Introduction

The editors of the Resource Guide to Wraparound met one another some time during 2002. One of us (JW) was writing a monograph describing what her research team at the Portland State University Research and Training Center had found about communities implementing team-based planning to provide individualized services and supports for children and families. The team was finding that many of these initiatives called themselves “wraparound” projects, but what actually was happening with youth and families looked very little like the descriptions presented by wraparound’s leaders. Teams were not coming up with creative ideas to meet the family’s needs; extended family, advocates, friends, and informal helpers were rarely involved; teams often had not created a plan to guide their work, and rarely assessed their progress or outcomes; and there was little evidence of a strengths focus in planning. This was not the wraparound that was described in stories told by Karl Dennis, early research by John Burchard (e.g., Burchard & Clarke, 1990), manuals by John VanDenBerg and Mary Grealish (1998), or the monograph by Barbara Burns and Sybil Goldman (1999).

The other editor (EB) had just taken a job at a university after a few years overseeing service implementation at a community organization in a big city. While at this organization, he observed firsthand the same concerns that the Portland State team found in its research: There were few clear expectations about what the city’s funded “wraparound” programs should be doing. Training was spotty, staff turnover was high, and fiscal arrangements did not encourage availability of flexible supports. There was not much of a
community commitment to the programs and no real community “ownership” of the process. These experiences aligned with what he had learned researching wraparound with his mentor, John Burchard, of the University of Vermont. Though they had devised a tool to measure fidelity to the core principles of wraparound (the *Wraparound Fidelity Index*), how to achieve fidelity was not so clear. How might a group of concerned citizens and practitioners realize these principles in practice? How best to replicate the successes found in wraparound projects elsewhere?

Not surprisingly, perhaps, we started working together almost immediately. We found that there were a lot of leaders in wraparound, and in children’s mental health more generally, who were asking similar questions. In 2003, we suggested that a national meeting of the minds might help to identify the most crucial questions and to suggest some possible solutions. With very little notice and no financial support, just about everyone we invited showed up, and we filled a room in Portland to talk about the issues.

From the start, there was an interesting tension. The grassroots, decentralized nature of wraparound implementation nationally had been a blessing in many ways: Innovation was a hallmark of many initiatives, and bureaucracy was less likely to get in the way. But as interest and investment grew, these same blessings also complicated dissemination of the central ideas. Local practitioners could not find written information describing how to set up governance structures, achieve flexible funding, or build training and supervision capacity. Funders were not confident about how best to invest in the necessary capacity building or how to monitor the impact of their investments.

The leaders who convened in 2003 were also concerned about the impact that the evidence-based practice movement would have on communities seeking to implement wraparound. At that time, the movement was in full swing, and communities around the country were experiencing increased pressure to focus expenditures on practices that had been tested through rigorous research. Wraparound’s development was highly conducive to generating real-world, practice-based evidence. But the lack of specificity regarding its procedures and necessary infrastructural conditions had historically restricted formal research. As investigators interested in advancing the research base on a model that was so enthusiastically embraced by families and their advocates, we realized that acceptance of wraparound as a researchable phenomenon would also require that it be better described.

So, for all the above reasons, and in full acknowledgment of the perils of overspecification, the founding advisors of the National Wraparound Initiative (NWI) set an initial goal of creating materials and resources that would help the field better understand the wraparound model; implement it with greater consistency and quality; and support research studies. We assumed that it would be important to do this collaboratively, in order both to tap into the full range of expertise on wraparound and to engage as many stakeholders as possible. (For a more complete description of the methods of the NWI, see Walker & Bruns, 2006. Specific examples are also presented in various articles in this *Resource Guide*.)

One of the main benefits of coming together in this way is the opportunities that emerge for sharing resources and experiences. As the richness and abundance of this accumulated wisdom became clear, we began to think about how to tap existing knowledge in a way that it could be effectively and efficiently shared. Thus, the idea of a compilation of stories, examples, tools and other supports began to form. Over time, the scope of the project grew—it seemed important to solicit a wide range of relevant material, in order to highlight the diversity of approaches to achieving
the wraparound principles at many levels of practice. Finally, with encouragement (and financial support) from the Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch of the SAMHSA Center for Mental Health Services, we moved forward with a plan to make all this information accessible and available as a web-based resource.

The Resource Guide to Wraparound

The result is the Resource Guide to Wraparound—a collection of articles, tools, and resources that represent the range of expertise, experience, and shared work of the participants in the NWI. In the Resource Guide, you will find chapters of a number of different types, including:

- Foundational descriptions of the wraparound model;
- Examples of how different communities and programs have implemented wraparound and supported its implementation;
- Stories from youth, families, and communities;
- Review articles about wraparound’s current standing in the field of community services; and
- Appendices containing tools and resources that can be used in everyday practice

We have organized the Resource Guide into six sections, each of which include a variety of different types of chapters. In Section 1: Introduction and Basics, we have included this preface and some background information, such as a description of the National Wraparound Initiative and a presentation of the history of wraparound by John VanDenBerg.

