Family Alignment Initiative: Misalignment = Disengagement!

Caregiver Engagement Strategies, Part II
Working with Child-Welfare Involved Families

Sandra Killett
Child Welfare Organizing Project (CWOP)
Agenda

• CWOP background/history
• CWOP perspective in working with families /system
• Challenges that Child Welfare involved families have
• Protective factors
• Parents’ rights
• Supports
• Engagement strategies
• Resources/tools
• Q&A
Child Welfare Organizing Project

OUR FAMILIES, OUR CHILDREN IT’S TIME FOR CHANGE
CWOP Background

• CWOP is a not-for-profit organization that organizes parents and families to transform the child welfare system

• **History:**
  • It began as a research question “What voice do parents have in the child welfare system?”
  • Founded in the early 1990s through Hunter College’s School of Social Work and research department
  • CWOP has made many strides to increase the voices of parents within and outside of the child welfare system
  • Example: Parent Advocates participate in Family Team Conferences within the child welfare system
CWOP Perspective In Working With Families/System

• Respect the families voice
• Include families in the process, be honest open and empathetic
• Families may not be clear about their involvement with ACS/CPS
• Families may not know why they were referred for services
• Help the family understand you want help
CWOP Goals and Objective

• Our key targets for system change include working to bring about the following:
  – A continued increase in the proportion of public child welfare funding allocated to prevention and family preservation
  – The acknowledgement and development of a conscious strategy to address and counteract the widespread influence of systemic racism in child welfare decision making by the Administration for Children’s Services (ACS)
  – An increase in the indicators of parent involvement in the child welfare service planning, e.g., the rates of parents participating in Service Plan Review and meeting and exceeding minimal parent-child visitation requirement
CWOP Goal and Objectives (cont.)

• Mobilize parents affected and not affected to transform the child welfare system to respond to families humanly before and after contact. Increase the number of parents serving as consultants and in oversight roles within ACS, and exerting a direct influence on public policy development.

• Bring attention to alternative models of legal representation, reasonable caseloads for attorneys, training supervisory, clerical, investigative, and social work staff of those who come in contact with parents who are the respondents in Family Court and receiving preventive services.

• Increase the number of child and family service providers, legal and advocacy organizations who employ Parent Advocates as part of their staff and board to influence the way providers engage and work with families.
Poll Question

• What percentage of your cases are child welfare involved?

• 25% or less
• 25%-50%
• 50%-75%
• 75%+
Some Ways to Support Child Welfare Involved Families

• Get clear and honest information from the family
• Help family get over the stigma of being involved with ACS
• Help families get exactly what they need for their families
• Build protective factors
• Good legal services
Protective Factors: How can we help build these?

- **Parental Resilience - Being Strong and Flexible**: This is the ability to bounce back when life knocks you down.
- **Social Connections - Parents Need Friends**: These are the positive people in their lives who give them emotional support and assistance.
- **Concrete Support in Times of Need - Everybody Needs Help Sometimes**: This protective factor tells us that it is a sign of strength to ask for help when you need it.
- **Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development - Being a Great Parent is Part Natural and Part Learned**: Parents can pass on the great things their parents taught them as well as learn new things about their child's development.
- **Social and Emotional Competence of Children - Parents Need to Help Their Children Communicate**: Parents have a big role in teaching their children skills to manage their emotions, express their needs and feelings, deal with conflict, and get along with others.
- **Healthy Parent-Child Relationship**: Recognizing that the relationship with your children is a relationship and that their feelings matter, their dignity matters.
Parents’ Rights: Inform Them of Their Rights

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

• not lose my child because I’m poor.
• services that will support me in raising my child at home.
• speak for myself and be heard at every step of the child protective service process.
• be informed of my rights.
• a meaningful and fair hearing before my parental rights are limited in any way.
• quality legal representation.
• support from someone who has been in my shoes.
• have my child quickly placed with someone I trust.
Parents’ Rights (cont.)

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

• frequent, meaningful contact with my child.
• make decisions about my child’s life in care.
• privacy.
• fair treatment regardless of my race, culture, gender, or religion.
• services that will support me in reunifying with my child.
• offer my child a lifelong relationship.
• meaningful participation in developing the child welfare policies and practices that affect my family and community.
Available Supports For Families

- Community Organizing
- Parent Support Healing Group
- Parent Leadership Curriculum
- Parent Advocate Network
- Peer to Peer contact
- Other community base organizations for social justice: CVH, Parents In Action and Fostering Progressive Advocacy
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Tell your story strategically, e.g., Rise Magazine
Discussion Questions

• What are some specific challenges you’ve had in engaging child welfare involved families?

• How have you been able to support child welfare involved families?
Engagement Strategies Mental Health Providers Can Do to Support and Collaborate with Families

• Always communicate the strength of the family
• Include families in discussions and planning
• Help families gather information about mental health needs
• Assessment of family - do not judge
How To Approach Families

• When first referred for mental health services by CPS?
• When working with a bio and foster family together?
• During reunification?
• When the family is receiving preventive services?
• When there’s an open CPS case?
Resources/Tools

CWOP Tool Kit, Resources – www.cwop.org
Urban Justice Center - https://www.urbanjustice.org/
http://bds.org/
Q & A
Next Family Alignment Webinars in the Series

• View previous webinars and access checklists and resources at www.ctacny.com

• Next Core Area: Caregiver Engagement
  – Caregiver Engagement Consultation Webinar
    • Wednesday, April 15th; 12PM to 1PM
Thank you for participating with us today!

Contact Us:

Sandra Killett
skillett@cwop.org

CTAC Questions:
Lydia Franco
lydia.franco@nyu.edu

www.ctacny.com