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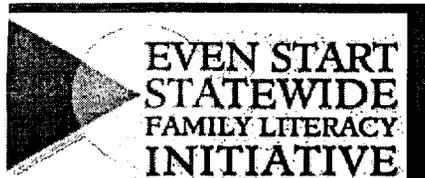
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ABSTRACT

Rural and urban family literacy programs share similar challenges in helping families work through obstacles to participation, such as transportation and childcare. However, the scope and nature of these challenges and the program management strategies to deal with them differ in rural and urban settings. Some of the most creative solutions to rural challenges grow out of rural strengths, particularly community ties (social capital) and a strong sense of place. In April 2002 Even Start state coordinators met to learn about characteristics of rural systems and their implications for family literacy services and to exchange ideas for effective delivery strategies. Forum participants were introduced to the "Rural Prism," a tool to aid rural development efforts by focusing on eight inherent rural characteristics: isolation, low population density, mobility disadvantages, scarcity of financial resources, lack of expertise and human resources, personal familiarity, resistance to change, and lack of ancillary services. Each characteristic has implications for service delivery and corresponding service options to address those implications. Participants used the tool to brainstorm ways to improve program services and support. Their ideas are presented in the following categories: expanding partnerships, collaborations, and community involvement; creating different service delivery models; enhancing staff training and support; providing incentives for both staff and participants; and maximizing the use and effectiveness of old and new technology. An appendix provides a chart to be used during staff discussion and planning of program improvements. (SV)

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A Newsletter for Even Start Statewide Family Literacy Initiative Consortia

Featured Issue

❖ Serving Rural Areas

Tool Kit

❖ Program Planning Worksheets

Resources and Research

❖ Key Web Sites

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Family Literacy Service Design and Delivery in Rural Areas

Rural and urban family literacy programs share many of the same challenges in helping families work through issues and problems that affect their participation in family literacy programs. Common stumbling blocks cited by local programs and state coordinators include transportation, childcare, health care and housing. However, the scope and nature of these challenges – and program management strategies to deal with them – differ in rural and urban settings.

Rural populations face unique challenges (see statistics on page 3)—but they also have unique strengths and qualities they can use to their advantage. Among these are strong community ties and personal relationships, smaller-scaled organizations, open space, and largely pristine environments.

Some of the most creative solutions to rural challenges grow out of these unique strengths, particularly **community ties** (social capital) and a strong **sense of place**.

Social Capital

Recently associated with the work of Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* 2000), social capital is defined as connections among individuals—

those features of social organization (networks and norms of reciprocity and trust) that facilitate cooperation and mutual benefit.

According to quality of life indicators, such as low crime, better physical health, higher educational achievement, and economic growth, communities rich in social capital are healthier and more prosperous. Communities build social capital through exercising leadership and by creating social forums where all the elements of the community can share information, engage in dialogue and healthy debate, and build networks and alliances. Communities with sparse resources that have—or create—strong social networks and institutions have shown they can develop innovative approaches to internal problems and external constraints. (See Resources: *Sustaining the Rural Landscape by Building Community Social Capital*).

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Sense of Place

When local economies rely on a few businesses, they are vulnerable to outside forces. Approaches to problem-solving that start from a sense of place harness sources of locally added value to capture local wealth rather than merely export it as raw material. Some paths to “adding value” include:

- Supporting new business ventures and local entrepreneurs
- Encouraging new alliances among traditional sectors—agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, and government
- Closing the “digital divide” and building infrastructure, if necessary
- Attracting equity capital

For example, North Carolina has a program which supports Individual Development Accounts (IDAs) for low-income citizens. IDAs are dedicated savings accounts managed by community organizations and funded by public and private sources, which allow low-income citizens to acquire assets. IDAs can be used to purchase first homes, pay for education or training, or as capital to start small businesses. (More than 300 IDA-capitalized small businesses operated in North Carolina last year.) Local communities can also tap into IDAs to build their own high-speed information and communications technology infrastructure.

