Theme 1:
Community Partnership

According to the Community Supports for Wraparound Inventory, community partnership in wraparound is defined as *collective community ownership of and responsibility for wraparound that is built through collaborations among key stakeholder groups.*

As conceived by the National Wraparound Initiative, implementation of wraparound requires attention to six types of community supports. One of these areas is *community partnership*.

This section provides information regarding how stakeholders involved in the wraparound effort do things such as: choose a collaborative structure, manage this structure, use this collaborative structure effectively, and support stakeholders to participate effectively.

1. What kind of collaborative structure should we use?

The ideal platform for wraparound implementation involves some sort of collaborative structure – often known as a "community team" – in which decisions are made. A community that is interested in building wraparound capacity has choices in establishing the collaborative body. These options include:

» **Finding an existing collaborative body.** Wraparound projects don't operate in a vacuum. Many communities may already have collaborative structures in place

that can be tapped in building cross-community support for the project. You may find that linking with an existing effort is the most efficient and effective way to get your project off the ground while getting it recognized as a valid effort.

» **Creating a new collaborative body.** You may also find that existing collaborative structures don't have the right mix of participation, decision-making processes or focus. In this case, you may elect to create a collaborative body that will provide a platform for launching wraparound efforts.

Whether you link up to an existing structure or find you need to create a new entity, certain characteristics and capacities are necessary. These include:

» **A representative group of stakeholders who are able to collectively take responsibility for task oversight including project design and risk assumption, as well as for project guidance through obstacles and challenges.** Structures associated with quality wraparound implementation *always* include a place at the table for youth and families who are receiving services and/or advocate for the interests of youth and families who are engaged in services. Like all members of the collaborative structure, families and young people should be provided with support and training so that they can participate fully and comfortably in these roles.

» **Relevant expertise with representatives who are able to participate in decision making.** Collaborative bodies should include a range of representatives from within social service circles, but should also include representatives with a range of perspectives outside of those circles. Examples include representatives of business and cultural organizations and groups, philanthropy, higher education and youth and families. Good representation at the collaborative body level should reflect the diversity of the community.

» Authority to actually make decisions that are followed in terms of program design and the capacity to commit financial, programmatic and staff resources to the implementation of the project.

2. What are the steps for preparing a wraparound collaborative partnership?

Merely convening a community collaborative body is not enough to ensure its success. Wraparound can be conceived as a proactive systems change process (see

Chapter 5.b by John Franz in the NWI's *Resource Guide to Wraparound*) that requires effective functioning of the collaborative body. The following are a few points to keep in mind:

» **Set a clear purpose.** You should work with stakeholders to set a clear purpose for the project including defining who will be helped, how they will be helped, and what the results of the help will be.

» **Build efficiency of effort.** Keeping the collaborative body together requires attention to efficiency. You should be mindful of people's time spent in meetings, and the relevance of the issues and decisions considered. Decisions put in front of the group should be decisions that group members are authorized to make; otherwise, you will be taking people's time to discuss areas they have no influence over. It is also important to remember that everyone wants to feel useful. The wraparound project should create ways for members of the collaborative body to make a difference.

» **Develop a method to ensure stakeholder representation.** Some steps in a wraparound implementation are nonnegotiable. These include the participation of families, youth and system providers. Other participants are critical but should be tailored to the strengths, needs and context of the community. Consider participation vertically, including identifying what layer of an organization is most effective for the job at hand, as well as horizontally, by including individuals who represent a broad spectrum of participation. Get specific about how you will make sure that participation is balanced and broad based while always ensuring that families are clearly listened to and represented.

» **Match your structures to meet your purpose.** Effective wraparound implementation requires a blend of structure and participation. Because wraparound represents change at the practice or direct family level while concurrently forcing change at the management and system levels, you will have to make decisions

about how to implement the right-sized partnership structure. Some communities develop very simple structures in which mid-managers meet twice monthly for the purposes of ratifying enrollments and conducting open discussion about challenges. Other communities will develop more complex structures that entail multiple levels of participation (managers, administrators, practitioners, supervisors, families and staff types) that address the mechanical aspects of wraparound but also form fairly ambitious system change and improvement activities. Still other projects will start with a single sponsor who agrees to support and champion efforts.

