

The Evolution of Wraparound Training: Lessons Learned

Constance Conklin, Wraparound/System Reform Coordinator
State of Michigan Department of Community Health



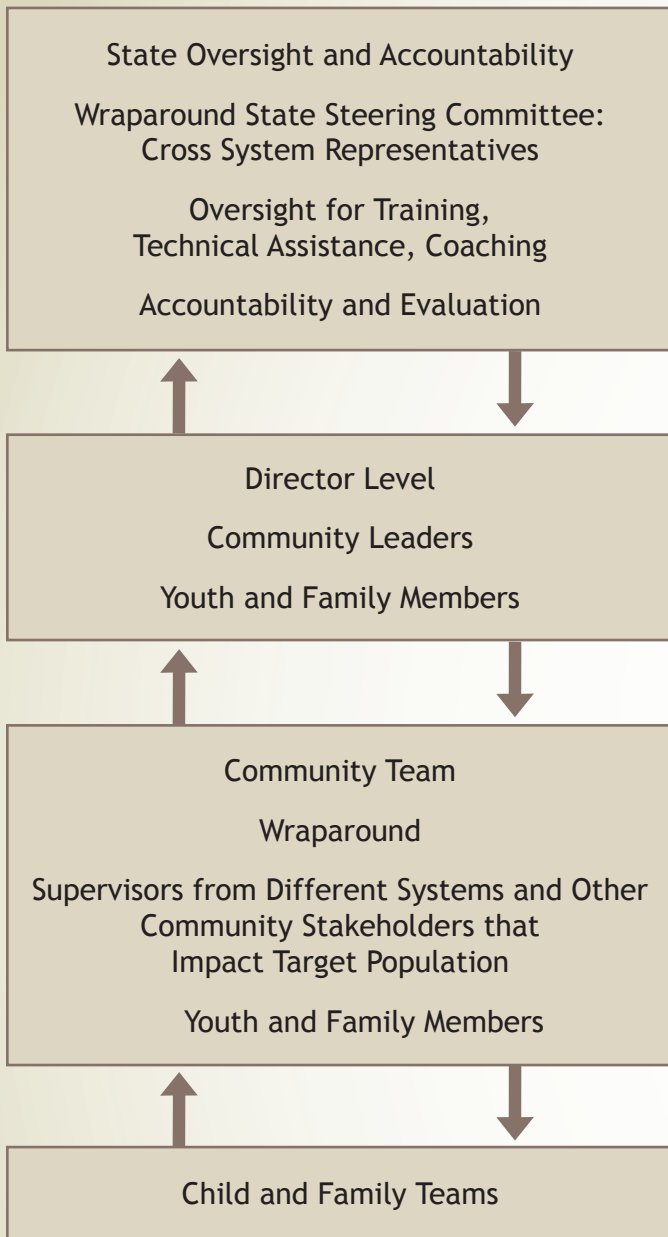
Infrastructure

Training for wraparound is a very complex venture that warrants careful attention. In wraparound, as in most evidence-based and promising practices, there is an increased emphasis on training, coaching and technical assistance, and this typically requires a significant commitment of financial resources. This article will focus on the need for training strategies to evolve as wraparound capacity develops and expands within and/or across a local area, region, or state. The article will outline different levels or phases of training, and it will briefly discuss how to tailor training for staff with different levels of expertise. It will show the importance of committing training resources and of developing an infrastructure that holds people and communities accountable for fidelity to the wraparound model. Furthermore, training needs to be seen as an evolving, ongoing process instead of as a single event or contract to get things started. The developing training and related infrastructure must be seen as a long-term process, otherwise wraparound may not evolve beyond being a good but unrealized idea about how to work with children and families.

It should be noted that this article is based on my personal experiences over 15 years in a variety of wraparound-related roles in Michigan, first as a team facilitator, and then as a supervisor for wraparound and as the wraparound/system reform coordinator in charge of coordinating training and technical assistance statewide.

