

Systems of Care Youth Coordinators Meeting

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What was the purpose of the System of Care Youth Coordinators meeting?

The *Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program*, funded by the Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch of the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, funds the implementation of systems of care nationwide. Systems of care promote integrated policy-making, services and supports across service providers and systems that support children and youth with mental health needs and their families. An important goal of the *Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program* is that systems of care be “youth guided,” which means that youth have the right to be empowered, educated, and given a decision making role in the care of their own lives as well as the policies and procedures governing care for all youth in the community, state, tribe, territory, and nation. This includes decisions related to treatment planning, policy-making and program-development, among others. Youth-guided systems of care also cultivate leadership and support opportunities for young people with mental health needs.

To support this goal, each system of care has been funded to hire at least one youth coordinator to serve as the liaison between youth and adults, create leadership opportunities for youth in systems of care, and help make the vision of youth guided systems a reality. Youth coordinators are integral to the system of care workforce; however, they often receive limited training, guidance and support in their roles – factors which limit their ability to impact the development of youth-guided systems of care. The Technical Assistance Partnership for Child and Family Mental Health (TA Partnership) as well as other national organizations (e.g., National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, Youth M.O.V.E. National, Georgetown University National Technical Assistance Center, Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign, University of South Florida’s Research and Training Center and Portland State University Research and Training Center) all provide resources, technical assistance and training designed to support youth coordinators in their roles. Many youth coordinators participate in virtual trainings and conference calls (i.e., webinars and youth coordinator affinity calls); however, many have reported concerns that youth coordinators’ training needs are not addressed at national systems of care conferences and other face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, youth coordinators report that face-to-face networking opportunities are needed to enhance the virtual trainings and networking opportunities available to them. Addressing these concerns is essential to promoting systems of care that can truly be youth-guided.

Gary Blau, Chief of the Child, Adolescent and Family Branch of the Center for Mental Health Services, funded and promoted the Systems of Care Youth Coordinators Meeting to better identify and begin addressing youth coordinators’ concerns. The meeting was designed to:

1. provide networking opportunities for youth coordinators;
2. present face-to-face training and professional development; and
3. offer opportunities to voice suggestions and opinions.

The two-day meeting was held in Washington, D.C. on January 22-23, 2009.

Who participated in the meeting?

Invitations were extended to youth coordinators as well as other members of currently funded as well as graduated systems of care whose roles in their communities included the following:

- Educating youth consumers, family members and adult providers on the importance of authentic youth voice in individual service planning, service delivery, policy development and governance;
- Supporting youth in developing and coordinating youth leadership training opportunities, including conferences;
- Coordinating and developing supports for youth groups and youth service (i.e., peer mentors or youth advisors); and,
- Coordinating efforts to ensure that youth voice impacts the services and supports offered to youth and that concerns of youth are addressed within the service system.

Invitations were also extended to members of national organizations, including as The National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health, Youth M.O.V.E. National, Georgetown University National Technical Assistance Center, Caring for Every Child’s Mental Health Campaign, University of South Florida’s Research and Training Center and Portland State University Research and Training Center. The meeting brought together youth coordinators and other representatives from 44 currently-funded tribal and non-tribal communities, graduated systems of care communities, and staff from the Child, Adolescent and Family Branch, the TA Partnership, national partner organizations, and systems of care implementation consultants. A total of 98 people participated, 72 of which represented currently funded and graduated systems of care sites.

The chart below lists the 44 communities represented at the meeting.

Year Funded	State/Place	Project Title
2002	Connecticut (Bridgeport)	Partnership for Kids Project
2002	New York (City)	Keeping Families Together
2002	Oklahoma (State)	Oklahoma Systems of Care
2003	City of Oakland/Native American Health Center (Oakland, CA)	Urban Trails Project
2003	Cleveland	The Cuyahoga Tapestry System of Care (Cuyahoga County)
2003	Louisiana (5 Parishes)	(LA YES) Louisiana Says Yes to Children with Mental Health Needs & Their Families
2003	Oregon (4-county region in Eastern Oregon: Hood River, Wasco, Gilliam, Sherman)	Mid-Columbia Child & Family Partnership
2004	Kentucky	Kentuckians Encouraging Youth to Succeed (KEYS)

