

The Value of Systems Thinking in Complex Community Change

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Purpose of Today's Presentation

- Illustrate how Systems Thinking tools can help us increase the value and impact of our community and state wide change initiatives
 - Soft-Systems Methodology
 - Systems Dynamics Modeling
 - Complex Adaptive Systems
 - Chaos Theory

- Identify ways to integrate systems thinking/change approaches into existing plans and frameworks

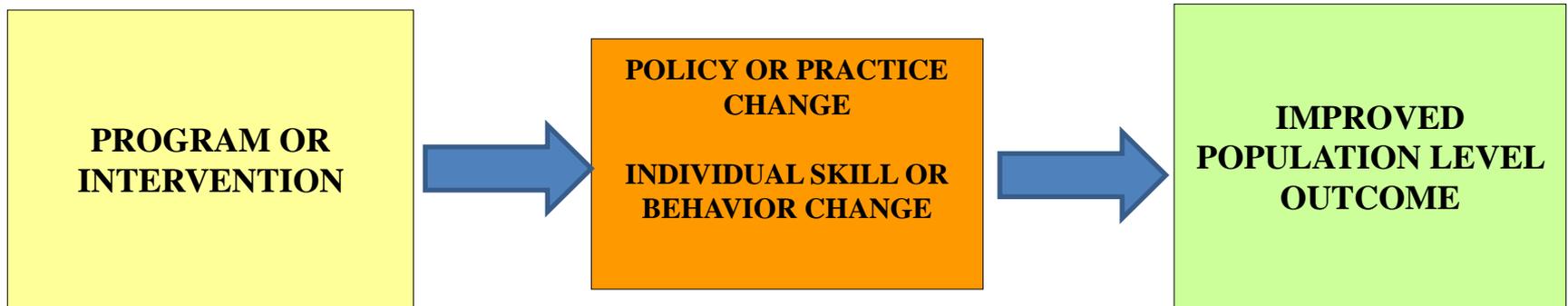


**Many collaborative
community change efforts
designed to address complex issues
have been challenged
to achieve
what they promised.**

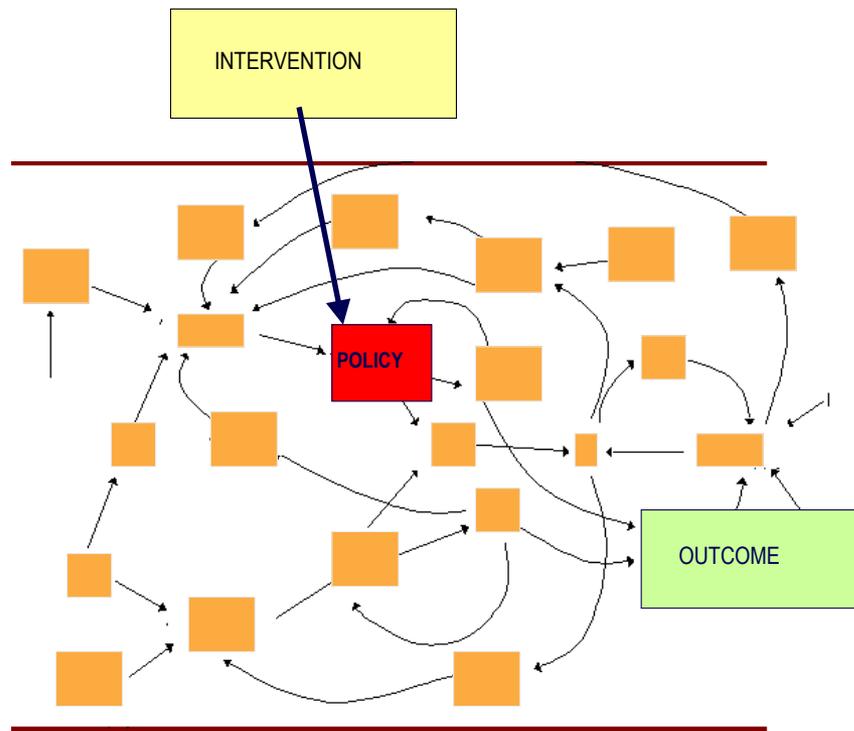
**In your experience,
why do many
community change
efforts fail?**



Typical Approach to Community Change

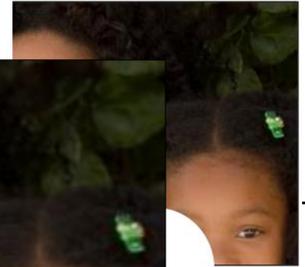


What does Community Change Really Look Like?



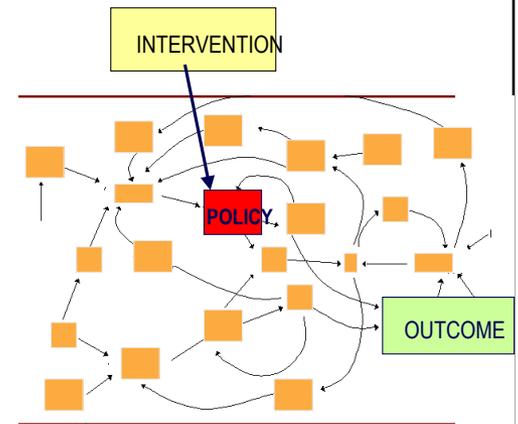






Proposal: Treat Community Change efforts as Systems Change

System Change is an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of a targeted system (Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007).



Because systems change efforts are intended to *change systems*...

- need tools and frameworks for understanding and changing the systems that contain targeted problems and solutions.





A Systems Change Approach

- Clarify the **Purpose** of the systems change
- Define the **System** to change
- Understand **Critical System Characteristics**
- Identify **Levers** to change the system
- **Embed** systems change into agendas and plans
- Create effective **Implementation Conditions**

(Foster-Fishman, et al., 2007; Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2011)

Clarifying the Purpose





Clarifying the Purpose

- Determining the **boundaries of the system**
- Defining the **targeted problem**



Defining System Boundaries

- Perhaps most **important step** in a systems change effort.
- Determines
 - whose **perspective** is considered or ignored
 - who may **benefit or suffer** from systems interventions
 - what **resources** are available for systems change efforts



Family Members

Youth

Youth Groups / Orgs

City Government

Police

**Public Sector
Leaders & Managers**

**Substance Abuse
Organizations**

Other MH providers

**17 other key
Non-profits**

15 other school districts



Included Groups

Initial Problem

Problem Description

Families are unaware/unfamiliar with services so services are underutilized or misused



Solution

County wide education & awareness

Expanded Problem & Solution

Problem Description

Public private agencies do not collaborate or connect youth and families to different resources



Solution

Promote stronger public/private partnerships & connections

Problem Description

Families are unaware/unfamiliar with services so services are underutilized or misused



