Engaging Families:

“What does it mean to really engage families in the child welfare system?”

A new day and a new way for child welfare

11th Annual Child Welfare Conference
Thursday, April 23, 2010
Southeastern Louisiana University
Hammond, LA
Overview

What is this ‘meaningful’ family engagement?
What will it take?
How can we get there?
Making Change in Child Welfare

- Change in focus on child/family outcomes vs. procedural compliance
- Clear indication of need for change based on CFSRs
- A focus on sustainable, large-scale, systemic, cultural change in public child welfare agencies and their community partners
Family Involvement in Child Welfare Systems

- **System-level involvement** - Family partners sit on regional and statewide collaborative committees and workgroups; provide and participate in social worker training.
- **Peer-level involvement** - Parent partners help other parents navigate the child welfare system.
- **Practice-level involvement** - Agencies utilize family-centered practices, e.g., Family Group Conferences, Team Decision Making, Child Family Teams, etc.
Meaningful Family Involvement: Making It Happen

The value of meaningful family involvement in child welfare is clear, but how do we make it a reality?
Collaboration Continuum

Co-exist

Compete

Communicate

Coordinate

Cooperate

Collaborate
A Definition of Collaboration that Works

“It is a mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties to achieve common goals by sharing responsibility, authority and accountability for achieving results.”

(Chrislip, 2002, p.41)
Purpose of Collaboration

“...to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purview of any particular party.”

(Chrislip, 2002, p. 42)
Skill Building for Collaboration that Works

- Assessment
- Conflict competency
- Engagement
- Empowerment
- Shared vision/leadership/accountability
- Act
- Reflective practice
- Beginner’s mind
Assessment requires…

- Be curious rather than critical.
- See what's there vs. what we want to be there or have been trained to see.
- See strengths *and* barriers as growth opportunities.
- Have humility and humor.
Conflict competency requires…

- Know your own triggers.
- Establishing a clear, individual/shared values-base.
- Be willing to resolve underlying sources of conflict.
- Commit the time and energy to working through conflicts and disagreements.
- Create or look for ways to work through the conflict or place of disagreement.
Engagement requires…

- A both/and orientation.
- Embracing conflict as an asset and opportunity.
- Respectful engagement.
- Humility and mutual respect.
Empowerment requires…

- Ability to value all *equally* despite variable levels of authority and responsibility.
- Distinguishing between ‘bogus’ and authentic empowerment.
- Willingness and ability to share power.
- Humility, humor, and persistence.
Shared vision, leadership, and accountability require…

- An ability to dream.
- An appreciative orientation - seeing and building on strengths.
- EVERYBODY has a piece of the action that is meaningful to them and moves toward shared vision.
- Key point: Make it a norm for ALL partners to learn and grow; not just families.
- Humility.
Action requires…

- Design an agreed upon process to move the work and assess the effectiveness what's accomplished.
- Ability to critique the work rather than criticize each other.
- Participation from everyone at every level.
- Discipline to act in accordance with the shared vision and values no matter your role.
- Humility and humor.
Reflective practice requires...

- Discipline to slow down to connect principles to practice.
- Courage to ask for input and insight from all partners; reflection becomes a group activity.
- Humility and humor.
Perpetual beginnings require…

- High tolerance for being a beginner rather than expert; a beginner’s mind.
- Exceptional self-care.
- Seeing set-backs as openings for quantum leaps.
- Learning to begin again and again is a great skill in this work.
- Humility and humor.
Think about this…

…some questions for

– Where are you on the Collaboration Continuum, and where are you headed and why?
– What can you do to help the situation?
– What are you willing to change?
Things to keep in mind…

- Collaboration requires trust and trust takes time.
- Collaboration, and collaborative leadership, require an expanded comfort zone.
- Collaborative leadership is a skill set to be cultivated in all partners. It requires the intention and attention of all partners.
- In collaborative leadership all partners are equally valued even when variably empowered.
Resources

Online Resources:
- [http://www.nrcpfc.org](http://www.nrcpfc.org) - The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections
- [http://www.friendsnrc.org/download/parent_leader_strategies.pdf](http://www.friendsnrc.org/download/parent_leader_strategies.pdf) - Parent Leadership: Successful Strategies, a resource from the National Resource Center for Community Based Child Abuse Prevention
- [http://www.collaborativeleadership.org/index.html](http://www.collaborativeleadership.org/index.html) - Collaborative Leadership (free, downloadable assessments and training tools)

Print Resources:
- The Collaborative Leadership Fieldbook by D. Chrislip (Jossey-Bass Publishers: San Francisco, CA)
More Helpful Resources

Print Resources:

- Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together by W. Isaacs (Currency Doubleday: New York, NY)

- The World Café: Shaping Our Futures Through Conversations that Matter by J. Brown & D. Isaacs (Berrett-Koehler Publishers: San Francisco, CA)
“If it takes a village,…”
“...BUILD IT!”