Year Funded	State/Place	Project Title
2004	Montana	Kids Integrated Delivery System for Montana (Kids FM)
2004	New York (Albany)	Albany County Family Partnerships for Change
2004	New York (Erie)	Erie County Family Voices
2005	Blackfeet Tribe (Browning, Montana)	The Po'ka Project (Blackfeet Children System of Care)
2005	California (Butte County)	Connecting Circles of Care
2005	California (Placer County)	Transforming Children's Mental Health Through Community and Parent Partnerships
2005	Connecticut (Hartford)	Building Blocks for Bright Beginnings
2005	Florida (Sarasota)	Sarasota County Early Childhood Mental Health Partnership
2005	Hawaii	Project Ho'omohala - Transition to Adulthood
2005	Illinois (Chicago)	McHenry County Child/Adolescent Recovery Experience
2005	Maine	Implementing a Trauma-Informed System of Care for Children with Serious Emotional Disturbances in Maine (THRIVE)
2005	Massachusetts (Boston)	Central Massachusetts Communities of Care (CMCC)
2005	Michigan (Lansing)	Integrating Multiple Paths Achieves Comprehensive Children's Treatment (IMPACCT)
2005	Minnesota	STARS for Children's Mental Health
2005	New York (Rochester)	Achieving Culturally Competent and Effective Services and Supports (ACCESS)
2005	North Carolina (Charlotte)	Mecklenburg CARES
2005	Oregon (Multnomah)	Wraparound Oregon: Early Childhood
2005	Pennsylvania (Allegheny County)	Child Mental Health Initiative
2005	Pennsylvania (Beaver County)	BC-SCORES (Beaver County's System of Care: Optimizing Resources, Education, and Supports)
2005	Pennsylvania (Pittsburg)	Start Early Together (SET)
2005	Rhode Island	The Positive Education Partnership
2005	Tennessee (Nashville)	Mule Town Family Network: A System of Care for Maury County, Tennessee
2005	Texas (Houston)	Harris County Systems of Hope
2005	Wyoming	Wyoming's SAGE Initiative
2005	Yankton Sioux Tribe (Wagner, SD)	Tiwahe Wakan (Families as Sacred)
2006	Minnesota	Children Succeed Initiative: A Six County Children's Mental Health System of Care
2006	Mississippi (Jackson)	commUNITY Cares
2006	Missouri	Circle of H.O.P.E., A System of Care for Children

Year Funded	State/Place	Project Title
		with a Serious Emotional Disturbance
2006	Pascua Yaqui Tribe (Arizona)	"Sewa Uusim"/Flower Children, Our Hope, Our Light, Our Future
2008	California (Los Angeles)	United American Indian Involvement's Seven Generations
2008	Maryland (Baltimore)	MD C.A.R.E.S.
2008	New York (Mayville)	The Tapestry of Chautauqua Initiative
2008	New York (Middletown)	Family Matters of Orange County
2008	Oregon (Portland)	Northwest Portland Area Indian Health Board
2008	Tennessee (Nashville)	JustCare Family Network
2008	Washington (Yakima)	Yakima Valley Youth and Family Coalition

How was the meeting structured?

The two day meeting included a mix of networking, discussion, and workshop sessions including: two plenary sessions, four workshops, facilitated small group activity and working sessions, a strategic planning session, a large group discussion with Gary Blau, and a resource mixer. The meeting agenda (*Appendix A*) includes descriptions of all sessions.

What were the outcomes of the meeting?

Over the course of the two day meeting, participants discussed challenges related to supporting the youth coordinator role and making youth guided systems of care a reality. They also identified recommendations for addressing these challenges. Gary Blau joined as a participant to some discussions; however, many discussions were held in facilitated small and large groups throughout the entire meeting. The items below were selected because they illuminate key concerns and recommendations. They are not intended to represent all challenges and solutions addressed throughout the two day meeting.

