

Family & Youth Engagement

Best Practices

5/17/2010

Family & Youth Roundtable – County of San Diego Children's Mental Health
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Background

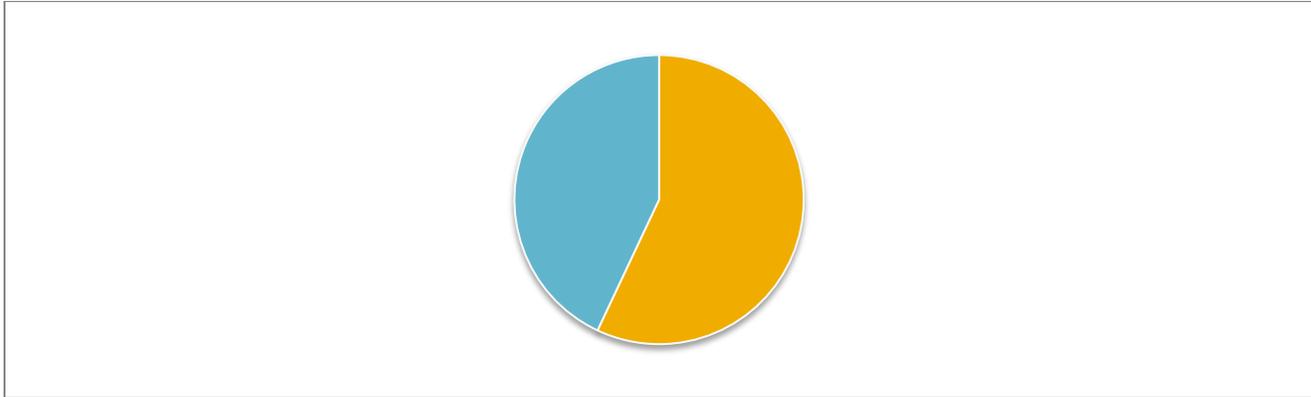
The County of San Diego Children's Mental Health Services (CMHS) is committed to delivering a community-driven, comprehensive service delivery system for seriously emotionally disturbed, unserved, under served, indigent and Medi-Cal eligible children and youth. Engrained in CMHS services are Children System of Care principles. These principles optimize outcomes for children and youth, ensure appropriate services are provided in the least restrictive environment and are integrated, community based and family centered. Cornerstone to Children System of Care principles is the full inclusion of all stakeholders or sectors. The San Diego community categorizes stakeholders into four sectors: Public, Private, Education and Family/Youth. With the exception of the Family/Youth sector, membership within a sector is the result of one's employment/career. Membership in the Family/Youth sector is the result of one's life experience. This, coupled with other unique factors, creates challenges/barriers for the inclusion of this crucial sector. CMHS' history in holding stewardship for Children's System of Care principles; contributed to CMHS' conviction that they and all sectors would have to support, and identify means to support, the Family/Youth sector's meaningful inclusion. CMHS took steps to ensure a foundation for this sector's significant involvement by: A) establishing a coordinating hub for this sector's involvement and B) developing policies and procedures to support this sector's involvement for the CMHS operational manual. These two steps have contributed greatly to this sector's contribution in the progression of a comprehensive CMHS service delivery system. In 2009, the coordinating hub supported family/youth sector representatives' participation in over 650 policy and/or program administrative functions which influence CMHS practices. It is important to note that each of the representatives noted above has access to a diverse population of the sectors' membership through the coordinating hub. Before participating in an administrative function, these sector representatives agree to represent the sector's perspective or identify when they are representing their personnel point of view. CMHS identifies the practice of this sector's inclusion as **Family Youth Professional Partnership**. County of San Diego Health and Human Services continually strives to practice transparency and to achieve continuous service improvements. One way in which CMHS has incorporated these practices into their administrative functions was to request that their CMHS Family Youth Liaison survey those receiving services each quarter on the subject of engagement. This report represents 12 months collection of these surveys, of which over 160 family/youth participated in completing. The intent of this report is to A) Share the results of these surveys with all sectors B) Based on survey data and sector expertise, share recommendations for the continuous improvement of Family/Youth sector engagement strategies.