Solution

County wide education & awareness

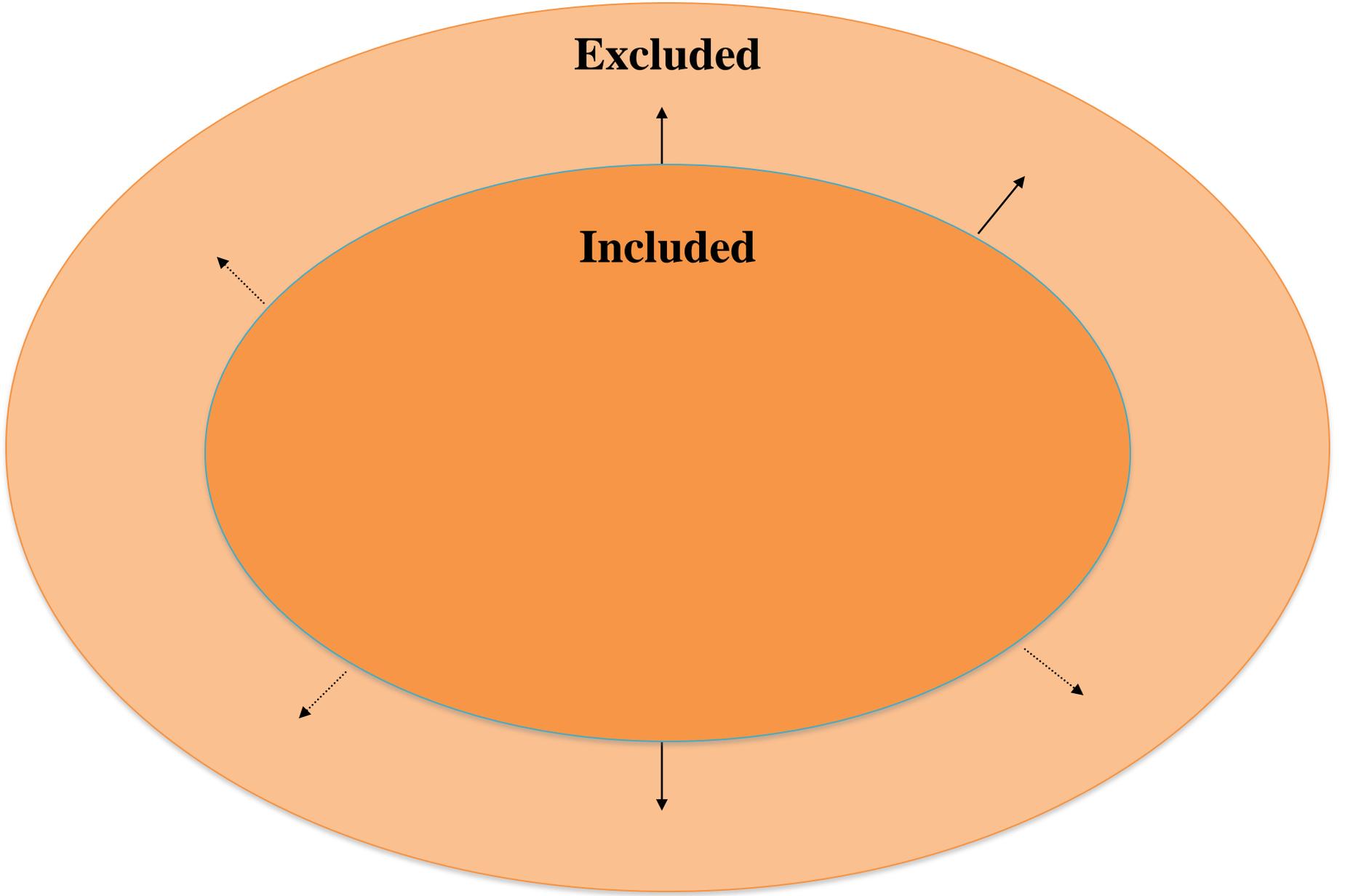


**Who was involved in
defining the problem for
your initiative?**

Who was excluded?

Excluded

Included



**How might the
problem be defined
differently by
bringing in excluded
stakeholders?**



**Expanded
Problem
Definition**



**Initial
Problem
Definition**



Defining the System to Target



Defining the System to Target

Existing System

- **Shared Purpose & Connections**
 - Understand & Improve System Components & Dynamics

New(er) System

- **Loosely Coupled; no Identified Shared Purpose**
 - Develop Shared Purpose & Goals
 - Build System Components

Identifying System Members

Service Providers

- Public Sector
- Private Sector
- Informal/Natural Supports

Institutions

- Business Sector
- Policy Makers/Leaders
- Funders

Neighborhood

- Faith-Based
- Neighborhood Associations
- Neighborhood Orgs

Constituents/Consumers

- Parents & other Adults
- Youth
- Mentors

**Who is part of your
system?**



Identifying System Members

Service Providers

Community Institutions

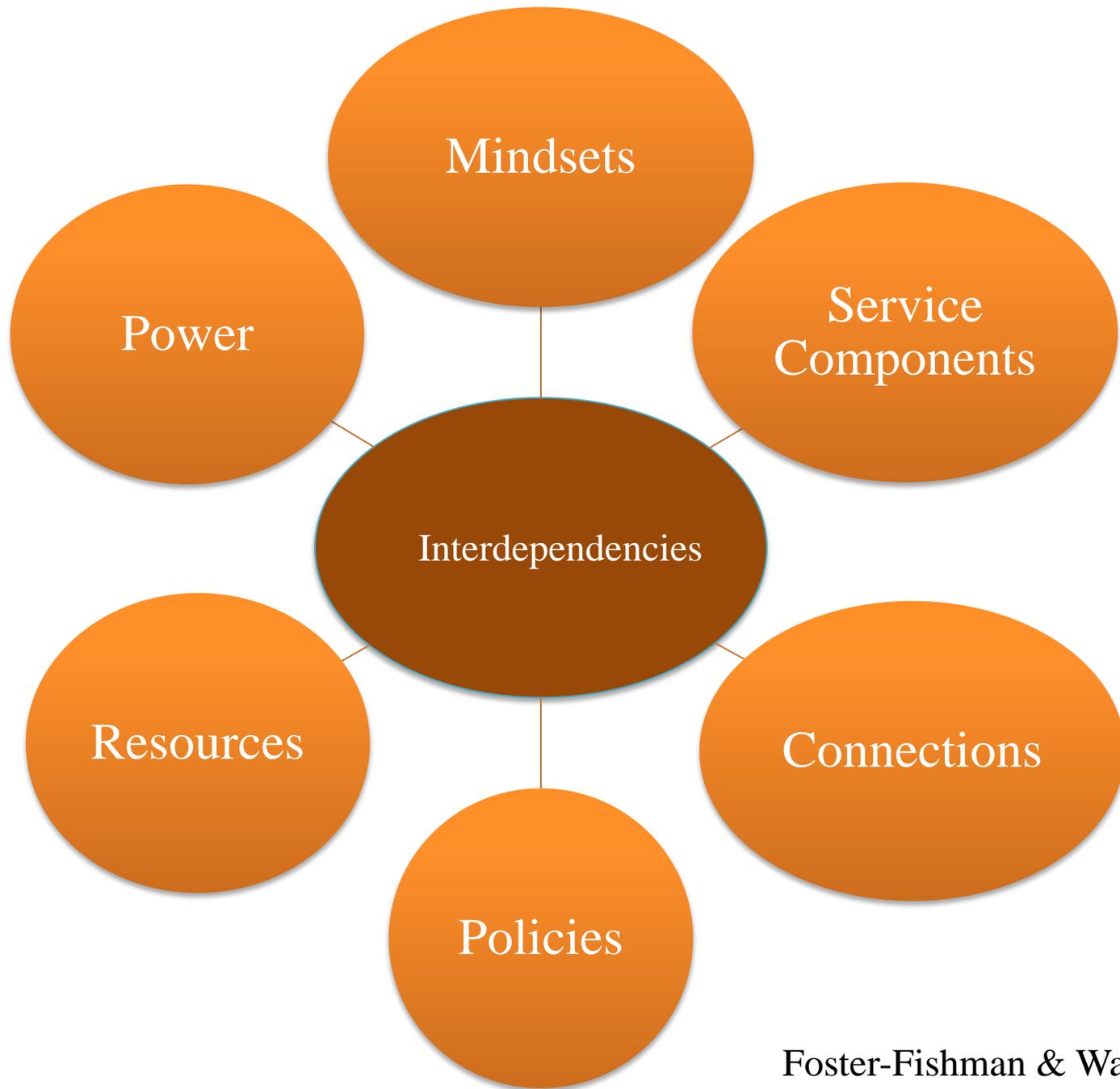
Neighborhood

Constituents/Consumers

Now that you have your system defined....
What should you change or build?