A New Role for Schools

Rethinking schools as community hubs rather than single-purpose institutions opens a wealth of other possibilities. Some models of a “pedagogy of place” that communities are exploring include:

1. The school as a community center—a meeting space, a learning resource center, a health and social services delivery center, a business training space
2. The community as a curriculum—a place-based curriculum that addresses natural features of the environment, the sciences, the human-land connection, and service learning
3. The school as a developer of entrepreneurial skills—home to school-based businesses, internships, and apprenticeships
4. Using digital technology—linking students (and the community) with the rest of the world for research and resources, advanced instruction, and avenues for entrepreneurship (e.g., on-line businesses)

The Statewide Initiative: A Rural Forum

In April 2002, RMC Research and the Arizona Department of Education hosted a “Rural Forum” with Even Start state coordinators from five states with large rural areas: Arizona, Arkansas, Montana, Oregon and South Carolina. Some of the information from this Forum was also presented during a workshop at the National Even Start Association (NESA) conference held in Washington, DC in October. At both meetings, participants had the opportunity to:

- learn about some of the characteristics of rural systems and their implications for family literacy services;



- reflect on and identify unique issues about the rural context of each state; and,
- exchange ideas for effective strategies and service delivery systems to improve literacy outcomes for families in rural communities using a planning tool created by RMC Research.

This newsletter includes key research findings and highlights of the discussions at the Rural Forum and NESAs Conference.

Defining Rural

The Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Census Bureau define “rural” as an open territory with fewer than 2,500 residents, and “non-metropolitan” as an area outside the boundaries of metropolitan areas with fewer than 50,000 residents. The following statistics are from the Rural Policy Research Institute (see *Resources*).

Population, Living Conditions and Employment

- 84% of U.S. land is rural; 25% of the population lives in rural areas.
- 76% of counties are rural; 82% have populations under 5,000 and 51% have populations under 1,000.
- More than 50% of children in rural female-headed households live in poverty.
- In 15 states, more than 50% of the welfare population lives in rural areas.
- Migration into rural areas (primarily the South and West) increased in the early 1990’s, but the growth in rural populations in 1998-99 was less than half that of urban areas.
- 22 million rural residents live in federally-designated “medically underserved areas” and have poor health care access, availability and insurance coverage, and a greater proportion of disabled persons.
- The rural poor experience 30% more inadequate housing conditions than urban poor.
- Almost 57% of rural poor do not own a car; nearly 40% live in areas without public transportation.
- 20% of the total personal income in rural America comes from federal transfers.
- Rural employment is dominated by low wage industries and agriculture, often part time and seasonal.
- Rural workers are nearly twice as likely to earn minimum wage (12%) versus urban workers (7%).

Education and Schools

- Rural schools represent 22% of all public schools, but receive only 12.5% of federal funding, 14% of state funding and 11% of local funding.
- 20% of rural youth drop out of high school, and they are less likely than urban youth to return to school or get a GED.
- Rural youth are less likely to go to college (23% rural vs. 29% urban) and are less likely to graduate from college (13% rural vs. 23% urban).
- The “out-migration” of rural residents is largely by the young and most highly educated.

Solutions & Service Implications for Rural Family Literacy Programs

Forum participants were introduced to the “Rural Prism,” a tool created by Marilyn Bok in 1995 for the Rural Services Institute at Mansfield University to help decision makers improve the effectiveness of rural development efforts (see *Resources*). Just as a prism refracts light into the color spectrum, Bok’s framework distinguishes eight characteristics inherent to rural communities: isolation, low population density, mobility disadvantages, scarcity of financial resources, lack of expertise and human resources, personal familiarity, resistance to change/innovation, and lack of ancillary services. Each, she explains, has service implications and options. For example, *Isolation* lists the following:

Inherent Rural Characteristic	Implications for Service Delivery	Service Options
ISOLATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incomplete knowledge of available services • Low rates of use • Inadequate response time in emergencies • Isolation of professionals • Difficulty attracting and retaining qualified professional staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home-based services • Satellite clinics • Telecommunications • Traveling service providers • Prevention measures • Rotate professionals • Offer incentives for years of service or to new providers who move to rural communities

State representatives at the Rural Issues Forum brainstormed ways to improve and expand program services and support using the Rural Prism, the program categories in the *Guide To Quality: Even Start Family Literacy Programs*, and the worksheets included in the “Tool Kit” section of this newsletter. A summary of the ideas they generated follows. While participants discussed and developed these ideas through a rural lens, many of the strategies and concepts can be applied to both rural and urban environments.

Expand the scope and depth of partnerships, collaborations and community involvement

- Collaborate with rural providers of crucial health and human services (e.g., medical, food, clothing, housing). These collaborations should bring as many services as possible to families at one site – “one stop” centers that are connected to family literacy sites.
- Work with public and private economic development agencies, county governments, agricultural associations, community colleges, etc. to identify possible literacy partnerships and job-related opportunities that lead to economic sustainability for participants.
- Make a concerted effort to build partnerships with the private business sector for money, equipment, supplies, volunteers and part-time instructors for specific job-related topics (e.g., the skills specific rural industries are seeking in employees, how to apply for jobs).
- Explore transportation funding and coordination with every possible provider of either funds or services in the county or region. Partner with agencies (e.g., healthcare and cooperative extension services) that have established rural networks to reach and/or transport families.

