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Empowering Families in Child Protection Cases: An Implementation Evaluation of Hawai'i's 'Ohana Conferencing Program

PERMANENCY PLANNING FOR CHILDREN DEPARTMENT



**NATIONAL COUNCIL OF
JUVENILE AND FAMILY COURT JUDGES**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The concept of family group conferencing (FGC) has captured the interest of law and policy makers searching for better ways of responding to the care and protection of abused and neglected children. A family group conference is a formal meeting where members of a child's immediate family come together with extended kin and members of the child's community to develop a comprehensive plan to keep the child safe. The capacity of FGC to be inclusive and attentive to the cultural context of families is a particularly commendable strength of the approach. FGC programs are based on a set of core philosophical assumptions and practice expectations about how the child welfare system responds to children and families in crisis and how professionals work with individual families. It is generally believed by advocates of FGC models, that if they change how the system responds to and works with children and families, they can change the experience of those families in the system, they can change the outcomes achieved through the system, and they can build individual, family, and community capacity to take responsibility for the care and safety of children.

Over the last decade, FGC programs have proliferated across the country and around the globe. FGC programs are operating in Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden, the Philippines, Israel, South Africa, and in more than 150 communities across the U.S.,¹ as tools to aid in reaching better decisions and accessing better services which have a greater chance of success. The breadth, scope, and purpose of FGC programs also broadened beyond a diversionary for families involved in the child welfare system. New variations of the model have evolved, translating core elements of FGC into similar, but somewhat different, practice models. Because FGC, by nature, is a resource and time-intensive process, new practice models are attempting to find processes that apply the conference model, but do so in a way that is less time and resource intensive. And, one could argue, perhaps less distinct from traditional child welfare agency practice. As the practice of FGC evolves, and as programs in their various forms proliferate, concerns are beginning to be raised about "model drift."² Questions are being asked about whether new permutations on the FGC model are moving too far away from the original model and its core values, and whether there are a set of critical features that serve as the defining characteristics of FGC models – implying that those models that do not reflect these critical features in policy and practice are not, in actuality, FGC programs. That is not to say that these programs are of less value, but that the absence of critical features of the FGC construct and program theory make them qualitatively different.

The rapid adoption of the FGC innovation has also led to concerns that new programs may be implemented without a proper assessment of need, a full exploration of whether the FGC model addresses the identified need, and a full understanding of the core philosophies, practices, and expected outcomes of the model. As the field continues to grow and programs continue to expand, jurisdictions are working hard to institutionalize programs, secure additional resources, and engender long-term support. One might argue, then, that it will become increasingly important to understand the importance of program theory (i.e., the core philosophical assumptions and practice expectations that underlie the FGC model), and to understand and articulate how the individual program components function as an integrated, cohesive whole.

¹ American Humane Association (2003).

² For a discussion of model drift and the processes and challenges of diffusing innovative policies and practices see Rogers, E.M. (1995). *Diffusion of Innovations. Fourth Edition*. The Free Press: New York.

Thus, this evaluation of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program examined the degree to which program theory is realized in program policies and practices.

As a general framework, this evaluation also applied the theory of social capital to its examination of the functioning of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program. Social capital and its associated ideas, such as community capacity-building, has received considerable recent attention in academic, public policy, and public interest debates. Social capital refers to the norms of trust, reciprocity and citizen participation. The basic tenets of social capital theory are that one's family and friends constitute an important asset, "one that can be called upon in crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, or leveraged ..."³ and that individuals and communities with a rich stock of social networks (familial and institutional) will be in a stronger position to confront vulnerabilities. Thus, social capital provides a much needed framework for responding to people who are disadvantaged and socially marginalized. Social capital provides ways of responding to families in need that emphasizes the building of community and constructing bridges and connections across society as a long-term response. Children and families in need of support are viewed as the responsibility of the whole community, with whom professionals, systems, and those citizens not experiencing difficulties should be engaging in collaborative partnerships with to support and rehabilitate families. Social capital is an important entity in sustaining collaborative effort aimed at addressing the needs of children and families, as it connotes an acceptance of the basic values upon which community-building is based. The theory of social capital is consistent with the program theory of the family group conferencing model. This evaluation explores the ability of 'Ohana Conferencing to facilitate the development of social capital.

This *Technical Assistance Bulletin* presents results from a research study designed to document how Hawai'i's family group conferencing model, the 'Ohana Conferencing Program, has been implemented and the benefits it has provided to children, families, and communities involved in child abuse and neglect cases in Hawai'i. This study included an examination of the philosophy behind family group conferencing models in general, the 'Ohana Conferencing model specifically, and how that model differs from other family group conferencing program models. The data generated regarding 'Ohana Conferencing Program implementation has been collected from key stakeholder interviews, conference participant feedback surveys, 'Ohana Conferencing program materials and databases, research staff site visits completed in 2002 and 2003, numerous discussions with program staff, and a survey of FGC specialists regarding the operation of other FGC programs or hybrids around the country.

The goal of this *Bulletin* is to paint a comprehensive picture of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program's implementation and functioning and, to that end, the information is representative of the varied experiences of family members, systems' professionals, and key program stakeholders. There are, however, limitations to the study. Because of time and funding constraints, as well as transitions in key administrative positions making access to data problematic within the grant period, this evaluation does not compare outcomes associated with 'Ohana-conferenced cases to outcomes associated with a similar control group of non-conferenced cases. Despite this limitation, the hope is that the information provided in this *Bulletin* serves a more general purpose – that is to identify and describe policies and practices that have led to specific process and outcome results, and, in so doing, to inform the nation about an example of a distinct and unique FGC model, the 'Ohana Conferencing Program, a major initiative of the Hawai'i Model Court (see next section). To achieve these aims, this

³ Woolcock, M. (2001). The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, Vol. 2(1), p. 12.

evaluation will closely examine the ‘Ohana program theory (i.e., its core philosophical assumptions and practice expectations), how the integrity of the program theory is supported through an organizational plan, how that program theory is realized in practice, and whether its program goals have been achieved.

The National Model Courts Project

One of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), Permanency Planning for Children Department’s (PPCD) many initiatives is the nationally recognized Child Victims Act Model Courts Project (VAMC), funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. This “Model Courts” project involves a total of 25 Model Courts, representing urban, rural, and tribal jurisdictions.⁴ Each of these jurisdictions is engaged in systems’ change efforts and is working collaboratively with social service agencies and other system professionals to achieve improvement goals. The VAMC Project seeks to improve court processing of child abuse and neglect cases by producing replicable innovations in Model Courts. Working closely with the PPCD and with each other, and drawing on the best practice principles of the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*⁵ and *ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY GUIDELINES*,⁶ the Model Courts are continually assessing their child abuse and neglect case processing, focusing on barriers to timely permanency, developing and instituting plans for court improvement, and working collaboratively to effect systems’ change. Each of the Model Courts is committed to taking a “hard look” at how its court process is working in everyday practice; how well the court is meeting federal and statutory requirements; how well social service agencies are meeting clients’ needs; and how well the child protection system as a whole is meeting the needs of the children and families it serves.

It is important to underscore the meaning of the term “model” within the VAMC Project. The use of the term “model” is not meant to imply that the Model Courts have achieved ideal practice or created perfect systems. Rather, the Model Courts serve as *models for facilitating systems change*. Each court engages in self-assessment and chooses jurisdiction-specific goals to improve its practice in child abuse and neglect cases. Each is using unique, individualized methods of collaboration with related child welfare agencies and community groups. Each Model Court is a source of untold information about how to begin, engage, and institutionalize needed systems’ change.⁷

The Honolulu Model Court

The Hawai’i Family Court is a Unified Family Court handling all types of family related matters, including abuse of family and household members, divorce, paternity, restraining orders

⁴ The 25 courts currently participating in the NCJFCJ national VAMC Project include juvenile and family courts from Alexandria, Virginia; Buffalo, New York; Charlotte, North Carolina; Chicago, Illinois; Cincinnati, Ohio; Des Moines, Iowa; El Paso, Texas; Honolulu, Hawai’i; Indianapolis, Indiana; Los Angeles, California; Louisville, Kentucky; Miami, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; New Orleans, Louisiana; New York City, New York; Newark, New Jersey; Omaha, Nebraska; Portland, Oregon; Reno, Nevada; Salt Lake City, Utah; San Jose, California; Toledo, Ohio; Tucson, Arizona; Washington, District of Columbia; and the Tribal Court in Zuni, New Mexico.

⁵ *RESOURCE GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse & Neglect Cases* (1995). National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, Nevada.

⁶ *ADOPTION AND PERMANENCY GUIDELINES: Improving Court Practice in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases* (2000). National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, Nevada.

⁷ For more information about the VAMC Project and the systems’ change reform efforts of the specific Model Courts, see *Child Victims Act Model Court Status Report- 1999, 2000, 2001* available from the Permanency Planning for Children Department of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV. Tel: (775) 327-5300 or www.pppncjfcj.org.

between family members, mental health commitments, private adoptions, juvenile delinquency, and child abuse and neglect. The Juvenile Division of the Family Court consists of four District Court family judges who are assigned to the Division for an average term of two years. The Juvenile Division is responsible for all cases involving juvenile delinquency and child abuse and neglect. The Family Court in Honolulu has been active with the PPCD and the NCJFCJ for many years. Beginning in July 1995, the court participated in the PPCD's Diversion Model Court Project,⁸ and became a VAMC Project Model Court in November 1997.

Hawai'i's 'Ohana Conferencing Program was originally one of four demonstration programs participating in the Diversion Project. Each "diversion court" [Honolulu, Hawai'i; Cincinnati, Ohio; Louisville, Kentucky; and San Jose (Santa Clara County), California] was asked to partner with local child protective service agencies and other community resources to find safe methods for diverting children at risk of abuse and neglect from long-term, out-of-home care. Sites were selected for participation based on the following criteria:⁹

- The existence of a cooperative partnership among the court, the child protective services agency, and the community;
- The availability of court, child protective services, and community resources to facilitate participation in the diversion process;
- The existence of state statutes and court rules to support court involvement in the diversion process;
- A commitment from the court, prosecuting attorney, advocates for children, and parents to be full partners in the diversion process; and
- A willingness by the court to serve as a model for additional jurisdictions interested in replicating the diversion process.

A multi-disciplinary team of court personnel, agency professionals, and community leaders in each Diversion Project site was convened to design partnerships to divert families into community-based services. Diversion Project sites were provided with training and site visits to other jurisdictions in order to examine established diversion programs and inform their own project development. As some of the Honolulu team members had already received training on the New Zealand model of family group conferencing, Hawai'i's Diversion Project chose to focus on developing its own family group conferencing model – 'Ohana Conferencing. Before being designated a VAMC Project Model Court in November 1997, the Honolulu Family Court was an "Observer Court," working with the other Model Courts on implementing improved court practice in child abuse and neglect cases following the principles of the *RESOURCE GUIDELINES*.¹⁰

⁸ The Diversion Model Court Project brought together four communities, led by juvenile and family court judges, to work collaboratively with other systems' professionals to develop community based plans to safely divert families from unnecessary court involvement and long-term foster care while addressing the needs of their families. Identified directions for change were: Using community alternatives that address the complexity of family strengths to safely divert families from traditional child protective services; designing child protective services to be more responsive to the variety of families' and communities' needs; developing new partnerships between local communities and state agencies for the protection of children; and emphasizing court oversight of these efforts so that all members of child welfare, social services and justice systems are responsible for the outcomes. Support from the NCJFCJ through its Diversion Project and from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation made this initiative possible. For more information see: National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. (1998). *Diversion Project Matrix: A Report from Four Sites Examining the Court's Role in Diverting Families from Traditional Child Welfare Services into Community-Based Programs*. NCJFCJ, Reno, NV.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Supra* note 5.

Family Group Conferencing in the Hawai'ian Context

A collaborative initiative of the Family Court, the Department of Human Services (DHS), and the Wai'anae community on the island of O'ahu, family group conferencing began as a pilot program in Hawai'i in July 1996. Effective Planning and Innovative Communication (EPIC), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, facilitates all 'Ohana conferences and trainings. The stated goals of Hawai'i's family group conferencing program, 'Ohana Conferencing, are:

- To help DHS/Child Protective Services (CPS) and families to reach an agreement that will keep the child safe with as little uprooting of, and trauma to, the child as possible;
- To partner family, community, and DHS to strengthen the protection and safety of children;
- To enhance the decision-making process among families, community service providers, and legal representatives for parents and children;
- To increase communication;
- To build family and community capacity for problem-solving and child safety;
- To develop a support team to keep children safe;
- To support family reunification, or finding safe permanent homes for children; and
- To increase the involvement of parents and families in the decision-making process.

'Ohana Implementation Evaluation Report

The research presented in this *Technical Assistance Bulletin* has been designed with the goal of providing information to 'Ohana program administrators to strengthen family group conferencing in Hawai'i, as well as contributing to the national dialogue about, and implementation of, family group conferencing models across the country. The primary objective of this research project was to study in-depth the program design, policies, and implementation of a nationally recognized family group conferencing program – 'Ohana Conferencing.¹¹ The research sought to examine the nature and functioning of the Honolulu Model Court's 'Ohana Conferencing Program, and the extent to which such an intervention assists agency and court efforts to protect children and preserve families. It is hoped that the results of this evaluation will not only inform the specific research site, but also courts and agencies around the country about how best to design and implement their own FGC program. The specific goals of the evaluation are as follows:

- Identify and describe the philosophical assumptions and key elements of 'Ohana Conferencing, highlighting unique features of this model as well as those elements in common with other FGC models [See Chapters 3, 4, and 5];
- Determine the degree to which 'Ohana Conferencing facilitates significant family and community-member involvement in planning and intervention [See Chapters 4 and 6];
- Assess the degree to which 'Ohana Conferencing is achieving the goals set for court and system improvement [See Chapter 6]; and
- Describe the importance and impact of the 'Ohana Conference intervention from the perspective of families and system participants, as well as the community [See Chapter 6].

A formative evaluation of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program was conducted by SMS Research and Marketing Services, Inc. between January 1, 1998 and March 31, 1999. A formal report was submitted to EPIC and the Department of Human Services, State of Hawaii, in October 1999.¹² The SMS formative evaluation focused on the development and implementation of 'Ohana

¹¹ Arlynnna Howell Livingston, Project Director, EPIC, was presented with a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner's Award at the 13th National Conference on Child Abuse and Neglect, April, 2001, for the development and implementation of 'Ohana Conferencing in Hawai'i.

¹² *Program Evaluation: 'Ohana Conferencing*. SMS Research and Marketing Services, Inc., Honolulu, Hawai'i, October 1999.

Conferencing during the study period, participant satisfaction, and the impacts of ‘Ohana Conferencing on conference outcomes and case level variables. The SMS evaluation findings, which included information from six data sources,¹³ will be incorporated in the current report where relevant. The evaluation conducted by the PPCD,¹⁴ and presented in this *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, both builds upon and extends this previous evaluation research.

Because an implementation evaluation focuses on whether program features are true to the program’s theory, as well as whether program elements as originally envisioned are adhered to in practice, it is important to understand the core theoretical tenets of a program and how those underlying philosophies are intended to be realized. Chapter 2 presents the evaluation methodologies. Chapter 3 sets the theoretical and programmatic context for the evaluation of ‘Ohana Conferencing by outlining FGC as a general model of practice, and the core philosophies and program elements that define FGC models are presented. Given the proliferation of FGC programs around the globe, and the diffusion of core FGC principles and practices to other types of FGC models, Chapter 3 also includes a brief discussion of some evolving models that have grown out of the original FGC model. Distinctions between FGC models will be further addressed in Chapter 6 as part of the presentation of the implementation evaluation results.

Chapters 4 and 5 provide an overview of FGC in the Hawai’ian context. Chapter 4 outlines the ‘Ohana Conferencing Model in some detail, outlining the critical program elements and features. Special attention is paid to the degree to which these elements and features reflect the underlying philosophies and programmatic elements of FGC as a general model. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the organizational structure of EPIC, including governance, administration, staffing and training components. Again, attention is paid to the degree to which these organizational elements support the integrity of the model and the program.

Chapter 6 presents the implementation results. Results address whether core ‘Ohana program features are realized in current practice, the unique aspects of program features in comparison to other programs around the country, and whether or not the overall goals of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program have been met. Through an evaluation of specific program elements, the overall integrity of the program model is evaluated. That is, does the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program appropriately incorporate and practice the core philosophical and programmatic tenants of FGC? To provide some national context for an examination of core program features, findings related to the ‘Ohana model are also presented in relation to other FGC models around the country. Chapter 6 concludes with recommendations for program enhancement and a discussion of the implications of this evaluation for future work, both locally within the Hawai’ian context and nationally.

¹³ Past ‘Ohana evaluations used the following six data sources: *Participant Observation*: SMS staff observed six ‘Ohana Conferences; *Key Informant Interviews*: SMS staff interviewed judges, social workers, and CPS supervisors during family discussion time in conferences or at some other scheduled time; *Focus Groups*: SMS conducted four focus groups with social workers (total of 30 participants) who had used Conferencing in their cases; *Surveys*: Data were compiled from survey forms filled out by participants in trainings (for social workers and potential facilitators) and actual conferences (includes family members and social workers); *Analysis of Case Plans*: ‘Ohana Conference Agreement and Family Service Plans were analyzed for content; and *Comparison Sample Analyses*: The impact of ‘Ohana Conferencing on case outcomes was examined on 70 cases (41 were cases that had received ‘Ohana Conferencing and 29 were cases that had not been through the Conferencing process).

¹⁴ This evaluation was funded by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare, with additional support for report publication and dissemination provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

CHAPTER 2

'OHANA CONFERENCING PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION METHODS

This evaluation, which began in October 2001 with funding from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare,¹⁵ considers the effectiveness of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program's implementation and associated process and outcome results. The primary objective of this research project was to study in-depth the program design, policies and implementation of a nationally recognized family group conferencing (FGC) program, 'Ohana Conferencing.¹⁶ To this end, the research includes both a process and outcome evaluation which examines the program's theory (i.e., core values and philosophies) and whether that theory is reflected in practice; highlights unique features of the 'Ohana Conferencing model as well as those elements in common with other FGC models; assesses the degree to which 'Ohana Conferencing is achieving intended program goals; and describes the extent to which the 'Ohana Conferencing Program assists court and agency efforts to protect children and safely preserve families.

A wide range of data sources were used to inform this evaluation. This included data available in existing databases supplied by EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing (including participant feedback forms), previous evaluation findings, and new research data gathered by the PPCD research team. Each of these data sources are briefly described below.¹⁷

- **'Ohana Program Materials, Policies, and Training Manuals** were reviewed for content by PPCD project staff.
- **Interviews** designed by PPCD research staff were used to elicit responses from 'Ohana program administrators, 'Ohana facilitators, Department of Human Services (DHS) administrators, DHS caseworkers, and Family Court Judges. These semi-structured, standardized telephone interviews covered the following topics: role; responsibilities, creation and inception of the program; relationships among the court, child welfare agency, and others; initial need for the program; challenges to implementation; strategies to overcome challenges; current operation of the program, including referral, preparation and training; most critical features of the program; overall effectiveness of the program; lessons learned; and vision for the future of the program.
- 'Ohana Conference participants (not including social workers) were asked to complete a **Participant Feedback Form** as they exited the conference. EPIC program staff had developed these exit survey instruments as part of their ongoing evaluation efforts. For purposes of continuity and comparison over time and to assess these forms' effectiveness as evaluation instruments, PPCD project staff utilized the same survey forms. Feedback forms covered the following topics: role in conference; purpose of the conference; helpfulness of the conference; information learned; improvements needed; ratings of facilitator, recorder, and coordinator performance; and ratings of the site and food provided. EPIC staff distributed and collected the satisfaction surveys and entered the responses into

¹⁵ Additional funding for report publication and dissemination was provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

¹⁶ *Supra* note 11.

¹⁷ Copies of evaluation instrumentation, as well as 'Ohana Conferencing Program protocols, can be obtained by contacting PPCD project staff.

a database. EPIC then shared the database information with PPCD project staff, and PPCD conducted all analyses. For the purposes of this evaluation Participant Feedback Forms were analyzed from 871 participants, representing conferences of 196 families. The 871 participants were comprised of 628 family members (72%), 85 service providers (10%), 73 friends or sponsors of the family (8%), 25 foster parents (3%), 16 guardians *ad litem* or voluntary guardians *ad litem* (2%), 7 DHS caseworkers (1%), and 3 attorneys (0.3%). Twenty-three participants indicated a role other than those defined above (3%), and eleven participants did not respond to the question (1%) asking them to identify their role.

- Social workers were asked to complete a **Social Worker Feedback Form** as they exited the conference. EPIC program staff had developed these exit survey instruments as part of their own evaluation efforts. As with participant feedback forms, PPCD project staff used EPIC's Social Worker Feedback Form to facilitate continuity and comparison over time and to assess form effectiveness. Feedback forms covered the following topics: description of conference; whether conference achieved objectives; suggestions for improvement; whether there were any outstanding concerns; ratings of facilitator, recorder, and coordinator performance; and ratings of the conference site and food provided. Social Worker Feedback Forms from 224 social workers were analyzed. Of the 224 Social Worker Feedback Forms, 96 (43%) were from 2002 and 92 (41%) were from 2001. It is important to note that thirty-six feedback forms (16%) did not have a date indicating the year in which the feedback form was completed.¹⁸
- Data from databases maintained by EPIC were utilized to determine timeframes for conferences, location of conferences, the average number of family members present at conferences, the average number of non-family members present at conferences, the type of agreement made, and other decision statistics.
- A national **Survey of Family Group Conferencing Program Specialists** was conducted by PPCD project staff. Twenty-one Program Specialists were interviewed telephonically and completed a short questionnaire about programmatic features. Topic areas covered by the survey were program inception and goals; institution housing the FGC program; funding; state or local implementation; single or co-facilitation model; training; staffing; referral; re-conferencing; use of private family time; and who participates in the FGC.

The study's process evaluation component describes the 'Ohana Conferencing Program and its implementation. It includes interviews with key program stakeholders, reviews of program policies, procedures and other written materials, analysis of program databases, and surveys of program participants.

Process Variables

- History of program development and implementation (e.g., staffing, roles and responsibilities, training, procedural issues, vision for the program, challenges to implementation and strategies to overcome challenges, number of people served).
- Assessment of conference process itself (e.g., timing of conference, conference planning, family and professional participation, perceived purpose of conference, suggestions for improvement, outstanding concerns).
- Assessment of performance of conference facilitators, recorders, and coordinators.

¹⁸ Researchers were not able to determine feedback form dates due to handwriting legibility problems.

Process Data Sources

- Program documents, procedure guides and protocols, and training manuals.
- Interviews with key program stakeholders.
- Conference participant feedback forms.
- Analysis of EPIC management information system database.
- Field site visits to the program.

As previously mentioned, because of time and funding constraints, as well as transitions in key administrative positions making access to data problematic within the grant period, this evaluation does not compare outcomes associated with ‘Ohana conferenced cases to outcomes associated with a similar control group of non-conferenced cases. For example, it was not possible to determine in this study whether ‘Ohana Conferencing is ultimately serving as an effective diversionary tool – successfully diverting child welfare cases from the Family Court.¹⁹ In addition, it was not possible to determine whether those court-involved cases receiving an ‘Ohana Conference are more likely to achieve permanency in a timely way than similar, non-conferenced cases. Despite these limitations to the current research design, however, it is possible to report the extent to which the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program’s theory of practice (i.e., core values and philosophies) are reflected in actual practice, as well as the effects of participation in ‘Ohana Conferencing.

Immediate Outcome Variables

A number of outcome variables, examining participant satisfaction with the conferencing process and the outcomes produced through it, as well as whether the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program is achieving its intended goals, were included in the evaluation.

- Degree of family-focused, strengths-based, culturally-competent, and community-based practice reflected in the program’s implementation.
- Empowerment via successful resolution of process.
 - Degree of satisfaction of participants.
- Empowerment via enhanced sense of responsibility.
 - Qualitative evidence of whether family members feel that the process has encouraged greater responsibility over plan/case; whether an ‘Ohana conference accomplished what participants hoped/expected it would.
 - Degree of involvement in the plan.
- Perceptions of relationships between families and DHS/CPS.

Immediate Outcome Data Sources

- Interviews with key program stakeholders.
- Conference participants’ feedback forms.
- Analysis of EPIC management information system database.
- Previous evaluation findings.

All data obtained from feedback forms and interviews were coded using a structured coding strategy. Codes were generated on a sample of completed survey instruments and modified as necessary. Coded instruments were then entered into a statistical database (SPSS) for analysis. Coding and data-entry were checked to ensure reliability of both code and coder. Frequencies and cross-tabulations were run on the resulting database, as well as on data provided in EPIC databases, to provide descriptive information related to each program goal.

¹⁹ Previous evaluation work conducted by SMS, Inc. did examine incidents of re-abuse for cases receiving an ‘Ohana conference. These findings, and other relevant findings from this past research, will be presented in Chapter 6 of this *Bulletin*.

Human Subjects Protocols to Protect Privacy and Confidentiality

Before beginning any data collection, human subjects protocols were filed and approved by the appropriate governing agency to protect the safety, well-being, and privacy of subjects, whether subjects were system professionals or children and families involved in cases under court or DHS jurisdiction that fell within the study population. The PPCD filed all required human subjects protocols under federal guidelines and maintained these protocols throughout the study.

CHAPTER 3

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING AS A GENERAL MODEL OF PRACTICE

Family group conferencing (FGC) offers a new approach to working with families involved with the child welfare system. FGC establishes a process for families to develop a plan that ensures children are cared for safely and protected from future harm while empowering the family and utilizing community supports. FGC has developed as a reform effort aimed at balancing the safety of children with the integrity of the family and as a means of building partnerships among the family, the court, the social service agency, service providers, and community resources. FGC is also a community-based approach to working with families. Its process reflects democratic principles by encouraging family and community participation in family and societal concerns. In this way, FGC builds social capital by strengthening social networks and community partnerships so that children are better protected from future harm.

FGC gathers together family members, child welfare and mental health professionals, and others closely involved in children's lives to discuss family strengths, concerns and resources, and to develop a safety plan.

Based on strengths and needs, families create a plan to ensure their children's safety and preserve their families.

Through the FGC process, families enter a partnership with the child welfare agency and court, and together they work to recognize and articulate family strengths as well as develop a plan that protects and nurtures their children from enduring further child abuse and neglect. Participants in a family group conference include individuals who can protect the child, care for the child, supervise the implementation of service plans, support the family in caring for the child, maintain contact with the child and family members, and have an established relationship with the child (e.g., siblings, extended family members, teachers, clergy, foster parents, and community resources). FGC programs recognize that families have the most information about themselves, and are, therefore, in the best position to make well informed decisions about service needs. These programs also recognize that individuals find security, a sense of belonging, and self-identity within their families and communities. Therefore, at its core, FGC is a family-centered, strengths-oriented, community-based, and culturally competent process.

