

# Qualifications for Wraparound Family Partners

*A Statement from the National Wraparound Initiative*



## Introduction

During the fall and winter of 2012-2013, the Family Partner Task Force of the National Wraparound Initiative (NWI) developed a statement describing the experience and capacities that are needed in a person who wants to be employed as a family partner for wraparound. The statement was subsequently reviewed by the NWI's "Core Group," members with high levels of expertise and experience with wraparound. This document presents the final version of the statement and a description of how the statement was developed. The document also highlights the particular parts of the statement that aroused some controversy during development, and describes how these controversies were resolved.

## Statement on Qualifications

A family partner for wraparound ...

- Must be the biological or adoptive parent – or kin or other “forever” person in the parent role – who has been the primary caregiver of a child with emotional or behavioral challenges.
- Must have lived experience navigating the Mental/Behavioral Health, Child Welfare, or Juvenile Justice system with their child.
- Must be willing to use their own lived experiences to provide hope and peer support to other families experiencing similar challenges.

- Must be committed to ensuring that other parents have a voice in their child’s care and are active participants in the wraparound process.
- Must be able to engage and collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Must be able to maintain a non-judgmental attitude towards both families and professionals.

Experience in wraparound is preferred but not required.

## Process, Issues, and Clarifications

The Family Partner Task Force began its work by considering parent/family partner job descriptions and requirements from a variety of sources. From these, a subgroup of Task Force members created a draft statement that was circulated to the entire Task Force for feedback. Upon receipt of feedback, the subgroup considered and discussed the input and created a second draft, which was in turn submitted to the entire Task Force and to a group of about 20 current wraparound family partners who were not part of the Task Force. After making further revisions based on this second round of feedback, the subgroup members felt that the statement was ready for review by the NWI's core group, which includes stakeholders in with high levels of expertise and experience in the spectrum of different roles related to wraparound.

Formal feedback from the core group was sought via a survey. Of the 41 core group members invited to provide feedback, 36 did so, for a response rate of 88%. The entire text of the survey is included here in Appendix A. The first part of the survey asked each core group member to vote yes or no to approve the statement, and the second part of the survey asked respondents, particularly those voting “no,” to provide comments. Of the 36 core group members who provided feedback, 31 (86%) endorsed the statement as written in the survey, and 5 did not. The Task Force members reviewed the feedback and made final adjustments to the statement as described below. The Task Force members believe that these adjustments responded to the concerns raised by 4 of the 5 core group members who voted “no.” Therefore, the revised statement was adopted as final.

Among those who voted “no,” the objections to the definition fell into two categories. A number of people who voted “yes” also raised these two same concerns, and these two areas had been discussed at length by the Family Partner Task Force at several points during the development of the statement.

The first area of concern – voiced by a majority of those voting “no” – had to do with what sort of relationship a person should have had to a child with emotional/behavioral challenges in order to qualify as a peer to the families in wraparound. The consensus of the Task Force was that a person would have to have an enduring connection and commitment to the child, and to function in a primary caregiving role. The statement presented to the core group described that as including biological and adoptive parents, as well as relatives or kin in a parenting role. Core group members felt that this definition might leave out certain specific types of parent figures who nonetheless had a permanent bond with the child. In response to these concerns, and based on a recommendation provided by a core group member in the

feedback survey, the statement was changed to include anyone in a parental role who had made a commitment to be a “forever person” in the child’s life. The Task Force members working on the statement felt that this clarification responded in a very direct and accommodating manner to the concerns raised.

The second area of concern focused on what level of system experience qualifies someone as a peer of the families that participate in wraparound. This exact concern had been debated by the Task Force members on several occasions. The statement specifies that a family partner must have had lived experience navigating the Mental/Behavioral Health, Child Welfare, or Juvenile Justice system with their child. The concern expressed by several of the survey respondents is that Education/Special Education is not included on the list. The Task Force members revisited the issue in light of the feedback from the core group survey, and reaffirmed the original wording. This decision was based on the rationale that children can receive Special Education services even though they do not have emotional or behavioral challenges, and the parents/caregivers of these children thus may not have experienced the shaming and blaming that typically comes about from involvement in the other systems. On the other hand, children in Special Education who do have serious emotional and behavioral challenges do typically have contact with one or more of the three listed systems as well.

The Task Force recognizes that not everyone who meets these qualifications will ultimately prove to be capable in the family partner role in wraparound. Substantial training and coaching is required before a person can perform the role competently, and there will certainly be individuals who for some reason are not able to achieve full competence. Similarly, there may be individuals who do not meet these qualifications laid out here and yet actually do fully qualify as a peer for families in wraparound

(and meet the other qualifications as well). In such cases, people responsible for hiring family partners may decide to make exceptions to the criteria laid out here; however, they should do so transparently and intentionally, and they should be prepared to explain their decisions to families, family partners, and other stakeholders in the wraparound project.

## Appendix A: Definition of Family Partner as it Appeared in the Survey

The Family Partner Task Force of the NWI has been working over the last few months on a description of the experience and capacities that are needed in a person who wants to be employed as a family partner for wraparound. We began by considering job descriptions and requirements from a variety of sources. We then did two rounds of feedback surveys within the Task Force (the definition/requirements were modified after each round), followed by a final round that included a larger group of family partners from outside the NWI as well.

