



# INVOLVING FAMILIES IN SOCIAL MARKETING: Tips for System of Care Communities



**SAMHSA**  
Substance Abuse and Mental Health  
Services Administration

S O C I A L M A R K E T I N G T A T E A M



# Introduction

It is hard to imagine what the world would be like if there were no social change campaigns. Marketing strategies have encouraged people to protect the environment, buckle their seat belts, quit smoking, eat healthy food, and do many other things to protect themselves and the world around them. Social marketing is the application of commercial marketing practices to promote ideas or causes. Instead of persuading people to buy a certain brand of soap or see a hit movie, for example, social marketing encourages people to support and sustain effective mental health services and supports for children and their families in the communities where they live.<sup>1</sup>

Systems of care use social marketing strategies to educate key audiences about mental health for children, youth, and families. Specifically, social marketing strategies are used to:

- Promote social inclusion;
- Raise awareness of mental health needs of children, youth, and families;
- Show that systems of care are effective; and
- Develop support for building and sustaining mental health services and supports.

## Benefits of Involving Families in Social Marketing

Families enrich social marketing programs by applying a strong voice rooted in first-hand experience to many aspects of planning and implementation. Family organizations can contribute their collective experience in advocacy and outreach with diverse audiences.<sup>2</sup>

Families are the best marketers in their own community. As such, involving them when a system of care begins its work—particularly as the social marketing plan is developed, when their impact can be felt—is critical. The plan's chance of success is greatly increased when families play a key role.

Involving families in social marketing:

- Supports the core values and principles of systems of care;
- Is consistent with family-driven and youth-guided care and practice;
- Creates excitement and promotes hope;
- Gives the work credibility (families are most likely to trust information that comes from other family members);
- Ensures messages are appealing and meaningful for families;
- Enlivens data with the inclusion of personal stories; and
- Contributes to the sustainability of systems of care by connecting data to family experiences.

# What It Takes to Engage Families in Social Marketing

From the very start of their social marketing activities, it is critical for systems of care to involve a variety of families who are receiving services. To make sure there is sufficient family voice at all times, it is necessary to have several family members involved; one member is not enough to ensure diverse perspectives are represented!

Social marketing with families requires building relationships, taking care of basic needs, training, and communicating.

## Strategies for building relationships:

- Working with families to clearly define roles and help everyone understand them;
- Developing an agreement about how to involve families in activities;
- Getting acquainted with local family organizations and support groups, and asking for a chance to talk with them about social marketing;
- Valuing family input;
- Respecting and valuing the priorities of different family organizations;
- Seeking out, respecting, and valuing the diverse identities and backgrounds of families in your community; and
- Providing validation and appreciation for individual family members and family organizations.

## Strategies for meeting basic needs:

- Asking families what their basic needs are;
- Providing child care or dependent care;
- Assisting with transportation by arranging for carpooling, gas reimbursement, parking, taxi vouchers, or bus tokens, and holding meetings accessible by public transportation;
- Holding meetings at times families can attend—coordinating both a day and an evening meeting if necessary to accommodate family schedules;
- Offering fair and reasonable compensation for families' time and expertise;
- Providing beverages, snacks, or full meals if the meeting is held during typical meal times;
- Using technologies such as web conferencing, email, and conference calls to eliminate the need for face-to-face meetings; and
- Scheduling phone call breaks during meetings and/or providing phones, phone cards, or cell phones so families can be reached or reach others in case of emergencies.

## Strategies for training:

- Training families in social marketing so they can be knowledgeable and skillful partners;
- Preparing social marketers and families to work in partnership;
- Training families on new technologies to facilitate better/easier participation in social marketing activities;
- Training families as co-trainers to talk about and promote systems of care in their community; and
- Coaching families on how to tell their story and be effective public speakers.

## Strategies for communication:

- Sharing information with families in formats they can use and understand;
- Using as little “jargon” as possible and educating families about the vocabulary and strategies of social marketing;

- Enlisting family members to recruit others;
- Promoting the importance of family involvement in social marketing within a system of care and working to sustain it;
- Relying on family members and family organizations to locate other families in their community and identify the best communication channels for reaching them; and
- Keeping family members up to date when they have not been able to attend a meeting or activity.

## Examples of Success

Social marketing has proven to be an important tool for system of care communities as they work to understand the mental health needs of thousands of children, youth, and families.<sup>3</sup> Families have contributed to this success by partnering in planning events and activities, developing materials, honoring and celebrating successes, presenting testimony, and facilitating trainings.

### Examples of activities:

- Planning conferences;
- Creating family-friendly environments at events;
- Conducting discussion groups;
- Recruiting family spokespeople; and
- Planning and participating in National Children's Mental Health Awareness Day activities.

### Examples of materials development:

- Reviewing and contributing content for coloring books, calendars, journals, and other outreach materials;
- Assisting with developing a "growth chart" for young children that defines developmental milestones;
- Writing a family column in local system of care newsletters;
- Recruiting families for photos, quotes for brochures, television commercials; and
- Writing content for brochures.

### Examples of honoring and celebrating:

- Creating and implementing award programs to honor agencies, professionals, families, and youth; and
- Planning a luncheon to celebrate the system of care community's success.

### Examples of presenting and facilitating:

- Facilitating and co-facilitating focus groups;
- Conducting workshops at conferences;
- Setting up speakers bureaus; and
- Presenting to state legislature and other decision-makers.

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<sup>1</sup> Stroul, B., & Blau, G. *The system of care handbook: Transforming mental health services for children, youth, and families*. Chapter 14: Social Marketing, p. 381. (Baltimore, MD: Paul S. Brookes Publishing Co. Inc. 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Stroul & Blau, p. 390.

<sup>3</sup> Stroul & Blau, p. 397.

## NOTES

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