,

- governance and leadership by the board,

- program planning, feedback mechanisms, and evaluation process,

- organizational structure, administrative leadership, supervisory staff, appropriate staffing and participation of staff in planning, adequate support staff, ongoing staff training, and technical assistance,

- funding, fundraising goals, resources for grant writing, and

- cultural competence that reflects the demographics of the community served.

Problem: Irrespective of any additional funding they may receive, agencies may not have adequate capacity to conduct a self-assessment or to address the issues uncovered in it.

Despite the expertise and self-knowledge agencies generally have, carrying out an informative self-assessment requires planning, skills, and perspective that may be beyond the capacity of already stressed agencies. Similarly, implementing changes identified in a self-assessment can prove problematic for agencies struggling to meet service demands. In these instances, it is important that they have access to appropriate technical assistance.

Recommendation: To maximize their investment, funders should provide community-based agencies with the resources to work with an organizational facilitator or consultant who can provide appropriate technical assistance.

Like the relationship that grows between a family advocate and his or her clients, successful partnering between a battered agency and an organizational facilitator or consultant hinges on several factors. Consultants should never be imposed on agencies by funders or others. The people who actually do the work, including the director of the community-based agency and its key staff, must participate in defining the issues they want help solving, deciding what technical assistance they want, identifying what abilities the consultant should possess, and selecting the facilitator or consultant who will provide assistance for them.

Consultants working with community-based programs in low-income and minority communities need to have specific skills and competencies. At a minimum, an organizational facilitator should be culturally competent and have the ability to:

- establish a respectful relationship with the agency that will produce a safe, open, and confidence-building environment,

- develop safe and confidential one-on-one relationships that enable agency staff to look openly and honestly at their own issues and at problems of the organization,

- transfer skills to staff rather than creating ongoing dependence on outside consultants,

- understand the dynamics of working in poor communities and what it means to be identified as an agency of color,

- accept that the culture of the population served by the agency in large part drives the way services are provided, and help the agency determine how it can deliver relevant services, and

- empathize with how difficult it can be for staff to balance expectations of what they hope to accomplish with the reality of the day-to-day difficulties facing their clients.

Problem: Funders' expectations that all agencies are ready and able to function collaboratively can set collaborations up for failure.

The common assumption that mainstream agencies and local agencies in low-income communities come to the table prepared to collaborate without first building bridges or mending fences is naive. Yet funders typically do not compensate agencies for the additional work required to participate in a collaborative, including the planning phase. As a result, many agencies — particularly smaller indigenous agencies that are already struggling financially — find themselves having to absorb the additional financial cost this work imposes. Unwarranted assumptions, expectations, and stereotypes that many funders, mainstream agencies, and organizational consultants hold about indigenous agencies in low-income minority communities can perpetuate or exacerbate existing organizational dysfunction, sometimes destabilizing even agencies that have been functioning fairly well.

Mainstream agencies tend not to understand and to devalue and marginalize local agencies whose cultural norms reflect the community they serve. Even organizational consultants, unaware of the level of battering experienced by these agencies, often try to provide traditional capacity building assistance without first assessing organizational wellness and identifying staff matters that need attention.

Recommendation: Funders should assess the impact that mandated collaboration has had on agencies and should provide adequate resources during the planning process for agencies to assess their readiness to function within a collaborative structure.

Each potential partner agency should:

- determine how being in a collaboration would help or hinder the agency,

- develop a realistic estimate of the costs of participating in the collaboration, including costs that will not be reimbursed in part or in full,

- assess whether the agency has the capacity to meet project demands throughout the life of the project (e.g., the extent to which the agency is prepared to participate in the many meetings typically required, whether staff meetings, case management, administrative, interorganizational, governance, or any other kind of meetings),

battered
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- assess what impact the project will have on the organization's mission, structure, and operations, and whether participation will advance the agency's long- and short-term interests,

- identify any unresolved problems with other potential partners that might impede collaboration,

- screen individual staff members for signs of frustration, stress, and potential burnout, and

- evaluate the cultural competency of agency staff.

