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**Family Independence
Initiative (FII):
Lessons Learned about
Developing and
Delivering Family
Literacy Services to
Welfare Recipients**

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

Overview of the Family Independence Initiative

The National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL) began the Family Independence Initiative (FII) to address the needs of welfare recipients and their families who might benefit from participating in family literacy services. With funding from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, NCFL developed a grants program during 1997-2000 to determine the ways in which family literacy programs could adapt their services to assist current and recent welfare recipients and their families in becoming economically independent.

The Family Independence Initiative had two phases of activities. During the Development phase (1997-1998), NCFL funded five family literacy program grantees to develop models of work-focused family literacy services. These grantees met with their local welfare offices in recruiting participants and in determining the conditions under which welfare recipients could receive family literacy services while meeting the requirements of welfare reform. They also modified three key elements of a family literacy program in serving welfare recipients: the amount of time for services, the content of services, and the processes for delivery services. Because welfare reform required that recipients participate in a work experience or hold a job, the amount of time that participants could spend in onsite program services was reduced. Thus the grantees had to ensure that the onsite services they offered were central to developing participants' basic and work preparedness skills. They also infused career awareness and work preparedness activities in the adult education, parent time, and early childhood components of services. By offering participants opportunities to learn about work through job shadowing, mentoring, and work experience, the grantees broadened the processes they used to deliver services to include offsite activities. They also expanded their collaborating partners to include business, industry, and often the welfare agency itself. By the end of the Development phase, NCFL had a blueprint for delivering family literacy services in the context of welfare reform.

Based on the lessons learned from the Development phase, NCFL carried out a Pilot phase (1998-2000) in which 11 grantees in six cities supported by the Knight Foundation were funded. The goal of the Pilot phase was to test further the efficacy of using family literacy services to assist adults in developing their skills to obtain and retain employment, as well as in facilitating the academic and social development of their children. The lessons learned from the experiences of the Pilot programs are presented in this report.

Abt Associates' Process Study

During the Development phase of FII, Abt Associates conducted case studies of the five grantees to understand the activities that they were undertaking in creating work-

focused family literacy services. To build upon this work, NCFL commissioned Abt Associates to continue their FII process study in working with the Pilot programs. The objectives of the Pilot phase process study were to:

- Document the types of adaptations that family literacy programs must make to serve welfare recipients and adults transitioning to work;
- Identify the factors that facilitate and impede the adaptation process; and
- Develop recommendations concerning the utility of family literacy as a mechanism for enabling welfare recipients to be economically independent and productive family members.

Abt Associates' team developed an approach to the process study of the FII Pilot programs in which the team collected data about: a) the overall design of the FII, b) the extent to which the programs selected for the Pilot phase were able to build upon a base of family literacy services that could be adapted for welfare clients, and c) the key factors that affected the capacity of the Pilot programs to work with welfare clients. The data collection methodology for the process study was comprised of the following activities:

