

Collaborative Adventures

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Using Surveys to Infuse Family Voice in your System of Care

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A few short questions will render a wealth of information. The more you listen to and apply what you learn from families, the stronger your community initiative will be. “Listen, listen and then listen” – another application for that all important Phrase that Pays. One way is to ensure that a caregiver of a child with special needs serves on your community team. It is dually important that you help to create an environment for them that is supportive and embraces the wisdom of this member. Ask this member to help you develop a consumer surveys tool that can be used to help you learn more about your target community. Surveys can be developed to track data about child and family teams, governance meetings and even family events. You are then demonstrating a way to practice another Phrase that Pays: “Make your Decision Value Driven”.

Consumer surveys are used at many system of care sites around the state of Indiana. They are used to gauge provider and consumer satisfaction of the SOC, and to better understand their needs. Information gathered from families is then used to guide the process of creating an informal family support mechanism. ‘Family Nights’ prove to be an effective approach towards empowering families in many communities.

Examples of support vary, from a peer to peer chat to regular family group gatherings. These activities usually involve food, and can be funded by SOC flex funds, donations or a “pitch-in”. Topics of interest generally cover education, recreation and social networking. Exactly what the support looks like should be determined by those being served. Remember the important maxim of the family movement: “Nothing About Us Without Us”.

Surveys can be conducted at any time and used to measure customer satisfaction at the beginning and end of wraparound. Asking for caregiver input to develop your survey instrument is recommended. It is also engaging and may spark an interest for the caregiver to take on a family leadership role. In developing the survey tool, it’s a good idea to provide a general list of options for survey participants to draw from. It is equally beneficial to leave room for additional comments and suggestions. It’s also an excellent opportunity to ask about their strengths and if they might be interested in taking on a leadership role. Remember, you are going to need someone to organize and facilitate your family support initiative and it should always be family led if at all possible. Be sure to leave room on the survey for each participant to write their name and contact information, if they wish, even if it is just to learn more about systems of care.

Contact other SOC sites and see what kind of process they are using and find out what has worked for them. A couple of other things to consider in developing your survey would be the age of the children, what is the best time of day to meet and if they would like someone to call on them. The survey should be no more than one page and typed in an easy-to-read font. The survey should also include your family representative or SOC contact person’s name and number.

Other opportunities to conduct surveys would be during a home visit or at one of your family gatherings. This time of year many systems of care are sponsoring back-to-school events. One community decided to have an ice cream social every year and to use this opportunity to honor the people who have offered informal supports in the community as well as the community team members. Whatever route you choose, select a survey that is planned and implemented by families. Make surveying an ongoing process, as families’ needs are always changing. What you learn represents the ‘voice’ of those you are serving and will drive a successful initiative.

SAMPLE SURVEY on next page:

