

Wraparound Practice: Chapter 4d.3

How School Sector Coordinators and Family Resource Developers Support the Wraparound Process

Elizabeth Berndt, Family Leadership Director
McHenry County, IL Family CARE



One never knows why we find ourselves traveling the journeys we take. I certainly never set out to work in the human service field but once I helped my first family, and heard that their experience was very similar to mine, I was hooked. I am the parent of a young man who suffers from a mental illness. Together we found ourselves embarking on a journey familiar to many parents across our country. Our family was one of the first families in McHenry County to experience wraparound and from that process I learned how to process my feelings of anger and channel my energy in a positive direction. With the help of very patient and committed professionals, I was able to turn a negative experience into a passion to help other parents.

As a family new to the community, we struggled to identify natural supports and non-traditional resources to support our plan. Although we benefited from services like family therapy, it was not until natural helpers and informal supports were identified and applied that we began to consistently practice what we learned, and began to experience success on our own.

My personal experience led me to several positions as a paid parent/professional that paired me with a variety of mentors along the way. I was fortunate to work for the Illinois Federation of Families, a statewide family support organization, for several years. In 2005, I returned to the community where it all began. I am now the Family Leadership Director for McHenry County Family CARE, a child mental health System of Care initiative. My charge is to design a family leadership process to increase family involvement in our system of care and develop a workforce of parent professionals, all of whom have children with serious emotional disorders.

The concept of relying on peer support is not a new idea. Various organizations have been using people to support other people in similar situations for many decades. What is relatively new, however, is the reasoning that parents (defined as primary caregivers for children with serious emotional disturbance) who have children with mental health disorders have a perspective based on personal experience that will benefit both other parents as well as professionals. Throughout the past 14 years, I have been part of a movement that validates the strengths of parents and caregivers and provides opportunities for those parents to support other parents. We have created a community of care that demonstrates collaboration with a variety of agencies infusing the parent voice across all systems.

We have had wraparound in our community for 14 years. In the past, wraparound facilitators, many times accompanied by the families, came to a single central location to present wrap plans. While this proved beneficial for some families, in our rural/suburban county of 600 sq. miles, it presented access barriers for others. It also meant that members of the panel were not as familiar with, or well connected to the families' communities and their resources. Another challenge was scheduling conflicts for school professionals who had to take time off from school to drive quite a distance to attend the meetings. McHenry County values the input we receive from our education professionals, so denying them the opportunity to provide insight into the academic portion of a child's day not only did a disservice to the child, but eliminated an opportunity for the teachers and other school staff to benefit from the resources and support wraparound can provide for them as well.



Resource Review Panels

In an effort to begin to address some of these challenges, the county has been divided into five sectors with all the county school districts assigned to a sector based on geographical location as well as number of children and families in the districts. Within each sector a Resource Review Panel is facilitated by a School Sector Coordinator. Local educators are encouraged to attend the

Resource Review Panel meetings and learn about resources and strategies for students in their schools who are struggling.

Through our evaluation of the wraparound process over the last several years, we have learned that teachers, school social workers, and others are often unaware of the wealth of resources they have available to them. By having access to the Resource Review Panels, they are now linked to a much stronger network for themselves as well as their students and families. In addition to learning about the resources and networking, they become involved in seeking out solutions to many of the problems that prevent families from accessing services and supports, and they participate in collective brain-

storming to figure out different ways to address these problems. As a result, they experience more ownership of the process and begin to feel like they are part of the community at large.

One of the many innovative qualities of McHenry County Family CARE is the incorporation of two new community resources: School Sector Coordinator (SSC) and Family Resource Developer (FRD). The SSC is similar in many respects to the community school coordinators used by the Coalition for Community Schools. The FRD positions are very similar to other positions filled by parents in other communities. The parent mentor, parent partner, parent resource specialists, just to name a few, are all very similar to each other but the differences may be the agency where they are assigned, or that the families are receiving services within a specific system. The unique quality of the SSC and FRD is that they are parents or caregivers

of a youth with serious emotional disorders. Once hired they build on their personal experience and professional training to engage families and community members in developing resources, to guide Wraparound Child and Family Teams, to access non-traditional supports and to help families navigate complicated youth serving systems. These two positions add to the value of our wraparound planning process by supporting the professionals as well as the families and identifying additional resources and supports. We have enhanced our ability to develop relationships with community members so that we may tailor the planning to meet individual youth and family needs by including more informal supports.