The process of family group conferencing dates back centuries. In tribal cultures, it was not uncommon for the community to be responsible for its children or to hold people accountable in cases of wrongdoing.²⁰ Although variations of family group conferencing have been historically used in Native American cultures, many family group conferencing programs in the U.S., are based on the sanctioning and dispute resolution traditions of the Maori of New Zealand.²¹ New Zealand was the first country to institutionalize FGC as a government sanctioned alternative child welfare program. Indigenous people in New Zealand advocated for alternatives to

²⁰ Mirsky, Laura. *Family Group Conferencing Worldwide: Part One in a Series*, International Institute for Restorative Justice. www.iirp.org

²¹ A Comparison of Four Restorative Conferencing Models. *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*. February 2001. www.ncjrs.org

Eurocentric, expert-driven models²² and were joined by proponents of child welfare and youth justice to reform the governmental response to children, youth, and families.²³ Together they emphasized family responsibility for their young people, children's rights, recognition of culture, and state-community partnerships to support families.²⁴

New Zealand's model of FGC was adopted into national legislation in 1989 as part of The Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act.²⁵ Development of the model was the result of a disproportionately high number of Maori children in the care of the state, over-represented in social workers' caseloads, and almost always placed with families of European descent.²⁶ As Mike Doolan (former 'Chief Social Worker' for the Department of Child, Youth, and Family Services in New Zealand) states, "The FGC process emerged because we were desperate to find an alternative to panels and courts staffed with people who seemed wealthy and racist in comparison to the people who appeared before them."²⁷

Advantages of Family Group Conferencing

- Recognizes the family and extended family as a valuable resource;
- Gives the family an opportunity to mobilize and show its strengths;
- Gives the family a position of ownership and importance;
- Helps the family make a commitment to carry out the recommendations of systems' professionals;
- Pulls together extended family and community to add resources toward resolution;
- Helps caseworkers function as consultants/facilitators of family ideas, as opposed to the family controller;
- Affords the caseworker a more neutral, helpful, and supportive role with the family, extended family, and community; and
- Helps caseworkers look for, and build upon, family strengths and helps them become a partner in co-creating options.

Adapted from Graber, Keys, and White (1996). *Family Group Decision-Making in the United States: The Case of Oregon. FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998)*, American Humane Association.

The Fundamental Principles of Family Group Conferencing

Communities have varying reasons for implementing FGC programs and multiple variations of the model have evolved. However, cornerstone philosophies of FGC have been identified as a practice that is *family-centered, family strengths-oriented, community-based* and *culturally competent*. FGC emphasizes that first

Fundamental Principles of FGC

- Family-Centered
- Strengths-Oriented
- Culturally Competent
- Community-Based

²² *Puao-te-Atatu: The report of the Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Maori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare* (1988). Ministerial Advisory Committee. Wellington, New Zealand: Department of Social Welfare.

²³ Hassall, I. (1996). "Origin and Development of Family Group Conferences." In Hudson, J., Morris, A., Maxwell, G. & Galaway, B. (Eds.). *Family Group Conferences: Perspectives on Policy and Practice* (pp. 17-36). Monsey, NY: Willow Tree Press.

²⁴ Pennell, J. *Mainstreaming Family Group Conferencing: Building and Sustaining Partnerships*. International Institute for Restorative Practices. www.restorativepractices.org

²⁵ The Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act of 1989 of New Zealand. The two core principles of the Act are: The interests of the child or young person are paramount; and the family should participate in decision-making and be empowered to care for its children and young people. The Act is administered by the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYF).

²⁶ *Supra* note 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

and foremost, families have the responsibility to not only care for their children, but also to provide them with a sense of identity.

1. Family-Centered Practice

A family-centered child protection system is one that recognizes the paramount importance of the family for the safe and healthy development of children. FGC explicitly recognizes that families have the most knowledge to make well-informed decisions about themselves, and that individuals can find security and a sense of belonging within their families.

The term “family” in the context of FGC refers to blood relatives and non-blood related significant or valued family friends, neighbors, and community representatives. It does not imply one particular type of family. Who comprises the “family” is defined by the family itself.

FGC highlights the importance of appreciating the role of the family and extended family members in decision-making. This includes viewing the family in inclusive terms and not excluding one side of the family. FGC principles suggest that the identification of the extended family should incorporate a kinship network inclusive of non-blood-related persons who act as family members, such as godparents. It is important to note that FGC is not family therapy, although both FGC and family therapy share a common philosophy of family inclusiveness and direct family participation.

Guiding Principles of Family-Centered Practice

- Every family possesses strengths and capabilities, although these strengths and capabilities may have gone unrecognized by the family, the community, and child welfare professionals.
- Family members must be given the opportunity to recognize, acknowledge, and demonstrate their strengths.
- Family members, including extended family members, are valuable resources.
- The family should be empowered decision-makers who are given a position of importance and ownership over their own life decisions.
- Often the best way to solve a dispute already exists within the family system, although it may not yet be realized.

Adapted from Graber, Keys, and White (1996). *Family Group Decision-Making in the United States: The Case of Oregon. FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998)*, American Humane Association.

2. Strengths-Based Approach

Historically, many assessments of families receiving social services have been deficit-based rather than strengths-focused. That is, traditional approaches consist of identifying what is wrong with people and then helping them either to correct or accept those limitations or pathologies. A strengths-based approach, on the other hand, focuses on positive aspects and helps individuals and families to recognize, enhance, and mobilize strengths, capabilities, and resources within their family system and their social and community network. Strengths represent a complex array of cognitive, attitudinal, and behavioral characteristics operating within a family or community context. Strengths can be both interpersonal and intra-familial in nature and play an important role in family functioning and family resiliency.

A family strengths approach is driven by the philosophy that all families, no matter how troubled, have resources and capabilities upon which to draw in times of crisis. If the time is taken to

A Strengths-Based Approach:

- Increases a family's sense of control.
- Blends family responsibility and accountability.
- Encourages family buy-in and cooperation to protect children.
- Counters isolation.
- Balances power through family and professional partnerships leading to family-generated, creative solutions.

FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998), American Humane Association, pg. 5.

build on these strengths and capabilities, families are more likely to respond favorably to interventions, develop increased competency and independence, and become better able to handle and ameliorate the current crisis and cope with future challenges.²⁸

Family Group Conferencing combines families' strengths with accountability.

The process of FGC is based on the recognition that families have strengths that need to be recognized and respected to secure safety, permanency, and well-being for children. A strengths-based approach blends family responsibility and accountability, empowering the family members to make decisions about family outcomes. It encourages families to cooperate; ensuring the best care for their children. It recognizes that family groups, who know the most information about themselves, can find safe solutions to abuse and neglect concerns. An underlying FGC principle underscores that families and their kin are the best resource for protecting children from abuse and neglect.

Guiding Principles of a Strengths-Based Approach

- Families have strengths and can change.
- Families have wisdom and solutions.
- Families and communities are our best resources.
- Strengths are what ultimately resolve issues and concerns. It is therefore important to ensure that families have the opportunity to recognize, articulate, and demonstrate their strengths.
- Strengths are discovered through listening, noticing, and paying attention to people.
- Strengths are enhanced and reinforced when they are acknowledged and encouraged.
- People gain a sense of hope when they are listened to. People are more likely to listen to others if they, themselves, are listened to.
- Options are preferable to advice. Options provide choices and facilitate empowerment.
- Empowering people is preferable to controlling people.
- A consultant is more helpful to people than a dictator.

Adapted from Graber, Keys, and White (1996). Family Group Decision-Making in the United States: The Case of Oregon. FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998), American Humane Association.

²⁸ Dunst, C.J., Trivette, C.M., & Deal, A.G. (1994). *Supporting and Strengthening Families*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Brookline Books.

3. Culturally Competent Practice

The concept of “culture” refers to patterns of social behavior, implicit and explicit, including thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, morals, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups.²⁹ Culture is relational and dynamic.

FGC is a culturally relevant process. It enables families to provide a sense of identity for their children. It encourages others to better understand and respect families. It affirms families’ cultural diversity within their own communities.

Being culturally competent means having the capacity to function effectively in different cultural contexts and to interact effectively in different cultural groups. Five essential elements that contribute to a system’s ability to become culturally competent are generally recognized as:³⁰

- Valuing diversity;
- Having the capacity for cultural self-assessment;
- Being conscious of culturally based interactional dynamics;
- Institutionalizing cultural knowledge into practice and policy; and
- Reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures.

To be truly “culturally competent,” these five elements must be manifested at every level of the system and they should be reflected in attitudes, structures, policies, and practices.

It is important to realize that people come from very different backgrounds, and their customs, thoughts, ways of communicating, values, traditions, and institutions vary accordingly. The choices that individuals make, and how they interact with others and with society, are powerfully affected by culture. It is also important to recognize that individuals live within multiple “cultural spheres” (e.g., work culture, family culture, church or spiritual culture) and that there is diversity within cultures. For example, it is generally assumed that a common culture is shared among members of racial, linguistic, and religious groups, yet the larger group may share nothing beyond similar physical appearance, language, or spiritual beliefs. Assimilation and acculturation, not to mention gender, age, geographic locality, and socio-economic factors, create kaleidoscopes of subcultures. Therefore, recognition of a person’s culture is much more than mere recognition of his or her race and ethnicity.

Cultural competence is integral to the FGC model and process. The conference must be planned, conducted, and followed-up on in a way that is reflective of the cultural norms of the family. Knowledge of cultural values, language, communication, and roles is crucial in working with the family to prepare for, and to facilitate, the family group conference. This includes discussing with family members culturally appropriate ways to begin the family conference, to greet participants, to conduct the conference, to develop and agree on a plan, and to end the conference. It has implications for the setting of the conference, seating arrangement, the length of the conference, and the type of refreshments that are served. It also means that the conference coordinator, facilitator, and all professionals, are aware of culturally appropriate ways to interact with family members.

²⁹ Price-Williams, D.R. (1985). Cultural Psychology. In Lindzey, Gardner & Aronson, Elliot (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (Vol 2). New York: Random House.

³⁰ Cross, T., Bazron, B., Dennis, K., & Issacs, M. (1989). *Towards a Culturally Competent System of Care* (Vol. I). Georgetown University Child Development Center, CASSP Technical Assistance Center. Washington, D.C.

Guiding Principles of a Culturally Competent Practice Model and System

- Families should be treated in a way that is reflective of their cultural norms.
- Developing cultural competence means improving cross-cultural capabilities by adapting services to the cultural context of families and children.
- Inter- and intra-cultural differences are respected and valued.
- Practitioners (and all system professionals) must become aware of their own cultural attitudes, assumptions, and biases and how these might influence how they interact with individuals from other cultures.
- Knowledge about different cultures and cultural dynamics must be integrated into good practice models.

Adapted from Graber, Keys, and White (1996). *Family Group Decision-Making in the United States: The Case of Oregon. FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998)*, American Humane Association.

4. Community-Based

When families are viewed as situated within the larger social network, assisting families becomes a process of mobilizing resources and supports that will enable their strengths and capabilities to emerge and grow. In a community-based model, resources can be provided by professionals as well as by friends, community networks, organizations, and the families themselves.

A Community-Based Approach:

- Enhances collaboration and cooperation among the family, the agency, and the court; and, among the court, agencies, and natural community supports.
- Encourages responsibility on the part of the family, the agency, the court, and the community.
- Encourages community ownership and support for child protection.

Adapted from: Cross et al. (1989). *Supra* note 29.

Implementation and use of FGC fosters collaboration and cooperation among the family and government institutions (the agency and the court), as well as with the community. It encourages families to connect with their communities and for communities to link with their families to protect children. In addition to families themselves being a critical resource to their members at risk for abuse and neglect, the support of communities is equally important.

Guiding Principles of a Community-Based Approach

- Primary strategies are focused on the local or neighborhood level of urban, suburban, and rural communities.
- Social and economic supports for troubled families and children are developed at the neighborhood level, where neighborhood is defined by geographic boundaries.
- Both formal and informal services (e.g., volunteer, professionally facilitated self-help programs) that are based on the principle of voluntary help by one citizen for another are widely available, regardless of whether access to such services is determined by place of residence.
- Importance of incorporating a family-strengths perspective into assessment and service delivery.

Adapted from Graber, Keys, and White (1996). *Family Group Decision-Making in the United States: The Case of Oregon. FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998)*, American Humane Association.

The General Family Group Conferencing Process

Regardless of the specific model implemented, FGC generally involves four phases:

1. Referral to hold a FGC conference;
2. Preparing and planning for a FGC conference;
3. Convening the FGC; and
4. Follow-up after the FGC.

1. Referral to Hold a FGC in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases

Although practice varies across programs, typically a referral to hold a FGC would be made by the social worker investigating and assessing a child abuse and neglect case.

Research and practice knowledge does not yet provide any definitive information about which specific families and case characteristics will benefit from a FGC, and which will not. Some localities have restricted FGC to those cases involving less serious allegations, while others allow referrals from a broad range of cases and associated presenting problems.

In New Zealand, the law provides the statutory authority for convening FGC in all substantiated cases of abuse and neglect. In the U.S., families are usually offered the option of a conference and asked if they would like to participate. In some jurisdictions, such as Miami, a referral to FGC can come from the judge presiding over the abuse and neglect case.

2. Preparation and Planning for a FGC

To increase conference success, the conference coordinator should thoroughly prepare family members, professionals, and other participants for the conference.³¹ For example, time should be spent prior to the conference to ensure that participants understand that the primary focus for everyone is the safety of the child(ren); to ensure that everyone understands what is meant by “family” and that family members are responsible and accountable for the safety and care of the child(ren); and to ensure that the participants clearly understand the process and the goals of the conference.

In deciding who to invite to the family group conference, the coordinator works closely with the family and the child(ren) (if age appropriate) to identify individuals who can protect the child(ren), care for the child(ren), supervise the implementation of meeting plans, support the family in caring for the child(ren), maintain contact with the child(ren) and family members, and who have a personal relationship and connection with the child(ren).

The coordinator works with the family to determine a date, time, and venue for the conference. The conference should be held at a time and place convenient for the family. Preparing family members to participate in the conference and focus on the issues is a key responsibility of the conference coordinator. It is important that the family group acknowledges that there is a need for a plan to improve the child(ren)’s welfare.

³¹ The coordinator is generally a person who can remain impartial and who does not have any connection to the specific case.

Planning Stage - Critical Activities

- Ensure safety for the child or adolescent.
- Define what is meant by family.
- Invite family members and relevant others to participate.
- Clearly define and communicate participants' roles.
- Manage unresolved family issues.
- Coordinate logistics.

Adapted from Graber, Keys, and White (1996). *Family Group Decision-Making in the United States: The Case of Oregon. FGDM Technical Assistance Notebook (1998)*, American Humane Association.

3. The Conference

The most critical stage of the FGC process is the conduct of the conference itself. While the family conference will differ depending on the specific FGC model adopted, generally the conference will involve a discussion among family members, family friends, and professionals about family strengths, concerns on the part of professionals with respect to the safety of the child(ren), possible service options and alternatives, and, ultimately, the development of a safety or case plan. The extent to which professionals are involved in the various stages of the conference, and the particular order and focus of the discussion varies somewhat across FGC programs. Some programs allow private family time in which professionals step out of the room empowering the family to develop their own safety or case plan. Other programs do not allow for private family time and all conference participants are involved in the development of the safety or case plan.

4. Follow-up After the Conference

Following completion of the family conference, a number of tasks should be accomplished by professionals that participated in the FGC, including:

- Writing and distributing the plan;
- Delivering services;
- Reviewing and monitoring decisions; and
- Reviewing case progress and case or service plan compliance.

Families, communities, and the government must partner together to ensure child safety and well-being. Families have not regularly been included in making decisions regarding the care and protection of their own children. While it is the responsibility of the professionals to connect the family with needed resources, the availability of resources in many communities makes this a challenging task. Concerted efforts must be made to identify and link families with community resources.

Research on Family Group Conferencing

A body of research on the effectiveness and outcomes of FGC is developing from studies of programs around the globe. Although studies differ somewhat by purpose and method, relatively consistent findings are emerging. Research findings from various settings suggest that family group conferences:³²

- Assist families to identify strengths and resolve problems;
- Mobilize family and community resources;
- Create appropriate and relatively comprehensive case plans;
- Generate high degrees of participant satisfaction with both the conference process and conference outcomes;
- Increase sense of family ownership and commitment to case plans;
- Empower parents and family members as decision-makers;
- Lead to improved relationships between caseworkers, the court, and families;
- Decrease rates of child protective services re-referral post-conference; and
- Reduce the amount of time children spend waiting for permanency.

FGC Model Expansion

Since its implementation in New Zealand, formal, institutionalized FGC programs have spread and are practiced in various ways in Sweden, Australia, the Philippines, Israel, Canada, the UK, South Africa, throughout the United States, and other countries.

As the model has spread to address new areas of concern and into other national settings, various hybrids of the original model of family group conferencing described previously have evolved.³³ FGC has been applied, for example, to issues outside of child protection. These include, but are not limited to school suspensions, juvenile delinquency, adult crime, custody disputes, reintegration of offenders into communities, and resolution of neighborhood conflicts.³⁴ Various restorative justice models and emancipation conferences for teens in transition are also beginning to utilize family group conferencing methods. In South Australia, family conferencing is now widely used in a modified form as a police-initiated diversion approach known as the Wagga Wagga model. Developed by the Wagga Wagga Police Department, this model uses police officers or school officials to set up and facilitate family conferencing meetings.³⁵

Since the introduction of the New Zealand model of family group conferencing in the U.S., a variety of similar models have been developed in order to suit specific program needs. The term “family group conferencing” now encompasses “Family Group Decision-Making”, “Family Unity Meetings”, “Team Decision-Making Meetings”, “Family Team Meetings”, and “Family Team Conferences”. While “Family Group Decision-Making” programs most closely resemble the basic features and processes already described in the preceding sections and most clearly

³² See for example *Family Conference Model Evaluation Final Report*. County of Santa Clara Family Conference Institute. San Jose, California; *Making a Difference: A Summary of the Preliminary Findings of a Research Study on Family Group Conferencing in Essex (UK)*. Essex County Council Social Services; Gatowski, S.I., Dobbin, S.A. & Litchfield, M.M. (2001). The Miami Model Court Family Decision-Making Conference Program: Evaluation Results. *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, Vol. V (No. 3). National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, Nevada; Shore, N., Wirth, J., Cahn, K., Yancey, B. & Gunderson, K. (2001). *Long Term and Immediate Outcomes of Family Group Conferencing in Washington State*. International Institute for Restorative Practices. www.restorativepractices.org

³³ *Supra* note 24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Supra* note 21.

involve families in decision-making about case and safety planning, each of the other models are briefly described below and contrasted with “pure” FGC program theory.

FAMILY UNITY MEETINGS (FUM)

In 1989, the Family Unity Meeting (FUM) model was developed in the state of Oregon. During initial program implementation FUM was only utilized for foster care cases, with the mission of “strengthen[ing] families and increas[ing] safety, security, and stability for children.”³⁶ Family Unity Meetings as described by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) are:

“Planning and problem-solving sessions facilitated by the social worker or, preferably, an impartial person (so that the social worker can participate). They follow a prescribed agenda moving from an introduction of all the people present in relation to the child, to a statement of purpose, a statement of concerns (family and agency), family strengths assessment, an enumeration of options, the development of a written list of formal and informal family supports, and concludes with a decision and a timeline for implementation.”³⁷

Unlike “pure” family group conferencing models, all participants are involved in *all* stages of Family Unity Meetings—*there is no private family time*. However, there typically is an order of participation during the family meeting: parents, then family members, non-family members, and finally, professionals.³⁸ Primary family members can also limit the participation of extended family members and others based on federal confidentiality laws designed to protect children from unnecessary disclosures.

The FUM model is divided into seven stages, with a co-facilitator or recorder taking notes on a flip chart: (1) Introduction; (2) Clarification of Meeting Purpose; (3) Strengths Assessment; (4) Sharing of Concerns; (5) Brainstorming of Options; (6) Family Discussion (this is *not* private family time—participants, and family members are given the lead in talking about the advantages and disadvantages of the options shared with other participants present); and (7) the Decision.

Similar to the “pure” family group conferencing model, FUMs primarily focus on actively involving the family in case plan development. Both the “pure” family group conferencing model and the FUM model balance the decision-making power between the family and the agency – an indication that families can make decisions in their own best interest.

FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS (FTM)

The primary users of the Family Team Meeting (FTM) program model are Family to Family (F2F)³⁹ sites supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The main focus of these meetings is to develop and maintain a positive relationship between the biological family and the foster care

³⁶ *Appendix C: Oregon Family Unity Model* (Pamphlet). National Institute of Justice. Child Abuse Intervention Strategic Planning Meeting: Background Papers. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/childabuse/app3c.html

³⁷ *Background Paper #3: Family Decision-Making Models*. National Institute of Justice. Child Abuse Intervention Strategic Planning Meeting. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/childabuse/bg3j.html

³⁸ Harper, C. & Rockhill, A. (2001). “Trends in the Growth and Use of Family Group Decision-Making: A Ten-Year Perspective.” Paper presented at the annual conference *Building on Family Strengths*, Portland, OR, April.

³⁹ A reform initiative funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Family to Family (F2F) initiative provides principles, strategies, and tools to project sites to confront problems faced by their child welfare systems. Identified goals of this initiative include strengthening the network of families available to care for abused and neglected children in their communities; building partnerships with at-risk neighborhoods toward that end; and tracking outcomes for children and families. www.aecf.org/initiatives/familytofamily

family. FTMs are held soon after a child is placed and then as needed in order to keep the team working together toward permanency for the child.⁴⁰ As described by the Center for the Study of Social Policy:

“The Family Team Meeting focuses on developing and maintaining a positive relationship between the parent(s) and the foster parent(s) and generally occurs after foster care placement (ideally within 3 days). The FTM provides an opportunity for the foster parent to learn from the primary family about the child’s needs, likes, dislikes, and daily habits or patterns. The FTM is meant to reinforce the child’s and parents’ attachment and is designed to encourage foster parents to support birth parents’ efforts to achieve reunification, which helps the child make a safe transition home.

In the FTM, the participants often make arrangements for family visits and discuss and resolve practical family issues, e.g., transportation and appointments for doctor visits. The FTM process is intended to: (1) create a continuum of care and familiarity to reduce trauma for the child; and (2) nurture a relationship between the parent and foster caregiver so that, while in placement, the child feels supported by both birth and foster parents.”⁴¹

Family Team Meetings are generally informal, structured on a case-by-case basis, and convened at a location within the family’s community.⁴² The meetings are facilitated by the caseworker or by an agency supervisor, and not by a “neutral” conference facilitator. At the initial FTM, participants include: the birth parents, foster parents, child (if age appropriate), the social worker, and the agency supervisor. Meetings that follow might also include extended family members, service providers, neighborhood organizations, and a neighborhood site coordinator. Unlike the “pure” family group conferencing model, FTMs do *not* utilize private family time, nor is the model used to develop case plans. Lack of private family time and lack of involvement of the family in case plan development reduces the level of direct involvement of families over CPS decisions. It is also important to note that FTMs are conducted with families whose children are already placed in the foster care system, and therefore meetings are not used strictly for diversion purposes as in other FGC program implementations.

FAMILY TEAM CONFERENCES (FTC)

Family Team Conferences are primarily being implemented in “Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare” sites.⁴³ According to the *Handbook for Family Team Conferencing*, the Community Partnership Family Team model incorporates:

“A flexible, highly individualized and needs-based approach to practice, a focus on neighborhood-based supports and the goal of identifying a “caring adult” to help the family sustain the change; it provides significant flexibility for use in the complex and unpredictable environment of community child protection”.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ *Out-of-Home Placement Services: Foster Care* (2003). Maryland Department of Human Services. www.dhr.state.md.us

⁴¹ *Bringing Families to the Table: A Comparative Guide to Family Meetings in Child Welfare* (2002). Center for the Study of Social Policy. (p. 15).

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ The Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare (CCPCW), of the Center for the Study of Social Policy, aims to support effective partnerships in the child welfare field between public and private providers, civic associations, faith-based groups, and local businesses and residents in pursuit of the common goal of keeping children safe and strengthening families within revitalized neighborhoods. www.cssp.org

⁴⁴ *Handbook for Family Team Conferencing: Promoting Safe and Stable Families in Community Partnerships for Child Protection* (2001). The Child Welfare Policy and Practice Group. Montgomery, Alabama.

The Family Team Conference process includes the following:

- Introduction;
- Family Strengths;
- Case Presentation;
- Discussion/Development of Plan;
- Conference Decision; and
- Child Safety Conference Conclusion.

Family Team Conferences are *not* utilized to develop CPS case plans. Instead FTCs are used to develop an “Individualized Course of Action” (ICA) or safety plan. Family team conferences are facilitated by the primary caseworker or by a trained community-based service provider. Non-negotiable issues are addressed prior to the conference. After being informed of the non-negotiable issues, the family identifies its desired outcome for the conference. A unique feature of family team conferences is the “family story” stage in which the family is able to describe the situation from its perspective. Although FTC participants can breakout into smaller groups to focus on more specific work items, FTCs do *not* use private family time. Family team conferences may be conducted at any point throughout the life of the case. It is important to note that FTCs are sometimes used in non-court involved child welfare cases (also known as “community cases”), therefore, this model is used both for court-involved cases and for diversion purposes.

TEAM DECISION-MAKING MEETINGS (TDM)

The Team Decision-Making model is another variation of FGC primarily used by Family to Family (F2F)⁴⁵ sites supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

A Team Decision-Making Meeting, as defined by the County of Santa Clara Social Services, is: “A facilitated process in which child welfare social workers, social work supervisors, parents, other family members, community members and service providers gather so that assigned social workers can make informed decisions and join with other meeting participants in reaching consensus regarding plans for removal.”⁴⁶

The main focus of a TDM is “to intervene early in a case to prevent a child’s removal or arrange a kinship placement”.⁴⁷ If the child has already been placed, TDMs are used similarly to Family Team Meetings in order to facilitate cooperative relationships between the primary family and the foster family. Experienced social workers trained in facilitation conduct TDMs as a full-time job. The caseworker is able to propose a plan during the meeting and allows the family to respond to the plan. Families may be offered private family time during a TDM in order to discuss the plan proposed by the social worker. It is important to note that private family time, when used in this model, does *not* empower the family to create its own draft of a case plan or safety plan, but rather to respond to and refine an agency developed plan. This approach reduces families’ direct involvement in decision-making.

⁴⁵ *Supra* note 39.

⁴⁶ *Family Conference Model Evaluation Final Report*. County of Santa Clara Family Conference Institute. San Jose, California.

⁴⁷ *Supra* note 39.

CHAPTER 4

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING IN THE HAWAI’IAN CONTEXT: THE ‘OHANA CONFERENCING MODEL

‘Ohana program materials and funding proposals supplied by Effective Planning and Innovative Communication (EPIC) were carefully reviewed in order to provide a description of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program process. The information obtained from these program materials about the history and specific features of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program was supplemented by on-site discussions with the program director and personnel, as well as interviews with key program design and implementation stakeholders. EPIC’s Director also reviewed this chapter for its thoroughness and accuracy.

‘Ike aku, ‘ike mai, kokua aku kokua mai; pela iho la ka nohana ‘ohana.

Translation: Recognize others, be recognized, help others, be helped; such is a family relationship.

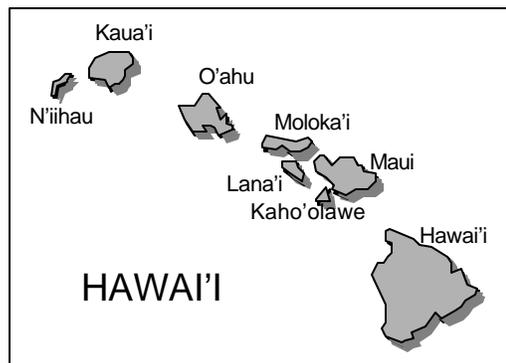
Explanation: Many native Hawai’ians live with their extended family and family is the most important part of life for them. This saying teaches why they should put family first...In the ‘Ohana or family, you know others and they know you, you help others and know you will be helped if there is anything you need.

(Proverbs of Hawai’i have been compiled by Mary Kawena Pukui, *‘Olelo No’eau*, Bishop Museum Press, February 1995).

The program description that follows is intended to provide the reader with a summary of the background and historical context of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program, its core philosophical assumptions and practice expectations, and its major program features. Specific information regarding the program’s organizational structure, governance, administration, staffing, and training is contained in Chapter 5. In order to inform this implementation evaluation, the ‘Ohana conferencing features described herein are also studied in more depth and compared to other models of family group conferencing in Chapter 6.

