



Multi-County Collaboration-  
Pipestone/Nobles

Benefits of a shared system:

- Financial gains – current shared contracts result in a total of over \$160,000 in savings for 2009 - \$80,000 saved by each system
- System growth can occur without cost of additional staff
- Economic downturn may cause increased need for Family Service programs (caseload growth)
  - Increased capacity can occur through compression of some staff positions (expect employees to handle some additional cases)
  - Centralize some administrative functions (i.e. accounting, child support), then
  - Reposition staff into areas of growth allowing agencies to meet increased need (changing position descriptions)
- Movement toward a joint system naturally lends itself to a decrease in the duplication of work done separately in two counties (two budgets, two outcome reports, two program plans, etc.) freeing up additional staff time
- Increased specialization allows workers to become familiar with complex tasks of a job making them more efficient while allowing for less “down time” in the system (i.e. adoption, daycare/foster care revocations, forensic interviews, etc.)
- Key component, one management team across both systems, increases consistency and begins to change the culture of both agencies as we move forward.

We “weather the storm” together getting through 2009.

We find ourselves in a good position for 2010, able to limit the loss of additional county program aid given our shared arrangement.

Pipestone/Nobles are able to negotiate from a position of strength together if a larger regional coalition should develop.

# Principles for Collaboration

## Priority Rankings

Number One Goal: Strong Health and Human Service delivery with confidence in leadership, and a certain amount of local control/equal governance.

Collaboration must uphold the public interest of the organization, while providing member counties fair representation within the governance structure.

- ✓ Point One - Adding strength to existing systems through joint ventures should allow all systems to become stronger; shared administrative arrangements will result in the most dramatic savings overall.

Counties should explore and promote cooperation and coordination between entities to avoid unnecessary duplication of services and to maximize the resources available to all communities they serve.

- ✓ Point Two - Governor's Budget Proposal is beginning to put pressure on continued movement toward multi-county service delivery. We want to be the ones in the driver's seat...not the state.
- ✓ Point Three - Collaboration efforts are sometimes difficult and may fail. While some residual effects may remain, it is crucial counties continue to explore possibilities to work together. "If at first you do not succeed..."
- ✓ Point Four - Movement toward one county system could result in tremendous pressure to continue to move in that direction, which could also result in a county's individual desires and voice being weakened. (See Point Five).
- ✓ Point Five - Timelines and process around multi-county collaboration should always be a joint venture. The system must be build cooperatively, with all parties involved in the process, continuing to shape the agency based upon each community's/county's individual needs.

Counties should regularly measure the multi-county collaboration against a clear set of performance standards and whether or not the collaboration is fulfilling the goals of the organization.

- ✓ Point Six - The decision making/collaborative process needs to be open and transparent. Counties have an obligation to conduct their activities with accountability and transparency. Information should be easily accessible and create external visibility, public understanding and trust in the organization.
- ✓ Point Seven - A county needs to have confidence in its ability to be an equal stake holder in the midst of the other entities within the system.
- ✓ Point Eight - Early, positive experiences within collaboration allow for expansion in the level of partnering. Expansion continues to make sense, particularly in light of pressure to continue to integrate health and human service models.
- ✓ Point Nine - Given the possibility of an eventual larger region, multiple counties together can negotiate from a stronger position with neighboring counties than any can do alone.
- ✓ Point Ten - Exploration of all regional options and continued work toward lowering infrastructure/administrative costs will result in slowed growth in county levy cost in years to come.

# Multi-County Collaboration

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Review of Current Arrangement:

What have we accomplished so far?

Pipestone and Nobles Counties share a total of 8 administrative contracts:

- Director
- Adult Services Supervisor
- Children's Services Supervisor
- Administrative Assistant (Case Aide)
- Income Maintenance/Child Support Services Supervisor
- Child Support Services Staff
- Foster Care Licensing Social Worker
- Accounting Technician Staff

**Total Cumulative Savings for 2010 - \$250,000** (approximately \$125,000 per system)

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## Expansion of our work together: Where do we go from here?

- Continuation of contracting method is too complex (administratively) to exchange funds position by position.
- Contracts allowed us to “test the waters” but may not be necessary as we move forward together.
- Opportunities for 2009 and beyond - potential for growth/rise in productivity with existing work force - spread caseload growth across both systems –
- NCFSA planned growth for 2009:
  - Addition of one financial worker
  - Addition of two case aides
  - Each position costs approximately \$35,000 (salary/benefits).
  - Although we do receive State and Federal reimbursements for portions of these positions, we are saving \$105,000 in **ongoing infrastructure costs**, as we go into a time of increased uncertainty. Reducing (or at least maintaining) our infrastructure costs will help us continue to absorb budget reductions over an extended period of time.
- Centralize “behind the scenes” functions in order to re-assign/reposition existing staff into growth areas of each agency (i.e. Accounting, Child Support, Financial Assistance functions completed via mail etc.)

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- Begin/advance specialization in program areas of increasing complexity.
  - Specialization reduces the amount of time an inexperienced staff person will spend on an unfamiliar task (i.e. Adoption, foster care revocation, forensic investigations etc.).

## **Goals as we move forward:**

- Collaboration vs. loss of County Program Aide
- Reduction in administrative expense allows for increased investment (or fewer reductions) in front line interaction between staff and clients.
- We should grow both systems together to accommodate increasing community need without additional staff expense - increase staff productivity as much as possible before the addition of any new staff.
- When staff are added (eventually), the resource is shared between both systems, reducing the cost by 50%.

Public Health alternatives may be a natural extension of our work together, depending upon the Governor's proposal and other "region wide" initiatives.

# Multi-County Collaboration

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## **Timeline for progress:**

- Pipestone/Nobles need to begin thinking of ourselves as one agency in order to receive the next level of benefits a multi-county system can provide.
- Implementation of one management team across both systems has begun (full integration April 2009/duplication remains in one position)
  - One administrative team increases unity and consistency while also reducing any duplication that may currently exist.
- Consider a letter of intent or begin JPA discussions (June 2009)
- If current discussions regarding human service delivery continue, we may be in a good position to work with the larger region to pursue financial incentives (pilot opportunities within Region 8).
- As we move forward within the larger region, Pipestone/Nobles can negotiate from a position of strength, given our experience with each other and multi-county partnership.

# Closing

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## Closing remarks:

- Generally speaking, Nobles and Pipestone counties have historically both been under developed in terms of programming, best practices, preventative strategies, etc.
- Specific program issues require immediate attention while simultaneously attending to the details around the joining of our two systems. This will take some time and we can expect some issues will need to be overcome.
- The administrative staff (Nobles County employees), while very experienced and competent program managers, need to shape and lead our agency, moving forward.
- Leadership and vision across the management team will be a major point of emphasis in our next phase of development.
- The budget, overall, is in very good shape. NCFSA has been diligent about drawing down revenue from all available State and Federal sources. This has a significant impact on Nobles County's low per capita costs.
- We will need to carefully manage out-of-home placement expenses in order to achieve the budget targets for 2009 and beyond.

# Closing

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- Future areas of work:
  - Transit/volunteer driver program
  - Collections/Estate Recoveries
  - Child Support Centralization
  - Licensing Centralization
  - Accounting Centralization (cross training has already begun in this area)
  - Continue to explore multi-county collaboration within the region
  - ETC.