

Wraparound Practice: Chapter 4b.3

Family Partners and the Wraparound Process

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As communities and organizations begin to develop capacity to implement the wraparound process, issues of staffing will arise. It is generally accepted that wraparound projects will need some type of process/team facilitator, who may also be referred to as a “care coordinator,” “resource coordinator,” or “wraparound facilitator.” Depending on the funding stream and generally acceptable wraparound practice within the state or local municipality, other staff roles may also be a part of creating infrastructure to implement a quality process. One such staff role is that of a family partner, who may be referred to as a parent partner, family support partner, peer support or family advocate. Family partners employed in wraparound are individuals who have experienced the child/family service system from the “other side of the counter,” as caregivers or loved ones of recipients of service.

History of Family Partners in Wraparound

Early wraparound efforts typically began with a target population of young people who had spent a great deal of time in restrictive environments in order to access treatment. Initial projects focused on returning these young people to their families and communities by redirecting funds, creating new interventions and arranging for people to serve and support one child at a time. Since these early efforts typically began with a need to redirect dollars that were already being spent, they started with a minimum of staff to keep overhead low. This minimal staffing usually involved someone to take on a facilitation role to bring people together and to follow through on managing bureaucra-

cy, funding issues and assuring that services were provided. In the early 1990s, many system of care projects began to experiment with hiring family members, including parents, in addition to funding free-standing family organizations. For those family members who were hired within service delivery organizations, a number of challenges arose.

To start off, several things quickly became clear about the organizational environments that employed these parents/family members. The first was that it had to be everyone's responsibility to interrupt bias, blame, and judgment as it impacted families and caregivers accessing services. Those sites that expected the hired family member to take on sole responsibility of correcting institutional bias soon found that those family members felt isolated and burdened by this responsibility.

The second lesson was that it wasn't enough to just hire a family member. In order to achieve results, family members' efforts were more effective when paired with a practice change strategy. It wasn't helpful if the "host environment" employing these parents and family members wasn't prepared to change the way it interacted with families receiving services. If the model of service remained expert-driven, there wasn't enough room to allow the designated experts to continue in their role while also integrating the expertise brought to the table by the family support partner. In effect, without changing the way of doing business, there seemed to be room for only one "expert" at the table.

In contrast, some agencies engaged in hiring parents and family members were also implementing wraparound efforts in order to move from an expert-driven model to a collaborative model. This was an attempt to align direct service with system of care values. It was not unusual for the parents and family members hired at these agencies to find a sense of coherence, belonging and purpose within the wraparound process. Indeed, parents hired at these service provider agencies often found themselves as the primary advocates for implementation of a quality wraparound process.

Models for Integrating Family Partners in the Wraparound Process

As wraparound expanded, second- and third-generation projects began to hire parents and family members as part of initial program design. Some early wraparound projects had designed and funded structures to support family involvement, but later projects were more likely to pair family members with wraparound facilitation staff to facilitate high-quality wraparound delivery as well build family involvement into the overall system.

As projects began to experiment with the roles of family members in wraparound projects, regional variances and opportunities presented themselves. These regional variations were sometimes driven by funding streams, as in the case of projects that were heavily dependent on federal entitlements. Other variations came from community or system context. Communities that had a strong, free-standing family organization might approach it one way while other communities that were experiencing broad-scale system change through lawsuit or legislative action might choose to implement differently. Regardless of the particular design, the vast majority of these projects involved in employing family members found that they could see direct benefits from the peer-to-peer support and activities of family members sharing with other family members.

The tables that follow describe and define various roles for family members hired within wraparound projects. The first model that a project selects may not prove to be the model they ultimately implement. Additionally, there are many more roles for family members within an overall system than those typically attached to a wraparound project. Regardless of the model chosen, if you are an administrator who is planning or implementing a wraparound project, it is important to keep in mind several principles about family partners:

1. *The wraparound family partner has to be someone who has experienced the service system from the consumer perspective. This unique perspective allows these indi-*



viduals to relate to families in unique ways and also helps professionals see their activities from a different perspective.

2. *Wraparound family partners bring a wealth of formal training in addition to their personal experiences.* Many wraparound projects who have employed family partners have found that they come to the table with a variety of formal education in addition to their personal experiences. Journalists, marketers, website designers, party planners and social workers are some of

the professional roles that family partners have brought to the table, in addition to their personal experience of caring about someone who has received services.

