Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Evaluation: 2012 Interim Report

II: The Role of the Intermediary

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Report Authors:
Debra J. Rog, Ph.D.
Kathryn A. Henderson, Ph.D.
Ranita Jain, M.P.P.
Martena C. Reed, M.S.W.
John R. Haight, B.S.

Westat

Overview

The Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative is a $60 million comprehensive systems change intervention aimed at ending family homelessness. Implemented in three counties in the Puget Sound region of Washington State (King, Pierce, and Snohomish), the Initiative is guided by a theory of change that builds on proven and best practices as well as emerging new concepts from a number of communities across the United States. The Initiative, created over the course of several years by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), was approved in October 2007 and officially launched in 2009. Building Changes, a local nonprofit organization with a long history of working on homelessness issues at local, state, and federal levels that was designated in 2004 by the state to oversee a public and private pool of funds for statewide supportive housing programs, was selected by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in 2009 as the intermediary to operate the Initiative. The three communities were funded to conduct a three-stage planning process, culminating at the end of 2010 in five year implementation plans that are currently being put into action.[1]

Westat, a national research firm with extensive background in the evaluation of program and system-level interventions for homeless families, has been commissioned to conduct a longitudinal evaluation of both the implementation and outcomes of the Initiative. This first set of coordinated reports documents both the baseline status of the systems for homeless families in each of the counties prior to the Initiative and the implementation of the Initiative in its first two years after the launch (2009 –2011). The reports are intended to provide a foundation of understanding of the Initiative and to provide formative feedback to BMGF, Building Changes, and stakeholders in the Initiative counties.

The eight brief reports, all under the title, *Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative Evaluation 2012 Interim Report*, are available on BuildingChanges.org. They include the following:

Executive Summary
Summary of Key Baseline and Early Implementation Findings
    I.   The Role of the Funder
    II.   The Role of the Intermediary
    III.   The Role of the Evaluation
    IV.   The Role of the Counties: Promising Practices
    V.   Interagency Collaboration and Data-Driven Decision Making
    VI.   Advocacy

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[1] Due to changes in the economic climate since the strategy was initially approved in 2007 and the length of time it took for the Initiative to unfold, BMGF has decided to extend the timeframe of the Initiative for an additional three years to allow for economic recovery.

Three sets of appendices include additional description and analysis of the implementation of the Initiative in each of the Initiative counties (Appendices I A-C); the role of selected organizations in the system and in the Initiative (Appendices II A-G); and the list of key informants for the Westat site visits in summer 2009 and February 2011 (Appendix III).

This report describes the Initiative's intermediary, Building Changes, including a description of how it is organized, the roles it has assumed, and the activities it has undertaken in the first two years and a summary appraisal of its efforts during this time.

Overview of Building Changes

Founded as AIDS Housing of Washington in 1988, Building Changes, a non-profit organization based in Seattle, Washington, has had a long history of working at federal, state, and local levels on strategies to help vulnerable populations, especially those with housing and homelessness issues. In 2007, the organization changed its name to Building Changes to better reflect its work on systems change and policy reform in the area of homelessness. Moreover, the organization's legacy work in HIV/AIDS, especially in owning and managing housing for this special population, is in the process of being discontinued.

Today, most of Building Changes' work is focused on vulnerable and homeless families, but with application to all populations, including veterans and individuals and youth. In recent years, Building Changes work has largely focused on systems that affect broad populations; including employment and public benefits, child welfare, and domestic violence. The organization's three primary activities are grant-making, capacity building/technical assistance, and advocacy.

A significant portion of its family homelessness work stems from the Washington Families Fund. In 2004, the Washington Families Fund was established by the Washington State Legislature as the first-of-its-kind public private partnership devoted to long-term funding for supportive housing for homeless families. The Fund was created in an effort to expand the lessons learned and impacts of the Sound Families Initiative to a statewide context. Building Changes administers this Fund, has assembled 24 public and private partners, and awards service grants to supportive housing programs across Washington State. In 2009 the Washington Families Fund expanded to support the Initiative in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. Over time, Building Changes expects to draw from the learnings in these three counties, and expand the Initiative statewide.

