



# FEDERATION OF FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH

## Report on Targeted Technical Assistance Activity

MISSOURI - DECEMBER 1-2, 2003

### THE REQUEST

*MO-SPAN, the Missouri Statewide Organization of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health requested assistance to be better able to carry out its responsibility for helping family members in three system of care communities acquire the knowledge and develop the skills necessary to effectively engage in policy work both in their local communities and at the state level.*

The State and family and professional leadership in all three projects endorse the values and principles of systems of care. Involving families in all aspects of the developing policy, designing and delivering services, and evaluating of these systems of care is a goal shared by family and professional leaders alike. One of the areas in which Missouri seeks to increase family involvement is policy work

MO-SPAN asked for the Federation's expertise and curriculum to train its seasoned staff so they can provide training and on-going support on policy work for families in the three system of care communities and throughout the state of Missouri. MO-SPAN and the Missouri Department of Mental Health requested that Pat Hunt provide two days of training on involving families in policy work for a core group of MO-SPAN staff and invitees. The Federation of Families provided this training as an opportunity to field test the curriculum "Families As Partners in Policy" submitted as Targeted Technical Assistance deliverable on February 11, 2003.

### THE PARTICIPANTS

The event was held December 1 and 2, 2003, St. Louis, MO for 9 persons. Trainees included family members from "Show Me Kids" in Springfield, MO and "Partnership with Families" in St. Charles County. Key staff that will be working in the new project "Transitions" for St. Louis City and St. Louis County also participated. Ann Frawley, an independent consultant to MO-SPAN, also attended. Her experience working within the St. Louis County CASA Program and as a trainer of Foster Parents for the MO Dept of Social Services, Children's Division (Foster Care/Abuse Neglect) contributed significantly to discussion of how this training could be adapted to Missouri climate, issues and opportunities.

## THE PROCESS

Participants were provided a copy of the curriculum, trainer's notes and handouts. During review of the materials, they engaged in discussion regarding training styles, personalities, their experience, and issues specific to MO.

Having three system of care communities creates an urgent and immediate need to be able to effectively support family involvement. Systems often ask to be connected with families who can participate before either the families or policy groups are prepared to maximize this opportunity.

Based on their experiences as trainers, advocates, families and leaders who have participated in policy work, they expressed a desire to explore two key issues that result from such urgency and to define more specifically:

- ◆ The attributes, experiences and skills that indicate family readiness to be involved at the policy level
- ◆ Information that families in Missouri need to have before working with policy groups

## THE OUTCOMES

Their discussion of the key issues generated a list of items they will consider when seeking families to be involved in policy work. Participants were clear that some of the skills on the chart on the following page could come from training, mentoring and ongoing support. The chart was developed as a guide rather than criteria.

When exploring *family readiness* to engage in such work, items of importance include advocacy experience, involvement in and exposure to family empowerment events, commitment to confidentiality; being able to offer solutions, to use their experience to illustrate issues, to listen; global thinking, eager to learn, knowledge of what a system of care is, the importance of demeanor, a willingness to be identified, to ask for the supports they need in order to participate, and to be reliable.

Expanding the curriculum to deeper discussion of the *types of information* that Missouri families need in order to be effective at policy tables yielded a more in depth list of issues relating to group history, meeting logistics, process and protocol, tangible supports, retribution, the importance of debriefing, and understanding political and environmental factors.

Participants learned how to use the Federation's curriculum "Families As Partners In Policy Work" to train and support others and adapt the curriculum specifically to the policy issues of importance in Missouri.