School Sector Coordinators

The School Sector Coordinators (SSCs) are employed by the McHenry County Mental Health Board which has entered into partnership agreements with various school districts. The agreements encourage collaboration between school districts and the mental health community to support a new way of providing services to youth and their families. Several school districts have provided office space for the sector coordinators, who split their time between different districts. Schools are required to develop student assistance teams, comprised of special educators, regular education teachers, administrators, support staff, and any others who have a vested interest in academic outcomes for students in that school district. These individuals meet regularly to discuss students who are not achieving academic success, or who may be experiencing difficulties because of their behavior.

With the addition of a sector coordinator, resources are identified and accessed much sooner for some of these students. The sector coordinators also provide workshops about mental health topics and link the schools to community resources that were often unknown because of a lack of time to develop the connections.

There are many ways that the School Sector Coordinators support the wraparound process. First, they facilitate the Resource Review Panel meetings. Community members such as business owners, parents, teachers, coaches, police officers and agency personnel meet each month to

review wraparound plans and make suggestions to further strengthen the plan that has been developed by the child and family team. Wraparound plans are presented to the panel periodically for review and to request additional flexible funds. The panel members offer guidance to our wrap-around facilitators by encouraging them to find community resources instead of relying completely on flexible funds to support the plan.

Second, in order to increase the responsiveness and the capacity of the Resource Review Panel to strengthen the natural support process for children and families, and offer a vast array of non-traditional services and supports, the sector coordinators network throughout the community and have developed relationships with business owners, parent leaders, faith-based organizations, among others within their sector and encourage them to become members of the panel. As a result, demographics of the community are much better reflected on each panel, and the panel more appropriately reflects the cultures and the values of the communities in each sector. These efforts have increased the buy-in from members of the community at large, who understand that their effort will support the children and families in their own communities. The addition of parents on the panel assures that the parent perspective is represented in all discussions. The panel then approves any request for flexible funding that is needed to support the wraparound plan. In addition, since they are community members they are more aware of who might be willing to provide non-traditional support thereby increasing the network of resources.

The unique quality of the School Sector Coordinator and Family Resource Developer is that they are parents or caregivers of a youth with serious emotional disorders.

Third, in order to better inform and involve parents in the wraparound process, we have used the SSC's to strengthen our initial engagement method for families entering wraparound. Upon receiving a wraparound referral, the SSC meets with the family who has been referred to Wraparound, explains the Wraparound process using the "Wraparound Process User's Guide - A Handbook for Families," and has them sign a consent form that we use to reinforce the importance of family participation in the process. And finally, sector coordinators are trained wraparound facilitators, facilitating child and family teams outside of their own sector.

The addition of a School Sector Coordinator to a school district has brought about changes in three major areas:

Following the assignment of the wraparound facilitator and the development of a child and family team, the school reports the girl's behavior has improved and they are no longer looking at alternative placement.

educators' awareness of mental health issues has increased, accessibility to resources has improved, and there is an enhanced connection with individual family members. Administration and staff have commented about how the presence of the SSC has helped them function better in their own positions. Through expertise and experience, the SSC has proven to be a bridge between families, school, mental health child welfare, and juvenile justice.

School Sector Coordinator Paula Briedis illustrates

this change with an example from a middle school in her sector. "The social worker and assistant principal contacted me about a 13 year-old student who was experiencing increasingly problem-

atic behavior. They wanted direction as to how to engage the teen and her family in a more effective course. With the conversations that followed, I was able to provide many resources for the school professionals, and suggest many strategies including a referral to wraparound. I then met personally with the mother, hearing her concerns about her daughter. As a parent-professional, I could understand and empathize, bringing comfort and hope to her. After that home visit, the family agreed to enter wraparound and I worked with the school social worker to initiate the referral process. Following the assignment of the wraparound facilitator and the development of a child and family team, the school reports the girl's behavior has improved and they are no longer looking at alternative placement. Legal concerns have also been allayed, with improved behavior in the community. The family states that they are experiencing more stability within the home, and have enjoyed the supports placed by the wrap team."

