Family Partnership Agreement

Training Module One: A Bird's Eye View

In order for our agency to be successful in meeting family needs, it is obvious that we must have a comprehensive view of the families' strengths and needs. Also, to be effective it is critical that we develop this "view" of the family as soon as possible after a child has entered our program because our window of opportunity to provide assistance to the family is limited. If we add to this responsibility the factor that our own resources (time, funds, etc.) are limited, it becomes very apparent that we must have a system that:

- *efficiently advocates for the real needs of our families;*
- *helps us focus our efforts on the highest priorities of family needs;*
- *is proactive in involving our families with needed resources;*
- *when needed, involves resources outside our agency;*
- *provides a clear and measurable outline of our efforts and responsibilities; and*
- *is flexible enough to adjust to more information or new family challenges.*

This concept of services is well defined in the Head Start Standards (1304.20(e); 1304.21(a)(2); 1304.23(b)(4); 1304.40; 1304.5(a)(1); 1306.30(b); 1308.19(j); and 1308.21). Even more important this concept of services is the essence of the spirit of Head Start. It is half of our Mission Statement. It is the perfect compliment to what is happening to our children in our Head Start classrooms.

I. THE REAL NEEDS OF OUR FAMILIES

… the instrument

The **Family Partnership Agreement** is a document that can provide us with a bird's eye or comprehensive overview of family needs. This document, however, is not a "cure-all" or healing potion. It is only a resource that *can* give us an introduction to the dynamics of a real family within a real community. *This instrument cannot perform better than the staff member who is using it*. It is only words on paper or a computer screen. It is a good and comprehensive list of possible needs, but to be effective it must be accompanied by a caring and sensitive person. The real strength of our family assessment of needs, must be in the people interacting with the family.

For any person to share any depth of need there must be relationship based upon trust. Real trust takes time to develop, and since our time with the family is limited, it is imperative that we have the skills to facilitate this process. The "skills" necessary will include the following:

- *empathy* - understanding what another is communicating and reflecting back to the other person that they are understood.

- *respect* - communicating to another that their life, fears, and goals belong to them and you have confidence in their ability to live their life. This also includes not giving suggested solutions to every issue the person mentions, but allowing and even encouraging the person to explore their options and experiment.

- *genuiness* - communicating on a person-to-person basis. This is the ability to communicate above the "I am the professional and you are the client." roles. This involves the "I am a person and you are a person - let's talk." interaction.

- *immediacy* - active listening skills, asking non-threatening questions for clarification, and staying focused on task. (The task is to get a comprehensive view of family needs, not to "get it over with".)

... the goals

After the **Family Partnership Agreement** instrument is complete the next step is to determine with the parent, what goals or expected outcomes will be pursued. This is a very brief summary of the picture painted by the process of completing the **Family Partnership Agreement**. After reviewing what has happened and what today is like, the goal will describe what path(s) will the family or individual members of the family take. It will often include interactions with sources outside the family, such as, Head Start, a Community College, the Public Library, Texas Employment Commission, etc.

The goals stated on the **Individual Partnership Agreement** form are our immediate and measurable steps that outline a large part of our interaction with the parents.

II. THE HIGHEST PRIORITY OF FAMILY NEED

... the goals

The information gathered in the **Family Partnership Agreement** in addition to information documented in **Progress Notes**, **Daily Notes**, and information stated on the **Case Management** Sheet must be synchronous. The goals must be stated in a way that is *measurable*, that is, there will be evidence after some time that the goals have been met or not met.

It is obviously essential that the family determine the goals, and it is also obvious that our role in this process is to facilitate this developmental process. Much of the facilitation process with some families involves assisting or examining with the family key issues and solutions. As professionals we are aware that some effects of poverty, and especially poverty that is exacerbated by cultural differences, include distorted perceptions of social roles and individual abilities, in addition to unawareness of personal potential. What may be an obvious "problem" to us, may not be perceived as an issue to a family. When this occurs we cannot force a family or family member to adopt a problem because we think it is important. The family or family member must perceive the problem. Part of our job is to provide the opportunity for the family to enlarge their vision of their potentials and sometimes social issues .

Some key issues that may appear in the data collected in a ***Family Partnership Agreement*** that should indicate a "problem", and if not generate a goal should at least generate some discussion of the implications of the information would include (this is not an exhaustive list):

- educational level of parents or adults in the household
- language skills
- earning level and immediate potential/long range potential
- financial responsibility
- living arrangements/shelter
- family counseling
- parenting skills
- transportation
- nutritional needs
- clothing needs

This is a list of alerts. If a parent who is an important wage earner in the family (or should be) has only a 9th grade education, why would this not be addressed in the goals? If a single mom does not have her own dwelling and is living in less than desirable circumstances, why would this not be addressed in the goals?