3. *It is personal to the family partners.* We hire family partners because of their personal experience. It doesn't make sense to turn around and ask them to "not take things personally" when their first condition of employment is their personal experience.

Possible Models for Implementing Family Partners in Wraparound Projects:

1. Paired Facilitator + Family Partner Team

Option	Defined	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Paired Facilitator + Family Partner Team	This model consists of a wraparound facilitator and family partner paired to implement the wraparound process. The first responsibility of the family partner is to assure that the parent/caregiver's voice and perspective is understood by other wraparound staff and the child and family team. When the Family Partner is sure that the parent's perspective is understood, they will also ensure that wraparound implementation is done with quality and adherence to practice steps. Typically, this model involves increasing caseload size somewhat since both parties are working directly with the same families. The family partner will also perform support activities with families as they go through the wraparound process.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wraparound is a complex process: having two people see it through together can increase reliability of wraparound practice. 2. Having a shared caseload increases continuity in the event of turnover. 3. The paired approach models a true parent/professional partnership when implemented well. 4. Multiple perspectives blended in a team may associate with a broader and more inclusive view of the family. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Both parties can end up "stepping" on each other's roles. 2. Issues of caseload size and cost have not been resolved. If a facilitator can manage a caseload of a certain amount, how should that increase when the project also hires one or more family partners? 3. This model runs the risk of these two people being so tightly connected that the family or other team members can feel on the "outside." 4. Creating the sense of both parties on the same team can be challenging.

Possible Models for Implementing Family Partners in Wraparound Projects: 2. Peer Parent Support

Option	Defined	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>2. Peer Parent Support</p>	<p>This model is more inter-dependent than the paired model in that family partners are hired to provide peer support to families experiencing the wraparound process. In this model, the family partner meets the family either with or around the same time as the wrap-around Facilitator. The family partner uses a method to identify whether the family will need contact that is intensive, moderate or supportive. This range includes at least weekly face-to-face contact and attendance at most child and family team meetings (intensive) to regular phone contact and attendance at child and family team meetings. In this model, family partners provide accurate and reliable information to families they can use in decision making as well as connecting to families to others who have a shared experience.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Allows the wrap-around facilitator and family partner to be connected when they need to be and independent when they need to be. 2. Allows the family partner to tailor their response to each family’s unique needs. 3. Direct support can be delivered at the family’s pace rather than in pace with wraparound. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Both parties (family partner and wrap-around facilitator) have to work at keeping communication open and accurate. 2. Either party (facilitator and family partner) can end up at cross purposes. 3. Wraparound administration must make sure that support activities performed by family partners aren’t seen as somehow “less important.” 4. More challenging to build accountability for family partners, because much of their direct work with families may be “unseen.” Thus, a project using this model needs to develop means to recognize and document good work.

Possible Models for Implementing Family Partners in Wraparound Projects:

3. Parents as Peer Interveners

Option	Defined	Advantages	Disadvantages
3. Parents as Peer Interveners	<p>This model creates a capacity for family partners to deliver direct services, supports and interventions to parents and caregivers. This model starts with an expectation that some parents/caregivers will benefit from direct interventions that are provided using a peer-to-peer model. In this model, the child and family team will work collaboratively with the family and other team members to identify needs, goals and strategies. If the team reaches agreement about a need, the parent intervener will be called in to accomplish that need. These individuals will spend minimal time in team meetings and much more time working directly with families, in particular parents and caregivers. Examples of activities these peer interveners will work on include helping a parent locate and access community resources, coaching skills that will help the parent/caregiver cope successfully, assisting the parent/caregiver with building a social network and other imaginative responses that are identified by the child and family team. These peer parent interveners are typically time limited and goal oriented.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creates capacity to get work done outside of team meetings. 2. Opens up a possibility of peer-to-peer work with parents who are struggling with building new skills or resources. 3. Creates more options for parents to be hired within the system outside of a wrap-around process. This role doesn't need wraparound to happen for the work to occur. 4. Can bill federal entitlements for this work as long as the peer-to-peer work with parents is tied to the identified child's diagnostic needs. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This model may lend itself to a "fix-it" mentality with parents or caregivers. Projects must guard against this. 2. The time-limited, goal-oriented nature of this arrangement can cause parents to feel let down if they counted on support provided by the peer parent Intervener. 3. If using federal Medicaid funding to support this role, the program has to demonstrate how these peer services to the caregiver relate to the identified child's diagnosis.

