



# SHARING DATA ACROSS YOUTH-SERVING AGENCIES: PHILADELPHIA'S POLICY AND ANALYSIS CENTER (PAC)

## Promising Practice Profile

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### Summary

Data sharing initiatives aim to combine data across various social service agencies into a single system. Youth-serving organizations can use data sharing initiatives to evaluate and improve their programs, meet funder requirements by tracking program performance, and demonstrate effective areas of service.

This promising practice profile highlights a data sharing initiative in the City of Philadelphia and the School District of Philadelphia to increase the availability of useful data to inform decision-making for local youth-serving organizations. The Policy Analysis Center (PAC) collects, integrates, and shares data across city human service agencies to assist a variety of social service initiatives, including local youth programs.

### Background on Data Sharing Initiatives

Access to data allows youth-serving organizations to track individual youth across services received from various human service agencies, spot trends, and meet funders' accountability requirements. A long-term data-collection strategy can also help organizations both maximize the impact of their own programming and promote synergy with other programs, thus improving student experiences and outcomes.<sup>1</sup> Further, federally-funded programs without data to substantiate their effectiveness may be at risk of losing, or prevented from obtaining, federal funding, as the Obama Administration is moving toward requiring all federally-funded social programs to demonstrate their effectiveness with empirical data.<sup>2</sup>

Data sharing initiatives are collaborative efforts among multiple entities to combine and share data. There are many different ways to share data, ranging from local community initiatives to large-scale national initiatives. The data collection can also include a limited or broad spectrum of data points. A goal of data sharing is to increase the availability of usable data to a

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<sup>1</sup> OMG Center for Collaboration Learning. *Lumina Foundation: Results and Reflections an evaluation report. Making the numbers add up: A guide for using data in college access and success programs.* October 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Lewis, Nancy. "Prove It or Lose It." *Youth Today*. July/August 2010.  
[http://www.youthtoday.org/publication/article.cfm?article\\_id=4100](http://www.youthtoday.org/publication/article.cfm?article_id=4100)

community, which can contribute to the alignment and coordination of youth-serving programs. Effective data sharing initiatives provide data that is pertinent to researchers, funding agencies, the public and youth-serving organizations.

It can be expensive to prepare data for sharing, and cumbersome for a single agency to reuse and manage large amounts of data. That is why many government agencies and some non profits combine their resources. By spreading the costs, data sharing efforts are more manageable for any single entity participating in the data sharing network. Technology has also made data-

### **How are Data Sharing Initiatives Funded?**

Research and data sharing efforts are funded by private corporations, foundations and national government agencies. Many larger foundations such as the W.T. Grant Foundation, Edna McConnell Clark Foundation and Annie E. Casey Foundation have supported the development and dissemination of data sharing initiatives. The federal government has funded various data sharing initiatives through the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. For example, the Departments of Education, Health and Human Services and Labor all have funding opportunities such as the Statewide Longitudinal Data System grants, Teacher Incentive Fund, Childcare and Development Block grants and Workforce Investment Act that directly support the design and implementation of data systems.

sharing efforts more cost effective, both for a government agency to build a data sharing system and also for non profits to access the data. For example, Hartford Connects II in Hartford, Connecticut is a group of government agencies and non profits that pooled their resources to form a city-wide data system to help youth-serving organizations track youth outcomes and improve services.<sup>3</sup> Youth-serving organizations typically pay a nominal fee to the entity managing the data sharing system or can submit a request to access the information without charge. Some non profit youth-serving organizations collect and manage data on their own if they have the proper infrastructure and funding in place. One such organization is the Foster Care Alumni Scholarship Benchmarking Network, a multi-state data sharing initiative among scholarship programs that systematically gathers and examines data on tracked foster care scholarship recipients.<sup>4</sup>

## **Implementation**

The Philadelphia Policy and Analysis Center (PAC) is jointly managed by the School District of Philadelphia and the Philadelphia Deputy Mayor for Health and Opportunity. PAC was formed in 2010 because of the city's desire to incorporate a data process integral to helping the city and city institutions make policy decisions in the areas of health, education and social services. PAC uses the Kids Integrated Data System (KIDS) model, created by researchers at the University of Pennsylvania.

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<sup>3</sup> Hartford Connects II. City of Hartford Office for Youth Services. <http://www.hartfordconnects.org/>

<sup>4</sup> Schultz, Jennifer Lee and Mueller, Dan. *Building a data sharing network of scholarship program for alumni of foster care*. Wilder Research. July 2008.

KIDS aims to support research, inform decision-making in public policy and practice, and improve services available to children and families.<sup>5</sup> As of January, 2010, the system included archived, de-identified data from vital statistics, physical and behavioral health services, homelessness and child welfare services, and public education for all children and youth aged 0-21, with archival records from 1990 through 2008. The City of Philadelphia also currently has a comprehensive database infrastructure developed for case management called CARES that includes all health and human services data on children and adults in the municipality. The purpose of PAC is to combine these two capacities.