- Especially in areas that cross borders, network with both in-state and out-of-state agencies. Encourage agencies in non-metro areas to partner with those in metro areas where residents currently work or where there are job opportunities.
- Partner with local and state libraries, both public and private (e.g., universities). Rural libraries are often mobile units offering opportunities for joint scheduling with family literacy workers.
- If land in the area is controlled by a federal agency, forge partnerships with the agency and its employees (e.g., Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management) to work towards training and employment opportunities to retain the adults in the area.
- Share staff members across agencies, especially to gain specialists in areas where individual programs cannot afford a full-time person.
- Involve your entire community in a needs assessment. This will lead to ownership of and more effective solutions to interrelated social problems and community needs. Provide your community leaders with examples of how child and adult literacy gains for those most in need can improve the social and economic capacity of their whole community. Involve adult learners to understand what their interests and learning goals are.
- Know your rural community and use its resources. Actively recruit volunteers and create partnerships with volunteer and civic groups so you have a stable pool of volunteers (e.g., veterans and business groups, retired teachers, churches).
- Publicize and celebrate how the family literacy program benefits both the participants and the rural community. Develop positive public awareness messages, rather than highlighting deficits and problems.

Create different service delivery models

- Recognize that center-based programs are the most effective means of providing services of sufficient intensity and comprehensiveness to produce family outcomes. A comprehensive center promotes access to community resources, fosters a peer support system, utilizes staff time most effectively, and allows for intensive services. Work toward creating centers that meet rural area needs.
- Rather than fund many, separate programs, establish satellite centers in surrounding areas in a network of related programs.
- Pursue plans for creating mobile family literacy units.
- Develop centers in public schools that expand the school's services, rather than just occupying a classroom as a "tenant." Redefine K-12 education in rural communities to include family literacy as a required service for eligible families.
- Develop centers in the area's major industries to provide family literacy, workplace literacy, and



childcare. Combining several agencies' services through partnership agreements may create a new entity.

Enhance staff training and support

- Provide training for program directors in “higher level” administration and collaboration skills, including concepts and strategies for developing social capital and entrepreneurial approaches.
- Match staff training with the type of service delivery models the program uses. For example, teaching via distance learning or in mobile units requires different instructional planning and delivery than classroom-based teaching.
- Coordinate professional development offerings within the state, across state lines (especially in border programs), and among collaborating agencies. It is very important to cross-train staff to ensure comprehensiveness and integration of services, and to address periodic staff vacancies.
- Provide funding to bring all staff together regionally or statewide for regular (e.g., two or three times a year) professional development and networking.
- Focus on team building and confidentiality systems to counter the personal familiarity that exists among residents of rural areas (“everyone knows everyone else”).
- Because limited funding is such a big issue, provide state or regional training on resource development and fundraising that improves program staff's ability to share resources and seek multiple types of funding.

Provide incentives for both staff and participants

- Explore scholarship opportunities for staff and adult participants to go or return to school.
- Ensure that adult education responds to learners' employment needs by combining literacy and employment skills, and relates to jobs available in the region's labor market.
- Provide possible future employment for parents through collaborations with businesses, including internships, job shadowing, and employee mentorships.
- Build adult learners' entrepreneurial skills through community service projects in public and private businesses.
- Offer incentives to participants who stay in the program for specific periods of time – e.g., \$10 or \$20 gift certificates for local stores after 6 months or one year in the program.
- Extend support services typically provided to participants, like childcare, to the staff's families.
- Attract staff by providing incentives, such as forgiveness of school loans, partnerships with car dealers for reduced prices, and assistance with home loans. Find out whether your program meets

criteria for staff hardship pay (provided to public school teachers and medical personnel in extremely rural areas).

Maximize the use and effectiveness of technology – both “old” and “new” forms

- Create courses for adult learners using radio and TV programming coupled with print materials that can be mailed to participants. Suggest that the certified teacher visit students at least once during the lesson series to improve learning and retention. Use distance learning (on-line courses) for both staff development and participant instruction.
- Approach local stations about broadcasting shows specifically created as “lesson series” – perhaps designed by program staff.
- Use books-on-tape, tape recorders, and videotapes in creative ways to enhance participants’ ability to conduct and practice lessons at home.
- State coordinators and program directors must take the lead in encouraging and supporting the development of technology and telecommunication systems in all rural programs. This includes identifying sources and applying for state funding, rather than leaving programs to do it themselves, and providing on-going staff training in the systems that are implemented.
- Use technology to improve program management and evaluation – maximize the capabilities of word processing, spreadsheet and database software to improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- Use technology to communicate with program management, staff and learners. Consider video and on-line conferencing for meetings, e-mail for staff communication and planning, and e-mail for learner communication and skill-building.
- Use the technology systems of local partners (e.g, community colleges, libraries, etc.) while finding the resources to develop your own.