Problem: Organizations that are required to partner or collaborate with other agencies to fulfill funding obligations may not know how to work together constructively.

Agencies applying for funds to create a collaborative effort typically exchange written agreements in the form of Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). These agreements detail how and when services will be provided and who will provide them. Very few potential partnering organizations, however, actually discuss, plan ahead, or agree about how they will solve tough problems or resolve differences. The lack of organizational assessment to identify potential areas of conflict and misunderstanding among partnering agencies can lead to problems serious enough to threaten the entire collaborative effort.

Recommendation: Agencies participating in a collaborative process need to agree about what to expect from each other and how specific issues will be handled and coordinated.

The initial planning period is a good time to think through what agencies should expect from each other. It is important that organizations in collaborations assess and articulate what each partner is bringing to the table, what each is risking, and what each is willing to let go of (e.g., turf, policy, resources). When conflicts arise, it is important to identify possible points of compromise. Interagency MOUs can include innovative ideas about how agencies will work through differences and can also include commitments, for example:

- to participate in a wellness assessment,

- to develop procedures for conflict resolution,

- to censor agencies not meeting their agreed-upon obligations or not performing as promised, and

- to join in all staff development and training provided for collaborating partners.

Learning to work together is a process. Agencies need to develop feedback loops so they can regularly check in with each other. As a group, they need to be clear about who is expected to do what, and as individual agencies, they must be clear with each other about what they cannot do (e.g., what is outside their mission). Minimally, agreement should be reached on how to handle the following questions:

- Who will supervise or coordinate the collaboration? Will that person be relieved of other duties?

- Whose authority is needed for redirecting resources and implementing the project and recommendations?

- Who will deal with interagency conflict?

- Who will deal with staffing needs?

- Who will do the scheduling?

The group developing program policies should include the staff expected to carry them out. The decision-making structure and process should be articulated in a written document that also includes a policy for conflict resolution. The particular process, whether consensus, majority rule, or some other, is less important than full agreement that it will be consistent, equitable, and clear (Walker et al., 1999). And each partner should consider the decision-making structure of the collaboration in terms of its own agency's practices.

Racism: Perceived, Internalized, and Institutionalized

Problem: Staff who work for agencies of color serving low-income communities often struggle in dealing with how they are perceived by others and may internalize stereotypes they hear about themselves.

When mainstream and local agencies need to interact, their relationship often begins with staff from each agency negatively evaluating the wisdom, skills, and competencies of the other agency's staff. These perceptions can generate tension over time, creating serious barriers to providing effective services:

- Local agencies resent the perception that they are incompetent. Agency directors or staff members of color may react to racially inappropriate behavior or language directed toward them or their clients with anger, defensiveness, or detachment.

- Being the object of bigoted and/or stereotyping attitudes, behaviors, and messages can cause considerable performance pressure and discomfort for staff of color, which can result in hostile, indirect, or infrequent communication on their part.

- Relationships often deteriorate to the point where one set of opinions is expressed in private and another in public. When things get to this point, agencies almost always respond to the bad feelings by finding subtle ways to distance themselves from each other or shut each other out of true communication.

Recommendation: Assess and develop cross-cultural competence of staff and board members from each of the collaborating agencies.

Cross-cultural training should address certain baseline issues and topics.

For all individuals participating in a collaboration, such training should help them:

- examine attitudes about working with people who are different from them, how those attitudes can undermine efforts to work collaboratively, and what insecurities commonly arise when working cross-racially and cross-culturally,

- learn to distinguish racist attitudes or behavior from what, instead, could be miscommunication or misunderstanding,

- develop assertive language and communication strategies for confronting inappropriate behavior in ways that others can hear, and

- learn through role-playing how to productively handle cultural conflict rather than pretending not to notice a culturally insensitive remark or aggressively counterattacking.

For staff or board members of color, such training should help them:

- learn constructive, self-affirming, and assertive ways to respond to problematic situations and behavior,

- learn to productively channel feelings of anger, powerlessness, and invisibility, and

⤏ become better equipped to function in two worlds while preserving their own cultural competency and integrity that might, at times, conflict with the expectations of mainstream agencies.

