Building the Strength of Natural Supports on Teams

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Objectives

- Understand differences between formal and natural supports

- Recognize the importance of including natural supports

- Identify challenges to engaging natural supports

- Identify strategies for engaging natural supports at the system, community, and family levels.

Adapted from: It Takes a Village: Engaging Informal and Natural Supports; Technical Assistance Partnership Webinar Series.

What makes someone a Natural Support?

Differences Between Formal and Natural Supports

Formal Supports	Natural Supports
Invested in the outcomes and interests of the agency/service they formally represent.	Tied to the interests and outcomes that comprise the family's hopes and dreams.
Focused on providing pre-defined interventions and supports.	Involved in daily life in natural ways and participating side-by-side with the family.
Tend to be accessible during times that families are not together (day time office hours, specified periods).	Accompany the youth and family across a day, week, as this is when they are naturally there.
Measure success based on the system's expectation and demands for the family's life.	Perceptions of success based in family's or personal system of beliefs and values rather than the system's needs.
Trained to be emotionally distant from the feelings of the people they serve.	Closer to the youth and family as they have been selected by the family's choice and lifestyle.
Approaches to the youth and family are frequently based in the authority of the position they hold.	Respect and shared history give rise to relationship that empowers access and support to the family.
Prior experiences with difficult youth and families shape and diminish the expectations that are held for individual youth and families.	Expectations are for a life as "good" as their own and the enthusiasm they bring from their natural relationship to the family moves this forward.
Have access to the resources that the system they represent holds in its services and structures.	Have knowledge about resources and practices of the individual family and the community they live in from a community-based perspective.
Involvement and commitments may be based on conditions imposed by people who are very distant from the family (supervisors, managers, etc.).	Investment is more often unconditional and controlled directly by the individual and not influenced by people outside the family.

Why is it important to have Natural supports on teams?

- Hint: Define the word *natural?*

- It just makes sense!

"What has made this nation great?
Not its heroes but its households."

- Sarah Josepha Hale
19th-century American writer

Individual and Family Culture

- Culture is defined as "the unique values, ideas, customs, skills, arts, of a family or a people that are transferred, communicated and passed along"

- "Culture" refers to the unique way an individual or family operates and functions, including habits, characteristics, preferences, roles, values, traditions etc.

- Sometimes we have difficulty identifying individual and family culture or reflecting it in Plans of Care. Culture is much more than ethnicity, language or food preferences. Without a quality and thorough discovery of family culture, and without reflecting that culture in the work of the team, plans are less likely to be successful.

Benefits of Engaging Natural and Community Supports

- Incorporates family and youth cultural needs and preferences
- Creates a plan that is individualized
- Creates "normalization"
- Combats stigma
- Creates an easier transition from formal services
- Promotes sustainability for families

Adapted from: It Takes a Village: Engaging Informal and Natural Supports; Technical Assistance Partnership Webinar Series.

What Natural and Community Supports Bring to the Table

- Willingness to help with immediate tasks.
- Able to see the family and youth from a different perspective, including recognizing strengths other team members may have missed.
- Can help point out strengths to the family and youth.
- Can often be frank with the family and youth regarding needs.
- Add to what parents and youth say
- Ongoing, round-the-clock support, particularly in crisis situations.

Adapted from: Lessons from the Field: What Helps in Utilizing Family Strengths in Wraparound; Rick Phillips, Ph.D.

"Sometimes I harbor a secret desire to be kidnapped by aliens and taken to a planet more sensible than this one. But time and again hope is renewed by the actions of ordinary people."

-Christopher Reeve

Challenges to Engagement of Natural and Community Supports

- Some families and youth feel ashamed or embarrassed by their situation

- At times, personal relationships for family members are strained

- Personal circumstances of the natural supports, such as transportation, schedule, and childcare

- Team member(s) struggle with the value of natural supports when compared to formal supports

- Concerns team members may have regarding a particular natural support person

Adapted from: It Takes a Village: Engaging Informal and Natural Supports; Technical Assistance Partnership Webinar Series.

Possible Team Challenges Involving Natural and Community Supports

- May align with the parent or youth in a way that is critical of a service provider on the team.
- May not follow through on what they say they are going to do.
- May have a "been there, done that" response to suggested supports, services or interventions.
- May become unavailable, or not show up.

Adapted from: Lessons from the Field: What Helps in Utilizing Family Strengths in Wraparound; Rick Phillips, Ph.D.

RELATIONSHIPS
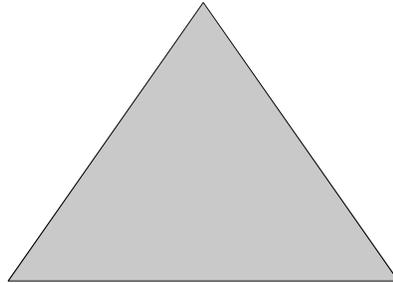
TRUST

Core Conditions in Engagement

- Genuineness
  - Being you
  - Being consistent in what you say and do
  - Communicating trustworthiness and acceptance
- Empathy
  - Communicate an understanding of and compassion for the person's experience
- Respect
  - Believing in the value of each person and the potential within them
  - Your ability to communicate respect in observable ways

"By perseverance the snail reached the ark."