*THINGS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FAMILY READINESS TO ENGAGE IN POLICY WORK  
IDENTIFIED BY MISSOURI PARTICIPANTS DECEMBER 2003*

1. Experience advocating for ones' own child -
2. Involvement in & exposure to family empowerment events. *Knowing others are in the same boat* usually happens when families are connected to one another through family-run organization services and activities, such as peer support, training, conferences and educational opportunities.
3. Commitment to CONFIDENTIALITY – Families understand the significance of confidentiality and honor it.
4. Have an understanding of what happened “to them” – knowing what could/would have worked helps families be prepared to offer solutions to the circumstances that create a need for advocacy.
5. They use their pain to inform others and to illustrate issues. They have found support for their grief, disappointment, anger, etc. and are motivated by their hope to make positive change for their family and others.
6. Ability to listen
7. Global thinking – Families express an interest in growing beyond their current experience. They show an interest in responding to opportunities and have a conviction to help make change. At this point, families often remark, **“I don’t want this to happen to anyone else”**.
8. OPEN to learning – Families are seeking more knowledge and eagerly search for training opportunities and new information.
9. Know what a system of care is – know about our agencies and what we are already doing.
10. Demeanor – Families who are prepared to work with policy groups attend to how they present themselves in various ways. It is not only what they know or say that counts, but also the manner in which they present it. This includes:
  - a. CLOTHING – You do not have to “dress up”, but should avoid clothing that is revealing, contains profane or sexual messages, demonstrates political or religious affiliations, etc.
  - b. LANGUAGE - Although policy group work may be frustrating at times, it is important to avoid “screaming matches”, using profanity and negative body language in order to be heard.
  - c. ATTITUDE – Helpful - avoid blaming, shaming, demanding or commanding.
  - d. BOUNDARIES – NEVER make commitments on behalf of other people or agencies without the authority to do so.
11. Are willing to be identified – At this point, families understand that the work accomplished at policy tables is public and agree to *have their names out there*. They do not use *confidentiality* to cloak a personal agenda or avoid accountability.
12. Know what they need in order to be involved – Life circumstances do not prevent them from effective participation. Families can readily identify and seek the resources they need in order to be involved. They *know what it will take* and are willing to ask for help in getting it.
13. Demonstrate integrity – Have a record for follow through, reliability and integrity.

*WHAT ELSE WE NEED TO KNOW*

Participants discussed the following issues in more depth as they relate to their work in MO.

<p><b>Goal of the group &amp; the meeting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ History</li> <li>◆ Membership list</li> <li>◆ previous minutes</li> <li>◆ agenda</li> </ul>	<p><b>Logistics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ location &amp; directions</li> <li>◆ parking</li> <li>◆ accessibility</li> <li>◆ how long it will last (stay over, meals, etc)</li> <li>◆ is lunch included?</li> </ul>
<p><b>How information is shared</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Are meetings recorded?</li> <li>◆ What happens with the minutes?</li> <li>◆ How quickly do we get information?</li> <li>◆ Who gets the results of the meeting?</li> <li>◆ How to get information if I miss a meeting</li> </ul>	<p><b>Process &amp; protocols</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What are the ground rules?</li> <li>◆ How are decisions implemented?</li> <li>◆ Can I bring someone with me?</li> <li>◆ Can I speak &amp; give out information?</li> <li>◆ Can I make a motion?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Decorum</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ What do I wear?</li> <li>◆ Where do I sit?</li> <li>◆</li> </ul>	<p><b>Knowing where the power lies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ who will <i>run</i> the meeting?</li> <li>◆ Who else will be there?</li> <li>◆ What do they all do for a living?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Mentoring</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ The “code” for a break to collaborate</li> <li>◆ How to connect ahead of time</li> <li>◆ How debriefing will occur</li> </ul>	<p><b>Expectations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ How often we meet</li> <li>◆ Clear responsibilities</li> <li>◆ Timelines for work</li> </ul>
<p><i>As a result of their discussion, MO trainers will emphasize strategies for these issues as part of their training.</i></p>	



*What do you plan to do as a result of the information you gained from this workshop?*

Disseminate the training. Put it into practice. Go home & get to work. Use this information myself & teach others how to work on policy committees. Use this to help train families and others in our giant area. Help empower more families to be policy makers.