Centro Familia's Evaluation Capacity:

Assessment Findings and Recommendations

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Committed to building the capacity of organizations and institutions to develop the health, economic equity, and social justice of communities.

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Introduction

Centro Familia contracted the Association for the Study and Development of Community (ASDC) to assess its current evaluation capacity and make recommendations for strengthening this capacity. This capacity was assessed for three of Centro Familia's programs: Programa LEONAS, Programa En Familia, and La Escuelita.

An organization's evaluation capacity may be thought of as its ability to do the following:

- Articulate a program's theory of change or explanation for how and why the program will work (Weiss, 1995)
- Define and measure core program activities and outcomes
- Analyze and report information about program activities and outcomes
- Use information about program activities and outcomes for program development and improvement

Method

The assessment involved a review of program documents and in-depth discussions with program staff. Documents reviewed include program descriptions, monthly reports, and funder reports. Discussions with staff occurred primarily during two workshops conducted by ASDC.

Program Results Workshop

The purpose of the first workshop was to define results for three Centro Familia programs and determine how to document them. The workshop was held on September 4th 2007 and scheduled for three hours (9:00 a.m. to noon). It included the following desired outcomes:

- Definitions of your program's results.
- Strategies for documenting your program's results.
- Awareness of who might be interested in your program's results.
- Understanding of what makes your program's results compelling.
- Understanding of how information about your program's results can be useful.

The workshop asked participants to reflect on and discuss the following questions.

- What benefits can children expect as a result of participating in your program?
- What benefits can parents/caregivers expect as a result of participating in your program?
- What benefits can the community expect as a result of your program?

- How would you share this information about your program's results with others?
- What types of strategies would you use to document results for one child or family?
- What types of strategies would you use to document results for all the children or families in your program?
- Who might be interested in this information about your program results?
- What type of information about your program results will be most convincing or compelling?
- How can information about your program results be used…
    - For making decisions about your program?
    - For improving your program?
    - For getting additional funding for your program?
    - For preparing to evaluate your program more formally?

Responses to these questions were recorded by ASDC as part of the group discussion as well as on the worksheets provided to participants by ASDC. These responses were used as part of the second workshop to illustrate program evaluation concepts in a way that would be most relevant for Centro Familia staff.

Program Evaluation Workshop

The purpose of the second workshop was to reinforce program results concepts discussed in the first workshop and introduce core program evaluation concepts. The workshop was held on September 26th 2007 and scheduled for two and one half hours (9:30 a.m. to noon). It included the following desired outcomes:

- Review definitions of your program's results.
- Review strategies for documenting your program's results.
- Awareness of who might be interested in your program's results.
- Understanding of core program evaluation concepts.
- Consider a draft central reporting form for Centro Familia staff.

A Power Point slide presentation was created and shared with participants as well as a draft central reporting form. Participants wrote comments directly on the form and ASDC used these to revise the form (see Attachment) accordingly.

Assessment Findings: Theories of Change

Assessment of the theories of change for the three Centro Familia programs was guided by the following questions:

- What are staff's explicit or implicit theories about how and why the programs will work and for whom?
- What are all of the assumptions and sub-assumptions built into each program?

According to written program descriptions and discussions with staff, Centro Familia in general and each program has an implicit theory for how and why it works.

- **Centro Familia.** Centro Familia provides high quality, culturally sensitive, nurturing, and affordable services that result in professional development for Latinas and school-readiness for their children.
- **Programa LEONA's.** This program provides Latina immigrants with networking opportunities as a means for developing professional and community leadership skills.
- **Programa En Familia.** This program provides Latina immigrants with home-based and office-based training and support to become licensed child care providers as a means for financial security and improving the school readiness of children in their care.
- **La Escuelita de Centro Familia.** This program provides immigrant, low income families with a licensed child care site that meets the cultural, linguistic and educational needs essential for the school readiness of their children.

These theories could be strengthened by articulating more explicitly *why* the program activities are expected to create the changes in women and children described. Assumptions about the significance of these particular program activities for Latinas and their children could also be stated more explicitly.

Assessment Findings: Data Collection Practices

Assessment of Centro Familia's data collection practices was guided by the following questions:

- Does each program have performance and outcome measures that are tracked and reported?
- Are program performance and outcome measures capable of indicating success and progress in attaining results?
- Are program performance and outcome measures tracking success and progress at all appropriate levels of analysis (e.g., child care providers, children, community)?

Strengths

Centro Familia's organizational culture supports practices that result in the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Most staff expressed support for these practices during workshop discussions.

Centro Familia is supportive of data collection specifically and program evaluation more broadly in the following ways:

- Staff are provided with monthly reporting templates and expected to complete them on time. These templates include both qualitative (e.g., pictures from home

visits) and quantitative (e.g., ECOR scores, number of people who attended a training) data. In addition, pre and post data are collected to assess change over time.

- A staff person (Director of Programs) has the responsibility of compiling monthly data into reports for various funders.
- The Executive Director has established clear expectations for staff understanding and reporting program inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes. For example, during the week of the second workshop staff was given the assignment of defining their program outcomes and submitting them in writing to the Executive Director.

