

Paradigm Shift in Services for Youth and Families

For children, youth, and families who struggle with mental health, and behavioral challenges, the road to effective services has taken many twists and turns. Prior to the 1980's most children who were considered to be in need of services were sent to out of home placements in either foster care, group homes, residential placement centers, and psychiatric hospitalization. Many others ended up in juvenile justice and corrections placements. All this at a tremendous cost to both state and federal governments, not to mention the toll to children and families.

The drawbacks to these services are that children are away from family roots, and away from their communities. Often there is little or no visitation to placement facilities by families or by the agencies that are responsible for the oversight of their care. The costs can be staggering often over one million dollars per year. Dollars spent on out of home care cannot be used to build community based infrastructure or jobs. But, the costs to children placed in these facilities are far worse. A recent study reported by the Bazelon Center in Washington DC, stated, there are no lasting long term positive effects from residential placement.

Starting in the 1980's, several systems were started that looked at building community based services that would keep seriously unique children in their own communities. These services included Homebuilders, Multisystemic Therapy, Therapeutic Foster Care, and Wraparound Services. The most prevalent today is Wraparound services, which were pioneered at Kaleidoscope, a private nonprofit agency in Chicago, the Alaskan Youth Initiative, and the Vermont Wraparound project.

Today every state in the nation and several foreign countries have viable wraparound initiatives.

Where Wraparound has been implemented, the results have been "extremely encouraging."¹ As compared to "treatment-as-usual" programs such as group care, psychiatric hospitalization, and incarceration, Wraparound results in "great declines in behavior problems, greater increases in functioning, higher stability in residential placement and an increased likelihood of permanent placement."²

One study found that children receiving wraparound "were significantly less likely to change placements," had lower rates of delinquency, and displayed few

¹ All references and footnotes in this paper can be fully found in Appeal No. 06-55559 United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit Diana Bonta, et al., Petitioner, v. Katie A., et al., Respondent Bruns Decl.,

² Bruns Decl.,

externalizing behaviors.³ Moreover, older youths who received Wraparound were significantly more likely to be in permanent family settings or living on their own, rather than continuing to bounce around the system.⁴ More importantly, the positive results continue after treatment ceased. During the post-intervention period, children with histories of incarceration and running away display significant decline in these self-destructive behaviors when compared to their peers who received standard practice services.⁵

Wraparound is a family-driven, strengths-based, needs-driven process for creating individualized services and supports for children, youth, and their families that facilitate access to normalized and inclusive community options, activities and opportunities.

A panel of nationwide experts has agreed upon the core elements of Wraparound services, which are key to the process success include:

- **Interagency Collaboration** – requires that the resources usually held in strict silos be shared to create an expansive array of services.
- **Community-based** – services should be provided in the local community or rural area where the child and his/her family live. Restrictive or institutional care should only be accessed for brief stabilization periods.
- **Individualized care** – is based on the specific needs of the child and/or family, and not on a menu of services. It can include both traditional and non-traditional services uniquely tailored to meet the specific needs and strengths of the child/family.
- **Family-driven – Family focused** – services are those where the family and child have direct input and ownership in the decision making process. Families and youth are listened to and heard at every step in the Wraparound process.
- **Strength-based services** – necessitates that the positive aspects of the child, family and community are a vital part of the holistic planning and service process. While the deficits are taken into account, the Wraparound process focuses on strengths as the basis of its services.
- **Unconditional care** – requires that service providers never give up on a child or family due to severity of behavior; instead services are changed as the needs of the child or family change. Children and families are never rejected from services thus creating continuity of care and breaking

³ CIMH Report

⁴ Id.

⁵ Id.

the extremely destructive cycle of movement from one placement to another.

Youth in Butte County California benefited from Wraparound services, achieving an 81% success rate during 2004. The services reduced the average time Butte County children spend in foster care and group home placements, reunified children with their families more quickly, and reduced the suicide rate among children receiving these services.⁶

Providing Wraparound to children with serious mental health needs “yields much better outcomes in terms of the child’s development and stability in the community and costs approximately half as much as placing these same children in residential treatment centers or a fraction of the cost of psychiatric hospitals.”⁷

Mendocino County also saw tremendous benefits from its Wraparound services. The county reported overwhelming success in keeping “at-risk” children out of residential placement and bringing other children home from residential treatment.⁸ The county also found that Wraparound services improved a child’s family functioning, social performance, emotional and behavior adjustments, school attendance, and academic performance.⁹

Arizona cites many reasons for extending eligibility for Wraparound, including its effectiveness in improving children’s well being, as well as significant family satisfaction with the services.¹⁰ Arizona’s experience shows that, over time, Wraparound services strengthen a child’s family-based support system and decreased his/her reliance on behavioral health services.¹¹

The benefits of these programs in terms of dollars saved and reduced placements, are even greater in the long term, as the children who receive these services mature into adults with the decreased likelihood of becoming homeless, institutionalized, incarcerated, or otherwise dependent on long-term social services.¹² The result will be generations of productive adults, and a significant reduction in the financial burden that States would otherwise incur from having to support and incarcerate adults who have been failed by a system charged with protecting them. The true question is, why do we continue to use methods of care that are costly and have no research that proves their effectiveness when

⁶ Letter from Patricia S. Crager, Director, Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services to Greg Rose, Bureau Chief, Resources Development and Training Support, DSS ER 05476

⁷ 1999 Surgeon General Report

⁸ Mendocino County Children’s System of Care, SB 163 Wraparound Services Pilot Project Final Report

⁹ Id.

¹⁰ 1999 Surgeon General Report

¹¹ Id.

¹² Id.

there are available alternatives that produce positive results at a much lower cost to both governments and to the children and families we are privileged to serve?

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