For white staff or board members, such training should help them:

⤏ understand how being part of the dominant culture and working in a mainstream agency yields certain privileges and advantages.

Problem: Agencies of color may resist being part of a larger service system that has not only historically viewed them negatively, but has also controlled and allocated the resources they need. Racially bigoted and classist behavior, attitudes, and stereotypes can be significant barriers to effective collaboration.

Like families that are unable to successfully negotiate an intimidating and alienating service system to get their needs met, agencies of color reacting to racism develop coping mechanisms, some protective, some self-destructive. Service-delivery resources in a given area may be obtained and controlled by a tight-knit group of mainstream agencies whose racist attitudes and stereotypes determine how they relate to agencies of color. The decision-making processes and institutional practices resulting from those negative perceptions pervade interagency staff relations in ways that create cultural and racial conflicts.

Class staffing differences can also prevent some agencies from being fully respected. For example, agencies that use peer workers may be less valued than those that employ licensed professionals. Agencies excluded from the social loop of the organizations that make the decisions ultimately lack access to the privilege and power held by those organizations.

Agencies that stereotype each other cannot truly collaborate. Mainstream agencies typically become defensive when told that their staff are not culturally competent to work with staff and clients of color, or that some of their practices seem racist. In response, agencies of color assume that such agencies truly are racist and close themselves off to any possibility of successful collaboration. As in the larger society, most agencies resist dealing with these difficult issues, letting them smolder under the surface. Tackling these subjects remains relatively taboo, in part because of fear that doing so would destroy or polarize the collaboration. Few models exist for dealing with these issues in a safe way.

Recommendation: Assess and address attitudes, beliefs, stereotypes, and cultural competence of individuals and of agencies participating in a collaboration. Consider using an organizational facilitator or other appropriate consultant to help each agency examine the environment in which it works and develop strategies to address institutionalized racism.

In a successful collaboration, bigoted assumptions and behavior are questioned and addressed on a regular and ongoing basis with everyone who sits at the table. Because internalized racism, stereotypes, and institutionalized racism are such powerful forces in relationships, we encourage funders to require that collaborating agencies examine their attitudes about race, culture, and class.

Among the environmental factors and stressors that should be examined at a systemic level are the working relationships an agency has with organizations in its immediate community, as well as with those outside the community. Among the factors to consider are:

⤏ unresolved history,

⤏ conflicting program philosophies,

⤏ unequal resources, and

⤏ cultural competence of agency staff.

The following questions should be addressed during the implementation phase of a collaborative effort:

+ Has a plan been developed that includes principles of cultural competence in all aspects of organizational strategic planning, and how will those principles be integrated within the overall collaboration?

+ Have key issues and approaches been identified to ensure cultural competence at each level of care within the system?

+ Do the collaboration's management structures (e.g., board, advisory committee, other policy-making and -influencing groups) reflect the cultural and linguistic demographics of the service area?

+ Do staffing patterns (from clerical through executive management) reflect the cultural and linguistic demographics of the service area?

+ Do staff (including support and professional) receive initial and ongoing cultural competence training?

+ Have performance evaluations and promotion opportunities been developed that reward cultural competence among all staff?

+ Have the unique needs of the population(s) within the community to be served been determined?

+ Have service modalities and models been identified that are appropriate and acceptable to the communities served?

Both staff and clients benefit when all partnering agencies are committed to developing cultural competence and the ability to work cross-racially. To that end, agency boards of directors must develop mission statements reflecting the priorities, policies, and values needed to support culturally competent work, including the commitment to train people at every level of the organization.

An organizational facilitator could advance this process for both agency staff and directors in the following ways:

+ provide individual and/or group sessions and workshops to help staff from mainstream agencies become more culturally competent and learn to work more effectively with people of color,

+ provide skill development training for agency directors to help them interact more effectively with people outside their cultural environment, and

+ help agency directors develop new skills to enhance their understanding about how healthy agencies function and to provide culturally competent services reflecting the culture(s) of the population(s) they serve.