Understanding Critical System Characteristics





Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2011)



Assessing System Mindsets

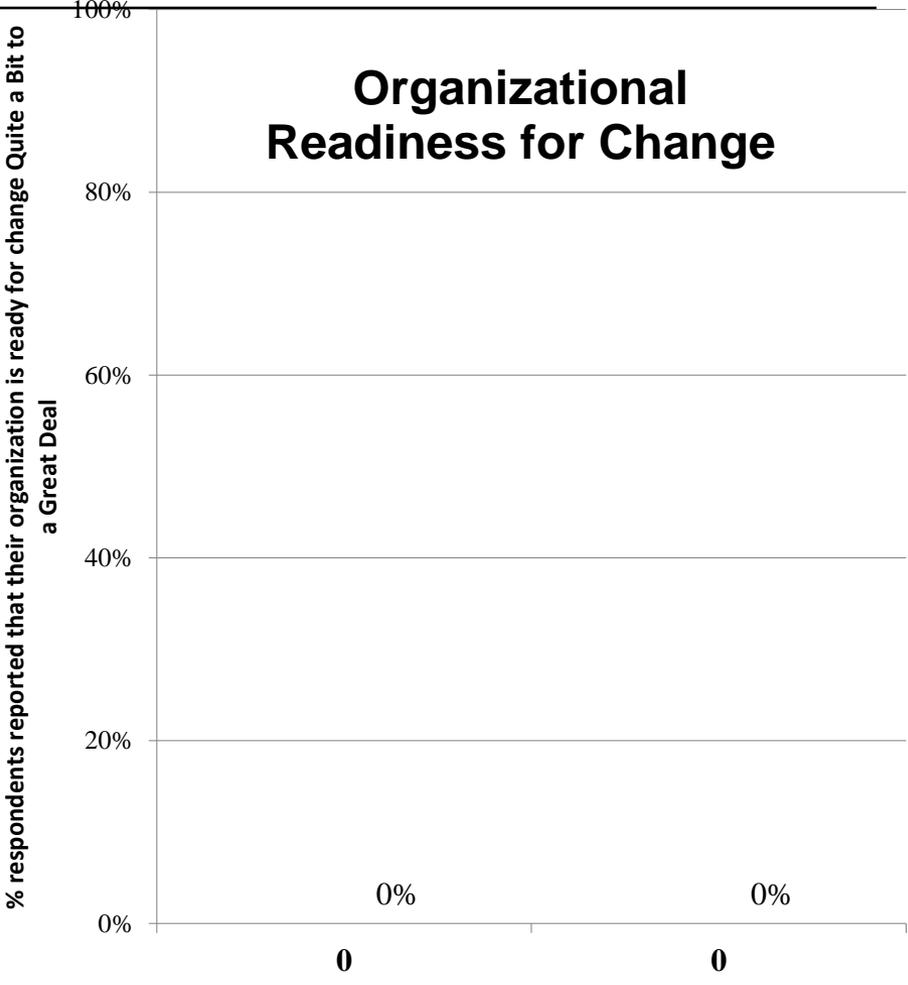
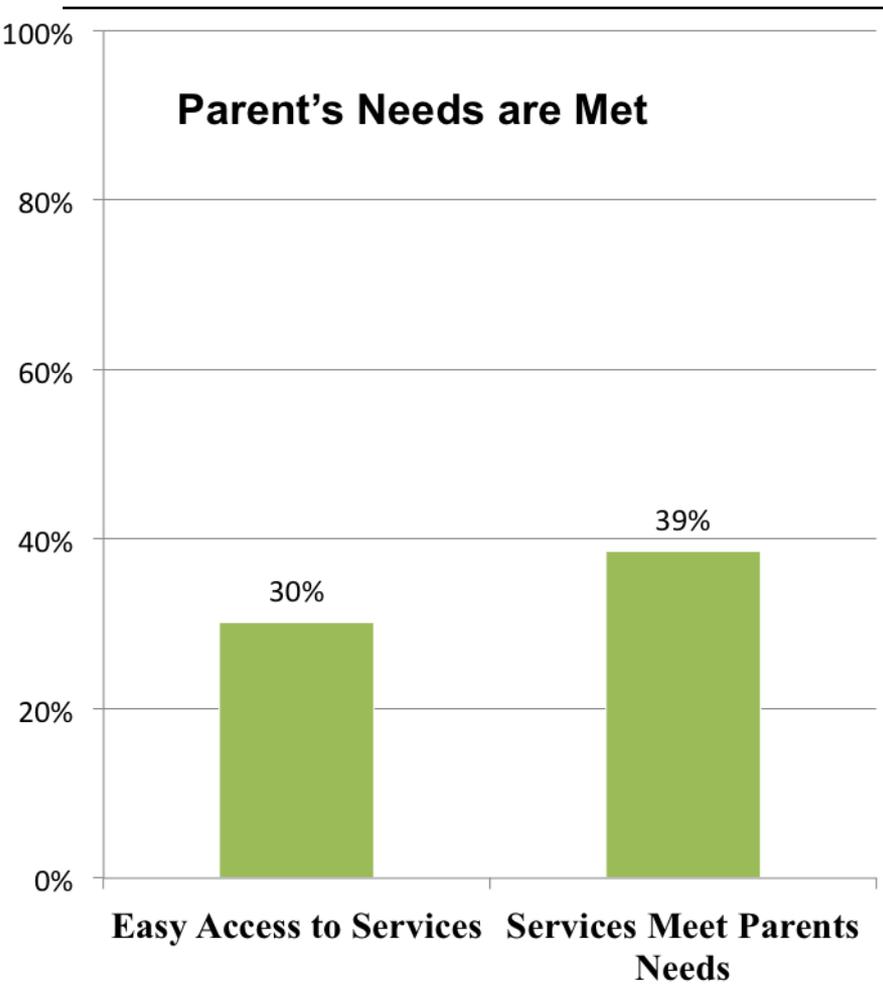
- What **assumptions** explain why things are done as they are?
- What are the **values** guiding current programs, policies, and practices within the system?
- *To what extent do the above exacerbate the current problem?*
- *To what extent are these compatible with the targeted solution?*

Valley Court

- Families don't want to be engaged and don't follow-through.
- Other providers don't do their jobs well.



Assessing System Mindsets





Assessing System Resources

Human Resources

- How will setting members be expected to behave? Do system members have these skills and knowledge sets?

Social Resources

- How will relationships need to shift in order for the proposed initiative to be successful?

Economic Resources & Opportunities

- How does the system need to use its resources differently to support the goals of the initiative? Who might perceive this reallocation as a loss?

Valley Court

- Providers do not know how to effectively engage families.
- Little trust across organizations.
- Currently no money to expand continuum of care.



Assessing System Connections

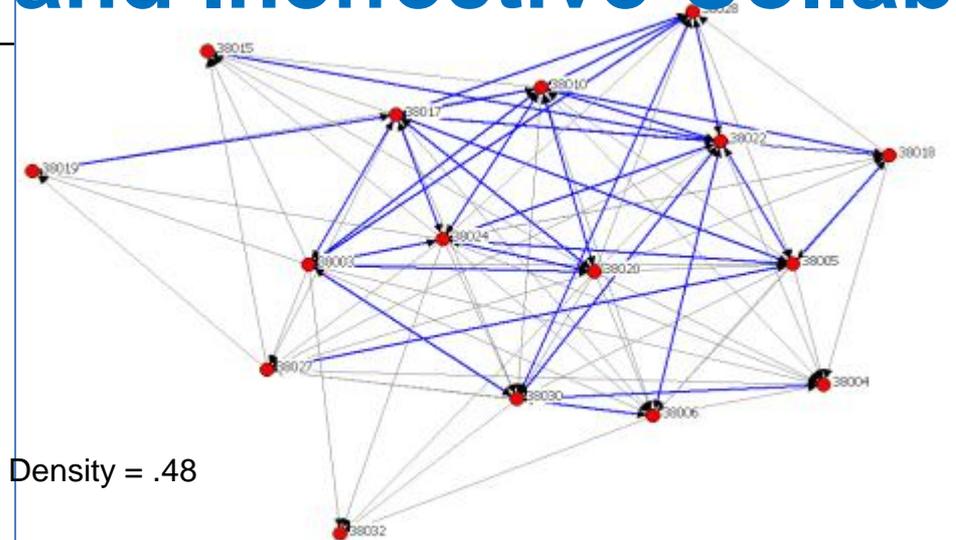
- **Coordination:** Do local providers share information, resources, and coordinate services in ways that support the overall goal or purpose?
- **Access:** Do families access the services they need?
- **Cross-Connections:** Are formal and informal supports connected? City and neighborhood organizations?
- **Alignment:** Are service approaches/ curriculum aligned across settings?

