

# Linking State and Local Policy Planning

## Oregon's Approach to Untangling the Web of Services for Youth and Families

Prepared by

**The Forum for Youth Investment**

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**A**round the country, states are making strides to coordinate youth policies and align programs, services and funding. In many ways they are ahead of federal efforts to do the same. In order for systems to flow seamlessly, however, communities must play a direct role in assessing their own needs, making recommendations for improvements and coordinating resources. Some states and communities have focused on working together to build systems that support the well-being of young people at the local level. Oregon is one leader in state-local collaborative efforts.

Oregon has a history of engaging and empowering local communities. In this tradition, the legislature enacted Senate Bill 555 in 1999 to address fragmentation in the human service arena by directing state agencies and local communities to plan together to create a more responsive state system. The legislation is being implemented in three phases over a six-year period. Phase One, completed in 2001, provided for an extensive community mapping effort of the strengths, gaps and barriers in services and supports. The second phase was completed in 2002, with local counties using the data collected in Phase One to develop community plans to prioritize efforts and use evidence-based best practices. Currently in the third phase, the state system is now monitoring the implementation of local plans to ensure continued improvements to programs and services. The legislation also established the Partners for Children and Families, an integrated system of state agencies, councils and local governing bodies.

### The Catalyst

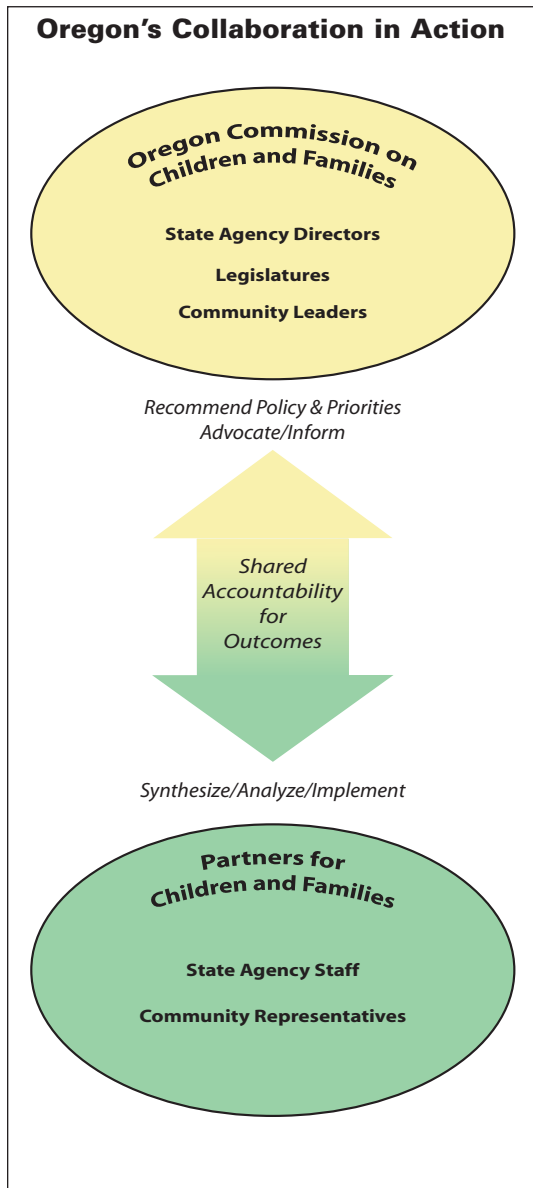
In 1992, the then Oregon Speaker of the House, Larry Campbell, started out on a journey, which ultimately resulted in the Oregon Commission on Children and Families. He had a high school son who became addicted to drugs and even though Campbell was someone who had resources, he also found it difficult to do what he called "navigate the system." At the same time, as the Speaker of the House, he was very interested in the budget and saw the human resources budget growing year by year.

Through his experience, he didn't feel that he was getting the help and support he needed for his son, so he started to look at the systems in place in the state of Oregon. He asked questions like: What are our services? How do we coordinate those services? And are we duplicating? He found that there seemed to be real fragmentation within the human service arena.

Campbell created the Children's Care Team consisting of legislators, business people, service providers and child advocates who met for about 14 months to look at the human service system. The Children's Care Team mission was to design and implement an action plan for a more integrated, accessible and PREVENTIVE statewide system of services for children and their families in Oregon. The result was legislation creating the Oregon Commission on Children and Families.

— Mickey Lansing, Director  
Oregon Commission on Children and Families

Figure 1



In recognition of the interdependence between strong caring communities and healthy children, youth and families, the Partners for Children and Families was convened by the Oregon Commission on Children and Families (OCCF) and consists of state agencies, councils and 36 local county commissions. The Partners and OCCF are unified under a single, overarching state vision for children and families, that ensures coordination and accountability of programs and initiatives. The common principles include a commitment to local decision making based on local planning, cultural competency, active collaboration between state and local partners, youth and family engagement, transparency and capacity building. The OCCF coordinating body of agency directors, legislators, business and citizen representatives acts as a children’s collaborative advising the governor and legislature on critical community needs (see Figure 1).