The role funders play in shaping and guiding complex initiatives involving numerous and diverse partnering agencies and communities makes it equally important for funders to assess and address their own beliefs and attitudes related to race, culture, and class. Organizations of private funders, such as Hispanics in Philanthropy, Bay Area Blacks in Philanthropy, Asian Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy, and the national organization of Grantmakers for Children, Youth and Families are excellent resources for funders.

Staff Training and Development

Problem: Agencies often lack the resources or opportunities to provide staff training and development, which can lead to high rates of staff burnout and turnover. The lack of training and technical assistance prevents agencies in collaborative relationships from being able to truly participate. Most foundations do not earmark resources for this purpose.

Lacking the resources to provide staff training, directors of financially struggling agencies are forced to focus more on agency survival than staff survival. One result is agency staff who need help dealing with frustration,

anger, and a sense of powerlessness when they can't accomplish their goals because they lack the necessary resources or skills (David, 1999).

Using scarce resources for staff development and training rather than for direct services may be a difficult decision for a financially strapped agency, yet inadequate support for staff often dooms an organization to falling short of its goals. This condition is more common than not. Fully two-thirds of respondents from small community-based service agencies in one study had never received any kind of technical assistance (Walker et al., 1999). Of those, 35 percent reported a lack of internal resources for such support and 25 percent reported structural and process constraints to obtaining staff training and development. Other barriers included not being able to find appropriate consultants or relevant local training, travel distance to trainings, and the inability to identify what type of assistance was needed.

Recommendation: Funders should be encouraged to provide a structure and resources for technical assistance, staff development, and capacity building to build skills, prevent burnout, and afford opportunities for cross-training.

As new service delivery systems continue to emerge, the need for technical assistance and staff development to promote organizational wellness at every level becomes more important than ever (Karasoff, Blonsky, Perry, & Schear, 1996). One of the most valuable legacies a funder can leave a community is a structure and resources for local agencies to receive technical assistance, staff development, and capacity building. The effects of this support will remain long after the funding ends.

Training builds more competent staff and, in the process, raises their morale. We have found that the best outcomes result when an agency is committed to nurturing and supporting its staff and to being open to ongoing self-assessment and staff input. Heaney (1991) recommends that social support interventions should ensure training and work contexts that explicitly support implementation of newly acquired behaviors and knowledge. He also argues that personnel from all levels of the organization should be included to ensure reinforcement and support for change.

The presence or absence of institutional caregiving behavior influences the experiences and work of staff, who become more willing and able to pass on caregiving to clients when they feel cared for themselves (Kahn, 1993). This dynamic flows through and affects an entire agency. The executive director who feels supported by the board of directors has more time for the supervisors who, in turn, can focus on helping the agency staff who, with the support and empathy of their supervisor, can focus their energy on clients.

When outside consultants are hired to provide training, it is important to select these resource people thoughtfully. Because so many technical assistance consultants are white, reliance on mainstream consultants perpetuates a pattern of hiring that has gone largely unexamined (Stone & Butler, 2000).

We recommend the creation of ongoing opportunities for staff training and development in skills development and burnout prevention.

Skills development. Agencies must decide what core skills they want staff to have, assess every staff member for those skills, and ensure that every staff member receives the training needed for them to develop those skills to the level of competency desired.

Staff need opportunities for regular training to upgrade their skills and practice new ones, learn about the current state of thinking in their field, be up-to-date on new laws that affect their work, and share their own experiences with other colleagues.

Management and technical assistance are especially important in building capacity and an internal infrastructure for a collaborative group. One study found that collaborations prefer highly personal, individualized professional development methods, such as peer-to-peer learning and direct technical assistance from a consultant (Walker et al., 1999). Wherever possible, the use of cross-training and job shadowing provides excellent hands-on opportunities for staff to experience different perspectives. This type of assistance is helpful in the following areas (Ibid., p. 32):

- ✈ providing opportunities to build on the experience of others through cross-training within the collaboration,

- ✈ training staff to accept new roles and responsibilities and build specific skills,

- ✈ negotiating roles and responsibilities for collaborative partners, and

- ✈ facilitating special meetings and retreats.

