

WEARING TWO HATS

Paula Savage, a single mother of three with two children receiving services, is also a Wraparound facilitator. During the late 1990s, Paula learned about Wraparound when she became involved with her local parent organization. Paulas son, then ten years old, was experiencing increasing difficulties, to the point that it was becoming unsafe to keep him at home. Paula learned firsthand about Wraparound from the team that formed to help support her and her family. Later, when her own family's need for services decreased, Paula decided not to end her involvement with Wraparound. Instead, she began volunteering as a Parent Partner, assisting other families on their teams. As her experience and knowledge base increased, she began to feel that she could be even more helpful to families if she were a facilitator. Since 2001, she has facilitated four teams.

Paula has participated in various Wraparound trainings. She says, however, that many of the skills that have proved most helpful to her in running a Wraparound team she learned in parenting classes. These classes covered negotiation, communication, and active listening, skills she believes facilitators need to have in order to be effective. In her opin-

ion, the Wraparound trainings she has attended have fallen short of teaching some of these skills. "Unfortunately, in many of the trainings, there's no really concrete 'How do you do this?' It's theory and a lot of philosophy. Many people struggle with how to implement this philosophy and theory." The Wraparound trainings did teach her that the process "is family focused, not client focused."

Paula believes that being a parent facilitator brings a number of advantages to Wraparound teams. For example, "Being a parent, I can make [Wraparound] more family [focused]. . . especially, I think, being a single parent. Its not just about one child, its about everyone." In addition, she can empathize with the family, she is able to truly hear what a parent is saying, and she can help the family develop a plan.

Paula's experience as a parent on Wraparound teams also helps her to recognize several issues that professionals often don't consider. One such issue is making sure caregivers are taking care of themselves. "We [parents] are working so hard to help our children, especially if you have more than one, that there is no time for us and we get worn out. Professionals continually encourage parents to take care of themselves, yet there is no realistic way to implement this. So, I'm able to make sure that, for each member of the family, those needs are identified [while the professionals are at the table] and I'm able to promote problem solving to address the needs of the entire family, including the parents or caregivers." She is also able to address the grief that these caregivers often experience. "I also understand there's a lot of grief with having a child who has complex

needs. Many people don't acknowledge or recognize that. . . . This is not the world we dreamed [our children] would grow up in. We are grieving at each developmental stage." Addressing these typically unrecognized issues helps the team create a plan that has future positive impact.

Paula has also learned strategies that help her manage the challenge of being both a parent and a facilitator. For her, self-awareness is essential. "I have to be very aware of my attitude, what's mine, what's theirs . . . I have to be very careful not to put my experience over theirs." Paula also has to be upfront with the teams she has facilitated and tell them when she is unable to attend meetings because of her own family's special needs.

As in many systems of care, the issue of academic credentials can be a barrier for her. Paula has no formal academic credentials and the facilitation skills she possesses are neither officially recognized nor organizationally supported. This lack of organizational and system support can pose significant challenges as she must volunteer her time to facilitate teams.

Lastly, she feels that neutrality is a major issue for her now that she has changed roles and is a facilitator. "I think one of the biggest things that I focused on, personally, with my history, is the neutrality. I must be neutral. Everyone must feel heard."

For Paula, the advantages outweigh these challenges. She feels that her experience as a parent really works to benefit the family. "There is a depth from being a parent that is missing from someone who is not. We, as parents, are not only looking at today, were looking at all of the tomorrows." —**Rupert van Wormer & Kathryn Schutte**

Partnership News

Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health. The 2003 Conference, Families Deserve the Best: Promising Interventions and Best Practices for Serving Children with Mental Health Needs, will be held November 21-23 in Washington DC. www.ffcmh.org/