

# Theme 2: Collaborative Action

**According to the Community Supports for Wraparound Inventory, when a wraparound initiative is fully supported in the area of collaborative action, *stakeholders involved in the wraparound effort take concrete steps to translate the wraparound philosophy into specific policies, practices and achievements.***

*Collaborative action* is tightly tied to *community partnership*. *Collaborative action* reinforces the idea that leadership has a role that goes far beyond making an initial decision to build wraparound capacity. For successful wraparound implementation to occur, policy makers, in collaboration with community and system partners as well as practitioners and families, must work together to take the steps that are needed to achieve the goals of the wraparound plan. Wraparound is unlikely to survive without a corresponding leader(s) or champion(s) providing support. Even as the project develops the capacity to support families using wraparound planning, collaborative action needs to occur concurrently on the program and system levels.

This section focuses on key issues and strategies to consider in helping your wrap-around stakeholders move ahead in a collaborative and coordinated way. For more details and community examples, you can also find several articles in the NWI's *Resource Guide to Wraparound* that provide information about the process of community development and system change that is typically necessary in order for communities to collaborate in their activities in support of wraparound, including "Planning for and Implementing System Change Using the Wraparound Process" (Chapter 5b), and "Family Voices Network of Erie County: One Community's Story of Implementing System Reform" (Chapter 5b.2).

## 1. What are some important first steps?

- » **Locate collaborative leaders for your wraparound efforts.** Wraparound efforts rarely succeed without champions. These champions can be housed in funding agencies, provider agencies and partner agencies. These leaders must have several key characteristics to be successful wraparound sponsors, including having a significant understanding of wraparound, clarity on what the initiative hopes to accomplish, and knowledge of typical methods used in wraparound to accomplish goals. Further, these collaborative leaders must be able to see the whole and component parts on both vertical and horizontal levels. This means that effective collaborative leaders can design policy initiatives that are coherent and add value to the wraparound initiative at the ground level where the process serves youths and families.
- » **Develop a guiding plan.** Managers and leaders associated with wraparound implementation should design and structure a plan that is future-oriented, concrete and specific. Collaborative action without that guiding plan runs the risk of detracting from the wraparound initiative rather than providing safe haven for it. Key decisions and issues that should be considered in creating the guiding plan include defining an initial population of focus; managing family entry and enrollment; funding and building capacity for necessary staff roles for wraparound implementation; developing supports and services as identified in wraparound team plans; setting performance measures including outcome, wraparound quality, satisfaction and fiscal indicators; and, finally, having a designated approach for mid-course correction.
- » **Focus on coordinated planning at all levels.** Leaders, including managers and supervisors, must work together to ensure that integration is occurring from the

child and family level through the agency level, and on through the policy level. This means that leaders must work to ensure that single plans are evident at all levels of the initiative. At the team planning level, this means that all parties agree to work off of a single plan of care. At the community level, this means that leaders should focus on coordinating and/or integrating administrative activities. Examples include creating consistent agency policies and procedures that are compatible with the wraparound initiative. This might include programmatic concerns (family as unit of support, working with entire families, partnering with parents and caregivers), personnel concerns (incorporating family voice in recruiting, hiring and evaluating staff) and administrative concerns (opening organizational culture to family impact).

## **2. Doesn't the necessary level of collaboration take time to build up?**

Yes! Working together to translate wraparound into concrete actions and to build coherence between the values espoused by wraparound and the way the system or “host environment” operates takes time, commitment and talent. Often, it takes some initial success to convince stakeholders to make a deeper commitment to collaboration and to wraparound, and this allows the project to move forward into more truly collaborative activities. Leaders need to be clear-sighted and, often, pragmatic when deciding what they can implement in the short run versus what is ideal for wraparound. They may decide that a less formal, less developed and less fully collaborative option is what is needed in order to get the wraparound project underway; however, leaders should be aware of challenges that may arise as a result.