Staff development and training should ideally focus on three different competency areas: attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Attitudes that are important for social service staff to possess include having a nonjudgmental, empathetic approach to working with individuals and families; working with families in a culturally competent fashion; and being able to reflect and learn from experiences. Knowledge that social service staff members need includes how individual families develop in their social context; how gender, race, and age affect how those factors influence development; and how behavior in a given community is affected by the cultural norms within that community. Skills that are important to develop include building trust and a mutually respectful relationship with individuals and families; enlisting families as partners in their own progress; and modeling effective behaviors, communication, and other personal interactions.

Burnout. While the relationship between caregiving staff (e.g., family advocates, social workers) and their clients is central to helping clients grow and heal, the need to be emotionally, physically, and intellectually accessible to clients can exact a high toll on caregivers. The absence of an agencywide commitment to witness, support, and safeguard their work experience places staff caregivers at risk of experiencing burnout and withdrawing from their work emotionally and physically (Kahn, 1993).

Various interventions prevent burnout and allow staff caregivers to feel cared for in the context of their work roles and replenish the "emotional supplies" used in caregiving tasks (Kahn, 1993, p. 561), including:

- ✈ helping staff learn to detach,

- ✈ developing peer support groups,

- ✈ providing supervision that offers support and learning opportunities, and

- ✈ designating days when staff members have no contact with clients.

Staff members need to be regularly acknowledged for their work with difficult populations and particularly challenging cases. Bringing in an outside consultant or facilitator to provide regular confidential sessions with staff in individual or group sessions without management present provides opportunities for staff to express and process feelings, problem solve, and support each other. "Such institutional caregiving is crucial for caregivers, whose own dependency needs are triggered and heightened by working with dependent others and who need to feel they can wade into seas of client emotions while remaining securely fastened to the immovable landmarks of their organizations" (Kahn, 1993, p. 561).

The agency also needs to protect its investment in staff training and development by supporting staff who are applying newly acquired skills in the workplace (Gooding, 1996). For training to be beneficial, the opportunity to operationalize what is learned needs to be supported within and throughout the organization (Heaney, 1991).

Burnout should be anticipated, with plans in place to address it. An agency wanting to address the issues presented in this document should adopt a policy making one-on-one counseling and other support available for staff who appear to be experiencing burnout.

Evaluation

Problem: For evaluation purposes, agencies are often required to collect data that either do not get fed back to them or are not helpful to their work.

For an individual agency or a collaboration, a requirement to collect, enter, and transmit data can be more of a burden than a means to assess and improve service delivery. Ideally, data should provide information that enables agencies to determine if they are being effective and, if not, how to improve. Evaluation can be a useful tool to establish and document accountability. In a collaborative group, evaluation can provide structure relating to the responsibilities each partner has within the project and the terms under which they agree to meet them (Walker et al., 1999). But communities that are not brought into the process can feel ambivalent, as well as threatened, by evaluation reports that have the power to impact relationships, reputation, funding, and sometimes policy (Stone & Butler, 2000). Further, evaluations do not usually deal with — or do not deal well with — race, power, and historical context. The absence of such information precludes analytic depth and impedes understanding about why relationships within the community or the collaboration occur as they do. Its absence also makes it virtually impossible to distinguish among outcomes that might be specific to the project versus those that have broader implications for other communities. Unfortunately, funders usually do not require a complex analysis, even though communities would appreciate the higher level of accountability and understanding that would come from such an evaluation (Stone & Butler, 2000).

Recommendation: Encourage a participatory evaluation process that allows community-based agencies and the community to play greater roles in determining goals and measures of progress. Before evaluation plans are finalized, include agency staff in identifying project outcomes and how they will be measured. Institutionalize the use of evaluation feedback at all levels of an agency.