Our county has a rapidly growing Latino community. Currently, 10% of McHenry County residents are Latino and it is anticipated that over the course of the next 20 years the proportion will increase to 40%. In order to create an environment that is culturally competent and responsive to community needs, we have placed an emphasis on hiring bilingual staff that reflects the cultural diversity of our county.

Ricardo Leon is a school sector coordinator in a sector that includes a large percentage of our Latino families. During the time he has been a sector coordinator, he has met with most of the schools staff, including nurses, social workers, special education teachers, regular education teachers, parent's liaisons, and support staff. He attends training, conferences and meetings, and shares his experiences and knowledge in order to influence members of the community. His personal belief is to be a good role model for the community. "I have helped with cases of truancy, cases of gang involvement... helping with doctor's appointments related to children with serious emotional disturbance. I helped a family with a daughter involved in gang practice, whose parents have very limited English." Riccardo goes on to say, "There are many situations in which the job of a SSC is crucial, important, and necessary. There is a great deal of literature on different topics

related to mental illnesses that are written originally in English, and need to be translated in some languages such as: Spanish, Polish, and Korean to reach some underserved populations. There are a good amount of people that for different reasons did not have access to education or simply did not finish their secondary, or even elementary education, I can certainly be influential on this specific topic.”

Family Resource Developers

Many times, when families have children with serious emotional disorders, their lives become very complicated, which can lead to isolation and feelings of being overwhelmed. Over the last several years we surveyed families within our county to better gauge the supports they felt were lacking with our services. A common theme expressed repeatedly was the importance of having someone to listen to them who understood what they were going through, whom they could talk with, who could relate to what they were experiencing, and who didn't judge them as parents. They identified the need for more time to share their concerns and problem solve for answers.

Timing of meetings was also a factor as families told us job retention was often a challenge because the people they needed to meet with at school couldn't always meet with them when it was most convenient. This obstacle created the need for parents to take additional time off work, and was not always met with approval from their supervisors. Eventually many parents left their jobs. Many were fired. We addressed these concerns and others in the design of the Family Resource Developer program. Like the School Sector Coordinators, the Resource Developers go into the home, sometimes with a therapist, to meet with families when it is most convenient for the families.

The FRDs support the work of the School Sector Coordinators. Each FRD provides resources and support to parents as well as professionals, works in tandem with a CARE manager for our crisis intervention program, provides wraparound facilitation, and guides parents through the various system mazes. More important, they listen to the family's stories and help them begin to process what they are experiencing and offer guidance



and support as they learn strategies that will impact their children's futures.

Currently, the FRDs work with families that enter the system through our intensive crisis management program, establishing a connection with the family and working in tandem with a therapist. It is during this initial phase with the family that the FRD begins to build trust and brainstorm with the family to identify potential team members within that family's life that have a vested interest in continuing positive outcomes for the youth and family. In this manner, the FRDs help create a balance between informal supports and traditional services. An emphasis is also placed on helping the family develop a team that reflects the cultural beliefs of that family. As the family moves away from crisis, the FRD transitions with that family into wraparound planning and begins to encourage and empower the family to take over the team facilitation.

Aurora Flores, a resource developer with the Latino Coalition works with our Latino families. Upon referral into SASS (Screening Assessment and Support Services) our crisis management program, Zack Schmidt, a SASS therapist brought Aurora in to assist him and a family in developing an effective treatment plan and to strengthen the support to the family. The 5-year-old child had been referred because she had been crying so hard she would end up vomiting at school each day. She had been given a diagnosis of attachment disorder but no services were currently being provided at the school.

