



PREPARED FOR BY THE MERCYHURST UNIVERSITY CIVIC INSTITUTE ON BEHALF OF  
THE ERIE COUNTY POLICY & PLANNING COUNCIL'S RESOURCE & PLANNING  
SUBCOMMITTEE

# Community Action Plan

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Erie County

June 2012

*The Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families (PPC) is a county wide collaborative where members share information and work together to promote a flourishing, asset rich community. The PPC supports sound decision making and research-based programs providing opportunities for youth and families to grow and thrive.*

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### *Executive Summary*

This plan describes the ways to address the priority risk factors identified in Erie County's *Communities That Care* effort. The *Communities That Care* system is a way for members of a community to work together to promote positive youth development. The system was developed by Dr. J. David Hawkins and Dr. Richard F. Catalano. Their research has identified risk factors that predict youth problem behaviors and protective factors that buffer children from risk and help them succeed in life.

Erie County developed its outcome-based plan after the Erie County Policy and Planning Council Data and Assessment Committee identified three risk factors as priorities for community planning:

- i. *Community disorganization*
- ii. *Family conflict*
- iii. *Parental attitudes favorable towards problem behavior.*

After the Data and Assessment Committee completed their work, the Resource and Planning Committee of the Erie County Policy and Planning Council was charged with identifying gaps, barriers, and other issues relative to programs addressing the prioritized risk factors within the Erie County. With training assistance from the Penn State EPIS Center, the committee conducted an agency survey in December 2011-January 2012, to assess existing services. Their findings were compiled into a report that offered the following recommendations:

- Increase efforts to address community disorganization.
- Enhance the collaboration and communication between existing programs, especially those that target our priority risk & protective factors.
- Where possible, assist existing programs in finding opportunities to obtain technical assistance and to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Examine the target population and fidelity of existing evidenced-based programs within the community to assure programs are aligned to provide the most effective services to the most appropriate populations.
- Review utilization of existing evidenced-based resources to address barriers that may be hindering referrals to existing services.
- Consider implementation and expansion of prevention strategies as opposed to intervention services as opportunities to address the prioritized risk factors.
- Review access and awareness issues pertaining to existing services from both referral sources and the community at large.
- Increase accountability of services to the community.

- Promote family engagement components to services.
- Increase staff and program development of family engagement strategies and outreach.
- Examine family focused childhood programming (ages 3-9) options.
- Although not included in the community resource assessment, recommendations regarding planning needs to incorporate building upon priority protective factors including:
  - Community Rewards for Pro-social Involvement
  - Community Opportunities for Pro-social Involvement
  - Religiosity

The drafting of this document (the Erie County Community Action Plan) was the next step in the *Communities That Care* process. Over the course of a series of meetings during April 2012, the Resource and Planning Committee members debated and discussed policies, practices, and programs relative to the identified risk factors and based upon the recommendations made by the resource assessment recommendations.

The following are the strategies identified by the Resource and Planning Committee selected to address the prioritized risk factors:

- Transform the Neighborhood Watch concept to a Neighborhood Association network concept promoting a more holistic approach to neighborhood building beyond crime watch
- Support and expand the transformed Erie Neighborhood Association Council so they can provide effective technical assistance and support to the Neighborhood Associations .
- Provide a model for developing and operating Neighborhood Associations and a Neighborhood Association Council (based off of successful groups such as Snoops, Little Italy, and BEST)
- Utilize the National Night Out of the United Way as a kick off to promote the network of Neighborhood Associations and the Neighborhood Association Council.
- Promote community opportunities for prosocial involvement and community rewards for prosocial involvement among youth within the communities through the Neighborhood Association Network
- Seek consensus on reduction of family conflict as a healthy community goal
- Develop a best practice protocol for programs/services on how to engage parents/families in services/programs to reduce family conflict.
- Encourage existing programs to develop and utilize service delivery strategies to engage parents/families to reduce family conflict.
- Increase supports and services that are family focused for elementary aged youth through the implementation of the Parent Child Interactive Therapy model to reach kids and families of kids between ages 3 -9
- Invest in the promotion of current community assets by increasing awareness and expanding utilization of effective services that engage families in family conflict reduction
- Support and promote programs that are working with parents
- Provide and create opportunities to recognize not only good kids but also good parents

- Educate parents that their attitudes and behaviors directly influence the behaviors of their youth

## **Introduction**

### ***Purpose and Use of the Plan***

Erie County presents its 2012-2017 Community Action Plan. This plan describes the results of the work completed thus far in Erie County County's *Communities That Care* effort. It will describe the changes we want for our community, the programs, policies and practices that will be implemented to address the community's identified priority risk factors, and the outcomes that will measure the progress toward our community's vision.

