

Supporting Wraparound Implementation: Chapter 5c.4

Supporting Workforce Development: Lessons Learned from Wraparound Milwaukee

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Wraparound Milwaukee began its system of care development back in September of 1994 after receiving a five-year federal system of care grant from the Center for Mental Health Services. The main focus at the time was to develop a new and better service delivery system for children and families who were using deep-end services such as residential care. Many of these children were using these services for many years, costing Milwaukee County millions of dollars each year and resulting in poor outcomes for these children. As the name implies, Wraparound Milwaukee embraced the values and principles of the wraparound process described in this guide, and utilized these values and concepts to build a new system of care for youth and families with complex needs involved in multiple systems.

Wraparound Milwaukee is funded under the umbrella of Children's Mental Health for Milwaukee County. Therefore, to be considered successful in the eyes of our stakeholders, who were unhappy with the costs incurred by previous long-term residential stays, it was imperative that we focus on financial sustainability very early on in the life of the five-year grant. This push, as well as the strong commitment and belief in the wraparound process, encouraged us to become creative about what it would take to build a lasting system of care that would support and maintain a high quality workforce over the long haul.

Over 80% of the staff we had in 1994, including the facilitators involved in our now widely known and recognized 25 Kid Pilot, are still with Wraparound Milwaukee today in either a management, consultant, trainer, or supervisory role. The 25 Kid Pilot was a study of Milwaukee youth who

received wraparound facilitation and were successfully brought back to their homes and community from residential care. Of Wraparound Milwaukee's current workforce of care coordinators, lead workers and supervisors, 50% have been with us for over 2 years and almost 30% for over 5 years, with some having been employed for as



long as 10 years. In reviewing the past 3 years of existence, there are several key lessons or strategies which have helped Wraparound Milwaukee to maintain a quality workforce over the long haul: 1) Hiring the right people, 2) Providing continuous training, 3) Providing a career ladder, 4) Promoting leadership skills and opportunities for further education, 5) Promoting and maintaining close ties and communication between care coordination agencies and management, 6) Providing structures that encourage mutual support by co-workers, 7) Building healthy competition among the workforce, and, lastly, 8) Creating methods for positive recognition and ongoing support. Each of these eight strategies is important in and of itself, yet combined they create an atmosphere that sustains our workforce of quality facilitators of the wraparound process. Each of these strategies is discussed in the sections that follow.

1. Hiring the Right People

When we interviewed our supervisors about what qualities they look for in hiring facilitators/care coordinators they responded with:

- Likes kids and believes in families

- Is open minded and creative
- Is receptive to the values that form the wrap-around philosophy
- Demonstrates good insight and judgment
- Is well organized
- Has an engaging and enthusiastic personality
- Is comfortable speaking in front of a group of people
- Knows when to be flexible and when to take control
- Has good writing skills
- Can speak to past experiences of team work

When hiring care coordinators, most of our supervisors use a combination that includes in-person interview by the supervisor and lead worker, written exercises, and role-play. For serious candidates, many supervisors will follow this with a group interview by the team of fellow care coordinators/facilitators with whom the candidate would work. The supervisors find the group interview to be one of their most successful tools in recognizing a “best fit” for the team they will be working with. This is particularly important since we have built a system of pairing facilitators to provide coverage for each other's families for evenings, weekends, holidays, vacation and/or sick time to avoid the possibility of burn out due to our policy of 24-hour-per-day, 7-days-a-week availability to the families we serve.

2. Providing Continuous Training and Coaching

All new facilitators receive 54 hours of training to become certified as Care Coordinators/Facilitators for Wraparound Milwaukee within the first six months of their employment. This training is broken up into 10 modules, including many of the topics that are included in this guide, as well as topics specific to working with Wraparound Milwaukee. All training is followed by coaching by either supervisors, lead workers, program coordinators, or wraparound consultants in specific skill sets such as running team meetings, writing plans of care, presenting in court, etc. Because Wraparound Milwaukee utilized a train-the-trainer approach early on in its development, we have been

able to “grow” our own trainers continuously.

