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Section 5:
Leadership
Development
for Families &
Youth

Leadership Development for Families and Youth

Families in Colorado have had a plethora of training opportunities and an informal peer support network, supported by The Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, National Association of Mental Illness, Mental Health America of Colorado, Empower and various other agencies, advocates and liaisons across our child and family systems.

Continuing leadership development of our families and youth is essential. It is equally important for the board to conduct regular self-reflection and assessment around its effectiveness in using community input, ensuring families and youth are comfortable to speak up and take initiative on the board is important (Pires, 2002). Feedback from family and youth members on ways to improve communication skills will be valuable in retaining family and youth engagement.

Building leadership is a deliberate process. As many of your current board members may have work experience and post high school education to draw from, some of our family and youth partners may not. Their contributions to the board come from their personal experiences within your system. They may not present as polished as other board members, but have an equal contribution to make to your discussions and decisions.

Family Leaders are invested in the outcomes of their involvement. Involving family members early on in a process and in sharing leadership responsibilities may foster a greater buy-in from the families on your board. Your board leadership may need to change from independent to interdependent, moving to a more collaborative leadership paradigm for board decision-making.

Leadership Development

Providing leadership development opportunities during and outside board meetings sends the message that:

- Your board is supportive of family and youth leaders;
- You want your family leaders to be successful;
- You want the commitment of family leaders to invest in the board; and
- You want to minimize mistakes and ensure they have clarity of information.

In addition, benefits of training will yield a more competent partner, with less of a need to ask other staff to help them understand concepts or procedures.

In order for your board to have dynamic and involved family and youth board members, your board will need to determine a strategy to build and grow the leaders among you. Some different methods for developing leaders may include (Community Toolbox, 2007):

"Grass is not greener on the other side. Grass is greener where we water it."
- Rabbi Boteach, *The Learning Channel*

- *Training as you lead.* Sharing your thinking about what you are doing and why you are doing it can be an invaluable learning experience to someone you are training. This can occur during, before, or after board meetings or as part of one on one mentoring.
- *Mentoring.* Mentoring means you take someone under your wing and teach them one-to-one over a period of time. When you mentor someone, you make a commitment to them. You help them become a leader by teaching them what you've learned and by encouraging them as they take on new challenges. *Your confidence in another person and commitment to them as a developing leader is one of the most effective ways to help them become a leader.*
- *Orientations.* Whenever a new person becomes part of your board, an orientation is important to help the person get on-board quickly. It is important to assist new members by giving them a broad understanding of how the board operations tie in to the agency mission and vision. People want to feel that they are doing a good job, and they need the information and training in order to do their jobs well. Giving people the help they need early on is a worthwhile investment. If people are left on their own when they first begin, they can often feel left-out or resentful.
- *Workshops.* Workshops can help your whole group move forward on key issues. Perhaps your board needs a workshop on decision-making, fundraising, or creating an action plan. Having a workshop that addresses key issues will align your board and build capacity as all board members, including family and youth members, increase their knowledge of the issue. If the workshop solves a long-term problem, it also has the potential of lifting morale and renewing commitment.

- *Retreats.* Retreats can be excellent for revitalizing or refocusing our board and identifying new goals or plan new strategies. A retreat can also be used when the board is poised to take a new direction and when it is necessary for everyone to understand the coming changes in order to make the change successful. Retreats can help people recommit to the board's mission. They can also help people remember the importance of their relationships to each other as they work together. All of these are important activities for families and youth to experience and help inform as they build their leadership skills.
- *Developing an individual leadership plan.* People often need persistent encouragement to lead. Your board chair or identified mentor can meet with the family or youth member about their leadership development goals. Ask them to brainstorm ways in which they would like to make contributions and what leadership skills they would like to learn.

Professional development such as leadership training requires a certain amount of organizational support, including paying for registration fees, travel, and other expenses associated with attending trainings. At the very least, ongoing training and professional orientation is needed and should be viewed as a board member's commitment. However, we recommend that efforts be made to minimize financial costs for family member's participation. Examples to help your board move forward with leadership training:

1. Develop a professional mentoring program between current board members and family and youth partners. Other boards have had success with a well thought out step-by-step model to meet the needs of new board members leaders.
2. Identify a set of skills you feel new board members need to have in order to contribute to your table. Explore internal training and community training opportunities to enhance that skill set of all new board members including families and youth.
3. Set aside time and money to encourage new family and youth board members to attend training and skills development programs through community groups and local advocacy organizations.
4. Encourage your family and youth board members to participate in a peer support program through your agency, a community organization, or an

informal network of advocates within local system partners. This will create additional support outside of your board and staff and contribute the broader development of a family and youth support network in your community.