Some Quick Facts About Hawai’i

Hawai’i is a string of 137 islands encompassing a land area of 6,422.6 square miles in the north central Pacific Ocean about 2,400 miles from the west coast of the continental United States. Stretching from northwest to southeast, the major islands are: Niihau, Kaua’i, O’ahu, Moloka’i, Lana’i, Kaho’olawe, Maui and Hawai’i. From 1893-1898 Hawai’i was known as The Republic of Hawai’i. Ceded to the United States in 1898, it became known as the Hawai’i Territory in 1900, and became the 50th state of the United States on August 21, 1959.



Based on 2001 census estimates, Hawai’i has a statewide population of 1,224,398, with 24.4% of the population under 18 years of age (compared to 25.7% nationally). The median household income (1999) is \$49,820, slightly higher than the national median household income of

\$41,994. Just over 10% of the state’s population lives in poverty, slightly less than the national average of 12.4%.

Hawai’i is a racially and culturally diverse state. According to the most recent census data, just over one-fifth of the population (21.4%) self-identify with two or more races. Asian persons represent 41.6% of the population, the largest racial group. Native Hawai’ians and other Pacific Islanders represent 9.4% of the population. Just over one-quarter of the population (26.6%) speak a language other than English at home, compared to 17.9% nationally, and 17.5% of the population is foreign born (compared to 11.1% nationally).

| Hawai’i Racial Breakdown (U.S. Census Bureau – 2000) | | |
|---|----------------|----------------------|
| | Hawai’i | United States |
| Asian | 41.6% | 3.6% |
| White, Non-Hispanic | 22.9% | 69.1% |
| Native Hawai’ian, Pacific Islander | 9.4% | 0.1% |
| Hispanic, Latino | 7.2% | 12.5% |
| Black, African American | 1.8% | 12.3% |
| American Indian, Alaskan Native | 0.3% | 0.9% |

‘Ohana Conferencing: Background and Implementation

As part of its ongoing commitment to systems improvement, the Family Court of the First Circuit and the Department of Human Services (DHS) worked together to identify systemic problems facing child welfare in Hawai’i, such as high caseloads, both in the court and for DHS; families being left out of the process and having no role in decision-making; fragmentation and compartmentalization of DHS and the broader service community; a lack of focus on and resources for prevention services; and a general sense of dissatisfaction among stakeholders, service providers, and community advocates. As part of the collaborative reform effort to address these problems, the court and DHS began to explore different models of dispute resolution, including the traditional Hawai’ian model of ho’oponopono (bringing families together to heal).⁴⁸

“We had Polynesian children being placed with military families. To them it was like being on the moon.”
 –Judge Michael Town

“Ho’oponopono is a group process of putting things right. It uses community leaders to bring together persons who are having conflicts with one another in a problem-solving process. Although Ho’oponopono is a spiritual process involving techniques that take many years to master, the basic elements of bringing people from the ‘Ohana (family) together and highlighting relevant cultural practices, like songs, prayers, and food, have become an integral part of Hawai’i’s family group conferencing model.”

Adams, P. & Chandler, S.M. (2002). Building Partnerships to Protect Children: A Blended Model of Family Group Conferencing. *Family Court Review*; Vol. 40. pg.503. Sage Publications, Inc.

This exploration led Family Court and child welfare advocates to the family group conferencing (FGC) model being implemented in New Zealand and they began to examine FGC as a viable strategy for culturally-relevant, community-based dispute resolution in Hawai’i. While the Family Court and DHS were exploring how to better meet the needs of children and families in Hawai’i, and how to better integrate the values of the predominantly Polynesian culture into child welfare policy and practice, FGC was also reaching a level of awareness on the U.S. mainland.

⁴⁸ Pukui, M.K., & Elbert, S.H. (1986). *Hawaiian Dictionary: Hawaiian-English, English-Hawaiian*. University of Hawai’i Press.

The Hawai'iian variation of family group conferencing was appropriately entitled 'Ohana Conferencing. 'Ohana is the Hawai'iian word meaning family, relative, kin group, related, extended family or clan. The 'Ohana Conferencing Program was originally one of four demonstration jurisdictions participating in the (NCJFCJ) "Diversion Project."⁴⁹ As some of the Honolulu team members had already received training on the New Zealand model of family group conferencing, Hawai'i's Diversion Project chose to focus on developing its own family group conferencing model – 'Ohana Conferencing. In November 1996, EPIC facilitated the first 'Ohana Conference in the Wai'anae community of O'ahu.

"From the beginning we were very collaborative, very supportive. The program would not be where it is today without the vision and leadership of the Family Court and DHS. That early vision and leadership is absolutely critical."
 - Arlyna Howell Livingston, Director, EPIC.

"'Ohana Conferencing differs from ho'oponopono in being a legal construct and a formal practice within the state's child welfare system. Behind the empowering practice of 'Ohana Conferencing stands the coercive power of the state and its capacity in the end to terminate parental rights. Unlike ho'oponopono, 'Ohana Conferencing is not limited to native Hawai'iian families but is available and used for all groups in Hawai'i's ethnically complex and diverse population." (Adams & Chandler, 2002: 502).

Hawai'i's family group conferencing program drew heavily upon three distinct models:

- ***The New Zealand Family Group Conferencing Model***
 - *Cultural Sensitivity:* Similar to the Maori, families in the child protection system (CPS) in Hawai'i have indigenous ancestry and are over-represented in the system. Practices respectful of cultural diversity and cultural sensitivity from the New Zealand model were incorporated into 'Ohana Conferencing for this reason.
- ***The Oregon Family Unity Model***
 - *Information-sharing:* Although it does not have private family time, the family unity model emphasizes its "information-sharing" phase. Hawai'i's 'Ohana Conferencing reflects this influence in its extension of the "information-sharing" stage of the meeting, focusing on family strengths and how to build solutions.
- ***Mediation***
 - *Voice:* Similar to mediation, 'Ohana gives more voice to the people directly concerned in the situation.
 - *Diversion & Dispute Resolution:* Court diversion and resolution between disputants facilitated by a neutral third party were mediation practices applied to the development of 'Ohana conferencing.
 - *Third Party Neutrality:* Contracting a private provider - in contrast to the New Zealand's utilization of child welfare professionals to organize and coordinate family group conferences - reflects 'Ohana's emphasis on third-party neutrality.
 - *Collaboration with the Court:* Hawai'i's blended model has been designed with significant Family Court input, which reinforced the influence of the familiar practice and philosophy of mediation.

Adapted from Adams, P. & Chandler, S.M. (2002). *Building Partnerships to Protect Children: A Blended Model of Family Group Conferencing*. Family Court Review: Vol. 40, pg. 503-517. Sage Publications, Inc.

The goals of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program are:

- To help DHS/Child Protective Services (CPS) and families to reach an agreement that will keep the child safe with as little uprooting of, and trauma to, the child as possible;
- To partner family, community, and DHS to strengthen the protection and safety of children;

⁴⁹ *Supra* note 8.

- To enhance the decision-making process among families, community service providers, and legal representatives for parents and children;
- To increase communication;
- To build family and community capacity for problem-solving and child safety;
- To develop a support team to keep children safe;
- To support family reunification, or finding safe permanent homes for children; and
- To increase the involvement of parents and families in the decision-making process.

EPIC offered 'Ohana Conferencing services throughout the Island of O'ahu beginning in January 1998. In March 1998, EPIC was awarded a contract by DHS to be the provider of 'Ohana Conferencing services in Hawai'i. This contract allowed EPIC to expand its services to the entire state. EPIC was awarded an additional four year contract in July 1999 to provide 'Ohana Conferencing services to the entire state, with the exception of Maui County.⁵⁰ The Islands of O'ahu, Hawai'i, and Kaua'i, all served by EPIC, account for 93% of child welfare cases in the state.⁵¹ Although a statewide program, the vast majority of conferences (82.3%) are held on the island of O'ahu.⁵²

Since its inception, the 'Ohana Conferencing Program has grown in scope from a purely court diversionary program. Today, the mission of EPIC and the 'Ohana Conferencing Program has enlarged to include both diversion and court-involved cases and a focus on mobilizing community resources and enhancing community health.

"Families stay out of court by participating in a conference. They are provided two paths. The less formal path of conferencing brings families together with a neutral facilitator, professionals, CPS workers, and lawyers (if requested) to discuss the specific CPS concern and to design an acceptable safety plan for the child. The alternative path is the traditional court process of petitions and reviews."

Adams, P. & Chandler, S.M. (2002). *Building Partnerships to Protect Children: A Blended Model of Family Group Conferencing*. Family Court Review: Vol. 40, pg. 509. Sage Publications, Inc.

The Need for a New Model of Child Welfare Practice

Key stakeholders working in the child protection field in Hawai'i recognized the need for improvements in how children and families at risk were being processed in the system. There were a number of problems with the existing model of child protection being used at the time and growing concerns that continuing on this way was not in the best interest of the children, the families, or the community.

During interviews with primary stakeholders involved in developing and implementing 'Ohana Conferencing, reasons why a new model was needed and why 'Ohana Conferencing was selected to address this need were discussed. Systemic problems identified included high caseloads, both in the court and for DHS; families being left out of the process and having no role in decision-making; fragmentation and compartmentalization of DHS and the broader service community; a lack of focus on and resources for prevention services; and a general sense of dissatisfaction among stakeholders, service providers, and community advocates.

Interview respondents noted that as the planning and implementation of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program began, a clear vision for a new child welfare system took shape – one whose vision included opening up the system to more fully allow for the involvement of families

⁵⁰ Maui County includes the Islands of Maui, Lana'i, and Moloka'i.

⁵¹ EPIC, Inc. *Purchase of Service (POS) Proposal Application*. (2002). pg.2.

⁵² *Ibid.*

and their extended kin in decision-making. Accomplishing this vision required a child welfare system that was family-friendly, prevention-focused, accessible and community-based, comprehensive in services, and accountable.

What problems in the jurisdiction made implementing this program necessary?

“High case loads at court and DHS. Significant criticism about DHS handling of cases. Families and community stakeholders and service providers were dissatisfied. Ongoing review statewide; to go to all islands and talk to people. Problems were identified: families left out of system; a closed system, extended family and were family left out. Fragmentation and compartmentalization of DHS because one section was handling investigation, one section was handling case management, one section was handling permanency; people were at different locations and cases would transfer, so families were lost and would have to switch case worker and case direction. There was no emphasis on prevention, it was a focus on crisis management only.”—Arlynn Howell-Livingston, Director of EPIC

“We probably were subject to the rescue concept, where we would remove the child rather than wrap the strong part of the family around the child.”—Judge Michael Town

“A very strong attitude that CPS was a bureaucratic, closed system. Families did not know what was happening. Parents did not know what was going on with kids. Foster parents believed that they were only used for housing. It was a closed system that needed to be reformed and include accountability.”—Dr. Susan Chandler, Past Director DHS

“There was a need to do things another way. Before family group conferencing, the extended family was not involved. They did not even know the children were removed.”—Dawn Slaten, EPIC, Legal Operations/Business Manager

Development and Implementation: Reflections from Stakeholders

An Early Collaborative Relationship: Building Relationships and Generating Buy-In

In its initial stages, program development required that the partner organizations work together to identify program stakeholders and generate “buy-in” as well as establish program goals and objectives, develop and formalize program policies and procedures, and develop training modules. Policy needed to be developed to support the ‘Ohana Conferencing model.

“Identification of key stakeholders is essential. You need to work with them, share your vision and mission.”—Arlynn Howell Livingston, Director, EPIC

“You have to realize that it takes a lot longer than a year to start new projects. If you think it will take one year, it will take two. The vision and the mission have to be strong enough to compel people to stay involved.” — Arlynn Howell Livingston, Director, EPIC

“You can never lose sight that everything we do is based on relationships.” — Arlynn Howell Livingston, Director, EPIC

A number of stakeholders noted that their involvement in this early collaborative relationship was a very positive experience. It provided an opportunity for two institutions – the Family Court and DHS – to work together toward a common goal and to creatively problem-solve how to better serve the needs of children and families. This collaborative strategy coincided with the court’s implementation of “Big 5” meetings as part of its overall court reform agenda. The “Big 5” meeting brings together decision-makers from the Family Court, DHS, the Office of the Attorney General, parent’s attorneys, guardians *ad litem*, and the Foster Parents’ Association to collaboratively address systemic reforms. The “Big 5” meetings provide an opportunity for administrators to discuss various issues in child abuse and neglect cases that affect the entire child protection system and work cooperatively to develop various joint initiatives.⁵³

“In an indirect way, the ‘Ohana program helped us to understand the value of starting our Big 5 meetings. It helped us recognize the power of collaboration.” – Family Court Judge

“We had to pick judges, social workers, attorneys, and parole officers that were open to working with the family and were able to accept the outcome generated by the family. It was a paradigm shift. What the family sees as its strengths may be very different than what the social worker assesses the family’s strengths to be.”

—Judge Michael Town

• Specific Barriers Facing Implementation

One of the first challenges to program implementation identified by stakeholders was resistance on the part of DHS caseworkers and the broader community to the ‘Ohana model. Initially, caseworkers did not want to refer their cases to the new pilot program. Given that the ‘Ohana model represented a new model of practice for caseworkers and a new way of working with families, resistance from caseworkers was understandable. Early program stakeholders undertook active efforts to educate caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators about the FGC model generally and the ‘Ohana program specifically. Caseworkers were exposed to the practice model and supervisors were given the opportunity to sit in on early conferences. Trust had to be developed with social workers and supervisors.

⁵³ For more information see the *Child Victims Act Model Court Status Report 1999*. (January 2000). *Technical Assistance Bulletin* Vol. 4, No. 1. NCJFCJ, Reno, Nevada and *Child Victims Act Model Court Status Report 2000*. (May 2001). *Technical Assistance Bulletin* Vol. 5, No. 2. NCJFCJ, Reno, Nevada. The concept of “Table of 5” originated in the Child Protection Division of the Cook County Juvenile Court, Chicago, Illinois, as a tool for reform. A number of Model Courts have subsequently adopted some version of regular “Table of 5” meetings.

The pilot community, the Wai'anae community of O'ahu, also had reservations about working with DHS within a new collaborative decision-making structure. Program stakeholders had to build trust with community members and negotiate a new relationship between DHS and the broader community. Core philosophies underlying FGC and the 'Ohana model required shared power and shared decision-making. For community members and child welfare professionals, this represented a significant change in how they would work together.

Participants in the design and development of 'Ohana conferencing identified a number of barriers that needed to be addressed before their vision for the program could be implemented, including: fragmented and inaccessible services; lack of available funding and staffing resources; community distrust of DHS; and resistance from social workers to opening up their practice. Interview respondents noted that social workers were being asked to embrace a different way of working with families, one that asked them to share power in decision-making, and that this made social workers uncomfortable.

What specific barriers were faced in implementing 'Ohana Conferencing?

"In the implementation stage, the first challenge was to get cases referred; to get caseworkers to open their practice [which] exposes the practice of social workers. Supervisors sat in on conference, as well as one or two representatives from DHS and family members. The community was very hostile to DHS, so it took courage. There had to be negotiation. The shift in control was huge. The concepts of shared power and shared decision-making were very unknown."—Arlynnna Howell-Livingston, Director of EPIC

"Barriers were all inside CPS. Staff members had a hard time giving up time to family. Social workers said, 'I didn't get a Master's in social work to give decision-making power to the family.' Social workers would say that they already do it anyway. So there was resistance at the front end. Some social workers may never refer a case to 'Ohana Conferencing."—Dr. Susan Chandler, Past Director DHS

"Resistance from the CPS. They thought they would have to share power and authority in decision-making."—Dawn Slaten, EPIC, Legal Operations/Business Manager

- **Building a Pilot Caseload**

Obviously, generating referrals to a new program is essential. As noted, caseworkers were initially hesitant to refer cases to the 'Ohana program. Relationship- building and training were essential to building confidence in the program. Early program leaders also "camped out" at the child welfare office in Wai'anae, reviewed cases to identify early "test" cases, and worked with the caseworkers and supervisors to prepare the cases for a conference. Although initially developed as a diversionary program, these early test cases were active CPS cases with court involvement. Most of the early cases were referred to the 'Ohana program toward the end of the case hearing process (e.g., at the permanency or TPR stage).

"Although initially intended to be a diversionary program, it took some time to evolve into that."—Family Court Judge

- **Resource Challenges**

Although the program was able to secure seed money, a lack of program resources posed a significant challenge in the early implementation stage of 'Ohana Conferencing. Early program leaders donated time, worked out of their homes, and used personal funds to purchase food for conferences. At a critical point in the implementation of the program, approximately three years after its initial implementation, an individual made a private donation to the 'Ohana program. This enabled the program to rent office space, purchase equipment, and hire staff. One program stakeholder noted that the private donation also served as a needed boost in morale.

"We were burning out ... by being recognized for our efforts it served as a huge shot in the arm that allowed us to do foundation work and continue the program." –Arlynnna Howell Livingston, Director, EPIC.

- **Meeting the Service Needs of Families**

One judicial stakeholder noted that an early and consistent challenge for the 'Ohana program was the development of service plans and the provision of services. This was a struggle because of the lack of available services for children and their families. Although creative solutions to this resource problem were often found, the provision of timely and appropriate services continues to be a challenge.

"There are not enough resources and parents do not always want services, but access to services is part of protecting parents' rights." – Family Court Judge

- **Overcoming Barriers**

The 'Ohana Conferencing Program design and development team prepared a plan for addressing these implementation barriers, particularly the resistance from social workers to this new form of practice, and put this plan into action.

What strategies were used to overcome barriers to implementation?

"Leadership from the top and persistence. The director of DHS and I had a clear vision and knew it would work. We had faith. We were very open to processing with anyone that had questions. The director and I had a problem-solving mentality."—Judge Michael Town

"Identifying key players that would be necessary for discussions of policies and procedures, bringing them together with real focused intent and follow-through, getting to know people, and maintaining relationships."—Arlynnna Howell Livingston, Director of EPIC

"Statutory change. The social worker had to write up why a conference is not appropriate. Train at least two people in each unit and hope the word will spread internally across."—Susan Chandler, Past Director DHS

"Training. We did a lot of training with social workers and urged them to do at least one conference. In most cases, after they did at least one, they overcame their resistance."—Dawn Slaten, EPIC, Legal Operations/Business Manager

Connecting FGC Model Philosophies to Practices and Policies

‘Ohana Conferencing was designed to honor the cultural traditions of the Hawai‘ian people, recognize and maximize families’ strengths and resources, and build upon and support families’ hopes and dreams for their children. The conferencing process is intended to build relationships among family members, social workers, and other service providers in an effort to promote positive and proactive discussions concerning the children’s safety and care. It is hoped that these relationships provide a mechanism for the sharing of fundamental information that is needed for making informed decisions that are in the best interests of the child(ren).

EPIC staff have articulated a “Statement of Values” that underscores the program’s core philosophies, and is reflective of the fundamental principles of family group conferencing as a general model. The “Statement of Values” is clearly documented in EPIC’s *Policies and Procedures Manual*, as well as in all of its various training manuals.

EPIC – ‘Ohana Conferencing: Statement of Values

- ‘Ohana Conferencing values the **family**. Family members are gathered together to become partners with the Department of Human Services. Family resources are found and utilized.
- ‘Ohana Conferencing values **family strength**. The ‘Ohana Conference builds first upon the strengths of the family, then marshals the resources of the family and the community to further strengthen family.
- ‘Ohana Conferencing values the **community**. The community in which the family lives and relates is a stakeholder in the decision-making for the protection of children.
- ‘Ohana Conferencing values the **culture of each family**. The ‘Ohana Conference asks each family to structure the conference according to its own family rituals and values.
- ‘Ohana Conferencing values **collaboration**. The family, the community, the Department of Human Services, and the Family Court working together to protect children provide a strong network of accountability and safety.

The ‘Ohana Conferencing Process

Phase I: Referral to EPIC for an ‘Ohana Conference

The referral to an ‘Ohana Conference begins when a social worker makes an initial determination that (1) a conference would be beneficial to the family and (2) that a parent is willing to have the conference take place. The social worker then relays the necessary information to EPIC so that a conference can be convened. Referral information includes:

- The names and contact information of the family in the case, as well as extended family members;
- The names and contact information of any professionals that may be involved in the case, including child welfare workers, legal representatives, service providers, school counselors, and so forth;
- Information as to the status of the case – case information provided at referral may include evidence that led to CPS involvement in the case, information about Family Court involvement, and information about the family. This information may be used by

- EPIC staff to understand which family members are necessary to include in the conference experience and what barriers to participation might be expected; and
- Any additional information about the case that will help plan and facilitate the conference.

Both CPS workers and the family have the prerogative to refuse an ‘Ohana conference. There is no policy in Hawai‘i that excludes a particular type of case from ‘Ohana conferencing, although CPS workers have been known to refuse to conference cases involving confirmed sex abuse.⁵⁴ The Hawai‘ian legislature has passed a bill requiring CPS workers to document in their Safe Home Guidelines why ‘Ohana Conferencing was not appropriate for a specific case.

Phase II: Preparation and Planning for the Conference

Preparing and planning for an ‘Ohana Conference involves a number of specific tasks:

- Reviewing referral forms and contacting the social workers to acknowledge receipt of the referral, as well as obtaining additional information if necessary;
- Determining the appropriateness of the case for ‘Ohana Conferencing;
- Assigning the case coordinator who will set up the ‘Ohana Conference (i.e., invite all the parties, expand the list of invitees where appropriate, determine a date and time, and find a convenient site);
- Purchasing, preparing, and taking food and drinks to the conference site;
- Preparing the site for the conference; and
- Briefing the social worker before the start of the conference about who will be attending and any other new information that might be valuable to the conference process.

‘Ohana conferences are scheduled at a date, time, and place convenient for the family.

An important part of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program is that conferences are held in neutral, accessible settings in the community. Conferences have been held in churches, community centers, recreation areas, parks, and private agencies within the families’ community. Discussions with program stakeholders indicate that such settings appear to raise the level of comfort for family members and their support networks. Due to families’ work schedules, conferences may be scheduled in the evenings, on weekends, or at other times when families are most likely to be available. According to program stakeholders, accommodations such as this have proven to be very important in enhancing the level and quality of participation by families.

Phase III: The ‘Ohana Conference

In addition to EPIC facilitators, the ‘Ohana Conferencing program uses facilitators drawn from the same community as the family (depending on facilitator availability). These community facilitators receive specialized training on the process of facilitation, as well as on the practices, policies, and procedural and legal issues involved in child welfare cases. The use of community facilitators helps to embed the conference process within the family’s cultural and community context. In addition to serving as facilitators, these individuals serve as community resources for family members. If a community facilitator is not available, the recorder will serve as the community resource for the family members.

⁵⁴ This information was obtained from key program stakeholders, including DHS/CPS representatives.

The use of community facilitators embeds the conference process in the community and culture of the family. It develops linkages and relationships among the family, the court, DHS, service providers, and the community. Through community facilitators, resources are developed in the community and the community response to families in crisis is enhanced.

Conference recorders work closely with facilitators and are primarily responsible for legibly and succinctly recording the conference proceedings on easel paper during conferences. These notes are hung on the wall for all participants to see. Recording the conference serves several important functions, including validation of participants’ ideas, facilitation of “group memory,”⁵⁵ and encouragement of open discussion.

A community facilitator is a respected community member who shares the family’s cultural values, and who understands the formal and informal support systems of the community. The community facilitator’s role is essential to the process. Community facilitators bring a rich and deep knowledge of the community’s resources and values to the ‘Ohana Conference. Community facilitators know their community, they are accessible to the families because they live and work in the community. They know the pulse of the community and they understand the culture of the family. They represent the commitment and the heart of the community. By bringing the community facilitator into the process, an affirmation of the community’s role and responsibility in the protection of children is made.

– Diversion Project Matrix, NCJFCJ (*Supra* note 8).

The conference process itself consists of identifying problems that are pressing and can be addressed by the group; identifying family resources; and working towards family decisions to address problems. Program stakeholders indicate that ‘Ohana Conferences typically take three hours or more from the welcome to the signing of agreements by family members and the social worker. An ‘Ohana Conference generally involves 10 distinct phases or steps.

Step 1: Welcome

The conference opens with a prayer, moment of silence, or other traditional beginning which is selected by the family. When asking the family if they would like to begin with some kind of traditional opening, the facilitator pays particular attention to family elders participating in the conference.

Step 2: Introductions

All participants introduce themselves and identify their relationship to the child(ren). The facilitator introduces the ‘Ohana Conferencing process and the conduct of the meeting. In explaining the role of the facilitator, the facilitator notes that (s)he is not part of child protective services (CPS), that (s)he works for EPIC ‘Ohana Conferencing. The facilitator emphasizes that (s)he will play a neutral role in the conference. The facilitator then presents the opening statement of the ‘Ohana Conference, reviews the agenda and purpose of the conference, and ensures that all participants understand the overall structure and process of the conference. The facilitator also reviews the ground rules and the confidentiality statement.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ The concept of “group memory” was coined by Geoff Ball, a specialist in multi-party resolution. He is also the founder of RESOLVE, one of the nation’s first consulting firms to promote collaborative problem-solving as an alternative to litigation. See “Graphic facilitation focuses a group’s thoughts.” April 1998. www.cbi-web.org/content/publications/consensus.

⁵⁶ The confidentiality of court records of child abuse and neglect cases is governed by HRS § 587-81. These records may be made available to “other appropriate persons, who are not parties, only upon order of the court” and after the court has determined that releasing the records would be in the child’s best interests or would serve some other legitimate purpose. This section also authorizes DHS to release information contained in court records as provided in departmental rules concerning confidentiality. DHS Rules, Subtitle 11 Child Welfare Service Programs, Chapter 1601, Confidentiality, authorize the release of information concerning child abuse and neglect reports and subsequent action by DHS if there is a signed and dated consent (§17-1601-5). These Rules also allow the release of confidential information without a written prior consent to

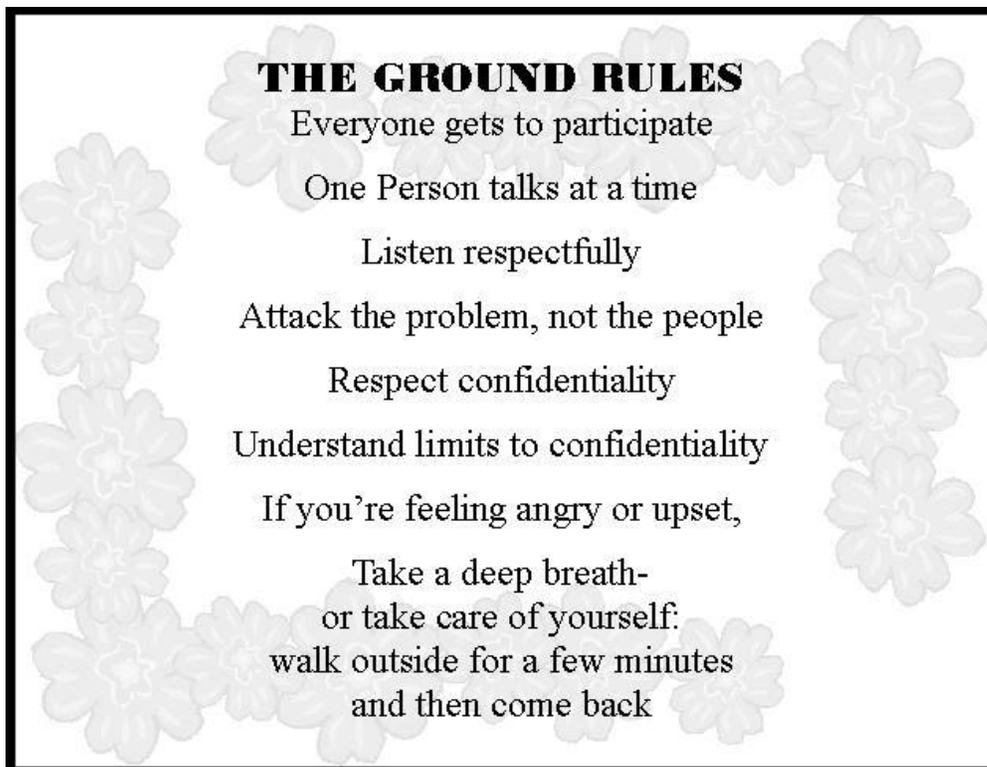
Setting the Tone: Family focused and culturally relevant. The welcoming statement and introduction serve to focus on the child(ren) as the center of the discussion, explain the overall purpose and structure of the conference, establish ground rules, and explain confidentiality and its limits.