Erie County implemented the *Communities That Care* process to help achieve the community's vision that all young people in Erie County County grow up supported and nurtured by their families, schools and community, and become healthy adults who contribute positively to society.

### ***Prevention Science Overview***

The *Communities That Care* system helps community members work together to efficiently and effectively promote positive youth development. The system was developed by Dr. J. David Hawkins and Dr. Richard F. Catalano of the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington, Seattle. It is based on their research, which has identified risk factors that predict youth problem behaviors and protective factors that buffer children from risk and help them succeed in life.

### ***Community Involvement***

The Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families is comprised of community members from public and private institutions including local government, education, health, law enforcement, local business and private social services.

Key leaders who have been involved in the creation of the community action plan include:

Jay Badams, City of Erie School District  
 Parris Baker, Gannon University & African American Concerned Clergy  
 Bob Blakely, Erie County Juvenile Probation  
 Charlotte Berringer, Erie County Department of Health  
 Dave Deter, City of Erie (co-chair)  
 John DiMattio, Erie County Office of Drug & Alcohol Abuse  
 Amy Eisert, Mercyhurst University Civic Institute  
 Samella Hudson-Brewton, John F. Kennedy Center  
 Mike Jaruszewicz, United Way of Erie  
 William Jeffress, Booker T. Washington Center  
 Ross Jarvis, Stairways Behavioral Health  
 Dave Jeannerat, Erie County Office of Mental Health & Mental Retardation  
 Danny Jones, Erie City School District

James Sherrod, Martin Luther King Center  
Joe Markiewicz, PennState CORE  
Tracey McCaslin, Erie County Office of Children and Youth  
Jerry Misfud, Erie County  
Jeff Natalie, Stairways Behavioral Health  
John Petulla, Harborcreek Youth Services  
Marshall Piccinini, Assistant United States Attorney  
Mark Rosenthal, Erie County District Attorney's Office  
Hope Ruedy, Erie Homes for Children & Adults (co-chair)  
Nick Scott, Jr. Scott Enterprises  
Ann Scott, Erie Insurance  
Dana Steward, Pennsylvania State Police

Additional community members that have been instrumental in creation of the community action plan include:

Jerri Allen, Erie Neighborhood Watch Council  
Jennifer Bach, Erie Together  
Jeremy Bloesser, Bayfront East Side Taskforce (BEST)  
Wally Brown, Little Italy Neighborhood Watch  
Tom Maggio, Erie Neighborhood Watch Council  
Heidi Miles, Erie Neighborhood Watch Council  
Shay Mizner, formerly of Erie Gains- Gannon University  
Joe Ropelewski, Harborcreek Youth Services  
Stephanie Scharnweber, Snoops Neighborhood Association  
Susan Wansor, Erie Neighborhood Watch Council

### ***The Community Planning***

A key goal of the *Communities That Care* process is to develop a Community Action Plan that builds on the data-based assessment of a community's priorities, strengths and resources. This plan focuses on the priority risk factors and draws on community resources and strengths. It also addresses resource gaps, issues and barriers by recommending new, tested, effective programs or systems-change strategies.

The Erie County plan accomplishes this goal by identifying specific desired outcomes for each selected program, policy or practice; for the priority risk and protective factors on which the plan is focused; and for adolescent problem behaviors. It describes how each selected program, policy and practice will work to bring about desired changes in Erie County County's youth and presents preliminary recommendations for how these strategies will be implemented in the community.

### ***How the Information was Collected and Drafted***

Erie County developed its community prevention plan based upon the prioritized risk factors that were identified through the work conducted by the Data and Assessment Committee of the Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families. Their assessment identified three risk factors as priorities for community planning: community disorganization, family conflict, and

parental attitudes favorable towards problem behaviors.

Erie County first drafted community-level outcomes, which consist of behavior and risk- and protective-factor outcomes. Community Board members drafted these outcomes at the Community Planning Training. Strategy identification took place during the month of April with the Resource and Planning Committee reviewing gaps, barriers, and other issues with existing services in addition to reviewing other programming options that address the identified priority risk and protective factors.