Valley Court

- Referrals made but families not accessing services.
- Neighborhood organizations isolated
- Curriculum between pre-K and K not aligned

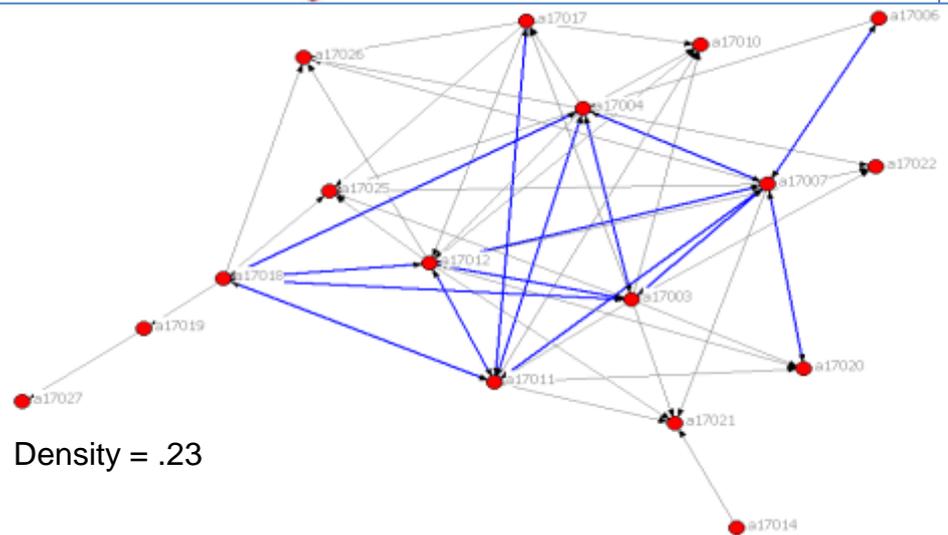
Comparing Service Access Networks of Effective and Ineffective Collaboratives

More Effective GSC



Density = .48

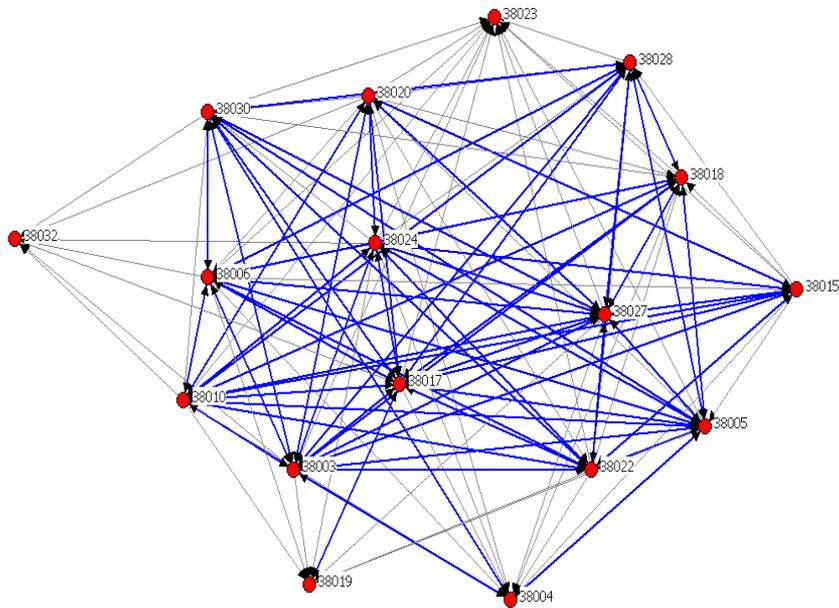
Less Effective GSC



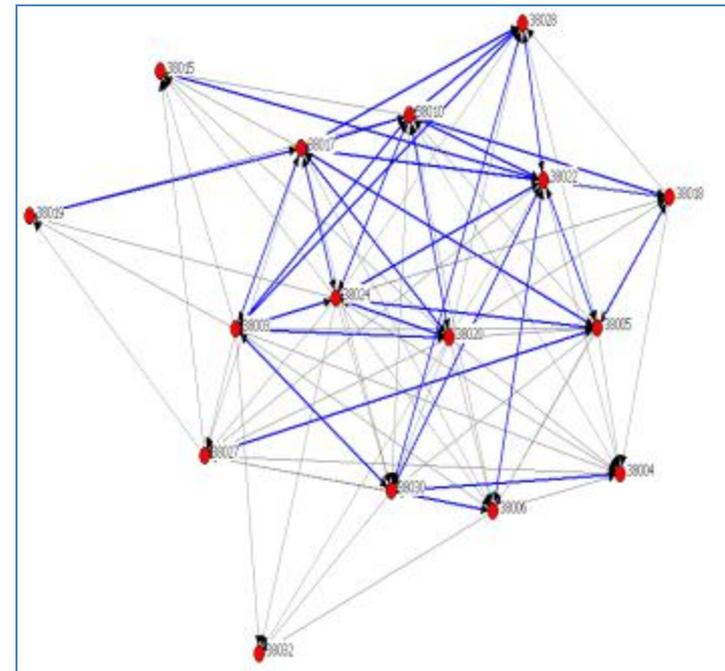
Density = .23

Differences Between Referrals and Access

Referrals Only



Actual Access to Services





Assessing System Policies

- What current policies, practices and procedures are incompatible with the change?
- What new policies, practices, & procedures are needed?

Valley Court

- No shared consent form.
- No follow-up procedures with referring providers.