A poster of primary agenda elements is hung in the conference room. As part of the introductory stage of the conference, the facilitator asks all participants to review the agenda. The facilitator then briefly explains each component of the agenda.

An 'Ohana conference agenda would include:

- Welcome
- Introductions
- Why are we here today?
- Family Strengths
- Hopes and Dreams for the Children
- Worries and Legal Timelines
- Help and Services
- Private Family Time
- Agreement
- Closure

A poster of the ground rules is also hung in the conference room. Using the poster as a reference point, the facilitator reviews each of the ground rules and asks all participants to agree to the rules.



*Sample ground rules from EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing Training Manual 2002.

persons required to secure services or benefits for the child which would not otherwise be obtainable (§17-1601-5). This would include releasing information to family members who participate in an 'Ohana Conference which is convened for the benefit of the child. A case is referred to 'Ohana Conferencing only if consent, verbal or written, is obtained from parents or if the court orders an 'Ohana Conference.

Step 3: Purpose

The DHS/CPS social worker is asked to state the purpose of the conference. This generally includes the reason DHS/CPS became involved in the family, the current situation (where the children are, what is happening with the parents), and the goals for the conference, including what the social worker hopes to accomplish.

Reviewing the purpose of the conference sets a realistic framework for decision-making and ensures that all parties are current on the status and placement of the child and the overall case.

Step 4: Hopes and Dreams for the Future

Family members identify who they want the child(ren) to be with in the future. Future planning is placed in the context of current decision-making.

Step 5: Family Strengths

The family members and professionals work together to identify family strengths. The *‘Ohana Training Manual* provides the rationale for a strengths-based approach and outlines sample opening comments and questions that can be used to facilitate such a discussion. Given that orienting oneself to see strengths in a family can be difficult for professionals, as well as for family members, the *Training Manual* also provides a possible list of strengths that can be used to start the conversation (e.g., “The family agreed to an ‘Ohana Conference ... they are willing to call on their family for help).

Discussion of a family’s hopes and dreams for its child(ren), as well as identification of family strengths, by family members and non-family members, serves to empower the family and helps it rally resources to cope with crisis in a positive way. It also serves to keep the focus on the child and to facilitate collaborative problem-solving.

Step 6: Worries and Legal Issues

Family and professionals share concerns for the child(ren) and the parents. The DHS and Family Court timelines are reviewed. Long-term consequences of current behavior are discussed. Issues and concerns are discussed openly and honestly, but within the broader framework of family and community strengths and accountability.

Safety concerns are addressed honestly and openly. Barriers to reunification and permanency are outlined and discussed. Help and services are targeted to the needs of the family and build upon and enhance existing strengths.

Step 7: Help and Services

Family support, neighborhood and community resources, and DHS services are identified. Any limits to family decision-making are noted and clarified. Throughout the entire conference process, information is shared among participants about DHS and court policy and practice, governing laws, and ASFA timeframes. Specific information is also shared about the case so that conference attendees learn about the facts of the case as part of their participation. Not only do extended family members learn about the incidents that led to DHS/CPS involvement and the reasons for that involvement, but DHS/CPS workers may also learn new facts about previously unknown family resources. It is a foundational belief of the ‘Ohana model that parents and families need to be better educated about child welfare and court systems’ process and provided the knowledge and tools to make informed decisions about the care and welfare of their children. Sharing information and educating participants also facilitates capacity-building within the broader community.

Step 8: Private Family Time

Service providers and facilitators leave the room, allowing the family as much time as necessary to come up with a plan for the safety of the child(ren). Food and drinks are provided. Private time is designed to allow the family members to discuss among themselves what services and needs they require to ensure the safety of the child and facilitate the achievement of permanency. If a family member requests that the facilitator remains in the room during private family time, this can be accommodated. The family is also told that the professionals will remain available, if necessary, to answer any questions that may arise.

“During the private family time the family is able to discuss things that CPS workers may not be aware of. Families know their own families better than anyone else. They know what is best for the children in their family. They come up with good plans. Private family time empowers the family as decision-makers.”

—Facilitator

Private family time is a critical component of the 'Ohana model. Private family time is what typically distinguishes this form of FGC program from other forms of meetings involving families, child welfare professionals, and service providers.

Step 9: Agreement

After the private family time has concluded, the whole group comes back together and the family's plan is discussed and negotiated as necessary. Foster home licensing information is taken by the social worker if the social worker will be making arrangements for a family placement. Agreements resulting from the conference are recorded on a three-part form, with a copy for CPS, EPIC, and the parent(s). EPIC also provides a mailed copy of the agreement to any conference participant who requests one.

The emergence of a service plan from private family time is another unique feature of FGC programs. In contrast to family team meetings and other types of conferencing models, professionals in this type of FGC program do not develop the plan and then have the family review it. Rather, the family develops the service plan and the professionals (in collaboration with the family) discuss it.

Step 10: Closure

The family members choose a method they feel comfortable with to close the conference (some methods have included handshakes, hugs, or prayer circles).

Phase IV: Follow-Up to the 'Ohana Conference

The individualized case plan developed by the family and agreed to by the social worker at an 'Ohana Conference is monitored for compliance by the social worker. 'Ohana Conferencing provides an opportunity for DHS, family members, service providers, legal representatives, and community support persons to collaboratively monitor case progress and solve barriers to compliance.

• Re-Conferencing

In the event of non-compliance with the individualized case plan, the social worker typically will contact EPIC to schedule a re-conference (or the social worker may also petition the Family Court). In addition, re-conferences are scheduled for the purposes of:

- Establishing a reunification schedule and safety plan, if applicable;
- Resolving a conflict over permanent placement;
- Explaining the petition process and what the family can expect from the court; and

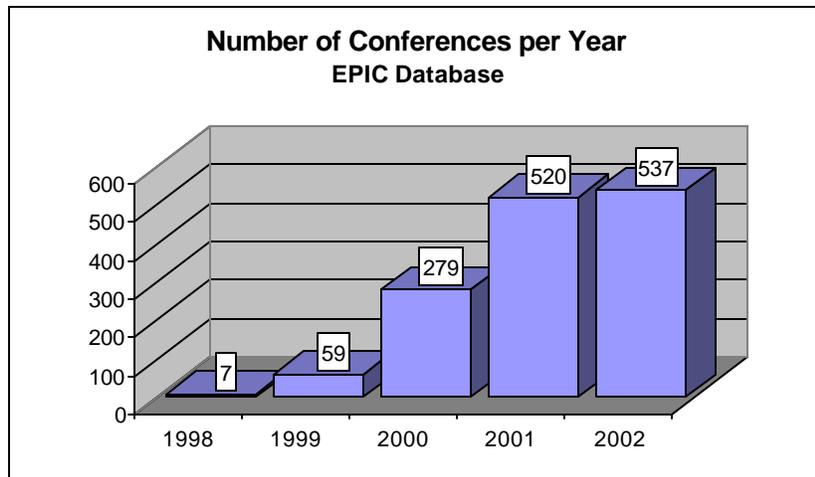
- Keeping a voluntary case⁵⁷ on track in terms of legal timelines. In fact, re-conferences are required in all voluntary cases.

During the process of scheduling a re-conference, EPIC's policies and procedures require the conference coordinator to talk with the social worker to get updated information on new service providers or legal advocates, and to talk informally with the family to find out how the individualized family plan has worked. If parents or family members have concerns about individualized family plans or safety issues, EPIC will inform the DHS/CPS social worker.

It is important to note that, in cases where the case plan requirements are not satisfied within six months, the DHS social workers are mandated by Hawai'i's Child Welfare Statutes to file a petition with the court.⁵⁸

Program Capacity

Since 3/19/98 EPIC has conducted 1,518 'Ohana Conferences.⁵⁹ The number of conferences conducted in a calendar year almost doubled from 2000 to 2001 and then remained relatively consistent through 2002. Based on the number of conferences conducted between 1/1/03 and 3/14/03 (116 conferences) the number of conferences completed in 2003 is projected to increase from those held in 2002.⁶⁰



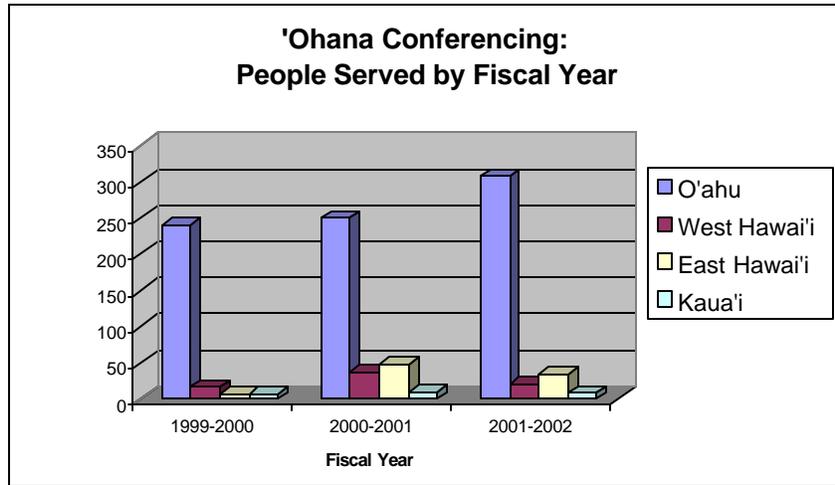
⁵⁷ Hawai'i Child Welfare Statutes, HRS § 587-81(b), provide the following definition of a voluntary case...the Department shall...seek to enter into a service plan, without filing a petition in court, with members of the child's family and other authorized agency as the department deems necessary to the success of the service plan, including but not limited to, the member or members of the child's family who have legal custody of the child. The service plan may include an agreement with the child's family to voluntarily place the child in foster custody of the department or authorized agency, or to place the child and the necessary members of the child's family under the family supervision of the department or other authorized agency; provided that if a service plan is not successfully completed within six months, the department shall file a petition or ensure that a petition is filed by another appropriate authorized agency in court under the chapter and the case shall be reviewed as is required by federal law."

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ The time frame for the database was 3/19/98 to 3/14/03.

⁶⁰ The evaluation of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program, conducted by SMS Research & Marketing, Inc., reported that EPIC conducted 252 conferences for 166 families for the period from January 1998 through March 1999.

According to EPIC statistics, there were, on average, seven family members who participated in each 'Ohana conference. The number of family members who participated in any given conference ranged from 1-30. With respect to non-family members, participation ranged from 1-17 people, with an average of five non-family members present per conference.



CHAPTER 5

EPIC ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE: GOVERNANCE, ADMINISTRATION, STAFFING, AND TRAINING

The organizational structure of a program should support the underlying philosophical assumptions and practice expectations of the program theory or model, facilitate the delivery of program services and corresponding service utilization, and incorporate quality assurance mechanisms. Important elements of an organizational structure include issues related to governance, administration, staffing, training, and resource allocation.

EPIC: Effective Planning and Innovative Communication

EPIC (Effective Planning and Innovative Communication) is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization created to design policies and procedures in cooperation with the Hawai'i Department of Health and Human Services (DHS), and to establish 'Ohana Conferencing as a viable tool for families and social workers in Hawai'i's child welfare system. EPIC is comprised of a Board of Directors, a team management system, six-full time staff, and 35 part-time facilitators.

Throughout the EPIC offices, pictures of children, especially native Hawai'ian children, are prominently displayed. Artwork (including children's art and posters from child advocacy groups) and quotes from famous historical figures that reflect the underlying philosophy and core values of EPIC and family group conferencing (FGC) are also prominently displayed. The mission statement is located in the entryway and visible to everyone working in and visiting the offices. EPIC's well-developed mission statement reflects the core values and philosophy of the organization, as well as the overarching goals of the organization. EPIC's mission statement also reflects the underlying philosophy and principles of family group decision-making.

EPIC's Mission Statement

"Families are the foundation of our community, and their well-being is inextricably linked to the health and prosperity of the community, state, and nation. EPIC transforms the culture of child welfare practices through a respectful, collaborative, solution-oriented process that protects children, strengthens families, and enhances the health of the community."

Governance, Administration, and Oversight

The Board of Directors is responsible for the oversight of the 'Ohana Conferencing program and maintains involvement in policies and procedures. EPIC's Legal Operations/Business Manager also serves on the Board.⁶¹

⁶¹ EPIC, Inc. *Purchase of Service (POS) Proposal Application*. (2002). Pgs. 41-42

The Executive Director⁶² is responsible for the overall administration of the program, including 'Ohana Conference facilitation, mentoring of facilitators, trainings, and supervision of staff. The Executive Director is also responsible for recruiting, hiring, and training new staff; assessment of staff performance and practice; and overall direction and management of the 'Ohana Conferencing program to ensure that program goals and objectives are achieved in accordance with policies and procedures developed by EPIC and DHS.

The Legal Operations/Business Manager⁶³ is responsible for accurate and timely maintenance of the business aspects of the organization, as well as the legal work of the 'Ohana Conferencing program. The Legal Operations/Business Manager also facilitates 'Ohana Conferences and serves as a mentor to facilitators.

The Operations Manager⁶⁴ is responsible for supervising the work performed by the case manager, conference coordinators, facilitators, recorders, and neighborhood island DHS liaisons. The Operations Manager works closely with the Executive Director to ensure that program goals and objectives are achieved in accordance with policies and procedures developed by EPIC and DHS. The Operations Manager is also responsible for quality assurance aspects of 'Ohana Conferencing, including database management and evaluations of the case manager, conference coordinators, facilitators, and recorders.

EPIC has a clear governance and supervisory structure. Roles and responsibilities for each position are clearly articulated in policy and procedures. EPIC's *Policies and Procedures Manual* explains EPIC's mission, its organizational structure, the duties and responsibilities of each staff member, and lines of supervision.

Staffing and Supervision

All staff members are expected to participate in weekly staff meetings. Staff meetings support good communication, recognize each staff member's contribution to the organization and delivery of services, keep all staff members informed, and clarify roles and responsibilities. Written performance evaluations of staff are conducted annually.

⁶² Minimum qualifications for this position include a masters degree in social work or an equivalent related human services discipline earned in an accredited graduate program, or a law degree with a specialty in family law; relevant training and experience in working with families whose children have been harmed or threatened with harm and facilitation and/or mediation; the ability to work cooperatively with social work, judicial, legal and fiscal/clerical personnel and with representatives of other agencies; and the ability to plan and supervise work assigned to the staff of the program.

⁶³ Minimum qualifications for this position include a law degree earned at an accredited law school; considerable experience in family law and the ability to provide representation to clients to complete adoption, guardianship and other custody actions; relevant training and experience in working with families whose children have been harmed or threatened with harm and in facilitation and mediation; the ability to work cooperatively with social work, judicial, legal, and fiscal/clerical personnel and with representatives of other agencies; and the ability to plan and supervise work assigned to the staff of the program.

⁶⁴ Minimum qualifications for this position include a masters degree in social work or an equivalent related human services discipline earned in an accredited graduate program; relevant training and experience in working with families whose children have been harmed or threatened with harm and facilitation and/or mediation; the ability to work cooperatively with social work, judicial, legal, and fiscal/clerical personnel and with representatives of other agencies; and the ability to plan and supervise work assigned to the staff of the program.

An *Administrative Assistant*⁶⁵ is responsible for assisting in the development of training materials; coordinating trainings for facilitators, recorders, and social workers; and preparing educational materials for facilitators and the community. A *Case Manager*⁶⁶ is responsible for following cases from referral to case closure. *Conference Coordinators*⁶⁷ are responsible for setting up 'Ohana Conferences, including contacting all necessary people, finding a workable date and time for everyone, and arranging a conference site. They also get a rich picture of the case and provide information about the case to the facilitator and recorder.

*Conference Facilitators*⁶⁸ are primarily responsible for providing the direct service of facilitating 'Ohana Conferences. Annual evaluation meetings are held with each facilitator, during which time the Operations Manager and the facilitator discuss the facilitator's self-assessment, the assessment by the facilitator's mentor, and any concerns raised in the social workers' and conference participants' feedback forms filled out at each conference.

*Recorders*⁶⁹ are primarily responsible for legibly and succinctly taking notes on easel paper at 'Ohana Conferences and helping to maintain information for conference participants in a visually accessible and organized way. Annual evaluation meetings are also held with each recorder, during which time the Operations Manager and the recorder discuss any concerns raised in feedback from the facilitator's and the recorder's self-assessments, as well as any concerns raised in the social workers' and conference participants' feedback forms completed at the end of each conference.

The DHS *Child Protective Services social worker* maintains case responsibility and continues to monitor case progress, including compliance with the service plan. An *'Ohana Conference facilitator does not make case recommendations or decisions. That role remains with the social worker.* When a family creates a case plan in private family time, the social worker must agree to the plan. If the social worker does not agree with the plan, a period of negotiation will be facilitated by the 'Ohana Conference facilitators. Ultimately, if there is no agreement on a case plan, a family court judge would decide upon the plan.

⁶⁵ Minimum qualifications for this position include a bachelor's degree earned in an accredited institution of higher learning; the ability to work cooperatively with facilitators and recorders; and the ability to perform administrative and clerical tasks as assigned.

⁶⁶ Minimum qualifications for this position include a bachelor's degree earned in an accredited institution of higher learning (exceptional communications skills may be substituted for the educational requirement); considerable experience in the area of child abuse and neglect; the ability to work cooperatively with social work, judicial, legal, and fiscal/clerical personnel and with representatives of other agencies; and culturally relevant training specific to the community they serve.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Minimum qualifications for this position include a bachelor's degree earned in an accredited institution of higher learning; relevant training and experience in working with families whose children have been harmed or threatened with harm and facilitation and/or mediation; culturally relevant training specific to the community they serve; and the ability to work cooperatively with social work, judicial, legal, and fiscal/clerical personnel and with representatives of other agencies.

⁶⁹ Minimum qualifications for this position include a bachelor's degree earned in an accredited institution of higher learning; experience in the area of child abuse and neglect or a related field; relevant training and experience in working with families whose children have been harmed or threatened with harm; the ability to work cooperatively with Social Workers and representatives of other agencies; the ability to write legibly so that participants can read what has been recorded; and the ability to competently write an 'Ohana Conference individualized family plan.

Training⁷⁰

The 'Ohana Program has a strong training component for EPIC staff, conference facilitators, and DHS. EPIC's budget includes funds for activities such as staff development (including workshop and conference fees) and paid staff time while attending trainings.

All EPIC staff members are required to familiarize themselves with the 'Ohana Conferencing model, EPIC's procedures for handling cases in the office, process for coordinating conferences, and policies for handling unusual or difficult situations. Examples of these tasks include: reports of child abuse, coordination of re-conferences, tracking voluntary foster custody cases, protocols for setting up and taking down 'Ohana Conferences, procedures for closing case files, and policies regarding dealing with clients who speak minimal English or who have disabilities. To facilitate staff training, EPIC has developed a number of policy and procedure guides and training manuals:

- *EPIC Policies and Procedures Manual*
- *EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing Training Manual for Social Workers*
- *EPIC Facilitator Training Manual*

The EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing Training Manual 2002 covers the following topics:

- History, Philosophy, and Values
- The Process
- Role of the Social Worker
- Convening an 'Ohana Conference
- Facilitation Skills
- Standards of Conduct for Mediators
- Recording
- Services Information
- Facing Challenges
- Legal Information
- Forms
- Current Related Research
- Site Information and EPIC Directory

EPIC also maintains a library of journals, publications, and articles pertaining to child development, child welfare services and practices, and child and family well being. Staff members may access library resources as needed. EPIC encourages staff to attend at least two child welfare seminars and/or conferences yearly as part of staff development. EPIC staff also use the training provided in office systems and software through the Employment Training Fund of the State Department of Labor and Industries. In addition to broad-based training of all EPIC staff, specialized and role-specific trainings are also conducted.

- **Training Facilitators**
EPIC's training of facilitators includes an orientation, three intensive workshops each year, continuing self-evaluation, evaluation by a mentor, and regular debriefing sessions. Each facilitator is required to complete 12 hours of orientation to 'Ohana Conferencing facilitation, including basic skills training, experience with the 'Ohana Conference model, and other information about facilitation. In addition, facilitators are required to participate in 40 hours of mediation/facilitation skills training, as well as facilitation of at least five cases as a trainee while accompanied by a mentor. A certificate of completion is awarded upon completion of the mentoring process, which includes self and mentor assessments. After completion of the training, mentors will continue to observe and assess the facilitator's skills. Prior to training, facilitators must already possess requisite

⁷⁰ EPIC, Inc. *Purchase of Service (POS) Proposal Application*. (2002). pgs. 31-33.

knowledge and/or skills with respect to the DHS/CPS system, the legal system and community, skills in facilitation and mediation, as well as strong social and written skills. The majority of facilitators selected for training are social workers or family law attorneys.

- Training for Conference Recorders

EPIC's training plan for recorders includes an orientation, three intensive workshops each year, continuing self-evaluation, evaluation by a mentor, and regular debriefing sessions. Each recorder is required to complete 30 hours of orientation to 'Ohana Conferencing recording, basic skill training, experience with the 'Ohana Conference model, and instruction on supporting the facilitation process. Self and mentor assessments are utilized to identify further training requirements. Recorders must demonstrate the ability to listen, summarize, reframe, write clearly, draft agreements, assist with room set-up and breakdown, manage small group interactions, and maintain case documents (such as sign-in forms and evaluations). Recorders must also be willing to assist with picking up refreshments and maintaining supplies and equipment. Recorders must already possess knowledge regarding community resources, cultural awareness of the families being served, and the DHS/CPS system.

An experienced, well-trained, and competent staff is essential to the success of the 'Ohana Conferencing program. EPIC has ensured a high level staff with minimum skills and education requirements, detailed job descriptions, and continued training.

Accountability Mechanisms

In 1998, EPIC accepted a purchase-of-service contract with the State of Hawai'i. This contract is monitored by DHS in accordance with the requirements set forth in Chapter 103F, Hawai'i Revised Statutes. Steps taken to monitor the contract on an annual basis may include site visits, with a comprehensive evaluation of several areas of performance, including review of conformance with standard contractual requirements. The contract is also monitored on an ongoing basis through review of monthly and quarterly reports, as required, and periodic assessment of program effectiveness.

EPIC submits quarterly and annual reports to DHS summarizing the major program activities undertaken by EPIC during the reporting period. Data reported will include the number of service units (each service unit equals one 'Ohana Conference including training, referral, convening activities, logistics, and other activities that complete the conference); the number of persons served; accomplishments of program outcomes and objectives; problems encountered; and recommendations for proposed future activities. Fiscal reports describe cost reimbursement invoices (submitted in the format provided by DHS) and quarterly and year-end reports listing total expenditures of funds.

EPIC also maintains a system of self-appraisal and program evaluation to evaluate the effectiveness of all service activities, including tools to identify client change relevant to client outcomes, and a process for making improvements or taking corrective action based on evaluation findings.⁷¹

⁷¹ EPIC, Inc. *Purchase of Service (POS) Proposal Application*. (2002). pgs. 46-47.

CHAPTER 6

THE ‘OHANA CONFERENCE MODEL: IMPLEMENTATION EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents results from an examination of how Hawai‘i’s family group conferencing (FGC) model, the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program, has been implemented, and the benefits it has provided to children and families involved in child abuse and neglect cases in Hawai‘i. Results address whether core ‘Ohana program features are realized in current practice, the unique aspects of program features in comparison to other FGC programs around the country, and whether or not the overall goals of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program have been met. Through an evaluation of specific program elements, the overall integrity of the program model is evaluated. Results related to potential outcomes of participation in ‘Ohana Conferencing, such as enhanced decision-making, family empowerment, and community-building are also presented. Note, however, that due to time, funding, and logistical constraints, this evaluation does not compare outcomes associated with ‘Ohana-conferenced cases to outcomes associated with a similar control group of non-conferenced cases. For example, it was not possible to determine in this study whether ‘Ohana Conferencing is ultimately serving as an effective diversionary tool – successfully diverting child welfare cases from the family court. In addition, it was not possible to determine whether those court-involved cases receiving an ‘Ohana Conference were more likely to achieve timely permanency than similar, non-conferenced cases.

Results from this evaluation of the implementation of the ‘Ohana Conferencing model are presented in three sections. Section I presents results regarding how well ‘Ohana Conferencing’s original program theory has been translated into current practice. This section closely examines program features and whether these features reflect core values of FGC and the ‘Ohana Conferencing model. Data obtained from interviews with key stakeholders (i.e., Family Court Judges, EPIC staff and facilitators, DHS social workers), from exit surveys of conference participants, and from the program materials and databases provided by EPIC, are used to compare the model as it was initially conceived to how it is currently functioning. To provide context for an examination of ‘Ohana Conferencing program features, corresponding program features from 21 other FGC programs around the nation are also presented.⁷¹ Section II presents immediate outcomes associated with participation in an ‘Ohana Conference. While practice recommendations are discussed throughout each relevant section of this chapter, Section III summarizes recommendations for program enhancement and includes a discussion of the contribution of this report to the evolving knowledge and debate about family group conferencing models and processes. Throughout the chapter illustrative quotes are provided from stakeholders as they pertain to each of the issues addressed. Inclusion of these quotes serves several important functions. Most importantly, it ensures that the voices of those individuals who have been closely involved in the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program, including parents and families, have the opportunity to be heard and to share their experiences and comments with respect to the program.⁷² An analysis of quotes and comments also provides

⁷¹ Recall that a national survey of FGC Program Specialists was conducted by PPCD project staff. Twenty-one Program Specialists were interviewed telephonically and completed a short questionnaire about programmatic features. Topic areas covered by the survey were: program inception and goals; institution housing the FGC program; funding; state or local implementation; single or co-facilitation model; training; staffing; referral; re-conferencing; use of private family time; and who participates in the FGC. Comparative information from the 21 jurisdictions participating in the survey of program features are presented in aggregate or summary form.

⁷² Because families were not interviewed as part of this evaluation, families’ comments are limited to those provided on exit surveys. These exit surveys, developed by EPIC as part of their ongoing evaluation efforts, do not allow for extensive comments from parents (i.e., most questions are close-ended in a check box format).

insight into the extent to which the core values of FGC have become embedded in the fabric of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program, its ongoing practices, and in the experiences of those who participate in it.