The family is originally from Mexico and the child and father had been separated for months

from the mother and older brother before being reunited. In addition to being separated from her mother, this young girl was pulled from her father's care to live with her grandmother, while the father secured a safe living arrangement for his family. Finally, after a successful reunification with his family, the father was injured on the job and as a result, lost his employment. After months of trying to find ways to pay for medical help, suffering the loss of income, and having no interpersonal support, the family was in danger of losing their home. Living in a home under such financial stress, and having endured the trauma of abandonment earlier, the little girl was falling apart, and the family was doing their best to meet the challenges. Recently, while taking in a friend's child to baby sit, the child ran away. A hotline call was made to child welfare and an investigation was opened. As if the situation could not get any more complicated, the mother learned she was pregnant with her third child and didn't know how she was going to pay the bills.

Aurora spent time with the family in their home listening to their concerns. Language was not a problem but even though the SASS worker is bilingual, he is not from Mexico and struggled to relate to some of the cultural barriers. Aurora however, who was born in Mexico herself, was able to help Zack understand the issues so that as a team they could help the family better. Aurora attended appointments with the family, and sat with them and helped them make phone calls, which was different from the supports the family was used to. They quickly learned that they had someone willing to go the distance with them rather than just hand them phone numbers and promise to call and check in.

Aurora's effort strengthens the treatment plan by securing supports within the community. The church paid the family's rent so they would not lose their home. Clothing was a problem so Aurora asked her fellow resource developers if they knew of a place where she could get clothes for the family. They referred her to a resale shop but it was quite a distance from the family's home. Aurora took the family shopping for clothes and was able to link them to other resources that helped to stabilize their home situation. In addition, the family has developed a strong support team of community members, including a Pastor who speaks

Spanish, to help them maintain their success. The child has stopped crying at school and the family is feeling much more connected to and supported by their school and community. The SASS plan was closed and the family is doing well.

Hiring Parents

As a way to infuse the concept of hiring parents throughout our system, Family Resource Developers were employed by numerous youth-serving agencies that collaboratively could support them as a team. Seven McHenry County organizations--Family Services Community Mental Health Center, The Youth Service Bureau, McHenry County Mental Health Board, Options and Advocacy, the McHenry County Latino Coalition, The Family Health Partnership Clinic and the McHenry County Regional Office of Education--built upon existing relationships to develop a collaborative partnership with the local community to support the Family Resource Developers and the youth and families they serve. Together, these organizations currently support a team of eleven Family Resource Developers.

Collaboration among these organizations began with formal letters of commitment. Each organization committed time and resources to the development of the Family Resource Developer program through multiple joint planning meetings. Over a six-month period, representatives of each organization met regularly to learn about Systems of Care and Family Resource Developers. Together, they outlined a potential program structure identifying job responsibilities, key operating principles, necessary resources, and the training process. Finally, all the collaborating organizations signed formal Memoranda of Understanding outlining their commitment to sustainable funding, joint training, joint supervision and continued participation in the planning process.

Hiring parents into our system of care presented some initial challenges. One of our challenges was the struggle to place a value on life experience vs. book knowledge when it came to developing a pay scale for parents, many of whom do not have any college credits. We finally settled on providing the organizations with guidance about hourly figures based on what other family organizations paid their parent partners. The FRD's are

salaried at that base rate for having a high school diploma, and it increases accordingly if they have a degree.

We utilized our county website for recruiting. Since these were new positions, Family CARE staff wanted to screen applicants prior to the interviews with the different agencies, so they could be assured the person possessed the right qualifications for the job. Determining the qualifications of the resource developers proved to be an interesting topic of discussion in the early months of the project. After much discussion it was decided that it is not the level of education that makes the person the right candidate, but whether they possess the necessary skills needed to perform all functions of the job.

The Family CARE interview team used a checklist with statements directly related to the qualifications necessary for the position: excellent written and verbal communication skills, flexible time schedule, availability to attend professional development workshops, friendliness, and leadership potential. Other statements centered on the candidates' experience in the field of support and their ability to relate and work with a team. If the applicants met the criteria we sent their application packages to the five organizations who agreed to participate in the first round of hiring. We provided each organization with a copy of the resume and interview team checklist for each applicant. As they found the ideal person to complement their team, the partner organizations hired the FRDs. While there were certainly occasions when more than one organization was interested in a candidate, all organizations managed this challenge with grace and respect for each other and the Family Resource Developers involved.