Evaluators can help define and direct the efforts both of individual agencies and of collaborations, and to ask what the community wants to accomplish. Evaluators should work with agencies and the community to design achievable outcomes and an evaluation strategy. Evaluations should be planned in a participatory process that includes perspective and input from those who provide and receive services. Outcomes are more likely to be achieved when they build on individual, organizational, and community assets and, in the case of collaborative groups, when they are formed with the participation of all partners (Walker et al., 1999). In developing evaluation plans, the evaluator, together with the agency (or agencies) and the community, must identify what data are worth collecting because it would be useful for the evaluation process and for the agency, would benefit clients and services, and could be used to educate staff. In deciding what data to collect, key questions are:

- What is the purpose of the data?
- Who is it intended to help?
- Will staff receive feedback on their work from evaluation findings?

The usefulness of data often remains abstract unless agencies spend time talking about lessons that have been learned from data they have already collected and incorporating those lessons into the following year's program plan. A participatory evaluation model can provide feedback to supervisors and line workers about their work.

Like the organizational facilitator described above, evaluators need a variety of abilities (Stone & Butler, 2000, p. 21-23). They need to:

- establish trust,

- possess both technical writing and people skills,

- have credibility with the research and funding communities,

- be culturally competent about the community with which they are working, and

- be able to manage the power of the research being conducted so that it does not work against the interests of the community.

Funders can ease agencies' reporting burden by working with agency staff, agency clients, and the evaluator to identify what data should be collected to benefit both the agency (or agencies) and the evaluation. For example, the funder, evaluator, and agency staff, together, could compare and integrate the questions and data needs specific to the funder's project with those that the agency may already be addressing for other funders. At a different level, funders should begin discussing among themselves ways in which to coordinate their data needs (e.g., identify common data elements and reporting standards) when they find themselves funding the same community or agencies.

Supervision

Problem: Many agencies do not have a structure in place to provide staff with the support they need to engage in complex case and system planning.

Ideally, supervision would be designed to support the individual worker. In reality, supervisors working in nonprofit organizations typically wear more than one hat and have little time to provide the type of supervision that can contribute to the well-being of all staff. In community-based organizations lacking financial resources, supportive staff supervision may be less valued than managing staff (e.g., overseeing schedules, being sure paperwork is up-to-date). Over time, workers who do not receive the support they need for processing the difficult work they do may not be able to sustain the energy and support that clients need.

Recommendation: Agencies should train supervisory staff in reflective supervision.

We strongly believe there is a need to develop a reflective supervisory role, especially in battered agencies. Staff who perform challenging and emotionally draining work with families need opportunities to talk about the issues that come up for them. Reflective supervision offers those opportunities. It also provides the supervisor with an opportunity to teach staff new techniques and interventions that will benefit both clients and staff.

Reflective supervision was used to actively engage MCFF family advocates in reflecting, dialoguing, problem solving, and making decisions about strategies and cases. In this approach, the supervisor's role is not manager and authority but, rather, consultant and facilitator (Bremond et al., 2000). "The key to effective reflective supervision is the same as the key to effective home advocacy work: the establishment of a trusting, nurturing relationship through which honest and productive communication can occur. In both relationships — that between supervisor and family advocate and that between family advocate and client — what needs to be forged is a strong therapeutic alliance, which becomes the foundation for change, support, and growth" (Benard & Quiett, 2002, p. 14).

The supervisor and frontline staff member, together, sort out the complex issues that arise in working with individuals or families in high-stress circumstances. Together, they identify and process the emotional issues that might come up for and impede the effectiveness of the worker. They also identify difficult case issues,

appropriate intervention strategies, and reasonable next steps for the worker to take. Throughout this process, the supervisor intentionally models the same kind of relationships and process that the workers would strive to have with their clients and collaborators. In the process of talking through their feelings with the supervisor, discussing their concerns, and jointly solving problems, the workers experience — and see modeled — the same supportive process they would use with their clients and colleagues. This process has proven quite effective in keeping small problems from escalating into big ones.