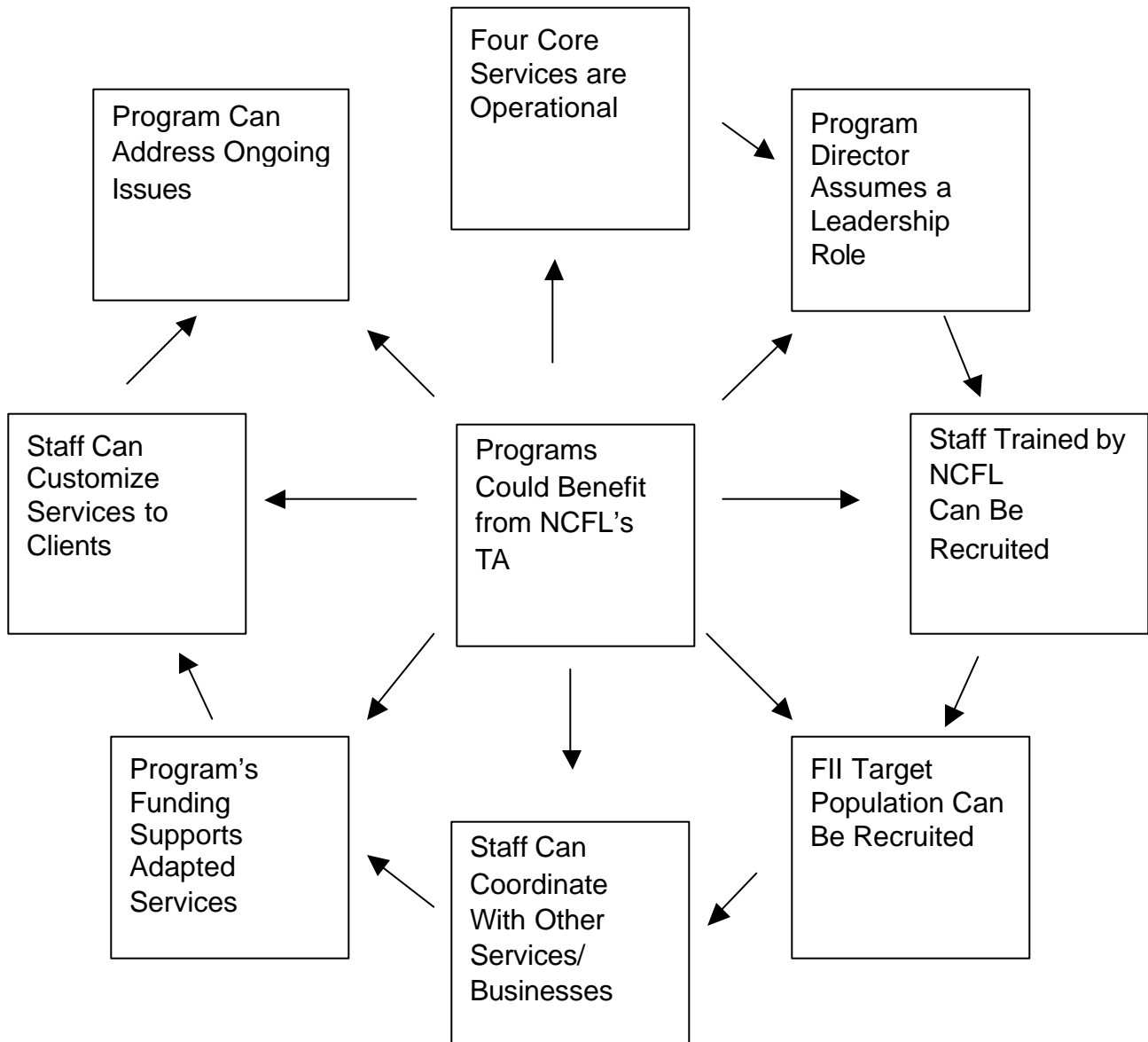
- Three site visits to each of the 11 programs during Years 1 and 2 of the Pilot phase, which included individual interviews with key staff, observation of program services, and review of program documents;
- Review of NCFL's documentation of the technical assistance that they provided to the Pilot programs;
- Participation in annual Pilot program meetings; and
- Review of the participant data that the Pilot programs submitted to NCFL.

The study team analyzed the data to determine the factors affecting the programs' implementation of family literacy services that were unique to the programs based on their organizational infrastructure, the clients served, and the available resources for services. The team then determined the issues that were common across the programs, and used the results of this analysis in formulating recommendations for this report.

FII Guiding Assumptions and Pilot Program Grantees

Guiding Assumptions. In selecting the Pilot grantees, NCFL staff made a number of assumptions about the organizational capacity of the Pilot programs, their resources, and their ability to deliver services. These assumptions are presented in Exhibit 1.

Exhibit 1. Assumptions Guiding the FII Implementation Model



Three of these assumptions were incorporated in the criteria that NCFL used in choosing the Pilot programs:

- The existence of the four core family literacy services (adult education, parent time, early childhood education, and parent and child time – PACT);
- The availability of welfare recipients who could participate in a family literacy program; and
- Sufficient program funding to support the required services.

Other assumptions guiding the FII program implementation concerned the capacity of the Pilot program staff to provide leadership, implement and adapt comprehensive family literacy services, as well as work with collaborating agencies in delivering these services. It also was assumed that the Pilot programs would require technical assistance in strengthening their family literacy services, in expanding their activities to incorporate work preparation and work experience, and in collaborating with other agencies. In carrying out the Pilot process study, Abt Associates' team examined each of these assumptions in terms of the challenges they posed to the Pilot programs and the ways in which these programs addressed the challenges.

Pilot Programs. NCFL funded 10 Pilot programs in five cities that represented a variety of fiscal agents and service delivery models. An eleventh Pilot program in a sixth city was a Development site that NCFL funded to carry out additional post-employment services for participants and to assist with technical assistance for the 10 new programs. An overview of the Pilot programs is presented in Exhibit 2. In their selection process, NCFL chose programs that represented a variety of organizational and fiscal arrangements for delivering family literacy services to welfare recipients.

Pilot Participants. The FII Pilot programs intended to enroll families for at least one year of service. Over the two years of the Pilot phase, a total of 396 adults were served across the 10 FII programs. Eleven percent of the participants from Year 1 returned for a second year of service.

Technical Assistance to Pilot Programs

A key activity that facilitated the work of the FII Pilot programs was the technical assistance that NCFL staff delivered. The staff visited each program at least twice during each of the two years of the Pilot phase. The format for the visits consisted of an observation-feedback-management cycle of activities where NCFL staff observed some aspect of the programs' activities, provided feedback to the program staff on what they had observed, and conducted a discussion about key management activities. During some of the visits, NCFL staff or their representatives conducted workshops designed to assist Pilot staff in strengthening their practices related to delivering one of the core services or adapting components of services. In between the visits, NCFL staff held

Exhibit 2. FII Pilot Program New Grantees

Program City, Number of FII Pilot Sites	Fiscal Agent	FII Pilot Sites/Provider Agencies/Service Locations
Akron OH: Two FII Pilot programs	Akron Vocational School (AVS), Akron Public Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Akron Vocational School (AVS) in collaboration with Barrett Elementary School in Year 1, with a Head Start program in Year 2 ▪ Decker Family Development Center (a partnership of Barberton City Schools, Children’s Hospital Medical Center of Akron, and the University of Akron) providing all components of family literacy services
Boulder CO: Two FII Pilot programs	Family Resource Schools (FRS) Program, City of Boulder, Division of Children, Youth, and Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Columbine Elementary School in collaboration with Boulder Public Library ▪ Family Learning Center providing all components of family literacy services
Charlotte NC: Three FII Pilot programs	Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC)	FII was implemented in three service locations (two locations each year) that were part of the Even Start collaborative between CPCC and Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools
Long Beach CA: Two FII Pilot programs with a coordinating agency	Long Beach Unified School District	FII was implemented in two organizations coordinated by Long Beach Service Delivery Area, One Stop Career Center: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Burnett Elementary School (an Even Start program site) ▪ Long Beach Adult School
Philadelphia PA: Three FII Pilot programs with a coordinating agency	Mayor’s Commission on Literacy (MCOL), City of Philadelphia	FII was implemented in three separate organizations coordinated by the MCOL: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Congreso de Latinos Unidos in collaboration with Fairhill Elementary School ▪ The Center for Literacy in collaboration with Hill Elementary School (an Even Start program site) ▪ Lutheran Settlement House in collaboration with Hunter Elementary School

numerous telephone conferences with Pilot program staff, communicated with Pilot program staff via email, and met with staff at family literacy conferences. NCFL also convened the Pilot program staff during the summers of 1999 and 2000 to review the year’s activities, discuss the challenges they had encountered, and plan for the next year. NCFL staff also trained Pilot staff to collect demographic and outcome data, and provided feedback to the programs on the data that they submitted to NCFL. While all Pilot programs submitted data to NCFL, the response rates were low for the submission of complete data sets.

Strategies for Addressing Implementation Challenges

Our analysis of the Pilot programs' activities revealed three overarching factors that were critical to their implementation of family literacy services:

- The Pilot programs' organizational infrastructure;
- Coordination within family literacy program components and between the program and external organizations; and
- Integration of workforce preparation content within the adult education and parent time components of a family literacy program, as well as content integration across program components of early childhood education, parent time, and PACT.