### ***How to use the plan***

The Community Action Plan is intended to help guide the Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families to develop implementation, evaluation and budgeting plans for the selected programs, policies and practices. Participants developing these plans should use this plan to develop:

- funding strategies by tying funding plans to outcomes and reevaluating funding priorities as outcomes are monitored;
- implementation plans for the strategies identified in the plan; and
- evaluation plans for strategies identified.

## **The Community Plan Development**

### ***Data collection efforts***

The Data and Assessment Committee collected and analyzed data on Erie County including data from the Pennsylvania Youth Survey and additional archival community data (births to teens, arrests, child abuse rates, juvenile placement rates, etc). With input from the committee members, they identified priority risk factors to address, as well as community strengths to build on. The Community Assessment Report details the results of this work.

### ***Prioritization process***

Based on the analysis of the data and input from the community, the following risk factors were identified as priorities for community attention:

- *Community disorganization*
- *Family conflict*
- *Parental attitudes favorable toward problem behaviors*

These risk factors were selected as priorities for prevention action primarily because data indicated that they are elevated throughout Erie County.

### ***Existing resources, gaps, issues and barriers***

The Resource and Planning Subcommittee developed a community survey based upon the three prioritized risk factors to identify existing resources, gaps, issues, and barriers that exist within the

community relative to those risk factors. Surveys were sent to 133 programs/services and 93 responded. Based on the assessment information derived from that survey, the Resource and Planning Committee's resource assessment concluded that:

- There are limited resources, programs, and services that are addressing community disorganization throughout Erie County.
- There are several resources, programs, and organizations in Erie County that address family conflict and parental attitudes favorable toward the problem behavior; however the effectiveness of many of the identified resources is unclear.
- There is a lack of accountability to the community among services.
- Erie County is resource rich with evidenced-based programs; however the utilization, fidelity and target populations being served by those programs warrant further examination.
- Access and awareness regarding effective programs and services in the community by both referral sources and potential clients that address the priority risk factors also warrants further examination.
- Programs and services lack technical assistance.
- Family engagement components of programs and services are lacking.
- A number of prior prevention programs are now utilized as intervention strategies.

### ***Recommendations***

Based on the results of the community assessment, the Resource and Planning Committee recommended the following:

- Increase efforts to address community disorganization.
- Enhance the collaboration and communication between existing programs, especially those that target our priority risk & protective factors.
- Where possible, assist existing programs in finding opportunities to obtain technical assistance and to evaluate their effectiveness.
- Examine the target population and fidelity of existing evidenced-based programs within the community to assure programs are aligned to provide the most effective services to the most appropriate populations.
- Review utilization of existing evidenced-based resources to address barriers that may be hindering referrals to existing services.
- Consider implementation and expansion of prevention strategies as opposed to intervention services as opportunities to address the prioritized risk factors.
- Review access and awareness issues pertaining to existing services from both referral sources and the community at large.
- Increase accountability of services to the community.
- Promote family engagement components to services.
- Increase staff and program development of family engagement strategies and outreach.
- Examine family focused childhood programming (ages 3-9) options.
- Although not included in the community resource assessment, recommendations regarding planning need to incorporate building upon priority protective factors including:

- Community Rewards for Pro-social Involvement
- Community Opportunities for Pro-social Involvement
- Religiosity



## Community Planning Results

### *Community Level Outcomes*

Erie County developed outcomes for the following identified risk factors:

- *Community disorganization*
  - Description: Where there is little attachment to the community, where the rates of vandalism are high and where there is low surveillance of public areas, more problem behaviors occur.
  - Objective: To decrease community disorganization as measured by the overall composite score on the Pennsylvania Youth Survey from 70 to at or below a score of 65 by 2015.
  
- *Family conflict*
  - Description: Persistent, serious conflict between caregivers or between caregivers and children appears to increase risks for children raised in these families.
  - Objective: To decrease family conflict as measured by the overall composite score on the Pennsylvania Youth Survey from 53 to at or below the normative score of 50 by 2015.
  