Key concerns and challenges identified by Youth Coordinators

1. Youth coordinator roles remain poorly understood, especially in early childhood communities.

The expectations of youth coordinators include a broad range of responsibilities, many requiring diverse skill sets. Examples include serving as mentors and supports to youth; developing youth-run non-profit organizations; planning fun activities for youth; supporting and developing youth groups; facilitating youth involvement in anti-stigma efforts; building leadership skills among young people; improving services and treatment for youth; supporting youth in times of crises; fostering buy-in to systems of care and youth-guided systems to education, juvenile justice, child welfare, and other systems; advocating for services to better meet the needs of youth; educating youth on a broad range of topics, developing opportunities to engage in activities planned by other community organizations; involving youth in all aspects of systems of care; and more. An additional challenge is that

youth coordinators are expected to work with children and youth across broad ages and stages of development including early childhood, childhood, pre-adolescence, adolescence, and young adulthood – all with significant emotional and behavioral challenges and many of whom have experienced significant trauma. And finally, the systems of care sites demonstrate varying levels of adherence to systems of care principles and experience varying levels of conflict and other challenges, which require additional intuitiveness and dexterity on the part of youth coordinators.

Such broad expectations of the role contribute to limited buy-in as well as limited staff, financial, and moral support. Many youth coordinators report being assigned duties unrelated or marginally related to their role, such as providing child care and fun activities for children and youth involved in the system of care. These challenges are especially true for youth coordinators in early childhood communities, in which the concept of “youth guided” care is often met with confusion if not outright resistance. Many feel that the youth coordinator role is not sufficiently professionalized, which impacts the extent to which youth coordinators are taken seriously and getting buy-in from partner organizations and key leadership within systems of care. Youth coordinators need training and support in order to better understand their roles and enhance their effectiveness in supporting the development of youth guided systems of care.

2. The mandate for developing youth guided systems of care – along with specific guidance on exactly what doing so entails – is needed in order to support youth coordinators in their jobs.

Many youth coordinators are concerned that the lack of adult buy-in to support their work is informed in part by the lack of a clear mandate for developing youth guided systems of care. This obfuscated mandate also contributes to the sense of being pulled in multiple directions, all of which require very different skill sets, time commitment, and supports. Many youth coordinators are concerned that truly “youth guided” care and systems are difficult to attain in part because the youth guided value is broadly interpreted. As such, youth guided care and systems are tacitly seen as optional components of systems of care. Several shared concerns that there is insufficient accountability for developing systems, services, and initiatives that are truly youth guided. Some cited observations that federal site visit teams do not include any representation from youth, youth coordinators, or any other representative specializing in youth guided systems and care. The absence of this representation from the site visit contributes to a sense that developing youth guided systems is really optional.

3. More technical assistance and data is needed to support youth involvement goals as well as to identify what works and what does not work in youth involvement in systems of care.

Additional support is also needed in terms of best practices for involving youth in ways that truly advance the development of youth-guided systems of care. Youth coordinators struggle with recruitment, retention, generating support among adults, partnering with various organizations, and more. Participants also expressed a need for evidence that builds a strong case for the value added from developing youth guided systems, organizations, and initiatives in systems of care. When added to anecdotal data and personal experience, this data, evidence, and technical assistance could significantly boost the ability of youth coordinators

to enlist buy-in from skeptical adults and could also encourage youth coordinators to have a stronger sense of purpose when facing challenges getting youth involved in systems of care.

4. Youth coordinators would like to have opportunities to better share support, technical assistance and data amongst themselves.

There was substantial agreement that youth coordinators and others who support the development of youth-guided systems of care could benefit from a focused community of practice that supports the cultivation and dissemination of resources and support that help advance youth guided systems of care. Many also shared interest in on-site technical assistance in the form of shadowing successful youth coordinators within successful systems of care as well as on-site training and resources to support their work. This is especially true for newly hired youth coordinators. Participants in this meeting also expressed concerns about a perceived lack of formal educational structure and opportunities to help them build their capacity to be effective in their roles. These concerns and others expressed during the meeting directly addressed the need for diverse, accessible resources as well as adequate formal and informal training to support the work.

5. Youth coordinators are concerned about being disconnected from the broader positive youth development community as well as the broader youth engagement community.

Opportunities to connect to people doing similar work in initiatives not formally related to systems of care are being missed. This concern is related to the aforementioned barriers with collecting and sharing data, resources, and supports as well as challenges identifying and accessing training to support their effectiveness in their jobs. It is also related to the concern that many youth coordinators work in isolation.

6. The turnover rate among youth coordinators is high and may be caused by factors such as burnout, working in isolation, and limited support, training, and funding to do their work.