Noteworthy a majority of family and youth surveyed identified the sectors involvement in Children's Mental Health Services, other public child-family serving agencies and service providers; as Very Important or Essential. 76% of those survey stated they have never been asked to be engaged. Survey respondents were asked open ended questions, around barriers and engagement approach, answers we categorized into themes.

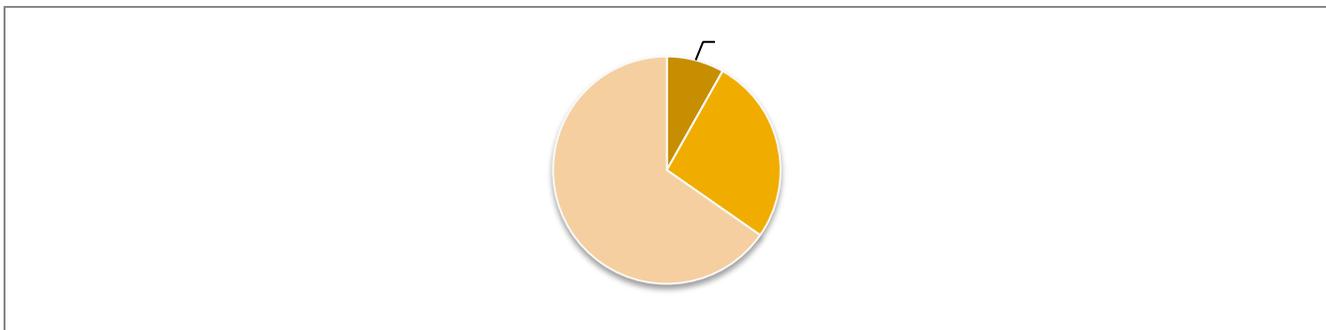
Barriers identified: 26% Engagement approach which would explain purpose and benefits for involvement. 24 % Time interferes with Work/School 11% Day/Family Care 14% would not know how or what they could contribute 10% Transportation. **Factors that made engagement successful:** 42% Peer invited and explained purpose, 18% Time worked. 39% there was a coordinated point of contact (hub) 1% it was their job, .5% clear expectations. **Factors that made engagement unsuccessful:** 37% Time of function interfered with my family/work/school obligations, 31% Did not understand what was expected, 18% did not have transportation to the location of event, 9% needed to be paid for their time, 5% felt they did not know what they could contribute. **How to engaged:** 21% Peer or someone I know, 14% Identify what benefits the engagement has for me or others, 17% having a point of contact/hub. 13% Contact or let me participate using email or internet, 6% Clear expectations.

Who took the survey

A 168 people took the survey either online or when visiting our office for an event/training.