Regardless of what type of training opportunity is made available, feedback on the training will need to be gathered. The feedback is best used amend the training content or change the range of training options available to the family and youth members of your board.

Two strategies for obtaining feedback, and the best times for using them, are (Community Toolbox, 2007):

- Group discussions and individual conversations: these are the best ways to get real information. They allow for give and take, and give people a chance to polish their thoughts as they hear those of others.
- Surveys: Anonymous or confidential surveys may be somewhat less revealing, but they may also give you accurate feedback on how helpful and interesting your training is. The important questions are whether participants feel that the training program, in general, was useful, and how it can be improved. Obtaining honest feedback could be difficult if the level of trust on the board is not high and surveys may be the best tool in these situations.

Financing Leadership Training: Joining with other organizations with similar needs to conduct joint trainings may be a practical way to finance training and ongoing support. When none of the organizations alone has the staff or financial resources to conduct a full-fledged training program, this can be a great way to provide high-quality professional development for family, youth, and other board members.

Opportunities for Leadership in Board Activities

One way to develop leadership capacity is to ensure the board environment is comfortable for all members, as discussed in previous chapters. Once these criteria are met, there are many ways to enhance leadership of your family and youth partners or any new board member, such as:

- Foster personal initiative. When someone suggests trying a different procedure, for instance, encourage the person to experiment with it. If it

works well, recognize the owner of the idea. Don't let new board members feel like their ideas are never accepted, or taken without credit;

- Apply board policies equally to everyone;
- Involve new board members in major board decisions and problem-solving sessions;
- Be sure your board allows for advancement of family and youth to help foster a sense of pride and self-worth, and to recognize the fact that experience helps people improve their work;
- Have a mechanism to give regular feedback to new board members regarding their work. This may include oral or written feedback such as regular evaluations;
- Make sure that everyone in the organization gets regular helpful supervision;
- Give the new board members a chance to evaluate the board chair and committee leads, either personally or anonymously; and
- Criticize privately and praise publicly.

Recognize work that is well done. This may be done in a variety of ways, including (Community Toolbox, 2007):

- A "Family – Youth Advocate of the Week" column in a board or agency newsletter;
- A recognition of achievement at board meetings with cake, card, or other perks;
- Nominations for awards;
- Thank you notes; and
- Assigning tasks that will challenge families, youth, and other board members, and allow them to shine.

Example Leadership Materials and Trainings

Your board does not need to create its own leadership training! Colorado already has many excellent opportunities for families and youth to learn leadership skills, develop a network of peers, and continue to be involved in advocacy opportunities outside your board. Opportunities available as of January 2009 include:

- Family Leadership Training Institute, hosted by Parent to Parent, Cerebral Palsy of Colorado, www.cpcoco.org.
- Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health ~ Colorado Chapter. <http://www.coloradofederation.org/>

- Parent Leadership Training Institute, hosted by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Eileen.Forlenza@state.co.us
- Opening Doors to Leadership, hosted by the Triad Early Childhood Council, www.frcce.org/triad.as .
- Learn how to serve on Advisory Councils and Boards: Understand the Role of Family Leadership in Public Policy, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, www.aucd.org/template/index.cfm
- Grassroots Training on legislative processes, hosted by Mental Health America, www.mhacolorado.org
- Advocacy Training for People on the Go!, hosted by the Children's Hospital. Children don't know politics, but every day they are affected by public policies and laws. It's up to adults to speak up and make sure those policies and laws are good for children's health and well-being. <http://www.thechildrenshospital.org/advocacy>
- Leadership Development Training, hosted by the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health ~ Colorado Chapter, www.coloradofederation.org
- Project Voice

In addition to training opportunities, peer support is available through:

- PEAK Parent Center – Helping Families Helping Children, www.peakparent.org
- Technical Assistance Alliance for Parent Leaders: Parents as Collaborative Leaders. <http://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/about/projects.htm>
- Leadership Academy: sponsored by WE CAN! Of Colorado, www.wecancolorado.org .
- Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, Colorado Chapter, www.coloradofederation.org
- Smart Start Colorado, www.smartstartcolorado.org
- Family Voices of Colorado, www.familyvoicesco.org
- Empower Colorado, www.empowercolorado.com
- Parent to Parent of Colorado, www.p2p-co.org
- Colorado Parent Coalition, www.coparentcoalition.org
- Peer Specialist Training, Community College of Denver, part of the Human Services Certificate Program. http://www.peertraining.com/applications_&_updates.htm

Please note: The resources provided in this workbook are in no way exhaustive.