Selection as the Systems Initiative Intermediary

In 2009, due to Building Changes' experience with developing relationships, providing technical assistance, and awarding grants across Washington State, BMGF designated Building Changes to operate as the intermediary for the systems initiative. The selection of Building Changes resulted in BMGF naming the Initiative the Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative in order

to connect it to the existing Washington Families Fund program and set the stage for Building Changes to expand the systems change work statewide.

On March 19, 2009, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by 24 entities for the purpose of articulating a shared intention to continue and expand the public-private partnership administered by Building Changes and known as the Washington Families Fund (WFF). Partners included the state (as endorsed by the Governor); the three counties of King, Pierce, and Snohomish (as endorsed by the respective County Executives); the major cities of Seattle, Tacoma, and Everett (as endorsed by the respective mayors); two prominent Puget Sound employers, Boeing and Microsoft; the five public housing authorities in the three counties; community and philanthropic foundations in the area; and the United Way entities for each county. As part of this partnership, a WFF Leadership Committee was formed, co-chaired by the Governor or his or her designee, and a committee member from a philanthropic partner. The purpose of the Committee, as stated in the MOU, is "to champion and refine the goals of the Washington Families Fund, review evaluation findings and monitor progress toward the stated goals, identify and promote policy needed policy changes, recommend investment strategies, and approve policies for pooled funds." The Washington Families Fund Leadership Committee meets twice a year.

The MOU also established a Technical Steering Committee. This committee was slated to meet four times a year and, co-chaired by a Building Changes representative and a government representative, to advise the counties in each phase of the Systems Initiative, to determine and promote opportunities for collaboration and learning throughout the counties and state, to make funding recommendations to Building Changes and partners, and when relevant, to review and share evaluation findings. Building Changes, however, decided not to create a separate Technical Steering Committee since much of this work was part of the existing purview of Washington State's Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness. Instead, Building Changes' Board of Directors created a WFF Program Committee that sets the funding policies and priorities for all WFF-related grants. Representatives on this committee include Board members and members of the community, including the Program Officer from BMGF.

Since 2009, Building Changes has received $4,031,000 to operate as an intermediary for the Initiative. These funds support efforts related to the organization improving its internal capacity, and support the technical assistance, convening, communication, and advocacy work related to the Initiative. Also, as of 2011, nine of 27 Building Changes staff were involved, to a varying extent, in the work of the Initiative.

Role as Systems Initiative Intermediary

Intermediaries are defined as the "substantive link between two segments of society: organizations with resources (funders) and those organizations that are seeking resources (community organizations and initiatives) (ASDC, 2002). Intermediaries assemble the resources

from one or more funders, such as government, foundations, corporations) and distribute them to non-profit organizations intended to strengthen communities.

As the intermediary for the Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative, Building Changes is funded by BMGF and co-manages the Initiative with key Foundation staff. Its role involves working with each of the respective county leads, local housing and mainstream service providers, and government agencies to guide the planning of the Initiative and to put these plans and strategies into action. Building Changes has undertaken several key roles, most of which are common functions for intermediaries (ASDC, 2002; Fieldstone Alliance, 2008; Schorr, 2010). These include the following:

- Grant-making;
- Technical assistance, training, capacity building, ongoing support;
- Convening of meetings and fostering peer support and networking;
- Documentation/synthesis;
- Pilot projects; and
- Policy and advocacy.

Table II_1 provides a detailed listing of the activities within these roles that Building Changes has conducted since 2009, the target audiences for each activity, and the focus area of the Initiative that is being addressed. The four focus areas constitute the Theory of Change that undergirds the Initiative and are described more completely in the *Summary Report*. The four focus areas include the following:

1. Promising Practices (in five pillar areas of activity: coordinated entry, prevention, rapid housing, tailored services, and employment);
2. Interagency Collaboration;
3. Data-Driven Decision Making; and
4. Policy and Advocacy.

As can be seen from the table, although Building Changes' work spans the different target audiences and focus areas of the Initiative, to date most of the work has been concentrated at the county level either with individual counties or across the counties, and focused on the promising practices that align with the five pillars. A brief review of each category of activity follows.

Grant-making/Funding
One of Building Changes' intermediary roles is to provide funding support for the counties as they implement the Initiative. This support involves allocation, oversight, and administration of WFF System Innovation Grants (SIG), and participation in each county's funders' group.