... the steps

Once a goal is determined by the parent and Family Advocate, there must be a "plan of action" that states what it will take to reach the goal. This plan will be stated in not only what will be done, but also the order in which it will be done. Because of this it is essential that we *reinforce* this activity by asking about their progress or difficulties with a specific step, in our brief interactions with parents when they come to pick up or deliver their child to the Center. This approach has the goal to *encourage* not to pressure the parent.

The steps identified to reach a goal should always be open to revision. Sometimes it is necessary if progress is not being made to go back and redefine activities in "smaller steps". (Example: If the step is initially stated that the parent will "enroll in a local community college continuing education course ...". If after several contacts with this parent over a few weeks, the parent is acting embarrassed or uncomfortable about the topic and has made no effort to enroll, this should alert us to reexamine this step. Possibly "smaller steps" need to be identified. Does the parent have transportation? Has the person ever been to a community college campus? Does the parent know who to talk to on campus? etc.)

The progress of the parent, as outlined in these steps, must be reflected in the **Progress Notes**. Entries in the **Progress Notes** should be a minimum of once a month. Progress is the key. Progress in the steps is the path to self-esteem, confidence, and the potential for success. Failure in the steps will probably reinforce negative self-concept.

... the referrals

Often the steps will involve the parent getting involved with other agencies, businesses or individuals to assist them in reaching their goals. This concept is true for everyone of us. We all live in a community, and non of us have all that is necessary without periodic assistance from others. Our job as it concerns linking parents with community resources consists primarily of, first - identifying the appropriate resource or referral that can best be of assistance to the family. For most of us this is the easy part. The second part of the referral process involves linking the parent to the referral. *This means outlining a path between the parent and referral source that is understandable and acceptable*.

Outlining this path requires a knowledge base on the part of the parent, and an emotional investment.

- **Knowledge**
  Does the parent know what the referral can do to assist them?
  Does the parent know how to or what to communicate to the referral?
  Can the parent get to the referral or find it?
  Does the parent know what will be asked of them from the referral?
  Does the parent know what they will need to provide to the referral (Examples: Social Security Card, Drivers License, Proof of residence, Birth Certificates, etc.)
- **Emotion**
  Is the parent embarrassed about seeking assistance?
  Is the parent fearful?
  Is there resentment about having to seek assistance?
  Is there a history, especially a negative history, of the parent seek

assistance?

Discovering these elements of our parents may not be an easy task. It is important that we are careful in our assumptions, and diligent in our observations and communications.

Exercise: Answer the following questions

1. **Which of the following best describes what we must do in our *Family Partnership Agreements*?**

   a. ☐ Write at least 3 objective.

   b. ☐ Make sure we get every goal finalized within the first 3 months after enrollment.

   c. ☐ Make ourselves available to our families so that they can let us know if they need anything.

   d. ☐ Be proactive in involving families with needed resources.

2. **Which of the following best describes the *Family Partnership Agreement*?**

   a. ☐ It is no better than the staff using it.

   b. ☐ It is a comprehensive evaluation tool.

   c. ☐ If completed correctly, it will not need to be amended.

   d. ☐ It will only be effective if we use out-of-agency resources for referrals.

3. **Which of the following is necessary to develop trust in a relationship with parents?**

   a. ☐ Making sure all the family needs are met.

   b. ☐ Empathy and respect.

   c. ☐ Spend a lot of time with their children.

d. ☐ Professionalism and knowledge.

4. When we say that the stated goals in the *Family Partnership Agreement* are measurable we mean?

a. ☐ Everybody understands exactly what has been written.

b. ☐ There will eventually be evidence that the goal was met or not met.

c. ☐ All the written goals are related.

d. ☐ Everyone agrees with the stated goals.

5. It is important to communicate with parents on a regular basis in order to

a. ☐ make sure they are doing what they said they would do.

b. ☐ confirm the numbers for your monthly report.

c. ☐ to reinforce and encourage the actions to be taken by the parents.

d. ☐ find out if we need to change the goals.

6. The two main parts of the referral process are

a. ☐ identifying the referral and making sure the parent gets there.

b. ☐ identifying the referral and linking the parent to the referral.

c. ☐ Qualifying the referral and communicating this to the parents.

d. ☐ Clearly stating the referral and documenting this process.

7. What is involved in linking a parent to a referral?

a. ☐ Outlining a path that is understandable and acceptable.

b. ☐ Giving accurate information to the parent about the referral source.

c. ☐ Going with the parent to the referral agency.

d. ☐ Following up on the parents progress with the referral source.