**Local planning informs state planning**

The OCCF convenes state and local partners within the system such as the Governor’s Council on Alcohol and Drugs, the Oregon Criminal Justice Commission, the Oregon Youth Authority and 36 local county commissions. It also oversees the development of comprehensive local plans that assess community needs, and monitors and evaluates existing practices and conditions. This system works effectively by basing its decision making on the needs and priorities of the local communities. Through local planning and regular communication with the OCCF, the county commissions convey data and information about program quality and effectiveness as well as gaps in service delivery. During the community mapping process, the top three gaps identified were public transportation, mental health services, and after-school activities. These findings informed the development of local commission plans, which incorporated strategies to address these gaps, as well as shared state and local accountability for results setting and tracking. Once plans are drafted, they are integrated into a larger overarching state plan for child and family well-being.

**What does the OCCF do?**

- Advises Governor and Legislature on critical needs of kids and families
- Oversees comprehensive planning—local commissions act as conveners and facilitators to determine local needs
- Assures system-wide accountability for expenditures and measurable results for programs and services
- Builds community awareness of children’s issues
- Develops and advances specific policy initiatives

**Who are the local commissions?**

- 36 local county commissions appointed by local Board of County Commissioners
- Comprised of citizens, community leaders, youth
- Represent public, private and nonprofit sectors; faith-based organizations; businesses
- Committed to youth issues along the age continuum of ages 0–18
- Connected to municipal government

**How is this different than business as usual?**

The partnership’s success is rooted in its values and commitments to transparency, inclusiveness and accountability. Through public forums to promote open and honest communication, both local and state stakeholders share information and discuss funding and policies. Lane County believes its direction is clear, as reported in their comprehensive plan, “our community, in partnership with the state, must lead and that leadership will require character and courage. It will demand that we be inventive, flexible and willing to team with multiple sectors in the state and local communities. It is one thing to feel the need for change, it is another thing to create and manage change. That is our charge and our challenge — to develop actions and strategies that will create a future where we give as much priority to promoting children’s potential as we do to ameliorating problems.”

During the community planning process, local commissions ask for youth and adult feedback on issues. Then they partner to develop strategies and priorities that will be integrated into the larger state plan for child and family well-being. The OCCF supports this process by providing local level capacity building, training and technical assistance and using its influence to help minimize or eliminate barriers to providing effective services. Prior to the state-local system, barriers most frequently identified were territorial disputes and competition, lack of

**Our system is made up of state and local, not the state telling the local commissions what to do. Everything we do, we do together, we call it an “interdependent partnership.”**

— Mickey Lansing, Executive Director  
Oregon Commission on Children and Families

Figure 2



communication and conflicting goals and philosophies. In 2000, Washington County reported a reduction in barriers in their adolescent day treatment programs for youth with serious emotional disorders, citing success due to increased levels of partnering between the local school districts, establishing joint funding (state mental health and local education funds), jointly developing eligibility and intake criteria as well as a shared reporting system to facilitate communication between the day treatment program and schools. The system establishes mutual accountability for high-quality policies and programs and effective and efficient funding that meet the needs of children, families and communities (*see* Figure 2, *page 3*). Local commissions are not just recipients of state funding but also look for additional local resources to ensure that community needs and priorities are being addressed. For example, in some communities for every dollar that the state contributes, up to seven dollars is being raised locally.

### **How are Oregon kids and families better off at the end of the day?**

The system's results-based planning framework establishes shared responsibility between the state and local levels to set high-level outcomes, analyze current community needs and develop local priorities and strategies to address them. This ensures that state planning is grounded in the local reality of what works and what does not work for kids and families. For example, the 2000–2001 Hood River County Comprehensive Plan for Children and Families reported that “five years ago, case workers were handling case loads of up to 150 youth in the Juvenile Department but with strong leadership and community planning involvement, caseloads have been cut by two-thirds with minor first time offenses being diverted to teen court where youth are given the opportunity to make amends for their mistakes and clear their records.” Without this local data collection and planning, youth with the highest needs would have been at even greater risk of being overlooked for necessary services and supports. Local plans identify gaps and barriers in services and advocate for effective investment of resources. Both state and local agencies and communities are responsible for results — tracking and monitoring to ensure that programs and services are meeting the needs of kids and families.

### **Successes**

- Local plans drive policy and resource decisions
- Plans are relevant to local residents
- Organization of disparate services and initiatives
- Comprehensive coordinated planning process between state and local partners
- Team approach to technical assistance for the counties
- Consistent guidelines and training on culturally- and gender-appropriate services
- Policy development drives service coordination
- Increased community engagement and ownership
- Local accountability over programs and services with state oversight
- Leveraged state and local resources

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For more information on the **Oregon Commission on Children and Families**, please contact them at:

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