Though not formally tracked, the general consensus is that youth coordinators experience higher than average turnover rates in systems of care. The high turnover rate contributes to difficulties in keeping youth engaged and also impacts each system of care's efforts to maintain relationships with adult partners, including organizations supporting youth engagement and the development of youth-guided systems of care. Another factor that contributes to this challenge is the lack of a clear strategic plan for developing youth guided systems of care, which includes engaging and continuously recruiting youth to be involved in diverse and meaningful ways. .

Recommendations for addressing key concerns

1. Clarifying the role of youth coordinators in systems of care is essential.

While some youth coordinators identified peer support as well as technical assistance as helpful in defining their roles, many felt that more could be done to ensure that their roles are clearly understood by project directors and others within the system of care. Steps to better

professionalize the role may help to bring more clarity and consistency to the function that youth coordinators play in systems of care. This may also contribute to improved accountability and improved salaries for youth coordinators. It is critical that the youth coordinator role be used to help empower young people and hold systems accountable to the youth the systems are designed to serve. Likewise, it is essential that the role not be used as a way to provide, as some participants stated, “glorified childcare” to children and youth.

Steps to foster a clearer and more uniform understanding of the youth coordinator role may include, but not be limited to: supporting formal peer to peer mentoring by which youth coordinators shadow experienced peers in other communities for a limited period of time; disseminating a model job description for youth coordinators; as well as providing training to project directors, lead family contacts, and others who often supervise youth coordinators in their roles. Further attention needs to be paid to clarifying the role of youth coordinators in early childhood communities.

2. To better reinforce the importance of youth guided systems of care, federal site visit teams should include representation of youth, youth coordinators or other members whose specialty area of focus is on youth guided systems and care.

Site visits should also focus on the importance of youth guided care with clarity and consistency. Site visit teams should collect feedback on the community’s perception of the visit with respect to the focus on youth guided services and systems. By doing so the Child, Adolescent, and Family Branch would send a strong message of commitment to youth guided care and help hold communities accountable for doing the same. Steps like this are expected to reinforce the importance of youth guided systems of care as a whole.

3. It is important to improve our capacity to collect, organize, analyze and disseminate data that makes a case for developing youth guided systems of care.

It is also important to hone in on those practices that, when applied, yield the best outcomes for youth and for systems of care as a whole. Currently available data should be culled and helpful findings should be shared with communities to help them better implement youth guided systems of care. Technical assistance and training should help communities implement and overcome common challenges. This is especially true for communities that need advanced training and support in their efforts to develop and implement youth guided systems of care.

4. Formal training should be developed to better meet the educational needs of youth coordinators.

Systems of care conferences provide an ideal opportunity to provide opportunities for focused skill-building and networking among youth coordinators and other professionals involved in developing youth guided systems of care. Cross-community collaboration should be encouraged to support capacity building for youth and youth coordinators alike. It may be helpful to adopt more resourceful approaches to meeting the training and support needs of youth and youth coordinators in systems of care. Efforts to utilize technology should be

explored in order to develop creative ways to share lessons learned and foster better networking and resource sharing in support of developing youth guided systems of care. Efforts to identify new training and networking opportunities beyond those currently available through local communities and current national technical assistance providers may be helpful as well.

5. A “community of practice” should be developed to facilitate additional networking and sharing of resources and supports that contribute to the development of youth guided systems, programs, and services.

This community of practice may include representation from individuals in many roles, whether youth, youth coordinators, project directors, clinical directors, family members, or others committed to developing youth guided systems of care. A steering committee focused on youth involvement should also be developed to maintain a continued focus on youth involvement concerns and develop recommendations for addressing concerns. This committee should include representation from the Child, Adolescent and Family Branch, youth from currently funded systems of care, youth coordinators, project directors, social marketers, evaluators, cultural and linguistic coordinators, and others who may be able to provide insight on matters related to youth involvement.

6. Youth coordinators should better infuse positive youth development theory and practice into the youth-guided work within systems of care.

This can be accomplished by accessing more training on positive youth development and actively breaking down silos that create barriers between the systems of care communities and other communities that may share goals, but operate within different funding streams.

Conclusion

Youth coordinators play a critical role in developing youth guided systems of care. Yet, there are many challenges which limit their effectiveness. Their responsibilities are vast, authority is limited, and the necessary resources, information and supports are often missing. Steps to address these challenges include bringing clarity to the youth coordinator role, holding communities accountable for creating systems of care that are truly youth guided, and developing creative approaches to better sharing information and resources to support this work. By taking these necessary steps, the vision of creating youth guided systems of care will become a reality.