In Section 2: The Principles of Wraparound, we present the most basic of all the foundational documents, a description of the ten principles of wraparound, as confirmed by the advisors of the NWI over several iterations and several years. In this section, we also present a few specific examples of how practitioners and communities have made some of these principles come to life in the real world, including strengths-based practice (by John Franz and Kathy Cox) and community-based services and supports (by Bob Jones). Because the Resource Guide is a living, evolving document, we welcome and will continue to update this section with additional practice examples over time.

In Section 3: Theory and Research, we present the results of several studies and literature reviews. This includes an insightful presentation of the theory base for wraparound that summarizes the basic research that supports the model. Elsewhere in this section, you will also find articles on the state of the research base for wraparound and a comprehensive review of published outcomes research on the wraparound process. Finally, this section presents the results of a national study on wraparound implementation, original research that assessed how widespread wraparound deployment was in 2008, and how it was being supported by states and communities.

Section 4: Wraparound Practice presents the second major foundational document of the wraparound model—the Phases and Activities of the Wraparound Process. This document represents a key contribution of the NWI to the community services field, in that it provides a summary of the typical activities that take place in wraparound team practice. Supplementing this document are a number of additional resources, including descriptions of key roles that communities have developed to support wraparound practice, such as the family partner, the youth advocate, the behavioral support worker, and the wraparound clinician. Other chapters provide further detail on how to ensure family and youth voice throughout the wraparound process.

Recent research has illuminated how critical community and program supports are to implementing the wraparound model. As such, it is probably fitting that Section 5: Supporting Wraparound Implementation is the largest section of the Resource Guide. The foundational documents here include an overview of the necessary support conditions for wraparound, a summary of the critical monograph by Walker, Koroloff, & Schutte (2003, included as an Appendix in this Guide), as well as a description of the Community Supports for Wraparound Inventory, an assessment of the level of system support for wraparound. In addition, this section also presents multiple examples and descriptions of methods to train, coach, and supervise staff filling key roles in wraparound; a
description of financing basics for wraparound, as well as multiple financing examples; a review of methods for measuring wraparound implementation fidelity; and an example of how Wraparound Milwaukee built databases to support wraparound implementation. Finally, this section includes several additional chapters, such as a review of systems change issues by John Franz, a description of the community collaborative team model used by wraparound initiatives in Canada, and a description of how wraparound can be integrated into school settings, by Lucille Eber.

Finally, we have included Appendices, including the Wraparound User’s Guide (a handbook for families) in English and Spanish, Achieve My Plan! (a how-to manual for helping youth participate actively in wraparound planning), and sample copies of a number of evaluation and fidelity instruments.

Conclusion

Needless to say, it is not without some anxiety that we have produced this compilation of materials. For one thing, there is already a wealth of resources out in the world describing wraparound and systems of care. Such information can be found in training manuals, book chapters, monographs, and academic journals, as well as in the stories and expertise of those who have been implementing wraparound for years and decades. No matter how hard we try to be “even more comprehensive,” the idea of creating a resource on wraparound is hardly a new one.

Moreover, a key feature of this resource is the somewhat audacious idea that we can simultaneously define what wraparound is—in operational and measurable terms—and yet still insist that it must be tailored to the context of each local community and the needs of each participating youth and family. To do so requires a balancing act that will never be perfectly achieved. After four years of producing materials that attempt to present the consensus of a diverse community of practice about what wraparound should look like, we have begun to hear calls for less specification and more local innovation. Perhaps this is evidence that we have achieved the goals the NWI’s founders set in 2003.

Regardless, for us, this seems like a good time to present this wealth of information, analyze some research data, and pause to consider what is needed next with respect to wraparound. We hope that you find these materials helpful and that you will give us feedback about their usefulness. Our feeling is that there are revisions to be done and new materials that will be added to these contents well after we write this introduction. This Resource Guide is not a product but part of a process that intends to continually improve our ability to support individuals with complex needs and their families.

References


Authors

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Janet Walker is Research Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at Portland State University and co-Director of the Research and Training Center on Pathways to Positive Futures. Her current research focuses on 1) exploring how individuals and organizations acquire capacity to implement and sustain high quality practice in human service settings, 2) describing key implementation factors that affect the ability of organizations and individuals to provide high quality services and treatment, and 3) developing and evaluating interventions to increase the extent to which youth with emotional or mental health difficulties are meaningfully involved in care and treatment planning. Together with Dr. Eric Bruns, Dr. Walker co-directs the National Wraparound Initiative.

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