Section I: Findings Regarding How Well the 'Ohana Conferencing Program Theory Has Been Translated into Practice

A critical component of any program evaluation is the examination of the link between the model, or program theory, as originally conceptualized; the need it was intended to address; the program design and organizational structure; and the current operation of the program in daily practice.⁷³ Chapter 3 reviewed the core philosophical assumptions and practice expectations of family group conferencing as a general model of practice. As discussed, the 'Ohana Conferencing program developed out of this general model of FGC and was then tailored to address the specific needs of the Hawai'ian community. The 'Ohana Conferencing Program theory is schematically represented on page 47

The Need for a New Practice Paradigm

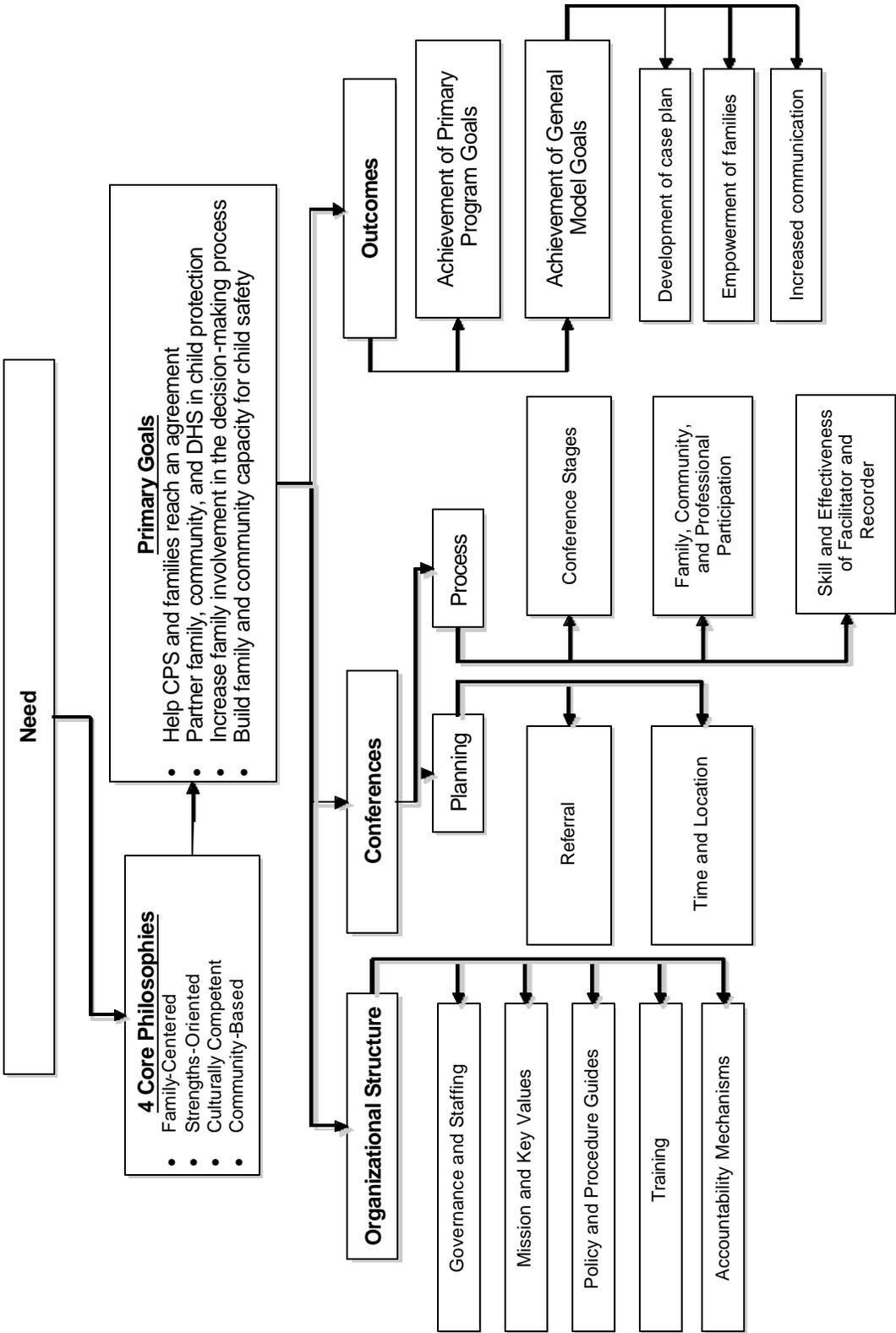
The development and implementation of 'Ohana Conferencing grew out of concerns that the current model of child welfare practice in Hawai'i was not in the best interest of children, families, or communities. Interview respondents reported that Hawai'i's experience with a dramatic increase in the number of children in out-of-home care, accompanying high case loads both at court and DHS, and dissatisfied consumers (e.g., families, communities, and service providers) gave impetus to systemic reform efforts in child welfare practice. As the planning and implementation of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program began, a clear vision for a new child welfare system took shape – one whose vision included opening up the system to more fully allow for the involvement of families, extended kin, and community members in decision-making. Accomplishing this vision required a child welfare system that was family-friendly, prevention-focused, accessible and community-based, comprehensive in services, and accountable.

Are Key Values of FGC and 'Ohana Conferencing Reflected in Program Goals?

As discussed in Chapter 3, FGC as a general model is, fundamentally, a family-centered, family strengths-oriented, culturally competent, and community-based process that enables families, child welfare professionals, and communities to partner in a collaborative problem-solving process. The goal of this collaborative process is the development of a plan that ensures children are cared for safely and protected from future harm while empowering the family and utilizing community supports. The FGC model outlines a general process to accomplish this goal that includes the initial referral to the program, the preparation and planning of the conference, the conference itself, and necessary follow-up tasks.

⁷³ For an overview of the components of an effective program evaluation see Dobbin, S.A. & Gatowski, S.I. (1998). "Thinking About Program Evaluation: What is It and Why Should You Do It?" *Technical Assistance Bulletin*, Vol. 11(4), National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, Reno, NV.

'Ohana Conferencing Program Theory Schematic



Although EPIC has a clearly articulated “Mission Statement” and “Statement of Values,” it does not have a clearly articulated list of specific, measurable, program goals for 'Ohana Conferencing. Researchers were able to infer, however, a general list of program goals from program materials, discussions with program administrators, and other written materials describing EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing. These program goals are:

- To help DHS/Child Protective Services (CPS) and families to reach an agreement that will keep the child safe with as little uprooting of, and trauma to, the child as possible;
- To partner family, community, and DHS to strengthen the protection and safety of children;
- To enhance the decision-making process among families, community service providers, and legal representatives for parents and children;
- To increase communication;
- To build family and community capacity for problem-solving and child safety;
- To develop a support system to keep children safe;
- To support family reunification, or finding safe permanent homes for children; and
- To increase the involvement of parents and families in the decision-making process.

A National Snapshot ...

With respect to the 21 Program Specialists surveyed, the two most commonly identified goals of a FGC program were empowerment of the families as decision-makers and development of a case plan. Twenty-nine percent of FGC program specialists responding to the survey (n=6 of 21) identified “empowering families as decision-makers” as a major program goal.² More than one quarter of the program specialists (29%; n=6 of 21) reported that the “development of a case plan” was a major goal of the program. In addition, program specialists indicated that “reducing the amount of time to achieve permanency” and “reducing the number of children in care” were program goals (19%; n=4 of 21). Fourteen percent of program specialists (n=3 of 21) reported “identification of permanent placements” as a program goal. Other program goals mentioned included: to “enhance the decision-making process by including the family” (10%; n=2 of 21); to “maintain the child safely in the home” (10%; n=2 of 21); to “place child(ren) with family members where appropriate” (10%; n=2 of 21); to “resolve problems” (10%; n=2 of 21); to “reunify the family” (10%; n=2 of 21); to “increase communication among parties” (5%; n=1 of 21) and to “reach out to the extended family” (5%; n=1 of 21).

As program goals clearly illustrate, 'Ohana Conferences serve a variety of functions for families, but the primary goal identified by program stakeholders is for the family to develop a plan that will provide for the safety of the child and address the problem(s) that brought the family into the child welfare system in the first place.

FINDING: Key Values of FGC and the 'Ohana Conferencing Program are Reflected in Program Goals

'Ohana Conferencing Program goals are generally consistent with the underlying values and philosophies of FGC. In various ways, 'Ohana Conferencing Program goals reflect a focus on child safety and permanency, family and community, the development of partnerships, and community capacity-building. Program administrators should also develop a list of specific, measurable, and prioritized program goals. These goals should be consistent with both EPIC's mission and operating philosophy, and with the core philosophies of the FGC model, and should clearly articulate how those philosophies will be realized in practice. However, although explicitly articulated in their “Statement of Values,” program goals only implicitly address issues of respect and culture. Given that culture is a multi-dimensional and complex concept, and is clearly recognized by program administrators as an important aspect of work with families in

² Percentages may sum to than 100% due to the ability to provide more than one answer.

Hawai'i, program administrators may want to consider developing a specific *program goal* around cultural competence. A list of clearly stated, prioritized, and measurable goals emphasizes the program's commitment to accountability. Whether program goals are achieved will be addressed in Section II of this chapter.

↳ **Program Enhancement Recommendations:**

- ◆ Develop a list of specific, measurable and prioritized program goals. These goals should be consistent with both EPIC's mission and operating philosophy and with the core philosophies of the FGC model, and clearly articulate how those philosophies will be realized in practice.
- ◆ Develop and incorporate a program goal that explicitly addresses issues of respect and cultural competence.

The Planning Phase: Does the Pre-Conference Process Support Key Values of FGC?

Conference Referral

EPIC typically restricts the ability to refer a case to an 'Ohana Conference to social workers or their supervisors. Social workers identified a number of general and family specific criteria they consider when deciding to refer a case to the 'Ohana Conferencing Program. In general, social workers indicated that the family had to voluntarily agree to participate in the program and appear to be capable of participating effectively in the conference process. Some of the family specific issues that social workers focused on in the referral decision included the presence of an existing support network of extended family or friends, the ability to identify strengths within the family, and a willingness on the part of the family to try to work collaboratively to create a better family system or environment for the child(ren). There was general agreement among the social workers that not all cases are appropriate for 'Ohana Conferencing and that not all families can benefit equally from the process. Cases involving sexual abuse, domestic violence, or inter-generational drug use were specified as being least appropriate for 'Ohana conferencing because the extended and immediate support systems involved are perceived to be dysfunctional. The consensus was that such cases should be subjected to extensive review before they are referred for an 'Ohana conference to ensure that family strengths can be recognized by conference participants and that the parents will not feel victimized by the process. One worker said that (s)he does not usually recommend sex abuse cases for conferencing because of the "inherent difficulty of managing family tensions in these instances."

Cases that might be excluded from 'Ohana conferencing ...

"Families where you can not identify strengths among extended family members. Cases where there is substance abuse across generations or sex abuse. I would not recommend those cases for an 'Ohana conference." – Social Worker

"Domestic violence or sex abuse cases need exceptional review before scheduling cases for an 'Ohana conference." – Social Worker

A National Snapshot ...

The 21 Program Specialists surveyed were asked to indicate who is able to request a family group conference. Respondents reported, in order of frequency of mention, that conferences could be referred by: social workers (95%; n=20 of 21); judges (81%; n=17 of 21); attorneys (67%; n=14 of 21); parents (67%; n=14 of 21); extended family members (62%; n=13 of 21); child(ren) (52%; n=11 of 21); service providers (10%; n=2 of 21); guardians ad *litem* (GALs) (5%; n=1 of 21); and court appointed special advocates (CASAs) (5%; n=1 of 21). Of the 21 programs, 24% (n=5) of programs allow for various parties to request a family group conference but all referrals must come from Child Protective Services. In Grand Rapids, Michigan, a family group conference is mandatory if the child is to be placed.

Some jurisdictions are trying to, or have developed, ways for families to self-refer (e.g., Modesto, CA.). Program Specialists reported that self-referral would bypass any issues that may develop when a social worker is not 'on board' with the idea of family group conferencing, since social workers are frequently responsible for referrals to FGC.

Sixty-two percent of the programs (n=13 of 21) exclude particular types of cases, or case characteristics, from the FGC programs. Types of cases that are excluded from family group conferencing programs included sexual abuse (69%; n=9 of 13), domestic violence (46%; n=6 of 13), pending criminal charges (15%; n=2 of 13), and severe physical abuse (15%; n=2 of 13). Additional excluded cases include parent(s) with a prior termination of parental rights, custody disputes, gang violence, and situations where family members are not available. Eight programs (38%) do not exclude any specific type of case from the FGC program.

In contrast to 'Ohana Conferencing, many FGC programs around the country reported that they allow legal advocates, judges, service providers and other system professionals, as well as families themselves, to directly refer a case for a family group conference. Some programs allow any party to suggest a family group conference, but the power to refer a case rests only with the caseworker. Some jurisdictions also allow the court to order a case to a conference. In these jurisdictions, participation in the conference remains voluntary – the fact that participants appear at the allotted time and place fulfills the court order, but they can still choose whether or not to participate in the conference. In some jurisdictions where the court has the ability to order a family group conference, the court will explain the purpose and scope of the conference and ask the family if it is willing to participate; if the family agrees to participate, then the court will order the conference.

For a number of programs around the country, expanding the number of people who can refer a case has served several purposes. For example, different professionals, by virtue of how they interact with the family, their professional position, and their role, may see different strengths within the family and determine that a conference would be valuable. Moreover, some programs have found that expanding the number of people who can refer a case to a family group conference helps to "institutionalize the program" and generate greater stakeholder "buy-in." It is important to recognize, however, that expanding the number of people who can potentially refer a case to a family group conference also expands the potential number of cases to be conferenced. Obviously, the resource implications of expanding case referral practice must be carefully considered, as the ability to serve referred cases in a timely way also has implications for stakeholder "buy-in."

EPIC's database was analyzed to ascertain when in the case process an 'Ohana Conference typically occurs. On average, the first 'Ohana Conference is held 18 days after the initial referral to the program, with a range from 0 to 248 days. Most frequently, the conference is held 15 days from referral. In the year 2000, the average number of days from referral to the first

'Ohana Conference peaked at 64; however, the average number of days to convening a conference post-referral remains consistent for the remaining years. A second 'Ohana Conference is held an average of 95 days after the initial conference, with a range from 0 to 371 days. The average number of days between the initial conference and the second conference was greatest in 1999 (280 days). Since 1999, the average number days between the two conferences has decreased. For those cases that receive a third 'Ohana Conference, this third conference is held, on average, 105 days after the second conference.⁷⁴

Overall, the average length of time from the first 'Ohana conference to the last 'Ohana conference is 112 days. The average number of days from the initial 'Ohana Conference to the last 'Ohana Conference has steadily decreased since program inception in 1998.

With respect to conference timing, facilitators also indicated that attention needs to be paid to convening an 'Ohana conference as early as possible in the case process. One facilitator stated, "If I get a case in the beginning, I can explain timelines and clarify steps. I can give the family information about what they've gotten themselves into. This gives the family the best chance at succeeding. If they don't succeed at the end, then you know that you gave them the best shot." Another facilitator remarked, "The conference should be held sooner in the case. If held soon enough it can help with services. There are only a limited number of services, such as parenting skills training, substance abuse treatment, and anger management. It is not like we have enough resources to be creative." Facilitators did indicate that they generally prefer that 'Ohana conferences occur earlier in the case process. One facilitator remarked, "A lot of cases are coming in after service plans were created, and the service plans have failed them. The social worker ends up calling the 'Ohana conference to do permanency planning."

Social workers also prefer the conference to be held early in the case, but were concerned that on occasion conferences are held as a "last resort." Social workers indicated that by conducting the 'Ohana conference "up-front and pre-petition filing" results in earlier identification of a safety plan and concurrent plan. Social workers also mentioned that scheduling a conference is difficult because conferences generally "take the bulk of the day."

A National Comparison ...

FGC programs surveyed differed with respect to the point at which a family could be referred to conferencing. Of the Program Specialists surveyed, 57% noted that their program is "court involved, and cases could be referred at any point in the court process" (n=12 of 21). Fourteen percent indicated that their program operated as both a "purely diversionary model" and as a "court involved program" with referral occurring at any point in either process (n=3 of 21). Two Program Specialists reported their programs to be "purely diversionary," two Specialists indicated that their programs are utilized for court involved cases both pre – and post – adjudication, and two Specialists stated that their programs are only used with court-involved cases after adjudication. Of the four remaining Program Specialists, one reported that the FGC program is both "purely diversionary," as well as "court involved, but referral must occur pre-adjudication" (5%); one Specialist stated that the program is utilized both at any point in the court process, as well as when the child is aging out of the foster care system.

⁷⁴ Outliers were removed from the analysis. Outliers are data values that fall more than two standard deviations from the mean. Typically, outliers represent either very unusual cases or circumstances, or a data entry error. In either case, inclusion of outlying values would misrepresent more typical practice.

Conference Time and Location

According to program stakeholders, an important feature of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program is its ability to convene conferences in community settings at a date and time that is most convenient for family. Such programmatic features reflect the family focus of the program. Since EPIC began providing statewide 'Ohana Conferencing services in January of 1998, between 35% and 50% of conferences have been held on evenings and weekends to accommodate family needs.⁷⁵



Overall, conference participants seem satisfied with the conference location, with 64% (n=532 of 828) of all participants rating the site as "excellent" and 34% (n=280 of 828) rating it as "good enough". Only 2% of conference participants (n=16 of 828) "didn't like" the conference site, however, these respondents did not provide a specific reason as to why they felt that way.⁷⁶

Of the 628 family members who commented on the conference location, almost two-thirds (64%; n=400 of 628) rated the conference location as "excellent;" 30% (n=190 of 628) rated it as "good enough," and less than 1% (n=6 of 628) did not like the conference location. Social workers also seem to be satisfied with the location of 'Ohana conferences. Half of the social workers providing feedback (53%; n=119 of 224) rated the conference location as "excellent"; an additional 35% (n=79 of 224) gave the conference site a rating of "good"; and 11% (n=25 of 224) of social workers rated the conference site as "adequate". Only one social worker felt that the conference location was "inadequate", citing reasons unrelated to specific program or conference goals.

The conference coordinator obviously plays a key role in ensuring that all conference planning is conducted with a family-focused and strength-based approach. Findings associated with specific functions of the conference coordinator will be addressed more fully in subsequent sections of this chapter.

FINDING: Pre-Conference Planning Activities, such as Referral and Conference Venue Selection, Underscore the 'Ohana Program's Family-Focused and Strengths-Based Approach to Working with Families.

'Ohana Conferencing's referral practices clearly reflect the family-focused and family strengths-based approach of the program. While the initial referral to 'Ohana Conferencing is made by the social worker, families always retain the ability to refuse to participate in a conference. Moreover, referral decisions are based on a number of factors including the ability to identify family strengths. Cases with the potential for families to feel victimized by the conference process are excluded from the program. Conference participants, most importantly family members, are satisfied with the setting for conferences, with most rating the conference site as "excellent." EPIC has demonstrated a commitment to convening conferences at times and locations convenient for family and community members, with a considerable number of conferences convened on evenings and weekends.

⁷⁵ EPIC, Inc. *Purchase of Service (POS) Proposal Application*. (2002). pg 12. Exit surveys did not ask participants to indicate whether or not the conference time was convenient.

⁷⁶ A response was not ascertained from 5% (n=43 of 871) of respondents.

↳ **Program Enhancement Recommendations:**

- ◆ EPIC should consider whether resources and organizational capacity would support expanding the number of individuals who can refer a case to an 'Ohana Conference. Expanding case referral practice may tap into differing perspectives on families and the value of continuing to serve those families' needs.
- ◆ EPIC should consider whether the court has a role in referring, or ordering, an 'Ohana Conference, and exactly what that role is (or will be).
- ◆ EPIC should consider whether expanding the number of individuals who can refer a case to an 'Ohana Conference would facilitate greater system "buy-in" for the program.
- ◆ Although referral practices are family-focused and strengths-based, EPIC should consider expanding avenues for referral to include self-referral by families to the program.
- ◆ While EPIC schedules conferences at times most convenient for families in accordance with the family-focused nature of the program theory, social worker stakeholders did report that it is often difficult for social workers to attend conferences on evenings and weekends. These social workers noted that because it is well known that conferences are held outside of typical office hours many social workers are hesitant to refer their cases to the 'Ohana program. In light of these comments, EPIC program administrators should consider ways to balance the need to be family-focused in setting conference times and venues with the need to address concerns of major program stakeholders – especially as these concerns may be impacting referrals to the program.
- ◆ Because of the key role that conference coordinators play in ensuring that conferences are planned with attention to families' needs, strengths, and cultural background, EPIC should continue to support this important role.
- ◆ While 'Ohana conferences are convened most frequently within 15 days from referral, feedback from program stakeholders suggest that attention should be paid to holding a conference as early as possible in the *case process* (i.e., cases that have not been involved with DHS/CPS for long periods of time or court-involved cases that are pre-disposition). Such early referral to 'Ohana Conferencing facilitates information-sharing which can assist families in successfully navigating the child welfare system. Early referral to conferences may also help to build positive relationships between DHS and families and identify heretofore unknown resources for services and placement.
- ◆ Although EPIC's database effectively tracks when conferences are held post-referral, researchers were unable to determine when in overall case processing time frames cases are referred to EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing. Should this information be collected, EPIC could measure trends in referrals (i.e., do referrals typically occur at specific points in case processing?) and empirically determine whether 'Ohana Conferencing is more effective with "newer" cases as some stakeholders suggested.

The Conference Process: Does the ‘Ohana Conference Process Support Key Values of FGC?

Core Value I: Child and Family Focused

- Extended family members are included in the process.
- Family members choose the method of conference welcome.
- Participant relationships are defined in terms of relationship to child.
- Parent(s) and family must understand structure, purpose, and goal of conference.
- Ground rules are established to ensure a respectful process in which everyone participates.
- Group discussion begins with the family identifying hopes and dreams for future.
- Information-sharing and education of family members is critical.
- Private family time is necessary.
- Family members choose the method of conference closure.

“With ‘Ohana, family members are able to get involved and become informed on the issues. An additional benefit is that the extended family members are empowered to hold the parents accountable for their actions and their compliance with services. The families come up with great plans that really help the children.”

– Facilitator

Core Value II: Strengths Based

- Discussion of family strengths, including both family members and professionals, comes before discussion of deficits.
- Focus is placed on mobilizing family and community resources.
- Families must be provided with the knowledge and information necessary to make informed decisions.
- Parents and families are held accountable by tracking post-conference compliance and re-conferencing as necessary.

“We all had to collaborate around the family. It was a strengths-based model. Strengths in the immediate family, strengths in the extended family, and strengths in the community are used to keep the child with the family.”

– Family Court Judge

“People need to experience it to understand how powerful it is. I think we have to reject the concept of the dysfunctional family and the dysfunctional community and respect the family.”

– Family Court Judge

Core Value III: Culturally Competent

- Facilitators are typically drawn from family’s community.
- Family members choose the method of conference welcome.
- Attention is paid to cultural dynamics.
- Culturally appropriate food is provided.
- Conference is held in family’s community whenever possible.
- Family members choose the method of conference closure.

“Facilitators try to make sure that the opening of the conference is culturally appropriate for the family. Opening with a prayer or whatever the family deems appropriate sets a good tone for the beginning of the conference, validates what the family believes in, and displays to the family that their input is valued.”

– Facilitator

Core Value IV: Community Based

- Facilitators are drawn from family’s community.
- Conference is held in family’s community.

“We try to make sure that the facilitators and recorders are from the same culture that the family is, in order to make the environment more comfortable for participants.”

– Facilitator

- Community service providers are included in the conference.
- Community capacity is built through information sharing and education, as well as the use of community facilitators.

Private Family Time⁷⁷

A majority of facilitators interviewed reported that private family time is beneficial to the 'Ohana Conferencing process. 'Ohana facilitators feel that private family time is "very important" because it empowers the families as decision-makers. During private family time, families are able to discuss things that CPS workers may not be aware of, and to speak to each other with no inhibitions in a non-restrictive environment. Facilitators indicated that once families are given parameters to work within, they are able to address any existing issues and create their own plan during private family time. As one facilitator noted, "Families know their own families better than anyone else. They know what is best for the children in their family. They come up with good plans." When asked about private family time, another facilitator explained, "It is empowering, the whole process models problem-solving abilities."

Each of the social workers interviewed also reported that private family is beneficial to the family because it allows the family to openly communicate without feeling intimidated by professionals, to focus on the child, to review the options that were developed during the conference, and to talk about additional issues that may not have been presented in front of other participants.

It is important to note, however that facilitators do not feel that private family time is appropriate in all cases, particularly in cases in which a participant's safety may be at risk. In some instances facilitators may offer to sit in on the private family time in order to keep the family on task and ensure a greater level of comfort for participants. Some facilitators choose to break the conference up into smaller 'mini-groups' if safety is at issue. One facilitator remarked that if it has already been decided what the plan is going to be, (s)he uses private family time as an opportunity for the family to take a break, have some food, and clear their heads. Then, when the group reconvenes, (s)he reviews the plan again to make sure everyone understands it and is in agreement.

A National Snapshot ...

In an evaluation of the Miami Model Court's Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) Program, parents and family members were asked to rate how useful they found private family time. Just under half of the parents and family members surveyed (47%; n=63 of 134) found the private family time to be "very useful." However, 14% (n=19 of 134) found it to be only "somewhat useful," and 37% (n=49 of 134) found it to be "not useful at all." The degree to which parents felt they had been sufficiently prepared for the family decision making conference was a statistically significant predictor of how useful parents viewed the private family time ($p < .003$). (Gatowski et al., 2001). *Supra* note 31

⁷⁷ Data regarding parent and family's perceptions of the utility or effectiveness of private family time were not collected through EPIC evaluation forms. Therefore, parent and family perceptions of private time cannot be reported.

FINDING: The 'Ohana Conferencing Process, Including Private Family Time, Supports the Key Values of FGC.

The 'Ohana Conferencing process, through its various stages, clearly reflects the four core values of FGC – family-focused, strengths-based, culturally competent, and community-based. Each of these core values are intimately linked, supported by, and reflected in multiple conference elements. One key stage of the 'Ohana Conferencing process – private family time – was identified by both facilitators and social workers as particularly important for empowering families as decision-makers, facilitating communication among family members, and demonstrating respect for families.

↳ ***Program Enhancement Recommendations:***

- , EPIC program administrators should ensure that 'Ohana Conferencing retains flexibility in its approach to offering private family time (e.g., offering private family time on a case-by-case basis to suit the needs of families and specific case characteristics).
- , EPIC evaluation forms should be revised to allow feedback from family members regarding the utility or effectiveness of private family time.
- , Particular attention should be paid to ensuring that parents and family members are fully prepared for the 'Ohana conference and clearly understand the purpose of private family time.

Is the 'Ohana Conference Process Culturally Competent?

Facilitators were asked how they ensure that an 'Ohana conference is culturally appropriate for the particular family participating in the conference. Because conference coordinators play such a vital role in providing information to the facilitator, many facilitators explained that they rely on conference coordinators to provide them with information about a family's cultural background. One facilitator said, "The coordinators usually learn about the cultural needs of the family when initial contact is made" (e.g., if a translator is needed, area in which the family is located, etc.). Many of the facilitators stressed the importance of ensuring that the opening of the conference is culturally appropriate for the family. Facilitators felt that opening with a prayer or other tradition the family deems appropriate, "sets a good tone for the beginning of the conference," "validates what the family believes in," and "displays to the family that their input is valued." Facilitators also identified providing culturally familiar food as an additional means to ensure the cultural appropriateness of the conference for families. Moreover, community facilitators and recorders are utilized as a means of facilitating a culturally appropriate process. "We try to make sure that the recorders are from the same culture that the family is, in order to make the environment more comfortable for participants," explained an 'Ohana conference facilitator.

FINDING: The 'Ohana Conferencing Process Incorporates an Attention to Culture.

'Ohana conference coordinators focus on gathering as much information about a family's cultural background prior to the conference as possible. This information is provided to facilitators so they are prepared to address the cultural needs of the family. Conference openings are adapted to suit the cultural background and traditions of each family, and food selections are made based upon family preferences. 'Ohana Conferencing's use of community facilitators and recorders, drawn from the family's community, demonstrate the program's commitment to be both culturally competent and community-based.

The use of facilitators and recorders drawn from the same cultural community as the family is an important program feature designed to ensure a culturally relevant process. But, the use of community facilitators raises some interesting questions that program administrators may want

to explore further. Because facilitators and recorders are, by definition, a "neutral" part of the conference process, does their neutrality undermine their ability to actively advocate on behalf of the family's culture? For example, might the inclusion of an individual from the same cultural community as an active conference participant or community resource person better ensure a culturally relevant process and a culturally relevant service plan? Such a person could serve as a cultural resource person or as a community provider who "provides" cultural knowledge to the group.