- *Parental attitudes favorable towards problem behaviors*
  - Description: If parents are involved in one of the problem behaviors or are tolerant of the children's involvement in such behaviors, children are much more likely to become involved in those problem behaviors.
  - Objective: To decrease parental attitudes favorable towards the problem behaviors as measured by the overall composite score on the Pennsylvania Youth Survey from 57 to at or below the normative score of 50 by 2015.

### **Risk factor: Community Disorganization**

#### *Selected Strategies*

- Integrate the neighborhood watch concept to a neighborhood association network concept promoting a more holistic approach to neighborhood building beyond crime watch to include partnering every neighborhood watch with a corporate, church, school, neighborhood center, social service agency, law enforcement and youth partner (See Appendix A)
- Support and expand the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council so they can continue to provide the following to countywide neighborhoods but on a larger scale with maximum efficiency:
  - Training and technical assistance to local watches
  - Pass through opportunities for communities who are not 501c3 to seek grant funds

- Best practice information
- A means to communicate with other neighborhood groups and the broader community
- Education to communities on other resources available to community members
- Connect existing neighborhood watches with key community partners (business, education, services, religion, parents, youth)
- Provide a model for developing and operating neighborhood watches to operate at their maximum efficiency and effectiveness (based off of successful groups such as Snoops, Little Italy, BEST and the Neighborhood Watch Council, among others)
- Utilize the National Night Out of the United Way as a kick off to promote neighborhood watches and the networking of the associations through the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council.
- Promote community opportunities for pro-social involvement and community rewards for pro-social involvement among youth within the communities through the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council.
- Include Healthy Youth Development training opportunities through the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council and associated neighborhood groups.

#### *Program Level Outcomes*

- Whether the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council has been supported and expanded to effectively assist the existing neighborhood watches.
  - Whether funding has been secured to support the additional required staffing to bring the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council up to maximum efficiency.
- Whether a model program for developing and operating a network of neighborhood watches has been identified or created.
- Whether the existing neighborhood watches have been provided adequate support from the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council to have established partnerships with the key community partners for their community.
  - Number of neighborhood watches that have networked with each key community partner sector within their community.
- Whether opportunities for youth increased through the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council and associated watch groups.
  - Number of opportunities for youth through neighborhood watches as reported by the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council.
- Whether reward recognition increased for youth through the neighborhood watches.
  - Number of rewards for youth through neighborhood watches as reported by the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council

#### *Preliminary Implementation Plans*

- Funding will be sought to secure additional staffing at the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council through the Erie County Policy and Planning Council Funding Committee.
- Simultaneously with the seeking of funding, existing neighborhood watches will work together to identify or develop a model network of partners within each association and an operational model as a guide for other neighborhood watches.
- Once funding is secured and staff are hired, work towards enhancing the existing

neighborhood watches and expanding the network of services and opportunities will begin.

### **Risk factor: Family Conflict**

#### *Selected Strategies*

- Seek consensus on reduction of family conflict as a healthy community goal
- Develop a best practice protocol for programs/services on how to engage parents/families in services/programs.
- Encourage existing programs to develop and utilize the best practice protocol to engage parents/families.
  - Provide training opportunities for existing services on why and how they can engage families in services
  - Encourage providers to develop defined opportunities for parents/families to get involved in services/programs their youth attend
  - Encourage providers to make formal invitations to parents and families to get involved in services/programs their youth attend
- Encourage funders to include outreach and family engagement as a criteria in services they fund
- Build up the Building Bridges Parent/Provider Partnership so that the information provided by parents is relevant and more effective to service providers
- Increase supports and services that are family focused for elementary aged youth
  - Support the implementation of the Parent Child Interactive Therapy model to reach kids and families of kids between ages 3 -9
  - Seek funding to sponsor PCIT training and certification for counselors (Parent Child Interaction Therapy)
  - Market the PCIT therapy model and seek broad acceptance of its therapeutic benefits to reduce family conflict
- Invest in the promotion of current community assets by increasing awareness and expanding utilization of proven effective services that engage families in family conflict reduction
  - Partner with school districts and community centers to broaden referral sources and increase awareness
  - Expand utilization of school and community center facilities for provision of services
  - Utilize the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council and associated neighborhood watches to inform the community on available family supports and expand program utilization

#### *Program Level Outcomes*

- Whether consensus has been reached among the county, county council, city council, and community collaborative partnerships (Erie Together, Erie County Criminal Justice Coalition, United Way, Success by Six...) that reduction of family conflict is as a healthy community goal.
- Whether a best practice protocol for parent/family engagement in services has been

