

Approximately five years ago, our county began to utilize the practice of Family Group Conferencing (FGC). (Provide a brief explanation of what FGC entails) We discovered that this practice created a new and exciting venue for giving families a meaningful voice while involved with formal systems. The principles and values that drive the practice of FGC, parallel those that steer a successful System of Care (SOC). (what are those principles?) In addition, SOC principles are identical to those of CAASP (spell out), inclusive of Balance and Restorative Justice (BARJ) principles and evident in the values, beliefs and actions of many of our other formal and informal partners. It has been remarkable to see all the similarities between various systems when it comes to how to best serve children and families. FGC provides a means to bring people together as partners, and SOC has expanded these partnerships in ways that we could have only hoped for.

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We received the SOC grant nearly three years ago; and through the resources we developed and the partners we have engaged, we are building an infrastructure reflective of the SOC principles. We have reinforced FGC as our foundational strength-based planning method. We are committed to improving our data systems in order to make community resources more accessible and data entry less cumbersome for workers. We embrace true collaboration within the Child Welfare system and among other systems, with which we work. We acknowledge the diversity of the people we serve and promote not only cultural sensitivity, but also fairness and equity through training and in our interactions with others. We recognize the need for quality assurance and evaluation, and we wish to be accountable. Finally, we value and support our community and accept that we cannot do this important work without them.

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The degree of informal involvement has far surpassed what we initially envisioned and is structured in a way that will hopefully allow for sustainability after the grant is over. We have five SOC subcommittees represented in our community outreach efforts: Outreach, Community-based, Parent, Cultural Competence, Youth and Faith-based (isn't that 6?). The Outreach subcommittee is the oversight committee that helps to guide and support the other subcommittees. The goal of the Community-based subcommittee is to bring many community organizations together to allow for the best and most effective use of resources. They also are responsible for ensuring that the needs of the community are being met. The Parent subcommittee ensures that there is a parent voice represented at meetings, advocating for other parents and helping, with presentations about collaboration with our informal partners. The Cultural Competence subcommittee is responsible for ensuring that services to families and children are culturally sensitive, relevant and appropriate. The Youth subcommittee is the voice of the children, as they want to have as much input as possible on all issues pertaining to or concerning them. Lastly, there is a Faith-based subcommittee. This subcommittee has collaborated with Youth for Christ (an organization that provides children with mentors?) to provide mentors to children, and helped in the development of our first annual SOC summer camp. All of the subcommittees are primarily comprised of community folks and have their own mission statements and strategic plans, with the exception of the Youth subcommittee which was recently established.

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