One of the lessons I learned from observing the growth of wraparound is that it probably would not have happened

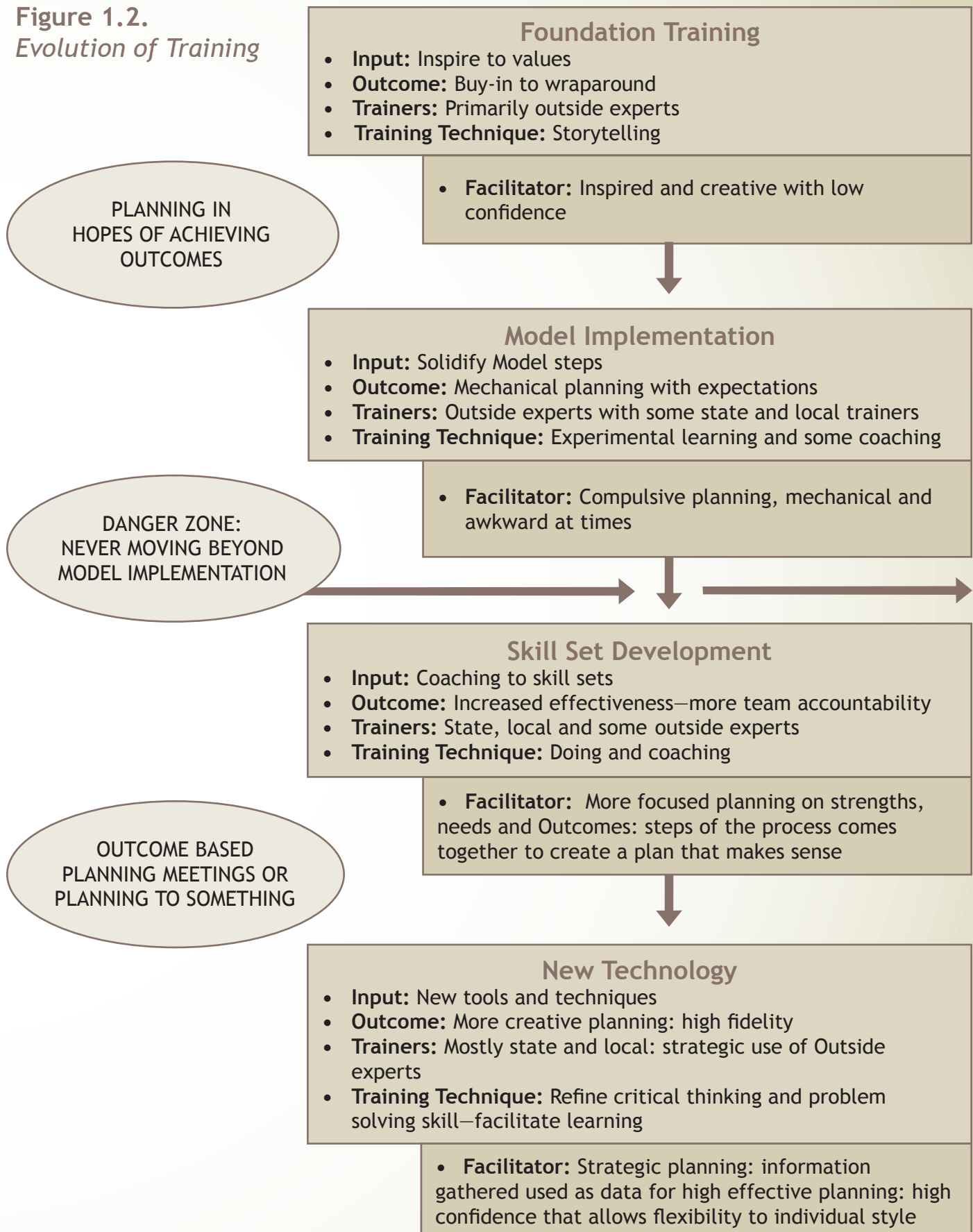
Figure 1.1. Flow of Accountability



without state and local leaders working closely together. In Michigan, state leadership provided a fiscal opportunity or “seed money” while local leaders took this opportunity and “made it grow.” There was major concern at the state and local levels over the number of children in out-of-home placement and the need to try something new that could result in more effective community-based options that also preserved child and community safety. All of the local and state systems had this common vision and were motivated to achieve it.

