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### Collaborating with Community-Based Organizations in Developing Systems of Care

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## Increasing Access in Systems of Care

- Systems of care aim to increase access for children & families, defined as the “ability to enter, navigate, & exit appropriate services & supports as needed”(Center for Mental Health Services, 2004).
- Community-based organizations, in particular, have been adept at creating an environment where local residents in need of help feel comfortable accessing services and/or supports (Callejas, Mowery, Nesman & Hernandez, 2008).

## Increasing Access in Systems of Care (con't)

- Multiple cultural, social, & structural factors are barriers to mental health service access for culturally/racially diverse children & their families (Hernandez, Nesman, Isaacs, Callejas, & Mowery, 2006):
  - > Cultural misunderstandings between providers & families
  - > Poverty & lack of resources in low income neighborhoods
  - > Lack of insurance or legal immigration status
  - > Mistrust & fear
  - > Culture-based beliefs about mental health
  - > Language differences

## Potential Role of Community-Based Organizations

- Community-Based Organizations (CBO) that are embedded in hard-to-reach communities can serve as linkages between the populations they serve and the formal service system.



- CBOs that collaborate with systems of care need to be able to live in both worlds without losing their essential identity.

## True Collaboration

- “Successful collaboration within systems of care for children with serious emotional disturbance and their families that incorporates qualities of role clarity for families and service providers, interdependence and shared responsibility among collaborating partners, striving for vision-driven solutions, and a focus on the whole child in the context of the child’s family and community.” (Hodges, Nesman, & Hernandez, 1999).

## RTC Study 5 Methods

- Selection of 12 organizations that increased mental health service access for racially/ethnically diverse children & families
- Conducted 151 semi-structured interviews in person or by phone; audio taped
- Entered transcripts from interviews into Atlas.ti software and conducted systematic qualitative analysis
- Identified themes related to organizational & community characteristics, & strategies that increase access, availability, & utilization of mental health services

### Types of Organizations & Collaborative Relationships

- System of care grantees that provide a wide range of ethnic specific services & have MOUs with other providers
- Organizations contracted to provide ethnic-specific mental health services
- Organizations funded to provide certified mental health interpreter & cultural consultation services

### Types of Organizations & Collaborative Relationships (con't)

- Organizations with an MOU to provide safety net services & referrals to mental health services
- Organizations that provide cultural competence training & linkages to the community
- Organizations that provide ethnic-specific natural helper & service system navigation services

### Findings: Key Community-Based Organization Characteristics

- Credibility in the community
  - Reputation of providing help that is needed/desired; responsiveness to community & providers; effective advocacy; known & trusted by community
- Connections
  - Able to connect community & providers to resources, information, & people

### Findings: Key Community-Based Organization Characteristics (con't)

- Credentials
  - Respected & considered professional by the community; trained staff with appropriate certification; appropriate organizational credentials
- Capacity
  - Growing & able to sustain services through ongoing organizational, human resource, & infrastructure development

### Findings: Key System of Care Characteristics

- Open-mindedness
  - Understand culturally specific help-seeking strategies & different beliefs about mental health
- Outreach
  - Reach out to community members & organizations with an emphasis on relationship building

### Findings: Key System of Care Characteristics (con't)

- Operationalization
  - Develop specific strategies to serve diverse children & families using community input
- Opportunity
  - Seek out opportunities for building capacity, adapting the service array, & attracting new funding to serve diverse communities
- Ongoing relationship
  - Demonstrate commitment to continue to work with diverse communities

### Contributions of Community-Based Organizations

- Community-based organizations assisted in overcoming barriers to service access through:
  - Cultural understanding & knowing the community
  - Programs addressing poverty, immigration, culture, racism, & trauma
  - Funding that is not dependent upon insurance or legal status
  - Community trust in the organization & staff
  - Reducing stigma associated with seeking mental health services
  - Bilingual/bicultural environments & resources

### Enhanced Collaboration Strategies

- Formal contracts developed between community-based organizations & systems of care to provide specific services
- Funding provided to CBOs for adaptation of required evidence based practices
- CBOs participate as full partners in governance/ policy-making bodies
- Adaptations to system of care strategies are made based on knowledge of the population developed through collaboration with CBOs (e.g. child & family involvement)

### Conclusion

- System of care development can benefit from early and ongoing collaboration with community-based organizations through:
  - Building upon existing strategies that reduce economic, legal, racial, cultural, & linguistic barriers
  - Getting to know communities so that misunderstandings & mistrust are reduced
  - Building capacity of community-based organizations to address mental health needs and reduce stigma
  - Increasing credibility in the community through staff & organizational connections so that a positive reputation is developed & maintained

### References

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