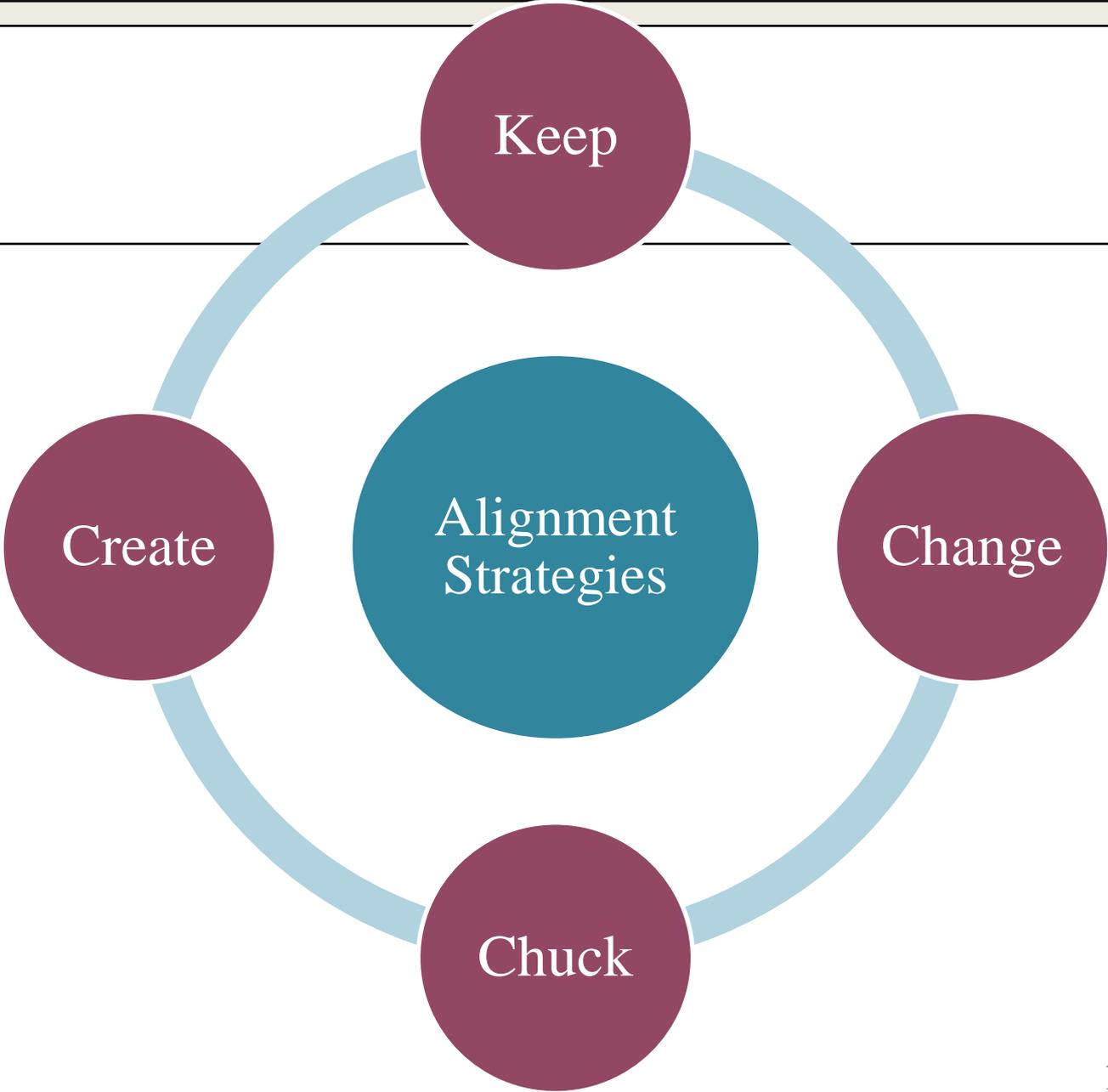


Assessing System Power Operations

- How does the systems change effort challenge the existing power and decision-making structures?
- What new power bases or decision-making structures will need to be developed to support the goals of the initiative?

Valley Court

- No venue for family voice.



Adapted from
Bob Williams



Keep

**High quality MH
services**

**Strong Org
Leadership**

Change

**Misunderstandings
about other orgs
services and access
processes**

Create

**Shared consent
processes**

Chuck

**Ineffective Family
Advisory Processes**

Strategies for Change

▪ Coordinated Services

- Increase providers' knowledge about available services to improve referral networks & coordination of cross-agency services
- Create incentives for providers to collaborate

▪ Accessible Services

- Change local policies to make the service access process easier

▪ Aligned Values/Norms

- Create shared goals
- Create readiness for change

▪ Supportive Power Dynamics

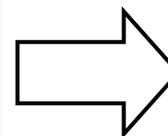
- Improve authentic family's voice

Targeted Outcomes

Improved Outcomes for Children and Families



Improved Service Delivery System



**What conditions should
your effort keep,
change, chuck, or create
to address the targeted
problem?**



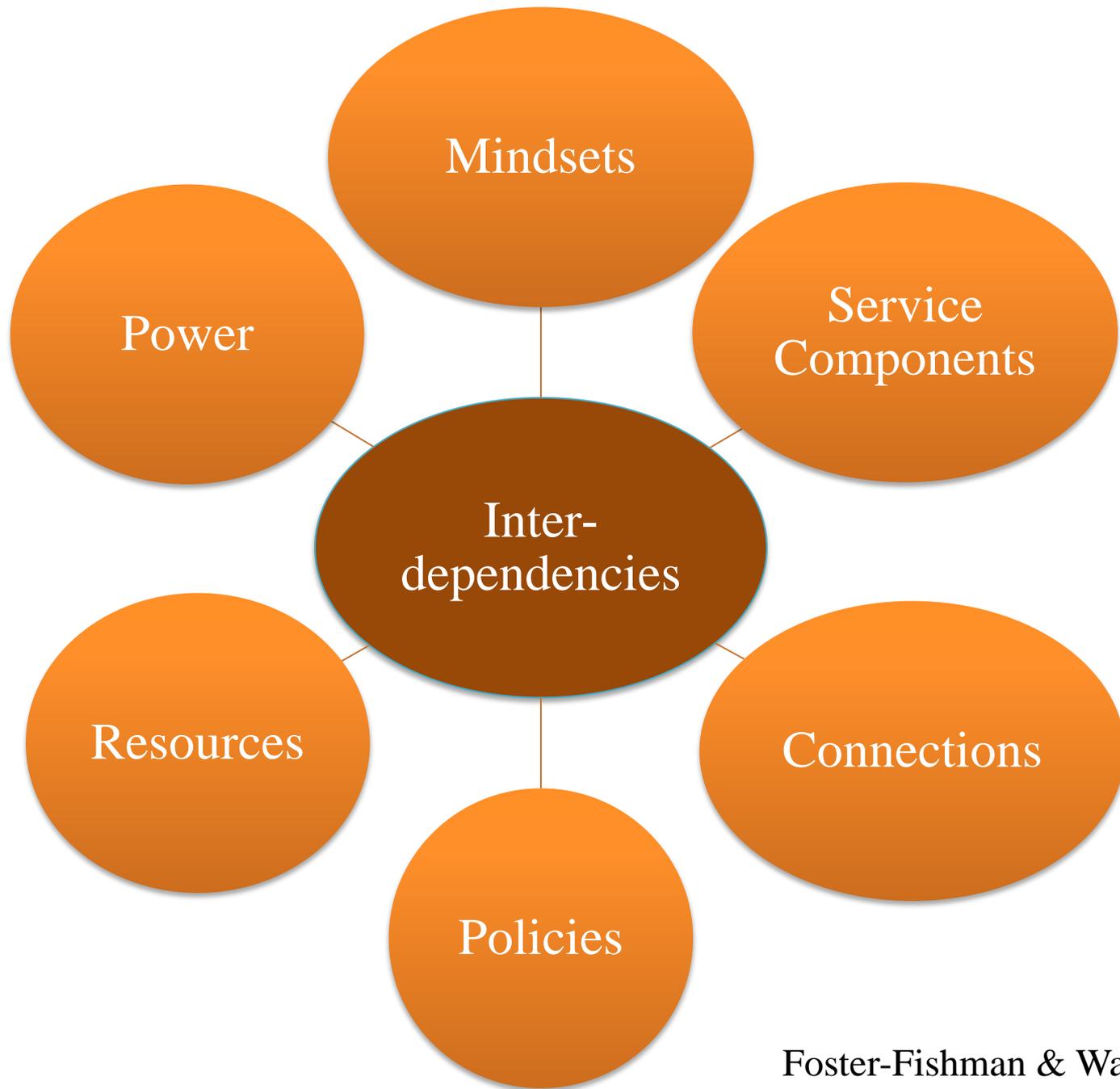


Keep

Change

Create

Chuck

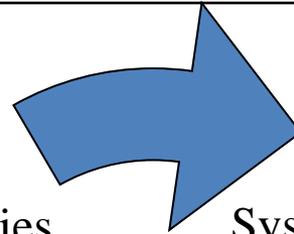


Foster-Fishman & Watson, 2011)

The Interdependencies within the System

*“Client centered”
approach provided
excuse*

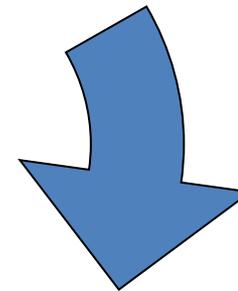
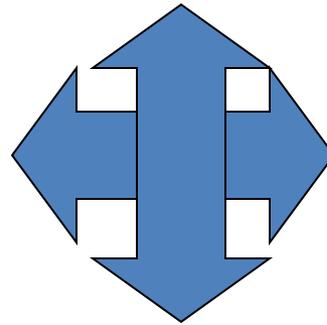
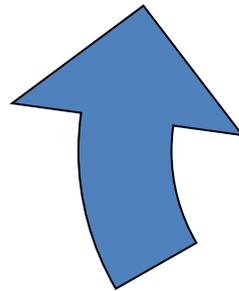
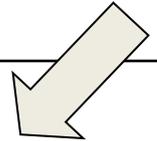
System Policies



