

Assessing local needs helps communities improve services for diverse families at risk

While helping families prevent such problems as domestic violence, child abuse, teen pregnancy and school failure, community agencies are stretched beyond capacity — yet must show positive results. Cooperative Extension and community teams assess local needs, then use these to develop more effective services for diverse families at risk.

Situation:

Many Wisconsin children, youth and families are at risk for problems such as child abuse, school failure, teen pregnancy, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental health disorders. These problems disrupt family life. They prevent individuals from reaching their full potential and becoming responsible family members, workers, and contributing citizens.

Public and non-profit agencies that provide programs and services to families at risk are stretched beyond their capacity. More of these groups are charged to show positive outcomes as a result of their efforts. Yet they often have neither the tools to assess local needs and effectively target their efforts, nor the expertise to evaluate their programs to show their effectiveness and improve program delivery.

Response:

As funding tightens, Cooperative Extension campus and county faculty recognize the increasing pressures on their community partners to deliver quality services that are targeted to local needs, prove effective, and show positive impacts. County UW-Extension family living educators provide technical assistance on assessing local needs, improving program delivery, and evaluating service quality. With this help, a diverse array of local public and non-profit agencies and groups improve services to children, youth and families at risk.

Impacts:

With the *La Crosse County United Way*: The family living educator helped develop a needs assessment that identified four main concerns of county residents. The United Way is using these to guide how they respond to program funding requests.

For the *Lanlade County Health Department*: The county family living educator conducted an assessment of residents' health needs. These results are being used to guide development and delivery of more effective county health services.

On behalf of *Manitowoc County Latino community leaders*: The family living educator assessed the needs of county Latinos. These findings are being used to guide agencies developing policies and programs for the rapidly growing Latino community.

For an *Oconto County school district*: The family living educator surveyed school district staff to help the district better understand staff needs, then develop more effective teacher in-service opportunities.

Success story:

As part of a statewide assessment process, the Portage County family living educator collaborated on assessing Hmong families' needs. The findings are helping the county develop more effective strategies to reach the underserved Hmong community.

See also the program impact report "Hmong Family Strengthening Project community approach improves relationships, reduces risks for teens/ Tsev neeg hmoob kev sib haum xeeb: zej zog kev tshawb xav."

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