

# The Wraparound Orange County Model

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## Background

Orange County is located between Los Angeles and San Diego counties in Southern California. The county is populated by 3 million residents, of whom 53% are Caucasian, 32% are Hispanic, and 13% are Asian. In this urban county, the median family income is about \$84,000 per year. The Social Services Agency (SSA) is the child welfare agency in Orange County. SSA chose to implement Wraparound Orange County for several reasons: a disproportionately high reliance on group home placements, a recognition that many emancipating adolescents return to their families of origin after dependency terminates, and an appreciation of the enhanced value of services provided through a strengths-based, multidisciplinary approach. The SSA has a positive, effective working relationship with the Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA), the behavioral/mental health agency in Orange County, and in fact already had integrated behavioral health staff into many components of child welfare work. SSA also has a positive working relationship with the Orange County Probation Department, which shares a common interest in developing better solutions for youth with severe emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Wraparound Orange County was implemented in July 2001. It is administered by the SSA, in partnership with HCA and the Probation Department. As of April 2007, Wraparound Orange County was serving 330 youth each month.

## Target Population

To be eligible, a youth must have severe emotional or behavioral difficulties, and be currently placed in, or be at-risk of being placed in, a group home (which includes residential treatment centers and correctional placements), and be either:

- a dependent from child welfare, or
- a ward from probation, or
- referred by mental health and identified by special education.

Child Welfare dependents are youth who are declared to be abused or neglected, and who are under the jurisdiction and supervision of the Juvenile Dependency Courts. During court dependency, youth may reside with their birth parents, relatives or in foster homes. Similarly, probation wards are youth who have committed a crime, are adjudicated, and under the jurisdiction and supervision of the Juvenile Probation Courts. The Juvenile Courts will terminate dependency or wardship when the conditions that brought the youth to the formal system have been resolved, i.e., youth are living in a safe and permanent home, or they are no longer determined to be a safety risk to the community.

## The Wraparound OC Model

Wraparound OC is administered by the SSA. Administrative tasks for Wraparound OC include contract management, payment of placement costs, quality assurance, training and technical assistance, and coordination of services with county staff and the Juvenile Court. Liaisons (supervisor level staff) from the HCA and Probation Department participate with SSA staff in these tasks. The SSA contracts with five community-based organizations to provide direct and support services. Four agencies have extensive experience in the residential treatment field, and are certified Medi-Cal providers. Medi-Cal is California's version of Medicaid, which is available to all foster care dependents and probation wards while under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court. Additionally, families may qualify for Medi-Cal to meet their physical and mental health needs, depending on their financial situation.

These agencies employ Care Coordinators (facilitators), Parent Partners (peer parents), and Youth Partners (mentors) to work with wraparound families. A fifth agency, Family Support Network, developed the Parent Institute to recruit, train, and support the Parent Partners, who are employed by the four direct service provider agencies. The Parent Institute represents the collective voice of parents in the development, administration and oversight of Wraparound OC, and it participates in a variety of meetings, trainings and organizational planning sessions.

Senate Bill 163 was established in California to allow counties with approved wraparound plans to access the state and county foster care funds that



would have gone to fund the youth's placement and treatment costs in a group home facility, and instead allow counties to use the funds to support and maintain the youth in a family setting. In compliance with California Department of Social Services (CDSS) SB 163 Wraparound standards, the four wraparound provider agencies bill Medi-Cal for allowable services to eligible families. The Orange County Health Care Agency (HCA) administers the Medi-Cal contracts and meets each month with the providers and SSA to ensure coordination of services and fiscal accountability.