From the very beginning, it was necessary to bring in outside experts that had been involved in wraparound in other parts of the country. They had experienced success and could speak to this common vision. The state provided the leadership and funding for this training and identified and funded local communities that were motivated and eager to take on this new challenge. One requirement to receive this funding was that the communities develop an infrastructure that provided for the flow of accountability and information between the top director level, the supervisor level, and those who worked with children and families (Figure 1.1). This infrastructure helped the wraparound facilitators address system challenges more easily because they had support from the top down. It quickly became apparent that for this arrangement to work, training needed to be offered to people at each of these levels, from the “top” directors on down. Once you have the executive level committed to the wraparound mission and have the roles and expectations defined at all levels of the system, training can be tailored to each level and role. If you skip the executive level and your target population is high-risk multi-system children and their families, there is a high probability that your wraparound efforts will fall short. There needs to be cross-system training that identifies some inherent conflicts in system language and mandates. For example, a probation officer is charged with the community safety mandate. So the wraparound team must find ways to meet this mandate while preserving the child and family’s needs and voice in the wraparound process. In order to maximize impact, training for wraparound should rarely be done in a vacuum of one agency, but should instead be provided to people who need it, regardless of their “home” system or agency. This will help establish the sense of shared commitment and responsibility for the children and families to be served. Establishing a learning environment that supports the opportunity to discuss the similarities—as well as the potential conflicts—makes resolving differences more likely. Sometimes this resolution takes place at the child and family team or supervisor level, but other times, this resolution may need to occur at the executive/director level. Which leads to a central truth: “Wraparound is only as strong as the community that supports it.”

Figure 1.2.
Evolution of Training



Foundation Training

As wraparound expands, training efforts must evolve. (See Figure 1.2, previous page). In its evolution, training must move beyond foundation training, which consists of inspiring the community and promoting commitment to wraparound values, and which results in initial buy-in to the wraparound process. Unfortunately, sometimes facilitators and teams get stuck in the value-based process and the result is planning that is more lecture-based than action-based. The result of this type of planning is that in the attempt to bring people together to plan, you create an atmosphere of debate and judgment of what you should do, while little actually gets done. This may occur when some team members buy into the values of wraparound, but other team members do not, or when some team members do not understand the planning process. The facilitator may not have

Sometimes facilitators and teams get stuck in the value-based process and the result is planning that is more lecture-based than action-based.

the skills to move the team beyond the debate of values which can result in team conflict. This is why it is important not only for the facilitator to be trained but also for all team members to be oriented to the wraparound model and expectations. Once people know the rules of a game, they are more likely to participate based on the structure provided. The missing piece typically is that the facilitator knows what he or she is supposed to do but the other team members do not. Some facilitators have the personality that inspires a high level of trust, and they can use this to move teams to planning. However, this tends to be the exception rather than the rule. If the orientation step is missed, the result can be that the plan gets very comprehensive across several life domain areas to ensure that it is holis-

tic, but the needs change so quickly that the plan soon becomes irrelevant to the child, family and team (“too much process and not enough production”).