Reflective supervision provides an extensive base of support for practitioners working with families (Jones-Harding, 1997, p. 16) by providing:

- a safe time and place in which they can candidly discuss the clients with whom they are working from both objective and subjective points of view,

- nonjudgmental and supportive feedback about their work,

- validation from a supervisor who, rather than simply monitoring their performance, strives to understand what staff experience in working with their client families,

- opportunities to meet with other colleagues to discuss work challenges and share strategies for meeting the needs of their clients and their own needs,

- the opportunity to develop an increased sense of competency through didactic and experiential training, and

- a supervisor who is attuned to staff experiences that are particularly exhausting physically or mentally and that can lead to feeling burned out.

Kahn (1993) suggests building stronger linkages between agency administrators and those actually providing the services because connections between them have traditionally been fragmented. To offset such fragmentation, agency staff at all levels must find ways to examine their dysfunctional interactions and work together to create networks of support. "This will occur not simply by having administrators perform more caregiving acts, but by training all organizational members to examine caregiving patterns in relation to one another. Members must learn to create portraits of organizational caregiving that show the overall effects of their acts of giving and withholding care on their work and relationships" (p. 562), and share with others their personal experiences of being given or denied care within their roles.

Some believe that assessing the total program environment in which helping clients occurs is as important as assessing individual client-worker relationships. Gowdy and Freeman (1993) suggest periodic program supervision to ensure that the effectiveness of case-level work is supported and enhanced at the agency level. Supervision needs to consider not just clients but also context. Often, staff members are more confused about working with the larger service system than about working with their clients; these feelings and issues should be addressed.

Because supervision is so seriously underfunded and many supervisors may not be able to provide the time required for reflective supervision, some agencies bring in outside people to provide that objective or unencumbered support for staff.

Organizational Capacity Building

Problem: Traditional strategic planning methods are not appropriate for battered agencies.

Strategic planning has been used as a successful private sector management technique, but it is a difficult process to undertake with agencies that have lost confidence in themselves. A major problem emerges when an agency has disintegrated to such a degree that it loses faith in its ability to function and calls in a management consultant in the belief that external solutions are its only hope.

Recommendation: Prepare the agency to begin a strategic planning process through self-assessment and team-building.

Building organizational capacity means increasing the agency's ability to function, including its ability to set and meet goals, assess its needs, and develop a strategy to meet those needs, create a vision, and gain access to the necessary resources for attaining it. We have argued that battered agencies are not able to benefit from traditional capacity-building approaches without first assessing the organizational damage that has developed over the years. Once that assessment has been done, steps can be taken to provide appropriate technical assistance and training.

Before an agency can become proactive in managing its own environment through strategic planning, it needs help:

+ regaining confidence in its own strengths and abilities,

+ reinforcing staff competence, and

+ restoring internal morale so that it can again function effectively and as a unit (Posey et al., 1987).

The ideal facilitator or consultant will bring to this setting some carefully thought-out organizational development interventions to help agency staff become open to change and ready for strategic planning. Goals of this work should include:

+ getting agency directors and staff members to believe that they are capable of taking charge of their agency's destiny if they choose, and that it must be done on their own initiative and action, not that of others,

+ encouraging agency staff to understand how their responses to stress have been destructive and counterproductive, and

+ reassuring staff that their feelings of distress and uncertainty can be overcome.

IV. CONCLUSION

We have found that many local service agencies working in impoverished neighborhoods are battered. Battered agencies, like traumatized families, can be quite resilient and, even during the most difficult times, they have assets and strengths to use as building blocks. We have suggested several ways to build on these assets and strengths, including:

+ assessing organizational and staff wellness,

+ encouraging funders to earmark resources to hire an organizational facilitator or consultant who can nurture the development of a healthy organization,

+ deciding early in the planning phase of collaborations what partner agencies should expect from each other and putting it in writing,

+ assessing and developing cultural competence,

+ urging funders to provide resources for staff to build skills, prevent burnout, increase cultural competence, and afford opportunities for cross training,

+ training supervisory staff in reflective supervision so that frontline staff can actively participate in problem solving and making decisions about their cases,

- → encouraging a participatory evaluation process that involves community-based agencies in making decisions about their program goals and measures of progress, and

- → preparing a battered agency to start a strategic planning process through self-assessment and team building.