After some early experience managing the complex fiscal and bureaucratic tasks for new wraparound referrals, a system was established. The referring social worker, probation officer or therapist consults with a wraparound supervisor to determine whether the youth meets the eligibility criteria for Wraparound OC. Once consultation is approved, the referring worker obtains



the consents of the family members and prepares the referral packet. The Wraparound Review and Intake Team (WRIT), composed of administrators from child welfare, probation and mental health, together with parent representation, reviews referral packets each Wednesday and assigns eligible youth to a contracted wraparound provider, and engagement work with the family begins. This is the pre-enrollment stage. The referral remains in this pre-enrollment phase until the youth's transition from group care has occurred. Once the youth resides in the family home (birth home, relative home, or foster home), then official enrollment into a wraparound slot occurs, which triggers the funds to flow into the wraparound fund from the state and county, and remains until dependency or ward status terminates. Upon termination, official enrollment ends, and the youth can enter post-enrollment for up to 90 days of transition from wraparound. Each month, the county SSA submits statistical documentation to the California Department of Social Services in order to claim funds for youth enrolled in SB 163 slots. When youth are not enrolled in an official SB 163 slot, they are documented as pre- and post-enrolled, which is funded through Wraparound Orange County's savings and reinvestment fund. The Reinvestment Fund includes any savings from the Wraparound OC program, and is used to reinvest into services and programs to support children and families. In Orange County, reinvestment funds have been used to provide Wraparound to families who would otherwise not qualify, due to the fact that their behaviors do not rise to the level of group home care. In addition, a Provider Network has been developed to fund services and interventions that were otherwise not known or developed in Orange County, including crisis services, additional youth mentor services, sexual behavior treatment programs for families who could not afford it. Additional fee-for-service contracts are funded with reinvestment funds including tutoring, after-school programs, in-home safety aides, monitored visitation, and housing location services.

Within the initial month of referral, the Care Coordinator and Parent Partner are responsible for meeting with the family, holding an initial family team meeting and developing an initial Plan of Care, Family Budget and Safety Plan for

the first three months of service. The Family Budget is authorized by having the Care Coordinator submit monthly Individual Service Reports (ISRs) to the County Administrator for reimbursement of flex fund and non-Medi-Cal allowable costs incurred to support the family. The most common types of costs are related to basic needs (housing, food, utilities, childcare) and individual activities for youth in the community (dance lessons, sports, music lessons). On average, the use of flex funds averages about \$300 per family, per month. A separate Medi-Cal report is submitted to HCA for Medi-Cal allowable costs. In Orange County, direct therapeutic intervention is not provided by the wraparound staff. Instead, the wraparound staff will facilitate the family team in a planning and documenting decisions to access various services and interventions. This is considered "case management" according to Medi-Cal definitions. Additionally, the wraparound staff may directly assist the youth in the development of skills or engagement in activities. This is considered "rehabilitation." In addition, Medi-Cal allows staff to bill for the time it takes to document these activities, as "documentation." In addition to flex fund expenditures that are reported each month on the ISR, wraparound providers invoice SSA for their monthly operating and staffing expenses, per the approved contract budget.

Each contracted wraparound agency has a flex fund budget for each fiscal year, based upon the total number of youth the agency could serve each month. The provider expends funds to meet immediate needs of the families they serve, and then the agency is reimbursed for these flex fund expenditures. The contract requires that each wraparound agency has the capacity and resources for family teams to access funds the same day, as needed. The actual check writer remains within each wraparound agency. Once the family team decides what interventions could meet the family's need, there are a variety of interventions that can be paid for through the use of flex funds. Common interventions in Orange County include housing assistance, basic needs, respite, transportation and youth activities (sports, music lessons, tutoring).

The Social Services Agency, as the fiscal agent for Wraparound Orange County, maintains fiscal management of the reinvestment and savings pool

for Wraparound Orange County. The Wraparound Oversight Group (WOG) includes executive administrative management from Social Services Agency, Health Care Agency and Probation Department. Wraparound Orange County is in our 6th year of providing wraparound. Over that time, we have been able to save costs over what residential or

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other out-of-home placement costs would have been. Our wraparound plan, approved by California State Social Services and our County Board of Supervisors, states that any savings are to be reinvested into our system of care for services to children and families. WOG, in consultation with representatives on the countywide Children's Services Coordination Committee (CSCC), reviews and approves recommendations for reinvestment of the

savings into various services for children and families. Reinvestment into services promotes system change within both community and formal service systems. By expanding the target population for referral to Wraparound Orange County, additional families and staff have had the opportunity to participate in this family-centered, team driven, strength-based decision making process.

