



CHAPTER

1

Introduction

Crafting Logic Models for Systems of Care: Ideas into Action

Introduction

Efforts to establish and expand comprehensive community-based systems of care for children with serious emotional disturbance and their families have grown tremendously since the concept of systems of care was first described by Stroul and Friedman (1986). Stakeholders¹ in communities across the country have come together with enthusiasm and commitment for the purpose of creating coordinated, comprehensive, individualized, and culturally competent services and supports for children and their families with the goal of meeting child and family needs in less restrictive community-based settings.

The work of building systems of care, however, is complex and challenging. Even when stakeholders share a deep commitment to developing systems of care and even when they agree that this work is a top priority, the ability to anchor their ideas for their system of care in concrete strategies for change can be both elusive and overwhelming.

Turning systems of care ideas into solid strategies for change requires a tangible approach to system development at multiple levels: policy and administrative levels, program implementation levels, and the level of practice. To accomplish this, stakeholders need to anchor their system of care ideas in clear and specific expectations for the children and families they expect to serve, what they hope to accomplish, and how they believe they can effectively achieve their goals. Making expectations for system change clear in this way is called using a theory of change or theory-based approach to systems of care development. This use of "theory" is different than theory in the sense of scientific principle such as a theory of combustion or theory of gravity. For systems of care, theories are beliefs, based on available knowledge and research that guide the selection and combination of the services and supports made available to children and their families. In systems of care, using theory

to guide action allows stakeholders to make clear statements about what they *believe* will bring about necessary change for children with serious emotional disturbance and their families.

This monograph is designed to guide communities in using a theory-based approach to systems of care development. By applying a theory of change approach, this monograph provides a straightforward method for system stakeholders to turn their ideas (and dreams) about systems of care into tangible action-oriented strategies for achieving their goals and offers practical guidance in how to make explicit the relationships among the populations the system intends to serve, the system's intended goals, and the strategies for achieving those goals. This monograph is not, however, a primer on the components needed to build a system of care. For this purpose Pires' (2002) detailed guide to systems of care is highly recommended.

The theory of change approach described in this monograph is intended to help communities that are developing a system of care to:

- Improve their communication both internally and externally,
- Organize their work cohesively,
- Track their progress,
- Improve their use of strategic planning and internal evaluation, and
- Effectively identify technical assistance needs.

In addition, this monograph will address the purpose and benefits of articulating a theory of change, present tools for developing a theory-based framework, and provide examples to illustrate the development process. This monograph will also discuss how theory-based frameworks can inform both strategic planning and evaluation. Ultimately, this monograph is designed to assist system stakeholders in developing a theory-based approach to system development that will aid all levels of planning and implementation.

¹ In this context, stakeholders refers to a cross-agency group of system planners and implementers that includes policy makers, funders, managers, administrators, direct service staff, families, and community members.