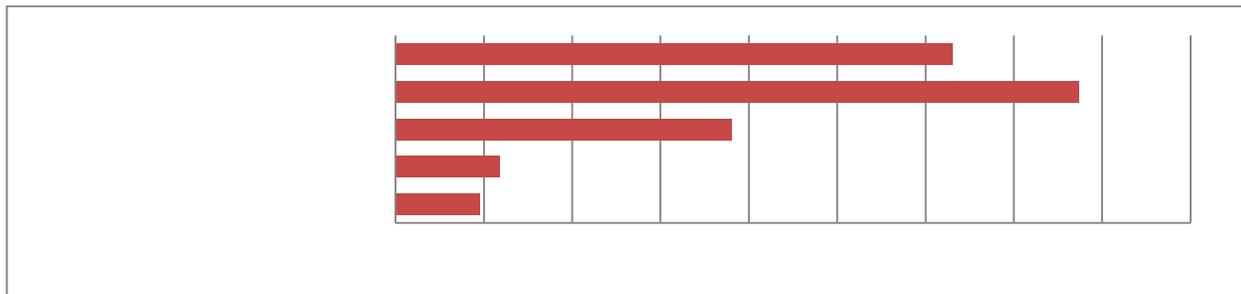


Age Range of youth who took the survey



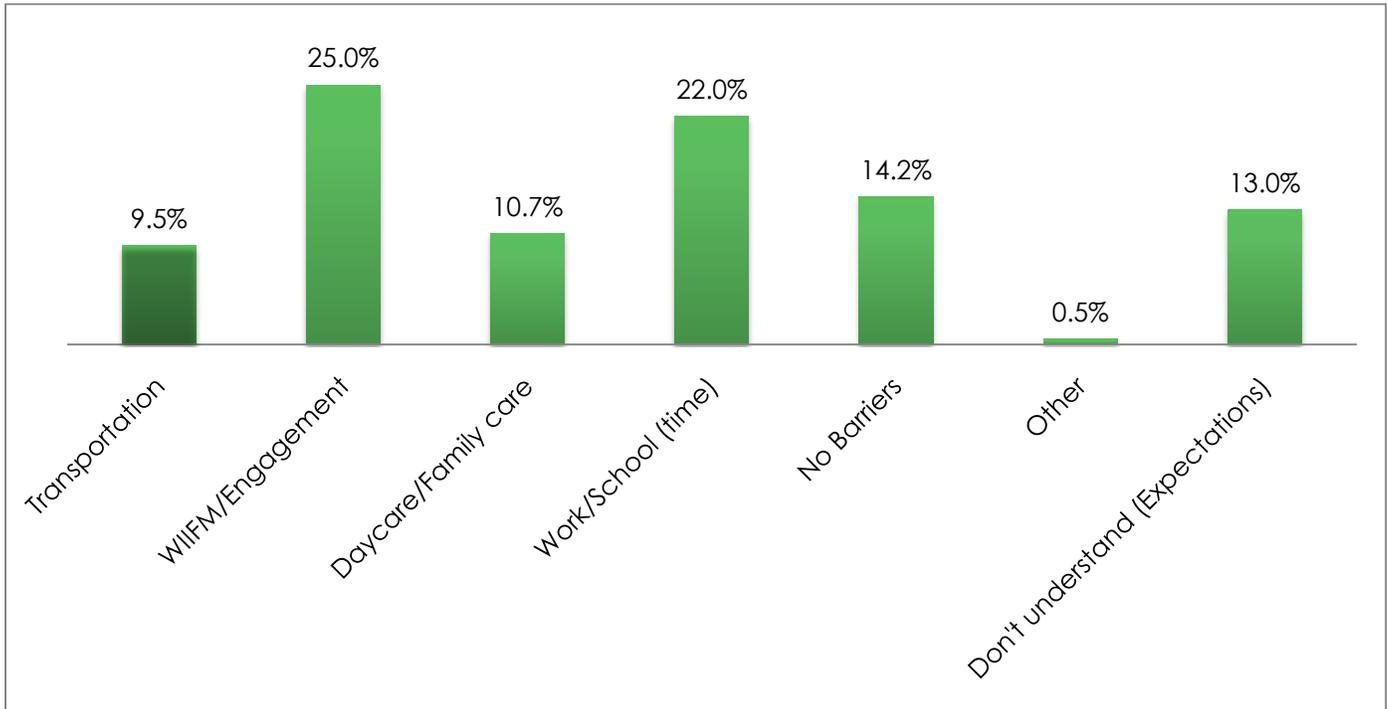
Importance of Family Youth Sector Involvement

Respondents were asked to rate how important they thought the involvement of family and youth in Children's Mental Health Services, other public child-family serving agencies and service providers; the majority of respondents (70.2%) rated this as Very Important or Essential.



Barriers

Respondents were asked what barriers would prevent them from being involved. The open ended responses were categorized into themes.

