Wraparound Practice: Chapter 4b.4

Building a Quality Family Partner Foundation: Tips for Implementers

Patricia Miles, Consultant

Many wraparound projects have enhanced their delivery of wraparound planning by hiring family partners. Family partners in wraparound serve many purposes, including providing direct peer-to-peer support for family members, providing consultation to wraparound staff members about the perspective of the parent/caregiver, developing resources and supports on behalf of families, and participating in oversight efforts of wraparound. Figure 1 (next page) defines a cycle for employing family partners in wraparound projects. This summary will review each of these stages and identify typical mistakes as well as tips to build a strong foundation integrating family partners within wraparound projects.

The first opportunity for wraparound projects involves *recruiting* potential family partners. Family partners are individuals who have experienced the system from the "other side of the counter." Typically, in wraparound, these individuals are parents or caregivers of children who have received direct services although in some cases, other family members are hired. Projects that want to enhance wraparound through the use of family partners must make arrangements to recruit people who have had direct experience within the system rather than simply using the title of family partner for people who haven't had that direct experience.

When the recruitment process is underway, wraparound projects should move to *hiring* family partners. A project interested in hiring should be prepared to make accommodations to facilitate hiring. Administrators and managers should be prepared to accommodate both the personal and professional experience of family partners when making job

national
wraparound
initiative

Figure 1. Stages in Building a Strong Family Partner Capacity

RECRUITING

HIRING

TRAINING

SUPERVISING

TRANSITION
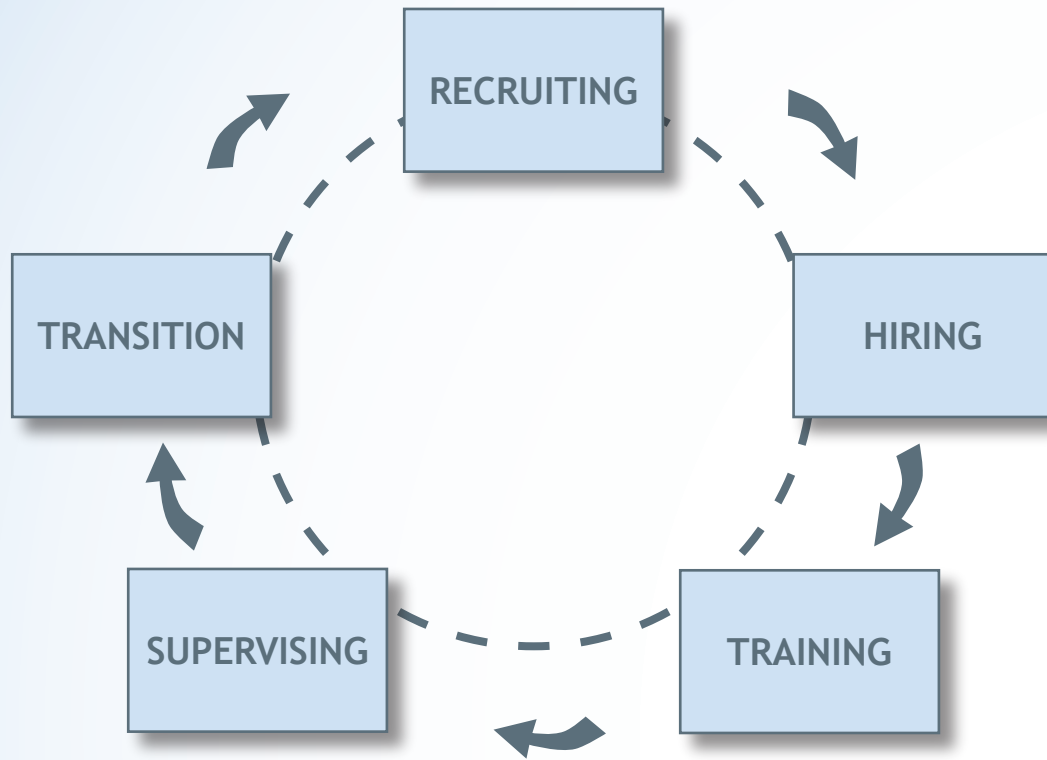
assignments and outlining pay. Family partners are hired because of their personal experience. Recognition of this personal experience can be accommodated by working with the human resource department. When building this recognition for personal experience, the project should also develop ways to recognize this through salary levels.