The Pilot programs undertook a variety of activities to address these factors. While Pilot programs differed in the extent to which they had existing family literacy services, they all had to strengthen their organizational infrastructure and leadership capacity. This presence of an infrastructure was important in securing staff and space for services, recruiting the target population, and organizing fiscal resources to support the required services. The Pilot programs also developed relationships with services within their organizations as well as with external entities to expand the range of activities that they could offer participants. These included support services to address the variety of personal challenges that participants had to address, as well as other components of core family literacy services that had to be added to programs. Finally, the Pilot programs made progress in integrating workforce content into the adult education instruction, in providing a range of work-preparation services, and in including job-seeking and job-keeping issues in parent time. They also made efforts to align the content and activities of the family literacy components and to integrate family issues across components. The experiences of the pilot programs provided a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that family literacy programs must address in serving adults transitioning from welfare to work, as well as a variety of strategies that can be used to meet these challenges.

Lessons Learned from FII

The results of our study point to a number of lessons about the process of developing work-focused family literacy services. These findings also provide insights about the structure of the services that these clients must have in order to move toward economic self-sufficiency.

Organizational Infrastructure. The FII programs' experiences in organizing the components of a family literacy service demonstrate the importance of developing a solid organizational infrastructure. Fundamental to the operational of a program are: administrative leadership, qualified staff, adequate facilities, the availability of the target population of clients who are to be served, adequate fiscal resources, and an

understanding of the services that are to be delivered. Two lessons from the Pilot programs' experiences regarding infrastructure are:

- A complex intervention such as family literacy cannot thrive on a weak organizational base. Early in the development of a program, key administrators must understand the rationale and operational requirements of the program and attend to the core components of the service such as staff, facilities, and funding. Once these components are established, they must be routinely monitored and reinforced; and
- It is important to identify the populations of clients who are to be served so that services can be targeted to meet the specific needs of these clients. In developing a family literacy program aimed at a specific client population, the availability of this population needs to be confirmed and the particular service needs should be delineated. For family literacy programs focusing on adults who are transitioning from welfare to work, the extent of their prior work experience and their disposition toward work are important characteristics to consider in developing services.

Program Coordination. A key requirement of a successful family literacy program is the staffs' capacity to coordinate services within the program and with external agencies and organizations. The main premise underlying family literacy is that there is value-added from different components of service working together to address the educational and social needs of the family. The FII programs faced many challenges in coordinating services, and their experiences indicated the following:

- More specific training in developing and sustaining relationships with organizations may be needed. Family literacy staff need guidance on processes for working with other agencies that include: identifying a common goal, specifying the strengths that each entity brings to the relationship, developing ways of monitoring the relationship, and resolving difficulties that arise in the relationship;
- Family literacy staff need assistance in identifying the types of incentives that the primary service can offer to collaborating service partners to keep them engaged in the collaboration, such as the types of data that can be shared, the expanded services that will be available to clients, and successes that can be celebrated; and
- In coordinating the delivery of work preparation services with external agencies, it is important that staff have a strategy for identifying clients who are ready to participate in activities involving business and training partners. The appropriate placement of clients in work preparation activities will ensure a successful learning experience for the client and an ongoing relationship with business and training partners.

Integration of Services. The main focus of FII programs' work in integrating services was their incorporation of work preparation activities in the adult education and parent time components. The lessons learned from their experiences are:

- Integration of curricular activities requires that staff have time to plan their activities, meet with colleagues, and understand the overall instructional content of family literacy. These requirements need to be recognized by the program’s administrators and negotiated in the development of the components of service;
- It is critical that staff understand the underlying skills that are being taught through work preparation activities in order to integrate them as part of adult basic skills instruction. The use of work-related applications in teaching basic skills is most effective when the applications are appropriate for the level of skill being taught; and
- In implementing a new model such as work-focused family literacy, it may be helpful if program staff consider strengthening the content and processes of each individual component of family literacy before moving toward integration across components. Once components of service are organized and the content has been defined, staff may be better able to work together in integrating the content and activities to solidify the overall program.