For example, some projects choose to begin operation using facilitators that are loaned or bought out part-time from their usual jobs in child- and family-serving agencies such as mental health or juvenile justice. Thus, these facilitators are not employed exclusively in wraparound, and have not been hired specifically for the wraparound project. This sort of model may be the most feasible option for some communities in early-stage wraparound development; however, experience has shown that communities that rely on this sort of staffing plan have a hard time ensuring that these part-time facilitators have sufficient time, skill, and motivation to complete a high quality wraparound process. Demands from the “home” system may take precedence over wraparound duties, since the home system is the one that typically remains the official employer. Additionally, the project often experiences



confusion about who will supervise these part-time facilitators, and the facilitators themselves often complain that the philosophy and values that govern their other duties are inconsistent with wraparound's philosophy and values. This is not to say that this sort of staffing pattern never works out or allows a community to eventually move to a staffing pattern with full time facilitators hired specifically for wraparound; however, stakeholders should educate themselves about the challenges associated with such a choice. Of course, making too many compromises can mean that a community implements wraparound so poorly that it doesn't really help families and/or that various stakeholders become disillusioned and unwilling to collaborate with the wraparound project.

### 3. What are some of the most common pitfalls we should avoid?

- » **Failing to allow enough time.** Building collaborative action that creates support for wraparound implementation takes time and commitment. Managers and leaders must be prepared to stay connected with the project through its early implementation, and continue to stay involved as the project matures, expands and adapts. Be prepared to dedicate time to understand how the project is operating, as well as creating mechanisms to ensure that administrators have a significant understanding of the child and family's experience.
- » **Creating a firewall between the wraparound project and the rest of the system.** A wraparound project should be relevant to the overall system in which it operates. If not, the project runs the risk of becoming increasingly irrelevant over time. Wraparound principles should be relevant to the rest of the system and wraparound-compatible language can be reflected in contracts, agreements, procedures and policies. In some cases, wraparound managers will identify inconsistency between system processes and wraparound processes. In these cases,

managers and community teams should work to resolve those inconsistencies for direct service staff and families.

- » **Failing to become the change you wish to see.** A common mistake for many wraparound champions is to focus change efforts on the wraparound project rather than their own organizations. County mental health or child welfare managers who create wraparound contracts so they can have an additional referral option miss the boat when they don't make changes in their own operations. Likewise, the administrator of a nonprofit organization who thinks he or she can start a wraparound department without identifying procedure and protocol changes agency-wide is likely to be faced with many challenges and organizational conflicts shortly after implementation.
- » **Substituting values speak for real change.** Some leaders and wraparound champions are able to preach the need for change around wraparound values. The wraparound values base can be useful in terms of creating a case for change as well as way to talk about change. Realizing the potential of wraparound requires a change in systems and structures and wraparound champions should be



prepared to make these changes. During early days of implementation, this may involve seeking exceptions to situations but as the project matures wraparound leaders should be prepared to construct policy and procedural changes that show a formal endorsement for creative, needs-based planning and programming.

- » **Omitting young people and families.** Young people and families should be part of the collaborative action and leadership equation. When joining with young people and families there are two common traps that leaders may face. The first is the trap of guilt. This occurs when an in-system ally hears the family's perspective for the first time and begins to realize what brought them to this situation. This

can also occur when families raise concerns about wraparound implementation. Guilt can cause paralysis and shame. The second area is the trap of denial. This occurs when a family's perspective is heard but the reaction is to deny the reality. Often, families' messages about system operations seem too painful to contemplate. This sometimes occurs with nascent wraparound projects as families make complaints. Even though wraparound may reflect a community's best hopes for excellent practice, wraparound is as capable as any other approach of getting it wrong with an individual family. Don't let this possibility deter you from including youths and families in leadership and course correction, or from being persistent in your efforts to improve services and systems through wraparound when a family points out shortcomings.

#### **4. What is the “take home” message? What are the key things we should keep asking ourselves?**

Here are some key questions to help you remember some lessons learned by others as you move from building partnership to collaborative action on your journey:

- » Have we worked to ensure that all participants in our effort understand the values that guide us?
- » Have we invested the time to make sure we have a plan for moving ahead, and that the right people know the plan?
- » Have we created an environment where we are changing not only the space between agencies and organizations, but also paying attention to changing individual agency/ system life so that it aligns better with our vision and action plan?
- » Have we laid out a clear plan for our first and next steps?
- » Have we revisited and updated the plan as a way for us to model collaborative action at the planning and leadership table?