Possible Models for Implementing Family Partners in Wraparound Projects: 4. Parents as System Developers or Family Involvement Coordinators

Option	Defined	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>4. Parents as System Developers or Family Involvement Coordinators</p>	<p>This design is especially well suited in those projects that don't have full funding to hire as many family partners as they would prefer, or in sites that are struggling to locate and hire parents/caregivers who are willing to work in the wraparound project. In this model, the project hires a relatively small number of parents or caregivers to assist with start-up activities. In this model, the role of the family involvement coordinator is to develop the hospitality of the wraparound project specifically as it welcomes parents and caregivers into the project. Typically, in this role, the family involvement coordinator will meet with parents/caregivers as they enter the project to provide an overview of the wraparound process as well as inviting the parent/caregiver to call any time with concerns or questions. The family involvement coordinator may not have contact again with that parent as they go through wraparound. If problems occur, either through identification by the parent or program staff, the family involvement coordinator or parent system developer can troubleshoot the situation to ensure that it is resolved and that the parent's perspective is understood.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. This role is effective when the parent system developer or family involvement coordinator has influence and access to the project's administration. It assures family perspective in wraparound management. 2. Creates a capacity for parents to connect even when the project can't hire enough parents to be available on every team. 3. The family involvement coordinator can develop some community activities such as support groups so that families can connect outside of wraparound. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Staff can "over-rely" on the family involvement coordinator to "fix" conflicts with caregivers rather than resolving differences themselves. 2. The family involvement coordinator/parent system developer who gets called in as the troubleshooter may never get a chance to really connect with teams that are working. This can lead to discouragement. 3. Other wraparound staff can experience the family involvement coordinator/parent system developer as "policing" their practice as families are invited to call them with concerns. Projects have to guard against a backlash around this role.

Possible Models for Implementing Family Partners in Wraparound Projects:

5. Families as Wraparound Facilitators

Option	Defined	Advantages	Disadvantages
5. Families as Wraparound Facilitators	Parents and family members are effective advocates for high-quality wraparound implementation. As a result, some wraparound projects have hired parents and caregivers as wraparound facilitators. In this role, the parent or caregiver will take on the responsibilities of any wraparound facilitator. Those sites that have elected to hire wraparound alumni as facilitators expect that the person in the facilitator role will share information about their personal wraparound experience as part of implementing the process, as a way to fully engage family members.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal experience allows for strong connections between the family and the wraparound facilitator (who is also a parent). 2. Many parents can bring their personal experience of navigating systems and communities to the wraparound planning table. 3. This model enables efficient use of staff roles, especially for projects that don't have a great deal of funding available for staffing. 4. There is some thought that family members "get" wraparound quicker because of their personal experience. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Wraparound family partner and wraparound facilitator are two different, full-time roles. Placing these roles together may result in neither getting done well. 2. Projects have to guard against creating a dual workforce of those "professionally" trained and those "personally" trained. 3. Regardless of which "type" of training the facilitators received, all facilitators require consistent support and supervision.

Summary

There are many roles for hired family members within the wraparound process. These descriptions are not intended to be exhaustive but rather should be seen as starting concepts. Wraparound managers who are interested in hiring family members as part of their wraparound delivery should start by creating a model with clear assumptions, and then monitor that model to assure that the initial assumptions are being realized and make informed adjustments based on results. Key ingredients for building an effective family partner capacity include building a strong training component so family partners can continue to develop and refine their skill sets, developing an adequate career ladder so family partners can continue to grow and improve, and developing an adequate feedback loop so family partners can modify their role as the project matures.

A word about youth partners: Many wrap-around projects are beginning to experiment with hiring youth partners, peers or “near peers” who have experienced wraparound or system inter-

vention. This is a relatively new development in wraparound implementation and should be treated with the same careful consideration of other innovations in wraparound. As with the family partner, the youth partner requires model development, ongoing training and support as well as creating opportunities for individuals in these roles to grow, advance and develop.

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