In working with agencies we describe as battered, we have seen firsthand the harm that results when overworked, resource-deprived, and economically vulnerable community-based agencies in low-income and minority communities try to comply with extreme demands and expectations. As a result of perceived and real pressure, agency morale declines, causing stress throughout the organization. Problematic organizational and staff behavior results, which, in turn, undermines the confidence of agency staff, of other involved agencies, and of funders that the agency will successfully conduct its work. Once agencies reach this point, continuing to approach business as usual is detrimental to the well-being of the organization and its effectiveness in the community.

We have also suggested that funders need to function more as partners than they currently do. If funders were more involved in the process of collaboration, they might be better able to create the supportive environment that is necessary if the organizations and communities in which they invest are to experience greater success, let alone if they are to thrive.

Battered agencies need special assistance because of the unique pressures they face. They also need to be recognized as vital community voices, with valuable experience, knowledge, and skills. This document provides guidance in how some of them might be revitalized so that they, in turn, can help restore their communities.

APPENDIX

Practical and emotional supports are necessary for families and agencies to begin overcoming daunting conditions.

FAMILIES	COMMUNITY AGENCIES
Families struggle with financial uncertainty, homelessness, substance abuse, parenting issues, family relationships, lack of skills, and unemployment.	Agencies are overwhelmed by funding uncertainty, burnout, anger, isolation, and lack of training and resources for staff development
Families encounter many daunting challenges while trying to transition from dependency to self-sufficiency.	Agencies struggle with year-to-year funding cycles that increase instability and create anxiety about organizational security.
Families who are living on woefully inadequate public assistance or who are among the working poor lack resources to meet their children's social and educational needs.	Organizations typically have just enough resources to provide a basic service but not enough to create an infrastructure that adequately supports staff in providing quality services for challenging populations.

Those most affected by potential changes are rarely consulted or involved in the decision-making process. Even when brought into the planning process, they feel their ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experience are disregarded.

FAMILIES	COMMUNITY AGENCIES
Low-income families often lack the social skills and confidence to advocate for themselves and are often devalued by the systems with which they must interact.	Large mainstream agencies often develop funding proposals using data from low-income communities to demonstrate need, but fail to consult local agencies or the community until late in the process. Agencies in communities of color are not part of the information loop or power structure.

Opportunities for education and training or re-training are limited.

FAMILIES	COMMUNITY AGENCIES
Parents often find it difficult to obtain and maintain adequate childcare and other vital supports that enable them to participate in training or other educational opportunities.	Agencies lack funding to provide the type and variety of training needed if staff are to know about and utilize best practices in the field.

Rigid funding requirements can impede effectiveness.	
FAMILIES	COMMUNITY AGENCIES
Welfare agencies may interpret requirements in ways that adversely affect families (e.g., an inadequate transportation allowance can prevent a client from getting to appointments or training, which can result in a loss of benefits)	Funders' lack of flexibility can prevent programs from being able to modify their original program design to better respond to client needs.

Repeated failure can generate pessimism and negativity.	
FAMILIES	COMMUNITY AGENCIES
Family members who have experienced years of marginalization have trouble developing hope that things can change in their lives or for their children.	The intensity of working in low-income communities can create defeatist attitudes among program staff, especially when they see few signs of success or progress.

Facilitators or advocates can help agencies and families negotiate complex systems and relationships.	
FAMILIES	COMMUNITY AGENCIES
Family advocates can help families acquire resources to meet basic survival needs, help them recognize and draw on their own resources, provide supportive counseling, and help families develop problem-solving skills.	Organizational facilitators can help agencies with self-assessment, conflict resolution, communication, integration of goals and principles into concrete activities, and, in the process, help restore staff confidence in their ability to function as an agency.

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