In January 2011, Building Changes made its first SIG awards. The organization re-grants BMGF funds, making targeted investments to providers to support the implementation of promising practices work in the Initiative counties. Throughout the span of the Initiative, Building Changes will receive roughly $30 million from BMGF to re-grant as SIGs. In order to receive these funds, organizations need to secure $2.50 of public funds for each requested SIG dollar. The WFF Program Committee reviews the grant applications and makes funding recommendations to the Building Changes Board of Directors.

For the first round of funding in 2011, Building Changes had $4.5 million available for SIG grants. The allocation for these funds was split across the three counties, with a 40 percent, 30 percent, and 30 percent split for King, Pierce, and Snohomish, respectively. In 2011, Building Changes granted $3,086,317 in SIG funds, composed of $1,800,000 in King County, $603,883 in Pierce County, and $682,434 in Snohomish County. Building Changes worked with funders in each of the three counties to align funding priorities and policies to release the SIG funds.

In King County, $1,800,000 of SIG funds was matched with $6,211,600 of funds from the 2163 program, the local Vets and Human Service Levy program, and the United Way of King County. This funding supports the implementation of a coordinated entry and assessment system (operated by the non-profit agency Catholic Community Services), a prevention program (operated by the non-profit agency Neighborhood House), and a time-limited housing program (operated by the non-profit agency Wellspring Family Services). Details of the work these agencies are undertaking to implement the promising practices are provided in Appendix II-A of this report.

In Pierce County, $603,883 of SIG funds was matched with $1,672,209 of funds from the county's 2163 program. (This matched funding comes from the Homeless Housing and Assistance Act that raises revenue through real estate document recording fees). The funding supports the implementation of a centralized intake and prevention system (operated by the non-profit agency Associated Ministries), a Landlord Liaison Project (operated by the non-profit agency Metropolitan Development Council), and a rapid housing and tailored services program with the Tacoma Housing Authority and McCarver Elementary school (operated by the Tacoma Housing Authority). Details of the work these agencies are undertaking to implement the promising practices are provided in Appendix II-B of this report.

Table II_1. Building Changes Activities

Intermediary Activities	Target Audiences				Focus Area			
	Specific County	Tri-county	State	National	1 PP*	2 IC	3 Data	4 P&A
Grant-making/ Funding								
Fund SIG grants	K P S				✔			
Participate on Funders' Group	K P S					✔		✔
Technical Assistance, Capacity Building, and Ongoing Support								
Meet regularly with county leads	K P S							
Host learning opportunities		✔			✔			
Sponsor sessions with experts: (e.g., Dale Jarvis; Katharine Gale)		✔			✔			
Work with DV Coalition		✔			✔			✔
Assisting on developing a funding assessment document and tool box	K P S				✔		✔	
Assist county with staff development curriculum	K				✔			
Work with WDC, KCHA, SHA, and KC on employment programs	K				✔			
Work with county on organizational assessments/ tailored services	P				✔			
Work on developing employment navigator projects	P				✔			

Intermediary Activities	Target Audiences				Focus Area			
	Specific County	Tri-county	State	National	1 PP*	2 IC	3 Data	4 P&A
Work with on a series of trainings for providers	S				✔			
Convening and Peer Support/Networking								
Convene and manage WFF Leadership Committee		✔	✔		✔	✔	✔	✔
Co-convene the WFF Data Solutions Workgroup		✔	✔				✔	✔
Co-convene monthly tri-county meetings		✔			✔	✔	✔	✔
Facilitate peer learnings after hosting Learning Opportunities		✔			✔			
Hosted a networking session between employers and housing providers		✔			✔			
Convened Silos to Systems: Solutions for Vulnerable Families meeting		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔		✔
Documentation/ Synthesis								
Develop policy paper of family homelessness		✔	✔	✔		✔		✔
Document employment navigators		✔			✔			

Table II_1. Building Changes Activities (continued)

Intermediary Activities	Target Audiences				Focus Area			
	Specific County	Tri-county	State	National	1 PP*	2 IC*	3 Data*	4 P&A*
Document funders groups		✔				✔		
Document coordinated entry		✔			✔			
Pilot Projects								
Work on Child Welfare Pilot	K P		✔			✔		✔
Policy/Advocacy								
Led effort for passed legislation on telephonic consent for HMIS			✔		✔			✔
Advocate for funding for grant-making			✔					
Support other advocacy agendas		✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔

* PP: Promising Practices. IC: Interagency Collaboration. Data: Data-Driven Decision Making. P&A: Policy and Advocacy
** K P S: King, Pierce, and Snohomish Counties

In Snohomish County, $682,434 of SIG funds was matched with $1,707,916 of funds from various sources, including the Workforce Investment Act, the Community Services Block Grant program, the Consolidated Homeless Grant program, the Emergency Housing Program, and Edmonds Community College. This funding supports the implementation of all five promising practices for the pilot Initiative implementation. The non-profit agency Catholic Community Services of Western Washington is implementing coordinated entry and tailored services pilot activities. The non-profit agency Volunteers of America is implementing pilot prevention activities, and the local YWCA and Edmonds Community College are implementing tailored services and economic opportunities pilot activities. Details of the work these agencies are undertaking to implement the promising practices are provided in Appendix II-C of this report.

In addition to administering the SIG funds, Building Changes is a member of each of the county's local funders' groups. In each county, the funders' group includes representatives from local

government and non-government organizations that have financial resources for housing and homelessness programs. Building Changes has an active role in each of these funders' groups by offering strategic guidance for setting funding priorities, and leveraging SIG funds as a resource to align funding decisions for homelessness programs. Further description of the funders' groups is presented in *Interagency Collaboration and Data*.

Technical Assistance, Capacity Building, Ongoing Support
Much of Building Changes' intermediary role is to support and guide the work of the Initiative counties by working closely with the county leads in the implementation of their efforts. This support includes regular contact with each of the county leads and holding additional meetings as needed to help them implement each focus area of the work. Building Changes also works with local organizations, including housing authorities, workforce development agencies, and housing providers, to provide technical assistance and assist in the development of systems-change plans.

The work to date has focused on implementing the five promising practices in the first focus area of the Initiative. As an example, Building Changes hosted a series of "learning opportunities" for provider agencies in each of the counties in the summer of 2011. Each session included a speaker who represented a community from another area of the country, such as Grand Rapids, Michigan; Chicago, Illinois; and Salt Lake City, Utah, where they have been implementing one or more of the promising practices outlined in the theory of change. The objective of these series was to increase providers' awareness of promising practices, and to improve their understanding of how they can be implemented. Another example of technical assistance is Building Changes hosting a two-day session in January 2012 for a national prevention expert to meet with group of funders and county and city planners. The goal of this session was to convene stakeholders, and have them develop prevention planning efforts for the upcoming year.

Building Changes also works with BMGF to jointly sponsor sessions on key topics for the monthly tri-county meetings. These meetings foster cross-county learning as well as provide opportunities to hear from representatives from mainstream agencies, such as the school or child welfare system, and to strategize with county leads on how they can be involved with the Initiative. For example, as a result of one of the tri-county meetings, Building Changes staff initiated conversations with a group of stakeholders in Pierce County about how the county and workforce development agencies can align their funding and develop an employment program for families identified by local McKinney Vento liaisons. There is currently an informal workgroup composed of staff from Building Change, Pierce County, Workforce Central, and Washington Women's Employment and Education (WWEE), that is developing plans for a Pierce County McKinney Vento Employment Project.

Finally, Building Changes provides direct technical assistance on key tasks for each of the counties. For example, Building Changes staff is working with King County to develop a

curriculum for housing providers to prepare its staff for implementing tailored services. Building Changes staff also has worked with Pierce County in developing an organizational assessment of each housing provider and to develop a plan for each agency to implement a tailored services approach.

A detailed listing of Building Changes' technical assistance, capacity building, and ongoing support activities is provided in Table II_1.

Convening Peer Support/Networking
Building Changes has assumed the role of convener, both for the three counties and for larger audiences to support the work of the Washington Families Fund Systems Initiative. The work includes holding regular meetings, such as the semi-annual Washington Families Fund Leadership Committee meeting and the monthly tri-county meetings, as well as organizing other meetings as needed, such as the Data Solutions Workgroup, which was designed to address problems with the Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS), and the employment training session.

