



CROSS ASSOCIATES
Research & Evaluation Services, LLC



Capacity-Building for Practice and Innovation

A Research-to Practice Fellowship
Project

Cross Associates Research & Evaluation Services, LLC
Wynona's House Child Advocacy Center

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Center for Victim Research

The [Center for Victim Research](#) (CVR) is a one-stop resource center for victim service providers and researchers to connect and share knowledge. Its goals are to increase 1) access to victim research and data and 2) the utility of research and data collection to crime victim services nationwide. CVR's vision is to foster a community of victim service providers and researchers who routinely collaborate to improve practice through effective use of research and data.

Accordingly, CVR engages in a number of training and technical assistance activities to support victim research-and-practice collaborations. Specifically, CVR:

- Hosts a library of open-access and subscription-based victim research;
- Provides light-touch research-focused technical assistance to victim service providers;
- Translates research findings for the field in fact sheets, reports, and webinars; and
- Highlights useful research-and-practice tools and training resources for the field.

CVR also supports two types of [researcher-practitioner collaborations](#): interagency VOCA-SAC partnerships and local-level Research-and-Practice (R/P) Fellowships. In 2018, CVR's R/P Fellowship program supported nine teams of researchers and practitioners engaging in a variety of victim-focused research projects. Fellows were engaged in emerging, ongoing, or advanced research-and-practice partnerships. This report describes activities by one of CVR's 2018 R/P Fellowship teams.

R2P Fellows: Organizational Descriptions

The mission of Wynona's House is to promote justice and healing of child victims of abuse and violence. This is accomplished by providing a trauma-informed, safe, child-friendly environment for child abuse investigations and treatment; supporting a multi-disciplinary process of working with child abuse victims; and engaging in strategic public and private community partnerships to develop and enhance services that both respond to and prevent child abuse.

Wynona's House coordinates a **cross-systems collaboration** within the 22 municipalities of Essex County, New Jersey, including Newark, the state's largest city. The multi-agency collaboration serves 789,565 county residents across a diversity of urban and suburban municipalities and provides direct services to more than 800 abused or neglected children each year. Family advocacy program clients receive extended service to ensure long-term healing, recovery and family strengthening for as long as they are in need, including after other partner services have been terminated.

Wynona's House is an accredited member of the National Children's Alliance (NCA), the national association and accrediting body for Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs), the New Jersey Children's Alliance and the Multi-disciplinary Team Coordinator's Association. Carol Berger, JD, the practice fellow for this project, is also

an adjunct faculty member teaching policy and cultural competence in Montclair State University's Social Work & Child Advocacy program.

Cross Associates specializes in victimization research, program evaluation and organizational development. The mission of Cross Associates is to provide cost-effective research and evaluation expertise to social programs that: 1) builds organizational capacity for measurement; 2) empowers leadership and staff with new knowledge and skills and; 3) provides a firm foundation of data to support innovative programming and the funding it requires.

Cross Associates holds memberships in the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children (APSAC) and the American Evaluation Association and has affiliations with university-based researchers. Elizabeth Cross, PhD, the research practice fellow for this project, serves as an adjunct faculty member teaching classes in research and evaluation as well as the senior capstone seminar in Montclair State University's Social Work & Child Advocacy program. The senior research advisor from Cross Associates, Ted Cross is a research full professor at the University of Illinois School of Social Work's Children and Family Research Center. He directed the Multi-Site Evaluation of Children's Advocacy Centers, serves as consultant to the National Children's Alliance, and has collaborated on research with multiple CACs across the country.

Description of the Problem

The National Children's Alliance reports that there are now 854 member CACs throughout the country and 324,602 children were served in the most recent year in which data were available¹. Some research demonstrates the impact of CACs, but much remains unexplored about the processes and outcomes of these multi-faceted service organizations.

The program theory is underdeveloped, and key CAC processes such as multidisciplinary team meetings, coordinated investigations, and family advocacy are not well understood and need further study. CACs have made great strides in data collection through such systems as NCAtrak and OMS, but these systems have not reached their full potential as research tools, in part because of challenges with implementation and use. Much needs to be done.

This fellowship was a new enterprise for the partners, who had never worked together before in spite of having two extensive professional networks (National Children's Alliance, Montclair State University) in common. The partnership came together at a time when each organization was seeking to deepen its knowledge and practice within the other's areas of expertise.

At the inception of the partnership, Wynona's House had begun efforts to identify and purchase a customizable case management software system out of which they could develop outcome reports. Together the leadership of both organizations conceived of a partnership, potentially sustainable beyond the grant period, that would build

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Wynona's House's capacity for making more effective use of data, identifying and disseminating best practices and testing innovative interventions and research.

The project would also provide Cross Associates with the opportunity to learn about the policies, practices and unique challenges associated with responding to and preventing child victimization in New Jersey, and a chance to establish a partnership for developing knowledge aimed at improving services for child victims.

The key partnership goals were:

1. Identifying activities, inputs, outputs and outcomes for established programming.
2. Identifying activities, inputs, outputs and outcomes for new or innovative programming.
3. Developing a set of recommendations for measurement strategies including the roles and responsibilities of the different partners for ensuring that data is are collected
4. Identifying potential long-term research and evaluation projects and funding sources for these endeavors

As of this writing goals 1, 3 and 4 have been met and a sound foundation has been established for meeting goal 2 in the coming year.

Addressing the Problem

The R2P partnership was organized around the research fellow inhabiting several roles across a variety of Wynona's House meetings and program activities. Observations were made of the multidisciplinary team meetings, planning sessions, presentations and public events. In other meetings, Cross Associates acted as instructors or facilitators.