While the absence of a structured community body doesn't preclude getting started with wraparound, the presence of such a body can make implementation more effective and consistent. The key point is to start with what you have and continue to work towards effective partnership. For an example of one community's approach to developing a community team, see Chapter 5.f by Andrew Debicki in the *Resource Guide to Wraparound*.

3. What activities should our community collaborative structure(s) undertake?

The community collaborative structure (often referred to as a "community team") can serve a number of roles. The focus of community teams ranges from setting goals to intake to monitoring the project for quality. The following items should be considered in every wraparound project:

» **Referral, enrollment and assignment.** These activities are about making sure that families and other stakeholders have a clear pathway to enter wraparound. This includes setting forth enrollment criteria, setting a process to ensure that families are gaining access to wraparound in a timely fashion, and ensuring that families are matched to individuals or organizations that are likely to provide

quality services. Specific areas to address include:

- **Population of focus.** Setting the target for who should be helped through the wraparound process. This should include the characteristics and indicators of families who everyone can agree need this type of practice.
- **Gatekeeping.** Creating a process to ensure that the right family situations are making their way to the people who are operating the wraparound project. This process will often involve a group of stakeholders reviewing referrals to ensure that youth and families are never rejected from the process for being seen as having too much need – or to ensure that families who enter wraparound have adequate levels of need to justify their enrollment in the project. In some communities this may include other system processes such as assessing medical necessity.
- **Assignment.** This function can be housed within the community team or can be assigned to the organization that is responsible for wraparound implementation. In larger communities that have multiple providers, this may entail blind assignments or matching to the anticipated needs of the family. In smaller communities in which one provider is responsible for wraparound implementation, this will often involve the supervisor or manager assigning a newly enrolled family to the right complement of staff.

» **Quality management.** Managing quality in wraparound is an ongoing part of the process. The community team should ensure that quality is addressed and is a major focus of activities. This is done in the following areas:

- **Plan review.** Some sites will have each plan of care reviewed by the community team during the initial two years of operation. This is helpful in establishing consensus about quality. It can also be dangerous if the community team tries to make major changes to the plan. Though a community team may wish to have this level of oversight, it is important that the wraparound (child and family) team that is uniquely constructed for each family can serve as the decision maker for what is needed. The community team, however, can set quality benchmarks and review plans to make sure that every plan completed addresses quality elements.
- **Outcomes tracking.** Effective community partnerships will pay attention to outcomes as they occur rather than waiting for an end-of-year report. Depend-

ing on the number of families enrolled in your project, tracking outcomes can be a struggle unless you have created a method for paying attention on an individual level. As discussed in this *Guide's* section on *accountability*, it is helpful to set benchmarks that address living situation, school attendance and other areas upon completion of wraparound.

- **Provider network and the array of services and supports.** Good provider networks are broad based and well balanced. The community team will need to be able to oversee the development of a provider network that provides a range of treatment services, support services, and community services, ideally based on data from families, wraparound plans, and facilitators about what service and support options are currently available and of high quality and what are not. This will undoubtedly be a developmental process and will occur slowly, but it should be actively attended to by the community team (See more in section on *access to needed supports and services*).

- **Fiscal oversight and sustainability.** Effective wraparound initiatives are able to manage, blend and braid funds from a variety of sources. When this doesn't happen centrally, wraparound providers often march to two or more masters in the form of funders. The community team should be well-informed about, oversee the blending or braiding of, and monitor the use of different funding streams to ensure sustainability, flexibility, and that providers are adhering to the wraparound principles regardless of the different sources of funds that are used to finance the initiative. (See more in section on *fiscal policies and sustainability*).