Supervision of FRDs is also a joint effort. In addition to each organization's clinical director providing supervision to their Family Resource Developers, Family CARE's Clinical Director and the Family Leadership Director provide group supervision as it relates to the System of Care principles for promoting family driven, youth-guided, evidence-based, culturally competent, individualized and strengths-based care. Finally, on a monthly basis, the leaders from each organization meet with all Family Resource Developers to review the program, problem solve and provide additional support.

Staff Development

Training is a major focus of our effort because most of the parents being hired into the system have not had access to a formalized method of preparation for a job of this magnitude. The training that is offered is attended by both the resource developers and the sector coordinators since both positions are being filled by parents. They participate in one week of orientation and then begin an intensive training program. Training topics include Introduction to System of CARE, Wraparound Facilitation Training, Public Speaking and Presentation Skills, Special Education IDEA Updates, and Balancing Work and Home. Staff also provided training and ongoing support regarding the Illinois All Kids insurance program, Medicaid documentation, evaluation and data collection, evidence based practice strategies, and legislative information and updates. Future topics identified by the FRDs so far include cultural competency training and time management. Administrators and staff of partner organizations also participate in multiple training opportunities along with the School Sector Coordinators and Family Resource Developers.

Since the main function of both the FRD and the SSC positions is to support the wraparound process, it was imperative to give them a variety of ways to learn about wraparound. A wraparound facilitator mentoring process has been designed that allows the SSCs and the FRDs to attend child and family team meetings with skilled wraparound facilitators to observe the way they facilitate meetings. After they have observed another child and family team three to four times, the FRDs and SSCs co-facilitate three to four meetings with an



experienced facilitator and then test their own abilities with a facilitator/mentor observing them. If all goes well, at that point, they are ready to facilitate on their own. We have increased our capacity to serve at minimum an additional 65 families in the wraparound process with the addition of these two types of positions.

Once a month the FRD's and the SSC's attend a team meeting. These meetings are a chance to share information with each other regarding resources in the county, a chance to continue trainings with speakers on topics relevant to their job, and a place to express concerns and share successes.

Cost of the Program

The cost of the School Sector Coordinators and Family Resource Developers can vary depending on how they are paid. In our community, we chose to pay an average hourly figure of \$12.00/hour. Each organization that hires a FRD receives a certain amount of money that is to be used for salary and fringe, and they decide how much they will pay the FRD depending on the level of education they have. The average salary for a school sector coordinator is \$36,000.00. In addition to salary, there are other costs associated with the program. Each SSC and FRD has a wireless laptop and computer software that assure they can process their paperwork efficiently. Costs for computers, software, training, travel, and other miscellaneous items, such as printing can add up, but are necessary for the professional development and productivity of each parent professional.

Benefits of Hiring Parents into the System

The School Sector Coordinators are just beginning to meet regularly with their Resource Review Panels. The number of additional community members attending these panels, including consumers, who are now aware of system of care work, has more than doubled. School administrators are recognizing the benefit of having a liaison in their district to provide staff and families with extra information and support. The agency partners are beginning to see a shift in the way therapists work with families and the dialog is now

including how they can recruit parents and youth for their committees and boards. Families that have provided feedback on their experience with SSCs and FRDs have been very positive, and they advocate for more parents being hired into the system. Faith-based and other community members are embracing the philosophy of a family-driven system and volunteering to participate on workgroups, boards, committees, and child and family teams.

The integration of Family Resource Developers within and across these collaborating community organizations has already begun to directly fight the stigma associated with youth with serious emotional disorders. Providers working as colleagues with caregivers of youth with serious emotional disorders learn not only the challenges but also the multiple strengths these youth and families possess. Families and caregivers are no longer viewed as part of the problem, but as part of the solution.