System Resources

*Providers unskilled at
engaging families.*

*Families unskilled
at voicing their
concerns.*

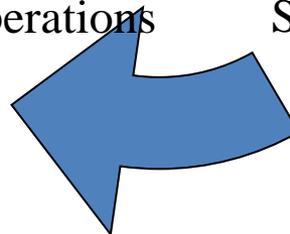


System Power Operations

System Norms

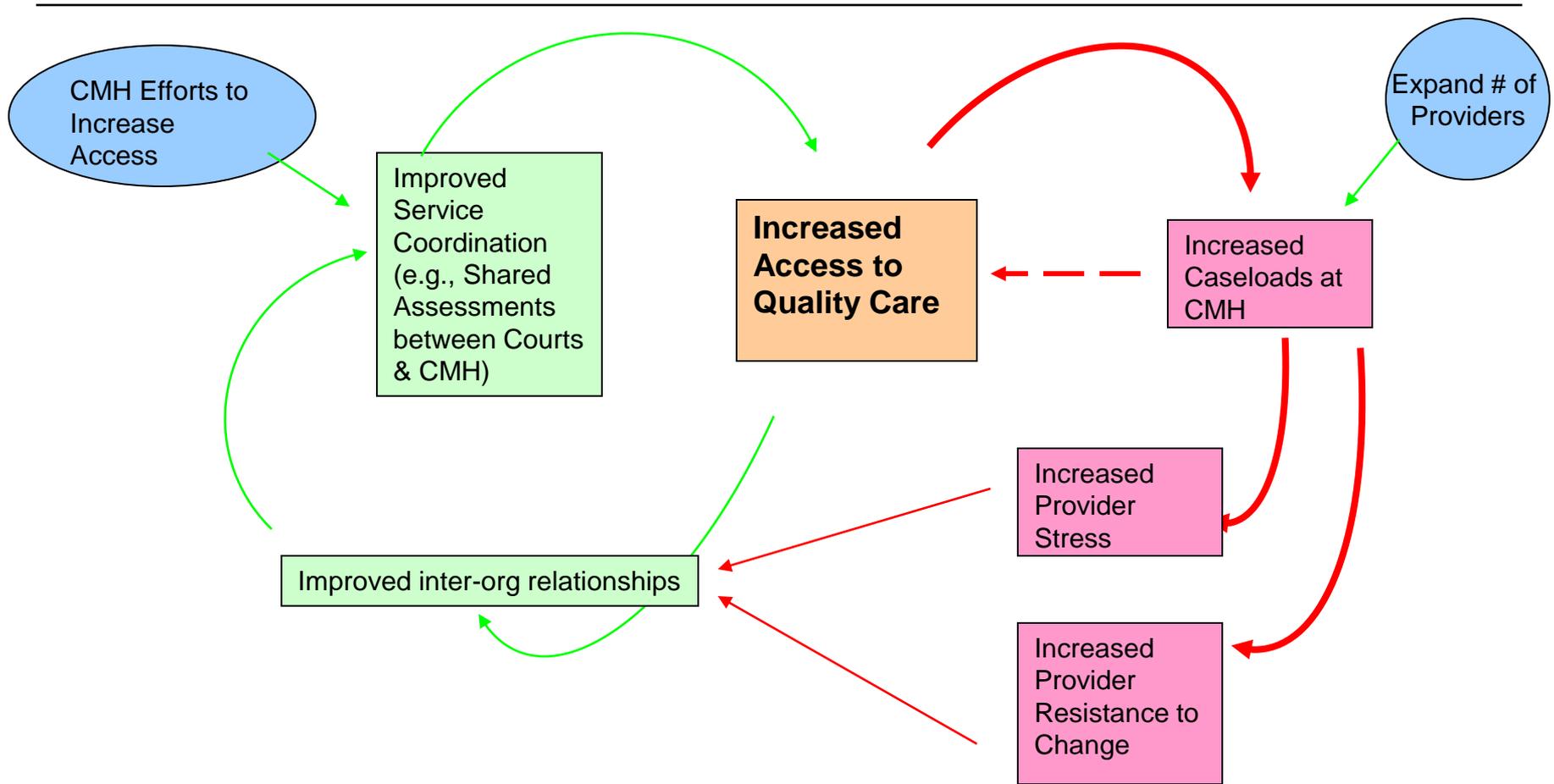
*Families don't want
to be engaged.*

*No venue
for family
voice*



*Providers don't want to
hear families voice.*

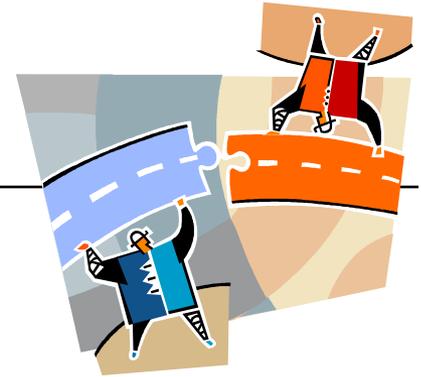
One set of Causal Loops in a System of Care Effort



Identify Levers to Change



Identifying Leverage Points



- **System Purpose**
- **Critical System Parts**
 - **System Norms, Resources, Regulations, Power/decision-making**
 - **Cross level influences**
- **Feedback loops/interdependencies**
 - **Anticipating feedback, reducing delay in feedback or providing feedback where it did not exist before.**



Changing System Purpose



Help Families
Help
Themselves



Create
Conditions for
Success



Help All Children
Succeed by 3rd
Grade



Help Vulnerable
Children Succeed
by 3rd Grade



Help Families
Make Healthy
Choices



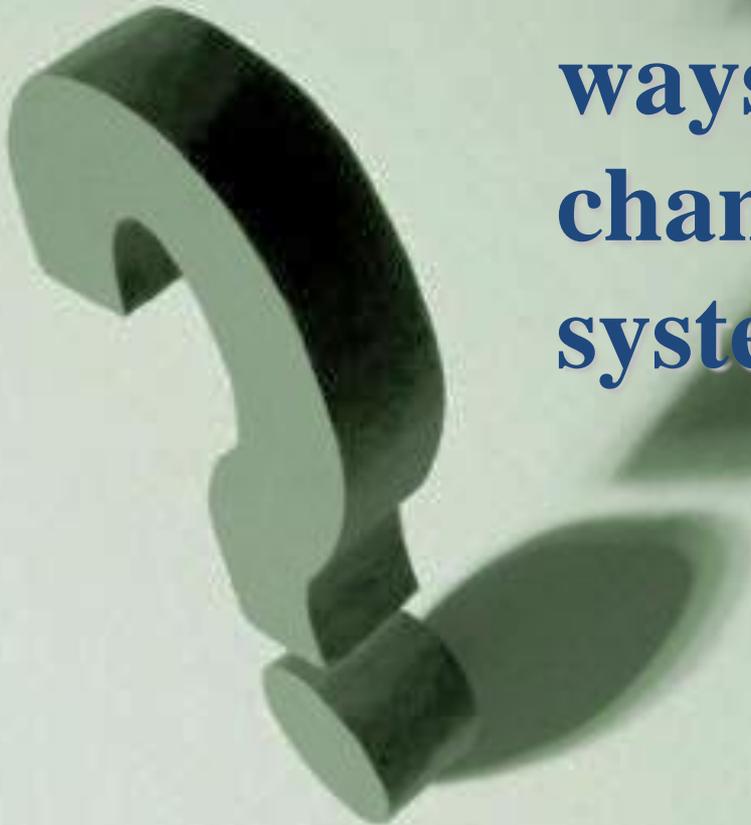
Create A
Sustainable
Healthy Food
System



Leverage Change in Critical System Parts & Interdependencies

- Immediate or small wins
 - Feasible
 - Motivating
- Cross-Level or Cross-Setting Influences
 - Interactions
 - Regulations
 - Mindsets
- Feedback Loops
 - Creating, anticipating, responding

What are some initial ways you could leverage change in your targeted system?



