Implementing Family Engagement in the Juvenile Justice System

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Objectives

• Explain what is meant by “family engagement”
• Identify barriers to family engagement
• Provide recommended steps at state and local levels
• Provide an overview of Cowley County’s efforts
What is Family Engagement?

- There is no universal term
- Family engagement is empowering families, based on their strengths, to have an active role in their child’s disposition and treatment
- Family engagement involves establishing a collaborative relationship
Who are Families?

• Parents and/or other adults caregivers
  – Biological or step parents
  – Legal guardians and foster parents
  – Grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings
  – Kinships

• Youth’s perspective of family

• Noncustodial parents
Why Involve Families?

• Leads to better outcomes for youth
• Leads to better outcomes for the community
  – Families are the experts on their youth
  – Families have influence over youth
Why Involve Families? (cont)

• Involving parents is a best practice principle
  – Reduces behavior problems
  – Promotes school success
  – Provide greater supervision
  – Reduces recidivism
Family Barriers to Family Engagement

• The family
  – Does not trust the system
  – Feels betrayed by the system
  – Is frustrated
  – Feels degraded by the system
  – Is confused/does not understand the system
  – Feels powerless
  – Feels ashamed
  – Is uncooperative
Family Barriers (cont)

• Financial barriers
• Time barriers
• Transportation issues
• Multiple barriers
System Barriers to Family Engagement

• System design
• Fiscal challenges
• Lack of cultural competence
• Lack of training
• Conflicting goals
• Stereotypes
• “Us” vs. “Them”
Commitment to Change

• There is agreement among Juvenile Justice professionals that family engagement is a major need

• However, implementation of systematic steps to improve family engagement is limited

• There has to be a real and lasting Commitment to change
Recommended Steps at the State Level

• Develop common concepts and measurements of family engagement
• Develop fiscal strategy to fund family engagement
• Develop a basic guide for families
  – To find examples guides go to:
    http://modelsforchange.net/publications/436
  – See handout for contents of guide
Recommended Steps at State and Local Levels

• Provide training for Juvenile Justice professionals, including:
  – How to interact with families
  – Cross cultural representation

• Implement performance based standards

• Implement research-based models of improving family involvement
Recommended Steps at State and Local Levels (cont)

• Integrate parent advocates into the Juvenile Justice system
• Identify existing family support organizations and initiatives
• Implement Parent Education programming
Recommended Steps at State and Local Levels (cont)

• Adopt family-friendly sentencing options
• Incorporate strategies to improve family involvement in out-of-home placements
Recommended Steps Local Level

• Have dedicated staff persons with each agency to coordinate family engagement efforts and activities
• Establish a foundation of mutual respect
• Identify and promote family engagement practices and processes, which support communication between families and juvenile justice system
Recommended Steps Local Level (cont)

• Review current policy and procedures to identify where opportunity for family engagement can be strengthened

• Engage existing groups that support family engagement to assist them in identifying, adapting and or developing materials for families
Cowley County Youth Services
Family Engagement Program

• Purpose of the program
  – Involve families in the juvenile justice process
  – Reduce responsivity factors
  – Ensure successful rehabilitation
  – Sustain reintegration into the community
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Family Engagement (cont)

• First steps
  – Hire a family collaboration coordinator
  – Cross-train family collaboration coordinator

• Family Engagement Caseload
  • Court ordered
  • On supervision
  • Score high to moderate risk on the YLS/CMI
  • Immediate Intervention after referral to multi-disciplinary team (MDT)
Cowley County Youth Services
Family Engagement (cont)

• Responsibilities of the coordinator:
  – Remind parents of upcoming court dates
  – Attend court hearings
  – Attend supervision planning meetings
  – Assist in finding resources for family
    • Counseling
    • Legal services (Eagles Nest)
    • Food banks
    • Education
    • Insurance
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Family Engagement (cont)

• Responsibilities of the coordinator (cont):
  – Offer emotional support
  – Collaborate with parents to reduce the “us vs. them” mentality
  – Meet with the families a minimum of once a month – twice a month
  – Offer assistance in keeping parents on track with probation goals.
  – Attend the Parent Project® parenting class (more info on following slides)
**Parent Project®**

- Two programs available:
  - Parent Project Sr. (parents of adolescents)
  - Parent Project Jr. (parents of children 5-10)
- Focuses on difficult children, but is both a prevention and intervention program
- Behavioral approach: lots of love and affection, clear rules; consistent consequences, structure, and active supervision
- Skill building workshop with added emotional and practical support for parents
Parent Project® (cont)

• 16 week program
• Part I: Skill Building
  – Promote love and affection (influence vs. control); increase positive behavior (school attendance & performance); handle negative behavior, promote active supervision, identify risk factors
• Part II: Build Self Help Support Group + Skill Refinement:
  – Finding help, communicating values/ standards, family unity, building positive self concepts
• Part III: Parent Led Support Groups:
  – On-Going, Parent Led Support Groups
Parent Project® (cont)

• Examples
  – Parent Survey
  – Stories
Parent Project® (cont)

• 6 Key Elements of Parent Projects’ Success:
  1. Solution-focused
  2. Deals with even the most difficult acting-out adolescent behaviors
  3. Activity-based
  4. Community collaborative approach
  5. Provides parents information, skill training, encouragement, & practical/emotional support
  6. Developed as a compilation of answers to parents’ questions (MOST unique component)
Discussion
For More Information

- Feel free to contact Melody Pappan, mpappan@cowleycounty.org
- Consult the following materials used for developing this presentation:
  - Models for Change: “Family Involvement in Pennsylvania’s Juvenile Justice System”
  - The National Reentry Resource Center: “Effectively Implementing Family Engagement and Involvement Practices for Youth in the Juvenile Justice System”
  - National Institute of Mental Health/MacArthur Foundation: “The Challenge and Opportunity of Parental Involvement in Juvenile Justice Services”
  - Vera Institute of Justice “Identifying, Engaging and Empowering Families: A charge for Juvenile Justice Agencies”
  - Campaign for Youth Justice: “Family Comes First”