Throughout the project, the fellows were in weekly communication with each other and Cross Associates was on site "shadowing" the practice fellow approximately 1-2 times per week. The research fellows met with agency leadership every 2 to 4 weeks, depending upon the stage of the project and also met with family advocates and other case managers.

Work with the staff focused on two primary areas of interest: 1) the development of a strategy for increasing the response rate for the family feedback surveys required by the National Children's Alliance as part of the certification process, and: 2). the development of a logic model that would reflect the staff's perspective on their work.

As the research fellow developed work products, these materials were vetted with staff for verification and further improvements. Cross Associates signed a confidentiality agreement with Wynona's House and, as per agency policy, underwent background checks before the start of the work.

Data Sources

A major focus of the project was the development and enhancement of data sources for future program evaluation and research. Interviews and focus groups with Wynona's House staff and review of program documents yielded key information on a) program

resources, inputs, activities, outputs and intended outcomes; b) case flow processes; c) current program evaluation methods and data.

Cross Associates reviewed Wynona's House use of two software systems: the Outcome Measurement System (OMS) of the National Children's Alliance and NCAtrak. OMS is a web-based system designed to collect data from families and from MDT members about the quality of their experience with the CAC. NCA expects regular OMS data from each CAC. NCAtrak is a software system developed for CACs to support case management and collection of case data. Cross Associates also consulted with Wynona's House in its assessment of new software that would potentially replace NCAtrak.

The researchers also observed six multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings to develop a conceptual framework to describe their functioning and impact. These case consultation team meetings² are designed to engage professionals from multiple disciplines to advise primary caseworkers on treatment planning, case decision-making and other aspects of intervening with children families. Each meeting lasted 90 minutes and considered anywhere from 12 to 15 cases.

Increasing data quality has been an important objective of these activities, as we discuss further below. Work on case flow and logic modelling help identify activities, outputs and outcomes, which will facilitate future measurement. The work on protocols for OMS is designed to improve family response rate, which has been lagging. The examination of NCAtrak and an alternative software system was designed to enhance the quality and utility of case data. The development of a conceptual model of MDT functioning aims in part to promote the creation of a new observational tool to measure how MDTs impact response.

Results

This fellowship is best described as an experiential learning project in which Cross Associates was able to develop a deeper understanding of child advocacy center policies, practices and systems in New Jersey through its work providing evaluation and research expertise and mentorship to Wynona's House.

At the same time Wynona's House leadership and staff developed greater capacity for managing and monitoring outcome measurements systems and more importantly, were able to identify their programmatic activities and strengths that heretofore had not been measured. Wynona's House leadership fully embraces outcome measurement as a priority for the agency. They have developed staff capacity and are making permanent changes to staff roles that will include more ownership over and implementation of quality management and outcome measures.

More specifically, the partnership produced or developed the following:

² For a description of different types of multidisciplinary team meetings, see Lalayants, M., & Epstein, I. (2005). Evaluating multidisciplinary child abuse and neglect teams: a research agenda. *Child Welfare, 84*, 433-458.

- A detailed case flow schematic tracing four “tiers” of case types from initial report through the Wynona's House case coordination and follow up services.
- Logic models that significantly clarify program theory and could be used both to support additional grant seeking for both service delivery and research.
- A detailed data collection protocol designed to significantly increase family response rate for Wynona's House on the National Children's Alliance's Outcome Measurement System.
- A plan negotiated with the National Children's Alliance to obtain Wynona's House-specific outcome data from the national data set, with follow-up consultation to Wynona's House to assist with further analysis
- An initial conceptual model of multidisciplinary team (MDT) functioning designed to promote description and measurement of the effects of MDTs in enhancing responses to child victims and their families
- Development of a data-specific internship opportunity for students in local university programs.
- Identified further opportunities for research, specifically around CAC and system response to youth with sexual behavior problems.

Implications for policy and practice

The current project has made tangible progress in developing the potential for further program evaluation and research at Wynona's House. The development of logic models will enable improved development of research questions and measures. An improved protocol for outcome measurement data collection has the potential to increase response rate, enhancing both the sample size and representativeness of Wynona's House family opinion data. The agreement with NCA to provide Wynona's House outcome measurement data will enable the research partnership to explore correlates of outcomes. A conceptual model of MDT functioning will enable the research partnership to explore the impact of MDTs and prepare for more rigorous research. Placement of a research intern will provide much needed “person power” to help maintain research activities. Wynona's House can use feedback from research activities to inform future program development.

Furthermore, the work in Newark has implications for research on CACs nationwide. Many CACs need further elucidation of their program theory, and can learn from the development of Wynona's House case flow and logic models. Many struggle to collect enough outcome data and could benefit from improved protocols to enhance response rates. The process of tapping the national outcome data set for data specific to a given CAC could be broadly utilized. The conceptual model we are developing for MDTs is designed to be applicable across CACs, and could help spawn new research on the process and outcomes of MDTs.

The R2P team is well-connected to CACs throughout New Jersey and nationally, and have a strong history of dissemination of new knowledge through conferences, workshops, and publication in both peer-reviewed journals and practitioner-oriented publications. The R2P team is planning presentations at upcoming conferences, including one hosted by Wynona's House for New Jersey professionals, and the

preparation of one or more research articles. We anticipate that this project will influence future research on CACs nationally.

Sustaining the partnership

Cross Associates and Wynona's House capacity-building work will continue through the spring of 2019. Cross Associates will be offering their services pro bono to Wynona's House in order to ensure that the data collection practices developed through the partnership continue.

Cross Associates will present on the results of the partnership at Wynona's House annual conference for New Jersey professionals in 2019, and plans to collaborate with Wynona's House on future conference presentations and publications.