The only real area of lingering controversy about the definition has to do with the first two items—those touching on 1) what sort of relationships qualify a person as being a “parent” for a child with emotional or behavioral challenges, and 2) what level of system experience qualifies someone as a “peer” of families that participate in wraparound. Ultimately, we chose to keep wording that reflected more stringent requirements in each of these areas. We thought it was important to describe the ideal qualifications, so that people who choose to make exceptions to these criteria would need to be thoughtful and intentional when doing so.

A family partner for wraparound...

- Must be the biological, adoptive, or kin parent of a child with emotional or behavioral challenges.
- Must have lived experience navigating the Mental/Behavioral Health, Child Welfare, or

Juvenile Justice system with their child.

- Must be willing to use their own lived experiences to provide hope and support to other families experiencing similar challenges.
- Must be committed to ensuring that other parents have a voice in their child’s care and are active participants in the process.
- Must be able to engage and work with people from diverse backgrounds.
- Must be able to maintain a non-judgmental attitude towards both families and professionals.

## Appendix B: Comments from the Survey

—Great!

—Why is education not listed as an experience area?

—“For the first item, I would think a grandparent (does “kin” qualify?) or therapeutic foster parent would also qualify (assuming they had available time to perform that role)

- For the second item, I think the special education system should be added....that system can be the most difficult of all and parents who have successfully navigated it could offer valuable assistance to others.

- The rest is great!

—This is excellent work. However:

- 1.) Foster parents also have realms of experience acting as the caregiver for children and youth with emotional or behavioral challenges. They have lived experience with multiple service systems including all of those in the second bullet as well as the education and health systems. They should be included.
- 2.) The first bullet rules out GLBT caregivers who live in states that do not offer marriage equality, or who have not adopted. I’m not at all certain (and we must be)

that people will interpret “kin” to include GLBT caregivers.

- 3.) The second bullet must also include the education system which so often fails to adequately work with caregivers and these children/youth.

—This is a very good description except that it may unintentionally exclude grandparents or other kin who have parented a child with emotional or behavioral challenges. I would prefer for the first line to state “must be biological, adoptive, or kin family of a child with emotional or behavioral challenges. I agree with the remaining bullets as written.

—I feel strongly that both 1 & 2 are important and in a ideal world they would have also participated in wraparound services themselves.

- “On the issue of “Who” I would simply say “Must have been a primary caregiver of a child with..” (this lets in all the grandparents). This definition works well in Massachusetts.
- On second bullet, would add “Special Educational”
- Otherwise, looks great!!!

—If “kin” parent encompasses those adults making a forever moral commitment to a child, even if that child is not free for adoption or related by blood.

—I agree that the individual must have operated in the role of a parent or primary caregiver. I think the tricky part is whether people who were long term foster parents because the county or state didn’t move the child to permanency would also qualify. I think acknowledging foster parents who were guardians, or who continued to care for youth after they reached the local age of emancipation may have a lot to offer. While they would not have the same perspective or be a good match with a mother who’s child was in the child welfare system, they might be a good

support to a foster parent who is adopting a child with complex needs.

—One of our Parent Partners in the past had experience only in the Developmental Disabilities system and Education system. She had raised a son with Autism, and was gifted - easily engaging parents, bridging the gap that often existed in their relationships with schools, and working effectively to engage DDD in the Wraparound process. This may not be important, as most of our Parent Partners have experienced intense involvement with Child Welfare, Mental Health and/or Juvenile Justice - that is certainly more typical. And of course nearly all parents have experience in working with schools. However, with the increasing number of children diagnosed with Autism, and with litigation in some states (e.g. Washington) leading to greater inclusion of children with issues such as Autism in the Wraparound process, it might be nice to include DDD.

—Well done!

—great@

—Must is an order word. I imagine the group considered language that was focused on describing a qualification like, “is expected to have the capacity/ability to.....

—I think caregivers who have raised a child and meet the other qualifications should be included

—I believe that all the above listed attributes are important to the successful work of a family partner.

—It seems comprehensive to me.

—“Excellent job! Some thoughts:

- I think the 1st statement is perfect.
- Did you intentionally eliminate the Development Disabilities system from the 2nd requirement?

- *I think that in the 3rd statement, the word “other” is unnecessary.*
- *I think that the 4th statement is a little clunky. Do Family Partners also have the responsibility to ensure that the family is understood by other participants? If yes, that’s a step beyond what you’ve said, it seems to me.*
- *I prefer the word “collaborate” in statement #5 as that is more consistent with the 10 Principles of wraparound.*
- *Love #6.”*

—*My feedback is actually about the last bullet. I think it is an unrealistic expectation because the work involved does involve making judgments all the time. I do understand the intent of the statement though. I wonder if it could*

*speak to the ability to reserve judgement regarding both families and professionals and not allowing biases to cloud their thinking or interfere with collaboration. That is probably too many words but I thought I would at least give you my thoughts. I do like that you kept bullet one and two as is.*

—*All of the above sounds really good but I would also like to see a bullet about being in a place in their own recovery where the needs of the family being supported can consistently be the priority. If the parent partners are going to be paid supports, they have to be able to respond to the needs of the family consistently and dependably.*

—*Well thought out and well worded. Good job!*

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