In this early phase of implementation, wraparound is new to supervisors, and they are largely dependent on outside experts. This reliance on outside sources of expertise can lead some people to think that the training isn’t working, when really it is a necessary step to developing local expertise and just part of the learning curve. It is important to involve supervisors at the beginning stages of training and to offer them hands-on coaching and technical assistance so that they can effectively transmit the model to facilitators. Because wraparound is a different model than what people are used to, facilitators are tempted to fall back into their “comfort zone” of planning (case management, therapy, etc), and supervisors are likely to supervise to their “comfort zone” as well. That is why training alone cannot ensure model fidelity or the evolution of wraparound. Technical assistance and coaching to the steps of the process is necessary before skill refinement is ever possible.

Model Implementation

This next level or phase of training may be referred to as Model Implementation. Model implementation is the phase in training when facilitators are learning how to do the steps of the process, even though at times they may feel that this more ceremonial than connected to anything. The major pitfall of this phase is that facilitators will develop a “planning compulsion.” This is what happens when they create wraparound plan after wraparound plan for a family in hopes that one will produce outcomes, instead of first identifying needs and outcomes and planning to meet them. Facilitators do need to learn the “ceremony” or the steps of the wraparound process before they are ready to refine their skills. However, allowing facilitators to create plans that fail is not a good way for them to learn and has a negative impact on families. Further, having facilitators fail can result in significant staff turnover. To avoid this pitfall, coaching and support should be provided to the supervisors and the community team, so that they help move the facilitator toward more effective wraparound. Unfortunately, if this sup-

port and coaching is not there, many projects do not move beyond this ceremonial aspect of wraparound, with teams mechanically following the prescribed steps of the practice model. Teams may come together in the spirit of wraparound, and families may feel supported, but the possibilities to achieve high impact outcomes are limited by overly ritualized ceremonial planning and lack of plan implementation. These are the times when facilitators complain that nobody will come to meetings and agreements between systems and families can break down because planning is not oriented toward achieving results. Coaching to skill sets and outcome-based planning (the next phases of training) can break this ceremonial planning cycle that feels mechanical and does not achieve the outcomes desired by leadership or families.



Getting Wraparound Past the “Danger Zone”

Just like anything else, before you can move forward you have to experience some painful lessons. The true danger of allowing a facilitator or project to stay in the ceremonial or value-based approach too long is that the risk to children and families is high and they need more immediate strategic planning. In addition to this, it will be easy for your facilitators to fall into the role of the “hero” who does too much individually and has difficulty motivating anyone else to change their practice. Another concern is that the initial plans that are developed can appear to meet the needs when, upon closer observation, they are based on superficial guesswork.

Another predictor of moving beyond ceremonial wraparound is the expectations defined by the funding sources and the state leadership. Does the training support growth and accountability? Are there contract expectations or quality assurance measures and evaluation? Does the training or technical assistance match the expectations?

If you do not have the structure of accountability as wraparound grows, wraparound practice will evolve into something that is unrecognizable.

Terms like warp-around, run-around, stand-around have been heard from people when wraparound morphs into something else entirely due to some of the factors cited.

In the fast food world, we are all about immediate gratification. In reality, people are complex and have to learn at their own pace, in their own way. General value-based training can inspire learning but it does not create

a strong skill set that is easily applicable. Adult learning principles (i.e., hands-on, visual, participatory training) should be incorporated at all training phases, but it is especially important in the two later levels/phases. There are always some people that go through training, assimilate the information and then create expectations and accountability to practice. This is more rare than common. Training needs to evolve to more technical assistance and coaching which creates a learning environment that is a balance of expectation and accountability. If you do not take the time to build a strong community infrastructure or state accountability for wraparound, it will be by sheer will that a project evolves beyond ceremonial or value-based wraparound. Unfortunately, sheer will comes from exceptional individuals and thus is not sustainable. Some facilitators will strive to move beyond the ceremony of wraparound but the policies, procedures or lack of supervisory or community team support will limit their best efforts. Some will come to a training session and leave inspired, but then within days, they are back to status quo planning and providing case management because there is not the support to be creative or actually do wraparound. Once again, this highlights the need to have supervisory support across systems if wraparound is to be effective. At this point in the development of wraparound training, supervisors should be the primary “coach” of wraparound versus utilizing outside experts. The

national, state or local experts should funnel their knowledge and expertise through supervisors versus in the presence of supervisors. Supervisors are charged with monitoring the day-to-day operations and need to be skilled in coaching facilitators in how to address safety risks and other issues that arise in the team meetings. Coaching facilitators in the absence of their supervisor sets up an interesting dynamic. Who will the facilitator listen to if the supervisor is not in agreement? Most will choose the one who directly impacts their livelihood, which is the supervisor.