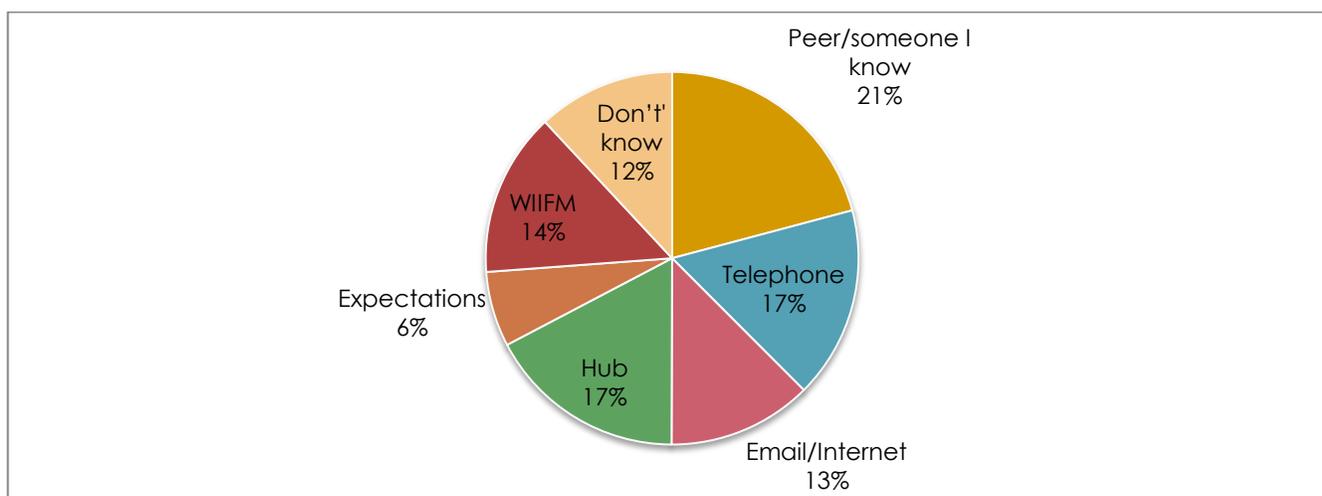


A sampling of categorized responses

Category	
Transportation	"I rely on the buses in town, and between their wait times and their coverage; it makes it hard for me to be as involved as I would like to be."
Daycare/Family Care	"No one will sit for my special child"
WIFM/Engagement	"I need to work and go to school so my time to volunteer is limited but what really prevents me from getting involved I really do not know what it is that i can contribute and how it would benefit people or me."
Work/School (Time)	"I have to work"
Don't Understand	"not having or knowing where to contact people for these events"
No Barriers	"I have no barriers no one has asked me before I was asked to attend this training"
Other	"no respectable clothes"

Engagement

Respondents were asked how they would like to be contacted and asked to participate.



A sampling of categorized responses

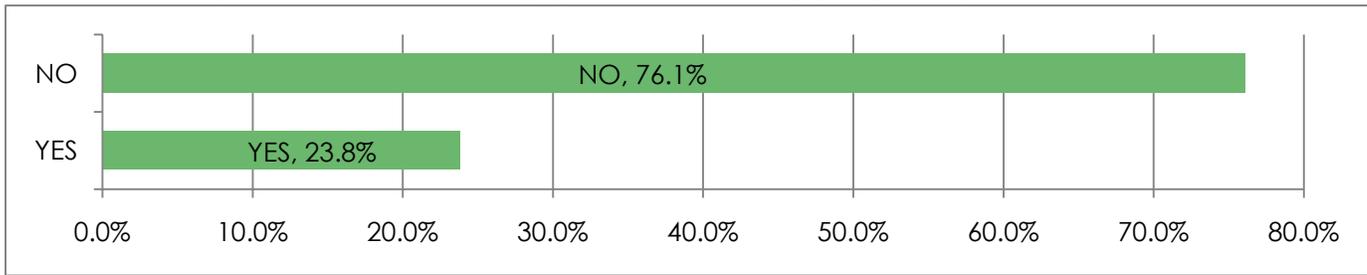
Categories	
Email/Internet	"Email me or hit me on my space ask me what you need"
Expectations	"Explain exactly what you want me to do and how long you want me to do it and then help me do it"
Hub	"I love the Family Youth Roundtable I love everything they stand for as a former Marine I would like to see more programs like Pathway to Partnership which helps people get back into the community I have been a part of the FYRT team for a while, I do everything the Roundtable ask me because I believe in what we can accomplish as a community thanks for asking me to fill this out Stewart"
Peer/Someone I know	"I was asked to come by Stewart when I got out of school. He makes me feel like what I got to say is important and he explains it all to me. I got his back I look forward to our next FLY meeting"
Telephone	"Call me I have a lot to say about services"
WIFM	"Like I said people got bills to pay nobody works for free. How's this going to help me at home or get a job to pay my bills or get my worker off my back"
Don't Know	"Don't know how it would work my life is always changing"

One caregiver respondent gave a noteworthy response to this question:

