

Parents Supporting Parents: A Wisconsin Parent Partner Model

Background

For the past several years, the Department of Children and Families (DCF) has been researching active models for promoting family engagement and the value of lived experience in driving system-change. DCF explored many different models and selected Iowa's Parent Partner Model to adapt in Wisconsin for its many potential benefits as well as for the ability for Wisconsin to contribute to the research base. Iowa reported several positive impacts, including:

- Reduction in time in out-of-home care (OHC); sooner reunification; less likely to reenter system
- Parents receiving service reported increased hope and belief in themselves, in addition they felt supported in a way that they had not previously experienced and that this support made the difference in their cases.
- Promoted critical skill development and opened career pathways for parent mentors, who also reported an increase in self-worth, self-esteem, and participation in their community.
- Culture shift and systems change in the areas of programming, practice and policy

The Wisconsin Model

Parents Supporting Parents: A Wisconsin Parent Partner Model, is an evidence-based model aimed at empowering parents with lived CPS experience as mentors to parents currently involved in the system, while integrating the voice of lived experience into the Wisconsin child welfare system.

Through a Request for Applications (RFA) process, DCF invited counties interested in this model of family engagement to apply. Three sites, called *Innovation Zones*, were selected: Door, Jefferson and Rock counties. Innovation Zones are funded for three years. The contract includes a planning year (2020), an initial implementation year (2021) and a continued implementation year (2022). After the initial contract period, Innovation Zones will be eligible for up to four annual contract renewals for full implementation of the program at reduced funding levels (2023 and beyond).

Local Parents Support Parents (PSP) Programs

The PSP Program will operate at the local level within or closely connected to the county health and human services agency. The program will be comprised of three main roles:

- a Family Well-Being Coordinator, who will manage and supervise the team;
- Family Well-Being Specialists (FWS), who will mentor families involved in the system; and,
- Clinical Support, a licensed mental health provider, who will facilitate monthly support for the local team of FWS.

In Door County, the program is being operated collaboratively between Door County DHHS and the United Way. United Way will employ and supervise the FWS.

Finally, while the PSP Program has a vital direct service component, just as important is the program's ability to create long-term system change at both the local and state level. Each Innovation Zone will develop an advisory council to advise PSP Program operations and system change at the local level and

participate in a state advisory council to advise state level program implementation and system change. Parent participation is a vital component to both the local and state advisory councils.

Family Well-Being Specialists

Family Well-Being Specialists (FWS) are parents who, for at least one year, have been reunited with their children or who have resolved issues related to termination of their parental rights or other permanency decisions.

Family Well-Being Specialists:

- ❖ Work intensively with birth parents to promote engagement in the case plan
- ❖ Support families by attending team meetings, court hearings, or other gatherings
- ❖ Help maintain connections between parents and their children
- ❖ Assist in the goal of reunification or appropriate permanency goal
- ❖ Provide a sense of hope and inspiration
- ❖ Collaborate with the team surrounding the family.

Family Well-Being Specialists do not:

- ❖ Testify at court hearings
- ❖ Create the case plan (can provide input on goals and progress)
- ❖ Supervise family interactions
- ❖ Transport children to or from services

FWS work as part of a team and receive a lot of training, support, supervision and ongoing opportunities for professional development. As the FWS develop and grow in their role they will have the opportunity to participate in local and statewide meetings, committees, training and collaboration.

How to get involved

There are many ways to get involved and to support the planning and implementation of this exciting new program!

- Join the local advisory council
- Spread the word
- Connect interested agencies or groups to receive a presentation
- Help us identify and recruit potential Family Well-Being Specialist
- Learn about our referral process
- Commit to making referrals to the PSP Program
- Stay connected, ask questions and communicate any concerns

Door County PSP Local Team Support

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