Dealing with Child Abuse and Neglect within a Comprehensive Family-Support Program

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Since 1989, the Community-Family Partnership (CFP) program in northern Utah has provided comprehensive services to families living in poverty. Such families are at increased risk for child abuse and neglect due to the many stresses associated with poverty (Gaudin, 1993; Tower, 1992). Within the two counties served by the program, the incidence rate of substantiated child abuse and neglect cases in 1994 was 0.3% (n = 355), slightly less than in the state of Utah (0.5%; n = 10,430) (Utah Children, 1996) and the United States (0.4%; n = 1,036,000) (National Committee to Prevent Child Abuse, Utah Chapter, 1995; Peterson & Urquiza, 1993).

This chapter describes the CFP program and how it provides comprehensive family support services to low-income families. Its central focus is on how CFP staff, in partnership with low-income families and staff from other agencies, provide comprehensive family support services which prevent and remediate child abuse and neglect. Lessons learned, evolution of policies and procedures, and outcomes achieved are discussed.

To understand the impact of comprehensive services on families living in poverty and, specifically, how these services can affect child abuse and neglect, one must understand the context within which the services are provided (Love, 1998).
The Community–Family Partnership program in northern Utah is one of the original Comprehensive Child Development Programs (CCDPs) funded by the Administration for Children and Families between 1989 and 1994. The CFP program thus includes both a federal and a local context.

**FEDERAL CONTEXT**

Authorized by Congress in 1988, the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP) is designed to address the pervasive needs of low-income children and families and to combat the fragmentation of existing programs that serve them. Its objective is to promote educational achievement and economic and social self-sufficiency through the provision of intensive, comprehensive, and continuous support to both children and families from a child’s birth until entry into school. (Smith & Lopez, 1994, p. 1).

**Federal Goals**

The goals of the CCDPs are fourfold:

1. To help poverty-level families maximize the development of each child in the home under school-age to prevent educational failure. This includes prevention and elimination of child abuse and neglect by intervening as early as possible to prevent and alleviate the negative impact on child development.
2. To help each family move toward social and economic self-sufficiency, thus preventing welfare dependency. This includes training parents in skills that will help prevent abuse and neglect, such as child management and mental health treatment.
3. To work as partners with other community agencies in achieving the two previously stated goals. This includes helping families access services from community agencies for problems that contribute to the occurrence of abuse and neglect, for example, substance abuse treatment.
4. To identify policy issues useful for welfare reform. This includes support for unified efforts to address problems such as child abuse and neglect through integrating services, such as interagency efforts to alleviate poverty and its negative effects and thus decreasing the stress often associated with poverty that leads to abuse and neglect.

**Federal Mandates**

The mandates of CCDPs are to (1) help families use existing services whenever possible (e.g., Aid to Families with Dependent Children), (2) work with other agencies to identify gaps in services and find ways to fill these gaps (e.g., working to create needed mental health services for children because few such services exist), (3) provide some direct services (e.g., in-home parent training in child development and basic nutrition), and (4) serve as the payer of last resort.