Any questions about this report can be directed to Reyhan Reid at (202) 403 – 5134 or rreid@air.org.

Appendix A: Agenda



Systems of Care

SYSTEMS OF CARE YOUTH COORDINATORS MEETING

WASHINGTON, D.C. JANUARY 22–23, 2009

DAY 1: THURSDAY, JANUARY 22, 2009, 9:00 A.M. – 5:30 P.M.

8:00 AM	Registration (<i>Potomac Foyer</i>)
8:30 AM	Mingling (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>)
9:00 AM	Welcome and Getting to Know Each Other (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ welcome video ▪ icebreaker exercise
9:50–10:00 AM	Break (Refreshments provided)
10:00 AM	Vision for Youth Involvement in Systems of Care (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>) Plenary session focused on the role of Youth Coordinators in advancing youth involvement in systems of care. SPEAKERS: Gary Blau and Sandra Spencer
11:00–11:10 AM	Break
11:10 AM	Taking the Temperature (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>) Facilitated small group activity designed to share perspectives on successes and challenges with youth involvement in systems of care.
12:00 PM	Lunch (Provided)
1:00 PM	A Force to be Reckoned With: Creating a Shared Vision for Youth Involvement in Systems of Care (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>) Strategic planning session designed to identify primary challenges and solutions related to youth involvement in systems of care. SPEAKERS: David Osher and Reyhan Reid
3:00–3:30 PM	Break (Refreshments provided)
3:30–5:00 PM	Concurrent Workshops and Resource Mixer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early Childhood Youth Involvement (<i>William Penn</i>) SPEAKERS: James Sawyer and Frances Duran • Getting Buy-In from Professionals (<i>Clifton</i>) SPEAKER: Magno Guillen • Strategic Planning and Brainstorming Continued (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>) Resource Mixer (<i>Potomac 3</i>) Selected youth coordinators and national technical assistance organizations will share information, tools, resources and supports available to Youth Coordinators in systems of care.



SYSTEMS OF CARE YOUTH COORDINATORS MEETING

WASHINGTON, D.C. JANUARY 22–23, 2009

Systems of Care
DAY 2: FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2009, 8:30 A.M. – 5:00 P.M.

7:30 AM	Registration (<i>Potomac Foyer</i>)
8:00 AM	Mingling (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>)
8:30 AM	<p>Sustaining Youth Involvement in Systems of Care - Part 1 (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>)</p> <p>Plenary session focused on sharing strategies for developing and sustaining youth involvement in systems of care.</p> <p>SPEAKERS: Keva White, Jane Tabler, and Naeemah Carter</p>
10:00–10:15 AM	Break (Refreshments provided)
10:15 AM	<p>Sustaining Youth Involvement in Systems of Care - Part 2 (<i>Potomac 1 & 2, Potomac 3, Clifton, & William Penn</i>)</p> <p>Facilitated small group working sessions designed to identify specific strategies and recommendations for sustaining youth involvement in systems of care.</p>
12:00 PM	Lunch (Provided)
1:00 PM	<p>Concurrent Workshops</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies for Engaging Youth (<i>Potomac 3</i>) Presentation from communities which have been successful in efforts to authentically engage young people as partners in building systems of care. SPEAKERS: Sara Dahlquist and LaRone Greer • Working with Policy Makers (<i>William Penn</i>) Presentation from communities which have been successful at involving youth in shaping policy. SPEAKERS: Brittany Couch and Dan Delucey • Work Room Available (<i>Clifton</i>) This room will be available for Youth Coordinators to continue discussion from the morning session, network, and engage in strategic planning for their work
2:20–2:30 PM	Break
2:30 PM	<p>From Words to Action - A Conversation about Moving Forward (<i>Potomac 1 & 2</i>)</p> <p>Gary Blau will meet with participants to discuss fresh insights and recommendations for supporting Youth Coordinators in efforts to build meaningful youth involvement in systems of care.</p>
4:00–5:00 PM	Closing Reception (<i>Potomac 3</i>)

6:00 PM until...

Celebrate Good Times!

After two days of hard work, it's time to celebrate! Join your colleagues from around the country in an evening of dinner and celebration in the nation's capitol.