



Meaningful Family Involvement

 Williamson, E. & Gray, A. (2011). New roles for families in child welfare. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 33(7), 1212-1216.

WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

This article discusses strategies and approaches for child welfare agencies to increase meaningful family involvement in the service delivery process. This research seeks to provide information on creating and implementing sustainable family involvement programs in child welfare agencies.

WHAT ARE THE CRITICAL FINDINGS?

Developing partnerships and promoting family involvement are important aspects of the systems of care approach. With this approach, family members are viewed as experts and partners in the child's care-planning process and may be included in policy and procedure development. Family members can work as peer mentors to help other parents navigate the child welfare system, find resources, and understand policies and procedures. The chart below describes the elements of various child welfare agency capacity-building efforts surrounding the peer-mentoring program.

 PROGRAM STAFFING	Sufficient staff to support programs and activities Full-time position for family involvement initiative Responsible for development, implementation, and oversight Outreach, marketing, presentations, work groups, advocate
 FAMILY ENGAGEMENT	Engage family members with previous involvement in the child welfare system to be peer mentors Provide them training, supervision, and compensation
 REQUIREMENTS	Designed to prevent individuals from falling back into substance abuse and/or reentering child welfare system Referrals or readiness tools
 TRAINING	Mandates, structure, and skills of the child welfare system
 SUPERVISION	Regular supervision to discuss cases, challenges, and personal life Enhanced sustainability of programs
 COMPENSATION	Ranged from \$10-25/hour, some offered benefits & mileage
 AGENCY BUY-IN	Discussed program in staff meetings and trainings Education and outreach efforts with family member cofacilitation

Limitations exist in sampling and data collection including: qualitative retrospective design that relies on participant memories; limited sample and lack of generalizability; and homogeneous sample with majority being female.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR WORK?

It is important to engage staff and family members in capacity-building initiatives prior to implementing full-scale family involvement programs. A critical capacity building program is training for both child welfare staff and family members, to clarify roles/responsibilities, and differentiate case managers from peer mentors. Open communication between family and staff helps them identify needs and voice concerns. Agencies should seek to include all types of family members (not just parents and siblings). It is important to compensate peer-mentors and provide the resources necessary to support and encourage family involvement.