The lack of congruence between the principle of "cultural competence" and the explicit goals for the 'Ohana Conference Program does not mean this ideal is not being realized in practice. In fact, data from a number of sources indicate that concerns for cultural competence are built into 'Ohana conferencing procedures and that participants are aware of this. The fact that it is a fundamental principle of the model and that it is being expressed in the practice of conferencing, however, means that, ideally, there should be a deliberate attempt to create goals that relate to cultural competence. By creating a goal or multiple goals related to cultural competence, it will be possible to evaluate the progress of the 'Ohana program in fulfilling this principle and to highlight areas where this could be improved in practice.

↳ **Program Enhancement Recommendations:**

- , EPIC program administrators should explore ways in which issues of culture can more fully and actively be integrated into the conference process, service plans, and other related conference activities and products.
- , EPIC evaluation forms do not specifically ask conference participants to provide feedback regarding whether or not the conference was culturally appropriate. Although families are asked to rate the food that was served and the site for the conference, a positive rating does not provide evidence that either were culturally appropriate to the family.⁷⁸ EPIC program administrators should consider asking participants to provide specific feedback about whether or not the conference process recognized and valued their culture (e.g., throughout each conference stage: preparation for the conference; conference location; interactions with conference coordinators, facilitators, community facilitators and recorders; the food provided; the opening and closing of conferences; and in conference follow-up).

Does the Organizational Structure of EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing Support the Philosophies and Practice Expectations of the Program Theory?

It is important that the organizational structure of a program supports the underlying philosophical assumptions and practice expectations of the program theory or model, facilitates the delivery of program services and service utilization, and incorporates quality assurance mechanisms. Critical elements of an organizational structure include issues related to staffing (roles and responsibilities), training, governance, administration, and resources.

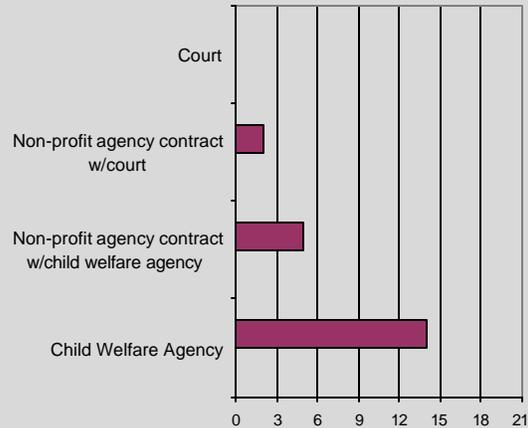
⁷⁸ Feedback forms ask respondents to rate the food and conference site as either "excellent," "good enough," or "didn't like." Further explanation of these ratings is not explicitly requested of respondents.

A National Snapshot ...

FGC Program Specialists representing 21 programs around the nation were asked to identify the institution within which their FGC program operates. Most commonly, (67%, n=14 of 21) FGC programs surveyed were housed within the child welfare agency. Nearly one-quarter of the programs are housed by a non-profit agency under contract with the child welfare agency (24%; n=5 of 21), and two programs are maintained by a non-profit agency under contract with the court (10%; n=2 of 21). Note that none of the programs are housed within the court.

The majority of programs surveyed (86%, n=18 of 21) receive funding from the child welfare budget. Three of the 21 programs (14%) receive funding from both the child welfare budget and private foundations. Two programs (10%) receive money solely from private foundations. One program receives funding from their state court improvement project.

What institution houses the program?



Staff Roles and Responsibilities

Generally, the role of the coordinator in a FGC program consists of thoroughly preparing family members, professionals, and other participants for the conference. Time is spent prior to the conference ensuring that participants understand the primary focus for everyone in the conference is the safety of the child(ren). Furthermore, coordinators typically discuss with family members their responsibility and accountability for the safety and care of the child(ren), and ensure that the participants clearly understand the process and goals of 'Ohana Conferencing. The coordinator also works with the family to determine a date, time, and venue for the conference.

Preparing family members to participate in a conference and to focus on the issues is a time intensive process. Through discussions with the family members and other conference participants, the conference coordinator gathers and documents information about the status of the case, names of the family and social workers, the purpose of the conference, any history of drug or alcohol abuse or violence, and participants' dynamics (e.g., tensions between certain parties, etc.). All of this information is recorded on a "Facilitator Information Sheet" which is then used by the facilitators to prepare for the conference. Generally speaking, any information that the conference coordinator feels may impact the conference is included in the Facilitator Information Sheet.

The conference recorder is primarily responsible for legibly and succinctly taking notes on easel paper and helping to maintain information for conference participants in a visually accessible and organized way. One social worker commented that sometimes recorders interrupt the flow of the conversation to ask what was said in order to record it. While recognizing that accurately recording the conversation is an important component of the process, the social worker felt that such interruptions tended to undermine the process.

A National Snapshot ...

Of the 21 programs surveyed, almost half utilize a co-facilitation model (47%; n=10 of 21) and 43% conduct conferences with a single facilitator (n=9 of 21). Two programs use a blend of both single facilitation and co-facilitation models (10%), depending upon resources, availability of facilitators, number of participants in the conference, and whether the conference is a re-conference or first conference for the family.

Just over half of the FGC programs (52%; n=11 of 21) do not have a formal recorder present during the family group conference. Forty-seven percent (n=10 of 21) of the programs do have a formal recorder. All of the programs that do not have a formal recorder indicate that recording is an additional responsibility of the facilitator. In 'Ohana Conferencing, recorders may also be responsible for co-facilitating.

'Ohana conference facilitators were asked to describe their primary role in the 'Ohana Conferencing process. Facilitators felt that their primary role consisted of serving as a "neutral third party" between DHS and the family during case plan development, conference coordination, defining conference issues, ensuring a safe level of comfort for participants, and report-writing. Facilitators also see themselves as having an important educational role in the conference. Facilitators use the conference process as a way to educate the parents and family members on a range of topics including the 'Ohana conferencing process, timelines with respect to services in order to meet reunification goals, and general legal information pertaining to the dependency process. Other responsibilities identified by facilitators included: facilitating an understanding for all parties present; identifying family supports; listening to all participants; and allowing participants to air their concerns.

'Ohana facilitators were asked to describe the role of other key stakeholders participating in the 'Ohana conference. Facilitators reported that it is necessary for all key stakeholders to understand that the focus of the 'Ohana conference is "the best interest of the child(ren) and to listen carefully to the family." Some facilitators indicated that one of the most critical roles during the 'Ohana conferencing process is filled by the social worker. One facilitator commented, "Social workers' reactions and their ability to acknowledge others can really affect the tone for the meeting." Another important role for the social worker, identified by facilitators, was explaining the rules, laws, and positions of DHS in a manner that is understandable to the family.

Social workers reported that their primary responsibilities with respect to 'Ohana-conferenced cases include referral to the conference, conference coordination, and follow-up of services to families. With respect to the 'Ohana Conference itself, workers reported that their role is more directive than it was originally intended to be. They also noted that they are uncomfortable with assuming a directive role in conferences. One social worker explained that (s)he has had to "try to get the family to talk" during 'Ohana conferences – a role better suited to the facilitator.

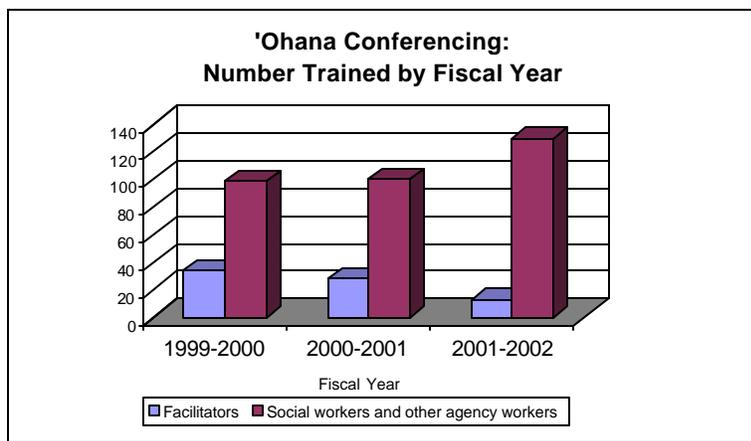
Facilitators were asked if they felt that the use of community facilitators is important to the success of the 'Ohana conference process. Facilitators indicated that there are many benefits of a community member facilitating 'Ohana conferences, particularly for their knowledge of the community culture, the geographic area, the resources available within the community, and the connections established within the community. Although facilitators feel that community facilitators are valuable to the program, they do *not* feel that community facilitators are a critical feature of the 'Ohana conference program. Nor do they feel that the involvement of a community facilitator in the 'Ohana conference determines its success. "Every program needs a community

member to be involved on some level. Sometimes community facilitators work and sometimes they do not, but the additional knowledge is beneficial,” remarked a facilitator. Although facilitators indicated that a community facilitator might be more likely to be embraced by the community, they stressed that the abilities, training and personality of the facilitator were more important.

Social workers were asked if they felt that the use of community facilitators is important to the success of an 'Ohana conference. Although community facilitators may be beneficial, social workers indicated that they are more concerned with the skill level of the facilitator than their community affiliation. One social worker remarked, “It is more important that they [facilitators] have good facilitation and communication skills than being from the community.” Another social worker added, “They do not need to be from the community, but they should be aware of the resources in the community.”

Training

According to EPIC’s fourth quarterly reports, two facilitator trainings were held during fiscal year 1999-2000, two facilitator trainings were held during the fiscal year of 2000-2001, and six facilitator trainings were held during the fiscal year of 2001-2002. In addition, EPIC held nine DHS/Community trainings during fiscal year 1999-2000, six DHS/Community trainings during fiscal year 2000-2001, and 18 DHS/Community trainings during fiscal year 2001-2002. Overall, this series resulted in the training of 75 facilitators and 329 social workers.



Conference facilitators interviewed reported that their extensive experience with the legal system, social work practice, and local community involvement prior to their involvement with EPIC aided them in their facilitator role. With respect to specific additional facilitator training, facilitators reported that the two-day trainings provided by EPIC were helpful. All but one of the facilitators interviewed (n=4 of 5) felt that the training they received adequately prepared them to become an 'Ohana conference facilitator.

Facilitators felt strongly that the intensive “hands-on” facilitator training required for 'Ohana conference facilitation is necessary to becoming a successful facilitator. Facilitators indicated that being mentored by experienced facilitators, observing numerous 'Ohana conferences, and having the opportunity to serve as a co-facilitator or conference recorder, in addition to formal training, significantly aided in the development of their facilitation skills. One facilitator remarked that they are constantly learning, “Since we are dealing with a variety of families, they never have the same story, never the same dynamics. The longer you do this, the more prepared you become. It is an evolving learning process.” Another facilitator reported, “Everything you think

that you know is constantly being changed by a new situation. The role is varied, as is life. There is always something new.” Additional critical components identified for successful facilitation included having appropriate information about the family, a good theoretical background in family group conferencing, and a strong belief in the family group conferencing process.

‘Ohana conference facilitators were asked for suggestions on how facilitator training may be improved. Reflecting the dynamic nature of the process and the uniqueness of families, facilitators recommended that training focus on the development of new and additional strategies for identification of recurring issues — such as visitation, placement, drug abuse, and managing the relational dynamics among family members, between family members and DHS, and among all participants. Additionally, facilitators indicated that it is imperative for them to be kept up-to-date on available services for families and pertinent legal information. One facilitator suggested that it would be beneficial “to have a briefing every six months in order to keep facilitators up-to-speed on what is happening on the legal and service side, or just to brush-up on legal terminology and processes.” ‘Ohana conference facilitators also indicated a desire for facilitators to be able to discuss issues, experiences, and challenges with each other in order to learn from each others’ experiences and to strategize about how to deal with various situations.

All of the social workers interviewed felt that the training they had received was sufficient. Social workers indicated that the training enabled them to learn about the various roles in an ‘Ohana conference; understand and explain the purpose, philosophy, protocols and process of ‘Ohana conferences to families; and ease the concerns the family may have. Social workers did indicate however, a desire for more frequent and “hands-on” training similar to facilitator training. Social workers felt that an important component to be added to their training would be conference observation. Although facilitators have the opportunity to observe the ‘Ohana conferencing process as part of their training, social workers reported that they do not have the same opportunity. Social workers felt that through observation of a number of ‘Ohana conferences they would be able to gain a better understanding of their role in the process. Social workers also indicated that facilitator training needs to be re-examined, as it is their perception that there is a great deal of inconsistency among facilitators with respect to performance.

A National Snapshot ...

Many FGC programs require specialized training for facilitators. The majority of programs represented in the survey sample (90%; n=19 of 21) required a considerable amount of additional training for facilitators. Most of the programs include formal ongoing training in facilitation skills and processes, a certain amount of required hours of mentoring prior to first facilitation, and in-house facilitator training.

FINDING: EPIC’s Overall Organizational Structure, Including Staff Roles and Training Components, both Supports and Reflects the Core Philosophies and Practices of FGC Processes and Programs.

EPIC’s “Mission Statement” reflects a commitment to and a respect for the integrity of families and communities, a respectful process, collaborative problem-solving, and the protection of children. The Mission Statement is prominently displayed and reflected in the office art work and décor. (See page 39 for a full articulation of EPIC’s Mission Statement). EPIC also has a clearly articulated “Statement of Values” that explicitly incorporates the core values of the FGC model – family, community, culture, and collaboration. These values are clearly articulated in procedure and policy manuals, training guides, and other program materials. In addition, EPIC

has a clear governance and supervisory structure. Program staff are appropriately qualified and skilled in legal or social work aspects of child welfare.

Facilitators' comments regarding their role in 'Ohana conferences clearly reflect the family-focused nature of Hawai'i's FGC model. With respect to the program's training component, facilitators give high marks to the training they receive from EPIC and feel well-prepared for their role as conference facilitators. However, since all social workers reported that they had received 'Ohana Conferencing training, their comments about this training indicate the need for enhanced training for social workers on the conference model. This training should include clarification of participant roles and responsibilities. Social worker comments also suggests that there needs to be follow-up with facilitators about the social workers' expressed discomfort during conferences and the perceived blurring of professional boundaries during the conference process (e.g., social workers' perception that they often assume roles better suited to facilitators during conferences). The importance of enhanced training regarding the social worker's role in conferencing is underscored by facilitators who report that social workers have "one of the most critical roles in the conference process."

↳ ***Program Enhancement Recommendations:***

- ◆ Respondent feedback regarding roles and responsibilities during 'Ohana conferences indicate the need for enhanced training. This training should include attention to role clarification, especially the difference between the facilitator's role and social workers' roles in the conference. In addition the role that the conference recorder plays in the conference should also be clarified. Training that clarifies roles and expectations for practice by all professional participants may generate increased "buy-in" from critical stakeholders who are currently expressing discomfort with aspects of the 'Ohana conferencing process.
- ◆ Training for facilitators should be enhanced to include opportunities to obtain up-to-date information about service delivery, pertinent legal information, and to provide a continuing forum for facilitators to discuss issues, experiences, and challenges.
- ◆ Training for social workers should include more "hands-on" opportunities such as 'Ohana conference observation and experience serving as a recorder. These opportunities may more clearly demonstrate the value of the FGC model to a key stakeholder group who are responsible for referrals to the conferencing program.
- ◆ Because of turnover in DHS staff, EPIC should consider offering more frequent training opportunities if resources permit.

Does the Management of Program Information Incorporate the Accountability Mechanisms of FGC?

EPIC has created and maintained a database which enables the following analytical tasks: calculation of time frames between referral and conference, and between conferences; participants at each conference; agreement rates; and placement decisions. EPIC has also created feedback forms that are completed by participants at the conclusion of each conference. There is one form for social workers and one form for other participants (i.e., family members, friends, service providers, attorneys). EPIC's participant feedback forms capture information regarding the role of each participant, the purpose of the conference, information learned at the conference, ways in which to improve the conference, and ratings of the various conference components (site, food, facilitator, recorder, and coordinator).

FINDING: The ‘Ohana Conferencing Program’s Management of Information Should Be Enhanced to More Fully Incorporate the Accountability Mechanisms of FGC.

While EPIC forms capture the information necessary to monitor and track ‘Ohana-conferenced cases as well as perform logistical support functions, these forms should be modified to more fully support evaluation or accountability activities. For example, an ideal feedback form would include some identifying number for purposes of linking associated forms and data from other participants who attended the *same* conference. Feedback forms should also specify whether the conference was an initial conference or re-conference, provide an opportunity for the respondents to indicate what expectations they held prior to the conference and whether or not these expectations were met, and measures addressing whether or not the participants felt respected and were given a “true” opportunity to participate in the conference. When rating scales are used (e.g., ‘excellent’, ‘good’, ‘poor’) space should also be provided to permit respondents to further explain their rating. With the exception of some questions which might be appropriate for some participants only, feedback forms should ask questions addressing the same topic to different respondents with exactly the same wording. This “standardization” of question forms facilitates comparison across respondents on the same issues. The current feedback forms used by EPIC do not ask the social workers and other participants the same questions. As a result, it is difficult to compare social workers’ feedback after an ‘Ohana Conference directly with other participants.

Any case demographic information currently captured on other forms, such as referral forms, should be linked with feedback forms and other data forms associated with ‘Ohana conferences. This would enable the program to generate more detailed statistics regarding the nature of the cases receiving an ‘Ohana conference, and analyze which types of cases may be associated with successful conference outcomes. Information from referral forms could also be linked with participant feedback forms to associate case characteristics with participants’ perceptions of the conference process and outcomes. These enhancements of ‘Ohana Conferencing’s data collection capabilities – tracking and linking logistical information, case processing information, and other information necessary for evaluation purposes in a database – will enhance EPIC’s ability to present detailed program information. This, in turn, may help achieve additional “buy-in” from system stakeholders, help the program to improve as well as prove successes, and provide a foundation for new or continued funding.

↳ ***Program Enhancement Recommendations:***

- , Revise feedback forms to more fully capture information regarding critical features of ‘Ohana conferences and participants’ experience.
- , Forms should be linked in a database to facilitate tracking of case outcomes and comparison of these outcomes for cases with specific characteristics (e.g., are cases with extensive drug history referred to ‘Ohana and what outcomes are associated with these cases?).

Section II: Immediate Outcomes Associated with Participation in the 'Ohana Conference Process

This section presents immediate outcomes associated with participation in an 'Ohana Conference, assesses the degree to which 'Ohana Conferencing is achieving intended program goals, and describes the extent to which the 'Ohana Conferencing Program assists court and agency efforts to protect children and safely preserve families. Obviously, articulated program goals are intimately related and over-lapping. Core program philosophies should support multiple goals. For ease of presentation, program goals were grouped around common elements of focus and purpose and posed as research questions. Associated findings will be summarized following each of these questions.

Does 'Ohana Conferencing Help DHS/Child Protective Services (CPS) and Families to Reach an Agreement that Will Keep the Child Safe with as Little Uprooting of, and Trauma To, the Child as Possible?

| <i>Outcomes</i> | Cumulative YTD 99-00 % | 99- 00 # | Cumulative YTD 00-01 % | 00- 01 # | Cumulative YTD 01-02 % | 01- 02 # |
|---|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|---------------------------------|----------------|
| 'Ohana families needing a reconference within six months of the initial conference | 25% | 85 | 37% | 178 | 36% | 184 |
| 'Ohana families not reported for harm or threatened harm of their children within one year of conference | 98% | 269 | 100% | 344 | 100% | 509 |
| 'Ohana families that did not require Family Court jurisdiction or intervention | 73% | 199 | 59% | 205 | 62% | 231 |
| 'Ohana families for which a petition was filed in family court, but did not require subsequent court intervention due to Ohana Conference | 99% | 149 | 96% | 204 | 96% | 173 |
| 'Ohana families under Family Court jurisdiction that voluntarily completed the adoption or guardianship process | 99% | 149 | 96% | 204 | 96% | 173 |
| 'Ohana families not under Family Court Jurisdiction that voluntarily completed the adoption or guardianship process | 5% | 24 | NA | NA | 23% | 54 |

FINDING: *The information shown in Table I indicates that families participating in 'Ohana Conferencing are benefiting from the process as seen by the consistently high percentage of families, approximately 99%, not being reported for harm (or threatened harm) within one year of the conference and not requiring subsequent court intervention after the conference had been held to address the original allegations.*⁷⁹

⁷⁹ According to the evaluation conducted by SMS Research & Marketing, Inc., for the period from January 1998 through March 1999, EPIC reported that fifty-seven cases that had been through 'Ohana Conferences were diverted from Family Court (i.e., child abuse and neglect petitions were not filed with the Family Court), and 22 active Family Court cases involving families that had participated in 'Ohana Conferencing were moved to permanency. It is not clear from the body of the evaluation report whether the cases that were moved to permanency did so in a shorter time than would be expected without the use of 'Ohana Conferencing and how "permanency" is being defined. That is, it is not clear whether permanency refers to reunification only, or if it includes adoption, or other permanency options.

The percentage of families who did not require family court intervention has shown some variation over the three years summarized (1999/2000 = 73%, 2000/2001 = 59%, 2001/2002 = 62%) although the absolute number of families falling into this category has risen consistently (1999/2000 = 199, 2000/2001 = 205, 2001/2002 = 231).

Does 'Ohana Conferencing Facilitate Case Plan Development?

According to EPIC data, 86% of conferences conducted between 3/19/98 and 3/14/03 resulted in agreement on family service plans (n=1,361 of 1,578).⁸⁰ Although maintaining a relatively high rate of agreement, agreement rates have fluctuated from year to year with a high of 93% in 1999 (agreements in 55 of 59 conferences) and 2001 (agreements in 484 of 520 conferences).

Stakeholder interviews and participant feedback forms indicate that 'Ohana Conferencing provides an effective forum for the collaborative development of case plans and identifying family resources. A number of stakeholders interviewed noted that the 'Ohana Conference helped to establish a plan that clearly articulated goals and outlined services and time lines for parents. A number of stakeholders, including parents, commented that the conference helped to clarify or establish the direction of the case.

Overall, facilitators agree that 'Ohana conferencing is an effective tool in the development of case plans. According to facilitators, families are able to take an active role in their case and all parties are able to gain a clear understanding of individual responsibilities, time frames and legal issues. Prior to the implementation of 'Ohana conferencing, facilitators indicated that control was taken away from families and that they were not educated about federal laws. Facilitators also explained that parents would either be confused or misinformed and, as a result, extended families were also confused, misinformed, or not informed about the situation. Prior to 'Ohana conferencing extended family members didn't have the opportunity to know what was going on with a case, hindering these individuals' ability to serve as resources. One facilitator remarked, "In the past, CPS workers seemed to be the only people that were clear on what was happening." Participating in the 'Ohana family group conferencing process enables families to become involved in what is going on with their case and to become better informed on the issues.

'Ohana conference facilitators further noted that the conference process not only assists families in case plan development but also assists social workers and case managers as well. One facilitator remarked, "There may be issues that have been missed by the case managers that can be addressed and can be put in time lines that caseworkers couldn't put in because of heavy caseloads." Facilitators feel that social workers are also able to gain better insight into the issues and needs of the family, which is necessary for case plan development. Stakeholders noted that 'Ohana conferencing allows the family and the social worker to develop a plan that is more broad, comprehensive, and supported.

All of the social workers interviewed felt that 'Ohana conferencing is an effective tool in the development of case plans. The various resources and tools that become available through the use of 'Ohana conferences were highlighted as an additional program benefit. "As a social worker, I spend a considerable amount of time calling people and gathering information. With 'Ohana Conferencing, you get an idea of the support system and all of the information from the

⁸⁰ According to the evaluation conducted by SMS Research & Marketing, Inc., EPIC reported that 96% of the conferences resulted in agreement on the Family Service Plans that were created.

family,” explained a social worker. Another social worker remarked that ‘Ohana Conferencing is “a great way to see how the family functions and their support system.” Social workers indicated that by participating in the ‘Ohana conference parents play a more active role in the development of case plans. By convening an ‘Ohana Conference earlier on in the case process, social workers felt that more information is provided to the parents, permanent placement is more timely, and support for the parent(s) is enlisted at an earlier stage.

Social workers had mixed views when asked if they felt that parents are more compliant with case plans due to ‘Ohana conference participation. Some social workers indicated that parents are more compliant because they developed the case plan and are invested in it. One social worker remarked, “A lot of families have no respect for us, but they do respect their family. They do not want to disappoint their family. It makes everyone accountable.” Social workers mentioned that through participating in an ‘Ohana conference parents are able to clearly understand the consequences and rewards of the plan that they develop.

FINDING: ‘Ohana Conferences Are Serving as Effective Tools for Case Plan Development.

Clearly, the ‘Ohana conferencing process is facilitating the development of agreed-upon case plans. It is clear from interview responses that the family-focused and collaborative nature of the process is critical to consensus building. Interview responses also reflected common themes of informed decision-making and accountability. Interview responses also make clear that information sharing among participants, especially parents, is critical to the process. Facilitators and social workers talked about “telling” the family things, “letting them know what they are in for,” and “clarifying issues” – with particular emphasis on explaining time lines, case plan requirements, and the consequences of non-compliance. Respondents continually noted the importance of making sure that all providers were “on the same page” in terms of communication with the family and understanding the family’s service needs. The informational materials developed by EPIC and disseminated as a part of the conference process, also underscore the importance of information sharing and education. Thus, not only does the conference facilitate the development of agreed-upon case plans through a family-focused and collaborative process, but it also helps to ensure that the parents and family members understand what it is they are agreeing to and understand the consequences of the behavior; parents are, therefore, more likely to comply with the case plan and more likely to take the steps necessary to protect their children and address the issues that brought them to the attention of the system.

In summary:

- Families are taking an active role in case plan development;
- Discussion of case plans is also serving as opportunities to educate parties about laws, timelines, services, and case goals;
- Key program stakeholders report gaining insight into the needs of the family as a result of conferencing;
- ‘Ohana conferences facilitate understanding of the rewards and consequences of complying with the case plan; and
- ‘Ohana conferences expand service options available in case plan development.

Does 'Ohana Conferencing Serve as Tools for Moving the Case Toward Permanency?

According to the EPIC database, 16% of 'Ohana Conferences resulted in a placement decision at the conclusion of the conference (N=239 of 1,518).⁸¹ For these cases, almost two-thirds (62%, n=148 of 239) resulted in a legal guardianship and one third (33%, n=78 of 239) resulted in an adoption.

All of the 'Ohana conference facilitators interviewed agreed that 'Ohana conferencing is an effective tool in moving cases toward permanency. Other facilitators commented that 'Ohana conferencing can "help identify family members as permanent placement options." According to other program stakeholders (i.e., judges and social workers), identification of extended family members as permanent placements has proven to be a major benefit of the 'Ohana family group conferencing program. Facilitators mentioned that prior to the implementation of the 'Ohana conferencing program, the largest resource for foster care placements within the state of Hawai'i were Caucasian, military families. When speaking about the issue one facilitator explained, "This used to be a real problem because if the children were adopted, they often were moved out of the state and away from the family unit. Now, through the use of 'Ohana conferencing, children are generally placed with a family member, a friend of the family, a church member, or someone that is close to the family ... this makes the transition easier and the family and the child near to each other." Not only were children being moved away from their parents, they were being removed from their island home and their culture.

'Ohana conference facilitators also feel that giving parents a say in their child's future helps ease the transition process. As one facilitator noted, "We are able to prepare the parents for grief and loss when reunification is not possible. Although losing their child, they know where the child is going and they were able to contribute to that decision."

Overall, social workers agreed that 'Ohana conferencing is an effective tool in moving cases toward permanency. A key element of the 'Ohana conferencing process identified by social workers is the utilization of concurrent planning. Through participating in the 'Ohana conference process more relative resources are identified and "parents are often more supportive of relative placements if they can not have the child." Another social worker remarked, "You can tell from early on if there are strengths to work with. It helps in giving us an idea if the case is going to permanency or reunification. You see from the get-go whether or not there is a promise."

FINDING: According to Program Stakeholders and EPIC Database Information, 'Ohana Conferencing Is Serving as an Effective Tool for Moving Cases towards Permanency.