4. How can we support stakeholders to participate effectively in the collaborative process?

Effective community partnership involves more than having people attend meetings. Strategies for ensuring effective participation include:

» **Ensuring that individuals have the right information and orientation to the setting they are in.** This includes ensuring that individuals participating in the community structure have a common understanding of wraparound as well as verifying that they are sanctioned to participate.

- Develop and distribute written materials to encourage common understanding.

- Set aside time to allow people to get to know each other as individuals.
- Take the time to orient members until you are satisfied there is common agreement.

» **Developing a structured and detailed definition of the rules of engagement.**

- Many of the partners who participate on the wraparound community team may be used to participating in cross system, community or collaborative meetings, some of which may not have been designed to be as supportive of systems change as the wraparound community team. In order to avoid this just being "another collaborative," it is useful to create detailed descriptions of the role and responsibility of each team member and the body as a whole.
- Lead the group in identifying their decision making process before they make decisions. This can be formal or informal, involve voting, majority rule or a variety of other processes but it is often helpful for individuals to make a decision about decision making before confronting the gathered group with the decision itself.

» **Developing a process for managing changing representation of stakeholders over time.** The initial group gathered to support wraparound implementation will change over time based on community and personal conditions.

- Remember to orient new members with the same care and attention you used with the initial group's development. This includes creating a written "memory" as well as identifying "buddies" or "mentors" for new members. Doing an orientation individually or in small groups outside of the meeting time can help keep meetings focused and efficient for all members.
- Acknowledge and reflect on changes from the initial development of this group. It is important for groups to recognize what

they do now and how it differs from their original activities. For example, one community team no longer reviews flex fund requests on an individual level. In the early years of implementation, reviewing individual flexible fund requests was helpful for identifying the types of gaps within systems as well as developing consensus about appropriate expenditure patterns. Over the years this community team discovered that continuing to review each request led to micro-management and, in some cases, detracted from the wraparound value of family voice and choice by having a group of strangers reviewing each expenditure. This group now reviews system patterns, including a quarterly aggregate financial report that shows cumulative expenditures for all enrolled families by life domain.

5. What are key community partnership cautions?

» **Getting too far ahead of your community partnership.** Wraparound projects that move forward with implementation on the ground with families without bringing along their collective community partnership will find their project at risk of becoming an isolated pilot that has little relevance to the larger system or community context. When this occurs, the wraparound project looks like a sub-culture that partners tend to dismiss. This isn't good for families or staff. Involve your partners at every step of implementation even when you don't want to.

» **Failing to evolve within community partnerships.** Creating a capacity for community partnership is developmental. The composition, focus, activities and traditions of your community partnership will evolve over time. It should. As your wraparound project matures, so will the relationships that comprise your collaborative body.

» **Omitting key players.** Good collaborative bodies should include a range of representation. This means that the collaborative body should be prepared to invite, welcome and work closely with a range of individuals from a

range of backgrounds. Avoiding jargon, adapting approaches including meeting locations, times and formats and fostering alliances among members can contribute to the effectiveness of the partnership experience.

» **Allowing dominating perspectives.** The collaborative body should avoid allowing a single person or organization to be the overpowering force behind the effort. While it is not unusual for one member to have a different investment in wraparound implementation than another, it is important that the project be open to a wide range of perspectives. If one system or partner had all of the answers you wouldn't need wraparound.

» **Accepting a false consensus.** Consensus doesn't necessarily mean that everyone agrees with every decision. Effective collaborative bodies are able to incorporate conflict in decision making, create space for disagreements to emerge and leave time to work through differences.

6. What is the "take-home" message?

Utilizing community partnership to guide and support your wraparound initiative is a critical and developmental component of effectively managing this kind of effort. Critical decisions include who participates, where you locate the partnership body, establishing appropriate decision making scope, and maintaining vitality and focus over time for the group that works together. Developmental aspects of this partnership will be reflected in refining and adapting the focus of the partnership as the community and system conditions change. What the partnership will need to work on in the third year of your project should be very different than what you need to do in the first year of the effort. This change will be reflected developmentally in the content and scope of the decisions that are considered and made, as well as the structures that represent your wraparound community partnership.