-C.H. Spurgeon
19th-century British preacher

Building Trust:
Interviews with family members

- Listen with true concern without judging
- Don't rush decision-making
- Two-way conversation – get to know each other
- Be honest
- Don't pretend to understand if you don't
- Treat parents as equals – acknowledge they know their child best
- Step "into their world" – work with families where they're at
- If you don't know the answer, say you don't
- Clear Expectations

Adapted from interviews between Wisconsin Family Ties advocate,
Tina Swinford and parents involved in the CST/ISP process
6/04

Trust Breakers:
Interviews with Family Members

- Going behind a participant's back to get information to "keep tabs" on them
- False statements of understanding
- Taking control – power over
- Not calling back or putting them off
- Not following through, broken promises
- Changing plans/making decisions without participant
- Forcing/pushing for formal services that may not address the participant's need

Building the team: Qualifications for Collaborative Meeting Involvement

To qualify for involvement, individuals should:

- Have a role in the lives of the family and youth
- Be supportive of the family and youth
- Be supported for membership by the family and youth
- Be committed to participate in the process – including regular team meeting attendance
- Participate in discussions
- Be involved in the Plan of Care

Potential Collaborative Team Members
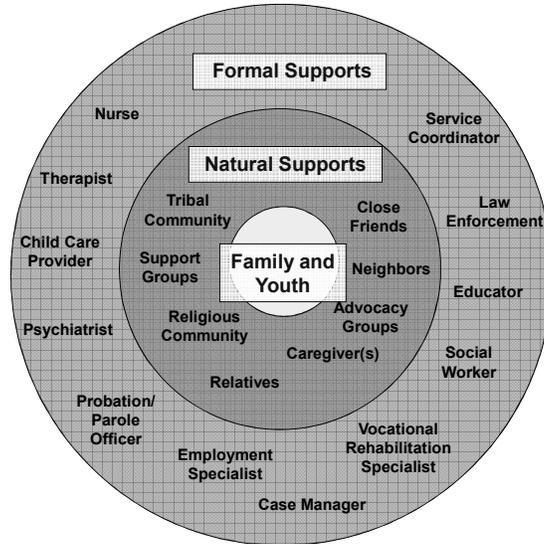
Involving Peer Support Specialists

- Caregiver of a child with emotional or behavioral disorders
- Specifically trained for an information, support, and advocacy role
- Genuinely understands and appreciates the culture of a family living with a child with special needs, because it is also their culture
- Typically employed by an organization other than service-providing agencies

Adapted from: Employing Parent Peer Specialists to Improve Outcomes, Hugh Davis, Wisconsin Family Ties

Team Development
The Role of Advocacy and Support

- Reinforce Coordinated Services Team process
- Use their experience to support the family and youth
- Attend and participate in team meetings
- Encourage balanced participation
- Clarify communication
- Ensure team members are being heard
- Encourage active listening

Suggestions Regarding the Role of
Natural and Community Supports on Teams

- **Suggestions from Parents**
  - Help the parent and youth stay positive
  - Help keep the meeting culturally appropriate
  - Help parents translate issues into their own language or experiences.

- **Suggestions from Service Providers**
  - Assert observations and positive historic events
  - Help keep parent and team on track at meetings
  - Move beyond frustration and skepticism; trust that the support of the team can help improve the situation.
  - Think of positive situations the family has dealt with and add to that
  - Help identify strengths

Adapted from: Lessons from the Field: What Helps in Utilizing Family Strengths in Wraparound; Rick Phillips, Ph.D.

Recruiting Community Supports

- Identify community organizations often referred to as "brokers of natural supports", and develop a plan to identify potential surrogate supports and connect them to youth and adult caregivers who need them. Examples may include: churches, service clubs, and other community organizations.

- Strength-based recruitment of family-specific natural supports to address a particular need or gap. For example: Pairing a youth who is interested in automotive repair with a mechanic in town.

Sample Questions to Help Families
Identify Natural Supports

- Who are the people who have been supportive and helpful over the years?

- When an incident or crisis happened, who was the first person you called?

- Who do you trust? Who does your child trust?

- Do you have neighbors, friends, or family members who are aware of your situation and can help you?

- Are there any activities in the community for your child and for you?

- Are you involved in any spiritual or religious activities?

Potential Sources of Natural Supports

- Family
- Friends
- Co-workers
- Clubs and social organizations
- Civic and professional organizations
- Recreation centers
- Volunteer opportunities
- Education opportunities
- Transportation resources
- Child care providers
- Online communities
- Religious and spiritual communities
- Schools and students
- Sports and hobbies
- Political parties and organizations

Adapted from: Project 10 transition education network
www.project10.info

Team Development
Getting Natural Supports on Teams

- Make personal contact, initiated by someone who has a trusting relationship with the person
- Eliminate barriers
  - Childcare
  - Transportation
  - Time & location of meeting
- Help ensure an active role
  - Encourage active participation
  - Explain the reciprocal supportive role of the team
- Provide orientation and ongoing support
- Long distance involvement