Overall Family Independence Initiative. Our analyses revealed a number of insights about the development and delivery of family literacy services as well as the implementation of an initiative or demonstration program with multiple grantees. These data suggest the following recommendations:

- Programs with some experience in delivering selected components of family literacy service may require training that takes into account the programs’ prior experience, and assists staff in developing a common understanding of the activities involved in a comprehensive family literacy program with integrated components of service;
- Technical assistance is critical when programs do not have all of the core family literacy services in place, need to build infrastructure and staff, or are not experienced in coordinating with staff within their own organization or with other agencies. The technical assistance needs to reinforce the key principles of family literacy programs, recognize and address the difficulty of implementing multiple program changes, and should be delivered throughout the period of the initiative;
- The process of simultaneous personal change may be too difficult for families to undertake who have to address multiple barriers to participation, such as personal, social, economic, and educational issues. Family literacy services to these families may need to be sequenced so that families can develop some stability in personal and social issues before participating fully in all education and parenting services. The length of time that families participate in these services may need to be increased to enable them to benefit fully from a comprehensive array of services; and
- Family literacy programs need additional guidance regarding the data collection, interpretation, and use of program and participant data. Staff in these programs generally are not using data to manage the services that they deliver or to reinforce

the participation of the clients whom they serve. Additional training and technical assistance could assist staff in developing ownership of the data, which should result in improving their collection and use of data.

Next Steps

One goal of our process study was to assess the utility of family literacy as a mechanism for enabling welfare recipients to be economically independent and productive family members. This question can be addressed from two perspectives: 1) the feasibility of developing a comprehensive family literacy service that serves welfare recipients or adults transitioning to work, and 2) the extent to which participation in family literacy services is beneficial to welfare recipients.

Development of Family Literacy Services. Our report has provided evidence that it is feasible to develop comprehensive family literacy services for welfare recipients, but that this process takes time, an organizational infrastructure, and a knowledgeable and committed staff. The FII Pilot programs persisted in organizing services that would meet the requirements of a comprehensive model of family literacy and that could address the multiple needs that participants brought to these programs. In undertaking these activities, however, the Pilot program staff found that the process took longer than they had anticipated and required a number of attempts to accomplish what they intended. The FII programs also worked hard to recruit, train, and retain staff who had the skills and knowledge to deliver the varied content of family literacy services. A key challenge that the Pilot staff faced in delivering these services was meeting welfare recipients' multiple needs. At the time of their enrollment in the FII program, many recipients had personal issues that they had to resolve that would pose barriers to both their participation in the program and to employment if not addressed. Some recipients also had low levels of English literacy and basic skills, which would require a significant instructional intervention in order for them to earn a living wage. The range of FII participants' needs at the time of their entry into the program meant that FII staff had to:

- Develop partners that would provide a variety of non-educational services;
- Sequence the delivery of family literacy services so that participants could manage the multi-component intervention; and
- Schedule sufficient time for the delivery of services to meet participants' needs.

Because family literacy is a complex intervention and adults transitioning from welfare to work bring a variety of personal and skill issues to programs, organizations that wish to develop a work-focused family literacy program may need to plan sufficient time and resources to configure each component of service. They also need to consider the particular needs of their target population in scheduling activities and in establishing

community and business partners. When these conditions are in place, family literacy is a viable service for adults who would like to enhance their skills as workers and as parents.

Benefits to Welfare Recipients. It is too early to determine the overall the benefits to welfare recipients who participated in the FII work-focused family literacy programs. The assumption underlying family literacy is that family members will make a number of changes as a result of participating in a family literacy program. Because of the challenges that adults face in making personal changes, it is reasonable to expect that such change would take time. The data that NCFL was able to gather from the FII programs provided a preliminary understanding about the personal and educational benefits that participants can receive by attending a program.

The near-term data that NCFL collected on FII participants indicated that approximately half of the adults who were assessed improved their basic skills. A number of FII participants also reported that they engaged in educational activities with their children and that participation in FII aided them in preparing for work. As the quality of the data collected by family literacy programs improves, it will be more feasible to determine the overall short-term outcomes for participants.

To address the limitations in the FII participant data collection and to understand the long-term outcomes for FII participants, Abt Associates, with support from NCFL, will conduct a follow-up study of the FII participants who received services during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 program years. Data will be collected from these FII participants one year from the end of each service year. The intent of the follow-up study is to examine the long-term outcomes for FII participants with regard to their employment, development of basic skills, and activities as parents and teachers of their children. The follow-up study will enable us to develop an understanding of families' experiences in using the assistance that they received from the FII programs and the improvements that they were able to make as a result of participation in a comprehensive family literacy program. The results from the follow-up study also will provide insight into participants' perceptions about the value of family literacy as a catalyst for personal and family change.