

Transitioning Case Coordination from the Wraparound Facilitators to the Family:  
Lessons from a Rural Multi-County Systems of Care

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## **Background and Context**

Family empowerment as a philosophical construct has significantly influenced the development of system of care philosophy (Graves & Shelton, 2007). Staples (1990) has described empowerment as:

The ongoing capacity of individuals or groups to act on their own behalf to achieve a greater measure of control over their lives and destinies. (p. 30).

The wraparound process has given the field of child mental health a way to implement this philosophy of care at the service delivery level. While there has been a plethora of research related to the wraparound process, there is continued benefit in further defining the practice model (Walker, Bruns & Penn, 2008).

The wraparound process consists of phases of service delivery. Within the final phase of the process, transition, the goal is to move from formal wraparound services to a mix of formal and informal supports within the community. One of the ways this is manifested is the wraparound facilitator transferring the Child and Family Team (CFT) facilitation responsibilities to the parent and youth (Walker & Bruns, 2008).

As wraparound facilitators search for strategies to successfully transition families out of formal services, there is much value in learning from successes and experiences of families that have gone through this process. The purpose of this study was to determine what strategies were most helpful to youth and families in this process.

## **Research Focus**

The purpose of this preliminary evaluation of caregiver and youth facilitators in the Child and Family Team process is to discover what elements are important to the process. The preliminary findings were considered necessary to determine what specific elements could be further studied.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the important elements in preparing a youth or caregiver to lead their own Child and Family Team meeting?
2. What barriers and facilitators should be kept in mind when preparing youth and caregivers for this role?
3. What skills are needed in youth and caregivers to facilitate this process?
4. What were benefits to youth and caregivers in developing this skill?

## **Research Methods**

A convenience sampling strategy was used for this study. The design was a retrospective semi-structured interview with no comparison group. Caregivers and youth were identified and invited to participate in the interview process. The following table indicates sample questions that were asked of participants.

Table 1

### Sample Parent Questions

1. At what point in the Child and Family Team process was the idea of leading your child's team meeting introduced?
2. How did your wraparound facilitator prepare you for the process?
3. Were there specific steps that you recall in developing the needed skills of leading your own Child and Family Team Meeting?

### Sample Youth Questions

1. How was the idea of leading your own Child and Family Team meeting brought up to you?
2. Has the experience of leading your own Child and Family Team meeting helped you? If so, how?
3. If you were asked to give wraparound facilitators advice in helping other youth with this process, what would you say?

In the analysis of the interview results, the evaluation team was presented with the manuscripts of each interview. Responses were categorized and trends were determined when present.

## **Research Findings**

In regards to the important elements to consider in the process of preparing a youth or caregiver to facilitate their own meeting there was repeated comments in two areas. The first area was the need to allow the youth and caregiver to experience the Child and Family Team process for at least 2-3 meetings to obtain an understanding of the process before introducing the notion of taking on the facilitator role. Introducing the concept earlier would not be as meaningful and would likely cause undue anxiety. Caregivers and youth indicated benefit in experiencing the wraparound facilitator lead the process and later being coached in specific facilitation skills. There was a comfort in knowing that if once they took on the role the wraparound facilitator could be there to help if needed. The second strongly emphasized comment was the need to

individualize for each youth and caregiver how the process of facilitation would “look” for them. This was guided by each youth and caregiver being asked what vision they would have for themselves after transition. Finally, a comment element that was identified was the debriefing of each experience of facilitation immediately following the Child and Family Team meeting.

In terms of barriers, many participants commented on two areas. The first was the need to endorse with all Child and Family Team members the benefits of the family or youth leading their own meeting. If this did not occur, there may be subtle forms of sabotaging the process. The second potential barrier is the need for family or youth facilitators to learn strategies to manage their feelings while being an effective facilitator. This skill was identified as difficult to teach as wraparound facilitators are always invested at a different level.

Although youth and caregivers are at different developmental levels the same types of skills were identified by both groups. The first skill being the ability to discuss their own strengths and hold others accountable to remaining strength based. The second skill was learning how to “speak in a meeting” in a way that would support ongoing discussion.

Both youth and caregivers saw ongoing benefits in participating in this process. Youth felt that they developed skills to talk to their parents and other important adults more effectively. Youth and caregivers both indicated feeling more in control. Caregivers also indicated developing the ability to listen more carefully to what professionals were saying about their youth.

### **Conclusion**

Empowerment is a process that must be individualized and supported by a relationship that truly understands the vision, needs and strengths of each youth and caregiver. The experience of being in the facilitation role appears to be valued by offering a type of learning that could not occur otherwise. Further study regarding the timing of introducing this concept will be beneficial in further consideration of developing skills in this area.

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