The first two training levels or phases that have been discussed are important for the evolution of a wraparound project, but there is a true danger to remain stuck or stalling out at either of these training phases. A dynamic of these two training levels or phases is focused more on the facilitator's ability to run an effective planning meeting. The unfortunate part of this is that sometimes the planning is more facilitated in hopes something will change versus planning to create change. Good meetings are fleeting and hard to measure. The best way to measure the effectiveness of a meeting is how the team interacts outside of that meeting. Is a therapist's practice driven toward the needs and outcomes of the child, youth and family in their therapy sessions? Does the principal/teacher incorporate the child's strengths during the school day? Does the child's grandmother change how she interacts with the child/parent outside of the meeting? Good meetings that produce best practice outside of meetings are optimal and what a wraparound project must evolve towards. Which brings us to the next phase: skill set development.

Skill Set Development

The next level or phase of training is when the focus should be on skill set development/refinement. Some effective ways to improve the skill sets of facilitators are to provide guided roundtables or "tailored learning environments". Most of these involve both the supervisor and facilitator since there is more accountability when they hear the information together. The other important aspect of moving to skill set training is the utilization of multiple trainers and teachers. It is important to incorporate different experts who

can build different skill sets. Facilitators need to learn from facilitators and from other systems, as well as from family members. Another important aspect in preparing to train staff at this level is the need to review team plans and observe team meetings. The wraparound plan can provide the key to training or coaching needs of the facilitator and supervisor. Facilitators will gravitate to a part of the process they feel most confident and that will be evident in the plan. For example, some facilitators' plans will tend to have great strategies, but needs statements that don't sound like something a real family would create. Others may be fabulous at helping teams create missions but weaker at getting teams to specify and commit to specific actions steps. There will also be evidence if parts of a plan are missing or if there are parts that are in need of attention. As a trainer, coach or supervisor, it is important to pull all aspects together and connect the steps of the process. Skill sets need to be broken down into manageable parts. Some areas that may need attention are:

- Developing strengths and culture discovery: moving beyond positive labels
- Conflict resolution
- Understanding the needs of children, youth and their families
- Creative planning beyond service-oriented planning
- Developing individualized outcomes that are embraced by the family and system
- Assessing risk and safety factors
- Bringing children/youth home from placement
- Understanding the needs/mandates of the systems

New Technology

The last level or phase is the development of new technology. This can happen when facilitators are experienced and skilled, and are ready to move toward more sophisticated, flexible, and refined practice. For facilitators in this phase the other more "basic" or "core" type training becomes a frustrating experience. They are ready to

learn approaches/techniques that they can apply quickly and that are applicable to their job. Many core types of training cannot offer that level of individualized learning to increase the skill set of the facilitator.

As the confidence of the facilitators increase with acceptance of the values, commitment to the model and increased skills to facilitate an outcome-based plan, they are more prepared to accept new tools and technologies that fit with their individual styles and help them refine their skills. These training experiences need to be more focused on the enhancement of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. There need to be more opportunities to think carefully about the steps of the process and flexibility to plan creatively without limitations. One way a facilitator can learn to lead teams to creative planning is by being provided with the learning environment and supervisory support that allow them to go there. The trainer is in the role of facilitator of learning versus a stand-up teacher. This is where training and coaching need to be less about the model and more about the skill of creative problem solving and critical thinking. At this point, the facilitator should be able to balance the need to have the structure of the model with having the process as a whole come together for each team. Learning styles and creative ways of gathering information need to be created and supported by the facilitator. Training needs to be less about providing information and tools and more about creating an atmosphere that challenges facilitators to create their own tools and respond to the uniqueness of individual teams. Learning environments and roundtable discussions that allow facilitators to analyze and problem solve situations are effective training techniques.