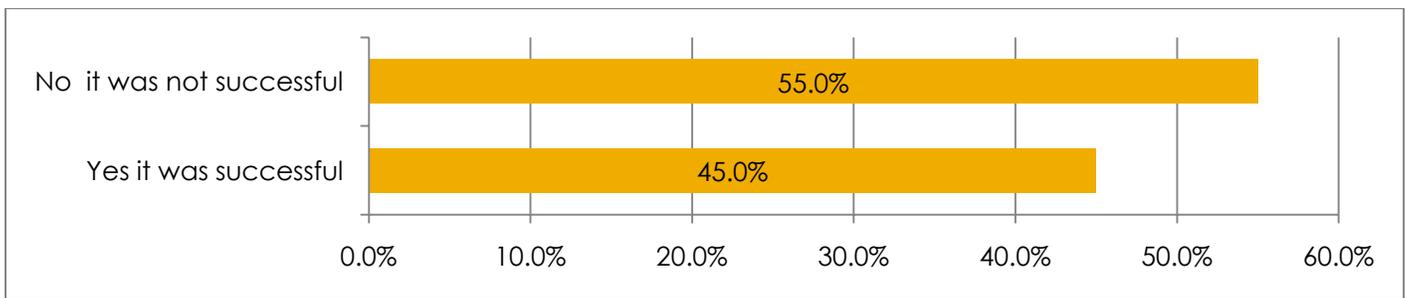
"I still feel the county is slow to think and working 'outside the box.' There are needs that are placed high on the families list that may seem unimportant or unrelated, that given that one bit of relief would mean all the world to the families/caretakers. The same is also true of the children in the system. I have two children with special needs - one has been in the system through the years and the other has fortunately been kept free of the system. Now I find myself trying to adopt a child who has been in the system for several years and has no clue of what love, family or trust means. **Yet, wants to give back to the system in some way** - with no one to offer guidance and support. This child struggles terribly just to survive another day - devoid of emotional support and more importantly HOPE. How can that be good for a child... any child?"

Prior Engagement

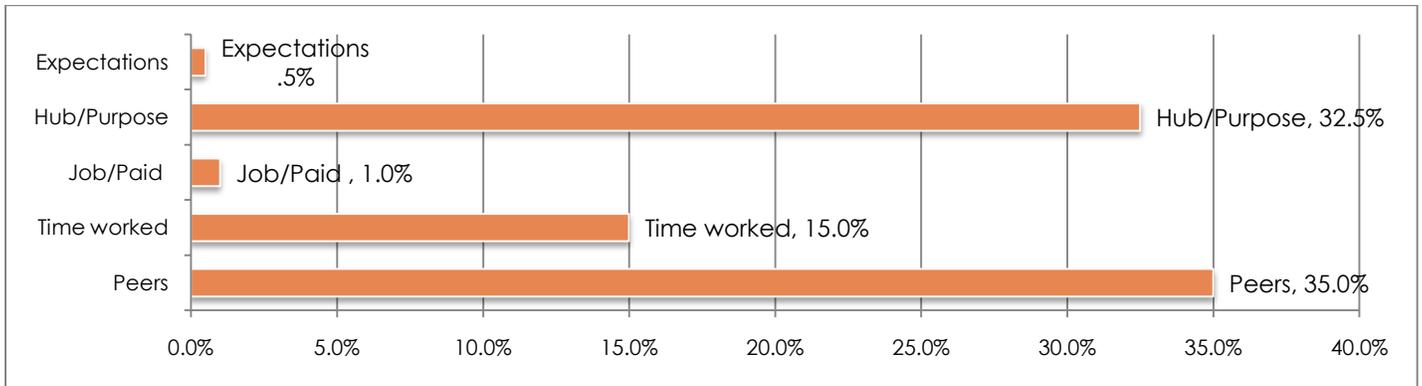
Respondents were asked if Children's Mental Health Services, other public child-family serving agencies or their/their child's provider has tried to engage them, a majority (76%) of respondents answered no.