Provisions for the use of data through PAC are controlled by the Executive Leadership from the City and the School District through their appointed Governing Board. PAC is currently staffed by an Executive Director, a Research Director to be hired in late 2010, a Deputy Research Director, and a Database Analyst.<sup>6</sup>

Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have demonstrated the use of such an integrated system of data through multiple population-based studies completed through the KIDS process. Evaluations that have been conducted on Philadelphia's youth using these data have included research on early childhood education and school readiness, the coordination of services between child welfare and homeless shelter systems, and characteristics of out-of-school youth and factors related to dropout.<sup>7</sup> Youth-serving organizations can access these research reports, conducted by trained evaluators, to help them think critically about their own program services or assess how various city programs are impacting youth.

KIDS is unique because it was designed from the beginning to be an ongoing infrastructure to support not just a single research project, but numerous projects including research on dropout prevention, early childhood risk factors, and homelessness. One major benefit of such a system is that it allows non profits and government agencies to have rigorous data about which programs are achieving results, and how different populations are impacted. In addition, data sharing can help agencies work collaborative by allowing them to monitor specific youth as they move through various social service agencies. Longitudinal data enables researchers and programs to track children from early childhood to high school and within specific systems (regular school or foster care). Ultimately, this helps youth-serving organizations use data to make programmatic and policy decisions. For example, the KIDS data was used to study family homelessness and the intersection of children welfare and homelessness. The findings are being used to inform policy in Philadelphia's child welfare system; and helping to improve the experience of children who are transitioning from emergency housing into foster care, and for older youth aging out of foster care and into emergency housing.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> PennChild Research. *Uses of KIDS Integrated Data System*. July 2010

<sup>6</sup> Policy and Analysis Center (PAC) Overview. University of Pennsylvania. January 2010. <http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/pennchild/PAC.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Fantuzzo, John and Culhane Denise. *Kids Integrated Data System*. University of Pennsylvania. November 2009.

<sup>8</sup> Culhane, Denise. Selected Works by Denise Culhane website. [http://works.bepress.com/dennis\\_Culhane/](http://works.bepress.com/dennis_Culhane/)

According to KIDS co-founder Dr. Denise Culhane, cost is one of the biggest challenges of combining data into a single source, especially because university-based efforts are less common and have smaller infrastructures than systems within state and local governments. Culhane noted that KIDS worked well as a pilot initiative managed at the university, but has worked better as a city government program in part because of the larger infrastructure, which is what prompted the transition to PAC initially. The William Penn Foundation and the city financially support PAC. In addition, KIDS' creators still work collaboratively with the city and those at PAC to get the system ready for larger-scale use.

## Evaluation

A 2005 study conducted by the University of Pennsylvania identified gaps in KIDS' capacity. Specifically, the study identified the need to integrate information on children with special needs from birth to five. These identified gaps led the KIDS Policy Group to recruit Early Intervention representatives from CHILD-LINK (Behavioral Health and Mental Retardation Services) to participate in KIDS.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, in 2006, KIDS co-founder Dr. John Fantuzzo was invited to participate in the Advisory Board for Special Education and Early Development Support. Overall, by assessing the data gaps in KIDS, the co-founders have been able to facilitate dialogue at the leadership level to determine how these gaps can be systematically addressed.

## Keys to Success

Accessing and sharing data across the entities serving youth helps youth-serving agencies and organizations align services, maximize resources, track trends, and ultimately, more effectively meet the needs of youth. To align and coordinate their work with data sharing efforts, youth-serving organizations can consider the following keys to success:

- ✓ Identify organizations/databases that have applicable/pertinent information.
- ✓ Obtain access to data sharing initiatives and be trained on how to interpret the data.
- ✓ Develop clear processes and procedures for collecting, analyzing, and using data, including data sharing agreements and ensure the database is financially sustained.
- ✓ Collect complete data to improve the quality and accuracy of data available.
- ✓ Find innovative and affordable ways to share the data with other organizations.

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<sup>9</sup> Mandell, David. *Met and Unmet Needs among Children Served by the Behavioral Health and Special Education Systems: An Evaluation of Service Integration*. University of Pennsylvania. 2005.

## Resources

Kids Network at the University of Pennsylvania, Project website  
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/child/projects/kids>

Policy & Analysis Center, Project website  
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/child/projects/ppac>

Policy and Analysis Center Overview  
<http://www.gse.upenn.edu/pdf/pennchild/PAC.pdf>

Data Quality Campaign. *Linking Data across Agencies: States That Are Making It Work*.  
November 2009 [http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/DQCbrief\\_Mar19\\_2\\_.pdf](http://www.dataqualitycampaign.org/files/DQCbrief_Mar19_2_.pdf)

Culhane, Denise; Fantuzzo, John, et al. *Connecting the Dots: The Promise of Integrated Data Systems for Policy Analysis and Systems Reform*. Intelligence for Social Policy. March 2010.

This profile is part of a series of resources developed by The Finance Project to provide information and tools on financing and sustaining youth programs, policies and systems.

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