Training Considerations

All of these levels or phases of training are fluid and different technology should always be incorporated to improve the learning or teaching opportunities for facilitators, families and systems. All trainers need to be prepared to do an assessment of what level the target audience is on. There are pitfalls in trying to start at the skill set level when the facilitators or systems do not have a strong foundation or commitment to the values

or understand the connection of wraparound as a model. That pitfall can be very damaging to high fidelity wraparound: the facilitator may not understand wraparound as a model because of the need to perform the skills too quickly. There is also the potential to focus too much on the facilitator and too little on the roles of the community and systems, which can make or break any wraparound project. The biggest impact from my perspective is to inspire facilitators, families, communities and systems to want to learn different skills that produce different outcomes and wraparound can be one mechanism to do that.

It was my experience that in the beginning, wraparound was more of a movement to push people and systems to think carefully about decisions they made with regard to placement, services and how to develop partnerships with families. In the attempt to respond to the push toward evidence-based practice and fidelity to the wraparound model, it is important to remember the lessons learned. You cannot build without the foundation and the commitment on all levels of the state, system and communities are critical to build ongoing capacity. Training, technical assistance and coaching should always follow, because in the absence of the foundation, wraparound is no different than any other model.

Family and youth trainers or consultants should have a role at every level of this journey. This involvement should evolve over time as well. It has been our experience that family members are instrumental in pushing wraparound toward the highest fidelity; as such it is imperative they are an integral part of all training experiences.

Outside experts are also important in starting

Family members are instrumental in pushing wraparound toward the highest fidelity; as such it is imperative they are an integral part of all training experiences.

any wraparound project, but their involvement should change over time as wraparound evolves. Utilizing and building your state and local experts as trainers by offering training of trainer opportunities helps decrease over-reliance on outside experts and increases local capacity to meet the training and coaching demands. It is important when starting to develop training teams that you consider geography, diversity, parent and youth involvement, and variety of other system and life domain areas. Wraparound training should provide topical training that address potential themes, issues or needs that are facing the youth and families that are involved in wraparound. Outside experts may continue to be a valuable resource but their training needs to be tailored to the expertise, skill sets and what outcomes you want to achieve.

I remember hearing in my fifteen years of wraparound that “wraparound is a process not a program” and, in theory, I believe this. But I also know that viewing wraparound only as a process can be damaging. So I suggest that wraparound is a model. It is a model for strategically organizing systems, people, services, supports and interventions that allow the child and family to experience different results that are meaningful in their everyday lives. It is a model that provides new opportunities based on strengths, capacities, interests while being respectful to their culture, values, preferences and attitudes. It supports teams by allowing them the opportunity to critically think through with children, youth and families

and problem solve more creative and effective ways to meet needs and produce outcomes. It is a model that acknowledges the mandates and expertise of the various systems and people within those systems and community while holding the family system as the most influential toward outcome achievement.

Acknowledgement:

I would like to express special appreciation to my colleagues and to youth and families in the state of Michigan, as well as outside experts who inspired this article.

Author

Constance Conklin is the Wraparound/System Reform Coordinator in the State of Michigan at The Department of Community Health: Mental Health Services to Children and Families. Connie has been involved in wraparound in several different capacities over the past fifteen years.

Suggested Citation:



Conklin, C. (2008). The evolution of wraparound training: Lessons learned. In E. J. Bruns & J. S. Walker (Eds.), *The resource guide to wraparound*. Portland, OR: National Wraparound Initiative, Research and Training Center for Family Support and Children’s Mental Health.