Tool Kit to Improve Family Literacy Services

During the two meetings where Even Start staff focused on issues and solutions for rural family literacy services, participants used the planning tool that follows to reflect on their current operations, how they could capitalize on available resources and partners, and how they could attract new resources and partners to fulfill their goals. The charts are organized as follows:

- Part 1: Reflect on current program design by considering how existing service providers (horizontal columns) impact program implementation strategies (vertical columns).
- Part 2: Generate ideas for enhancing program services by considering multiple factors that affect the accessibility of services and service delivery methods.
- Part 3: Create plans for pursuing selected ideas, including anticipated results and how these ideas play into annual program planning.

The next four pages contain an example that explores recruitment issues, followed by blank charts that can be used by programs. For the example, imagine this scenario:

*The staff of "Outpost Even Start" are using the planning tool during a discussion about how they can improve their efforts to **reach families (recruitment)**, which leads to a discussion about families' lack of **transportation**. A sample of their notes, questions and ideas to pursue are captured in the charts.*

Tool Kit

EXAMPLE: Here are some of the ideas generated during a staff discussion of how they could improve their efforts to reach families (recruitment), which led to a discussion about families' lack of transportation. They used the grids to raise questions and to decide which ideas they might pursue.

Part 1 ≈ Reflecting on relationships and services

PROGRAM DESIGN & SERVICES	Collaboration	Service Sharing & Expansion	Public-Private Partnerships & Funding	
	<i>Who are the existing partners and agencies providing services?</i>	<i>What additional services could come from these collaborations?</i>	<i>What new partnerships need to be pursued to improve this?</i>	<i>What new funding sources could be tapped for this?</i>
Reaching families: recruitment and referrals	Social services Local elementary schools	Diversify and intensify current efforts – e.g.: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meet with social workers, teachers and employers and include them in planning. ▪ Train parents to be recruiters by creating a “speakers group.” Then have them speak at school meetings and events that draw parents. 	Businesses Health Department Community college Need materials in other languages and more effective message/design to reach other agency staff and parents. Who can help with this?	New partners may pick up cost of some recruitment efforts (e.g., businesses for printing). Translation could be done by foreign language teachers. Design of new materials could be high school or college student project, or in-kind donation of graphics firm.

Part 2 ≈ Ideas for enhancing ability to provide and deliver services

SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS	Collaboration <i>Who provides these types of services?</i>	Service Sharing & Expansion <i>How can existing services in these areas be maximized?</i>	Public-Private Partnerships need to be pursued to achieve this?	Public-Private Partnerships & Funding <i>What new funding sources could be tapped for this?</i>
<p>Transportation services</p>	<p>Schools (buses) Elderly programs Libraries (bookmobiles) Health services (mobile units) Churches</p>	<p>What are the obstacles to sharing transportation services with other agencies? (e.g., legal issues, like insurance) How can we work through these obstacles? What do we need to find out about the insurance issues, county policies, etc.? Can we help families buy or fix their own cars?</p>	<p>Buy van alone or with other agency? Work with used car dealership to help families buy cars? High school or vocational tech students fix used cars as project, which are then sold or raffled to families? Mechanics donate time to fix cars of families who can't afford to do so?</p>	<p>Check which local/ state/ federal funds can be used for transportation, and make sure we're maximizing these. Donations - monetary and used cars - from businesses and nonprofits?</p>

Part 3 ≈ Plans and strategies for pursuing ideas to improve rural family literacy programs and services

Idea	Steps necessary to pursue idea (e.g., contacts, information gathering, identifying resources)	Outcome of pursuit of idea	Program Goal
<p>Recruitment</p> <p>Expand recruitment efforts with businesses and the community college</p>	<p>Decide which businesses should be approached and who to contact.</p> <p>Find out who to talk to at community college.</p> <p>Set up meetings with appropriate people.</p> <p>Prepare for the meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Who should attend? ▪ What are we asking for? ▪ What materials should we bring, what do they need to know about us? ▪ What should we know about their operations? 	<p>Based on what you found out, how should you proceed?</p> <p>For example, if the utility company agrees to put a program flyer in every bill for 3 months, what do you need to do to accept this offer?</p> <p>Create new flyers? Include contact information for programs in multiple counties (to match the company's service area)?</p> <p>Ensure you have the ability to handle the response? (e.g., staff, phone and e-mail capacity)</p>	<p>Create an action plan to accompany your decisions. As part of your action plan, create goals that become part of your annual program plan.</p>

