Effective Systems of Care:
A Summary of Implementation Factors

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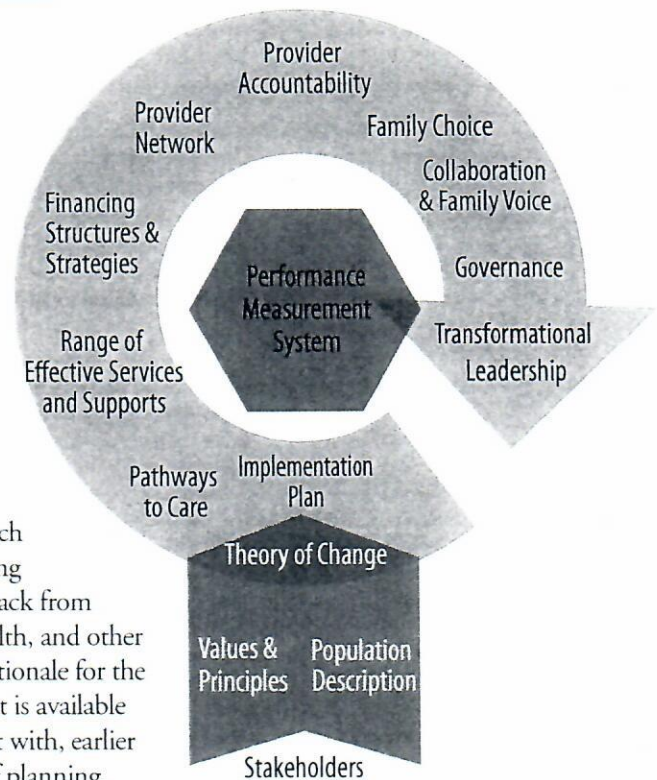Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute
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The Research and Training Center for Children's Mental Health seeks to strengthen the development and implementation of effective systems of care so that children with serious emotional disturbances may be better able to live, learn, work, play, and thrive in their communities. To guide its research, and to assist states and communities, the Center has developed a model of factors that it believes contribute to implementation of effective systems of care. The factors are based on research and theory on systems of care for children with serious emotional disturbances and their families, research and theory in related fields, the experiences of the Center in conducting research and providing consultation within systems of care, and feedback from the Center's Board of Advisors, state directors of children's mental health, and other parent and professional leaders in children's mental health. The full rationale for the selection of the factors is beyond the scope of this brief description but is available upon request from the Center. The model builds on, and is consistent with, earlier work on systems of care but places a greater emphasis on a number of planning, management, and accountability processes.

Although the factors are presented in list form, the Center believes that they can best be understood from a holistic and systemic perspective. The most important issues may not be the implementation of each factor but rather how the pieces of the system fit together, and how they match up with the cultural and community context in which they are to be applied.

The goal of the model is to improve outcomes for children with serious emotional disturbances and their families. The Center believes that the full test of a system model is the outcomes it produces at the child and family level, at the system level, and ultimately at the level of the entire community.

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Implementation Factors

1 Pathways to Care

Outreach mechanisms and clear pathways that facilitate access into and flow through effective care for all individuals in the identified population of concern. A system cannot be effective unless it provides access to effective care. This is an especially important issue for children from racial and ethnic minority groups where access to care has historically been less effective than it has for other groups.

2 Range of Effective Services and Supports

A broad and comprehensive range of effective services and supports, including care coordination, to support the development of individualized, culturally competent, and comprehensive treatment plans that assist the child and the entire family.

3 Population Description

A population of concern that is clearly defined and well-understood within the local context. For a system to be effective, there must be adequate information on the needs, strengths, and overall characteristics of the population of concern, including their culture and help-seeking patterns, and the organization and functioning of the entire system.

4 Values and Principles

A statement of values and principles, consistent with system of care values and principles, that has been developed through an inclusive, participatory process, and serves as a foundation for system development and evaluation efforts.

5 Theory of Change

A clear and widely held local theory of change that is developed through a participatory process and describes the population of concern, goals of the system, and mechanisms through which the community expects to be able to achieve the goals. Such a theory of change, often presented visually in the form of a logic model, becomes a guiding document for system development efforts.

6 Implementation Plan

An implementation plan describes the steps that will be taken to achieve the desired goals and includes timelines and a listing of individuals responsible for the actions to be taken. Such a plan is regularly updated and recognizes the complexity and challenge of taking statements of intended action, and actually implementing them as intended.

7 Performance Measurement

A performance measurement system that includes both process and outcome measures, is based on the theory of change, and provides ongoing information about the performance of the system which can be used to improve the system.

8 Financing Structures and Strategies

A comprehensive financing plan that is consistent with the goals of the system, the system values and principles, and the needs of the population of concern. Such a plan should identify expenditures across major child serving systems, utilize varied sources of funding, promote fiscal flexibility and incentives, maximize federal entitlements, and re-direct spending from restrictive placements to home and community-based services.

9 Provider Network

A provider network that is diverse in background, culturally competent, skilled in providing services and supports consistent with the values and principles promoted by the system, and of sufficient capacity to provide family choice.

10 Provider Accountability

An accountability system at the provider level in which the use of particular providers and the provision of funding to them is clearly tied to their performance so that incentives are created for high quality and family-responsive performance.

11 Family Choice

Mechanisms to ensure that families are provided with choice of services and providers in collaboration with their treatment team.

12 Collaboration and Family Voice

Mechanisms to promote collaboration between key service sectors and between families and professionals at all levels of the system.

13 Governance

Governance mechanisms that maintain the focus on the system values, goals, and theory of change, and the use of systematic data and stakeholder inputs to continuously strengthen the system, and that provide for clear and efficient decision-making about the system.

14 Transformational Leadership

Leadership that appreciates the inter-relatedness of each of implementation factors and their functions within a system and recognizes the importance of community-specific contextual factors. To be transformational, such leadership must be able to tie together all of the processes and functions into an integrated system and must be able to create and carry partnerships and collaborations to a high level.

Systems Coach to Support Resilience and Recovery

States and communities are engaged in transforming adult and children's mental health service systems. These efforts frequently involve initiatives to better coordinate service systems and improve access to effective services and supports as well as those preferred by consumers, children and their families. Communities need to reach consensus on improvements needed, current strengths and challenges in the service and community environments, populations to be served and strategies for effecting systemic and program changes. This transformation effort needs to take place with a focus on recovery and resilience.

Bringing about change in such complex systems is enormously challenging, and the use of coaches, a practice that is growing in the business world as well as the human services world, can help policy makers, providers and consumers, youth and family members be more successful. Through a contract with AHCA, Florida's Agency for Health Care Administration, a Systems Coach from the Florida Mental Health Institute will work with a team of policymakers and stakeholders in a DCF District. The role will involve:

- Assisting the community in assessing needs, readiness for new efforts, etc.
- Providing knowledge of systems change strategies and facilitating change initiatives through community coaching
- Serving as a resource person related to evidence-based programs, practices and processes
- Connecting the community and the teams to evidence-based program developers
- Introducing the community to systems change and Evidence Based Programs and Practices pathways
- Building "buy-in" across sectors and stakeholder groups for the initiatives defined by the community

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