The Practice and Power of Engaging Parent Leaders

Lisa Deputie & Roxy Foster

May 23, noon - 1:30pm
The Children’s Fire

- The whole community sits around the circle called the Medicine Wheel. Around the wheel are representatives of all the different aspects of the community. In the East, there’s the fool. In the West there’s the witch. In the South, there’s the hunter. In the North there’s the creator. Others positioned around the circle are the shaman, the politician, etc. And in the center of the circle is the children’s fire. Next to the children’s fire sit the grandfather and the grandmother.

- If you want to build a condominium in the community of Spirit Lake, you have to enter the medicine Wheel in the East, the position of the fool. The question you ask is, “May I build a condo on Spirit Lake?”

- The fool takes your question, turns it backwards and asks, “What would Spirit Lake say about such a condo?”

- You then have to take the question the fool gives you to everyone around the Medicine Wheel. Each will respond to you according to their position in the community.

- The last people you must ask the question to are the grandmother and grandfather who guard the children’s fire. If these two decide that the request is not good for the children’s fire, then the answer is “no”. They are the only ones in the circle who have the veto power.

- The concept of the ultimate question is simple. Does it hurt or help the children’s fire? If it can pass the test of the children’s fire, then it can be done.
IT ALL STARTS WITH ASKING THE QUESTION WHY?

It is a triple win for Families Systems Communities

- Why would parents want to be involved?
- Why would staff want to engage parents as PARTNERS?
- Why is PARTNERSHIP important?
Best practices of engaging parents with professionals.
**EARLY ENGAGEMENT - BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE RIGHT REASON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFESSIONAL ACTION</th>
<th>PARENT RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OUTREACH</td>
<td>INVITATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who do we want to partner with?</td>
<td>Do I know enough to belong?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are our expectations for this partnership?</td>
<td>What risks or barriers will I meet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What connections do we have in community?</td>
<td>Will this fit my schedule or cost me money?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do we have money to provide child care, food, transportation, translators etc.</td>
<td>Is this for me or them?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Handout 1 (Questions before starting to recruit)**

**Handout 2 (Guiding Principles)**

**Handout 3 (Best Practice)**
**EARLY ENGAGEMENT - BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS FOR THE RIGHT REASON**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFESSIONAL ACTION</th>
<th>PARENT RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ONE-ON-ONE</td>
<td>ONE-ON-ONE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Individual informal conversations with targeted populations. How do the families self-interest meet ours? Allow them to ask questions.  

Do they really know the issues that impact my family? Is this for me or them? What do they really want?
## CO-LEARNING – How do we learn from each other? Allow it to happen!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROFESSIONAL ACTION</th>
<th>PARENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once you gather information learned from the one-on-ones. Express shared interest. Allow parents to tell their story in a variety of ways.</td>
<td>Where do I see my ideas or suggestions implemented? Do I have a role in planning and implementation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use exercises that build trust and relationships. <strong>Understand this takes time.</strong></td>
<td>Can I trust the information I receive as truthful and accurate? Will I benefit and grow from my participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be open and flexible to change agenda’s and timelines in the beginning. This builds trust. Make mistakes together be accountable admitting we are better together builds partnerships.</td>
<td>Do I have an opportunity to build relationships with both professionals and other parents?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ARE WE IN PARTNERSHIP?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>PRACTITIONER</strong></th>
<th><strong>PARENT</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are parents partners in developing our approach or do they simply endorse our organization’s own ideas?</td>
<td>How does information and skills I receive impact my family and/or community life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are parents involved in planning, implementation and evaluation or assessment?</td>
<td>How has my perspectives about other people or practice changed as a result of my participation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are parents able to see their own ideas in action?</td>
<td>What do I know about myself that I did not know before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have you learned from different perspectives?</td>
<td>Can I see the impact of my time and energy in the community?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| How are we celebrating our outcomes together? | **Handout #4 Continuum for Parent Engagement**  
**Handout #5 Check list** |
Minnesota Best Practice

- Meaningful Parent Leadership and shared practice occurs when parents gain the knowledge and skills to function in meaningful leadership roles and represent a “parent voice” to help shape the direction of their families, programs, and communities.

- Shared Leadership is successfully achieved when parents, community members, staff, policymakers, community members and others build effective partnerships to improve systems and the quality of life for families and communities.

  - Share responsibility
  - Expertise
  - Leadership in decisions
Essential Elements of Strong Partnerships

- Mutual respect for skills and knowledge
- Mutually agreed upon goals
- Trust and honesty
- Clear and open communication
- Shared planning & decision-making
- Shared planning & decision-making
- Shared resources
- Mutual sharing of information
- Shared evaluation of progress
- Commitment to Shared Leadership
Results of Our Partnership
Developed new attitudes in agency and parent behaviors leading to trust and stronger partnerships

Identified meaningful leadership roles for parents

Formed organizational structures, such as task forces or teams, for staff and Parent Leaders to work together to implement and support a wide range of opportunities for Shared Leadership

Creating organizational cultures with resources to support roles for Parent Leaders

Removed barriers to partnering with parents

Supporting and recognizing parents in advocacy roles

Encouraging Parent Leaders to serve as role models and mentors to other parents.
Lisa Deutie-Region Director, Prevention Initiatives, MN Communities Caring for Children
651-523-0099
ldeputie@pcamn.org
www.pcamn.org

Roxy Foster-Parent Leadership Consultant
651-442-8914
foster.roxy2@gmail.com