Furthermore, staff responses to the reflection questions indicate an understanding of the following among most members:

- The differences among measures of activities, outputs, and outcomes
- The importance of program evaluation for improving services, making decisions, and informing others about the work
- The different audiences invested in program data
- The importance of collecting program data

Areas for Improvement

ASDC identified the following areas of needed improvement:

- The quantity and variety of data collected may be too cumbersome for meaningful and timely analysis and use. Current reports reflect a large amount of qualitative data that may be summarized more succinctly with numbers and place less burden on staff in terms of collecting, compiling, analyzing and reporting. Streamlining the number of assessments may also place less burden on program participants.
- Despite similarities shared by Centro Familia's programs in terms of activities and expected outcomes, core data elements shared across programs have not been identified. Collecting data on core services and outcomes would increase the consistency of the organization's data collection practices.

Assessment Findings: Data Analysis and Reporting Practices

Assessment of Centro Familia's data analysis and reporting practices was guided by the following questions:

- What types of information are examined?
- How is information examined?
- Who examines the information?

As summarized in the previous section, Centro Familia uses monthly reports to summarize program activities and outcomes. The organization's Director of Programs compiles different reports from these monthly reports for different funders. The process is cumbersome given the largely qualitative nature of the data reported currently and the various reporting requirements of funders. The Director of Programs expressed interest in developing a database (e.g., ACCESS or EXCEL) that could facilitate more uniform and timely analyses and reports.

Assessment Findings: Data-Based Decision Making

Assessment of Centro Familia's data-based decision making practices was guided by the following questions:

- How does Centro Familia use data or evidence to inform programmatic decision-making?
- How does Centro Familia use data or evidence to leverage funding?
- How does Centro Familia use data or evidence to inform policy decision-making?

Centro Familia uses the data collected to report to various funders and develop marketing materials (i.e., program brochures). Some staff feel that program information is used informally to make program improvements and improve service quality. Systematic use of program information for quality improvement is not in place, however.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Centro Familia and its staff have a strong foundation for further developing their current evaluation capacity. By refining data collection efforts, staff could better monitor the quality of the data, reduce time spent on writing lengthy narratives each month, and increase time dedicated to providing services. Using data more systematically to improve service quality may reduce staff resistance to the time required for data-related efforts as they see its relevance for helping others. ASDC recommends that Centro Familia consider taking the following actions to increase its evaluation capacity.

- Make implicit theories of change explicit. Consider articulating a general theory of change and program-specific theories. Think more about "why" Centro Familia's programs are expected to work.

- Collect program data more strategically. For every data element collected, analyzed, and reported, ask:

  o Can the same information be communicated more succinctly with a number?
  o Does the number require additional information (e.g., narrative that provides context and qualification) to be most meaningful?

- Collect core service and outcome data consistently across programs. See attached reporting form for examples. The actual form could be an EXCEL spreadsheet for each program that could easily be merged into a more comprehensive report.

- Consider collecting staff performance data in a separate reporting system. This system would have multiple purposes:

  o Increase staff accountability and compliance with the organization's culture regarding data.
  o Increase rewards and recognition for high performing staff.

- Use program information more intentionally for improving services. For example, staff could develop benchmarks for program success (e.g., by May all children will increase their reading level by 30%) and then discuss the data during regularly scheduled meetings (e.g., quarterly) to make modifications in programs as necessary.

References

Weiss, C. H. (1995). Nothing as practical as good theory: Exploring theory-based evaluation for comprehensive community initiatives for children and families. In J.P. Connell, A. C. Kubisch, L.B. Schorr & C. H. Weiss (Eds.), *New approaches to evaluating community initiatives: Concepts, methods, and contexts.* (pp. 65-92).

Appendix

	CORE SERVICES (PROCESS MEASURES)			CORE RESULTS (OUTCOME MEASURES)		
	Child	Caregiver	Community	Child	Caregiver	Community
Programa LEONAs	# Referrals Received (Data Source) # Served (Data Source) # Community Referrals (Data Source)	# Referrals Received (Data Source) # Served (Data Source) # Community Referrals (Data Source) Core Services (# Trainings, # Home Visits) (Data Source)	# Community Outreach and Education Events (Data Source) # Community Partnerships		Improved Leadership Skills (Data Source)	More Leaders in Community (Data Source)
Programa En Familia	# Referrals Received (Data Source) # Served (Data Source) # Community Referrals (Data	# Referrals Received (Data Source) # Served (Data Source) # Community Referrals (Data	# Community Outreach and Education Events (Data Source)	Improved Learning/School Ready (Data Source) Improved Social Development (Data Source)	Increased Knowledge of Child Development and Care Issues (# caregivers demonstrating increased pre/post knowledge) (Data Source)	More Quality Child Care Available (Data Source) or # of Formal Providers in Community

	CORE SERVICES (PROCESS MEASURES)			CORE RESULTS (OUTCOME MEASURES)		
	Child	Caregiver	Community	Child	Caregiver	Community
	Source)	Source) Core Services (# Trainings, # Home Visits) (Data Source)			Obtain Child Care License (# caregivers) (Data Source)	
La Escuelita	# Referrals Received (Data Source) # Served (Data Source)/Attendance # Community Referrals (Data Source)	# Referrals Received (Data Source) # Served (Data Source) # Community Referrals (Data Source) Core Services (# Trainings, # Home Visits) (Data Source)	# Community Outreach and Education Events (Data Source)	Improved Learning/School Ready (Data Source – ECOR, MCPS, Denver II)/% of Children Demonstrating Progress % of Children Ready for School Improved Social Development (Data Source)	Increased involvement in school and community (# caregivers who volunteered in class or co-op; # caregivers that come to read aloud; # of caregivers that come to coffee; # of caregivers that come to events) (Data Source)	More Quality Early Education Available (Data Source)# of Service Slots; # of Children on Waiting List; # Teachers trained