



TAPESTRY: A WRAPAROUND PROGRAM FOR FAMILIES OF COLOR FACILITATED BY PARENT PARTNERS

The name Tapestry represents the weaving together of parents and families with their community. With funding from The California Endowment, Tapestry was developed to increase access to Wraparound services for families of color residing in southeast San Diego. While this region has many strengths, including a population that is deeply spiritual, creative, and close knit, it also suffers from extreme poverty, high rates of crime and domestic violence, and the highest rate of reported child abuse countywide. Tapestry was conceived to address the over-representation of children of color in the juvenile detention system and to increase utilization of Wraparound services.

Fueling the Tapestry idea was evidence that local Latino and African American families did not embrace existing mental health services. Disadvantaged families in general were mistrustful of formal providers and saw treatment or services as part of a larger social services system they did not trust. What is more, social workers or providers tended to have little impact with disadvantaged families of color. A new way of working with families had to be developed. Tapestry was created with the understand-

ing that an effective mental health program needed to be owned and overseen by community members. With these concerns in mind, Tapestry trained Parent Partners to serve as Wraparound facilitators. Parent Partners are parents from the community who have personal experience with a child who has been involved with mental health, special education, and/or juvenile justice systems.

To ensure that Tapestry was truly embedded in its community, two main strategies were used. First, Tapestry wanted to locate its operations in the community and to build upon the strengths within its community. Tapestry staff formed a true collaborative partnership with The Mosaic Forum, a community collaborative sponsored by Southeast County Mental Health. Mosaic hosts a monthly meeting where providers, parents, youth, probation, and education representatives come together to share resources, partner on projects and community fairs, address and solve community issues, and help parents locate assistance. The inception, development, and outcomes of Tapestry were shared with Mosaic members.

Second, Tapestry committed to building strong links with the region's faith-based communities. While working with community liaisons, Tapestry located operations within a neighborhood church. This arrangement helped the local economy while also promoting the idea that faith and mental health are two dimensions of healing.

Features of the Tapestry Approach

The Tapestry program has sought to do business differently. Staff laugh when they hear Jon VanDenBerg's call to think outside of the box, saying, "We thought so far outside of the box that we now have a triangle."

Hiring and training Parent Partners as facilitators. Tapestry was developed to increase access to culturally sensitive mental health services. Because the community had embraced the *Natural Helper* or *Promo Toro* model of health support, it was felt that Parent Partners would be more effective than social workers in providing facilitation for the Wraparound process. Latino and African American families in the community tend to be strong and close knit, and they cherish the expertise and senior-

ity of older people as mentors. Parent Partners fit with this natural helper model because they are seen as mentors who have personal experience raising youth with emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges. Often, they have also been enrolled in a Wraparound program. Tapestry provides rigorous and lengthy training for Parent Partners (Becker, 2003), to ensure that they acquire the skills and knowledge they will need in their roles with teams.

By employing parents in this way, Tapestry promotes several goals simultaneously: creating services that are culturally sensitive, drawing upon neighborhood resources, and strengthening the community by providing new career opportunities. The hope of Tapestry is to build a network of support for families that continues to grow stronger with each participant.

Training and supervision focused on cultural sensitivity. Because Tapestry is committed to providing culturally sensitive services, we engage in an ongoing examination of how culture does, and should, impact our work. We believe that an appreciation of culture needs to be embedded in the very fiber of what we do. We began the program with a task force of community parents and providers who developed a cultural training and supervision plan for paraprofessionals. With this in place, we began intensive monthly cultural supervision, during which our cultures and those of our families are consistently discussed and examined. For example, while working with a parent from Louisiana, one Parent Partner was confronted with a family who held both Christian and voodoo beliefs. Supervision and discussion helped the Parent Partner better understand these practices, their history, and their impact on this family and their current situation.

Culture, as a topic, was expanded to include the culture of poverty, the culture of raising youth with challenges, Latino and African American cultures and subcultures, and an ex-

amination of gender roles and single parenting. Initial training focused on a definition of terms and social norms and practices. Self-examination and self-understanding were stressed, particularly in the areas of personal relationships, family relationships, and service relationships. Ongoing group training and supervision focus on the interaction of our personal cultural beliefs, feelings, and norms with those of our families. Culture is intertwined with the concept of relatedness and the quality of the relationship.

Being community based. The staff from Tapestry also wanted to clarify the meaning of community based, and then to make sure that our practices were in line with this definition. Tapestry hires from the community, serves a specific community, works to keep youth in their community, finds or helps to create resources within the community, and is co-managed by a resident community advisory board.

