

BRIEF

JULY 2015

The Power of Family & Youth Voice in Changing the Culture of the Court Process: The Evolution of the Administrative Review Board Process for Wraparound Milwaukee in Partnership with Families United

Background for Wraparound Milwaukee Working with the Juvenile Justice System

Wraparound Milwaukee is recognized as a national model and exemplary system of care for children with serious emotional and mental health needs and their families. Wraparound Milwaukee serves over 1,600 families annually in Milwaukee County and has an average daily enrollment of 1,050 youth and their families. Created in 1995, Wraparound Milwaukee has particularly focused on serving youth involved in the juvenile justice and child welfare systems who meet the following enrollment criteria:

- A DSM-V diagnosis
- A psychiatric condition or functional impairment at home, school, or in the community
- Involvement in at least two child serving systems including: mental health, child welfare, special education, or juvenile justice
- Risk of psychiatric hospitalization, residential treatment or juvenile correctional placement

The single largest group of youth served is from the juvenile justice system, accounting for nearly 40% of all youth on probation from Milwaukee County. Wraparound Milwaukee embraces the wraparound philosophy and values, incorporating a highly individualized, strength-based, family- and youth-directed, and community-based approach to working with youth and families. Wraparound Milwaukee has worked with the Milwaukee County Delinquency Division to serve youth and families using the Wraparound Process since 1997. Wraparound Milwaukee was created to address the large number of youth who at the time were being placed in out-of-home care due to the lack of options available to not only to youth and families but also the court system. Through use of the Wraparound Practice Approach, Wraparound Milwaukee has moved from a daily census of 375 youth placed in residential care in 1997, to a current average daily census of around 90 youth in residential care. Average lengths of stay in residential settings have decreased from 12 months to less than 4 months using a Care Coordinator working with the youth and family to create a plan for a successful return home.

Mary Jo Meyers, MS, Deputy Director,
Wraparound Milwaukee

Margaret Jefferson, Director, Families
United

Ann Kelley-Kuehmichel, MBA,
Wraparound Milwaukee Coach Consultant

This document was prepared for the Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health under contract with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Contract #HHSS280201300002C. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Additionally, Wraparound Milwaukee has embraced and continued to strengthen a partnership with Families United of Milwaukee over the years. Together with the Milwaukee County Delinquency Division, the organizations have conducted multiple joint cross-system trainings and initiatives, shared policy and procedures, and continuously worked towards increased communication and improved collaboration on behalf of youth and families. Care coordinators employed by Wraparound Milwaukee are trained alongside family members from Families United not only in the Wraparound Process, but also on how to advocate for youth and their families in the court system, including writing court letters, attendance at hearings, and speaking in court. Through these processes the organizations have strived to better the court experience as well as outcomes for the youth and families served.

Challenges for Youth and Families with the Court System

In previous years parents often felt they had little or no say in court hearings or decisions regarding their child being removed from home when charged with a delinquent act. Courts were often using out-of-home placements as an alternative to corrections, rather than to provide treatment. Once in placement, youth and their parents found it extremely difficult to have their voices heard in the court process and the youth were not returning home in a timely fashion. Parents and youth often felt intimidated and afraid to speak up in court due to the fear of losing services or in some way making things worse. When youth were placed away from their families for extended periods of time, they often returned presenting with more challenging or new behaviors and unable to relate to their family and community. Youth and families often did not know where to turn or who to trust for support and guidance through this process.

Wraparound Milwaukee and Families United Partnership for Change

Families United is a strong advocacy organization formed to assure family voice is heard in all aspects of care for children and youth. The organization views partnering with agencies that believe in the best outcomes for children and families as extremely important in promoting system change. Families United has partnered with Wraparound Milwaukee for the past seventeen years on multiple initiatives to improve access to care and assure youth and families have a voice in important system issues affecting their lives. Wraparound Milwaukee shares with Families United the vision and mission to keep families together in their homes and communities. The partnership between Families United and Wraparound Milwaukee was built on this shared vision and mission as well as a commitment to the belief that all youth and families deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, no matter the circumstances. This strong commitment led to the organizations joining together to bring change in the Children's Court processes for youth and their families. Following years of care coordinators and families expressing common concerns about the manner in which families were treated by the system partners in court proceedings, Wraparound Milwaukee was granted permission from the Milwaukee County Delinquency Division in 2010 to improve Administrative Review Board Hearings process which is how permanency planning for youth placed in out-of-home care on probation court orders is conducted. Wraparound Milwaukee requested the help of Families United to support changing how the hearings were conducted for youth and families. The resulting change consisted of a paradigm shift from system-run meetings to community and family-driven meetings designed to improve outcomes and wellbeing of children and their families.

