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SYSTEMS MAPPING AND UNIVERSITY PARTNERS HELP GEORGIA COLLABORATIVE’S STRATEGIC FOCUS

Ann M. DiGirolamo, Ph.D., M.P.H.; Angela Snyder, Ph.D., M.P.H.; and Cynthia Williams, M.P.A.*

INTRODUCTION

Intergovernmental collaboration is a core element in the system of care concept and philosophy. While many states and communities have worked to hold this infrastructure across child-serving systems, it is only more recently that local university partnerships—beyond national-level technical assistance centers—have been recognized as a supportive external resource for interagency groups. This paper describes how the Georgia Interagency Directors’ Team’s (IDT) partnership with the Georgia Center of Excellence in Child and Adolescent Behavioral Health (COE) assisted the IDT’s efforts to “manage, design, facilitate, and implement an integrated approach to a child and adolescent system of care which shares funding [and] resources and informs policy and practice.” The partnership yielded a systems map ushering in a more preventive focus and a revised strategic plan with manageable objectives.

BACKGROUND: SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVES

There is much research explaining what constitutes effective collaboration. The Wilder Research Center’s work encompasses most of these elements: environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources. Research also shows that a separate entity, such as the COE, is integral to the growth and sustainability of an interagency collaboration. Such an entity supports the collaborative through “ongoing facilitation, technology and communications support, data collection and reporting, and handling the myriad of logistical and administrative details needed for the initiative.”

The IDT’s membership includes nonprofits, government agency representation from child-serving agencies, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention as a Federal Consultant, and the COE at Georgia State University in an administrative and research/evaluation capacity. In this context, the COE serves as the “resource” element. The COE supports the IDT through research of best practices, facilitation, data management, and administrative support, with the goal of helping the collaborative make fully informed decisions. They also evaluate the IDT’s efforts and progress toward their strategic goals.

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BACKGROUND: SUPPORTING COLLABORATIVES

The partnership yielded a systems map ushering in a more preventive focus and a revised strategic plan with manageable objectives. The second change involved bringing the group together to revisit its original strategic plan. With an eye toward prevention, the group concentrated on more manageable— and fewer—strategic areas namely #1 and #4 from the previous six strategic areas. Their new goals included:

- #4: Identification of best practices of ADHD treatment and a survey of current practices in Georgia. Results from the survey will inform implementation approaches for training Georgia’s workforce.

- #1 and #4: Identification of best practices for integrating these trainings into the policies and practices of IDT child-serving agency partners.

- #1: The writing of a policy statement on the recent Georgia juvenile justice code review, responding to state-level policy.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SYSTEM-WIDE COLLABORATIVES

University partners ensure interagency collaboratives have the information they need and assist group members with staying on track or considering new options. These partners provide access to resources possibly unavailable to government entities and also operate outside the day-to-day challenges associated with policy development and implementation. Future research should consider how university partnerships help interagency alliances sustain collaborations.

REFERENCES


3. Wilder Research Center’s work encompasses most of these elements: environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources.

4. Research also shows that a separate entity, such as the COE, is integral to the growth and sustainability of an interagency collaboration.

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