Family-friendly assessment. As a parent there was nothing more humiliating to me than to have assessments performed on my child or myself and never see the results. The results were given to experts who then somehow used them to help. Tapestry involves families in assessments in a meaningful way. We decided to include assessments that tapped both youth and parental functioning and strengths. A measure that asked parents about their understanding of their children's mental health was developed to assess pre- and post-Wraparound understanding. Then assessments were fully explained to parents and they were given a report afterwards that explained each test, the results, and suggestions to be included by Wraparound teams.

Wraparound fidelity. Having trained Parent Partners to work with several San Diego Wraparound agencies, we noticed that there was a great variety in how Wraparound was actually conducted. The Tapestry program wanted to ensure that the values, principles, and processes of

Wraparound were being followed. We also wanted to give Parent Partners enough structure to conduct their work successfully. To address this concern, the Tapestry program developed a checklist for Parent Partners that walked them through the structure, goals, and achievements of initial meetings. As a further quality control check for facilitating Wraparound meetings, the Wraparound Observation Form was used (Nordness & Epstein, 2003). Parents, trained in Wraparound, received six hours of instruction on the observation form, and then attended Wraparound meetings to rate facilitators' performance. Feedback was then given to Parent Partners to help enhance their work.

Program Outcomes and Lessons Learned

In the first year of operation, the Tapestry program served 77 families. Families required the most assistance with information about services, mental health services, school difficulties, and advocacy. The average age of the children served was 10, far younger than originally expected. Sixty percent of families were Latino, and the remainder were African American. Average annual income was between \$12,000 and \$16,000. Forty percent of referrals were from informal sources such as churches, friends, schools, community forums, and health centers.

Assessments were conducted prior to the initiation of Wraparound ser-

Partnership News

The Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health at the University of South Florida's Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute. The 17th Annual Research Conference, a System of Care for Children's Mental Health: Expanding the Research Base, will be held February 29-March 3, 2004 in Tampa, Florida. <http://rtckids.fmhi.usf.edu/>



Artwork by Cheryl Ewer

vices and at completion. Measures were chosen that 1) were based on sound research and 2) would translate into useful knowledge for families. All tests were explained to families and a report with their scores and suggestions was provided to families and their teams.

Children's and youth's scores improved significantly on the Connors Scale, which measures various dimensions of youth functioning. Scores on the Parenting Stress Inventory revealed a trend toward lowered stress for parents, but the change was not statistically significant. Change as measured by the Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (Epstein & Sharma, 1998), a parent rating of child strengths, was not significant. Interestingly, parents reported that they did not care for this measure, as they found it discouraging to compare their children's challenges to strengths.

The Wraparound Observation Form yielded interesting results. Parent Partner Wraparound facilitation scored high in terms of preserving family voice, accessing resources, cultural sensitivity, and well organized, comprehensive care plans. Parent Partners had more difficulty incorporating strengths, including professionals on teams, overall team build-

ing, and focusing on strengths. Scores were lowest when it came to partnering with professionals and team building. This suggests that Parent Partners, who themselves were involved with systems, may need to pay extra attention to building productive relationships with professionals.

For Wraparound to be effective, teams need access to goods and services that meet families' unique needs. Tapestry had limited access to funds, so teams were called upon to develop creative strategies for family assistance. Creative means of finding goods and services included donation drives, free food round ups, service bartering, thrift store training, partnering with churches and community centers, participation in time dollar programs, and calling upon individuals mandated to perform community service. The average amount spent with a family is \$400 annually. These flexible funds were used primarily to access food, shelter, and youth and family enrichment activities. The success that Parent Partners have with finding goods and services is directly related to their familiarity with the neighborhood, and their personal experience with having to make do with limited financial resources.

It appears that there is a develop-

mental progression that Parent Partners go through as they become comfortable in their roles. Initially Parent Partners are excited, out to change the world, a bit naïve, and slightly overwhelmed with their responsibilities. After about three months, this stage may give way to fear, lack of self-confidence, and a sense of being overwhelmed by family pain and circumstances. At approximately six to eight months, Parent Partners generally begin to feel somewhat frustrated and a bit judgmental of families whose issues often mirror the Parent Partners' own histories and involvement in systems. At approximately one year, Parent Partners appear truly comfortable with their new roles. They have less difficulty establishing healthy helping relationships with families, and they acquire a feeling of ease. Each stage of a Parent Partner's growth entails different training and supervision needs. Future research that accumulates more information about these stages will be important as the career of Parent Partners expands.

References

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