Almost two-thirds of 'Ohana-conference cases with a placement decision at the conclusion of the conference, resulted in a legal guardianship. 'Ohana conferences are seen as important avenues to identify relative resources for permanent placement and as a means to ease transition to alternatives to reunification.

⁸¹ A placement decision was not entered for the vast majority of conferences (84%, n=1,279 of 1,518). For the purposes of analysis, researchers are assuming that the ultimate placement decision was made at some time after the conclusion of the 'Ohana Conference. An alternative explanation may be that this reflects a significant data entry error.

Illustrative Quotes from Stakeholders ...

"It made the rules clearer to me so that I have a better understanding of the things I need to do in order to get my children back with me." – Parent

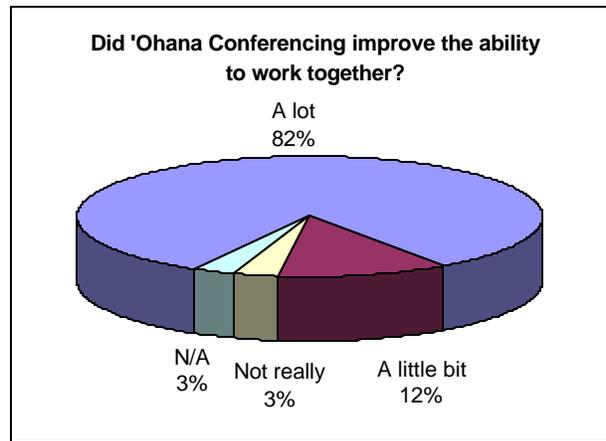
"Everyone came away with a better understanding of purposes, goals, and services." – Social Worker

"Family members as well as mom and dad are very clear on choices as well as consequences of those choices." – Social Worker

"We were able to clarify the direction of the case and had the opportunity to meet support systems who gave good feedback." – Social Worker

Does 'Ohana Conferencing Partner Family, Community, and DHS to Strengthen the Protection and Safety of Children?

Based on an analysis of exit surveys, the majority of participants (82%; n=717 of 871) report that the 'Ohana conference helped the family, DHS workers, and service providers to work together to meet the best interests of the child(ren).



The majority of parents indicated that the 'Ohana conference helped the family work with DHS workers and service providers to meet the best interests of the child(ren) (82%; n=513 of 628). Note that 12% (n=75 of 628) of family members, however, felt that the conference was only of "little" help in building a more collaborative working relationship, and 3% of parents (n=18 of 603) indicated that the conference was "not really" helpful in this regard.⁸²

All of the 'Ohana conference facilitators interviewed felt that participation in the 'Ohana program has improved or strengthened the relationship between the agencies and parties. Facilitators indicated that through participation in 'Ohana conferences people are able to see each other as more than just "agencies or departments" and recognize that everyone is there to help one another. While discussing this topic one facilitator remarked, "It helps to know faces and have phone numbers so that the family can reach out. This opens the lines of communication. It also makes people more accountable when dealing with each other face to face and not just by phone or paper." Another 'Ohana conference facilitator added, "I have been in this community for a long time, roughly 25 years. I can tell you that parents and families only saw CPS as an authority. They felt that CPS caseworkers were mean people that came to take your children away. Now the parents, families and CPS are able to openly communicate." Participation in the conference process "helps identify barriers and foster understanding." Facilitators indicated that through the collaborative efforts of the participants, the 'Ohana conference becomes a support tool not only for families but also for social workers and service providers. "It is more of a team effort," explained a facilitator.

⁸² Three percent of family members (n=25 of 628) did not provide an answer to this question.

Facilitators report that social workers and service providers are better able to discuss difficulties meeting legal timeframes and other system problems with family members, and more able to engage in creative problem-solving as a function of participating in ‘Ohana Conferences. Facilitators realize that social workers generally have overwhelming caseloads, but they see ‘Ohana conferencing as an additional resource that social workers can utilize. “Once the social workers see the value of ‘Ohana, they want to come back,” a facilitator remarked. Once barriers between the parties are broken down through the ‘Ohana process, everyone involved is able to work with one another. One facilitator explained, “When we start the conference, body language is defensive, as you go through [the conference] it softens. By the end everyone is hugging and kissing. That does not get written down, but [it] is very important to acknowledge how the mood changes.”

All of the social workers interviewed felt that participation in the ‘Ohana family group conferencing program has improved or strengthened the relationship between the agency and the parties. Social workers reported that through ‘Ohana conference participation the agency and parties are able to develop “a level of trust.” One social worker remarked, “There is no hidden agenda. There are more eyes and ears out there to make sure the babies are safe.” Another social worker felt that through ‘Ohana conferencing the agency and families “work together more.” Social workers interviewed believed that ‘Ohana conferencing made the situation more of a team effort. “I can’t think of a single ‘Ohana Conference that did not strengthen my relationship with the family,” explained a social worker.

In general, social workers indicated that by participating in the ‘Ohana conference process their relationships with the parents improved. Social workers felt that because the parents are able to see the social worker interacting with the rest of the family and working together in order to do what is best for their child(ren) improves the relationship between the social worker and parent(s). One social worker stated, “[Parents] are given a fair chance to address concerns and the expectations are clear. We end up working as a team.”

FINDING: ‘Ohana Conferencing Effectively Partners Family, Community, and DHS in a Collaborative Effort to Strengthen the Protection and Safety of Children.

The majority of conference participants report that the ‘Ohana conference helped everyone work together to meet the best interests of the children. The majority of parents participating in conferences report that the process helps the family work together with DHS and community service providers. Additionally, facilitators, social workers, and family court judges report that the ‘Ohana Conferencing program has strengthened relationships between DHS and families.

“Yes, I think that the process of ‘Ohana conferencing has helped enhance the communication. The face to face interaction with various providers, etc. along with the presence of the family members helps validate that it is not an ‘us against them’.”— Family Court

Do you feel the conference helped the family, DHS, and service providers work together to do what is best for the children?

“A Lot”

Family Members:

“I understand the CPS side of it, instead of being afraid of them.”

“CPS and EPIC staff can help. This is the first time I have ever dealt with CPS. I thought it was going to be bad. But I now know that they are very helpful and I would not hesitate to deal with them in the future.”

“Not Really”

Family Members:

“It’s good to get the family together, but everyone’s going to say what CPS wants to hear.”

“The focus was more on the adults as far as how to get them help versus facing the reality of why this conference was held.”

Community Service Provider:

“I think the attorneys made things difficult; I feel it prevented any progress.”

Does ‘Ohana Conferencing Enhance the Decision-Making Process among Families, Community Service Providers, and Legal Representatives for Parents and Children?

Decision-making among families, community service providers, and legal representatives is enhanced through conference procedures, including conference preparation, and conference role responsibilities which support communication and information-sharing among the participants, including clarification of issues, expectations, and timeframes.

The Role of the Conference Coordinator in Enhancing Communication and Family Involvement

Generally, the role of the coordinator in a FGC program consists of thoroughly preparing family members, professionals, and other participants for the conference. Time is spent prior to the conference ensuring that participants understand the primary focus for everyone in the conference is the safety of the child(ren). Furthermore, coordinators typically discuss with family members their responsibility and accountability for the safety and care of the child(ren), and ensure that the participants clearly understand the process and goals of ‘Ohana Conferencing. The coordinator also works with the family to determine a date, time, and venue for the conference. Through discussions with the family members and other conference participants, the conference coordinator gathers and documents information about the status of the case, names of the family and social workers, the purpose of the conference, any history of drug or alcohol abuse or violence, and participants’ dynamics (e.g., tensions between certain parties, etc.).

A National Snapshot ...

Program specialists from the 21 jurisdictions surveyed were asked if they have a program coordinator. In the majority of programs surveyed (71%; n=15 of 21) there was an identified program coordinator. Four programs (19%) do not have an identified coordinator. In programs that do not have a program coordinator, the facilitator assumes this responsibility. Program specialists from two programs did not respond to this question (10%).



Only forty-two conference participants in an 'Ohana Conference (non-social worker participants) provided a rating of the conference coordinator's performance.⁸³ Most participants (62%; n=26 of 42) rated the coordinator as "excellent", 33% (n=14 of 42) rated the coordinator as "good", and only two participants rated the coordinator as "not so good". One of the participants who rated the coordinator as "not so good" was concerned that s(he) had not been contacted directly. Five social workers were asked to rate the conference coordinator.⁸⁴ All of these social workers (100%) rated the conference coordinator's performance as "good" or better.

Despite these positive ratings of the coordinators' performance, some facilitators indicated that they feel that families are not necessarily clear on the purpose of the conference and what the conference actually is intended for upon their arrival. As stated by a facilitator, "Some of our families still are very unsure of what to expect of an 'Ohana conference. They don't necessarily understand the concept of 'Ohana Conferencing." Another facilitator remarked, "Sometimes they perceive the meeting as a place to gripe, so they come in with that mindset." Also, facilitators indicated that if the 'Ohana conferencing process and purpose are not clearly understood by the family and other participants, much of the allocated conference time is spent explaining 'Ohana conferencing rather than actually conducting an 'Ohana conference.

The role of the conference coordinator is highly valued by 'Ohana conference facilitators. Conference facilitators noted that the coordination and planning phase is a critical program component, and that the information provided by coordinators is key to their preparation. Facilitators recognize that the organized coordination phase of the 'Ohana conference process is important to gaining necessary information, getting parties involved, and making sure that the conference is culturally appropriate and comfortable for all participants. As a result of the conference coordination process, facilitators are well prepared prior to conducting the 'Ohana conference.

⁸³ Not all feedback forms required a rating for coordinators.

⁸⁴ Questions regarding the coordinator's performance were only asked on the latest version of the social worker feedback forms, which have only been circulated since October of 2002.

The Role of the Conference Facilitator in Enhancing Communication

Facilitators interviewed reported that prior to an 'Ohana conference they receive a copy of the CPS referral and the Facilitator Information Sheet. On occasion, facilitators also receive a copy of the family safe home report. The facilitator is provided with a list of those expected to be present for the 'Ohana conference. If the case is court-involved, the facilitator may also receive copies of the social worker report, the service plan, and any psychological evaluations. Because conference coordinators are able to gather a great deal of information and gain insight about conference participants and pressing issues through the planning process, facilitators often meet with coordinators prior to the conference. If facilitators felt that they had not been provided with enough information prior to conducting the 'Ohana conference, they indicated that they would talk with the social worker to get additional information when necessary. Those facilitators interviewed stressed that in order to conduct a successful 'Ohana conference, facilitators must take sufficient time prior to the conference to research and become familiar with the family, the case, and the various issues and concerns involved.

The majority of facilitators indicated that they are provided with sufficient information about a case prior to conducting the 'Ohana conference. One facilitator stated, "I feel comfortable with the amount of information I am provided ... All of the contact numbers and the names of the involved parties and the established goals of the meeting are available to me."

Conference participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of the facilitator. When combining data from the participant feedback form and the social worker feedback form, the vast majority of participants who responded (87%; n=914 of 1,053)⁸⁵ rated the facilitator as "excellent" and 13% (n=134 of 1,053) rated the facilitator as "good". Only five respondents (.05%) gave ratings reflecting a need for facilitator improvement. Facilitator ratings remained consistently high across re-conferences.



Family members were very pleased with the facilitator. Eighty-seven percent of the family members who responded (n=525 of 606) rated the facilitator as "excellent", and 13% rated the facilitator as "good" (n=80 of 606).⁸⁶ Only one family member reported that the facilitator was "not so good".

Eighty-three percent of social workers (n=182 of 218)⁸⁷ rated the facilitator as "excellent" and 15% rated the facilitator as "good" (n=32 of 218). One social worker gave facilitators a rating of "adequate," and three social workers (1%) rated the conference facilitator as "inadequate". Social workers who rated the facilitator as inadequate expressed concern that the facilitator was taking on the role of therapist, rather than functioning as a more neutral facilitator. One social worker commented that some facilitators rush the process with a "hurry up, hurry up" attitude. It was also noted that when a facilitator is also an attorney it changes the dynamic and the facilitator is perceived as "biased."

⁸⁵ Thirty-six participants did not respond to this question (3%; n=36 of 1089).

⁸⁶ Twenty-two of the 628 family members did not provide a rating for facilitators (4%).

⁸⁷ Six of the 224 social workers did not provide a rating for facilitators (3%).

Information used to prepare for a conference ...

“I take a deep breath and center myself. I work out a plan for the conference based on the family history and where we need to end up. I identify resources and steps for the family. I take time out to read the case history and case information and then prepare a plan of what services and resources the family might need, the steps they have to take, and so forth.” – Facilitator

“I look at the referral form to see the objectives of the conference, the social worker, attendees, agencies, issues at hand, and legal issues with regard to the permanency plan. I make sure I have the printed legal information from EPIC to educate myself on resources available ... I look at the time frame the family is facing ...” – Facilitator

“I talk to family members, the social worker, the GAL, the parents, and the parents’ attorney if they have one. I read the documents and I draft a script and fill in specific issues including the date the child was placed in foster care and the length of time in care. I check off issues as I go through. I don’t read from the script, I just use it to prepare.” – Facilitator

Overall, the most frequent facilitator characteristics that social workers found helpful were, in order of frequency of mention: “the facilitator is able to keep the conference and its participants on track” (31%; n=66 of 215); “the facilitator is knowledgeable and informative” (27%; n=59 of 215); “the facilitator is sensitive, understanding, and helpful” (22%; n=48 of 215); “the facilitator has a good personality [and] is able to keep everyone on task” (10%; n=21 of 215); and the facilitator is “professional and experienced” (5%; n=10 of 215).⁸⁸ Social workers also reported that they appreciated the relaxed and supportive attitudes of the facilitators. In addition, social workers indicated that facilitators were good at paraphrasing throughout the conference and were clearly able to relate to the children involved. When asked to indicate how the facilitator could have been more effective, social workers reported that they felt facilitators were, overall, doing a good job. Social workers did suggest, however, that facilitators needed to work on “keeping the conference on track” and “staying focused.” Social workers also felt that the facilitators needed to be “more confident” and to be sure “not to play the role of a therapist.”

⁸⁸ A response was not ascertained from nine social workers (n=9 of 224; 4%). Also, responses not offered frequently enough to be grouped into the thematic codes accounted for 5% of the sample (n=36 of 215). An additional 2% of social workers (n=16 of 215) provided a general positive comment about the facilitator, such as “good” without providing additional detail.

The Role of the Social Worker in Enhancing Communication

Social workers were asked to identify the kind of information they provide to families prior to an 'Ohana conference. Social workers reported that they try to let the family know why the conference was called, the purpose of the conference, its procedures, and their expectations for the conference. Confidentiality and the presence of mandated reporters are also discussed with the families prior to the conference.

Social workers mentioned that the 'Ohana conference coordinator is in touch with the family prior to the conference and while gathering information from the family, the coordinator tends to field some of the questions that the family may have, as well as offer additional information. Only one social worker felt that families were provided with sufficient information prior to participating in the 'Ohana conference. Social workers indicated that families are only given basic information regarding the agenda, purpose of the conference, and that conference attendance is a choice. According to social workers interviewed, some families still have questions before the conference begins.

Social workers report that by actively participating in an 'Ohana conference, parents are better informed about their case. Specifically, social workers feel that through conference participation parents are better informed about: why DHS is involved; what is expected from DHS; what DHS needs; and why DHS is involved in the case. Parents are also well-informed about ASFA timelines, laws and parental rights.

Communication Regarding Conference Purpose

To further assess whether parents and family members accurately understand the purpose of the 'Ohana Conference, researchers reviewed what participants identified as the goal(s) of the conference.⁸⁹ Based on data from the participant feedback forms it appears that 'Ohana Conferences are being used in the fashion they were intended as well as serving other beneficial functions.

Overall, the most commonly identified reason for a conference is "to develop a service plan" (62%; n=527 of 852).⁹⁰ Just over one-third of respondents (40%; n=341 of 852) noted that the purpose of the conference is "to develop a safety plan". The most frequent purposes for an 'Ohana Conference noted by family members were, in order of frequency of mention: "to develop a service plan" (65%; n=410 of 628); "to develop a safety plan" (43%; n=273 of 628); "to resolve a conflict between family members and CPS" (32%; n=201 of 628); "to find a permanent placement for the child(ren)" (28%; n=176 of 628); "to find a temporary placement for the child(ren)" (23%; n=145 of 628); and some "other" purpose (22%; n=140 of 628). Of the family members that indicated "other" purposes for the conference, the most commonly offered responses include: Reunification (4%; n=28 of 628); Review or revise case plan (2%; n=12 of 628); Visitation (2%; n=12 of 628); Unite and support family (2%; n=12 of 628); and determine the best interests of the child (2%; n=11 of 628). Although only a small number of foster parents completed feedback forms (n=25 of 871; 3%) they were more likely to note that the purpose of the conference was "to find a permanent placement for the child(ren)" (56%; n=14 of 25). When examined as a whole, a relatively high percentage of respondents indicated other purposes for the conference (26%; n=225 of 852) including, in order of frequency of mention: Reunification

⁸⁹ The participant feedback form used by EPIC for ongoing evaluation purposes provides 5 close-ended options and one space to write comments. Respondents are asked to check which ones are most relevant to their specific conference. Response options are: "To find a temporary placement for the child(ren);" "To find a permanent placement for the child(ren);" "To resolve a conflict between family members or family and CPS;" "To develop a service plan;" and "To develop a safety plan." Respondents can check all options that apply.

⁹⁰ A response was not ascertained from 19 participants.

(5%; n=42 of 852); Review/ or revise case plan (3%; n=23 of 852); Visitation (2%; n=20 of 852); Unite and support family (2%; n=19 of 852); and Placement Issues (2%; n=18 of 852).

| | Family Member (N=628) | Friend or Sponsor (N=73) | Service Provider (N=85) | Foster Parent (N=25) |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| To develop a service plan | 65% (1) | 52% (1) | 46% (1) | 52% (2) |
| To find a permanent placement | 28% (4) | 36% (2) | 21% (4) | 56% (1) |
| To develop a safety plan | 43% (2) | 32% (3) | 34% (3) | 20% (3) |
| To resolve a conflict between family Members and CPS | 32% (3) | 30% (4) | 19% (5) | 16% (4) |
| To find a temporary placement | 23% (5) | 23% (5) | 9% (6) | 12% (5) |
| Other | 22% (6) | 18% (6) | 44% (2) | 20% (3) |

Twenty-eight percent (n=238 of 852) of all respondents noted that the conference served only one purpose – of those, 48% (n=114 of 238) noted that the purpose was “to develop a service plan,” 25% (n=59 of 238) noted “to find a permanent placement for the child,” 16% (n=38 of 238) noted “to resolve a conflict between family members and CPS,” and 11% (n=27 of 238) noted the purpose of a conference was “to develop a safety plan.”

The majority of all participants viewed the ‘Ohana conference as serving multiple purposes. For example, of the 527 participants who identified the purpose of the conference as development of a service plan, more than half also identified the development of a safety plan as a purpose (53%; n=279 of 527). Just over one-quarter of participants (27%; n=238 of 871) noted ‘Ohana conferences served three or more purposes.

Of the 196 families for whom a conference was held and feedback information obtained, 24 families (12%) participated in a re-conference (i.e., a second ‘Ohana conference). The purpose of the second conference was identified by participants as, in order of frequency of mention: “To develop a service plan” (48%; n=43 of 90); “other” (33%; n=30 of 90); “to develop a safety plan” (30%; n=27 of 90); “to find a permanent placement for the child(ren)” (27%; n=24 of 90); “to resolve a conflict between family members and CPS” (19%; n=17 of 90); and “to find a temporary placement for the child(ren)” (14%; n=13 of 90). Those participants reporting the purpose as “other,” describe the re-conference’s purpose as: Review/Revise Plan (40%; n=12 of 30); Follow-up (23%; n=7 of 30); Reunification (20%; n=6 of 30); Unite/support the family (7%; n=2 of 30); Clarify information/answer questions (7%; n=2 of 30) and Placement issues (3%; n=1 of 30).

FINDING: 'Ohana Conferencing Procedures and Conference Role Responsibilities Enhance Communication and Information-Sharing among Parties.

While the level of understanding that families have regarding what to expect from an 'Ohana conference may vary on a case-by-case basis, it is important to recognize that lesser levels of understanding of 'Ohana Conferencing by the family may effect the ultimate success of the conference. Effective preparation of participants for the conference itself, the referring social worker, the conference coordinator, and the facilitator is a critical step in ensuring a successful conference. As previously discussed, conference coordinators and facilitators are clearly responsible for ensuring that participants are well-informed about the 'Ohana Conferencing process, its goals and expectations for participation. Moreover, conference coordinators and facilitators share information about the child welfare system, including DHS and court timeframes and service options with participants. Such communication is both a specific goal of the 'Ohana program and indicative of the key values of the FGC model. Interviews with key program stakeholders also demonstrate that this communication and information-sharing goal is being realized in practice.

Program Enhancement Recommendations:

- ◆ Because the planning of the conference is such a critical component of the FGC process and critically important to the success of conferences, administrators need to ensure that the appropriate program resources continue to be in place to support the time and energy required to engage in the necessary level of logistical planning, family contact, and information collection.
- ◆ Care needs to be taken to ensure that there is the appropriate level of communication and coordination among the social worker, the conference coordinator, and the conference facilitator, especially with respect to the purpose of the conference. Care needs to be taken to ensure that parents, family members, and community representatives are fully informed about the purpose and goal of 'Ohana conferences.
- ◆ Family members and community representatives should be encouraged to review conference brochures and informational materials prior to attending the conference and to bring those materials to the conference itself. This should reinforce the conference purpose and information imparted prior to attendance in the conference.
- ◆ DHS social workers need enhanced training on how best to communicate with the family regarding the purpose of the 'Ohana Conference. Social workers should take a more active role in preparing families for an 'Ohana Conference. Not only will this aid participant understanding of the purpose of the conference and begin the process of relationship building, but should also enhance social worker buy-in of the conference process itself.

"I learned that the safety and well-being of a child goes further than just the parents." – Family Member

"It enables families to be more involved in what is going on in their lives. It serves as a wonderful tool for diverting cases from the court as well as alternative dispute resolution for cases that are already court involved."—Family Court Judge

"[Ohana Conferencing] empowers the family—which gives them more cooperation. It educates the family and community, which helps with communication. And, it gives the family dignity."—DHS Social Worker

Is the ‘Ohana Conference a Respectful One Which Empowers Parents and Families as Decision-makers by Providing an Opportunity for Voice?

A considerable body of social psychological research and theory has demonstrated that ratings of fairness and satisfaction with outcomes are affected by the degree to which an individual identifies with the group involved in the procedure or process.⁹¹ This research indicates that individuals who perceive themselves to be a valued member of the group are more likely to put aside self-interest and act in a way that helps all group members. The extent to which individuals are offered an opportunity to express their opinions (an opportunity for voice) before a decision is made and have those opinions considered, and the extent to which they are treated with respect are factors that increase their identification with the “group.”

On EPIC feedback forms, family members were asked to rate the helpfulness of the ‘Ohana conference. In providing further explanations for their ratings, some family members included comments regarding the degree to which they felt “listened to” and respected.⁹² With respect to the opportunity for voice, family members did note that the ‘Ohana conference allowed them to “talk about the problems and express our feelings.” Family members remarked that, “We all got a chance to say how we feel,” and that “our feelings were shared with CPS and service providers.” Family members also reported that their was a “Sincere concern towards helping the family,” and that participants “were so understanding and explained everything to the whole family” in a manner which respected all parties.

“It helps the family members understand better what’s going on, ask questions, and voice their opinions. –Family Member

“The conference was handled in such a professional way that it made us feel comfortable, so being honest was not a problem.” –Family Member

All of the ‘Ohana conference facilitators interviewed felt that parents are given an opportunity to have a voice during the conference process. One facilitator explained, “I let everybody talk unless they are going to yell, swear, and talk meanly or “talk stink”. They can talk positively but cannot point fingers.” Facilitators indicate that they strongly encourage parents to have a voice during the conference, and openly exploring the concerns and strengths of the family is built into the agenda. Parents and other family members are also asked to discuss their hopes and dreams for the child(ren). Facilitators remark that they “go around the room and get feedback” and “stress the importance of everyone’s voice being heard.” An ‘Ohana conference facilitator shared, “We definitely give the message that the family is empowered to speak.” Facilitators stressed the importance of enabling all participants to talk making sure that they are able to speak without interruption.

Each of the conference facilitators interviewed felt that parents are treated with respect during the ‘Ohana conference. ‘Ohana conference facilitators utilize an established set of ground rules which are presented at the beginning of each conference to ensure that parents are treated with

⁹¹ For seminal works in this area see Lind, A. and Tyler, T. (1998). *The Social Psychology of Procedural Justice*. New York: Plenum; and Tajfel, H. (1978). *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Inter-Group Relations*. New York: Academic Press.

⁹² EPIC feedback forms do not explicitly ask participants whether they had an opportunity to voice their side, were listened to, or express their opinions (e.g., opportunity for voice), nor do the forms ask questions regarding whether participants were treated respectfully. Findings related to these items were inferred by researchers in coding of comments provided to other questions.

respect. Facilitators go over the guidelines with the participants, talk about the importance of respecting each other, as well as the importance of utilizing 'time-outs' when tensions rise. One facilitator remarked, "We try to explain to everyone that 'Ohana is not there to attack people and that we want to come up with solutions that are workable for the family and acceptable to the department. If things get out of hand we take a 'time-out' and then reconvene and shift the focus back to the child." One facilitator added, "If anyone is disrespectful, I stop them, stand in between people who are fighting, take breaks to stop it from getting out of control and separate people. Once people start arguing, they are not looking to the future. This is not about them, it is about the child(ren)." Facilitators indicated that they must function not only as a neutral party, but also as a behavioral role model for other participants to model themselves after. "You need to act as a role model. To work to keep control, modulate voice and make sure that people respond in a like manner."

"I think that 'Ohana conferencing has been a tremendous benefit to families. It enables families to be more involved in what is going on in their lives."

—Family Court Judge

The majority of social workers felt that parents were treated with respect during the 'Ohana Conference. Social workers indicated that parents are given an opportunity for voice, are not forced into agreements, and are able to ask questions whenever they need to. Social workers mentioned that if a parent gets emotional a break is taken until they are comfortable reconvening the conference. Overall, social workers also felt that they were treated with respect during 'Ohana conferences. Social workers indicated that generally everyone that participates in an 'Ohana conference is respected and is given an opportunity to speak. Nevertheless, some social workers reported that they felt they might be "judged for their reputation" whether good or bad. One social worker commented that if (s)he is not feeling respected (s)he asks the facilitator "to make sure that the focus is on the child and not the profession of the social worker."

FINDING: 'Ohana Conferencing Provides a Forum in Which Parents and Families Have an Opportunity to have a Voice and are Treated with Respect.

↳ Program Enhancement Recommendations:

Because research indicates that satisfaction with the process and outcome of dispute resolution forums is correlated with the degree to which participants feel that they have had a "voice" and felt respected, participant feedback forms should be revised to explicitly measure these variables. For example, measures should be added to capture whether individuals felt they had an opportunity to express their side or opinion. Feedback forms should also be revised to include measures of the degree to which individuals felt respected in the 'Ohana Conference.

Does 'Ohana Conferencing Build Family and Community Capacity or Social Capital for Future Problem-Solving and Child Safety?

As previously discussed, family group conferencing is a democratic, community-based approach to working with families. Its process reflects democratic principles by encouraging family and community participation in societal and family concerns. In this way, it embodies principles of social capital building by strengthening social networks and community partnerships aimed at better protection of children.