Embed Systems Change into Your Work





Venues for Systems Change Focus

- Theory of Change or Logic Model
- Strategic Plans or Action Plans
- Meeting Agenda & Conversations
- Accomplishments Tracking
- Evaluation

Strategies for Change

▪ **Coordinated Services**

- Increase providers' knowledge about available services to improve referral networks & coordination of cross-agency services
- Create incentives for providers to collaborate

▪ **Accessible Services**

- Change local policies to make the service access process easier

▪ **Aligned Values/Norms**

- Create shared goals
- Create readiness for change

▪ **Supportive Power Dynamics**

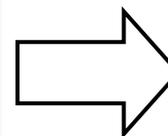
- Improve authentic family's voice

Targeted Outcomes

Improved Outcomes for Children and Families



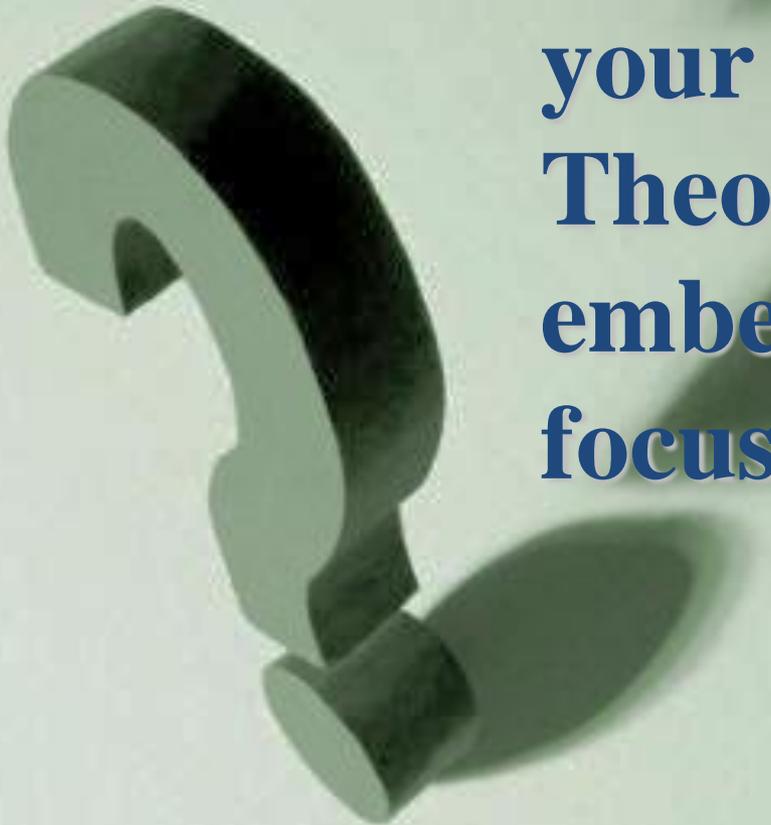
Improved Service Delivery System



ABLE Change Plan: Create Coordinated, Accessible Services

<i>What conditions need to change?</i>	<i>Goals for 2012</i>	<i>Small Wins</i>	<i>Future Efforts</i>
<p style="text-align: center;">Make initial access to care even easier</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simplify the access process ○ Create description of access process to guide families and providers. 	<p>CMH: will simplify its intake process to make access easier. <i>June 08 (A1)</i></p> <p>DHS & Courts: will start using three-way calling with families to help them get access to services. <i>May 09 (A15)</i></p>	<p>Schools: will organize a workshop on referral processes for special education services. <i>July 09 (A27)</i></p> <p>CMH: CMH will include more details regarding the specialty of each clinic in its revised counseling directory. <i>August 08 (A31)</i></p>

**What could you add to
your current plan or
Theory of Change to
embed a systems change
focus?**



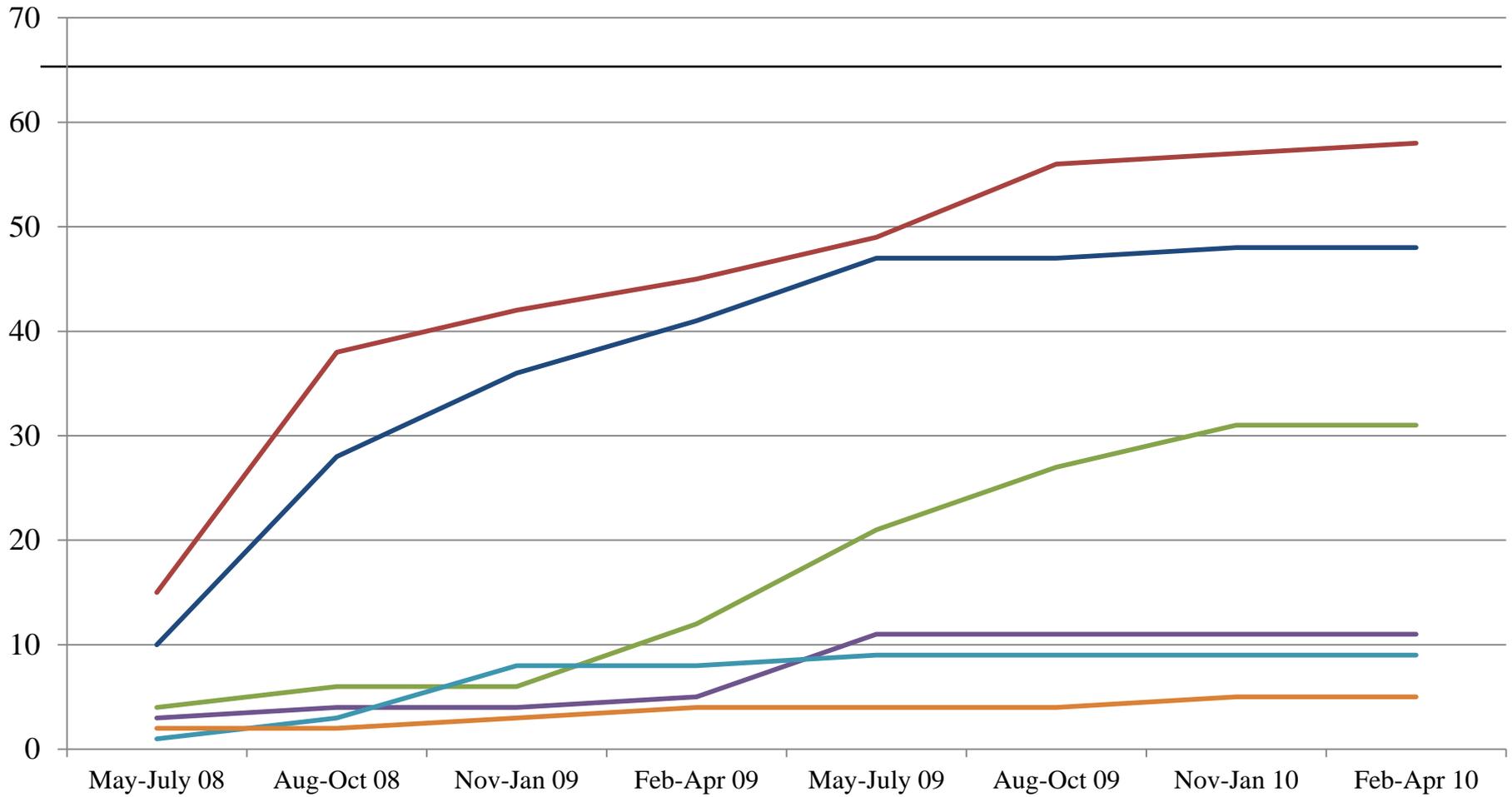
Action Agenda

System Levers to Align	Goals for 2012	Agenda Items
<p>Values / Norms: Readiness for Change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate broad understanding of need for change 	<p>A. Review social marketing campaign materials</p>
<p>Connections: <i>Stronger Exchange Networks</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make initial access to care even easier • Develop shared consent form 	<p>B. CMH's intake process</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observations from agencies & family reps • Suggestions for improvement? <p>C. Developing a shared consent form</p>
<p>Power: <i>Authentic Family Voice</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ways to increase parent engagement & leadership 	<p>D. Follow-up from Parent Coalition on leadership training</p> <p>E. Parent-to-Parent support groups</p>