Building Changes also has taken a larger convening role to support the work of the Initiative. In October 2011, Building Changes, in cooperation with BMGF, the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), the National Alliance to End Homelessness, the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Casey Family Programs, organized a meeting of local, state, and national leaders in the field. The purpose of this meeting, *Silos to Systems: Solutions for Vulnerable Families,* was to develop a shared agenda for policy and systems change informed by the most innovative thinking and promising practices. The meeting, supported by two policy background papers produced by Building Changes and CSH, focused on the fields of child welfare and income and work supports, with particular attention to housing needs and solutions for the most vulnerable and homeless families with children. The background papers documented why these two areas are in particular need of attention for vulnerable families, and offered recommendations for actions that may help strengthen the gaps in these fields. Work stimulated from this meeting is underway.

Documentation/Synthesis
A smaller role for Building Changes is documenting best practices as well as developing syntheses and white papers on key topics. In February 2011, the organization released a policy paper entitled, *Ending Family Homelessness in Washington State: An Emerging Approach*, which developed a framework for understanding homeless and vulnerable families, strategies for serving them, and policy recommendations for ending homelessness. Also, recently, based on the work of the three counties, Building Changes has started documenting the functions and roles for employment navigators and funders groups, and the process of coordinated entry being implemented in each of the three counties. For the last topic, the intermediary has also conducted a webinar, in collaboration with the Department of Commerce and Pierce, Clark, and Kitsap counties.

Pilot Projects

One major project that Building Changes has undertaken as part of the WFF Systems Initiative is working with local stakeholders to apply for a Title II_E waiver application under the Child and Family Services Improvement and Innovation Act. This waiver will provide Washington State with flexibility in use of its Title II_E funds, such as the ability to provide prevention services or services after a family has reunified. In doing this work, Building Changes is drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement between 17 public housing authorities and the Washington State Children's Administration. This agreement will formalize a relationship between the two entities to work together and combine rental subsidies with tailored, community-based services for families involved with the child welfare system.

Policy and Advocacy

Building Changes also partners with housing and homelessness advocacy organizations, public entities, and private philanthropy to promote effective programs, pass legislation, and maintain or increase funding aimed at ending homelessness. To date, a large portion of this advocacy work occurs at the state level. For example, in 2011, Building Changes was successful in leading an effort to pass state legislation allowing telephonic consent for HMIS data collection. This policy change was instrumental to the successful implementation of coordinated intake for the Initiative counties.

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Appraisal

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Over the course of the evaluation, we will examine the intermediary's work in facilitating the strategy development and implementation of the WFF Systems Initiative. This includes providing leadership, providing resources, fostering collaboration within and across the three counties and with the state, and fostering new initiatives, policies, and ideas to reduce family homelessness. At this stage in the evaluation, it is too early to examine all the areas of outcome, but it is appropriate to assess the extent to which Building Changes has begun to provide leadership and resources to foster the development of the Initiative county models, and the receptivity the organization has received at the county and state levels in its role, and the extent to which it has begun to co-manage the Initiative effectively with the Foundation.

Building Changes' work has spanned the four focus areas of the Initiative, including the following:

- Working with the counties to guide the development and implementation of their pillar strategies by providing resources especially through the SIG grants, offering ideas, establishing partnerships, and providing leadership through its various activities (Focus Area 1);

- Fostering the collaboration and coordination of agencies and organizations within and across the three counties, and within the state, and helping to foster a shared vision for the Initiative (Focus Area 2);
- Promoting improvements in the collection and use of data, primarily through the Data Solutions Work Group (Focus Area 3);
- Leveraging funding, promoting coordination and realignment of funding at the state level (Focus Area 4); and
- Promoting specific policy, advocacy, and innovative programmatic initiatives to reduce family homelessness (Focus Area 4).

In our two site visits, in 2009 and 2011, we had the opportunity to speak with the county leads and other stakeholders in the individual counties and the state about the role of Building Changes as the intermediary for the Initiative, as well as with staff from the Foundation and Building Changes itself. Through these interviews, we noted strong recognition and appreciation for Building Changes' support in the Initiative. Interviewees at both the state and county level noted Building Changes' growing role as a funder, convener, and provider of technical assistance for the Initiative. The organization's history in the housing and homelessness arena, particularly with building relationships and coalescing public and private funders, was also recognized, especially by individuals who had worked with the organization prior to the Initiative. In addition, the organization's ability to get the telephonic consent passed at the state level was applauded by several individuals whom we had interviewed.