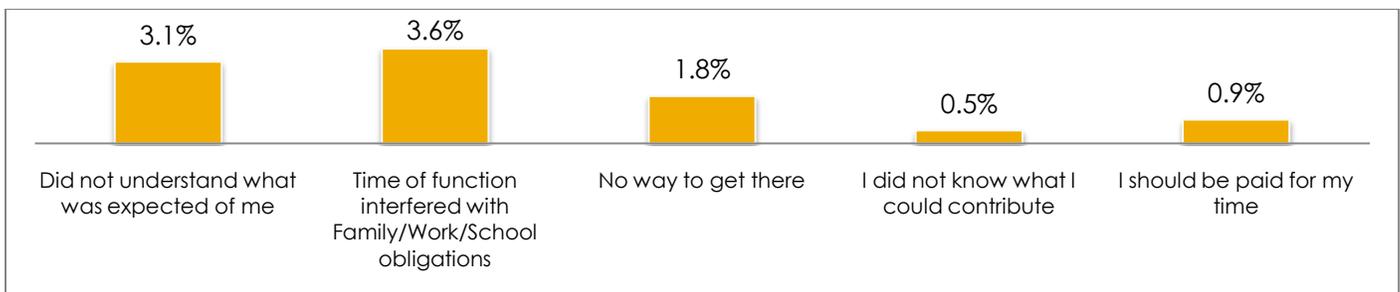
The 23.8 % of those that had been asked to be involved were then asked if they felt the process in which they were asked to participate was successful.



Respondents that indentified the engagement process was successful were then asked to name the major factor that made your engagement successful open ended responses were categorized into themes.



Respondents that indentified the engagement process was not successful, were then asked, to name the major factor that made the engagement not successful. Open ended responses were categorized into themes.



Recommendations

1. All agencies/organizations have a policy on family/youth (client) satisfaction; most agencies involved in a Children System of Care also have a policy on partnership. These policies should be continually reviewed by agency staff and leadership as well as by family, youth and community partners involved with the agency. Continually reviewing these policies help staff and clients to repetitively practice the agency's vision and mission. These policies should serve as a guide. Constant review of these policies also assists in supporting an agency's need to adjust or revise these types of policies so that agency is able to adapt to the evolving needs of those they serve.
2. Agencies involved in a Children's System of Care should have policy(ies) on operationalizing a family-centered practice. If the an agency does not have a policy yet, leadership may want to develop their vision for a family-centered practice and share their vision with family and youth receiving services, line staff and management staff. The agency should then request representatives from each of the above mentioned roles work together to develop the agency's policy. Policy should include items on how the family-centered practice informs agency programs and policies. Once the agency has committed to the policy, a continuous review practice of the policy should be incorporated into operational practice, as recommended in item one.
3. Agencies and individuals (Professional Partners) that take an interest in partnership development of Family and Youth Partners have highly motivated and productive partnerships. Numerous studies published in professional journals indicate that personal growth is of critical importance to an agency's/organizations' advancement and community's transformation. The consequences of not addressing personal development issues can result in doing more harm than good. Ask Family/Youth Partners about their aspirations. Whenever possible, assign them work that fits with their personal growth plan. If they have not acknowledged a personal growth plan, assist them in categorizing and prioritizing their aspirations into a personal growth plan. The results will far outweigh the effort expended.
4. Agencies must have a coordinating hub or point of contact assigned to their family/youth engagement and partnership efforts. This person must be able to articulate a clear vision of the partnership and be available to answer questions or resolve issues that family, youth or staff may encounter. This person must also be able explain the expectations and support adherence to their agency's family centered and partnership practices. It is important this person is able to identify, support and build on successes encountered. This point of contact/person should know the families and youth they are engaging, develop relationships with the families and youth, know their aspirations and strengths, and offer them opportunities that fit the family/youth's needs.

Agencies should be prepared to offer various means of engagement. Families and Youth want to be involved, but there are often barriers that prevent their involvement. They are not employees, which is a benefit if the agency is seeking to create a safe environment for genuine input. Get to know the families and youth you serve and be prepared to hear them without feeling the need to defend. Clearly identify expectations when possible, make available supports and create various means for participation. These practices result in capturing diverse perspectives which results in the agency capacity for growth.

¹ **Public:** All public funded agencies other than schools that serve children, youth and families

Private: All organizations that serve the system providing services to children, youth and families. Includes but is not limited to: Community/faith Based Organizations, Researchers, Contracted Service and Fee for Service providers.

Education: All educational systems that provide educational services for children and youth.

Family/Youth: All children/youth that have received public funded Child-Family Services and their caregiver families.