ABLE Change Plan: Create Coordinated, Accessible

<i>What conditions need to change?</i>	<i>Goals for 2012</i>	<i>Accomplished to Date</i>
<p>Make initial access to care even easier.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simplify the access process ○ Create description of access process to guide families and providers. 	<p>CMH: Has simplified and improved its intake process (now available 24 hours/day, requires only 2 steps instead of 5) June 08, completed November 08 (A1)</p> <p>Implementation Team: Has identified some strategies for improving access and referral processes between the schools and CMH and Headstart and CMH. <i>October 08, completed October 08 (A4)</i></p>

Cumulative Actions Initiated



- Access to Services
- Coordinated Services
- Community-Based Care
- Trust and Communication
- Inclusion of Child and Family Voices
- Shared Outcomes and Accountability

Create Effective Implementation Conditions

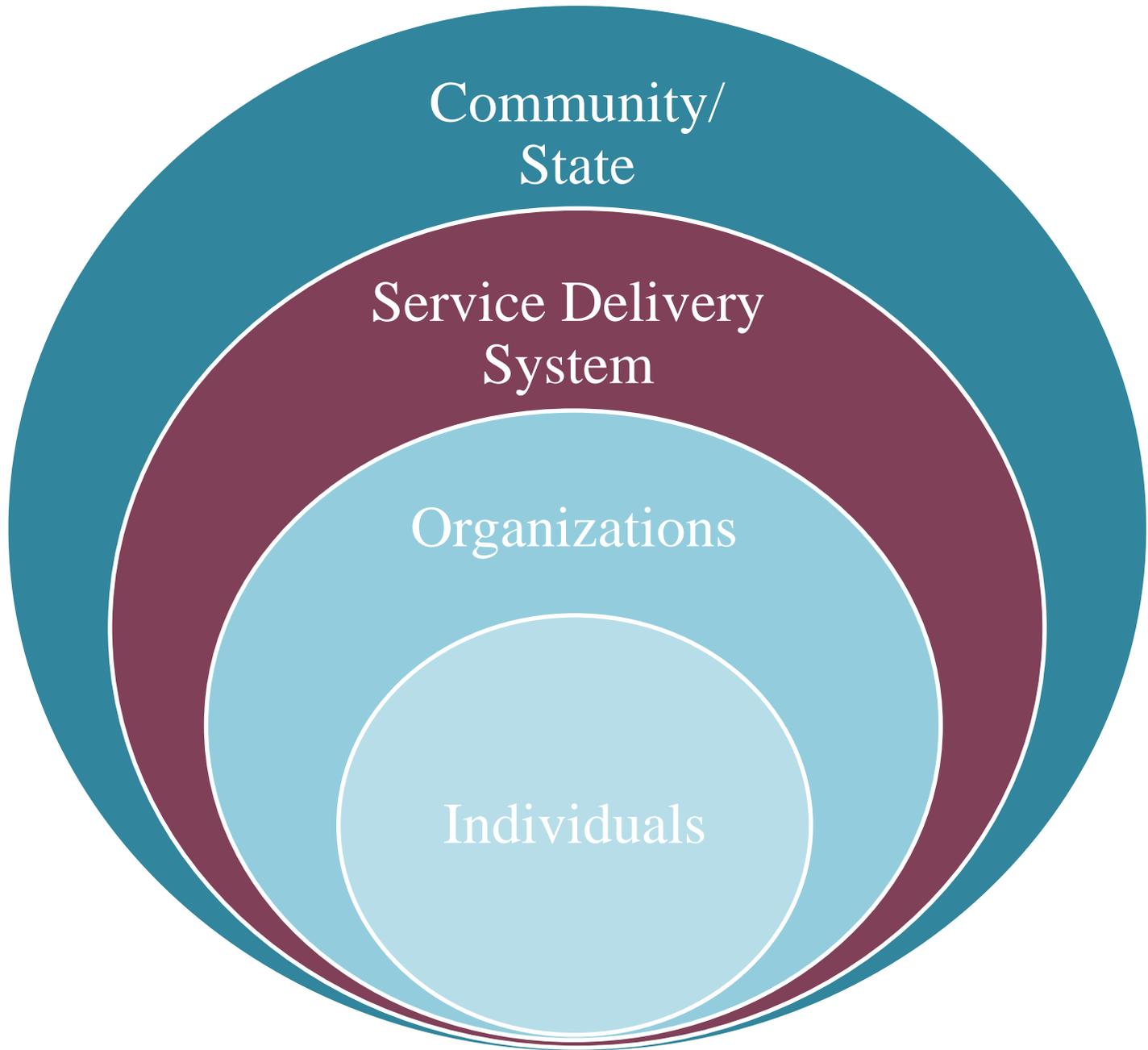


Readiness

Capacity

Diffusion

Sustainability



Community/
State

Service Delivery
System

Organizations

Individuals

Action Phase 1



Action Phase 2

Readiness



Capacity



Diffusion



Sustainability



Readiness

Capacity

Diffusion

Sustainability

Individuals:

- Do stakeholders recognize the need for change?
- Do they feel the initiative will really change local conditions?
- Are they motivated to change?

Organization / Community:

- Are local organizations willing to change?

Community Change Initiative:

- Are efforts being started at the right time to take advantage of existing momentum and avoid stakeholder burnout?

Readiness

Capacity

Diffusion

Sustainability

Individuals:

- Do stakeholders have the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to effectively implement the change?
- Do leaders know how to shift stakeholder's behavior?

Organization / Community:

- Are resources available to support the actions?
- Do local organizations have the capacity to support their staff in implementing the change?

Community Change Initiative:

- Is the effort feasible and clearly planned?

Readiness

Capacity

Diffusion

Sustainability

Individuals:

- Do all stakeholders know about the changes?
- Are stakeholders implementing the change in ways that are true to the model or larger goal?

Organization / Community:

- Is the change being communicated effectively throughout the system?
- Are there opportunities for stakeholders to access technical assistance with the change?

Community Change Initiative:

- Is the design simple to implement & flexible?

Readiness

Capacity

Diffusion

Sustainability

Individuals:

- Have stakeholders internalized new mental models and practices?
- Are they monitoring the need to develop new capacity in response to shifting contexts?

Organization / Community:

- Are necessary policies and procedures shifting to sustain these changes?

Community Change Initiative:

- Is the initiative cost effective?

System Levers	Goals for 2009	Agenda Items
Coordinated Services	Develop a Readiness form to increase	Implementing the shared consent form
	Diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow-up from school representatives on administration's response to the use and distribution of form Encouraging colleagues to use form, addressing barriers
	Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting staff in using form correctly
	Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Institutionalizing the practices

**What
implementation
issues should your
initiative focus on?**





A cautionary note

- It can be difficult to get others to adopt a systems orientation to this work.
 - Funders
 - Community members
 - Researchers
- It takes time to develop system thinking skills.
- Impossible to know everything about the system at the beginning of the project. As understanding unfolds – need to have flexibility to change. Difficult when grants have been made; reputations at stake.
- Best levers of change difficult to locate.

For more information, contact

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