Part 3 ≈ Plans and strategies for pursuing ideas to improve rural family literacy programs and services

Idea	Steps necessary to pursue idea (e.g., contacts, information gathering, identifying resources)	Outcome of pursuit of idea	Program Goal
<p>Transportation</p> <p>Approach churches about sharing vans</p> <p>Explore used car project</p>	<p>Find out which churches have vans. Do we have a relationship with them, or staff or parents who do?</p> <p>Find an attorney who will donate some time to explore legal issues (e.g., liability) and give us advice.</p> <p>Set up meeting with dealership owner to explore possibilities.</p> <p>Find out what state or national resources are available for this (e.g., Volunteers of America accept and re-donate used cars).</p> <p>Explore idea of creating our own fundraiser to support transportation needs. What civic groups might this appeal to?</p>	<p><i>Based on what you found out, how should you proceed?</i></p>	<p><i>Create an action plan to accompany your decisions. As part of your action plan, create goals that become part of your annual program plan.</i></p>

Part 1 ~ Reflecting on relationships and services

PROGRAM DESIGN & SERVICES	Collaboration across regions and state <i>Who are the existing partners and agencies providing services?</i>	Service Sharing & Expansion across diverse agencies <i>What additional services could come from these collaborations?</i>	Public-Private Partnerships & Funding capacity-building and resource development	
			<i>What new partnerships need to be pursued to improve this?</i>	<i>What new funding sources could be tapped for this?</i>
Reaching Families: recruitment and referrals				
Providing Family Literacy Services: Early Childhood Education Adult Education Parenting Education Interactive literacy				
Providing/Accessing Support Services: Transportation Health Care Child Care Housing TANF / Welfare Attracting Qualified Staff: recruiting, training, and retaining staff				

Part 2 ≈ Ideas for enhancing ability to provide and deliver services

SERVICE DELIVERY METHODS	Collaboration across regions and state <i>Who provides these types of services?</i>	Service Sharing & Expansion across diverse agencies <i>How can existing services in these areas be maximized?</i>	Public-Private Partnerships & Funding capacity-building and resource development <i>What new partnerships need to be pursued to achieve this?</i>	Public-Private Partnerships & Funding <i>What new funding sources could be tapped for this?</i>
Center or site-based services (using facilities of diverse agencies)				
Home-based services				
Mobile units or satellite sites				
Transportation programs (vans, shared rides, etc.)				
Distance education and technology				
Television and Radio (e.g., building programming into the curriculum – GED on TV, PBS)				

Part 3 ≈ Plans and strategies for pursuing ideas to improve rural family literacy programs and services

Idea	Steps necessary to pursue idea (e.g., contacts, information gathering, identifying resources)	Outcome of pursuit of idea	Program Goal

Resources and Research

Here are some key web sites for information and research on rural areas and issues. The ERIC Review contains many additional references and relevant web sites.

Community and Rural Development Institute. http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/research_briefs/CDR5-2.cfm

Cornell University: CaRDI. *Sustaining the Rural Landscape by Building Community Social Capital*. http://www.cardi.cornell.edu/research_briefs/CDR5-2.cfm

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. <http://www.ael.org/eric/>

The ERIC Review. *Perspectives on Urban and Rural Schools and Their Communities: Making Connections*. <http://www.eric.ed.gov/resources/ericreview/vol8no2/splash.html>

National Center on Rural Justice and Crime Prevention. <http://virtual.clemson.edu/groups/ncrj/rlife.htm>

National Rural Development Partnership. <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/nrdp/>

The Rural Literacy and Community Development Initiative. <http://www.lightlink.com/ccarlin/article4.html>

Rural Policy Research Institute. www.rupri.org (To access Marilyn Bok's Rural Prism, choose publications and then "policy papers" #P99-3 "Rural America and Welfare Reform: An Overview Assessment." The prism is an attachment to the article.)

For information about two successful mobile literacy center units, see the following web sites for the California State Library "LLABS" and District of Columbia "Transformer" projects:
<http://www.literacynet.org/llabs/>
<http://www.dcadultliteracy.org>

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