

Leadership Camp for Directors and Emerging Leaders of Family and Youth-Run Organizations

Supervision of Staff in Family-Run Organizations

Family-Run Organizations have provided parent peer to peer support for decades. Whether you do so through a formal or informal program model, supervision is critical. It should be the mechanism that allows the organization to ensure fidelity of the support service they provide and create an environment where the family member staff can enhance their skills, and receive support, guidance, and direction to perform at their best.

Most Family-Run Organizations have family members with lived experience raising a child/youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health disorders as their employees. While this lived experience is what translates into their unique expertise and skill set, it can also be the very thing that makes it difficult for them to maintain good boundaries.

As family members who have experienced the journey of those they are supporting, it can create challenging circumstances. Over identifying with families can lead to staff making decisions that may not be in the best interest of the staff, family or organization. By providing regular supervision through a multi-dimensional supervision model including peer to peer, individual, group and shadowing, family member staff can learn to recognize when they are entering into a challenging circumstance and initiate support from their supervisor.

Key elements of supervision should include:

- Supervisors with first-hand experience in the area of those they supervise is ideal. This creates credibility of the supervisor and allows them to empathize and relate to the day to day realities the staff experience.
- Supervisors with, excellent communication skills and an understanding of the organization's administrative processes
- Regularly scheduled times for supervision – weekly is recommended by certifying bodies
- Opportunity to speak with supervisor in an emergency situation
- A format for supervision that includes both:
 - Case Review – discussion of selected families (cases)- either new families or that may be in crisis
 - Administrative Review – reviewing files, reports or required documentation
- A supportive relationship

Supervision should focus on the following areas:

- **Boundaries** – helping staff identify the experiences from their own journey that can be effectively utilized to assist those they provide support services to and how to recognize when they are entering into a circumstance that may make it difficult to maintain appropriate boundaries.
- **Compassion Fatigue** – assisting staff to understand what compassion fatigue is, how to recognize when it is happening, and supporting the staff to integrate self-care into their routine. Supervisors must look for signs of compassion fatigue and intervene when necessary.

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- **Self-care** – the supervisor should monitor the family member staff to ensure that they are taking care of their own needs and the needs of their family. Family member staff are uniquely qualified to provide parent peer support because of their own family situation. If they do not allow sufficient time to take care of themselves and the needs of their own family, it will ultimately lead to an inability for them to effectively support families they work with and does not model good self-care skills for others.
- **Collaboration** – ensuring that the family member staff is promoting a collaborative process with other support/service providers. Family member staff should encourage families to work collaboratively with other systems such as mental health, education, juvenile justice and child welfare. Family member staff should work in tandem with other service providers to enhance the families support experience.
- **Problem Solving** - identifying potential problem areas and providing supportive intervention as soon as possible is important for the successful implementation of the any program. Frequently when family-member staff are providing a parent to parent peer support role within the community, community partners and families have different ideas about what the roles and responsibilities are for the parent to parent provider. These differing understandings can cause opportunities for conflict and confusion. Regular supervision and coaching sessions with staff can identify these issues early and can afford the supervisor the ability to shape how they are responded to.
- **Legal/Ethical Issues** – from time to time, ethical issues may arise, such as reporting child abuse or issues of confidentiality. Policies should be in place to ensure that staff members always consult with their supervisor when legal or ethical issues arise. In some instances, outside legal or clinical expertise may be needed.
- **Time Management** – supervision creates an opportunity to monitor time management skills of the staff and provide supportive strategies to assist staff in meeting their responsibilities within the time frames they are funded. This is an important area of supervision to ensure that staff members are not mismanaging their time which can result in a workload that is unable to be achieved within the time allotted.
- **Program Requirements** – supervision is an opportunity to ensure that funding and program responsibilities are being met. Paperwork, support delivery, communication with system partners, etc., are all areas that the supervisor should review to ensure successful implementation of the program.
- **Opportunities for Growth** – supervision should be used as a vehicle to identify the strengths of the staff member as well as opportunities for growth. Supervisors can provide coaching to staff on areas needing improvement, identify additional training if applicable, or pair up the staff member with another staff who may have a strength in the area of this staff's opportunity for growth.

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The key component of successful supervision is to approach supervision as a coaching opportunity. The goal should be to support the staff to enhance and further develop their skills. Whomever you have supervise family-member staff needs to understand the unique nature of the roles these individuals play with families, community partners and systems. They must also understand that there is a fine line to balance between getting the work done, holding staff accountable, but also making accommodations for what makes them great at what they do; they are family members!

Unique Supervision Issues for Family-Run Organizations

Family-run organization employees are also caregivers of children & youth with emotional, behavioral, and mental health care needs. Due to this, it is not uncommon for staff members to find themselves managing a crisis with their own child. This can significantly impact the staff member's ability to provide peer support to other families.

Supervisors will need to be aware of these times and try to make accommodations. This may include granting personal and/or medical leave for a specified period of time or temporarily shortening a staff member's work day. Organizations should have policies in place in the event a staff member is unable to return to work to ensure that contractual obligations are met and the ability of the organization to meet family needs does not suffer.