Jason Keeler, one of the resource developer partners at the Youth Service Bureau (YSB) comments, "I think it has proven to be a validating experience. It has generated meaningful conversations in meetings that allow for a richness and diversity when talking about families. It has promoted alternative perspectives for everyone involved. More directly, within an open and collaborative framework, Family Resource Developers and staff have jointly been able to engage with those families who have unfortunately experienced 'system' failure and have been disheartened and disempowered. We have been able to reinstate some level of hope and empowerment in these families and restore some of their faith in themselves as capable and caring parents who, when it is all said and done, simply want to help their children be healthy and

Families and caregivers are no longer viewed as part of the problem, but as part of the solution.

happy. Parents have often stated that they more readily become more comfortable with a [parent] who has been through some of the [similar] things that they are going through. Most are thankful for the extra attention that is focused on their issues, specifically in dealing with a youth with youth SED.”

“For the staff here at YSB, it is a reaffirmation that in most circumstances parents do not fail their children, but more often it is inadequate or inappropriate child- and family-serving systems that fail to identify, understand or effectively meet families’ needs. Services, particularly those to children and families, must be accessible at the time when they are most needed. As funding resources change at state and federal levels, more creativity and further collaboration will be needed at the local level to develop ways to respond to such changing conditions so that families have true access to a community of care that can meet their respective needs.”

The support that the sector coordinators and resource developers provide to our families enhances the way mental health services are delivered to child, youth, and families experiencing the daily struggles of mental health disorders. Parents helped identify problems and service gaps, and are now in a position to inform the system and provide side by side support with service providers.

As we near the end of the first year of employment for these new positions, our partners are asking for time to brainstorm to look for ideas and strategies to increase their participation in the design and implementation of roles for parents, not just as sector coordinators and resource developers, but in other roles as well, in the hopes of expanding their outreach to families. The partnering that is occurring between our providers and families has gone from reserved and hesitant to accepting, excited and looking for more possibilities.



While the implementation of these two positions in our community is relatively new, we are always learning from the experience. We have started to reflect on the continuum of development for parents new to this work and identify potential triggers that might interfere with the way they interact with some professionals. As those moments of clarity surface, we can begin to strategize how to move through the emotions that occur during those times.

Many of the parents who work in the system share the same feelings of accomplishment and hope. The partnerships that have been developed so far include a diverse group of professionals and parents without whom this work would not be possible. It has not come without challenges, but the commitment of the partners has allowed each participant to learn and grow from the others.

Finally, as we look to the future, we are challenged not only with the idea of sustaining these positions, but how to put into practice family-driven principles throughout our community of care. We are posing questions to our partners to challenge them to think about strategies to sustain their effort. Those questions are: In four years, how do you see your agency including parents on advisory boards and committees, as well as paid support staff? If the money were gone tomorrow, would you still employ School Sector Coordinators and Family Resource Developers? How are we assuring the sector coordinators and resource developers remain healthy and avoid burnout?

After years of navigating the system as a parent I know I wouldn’t trade my son for anything. I have grown as a person, and developed as a professional because of what I have learned from him, other parents, and professionals who chose to work with us. I am a completely different person than I was when I became a mom and he was placed in my arms that first day of his life.

I have developed more patience and understanding of differences, and more compassion than I would have if I had never traveled this journey with him. I know my feelings are shared by many parents working in this field. It is the perspective the parent professionals bring to this work that rounds out the continuum of care, and completes the circle of support for families.

Author

As a result of her experiences as a parent, **Beth Berndt** has learned about the special challenges and barriers to services that children with emotional and behavioral issues and their parents confront. Beth is a strong advocate for System of Care values. She is part of a team of parents and professionals working in concert to develop a system

that offers hope and support to families, helping them move from feeling overwhelmed and isolated to becoming engaged in various ways as members of the behavioral healthcare workforce. Beth has been married for 32 years to David and is the mom of three young men.

Suggested Citation:



Berndt, B. (2008). How school sector coordinators and family resource developers support the wraparound process. 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.