

HAMILTON COUNTY FAMILY AND CHILDREN FIRST COUNCIL RETREAT SUMMARY

On March 13, 2009, the Hamilton County Family and Children First Council hosted an all day retreat for 120 FCF members and community partners.

Entitled “ Public Sector Budgets: Realities and Implications”, the goals of the retreat were to:

- Discuss the impact of public and private sector budget cuts on social services for families and children in our community
- Prioritize needs impacted by the new budget limitations
- Develop community wide strategies to streamline services and collaboratively meet the gaps created by funding shortfalls
- Add to and build upon FCF’s biennial plan of ensuring coordination of high quality services and increasing family engagement in schools within current budgetary realities

The retreat began with a stimulating and informative panel discussion by Moira Weir, Director, Dept. of Jobs and Family Services; Pat Tribbe, President, Mental Health and Recovery Services Board; Mark Reed, Hamilton County Juvenile Court; Cheryl Phipps, Superintendent, Hamilton County Board of MR/DD and Margaret Hulbert, Vice President, United Way about the current and projected budget realities for the public systems and forecasts about what to expect from their state government counterparts.

Retreat participants then broke into small groups for which they had signed up prior to the retreat based on there area of interest and expertise. Each group was facilitated by a member of the FCF Executive Committee.

The purpose of the small groups was to identify gaps in services in the specified topic areas that may result from the budget shortfalls and to begin strategic planning about how to meet those gaps in services within the current budgets. Collaborative solutions were strongly encouraged. Emphasis was placed on how agencies and systems can work together more efficiently and cost effectively to provide those functions that are essential for children and families in our community in spite of the economic downturn.

Small groups were also asked to identify any areas that rule waivers of Council Cabinet agencies would facilitate their ability to provide services for families and children in our community. The law creating Family and Children First Councils states: *On application of a county council, the cabinet council may grant an exemption from any rules or interagency agreements of a state department participating on the council if an exemption is necessary for the council to implement an alternative program or approach for service delivery to families and children.*

Following a wonderful speech by special guest Frances Strickland at lunch time, the small groups resumed meeting to continue their work. During the final hour of the retreat, all the groups convened and the facilitators of each group or their designees each

presented a summary of their group's identification of gaps, their recommended strategies, and next steps. Those recommendations can be found in the following links on this website:

- Services for ages 0-3
- Services for ages 3-6
- Child Protection
- Juvenile Delinquency
- Mental health/health (these two groups merged during the retreat)
- School based services

At its upcoming meeting on May 7, the Executive Committee will decide what next steps should be taken by each group to move it towards implementation of its recommended strategies.