Conference facilitators clearly felt that the 'Ohana Conferencing Program builds capacity within the community. Facilitators indicated that by bringing all parties to the table (e.g., family, social

workers, service providers, community members, etc.) the 'Ohana conference can be used to foster greater understanding and communication. One facilitator remarked, "The family can bring in anyone from the community. This gives control back to the family and their community. I am not sure how far-reaching the effects are, but I do have one community where families will ask for conferences (self-refer). They have actually heard that it works from other members of their community." 'Ohana facilitators reported that it is not uncommon for families to request an 'Ohana conference from their social worker because they have had other family members or friends that were involved with CPS and had successful conferences. 'Ohana conferencing is also assisting families to become more aware of the resources available within their own communities. One facilitator stated, "We involve the service providers more with the families. A lot of the families didn't know that some of the services available to them even existed. 'Ohana conferencing definitely improves networking and the families benefit." Facilitators also indicated that as a result of a successful conference and becoming more familiar with the resources available in their community, it is not uncommon for families to get involved in those community supports in order to give back to their community and help other families (e.g., serving as mentors, foster placements, etc.).

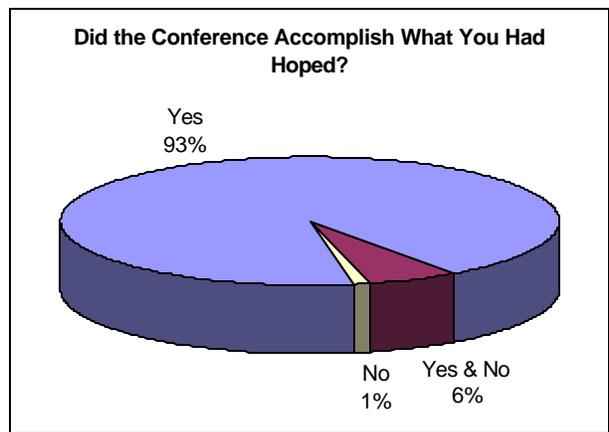
Social workers echo facilitators' comments about the community-building nature of 'Ohana Conferencing. The collaborative nature of 'Ohana conferencing and information sharing almost "force us to work together," a social worker commented. Social workers also stressed that the participants involved in the conference are a large determining factor in its effectiveness. One social worker described the impact of 'Ohana conferencing in the community as "it sort of spreads," and another added that a good conference would "get out into the community through word of mouth."

FINDING: 'Ohana Conferencing Facilitates Community Capacity-Building.

According to key program stakeholders and feedback from participants, 'Ohana conferences are creating supportive environments that encourage community-building and the strengthening of families.

This is accomplished by:

- Fostering positive connections between family and community;
- Providing community-based support for families by building local networks for services and placements; and
- Facilitating collaboration between agencies of government (DHS), the community, and families.



"Provides family and social worker with opportunity to get a broader plan, more comprehensive plan and includes more people, more support for the plan; building networks for people, greater chance for success." –Facilitator

Do Participants in 'Ohana Conferences Report Satisfaction with the Program's Process and Outcomes?

According to the evaluation conducted by SMS Research & Marketing, Inc., family members and social workers who participated in 'Ohana conferences between January 1998 and March 1999 were very satisfied with the process. Analysis of family members' survey responses (approximately 600 surveys total) indicated consistently high satisfaction with the 'Ohana Conferencing process and what was accomplished during it. For example, the lowest rated item, "'Ohana Conferencing helped me understand what is happening with CPS and [foster care]," showed that 79.4% of family members gave ratings of "A lot" or "Completely" when indicating their agreement with this statement. The highest rated survey item, "'Ohana Conferencing helped explain how the family can help parents and children," resulted in 88.2% of family members giving ratings of "A lot" or "Completely" when indicating their agreement with this statement.

Analysis of the survey responses of social workers who had participated in training or in an actual conference (approximately 180 surveys total) similarly showed consistently high ratings for 'Ohana Conferencing in terms of meeting specified objectives. For example, the lowest rated item, "The 'Ohana Conference facilitated cooperation between CPS and others for the children," showed that 94% of social workers gave ratings of "A lot" or "Completely" when rating their agreement with this item. The highest rated item, "The 'Ohana Conference facilitated assessment and decision making," resulted in 99% of social workers giving ratings of "A lot" or "Completely" when indicating their agreement with this statement.

"They are not forced to agree to a plan. It is an agreement we all come to. More times than not, the family is satisfied at the end of the meeting."—DHS Social Worker

Social workers were asked to describe the 'Ohana conference in a word or phrase on feedback forms. The most frequent descriptions of the 'Ohana conference provided by social workers were, in order of frequency of mention: a general, non-specific, positive comment or phrase (e.g., "great") (n=60 of 222; 27%); the conferences are "productive" (n=45 of 222; 20%); conferences are "effective/successful/efficient" (e.g., indicators that the conference accomplished what it was supposed to) (n=37 of 222; 17%); the conference was "helpful/beneficial" (n=27 of 222; 12%); the conference was "informative" (n=21 of 222; 9%); the conference was an "emotional" experience (n=20 of 222; 9%); and that the conference "focused the issues and concerns to be addressed" (n=6 of 222; 3%).⁹³ Social workers also described the 'Ohana conference as "open" and "enlightening".

Social workers were asked to indicate if the 'Ohana conference had accomplished what they had hoped it would. The majority (93%; n=207 of 222)⁹⁴ of social workers reported that the conference had accomplished what they hoped for. Only fourteen of the social workers (6%) indicated that while some of the goals that they wished to achieve during the conference were achieved, there were a few things that they had not been able to accomplish. Only one social worker indicated that the conference did *not* accomplish what s(he) had hoped.

In general, social workers reported that at the conclusion of the conference they left with few remaining concerns related to the family's case. When asked to identify concerns that they did

⁹³ A response was not ascertained from 2 social workers (n=2 of 224; 1%). Also, responses not offered frequently enough to be into grouped thematic codes accounted for 3% of the sample (n=6 of 222).

⁹⁴ Two of the 224 social worker feedback forms did not include this question.

have, social workers indicated that they were concerned about the parents and the family's ability or willingness to comply with service plan; complete services; and comply with drug treatment.

Conference participants were asked to indicate whether or not the conference helped the family, CPS, and service providers work together. The vast majority of participants believed that the 'Ohana conference helped "a lot" (86%; n=717 of 834).⁹⁵ Twelve percent of the participants believed the conference helped "a little bit" (n=99 of 834), while two percent indicated that the conference did "not really" help (n=18 of 834).

When looking only at family members, the responses appear to be consistent with the overall population. Eighty-five percent of family members indicated that the 'Ohana conference helped "a lot" (n=513 of 601), twelve percent indicated that it helped "a little bit" (n=72 of 601), and three percent indicated that it did "not really" help (n=16 of 601). Family members described the conference as being "pro-active and appreciated by the family." One family member commented, "With the help of this conference we know what is happening and how to resolve the problem.

Participant Suggestions for Improving 'Ohana Conferences

Interview respondents also provided suggestions about how 'Ohana Conferences might be improved. Some facilitators stressed, for example that the timing of the conference was critical, suggesting that 'Ohana Conference are best convened in a "timely manner, "and "not waiting for the situation to become intolerable and for hostility to become high." Facilitators also reinforced the importance of "making sure all the right people are there" to the success of conferences, especially "getting the main service providers and agencies to come." Social workers interviewed suggested that the 'Ohana Conference Program "needs to be adapt[ed] so that it can be used by [the child welfare system] more readily." They expressed concern that because the model is "too labor and time intensive" social workers "do not have the time to fully utilize" the 'Ohana conferencing program.

In general, social workers indicated that they feel the 'Ohana conferencing process is currently working very well. Nevertheless, social workers provided suggestions for enhancing the effectiveness of 'Ohana Conferences. Social workers suggested, for example, that increasing the involvement of various parties and increasing the attendance of family members and friends would aid conference effectiveness. Also, social workers mentioned that, on occasion, issues related to the site need to be addressed (e.g., telephone access, bathrooms). Other suggestions made by social workers regarding improving conference effectiveness revolved around issues related to children at the conference, and the need to provide activities or babysitters for them. Some of the comments indicate potential boundary issues between the perceived role of the facilitators and of the social workers. Namely, some social workers seem to feel that facilitators are trying to take on responsibilities that would be more properly in the realm of social workers. This concern was echoed by some of the social workers interviewed, who noted that "the people who run the conference are not supposed to have a role in decision-making ... but they tend to get too involved in providing input into the case plan."

Participants were asked to provide suggestions as to how EPIC 'Ohana Conferencing could help families work together and work with CPS and service providers for the good of the children. One family member suggested that the conference should be held at the beginning of the case, stating, "I wish we had known about this meeting in the first six months of the child's

⁹⁵ As answer was not ascertained from 37 respondents (4%; n=37 of 871).

placement.” Another family member stated, “They should investigate the situation more thoroughly, like meeting other family members and get their insight before making the final decision.” Another family member believed that some participant may be too shy voice their opinion and suggested, “Participants [should] write down concerns anonymously before the meeting.” One participant, identified as a “friend/sponsor on the feedback form, suggested that the family should “Meet once for a short meeting and meet again for a final decision. This will allow people to think about all that was gone over.” A service provider believes that each participant should be “[Asked] in advance to be prepared to say something about what they want for the baby so they think about it before the conference.”

What Direction Should be Taken by the 'Ohana Conferencing Program for Continued Growth and Success?

Participants in the child welfare system and the 'Ohana Conferencing Program (e.g., judges, facilitators, social workers), were asked a number of questions that relate to how the program can evolve productively. By examining the answers to these questions in conjunction with the previously identified program strengths and recommendations for enhancement, it is possible to begin the process of mapping out future directions the program can take to best maximize social capital and continue successfully. This section explores some of the day-to-day challenges faced in the implementation of the program, participant views on the diversionary status of the program, and the critical features that these stakeholders believe define 'Ohana Conferencing. These issues, along with the other previously discussed items, will be integrated into a final analysis of the success of the 'Ohana Family Group Conference program in empowering families as decision-makers and building social capital.

Day-to-Day Challenges

All of the participants were asked to identify the day-to-day challenges that they face in implementing the program. Identification of the barriers that each stakeholder group faces in utilizing 'Ohana Conferencing is essential because it begins the process of developing strategies to overcome such challenges and allows for coordinated efforts among the participants involved to engage in these efforts.

'Ohana Conferencing Program administrators were asked to identify challenges that occur in the day-to-day practice of the program. They identified logistical details, such as locating family members, transporting family members to the conference sites (especially when necessary to transport across islands), and finding a conference site as some of the challenges they face. With regard to personnel involved with the program, administrators indicated that there is a constant need to build relationships and train new staff or social workers due to high turnover rates in the field. Additionally, administrators felt that developing competent, community-based facilitators, as well as finding good coordinators are challenges. As expected, program administrators also indicated a difficulty in maintaining funding and conducting evaluation for the 'Ohana Conferencing Program.

'Ohana facilitators were asked to identify daily challenges that they experience in the practice of family group conferencing. One challenge identified by facilitators was dealing with angry participants. The timeliness of the 'Ohana conference was also identified as a challenge. If an 'Ohana conference takes place at a later stage in the case it allows “for the situation to become intolerable and for the hostility to become high.” 'Ohana conferences must occur in a timely manner. Facilitators expressed that it is sometimes difficult to control the situation and have everyone reach consensus. Having all of the “needed” information and parties present (e.g., key family members, service providers, and agencies) was identified as a consistent challenge.

“The outcome of the conference depends on who walks in the door,” explained one facilitator. Also, the match between the facilitator and the family can be challenging. “A facilitator may not be really appropriate for a particular family. Sometimes the facilitator just does not resonate well with the family. The facilitator may not be culturally appropriate enough for them,” remarked a facilitator. It is important to note that facilitators also indicated that among their day-to-day challenges was “burn-out.” Facilitators explained that “the need for conferencing is great; conferences are very intense and there is a lot of work to do.”

Another challenge directly affecting the ‘Ohana family group conferencing program is that the state of Hawai‘i now has a five-year cap on welfare benefits for families. “This is causing a huge problem when trying to reunify families because many families have already exhausted the amount of welfare benefits that are available to them and they are unable to get any further assistance (food stamps, medical care, housing, various services, etc.)” The five-year cap is an additional barrier when attempting to provide families with services in the state of Hawai‘i.

Daily challenges identified by social workers included: Convincing social workers that conferencing would be beneficial to them; scheduling conferences; finding highly skilled, well-trained, and unbiased facilitators; and training social workers on ‘Ohana conferencing when there is such a high turn-over rate.

Integrating ‘Ohana into Court Practice

As previously mentioned, the ‘Ohana conferencing program is not a strictly diversionary model and may be used for cases that are court-involved. Suggestions, originating within and outside of the program, have been made to expand the program and offer ‘Ohana Conferencing to more cases that are court-involved. This suggestion has met with both resistance and support from many of the stakeholders who have participated in ‘Ohana Conferencing. Thus, it is important to understand the basis for the differing views on the potential expansion of the ‘Ohana Conferencing program for court-involved cases in order to make a reasoned decision regarding this issue.

All of the conference facilitators interviewed feel that ‘Ohana conferencing could become more integrated into court practice. Facilitators acknowledged the support received by the court for the ‘Ohana Family group conferencing program and indicated that the support is greatly appreciated. Some facilitators mentioned that, on occasion, judges have been known to order ‘Ohana conferencing. Facilitators are divided on the issue of whether conferences should be court ordered. One facilitator commented, “There was a legislator that wanted to have all cases go to ‘Ohana conferencing, but that would detract from the program. If they are forced to participate, the families are not empowered.” The facilitator also explained that if the ‘Ohana conference program was ordered it would negatively affect the reputation that EPIC has worked so hard to develop within the local communities. On the other side of the issue, another facilitator remarked, “I really feel strongly that the family should be ordered into ‘Ohana conferencing at the beginning of a case. I can not even begin to say how many times I have seen families get to trial and say that they did not understand the process and their role in it.”

Some facilitators felt that more integration into the court system is not the solution. Instead, more consistent use of the ‘Ohana conferencing program by DHS was the answer they proposed. These facilitators indicated that if utilized more consistently by DHS, the effects of ‘Ohana conferencing would result in more detailed and consistent information getting to the

judge;⁹⁶ increased communication between DHS and the court regarding the needs and desires of the family, as well as increasing available resources for the family; and having fewer cases going to trial. “The more you involve and empower people, the more willing they are to care about the process and take ownership,” explained a facilitator.

The majority of social workers interviewed felt that ‘Ohana conferencing could become more integrated into court practice. A few social workers indicated that in some instances ‘Ohana conferences have already been court ordered. One social worker felt that formalizing the process to make ‘Ohana Conferencing court ordered might be beneficial. Although the worker felt that the court might not know families well enough to order a conference for them, (s)he thought that making an ‘Ohana Conference be court ordered might be a solution to getting around resistance from social workers who do not want to relinquish control over their families. One of the social workers who did not support making conferencing court ordered felt the potential benefits from an ‘Ohana Conference would not be obtained if, “you have a social worker that doesn’t believe in it.” If this were the situation, (s)he thought that people would lose feeling for ‘Ohana conferencing and it would become a “because I have to and not because I want to” program.

Social workers also mentioned that the Family Court in Hawai‘i currently has its own mediation program to settle court issues that are separate from court practice. “The two programs are very time consuming and labor intensive for social workers. Instead of two parallel processes, it would good to integrate both programs. Social workers won’t spend a lot of time sitting through mediation and can spend more time working with parents and foster parents.”

‘Ohana conference facilitators also indicated an interest in model expansion. Facilitators felt that the use of ‘Ohana conferencing in delinquency cases could benefit the juvenile system just as it has for dependency. Facilitators mentioned that by involving the schools as a source for obtaining information regarding the status of pending trancies, and getting feedback from community service organizations about potential service options, would help build community networks and maximize the available resources that could be accessed by juveniles involved in delinquency cases.

A few social workers also indicated an interest in expanding the ‘Ohana Conference model for use in juvenile cases and in different areas of the Court outside of CPS. Cases involving domestic violence, divorce, and other family court issues were mentioned by social workers as areas that might benefit from ‘Ohana conferencing.

Identified Critical Program Features

Participants from each of the stakeholder groups were asked to identify the three most critical program features of ‘Ohana Conferencing. Examination of the program elements that are identified by those who have participated in an ‘Ohana Family Group Conference is one way to determine whether the ideals of the model are being realized in practice and to also identify some potentially unexpected strengths of the program that can be built upon in the future.

Facilitators were asked to identify what they feel are critical features of the ‘Ohana family group conferencing program. Conference coordination was identified a critical feature of the ‘Ohana process. Facilitators indicated that the organized coordination phase of the ‘Ohana conference process is key in gaining information, getting parties involved, and making sure that the

⁹⁶ Facilitators reported that generally the ‘Ohana conference report is attached to the court files in order to allow the judge to be knowledgeable about what took place during the conference.

conference is culturally appropriate and comfortable for all participants. As a result of the conference coordination process, facilitators are well prepared prior to conducting the 'Ohana conference. Another critical feature of the 'Ohana conference identified by facilitators is that it is focused on the family as a unit. Facilitators mentioned that keeping the conference focused on the family is a powerful tool for empowering the family, reminding participants of the hopes and dreams of the family, and identifying goals that need to be accomplished. "It gives the family a chance to make a decision and this makes them more willing to accept it because they have had a say in it. Just like anyone, if we are just told to do something, then it is harder than if we have helped in the process of making the decision," stated a facilitator. Private family time was also identified as a critical feature and tool supporting the family focused and family-strengths philosophy of the 'Ohana conference program. Knowledgeable facilitators that are able to remain neutral, are respectful of all participants, and who either come from, or are very familiar with, the community were also identified as a critical feature of the 'Ohana program. Other critical features identified by facilitators included: Social workers that accept the concept and concept of 'Ohana conferencing; information sharing and informed decision-making; improved relationships between the family, DHS, and service providers; and an agenda that works with the particular community.

Social workers were asked to identify what they feel are critical features of the 'Ohana family group conferencing program. Critical features of the 'Ohana conferencing program that were identified by social workers were: private family time; involvement of the family in the decision-making process; plan approval by child welfare services; the collaborative efforts of the families, service providers, and CPS; informing parents about legal time frames; and conferences being conducted within the community. Social workers also mentioned additional benefits that result from 'Ohana conferencing, such as: empowering families; increased cooperation among family members; ability to educate the family and community; improved communication between parties; and, restoration of family dignity.

In addition, social workers rated the co-facilitation model very favorably. Social workers indicated that having a facilitator and a recorder present at the 'Ohana conference seemed to make the process move more smoothly. And, although social workers did not feel that it was necessary for facilitators to be from the community, they did feel that it was a beneficial if the recorder was from the community. One social worker commented, "usually the recorder is from the community and that is helpful."

'Ohana Conferencing Program administrative stakeholders provided a wide range of answers when asked to describe the three most critical features of the program. Most commonly, program administrators said that private family time and the community based nature of the program (utilizing community facilitators) are the most critical elements. Additional elements identified by program administrators included: program emphasizes focus on the child(ren); helps finalize permanency with adoption or guardianship; and the program operates outside the agency. In regard to the families and the benefits they receive, program administrators identified the following critical elements of the 'Ohana Family Group Conference Program: is a voice for the family; accommodates the family; and provides the family with information as to why CPS is involved in the case.

FINDING: 'Ohana Conferencing Is a Valued Community Resource that Should Continue Growing and Expanding

Systems' stakeholders identified important areas to focus on for the continued use and expansion of 'Ohana Conferencing in a successful manner. Barriers to the ability to have effective conferences were identified by each stakeholder group. By pooling resources within

each stakeholder organization and across the stakeholder groups it should be possible to address the logistical and organizational barriers that were identified. The specification of the critical features of the program for each stakeholder group can aid in the development and planning of future conference activities to facilitate the further growth and expansion of the program. Overall, participants were pleased with the ‘Ohana Conferencing program and the benefits it provides to the families and organizations involved.

Section III: Local and National Implications of the Evaluation

As indicated in the introduction, one of the primary goals of this research was to explore the implications of this evaluation for future work in this area, at both the local and national levels. In pursuit of this goal, the evaluation applied the theory of social capital to its examination of the functioning of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program. Social capital and its associated ideas (e.g., community capacity building) have received considerable recent attention in academic, public policy and public interest debates⁹⁷ and was a useful theoretical framework for evaluating the local and national contribution made by the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program.

The ‘Ohana Conferencing Program is still a relatively pure derivative of the family group conferencing model from which it developed and has a specific focus on community capacity building. Given the proliferation of family group conference programs, and the evolution of the model into new practice domains, whether or not these new permutations retain a focus on community capacity building needs to be explored further. Social capital theory offers relevant insight into the process of capacity building within the community and, as such, is useful for the current evaluation. It is important to recognize that the process of developing social capital is, by nature, long-term and ongoing. By examining the key principles and outcomes of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program within the framework of social capital theory, one can begin to assess whether the program is building capacity within the community.

A Brief Overview of Social Capital Theory

Social capital refers to the norms of trust, reciprocity, and citizen participation. Social capital facilitates community well-being by enhancing individuals’ opportunity for social belonging. Social capital can be defined as the features of social organizations such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.⁹⁸ “Social capital” is the tie that binds us to one another — the formal and informal social networks within a community. The basic tenet of social capital theory is that one’s family and friends constitute an important

⁹⁷ For more information about social capital building, see for example, Barter, K. (1999). “Building community: a conceptual framework for child welfare,” *Journal of Youth Care*, Vol. 13(1), pp. 49-72.; Cochran, M. (1988). “Parental empowerment in family matters: Lessons learned from a research program,” in D. Powell (ed), *Parent Education and Support Programs: Consequences for Children and Families*. New York: Ablex; Gaudin, J. and Polansky, N. (1985). “Social distancing of the neglectful family: sex, race and social class influences”, *Social Services Review*, Vol. 58, pp. 245-253; Hampshire, A., and Healy, K. (2000). “Social capital in practice.” Paper presented at *Family Futures: Issues in Research and Policy*, 7th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Sydney, July.; Haveman, R., and Wolfe, B. (1994). *Succeeding Generations: On the Effects of Investments in Children*. New York: Sage.; Herbert, J. and Smith, B. (1997). Improving living standards through social capital. *Social Security Journal*, pp. 33-60; and Vinson, T., Baldry, E., and Hargreaves, J. (1996). Neighborhoods, networks, and child abuse. *British Journal of Social Work*, 26(4), pp. 523-543; Kauffman, S., and Poulin, J. (1994). “Citizen participation in prevention activities: A path model,” *Journal of Community Psychology*, Vol. 22(4), pp. 359-374; and Kauffman, S., and Zigler. (1992). “The prevention of child maltreatment: Programming, research, and policy,” in D.J. Willis, E.W. Holden, and M.S. Rosenberg (eds), *Prevention of Child Maltreatment: Development and Ecological Perspectives* (pp. 269-95). New York: John Wiley and Sons.; Putnam, R. (2001). Social capital: Measurement and consequences. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, Vol. 2(1), pp. 41-52; Reppucci, N., Woolard, J., and Fried, C. (1999). “Social, community and preventive interventions,” *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 50, pp. 387-418.; Scott, D. (1997). “Home visiting, and Australian perspective,” *Children Australia*, Vol. 22, pp. 10-16; Woolcock, M. (2001). The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *Canadian Journal of Policy Research*, Vol. 2(1), p. 12.

⁹⁸ See Putnam, R. *Supra* note 96.

asset, “one that can be called upon in crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, or leveraged ...”⁹⁹ Individuals and communities with a rich stock of social networks (familial and institutional) will be in a stronger position to confront vulnerabilities.

Social capital provides a much needed framework for responding to people who are disadvantaged and socially marginalized. Social capital provides ways of responding to families in need that emphasizes the building of community bridges and connections across society as a long-term response. Empirical research has demonstrated the importance of social capital for enhancing the capacity of communities to cope with, and even overcome, the stresses associated with disadvantage.¹⁰⁰ Children and families in need of support are viewed as the responsibility of the whole community. Professionals, systems, and those citizens not seen as experiencing difficulties, should be engaging in collaborative partnerships with children and families in need to work toward the collective good.

Social capital is a pre-requisite for community building. It is also a process that can generate additional social capital, as it builds a stronger social fabric through bonds of information-sharing, trust-building and increasing solidarity between people. Social capital is also an important force in sustaining collaborative effort in the service of children and families, as it connotes an acceptance of the basic values upon which community building is based – including a sense of social justice, equality, and the worth, dignity, and integrity of all people – and a commitment to work collaboratively toward these shared goals, to the service of the collective good.

Features of Social Capital Enhancing Programs

For the purposes of practical application, the ideas of social capital or community engagement can be broken down into three general dimensions:¹⁰¹ bonding — with family, close friends and a close network; bridging — to a wider network within the community; and linking — to institutions, agencies, and government. The effectiveness of the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program can be evaluated in terms of addressing needs in these three dimensions and used as a springboard for discussing the overall benefits that can be obtained by using programs that explicitly adopt measures and features that address these areas.

- **Bonding**

“Bonding” within the framework of social capital theory means to build relationships among people of similar backgrounds or circumstances. Bonding refers to familial bonding, as well as cultural bonding and bonding between the family and its community.

The family-focused and community-based philosophy that is reflected in the ‘Ohana Conferencing Program’s underlying values and practice serves to enhance information-sharing and communication within the extended family network, as well as between the family and its broader community. Thus, ‘Ohana Conferencing is successfully engaging in the practice of bonding as used in social capital theory.

- **Bridging**

“Bridging” within the framework of social capital theory means to build bonds across differences. If the social capital or community engagement model is used to examine ‘Ohana conferencing,

⁹⁹ See Woolcock, M. *Supra* note 96.

¹⁰⁰ See for example: Herbert, J. and Smith, B. *Supra* note 96.

¹⁰¹ See Hampshire, A., and Healy, K. *Supra* note 96.

the element of bridging is evidenced by the inclusion of participants in the process who are differentially situated within the child welfare system to achieve the common goal of child protection and safety.

In practice, findings suggest that 'Ohana Conferences empower families by educating them about their obligations, informing them of resources available in the community, and by providing role models who can model appropriate behavior and effective problem-solving. The 'Ohana Conference Program with its strength-based focus, its ability to identify and provide access to resources relating to family-specific needs, and the development of collaborative partnerships between the family and service agencies in the community all support the practice of bridging as used in social capital theory.

- **Linking**

“Linking” within the framework of social capital theory means to create ties among institutions, agencies, and government. Although community members, social service providers, and other community supports make an independent contribution to a “child-friendly” and “family-supportive” environment, they cannot act alone to provide the full range of services or level of support that a particular child or family may need. With the goal of developing social capital, responding to children and their families therefore requires a comprehensive array of community based therapeutic and supportive services that specifically addresses the needs of disadvantaged or marginalized children and families.

The 'Ohana Program in both its underlying philosophy and practice explicitly acknowledges the need to involve the larger community in both the protection of children and the overall safety of its citizenry. By enhancing the level of collaboration among the family court, the Department of Human Services (DHS), community providers, and the broader community network, the 'Ohana Conferencing Program is providing tools to help families create safe and healthy environments for their children. Thus the 'Ohana Conferencing Program is facilitating linkages as understood within the context of social capital theory.

Conclusion

The final evaluation of the 'Ohana Conference Program suggests that it is moving successfully toward realizing its goal of capacity building within the community. Building social capital, as a means of capacity building within the community, is a long-term process that requires continued scrutiny of current practice and goals with refinements and adjustments made as needed to continue towards that ideal. As the program continues to evolve, attention should be paid to specifying ways to measure and assess the goal of building capacity within the community and ensuring that the community is benefiting as expected from the implementation of this program.

Results from this evaluation show that the 'Ohana Conferencing Program is realizing its core philosophical assumptions and theory in the daily implementation and practice of the program. Evaluation of specific program elements and the associated outcomes for families and system professionals participating in the conferencing process, support the efficacy of the 'Ohana Conferencing Program. As with any program, there is room for improvement. But, overall the 'Ohana Conferencing Program has successfully moved from theory to practice—empowering families as decision-makers, building community capacity, and, most importantly, protecting children.