Yet there was continued confusion about the intermediary's role, primarily at the county level by those most engaged in the Initiative. Several interviewees, especially at the county level, saw BMGF, not Building Changes, as having the lead role in implementing the Initiative. For example, there was confusion and some frustration, about which entity (BMGF or Building Changes) has the authority to approve plans for the SIG funds. As the Initiative was getting implemented, there was concern across the three counties that Building Changes could not make a decision, such as what constitutes a match, without getting the Foundation's approval. They viewed the planning process and initial grant-making as taking an inordinate amount of time, reflecting some flexibility but also indecision.

Stakeholders also often referenced BMGF as playing the integral role in convening stakeholders for Initiative learning and planning efforts. At the time, the Foundation had provided the county with the planning and Infrastructure Grants and had been the main funder. Many in the counties were yet unaware of Building Changes' role in the Initiative. At the time, the intermediary had only awarded one SIG grant, and had not yet participated in all of the three Funders' Groups. Since the 2011 site visit, Building Changes has implemented many more activities, but many of the activities continue to involve the strong participation of BMGF. It will continue to be important to assess the extent to which Building Changes can grow in its role and gain autonomy in its work with the counties. Though the Foundation and Building Changes are

co-managing the Initiative, the fact that BMGF funds are the source for both organizations' resources creates a natural imbalance between the two organizations that was exacerbated in the early implementation of the Initiative by the Foundation's need to approve county plans and infrastructure grant applications.

In addition, at the time of the 2011 visit, Building Changes was not yet viewed as having a strong technical assistance role at the local level. At least one county voiced the desire for more cross-county leadership and direction from Building Changes. At the time, the intermediary had not undertaken many of the technical assistance and convening activities that have been noted in this section. For example, the monthly tri-county meetings had not yet been initiated, and the Silos to Systems meeting had not occurred. As the evaluation continues, it will be important to understand the extent to which the technical assistance, capacity building, and support roles of Building Changes is well received. More importantly, it will be important to understand how these roles guide and strengthen the work in the counties; particularly with helping improve providers' ability and capacity to implement the promising practices work that is required for systems change.

Finally, in early 2011, Building Changes' had a few staff working on the Initiative , with one staff person working closely with the Foundation having the most central identity with the counties. The organization itself had weathered some staff transitions as it was moving into its new identity, reducing its legacy work, building its skill base in areas needed in the Initiative (e.g., advocacy, communication, grant-making) as well as preparing for a new executive director. As of February 2012, the Board of Directors approved a three year strategic business plan that firmly established Building Changes' role as a systems change intermediary and directed an organizational restructuring to support the systems change work. This includes creating three new leadership positions: Director of Policy, Director of Strategic Initiatives, and Director of Programs. In addition, the roles and responsibilities for all of program staff across all teams have been redefined to include identifying, developing, and implementing systems change work. Their work is largely focused on Initiative-related items, and the staff now has regular weekly meetings where they share and discuss systems change plans for the three Initiative counties and statewide. As the evaluation continues, it will important to understand how these organizational changes impacts Building Changes' ability to lend their expertise for technical assistance and capacity building work.

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Summary

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Building Changes' work to date has spanned different audiences and the breadth of the theory of change, but has been largely concentrated at the county level and on the five pillars of promising practices. The active role of BMGF in the co-management of the Initiative has created challenges in Building Changes' ability to make decisions on its own as well as being viewed as the Initiative leader. Confusion about roles with active funders is the second most commonly report challenge for intermediaries (Fieldstone Alliance, 2008) and therefore is something to be

expected, but also needs to be explicitly addressed and reconciled. It will be important to continue to assess how Building Changes is being perceived and received in the counties and the state as it expands and deepens its role while the BMGF takes a less direct role in the funding of county efforts. Recommendations for Building Changes and for the Foundation to consider in the next year of the Initiative to facilitate the intermediary role are provided in the Summary Report.