By virtue of the initial five-year grant, Wraparound Milwaukee had the opportunity to utilize many nationally recognized trainers such as Vera Pina, Pat Miles, John Franz, John VanDenBerg, Karl Dennis, Mary Grealish, and Naomi Tannen in the first two years of our development. We used this opportunity to get everyone firmly grounded in the wraparound process. We then began cultivating our own trainers by hand-picking facilitators from the 25 Kid Pilot who were exceptional care coordinators and team facilitators and also demonstrated the potential to teach others. Pat Miles continued on as our consultant, encouraging us to begin including families in trainings to teach us how to engage and talk to families as well as accept feedback on our facilitation skills. This practice continues today and no training is done for Wraparound Milwaukee with fewer than six family members present, and often as many as fifteen. We also partner with our family organization, Families United, to co-train for the majority of trainings.

As of 2007, Wraparound Milwaukee is proud to say we have helped develop two nationally known and recognized trainer/coaches and at least eight co-trainer/coachers who have worked in other states. Of our current workforce of about 90 (supervisors, lead workers and care coordinators), at least 20% are engaged in providing ongoing local training and coaching in the wraparound process. Wraparound Milwaukee has also hired two of our own original care coordinators/facilitators to work for our system of care as coaches who are available to assist any team in need and to complete quality assurance activities in the area of child and family team development and ongoing team facilitation process.

While every supervisor, lead worker, and consultant is expected to assist with training, care coordinators are also encouraged and recognized for taking roles in trainings. There are four to

eight opportunities a year in which care coordinators assist in training. At times, they are entirely responsible for creating and presenting on topics such as putting values into action, team development, and finding community resources. For the past two years, the supervisors and lead workers have designed and conducted our yearly two-day re-certification training. Feedback for improvement is provided by consultants who observe and critique the trainings, as well as from participant evaluations.

3. Providing a Career Ladder

Since many of the current managers of Wraparound Milwaukee worked as facilitators of teams during the original 25 Kid Pilot, we have an ingrained appreciation for keeping caseload size down and career opportunities up (see Figure 1). In 1996, as the number of enrolled families rapidly increased, a decision was made to build into our

Figure 1. Career Ladder



care coordination contracts a requirement for a “lead worker.” A supervisor and a lead worker—essentially an assistant supervisor—are responsible for the performance of eight to ten care coordina-

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tors. A lead worker is not allowed to carry more than four families on their caseload, while care coordinators are expected to carry eight to nine. Other responsibilities may include training new staff, providing coaching for facilitation of team meetings, providing mentorship to care coordinators in court, and reviewing plans of care.

While care coordination is considered to be the backbone of our system design, there are other potential career and promotional opportunities provided through our extensive provider network, our mobile urgent treatment team, and our screening and assessment team. As noted earlier, many of our original care coordinators are still with Wraparound Milwaukee today in a variety of roles including management, supervision, and program development.

4. Promoting Leadership Skills and Opportunities for Further Education

In 1997, Wraparound Milwaukee partnered with Trinity College of Vermont (now Southern New Hampshire University) by supporting their satellite weekend educational program. The program allows working students to obtain a Masters in Community Mental Health in two and a half years. Wraparound Milwaukee provided staff who enrolled in the program one third of their tuition costs, and provided as much flexibility as possible with work hours so that students could work and fulfill their internship requirements. Of the

first graduating class in 2000, eight of the nine Wraparound-employed students went on to be promoted to at least a supervisory position within the next year. Wraparound Milwaukee now partners with both the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Southern New Hampshire University to promote further education for all of our care coordinators. Some of our care coordination agencies also provide tuition reimbursement as part of their benefit packages.

There are multiple opportunities presented and encouraged in the area of leadership for facilitators, including training, coaching, committee work, sponsoring family events, attending workshops or seminars, and more. To assist our supervisors in recognizing their leadership skills, we begin our monthly supervisory meetings with each supervisor sharing an example of his or her leadership for that week. We also recognize leadership by highlighting a success story in our monthly newsletter.

5. Maintaining Close Ties and Communication Between Agencies and Management

An interesting phenomenon pointed out to us by an outside consultant is that the Care Coordinators introduce themselves as working for Wraparound Milwaukee despite the fact they are employed by nine different agencies who have contracts with Wraparound Milwaukee. They were never asked to do this. It has just evolved on its own. I have come to believe it is a direct result of how closely the care coordinators identify themselves with the process of wraparound as well as how often we communicate, meet, provide assistance, problem solve, or do oversight for the work they do. Wraparound Milwaukee administrators formally meet with supervisors and lead workers on a biweekly basis but informally see or talk with them every day. All managers maintain a true open door policy, and when it comes to any one needing help, all management team members make themselves available. It is not unusual to see our chief financial officer serving food at a family event or our management information consultant assisting our Youth Council. Family members are encouraged as well to stop by or call whenever they would like.