- developed.
- Whether existing programs have been encouraged to engage parents/families in services.
  - The number of agencies and # of staff members attending the collaborative family engagement training
  - The number of agencies that adopt the best practice protocol for engaging parent/families in services
- Whether funders have been encouraged to include outreach and family engagement as criteria for services/programs they fund.
  - Number of funders reporting having included outreach and family engagement in request for funding proposals
- Whether funding has been secured for a collaborative training on PCIT.
- Whether the PCIT therapy model has been accepted for its therapeutic benefits to reduce family conflict.
  - The number of service providers that adopt the PCIT model for working with children ages 2-9.
- Whether the utilization of existing evidenced-based programs (MST, MST-PSB, FFT) has increased.
  - Number of clients receiving services for existing evidenced-based programs as reported by the programs

#### *Preliminary Implementation Plans*

- The Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families will work to educate the community and key leaders on the importance of addressing family conflict as a means to improve overall community health.
- The Erie County Policy and Planning Council for Children and Families will establish a subcommittee to develop a best practice protocol for parent/family engagement in services, incorporating representation from those programs that have been identified as exceptional at family outreach and service delivery in addition to parent representation. Once a protocol has been developed, representatives will meet with each of the individual youth servicing agencies to encourage them to adopt the protocol and incorporate the recommendations into existing services.
- Existing training regarding parent/family engagement in services will be identified and/or developed if necessary (the Penn State EPIS Center has already indicated availability of technical assistance relative to this topic). The training will then be scheduled and all youth serving agencies in Erie County will be invited to send staff to the trainings. Funding for the training will be sought through the Erie County Policy and Planning Council Funding Committee.
- The countywide prevention plan, in addition to the supporting documentation of the community assessment and community resource assessment, will be shared with local funders so they are aware of the prioritized risk factors.
- Meetings will be held to gauge the interest of existing outpatient counselor providers regarding collaborative implementation of the PCIT model. Costs of PCIT training is yet to be determined.
- The funding committee of the Erie County Policy and Planning Council will be responsible for securing funds for this activity.

## **Risk factor: Parental Attitudes Favorable Toward Problem Behaviors**

### *Selected Strategies:*

- Support and promote programs that are working with parents
- Provide and create opportunities to recognize not only good kids but also good parents
- Educate parents that their attitudes and behaviors directly influence the behaviors of their youth
  - Utilize the Neighborhood Council Networks to educate parents and provide opportunities for positive recognition
  - Engage churches, businesses, schools, parents, youth, non-profits, government in changing social norming that accepts and/or promotes problem behaviors (such as underage drinking, bullying, drug use, aggression, teen pregnancy)

### *Program Level Outcomes*

- The number of opportunities created to recognize good parents
- The number of Neighborhood Council Networks that report providing educational opportunities in their community regarding parental attitudes and behaviors influence of youth behaviors.

### *Preliminary Implementation Plans*

- The Erie County Policy and Planning Council will utilize community youth representation to develop an outreach strategy to educate parents on how parental attitudes influence youth behaviors.
- Materials will be made available to the Erie Neighborhood Watch Council and associated watch groups promoting awareness of parental attitude influence on youth behaviors.
- Neighborhood Watch Groups as well as community agencies, churches, businesses, and schools will be encouraged to recognize good parents.

### **Next Steps**

- The community plan will be shared with the public.
- The Erie County Policy and Planning Council will convene the key partners identified as instrumental in the implementation of the strategies set forth in the community plan. This may require the establishment of ad hoc subcommittees.
- The Erie County Policy and Planning Council will convene the Funding Committee to start seeking resources necessary for the implementation of the identified strategies.
- Baseline data and an evaluation process will be identified in order to begin tracking outcomes and progress towards achieving program level outcomes.
- The release of the 2011 Pennsylvania Youth Survey data will also result in reconvening of the Data and Assessment Committee to identify if any additional risk factors need to be addressed.

# Community Disorganization

•Where there is little attachment to the community, where rates of vandalism are high and where there is low surveillance of public areas, more problem behaviors occur.

• Reduce the community disorganization risk factor from 70 to 50 by 2015

## • REBUILDING THE COMMUNITY



Erie Neighborhood Watch Council