Changing the Culture of Court: Administrative Review Board Hearings

Wraparound Milwaukee, in partnership with Families United and the Milwaukee Delinquency Division, improved the court experience for youth and families by significantly changing the culture and process of Administrative Review Board Hearings. In compliance with Wisconsin Statute 48.38(5) requirements, Administrative Review Board Hearings are scheduled at six-month intervals for youth in any type of out-

of-home placement. “It is the responsibility of the Administrative Review Board to document reasons for the continued need for placement outside of the family home or community; the efforts made by the agency and providers towards moving the young person toward permanence; and may also take into consideration other supports that can be implemented in order to make progress towards permanence” (Wisconsin Statutes and Annotations, 2012-13, 48.38(5)(a) Permanency Planning Plan Review). For young people and their parents, it is a chance to have their voices heard regarding their desire to be together, recognize their successes, as well as provide an opportunity for them to bring forth any barriers they may be experiencing in their plan to be together in their home and community. For the providers and system partners, it is an opportunity to participate in a discussion of the plan and also provides a mechanism to hold themselves accountable for their part in the plan. The Hearing is also a place where all parties assist in working through any challenges the family may be experiencing in achieving permanency. Before changes were made, the vital component of youth and family voice was missing in the way these hearings were conducted. Completely lacking was the input and first-hand experience of what it is like for youth to be placed out of their homes and what it is like for parents to lose all control of what is happening in the daily lives of their children.

While commitment to the policy and legal obligations of Administrative Review Board Hearings has not changed, the manner of how the Hearings are conducted as well as efficiency of the procedures has changed significantly. Efficiency has improved through use of a shared internet-based informational system called “Synthesis.” Wraparound Milwaukee managers, Human Service Workers (formerly and traditionally referred to as Probation Officers), Care Coordinators, and youth and families have access to the most up-to-date information related to health/dental records, educational records, current and previous services and support records, court information and relevant updates related to progress to returning home.

Administrative Review Board Hearings once held in a windowless brick room at children’s court are now held at Wraparound Milwaukee’s Administrative offices in a conference room with one full wall of floor to ceiling windows and three walls filled with pictures created or chosen by youth. These meetings, once run by section managers for Children’s Probation, are now run collaboratively by a manager from Wraparound Milwaukee and a team of at least four family and community members invited by Families United. Each meeting, held twice monthly, offers coffee, juice and breakfast to all who attend. In addition to the Board Members already mentioned, those in attendance include the youth and family members, the family’s Care Coordinator, the youth’s Human Service Worker, and any community mental health provider, extended family, or support the family chooses to invite. Young people and family members are asked to provide updates first, followed by other team members in attendance. Youth often report school related progress, how they are getting along with their peers and with the adults currently charged with their care, as well as their future goals. Youth and their family members are much more candid than in the past regarding their struggles and areas of concern. If someone is unable to attend, they are given an opportunity to provide input in writing, which is then shared during the Hearing. The youth fills out a form, which includes questions as to how they see themselves transitioning and areas in which they need support. The parents also complete a form, which provides input on how they feel the youth’s treatment is going and what may be needed to support the return home. Human Service Workers provide a report reflecting the progress towards the conditions of the juvenile’s court record and areas to be completed prior to returning home. Each report is provided to and reviewed by the Board Members to assist with the discussion. Following discussion with all in attendance at the Hearing, a summary of the review and a copy of the Permanency Plan Report are filed with the Court.

Benefits and the Effectiveness of the Change

When Wraparound Milwaukee and Families United took responsibility for Administrative Review Board Hearings, significant changes were observed and reported. Some of these changes include:

- Families know what to expect, which has led to increased attendance and participation by youth and families
- Meetings now conducted jointly by family and community members along with managers have resulted in more respectful and family friendly meetings
- A more relaxed setting has allowed for more candid discussion and problem solving
- Less dominance by system representatives has resulted in less intimidation of young people and their parents
- There has been a notable increase in attendance by family support systems
- Young people and their parents have expressed feeling more supported; parent advocates are in attendance at Hearings if needed
- There has been an increase in strengths-based and community-based ideas noted in documents that reflect the meeting's purpose to achieve permanency for youth and families
- Improved efficiency through the use of a shared information system has resulted in better tracking of lengths of stay for children in out-of-home care, Hearings, and completion and submission of necessary court documents, as well as tracking of time to achieving of permanency
- This partnership of efforts has served as a continual reminder of the importance of collaboration between Wraparound Milwaukee, Families United, and the Milwaukee County Delinquency Division

The changes and progress made in the process of how permanency is monitored and achieved for youth involved in Wraparound Milwaukee is an example of the power of real collaboration. By changing the culture of court processes and allowing the voices of children and families to be heard in meaningful ways, systems who embrace these or similar changes can assist families in having an increased sense of control over their futures and ultimately improved outcomes for families involved in systems of care.

Suggested Citation:

Meyers, M.J., Jefferson, M. & Kelley-Kuehmichel, A. (2015). The power of family and youth voice in changing the culture of the court process: The evolution of the administrative review board process for Wraparound Milwaukee in partnership with Families United. Baltimore, MD: The Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE NETWORK FOR CHILDREN'S BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

The National Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health (TA Network) operates the National Training and Technical Assistance Center for Child, Youth, and Family Mental Health (NTTAC), funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Child, Adolescent and Family Branch. The TA Network partners with states, tribes, territories, and communities to develop the most effective and sustainable systems of care possible with and for the benefit of children and youth with behavioral health needs and their families. The TA Network provides technical assistance and support across the country to state and local agencies, including youth and family leadership organizations.

ABOUT WRAPAROUND MILWAUKEE

This resource was produced by Wraparound Milwaukee in its role as a partner in the national [Technical Assistance Network for Children's Behavioral Health](#). Wraparound Milwaukee is one of the largest Systems of Care in the United States annually serving over 1,700 children with complex emotional and mental health needs and their families. At the core of this program, now in its 20th year, is its fundamental approach to provide care and support to families in the community that is family driven, culturally competent, highly individualized, strengths-based, and outcome driven.