6. Feeling Supported by Co-Workers

At an agency level, the supervisors have embraced creating a flexible atmosphere that allows care coordinators to get the work done and feel supported by one another. Many agencies offer flexible schedules and office time as long as care coordinators meet their work expectations. As mentioned earlier, care coordinators often share their workloads and provide coverage for one another. As identified in many studies of what keeps people at their jobs, care coordinators will often tell you it is the support they feel from the team that they work with. Agencies also participate in a variety of fun activities both with and without the families they serve. Despite the fact that agencies compete with one another for contracts, care coordinators themselves have formed strong bonds with each other. They are often asked to work together on committees, trainings, and family activities, where they share their ideas and support. Wraparound Milwaukee brings all care coordinators, lead workers, and supervisors together on a monthly basis for training on a topic of their choice. We also sponsor a yearly summer picnic and holiday luncheon for everyone to gather together. This also allows Wraparound Milwaukee to express our appreciation for our staff's hard work and dedication to the families we serve.

7. Building Healthy Competition/Incentives

As part of our data collection and quality assurance, Wraparound Milwaukee created a tool called the Agency Performance Report. This report contains a number of indicators built on the principles of wraparound. Individual care coordinators and agencies are measured on their ability to meet standards of holding monthly team meetings, increasing the number of natural and informal supports on teams, maintaining youth in home and community settings, etc. While at times this tool can create anxiety for the agencies, the majority of the time the tool has created a healthy competition among them and encourages staff development. Wraparound Milwaukee has provided financial incentives for some of the standards—such as successful disenrollments from

the program—that then translates down to small bonuses for the care coordinators. Some of the agencies have instituted their own pay-for-performance and incentive programs, which have also helped with staff retention.

8. Creating Methods for Recognition and Ongoing Support

In addition to receiving financial incentives, care coordinators benefit from frequent reminders of a job well done. We have created a simple one-page form called a Positive Recognition Form, that anyone can use to recognize anyone else for a positive accomplishment. The Quality Assurance Department for Wraparound Milwaukee is responsible for processing the forms which are copied with one copy to the recipient, one copy to his or her supervisor, and then multiple copies to the wraparound management team. With permission from the writer and the recipient, all positive recognitions are printed in our monthly newsletter, which has both a local and national distribution. In addition, each recipient who is a care coordinator, lead worker or supervisor receives a call from management to acknowledge their accomplishment and thank them for their great work. Individual agencies have also set up ways to recognize their employees by establishing employee of the month programs and providing gift certificates and other small tokens of appreciation.

Support for care coordinators is available in a number of ways, both formally and informally. First and foremost, care coordinators are taught from day one that building child and family teams and writing good crisis plans are the best things they can do for the families they serve as well as for themselves. One of the common denominators of care coordinators who have been with us a long time is that they excel in both building teams and creating effective crisis/safety plans. Wraparound Milwaukee supports these efforts by maintaining a pool of people with special skills who can be added to teams when needed. These people include staff from Families United (our family organization) and our mobile urgent treatment team (a group of care managers, social workers, nurses or psychologists trained in crisis response), as well as Wraparound Milwaukee coaches and consultants

trained in a variety of specialty areas. Beyond the support of child and family team members, care coordinators also have access to support from their lead workers, supervisors, and wraparound management. In training, a large emphasis is placed on how to utilize team members and how to ask for help when needed. The last training module of the certification for care coordinators teaches skills around taking care of oneself and promoting health and well-being. Agencies are encouraged to hold activities for their staff to promote teamwork and focus on adding fun to the work place.

While I am certain there are additional strategies that can be used to develop, enhance and maintain a cadre of quality facilitators, the eight described here capture what we have found to be essential for the care coordinators of Wraparound Milwaukee. As with all things in life, workforce development is a continuous journey of examining what works, what doesn't, and why. Most of the managers of Wraparound Milwaukee have been together for over 15 years, and as the "old folk" reflect on years of system of care development, many of us ask the questions: Have the workforce values changed over the years? Are the families we serve more complex? Is the community we live in getting more challenged by poverty and violence? And of course the answer to all three is yes. But what has remained consistent is our belief in the

values of the wraparound process and our desire to help children and families reach their visions for a better life.

And with those thoughts we continue...

Author

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