Some may question how the formal systems know when costs are really important for the family. In the early years, WRIT provided additional oversight for flex fund spending. A written request was required, which outlined the rationale for justification of flex fund use for individual interventions. The request was intended to remind wraparound staff to consider various options when developing interventions for individual needs, and to plan for the family's ability to sustain the investment over time, if needed. However, over time, this review of flex fund spending has transferred to the supervisors within each contracted wraparound agency. Wraparound teams are to de-

velop a Plan of Care, which includes how each intervention will be funded. Since each wraparound agency has a flex fund pool, the agency can determine whether to approve individual requests or not, based on the family team's recommendations.

### **Public/Private: Cost-Reimbursement Model**

In this model, the public system (child welfare, probation, and mental health) has identified the child welfare system (Orange County Social Services Agency) as the primary program and fiscal administrator to manage the wraparound fund, which is composed of both state and county funds. This county agency is responsible for provider network development, training and quality assurance of private, non-profit contracted providers, as well as outcome and fiscal management. In this model, Care Coordinators (facilitators) and Parent Partners (peer parents) are assigned to each family served. Care Coordinators function in the lead role of developing family teams, plans of care and safety plans, and authorizing purchase of services. The actual check writer remains with the contracted provider who employs and supervises the Care Coordinators, Parent Partners and Youth Partners (mentors). As a result of a Request for Proposal (RFP), several private, non-profit agencies have applied to contract with Orange County Social Services Agency to be an approved wraparound provider. Contracts are structured so providers can maintain a certain number of staff to serve a maximum number of youth. For example, a provider contracted to serve up to 120 youth could employ 12 teams of staff. Each team could serve up to 8-10 youth and would consist of one Care Coordinator, one Parent Partner, and, potentially, one Youth Partner. The Provider is authorized to begin the contract year with a certain number of staff, and may increase their staffing to the maximum allowed through their contract, based upon authorization from the County, who maintains referral authority as youth are referred to wraparound. In this model, the County fiduciary would reimburse the contracted provider for all program costs regardless of the number of youth and families served or the level of services provided. However, since providers hire staff based



on the flow of referrals from the County, there is rarely an instance when providers have more capacity than youth to serve.

### *What is needed to implement this system?*

- County oversight, quality assurance, fiscal organization and blending of funds, training, data and trend reports
- Request for Proposal (RFP) process for wraparound agencies to provide Care Coordinator, Parent Partner and Youth Partner capacity
- Ability to hire and manage paraprofessionals and parent support staff
- Core Values - strength based, family driven, community based, team driven, culturally responsive
- Parent Partner component - assigned to each family
- On-call capacity for staff within the wraparound agencies availability 24 hours/day, 7 days/week
- Check writing for flex funds within same day of a request

### *What are the advantages of this organizational option?*

- Unlimited capacity for Care Coordinators, Parent Partners and Youth Partners, based upon referral demand
- Contract-based, which is outcome driven rather than limiting families to a predetermined timeframe for their involvement in wraparound
- Allows savings to be managed in the public sector for reimbursement into services for children and families
- Allows for practice change within the entire wraparound agency, as staff interact with other departments and programs and continue to practice in family-centered, strength-based ways
- Service providers can be hired and deployed more quickly than county staff

### *What are the disadvantages of this organizational option?*

- Doesn't lead to as much practice change within the existing formal service system as it does within the community contracted wraparound agencies because the county staff are not the direct service providers.
- Developing a provider network to offer different types of services can take time
- Need to find a way for county system to include private providers in a meaningful way as the county system enhances service delivery policies and practices
- Some confusion between the formal system representatives about their role in wraparound (SSA, HCA, Probation)
- Increased formal service system oversight and government fiscal lead can make some community stakeholders nervous about flex fund spending to directly support families, if the county doesn't follow through with their plan to reinvest savings back into services for children and families

### **Author**

**Denise Churchill** has been with Orange County Children and Family Services for 16 years and has served as a Social Worker, Supervisor and Program Manager. Since 1999, Denise has worked to develop and recommend best practice approaches to enhance the Agency's delivery of services. Denise was involved in the development of Wraparound Orange County prior to the implementation in July 2001, and was Program Manager for Wraparound OC from March 2004-April 2008. Denise lives with her husband and two teenage daughters in Orange County, California.

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