When a hire has been made, wraparound leadership should begin a *training* initiative to assure that the family partners have adequate access to the resources, tools and information they may need. Not all parents or family members who have experienced the system turn into family partners. Many individuals who apply for family partner positions have reached a place in their own life that causes them to want to share their experiences in a way that helps other families. In fact, many family partners reflect that their journey to becoming a family partner has often followed this path:

- First, parents/caregivers reflect that they have been "brought to their knees" by their child's diagnosis. This is often described as a sense of disequilibrium and feeling of powerlessness.

- Second, the parent/caregiver recognizes that they and their family have become part of a system whether they like it or not.

- Third, the parent/caregiver realizes that if their family is likely to survive this experience, they will need to engage in the process of help as they never imagined.

- Finally, the parent/caregiver develops an interest in helping engage others on their own journey towards resilience and recovery.

Even the most self aware family partner deserves to be engaged in a process of skill and com-

Table 1. Stages in Building a Strong Family Partner Capacity

DO:	DON'T:
Openly recruit all family members who have participated in system services	Screen out individuals based on their compliance as a service recipient
Make accommodations to assure families can access system services in the future while having their privacy protected	Tell families if they become Family Partners they can no longer use services
Anticipate the need for career growth by building capacity for Family Partners to move into lead, supervisory or management positions within the Family Partner job cluster	Set up a hierarchy between other Wraparound staff and Family Partner staff
Encourage Family Partners to share their personal experience with professionals and other family members	Limit what the Family Partner is able to share by using one working definition of professional boundaries
Empower the Family Partner to interrupt bias, blame and prejudicial stances	Make interrupting bias the responsibility of only the Family Partner
Train Family Partners along with other Wraparound staff	Confuse Wraparound training with Family Partner training. They are two different things.
Develop specific training opportunities for Family Partners as it fits with the model your project is pursuing	Choose training activities in a vacuum. Family Partners should have access to the same training opportunities as all other Wraparound staff. On the other hand, Family Partners deserve to have some specialized areas of training that are unique to the role of peer support provider.
Prepare the rest of the workforce to develop alliances with Family Partners	Assume that alliances will form without attention. Family Partners are recruited and hired because of their unique vantage point about the way the system operates. Other differences may include age of Family Partners as well as formal training. Alliances will not form easily and will require administrators to nurture similarities and normalize differences in perspective.
Hold Family Partners accountable to produce results and activities	Over-accommodate Family Partners
Create meaningful roles for Family Partners in the operations of your Wraparound project	Use Family Partners as window dressing or a symbol of your commitment to families
Involve families in the Wraparound project operations	Confuse Family Partners with family involvement. Avoid over-reliance on Family Partners when seeking family voice about the functioning of the system or program.

petency development. The wraparound project that fails to create a skill development capacity is building a project based on personality rather than competency.

While training is an ongoing process, *supervision* of the family partner is another element in creating a strong foundation for the wraparound project. Family partners should have clear expectations for how they should perform within the wraparound project. This allows supervisors to manage to the skill set rather than the personality of the people in the role. Supervisory issues include developing the capacity for family partners to work cooperatively with other wraparound staff, managing supportive relationships with family members, and managing around their own situation. Family partner boundaries are different than boundaries for people who have been professionally trained for their roles. Supervisors have to join with family partners in order to establish helpful limits and structures to manage their personal stories.

Some family partners indicate they anticipate staying in the position forever. Others, however, are interested advancing and developing additional skills. Wraparound projects have to be prepared to help family partners *transition* in their jobs, either through promotion, reassignment, or termination. A common error involves failing to create a career ladder that allows the family partner to advance while remaining in the family peer job cluster. In some projects, family partners find their only mechanism to advance involves moving into a more traditional role such as facilitator or care manager. Reassignment may involve helping the family partner to move into another depart-

ment that allows for lateral growth rather than promotional growth. Many wraparound projects managed by nonprofit, multi-purpose agencies find that after experimenting with family partners in wraparound, they would like to see family partners in other departments. Creating capacity for wraparound family partners to move into other departments can keep family partners sharp, invested and interested. Finally, the last step in transition involves terminating a family partner when they can't demonstrate the necessary skills in enough time to help the families the project serves. If the person can't develop the ability to deliver peer-to-peer support, the wraparound manager has to be prepared to hold the person accountable and help them transition out of the project. When the transition phase is complete, the project should being with recruitment again.

Author

Patricia Miles is a consultant who lives in Oregon and helps communities, agencies, schools and others work to improve outcomes with people who are receiving public services.