The “Parent Connectors” Program

An empirical investigation of a parent support program

Albert Duchnowski, Ph.D. and Krista Kutash, Ph.D.

What is The Parent Connector Program?

A peer to peer support program for parents of children with emotional disturbances (ED).

Trained family members serve as Parent Connectors to deliver family support through weekly telephone contact.

Theoretical Framework

(Adapted from Heflinger, Northrup, Sonnichsen, Brannan, 1998, page 263)

Intervention

Based on prior NIMH funded project by Henry Ireys

Original project was a City-wide intervention

Intervention

• Parents of children who have ED were provided a 16 hour training program on how to be a Parent Connector.

• Parent Connectors were provided with weekly group supervision by a psychologist to discuss the contact with each parent.

• Parent Connectors had an opportunity to meet their families face-to-face at three dinners held at the school.

Participants

Parents of and students served in special education ED settings in a school district in a large metropolitan area.
Characteristics of Study Sample N=93

Family
People in home
Avg. # of persons in home: 4.5
Avg. # of children in home: 2.8

Poverty level
At or below poverty level: 43%
Average income: $23,254

Student
Gender Male: 74%
Years Special Education 7.4 years
Age Mean Age 14.4 years
Age Range 10 to 19 years
Ethnicity
Black 57%
White 25%
Bi-racial 8%
Hispanic 8%

Research Design
- Nine month pre-post design
- Parent-Child dyads randomly assigned to two conditions

Comparison Group n=47
Teachers receive specialized training in increasing parent involvement

Experimental Group n=46
Teacher Training Plus Parents receive weekly telephone calls from Parent Connector

Support Delivered
Over the nine month period for the 46 parent participants:

- Average number of calls to each parent: 53 (range 28 to 83 calls)
- Average hours of individualized support & information: 4.7 hrs (range 1.2 to 15 hrs)
- Topics most discussed were issues dealing with family life & school

Goal 1 Reduce Stress, Increase Empowerment and Efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct (Parent Respondent)</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Efficacy</td>
<td>Vanderbilt Mental Health Services Efficacy Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caregiver Strain Questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental Stress</td>
<td>The Ohio Scale – Hopefulness Subscale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Empowerment</td>
<td>Support Functions Scale</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Family Empowerment Scale</td>
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Goal 2 Increase Use of Services and Knowledge of Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct (Respondent)</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Receipt of Mental Health Services (Parent &amp; School Staff)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement at IEP (Parent)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service Assessment for Children &amp; Adolescents (SACA)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Participation Measure</td>
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</table>
Goal 3: Improve Student Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct (Respondent)</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improve emotional and behavioral functioning of students (Parent)</td>
<td>Student Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decrease level of impairment (Parent)</td>
<td>Brief Impairment Scale (BIS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Attendance (School staff)</td>
<td>Attendance Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Achievement (Student)</td>
<td>Wide Range Achievement Test 3 Reading/Math (WRAT3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outcome 1: Reduce Stress, Increase Empowerment and Efficacy

Effect Size Cohen’s d*
- Family Empowerment Scale: .32
- Caregiver Strain Questionnaire: .40
- Social Support: .39
- Hopefulness - Ohio Scales: .42
- Vanderbilt MH Services Efficacy Questionnaire: .14

*Cohen’s d: Small = .2; Medium = .5; Large = .8

Outcome 2: Increase Use of Services and Knowledge of Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Experimental Group</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
<th>Effect Size Cohen’s d*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Counseling at School (Total Average)</td>
<td>22 Hrs</td>
<td>12 Hrs</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Counseling (Student Only)</td>
<td>15 Hrs</td>
<td>8 Hrs</td>
<td>.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Counseling (Family member Only)</td>
<td>51 Min</td>
<td>20 Min</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family counseling (Family member &amp; Student)</td>
<td>52 Min</td>
<td>28 Min</td>
<td>.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Nights Spent in Detention</td>
<td>5 Npm</td>
<td>5 Npm</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Participation in IEP Meetings</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Cohen’s d: Small = .2; Medium = .5; Large = .8

Outcome 3: Improve Student Outcomes

Effect Size Cohen’s d*
- Strength and Difficulties Questionnaire: .30
- Brief Impairment Scale: .49
- achievement in Math and Reading: Mixed

*Cohen’s d: Small = .2; Medium = .5; Large = .8

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical Framework (Adapted from Heflinger, Northrup, Sonnichsen, Brannan, 1998, page 263)

More Information

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