Together, We Can Move Mountains

Parents as Leaders in Improving Systems for Children & Families

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Making Change

• Do we care enough to do something about it?

I will make the difference!
Making Change

• Effective strategies:
  – Ongoing:
    • Planning
    • Implementation
    • Evaluation
    • Revision of plan

• Persistent focus on key systems & central issues

• Understand specific changes needed
Making Change
Persistence, people, creativity, hands-on knowledge, emotional pull
Experiences as a Parent Leader

• Discuss a positive & negative experience you have had as a parent leader in trying to improve services &/or systems
What is Systems Change

Making positive changes by changing laws, policies, procedures, & attitudes that impact many children & families
Public Policy Advocacy for Social Change

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed [people] can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead
What do they mean?

- Brainstorm what each of these words means:
  - “Involvement”
  - “Advocacy”
  - “Leadership”
  - “Empowerment”

- Are there differences/similarities based on your perspective?
What is Parent Leadership?

- Speaking, writing, or acting in support of a cause
- Using a variety of organized tactics to achieve a public policy goal
- Demanding a change to benefit the lives of many
Social Justice Advocacy

• Challenging power
• Assuming risks
• Telling stories
• Involving those affected
• Offering alternatives
• Principles vs. compromise
• Balancing the scales of justice and equity
• Holding ourselves accountable
Leaders & Agents for Change

• Advocate on an individual basis
• Act as a catalyst for new ideas
• Think about how systems fit together
• Help others understand how change happens
• Coordinate activities aimed at making change
• Help others work as a team
• Facilitate info sharing with decision-makers
Engaging Families

• Involve those most affected
• Reflect the society we are working for
• Draw strength from/ be accountable to
• Gain access & voice
• Model collaboration
• Hold selves to high standards
How Change Happens

“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never has and it never will.”

-Frederick Douglas
Stages of Change

• Denial of the need for change
• Resistance to change
• Exploration of the change
• Managing the change
• Collaboration
• Compromise
• Maintaining momentum
Strategic Plan Process

• Broad involvement of stakeholders
• Honesty & trust
• Long-term as well as short-term thinking
• Consideration of various processes
• Facilitation if needed
Strategic Plan Format

• What do we want?
• Who can deliver it?
  – Audiences
  – Formal targets
• What do they need to hear?
  – Self interest
  – Public interest
• Who do they need to hear it from?
  – Expert voices
  – Authentic voices
Strategic Plan Format

- How do we get them to hear it?
  - Persuasion
  - Pressure

- What do we have to build on?
  - Leadership
  - Supporters
  - Information
  - Resources
  - Tools
  - Access
  - Messages
Strategic Plan Format

- What do we need to develop?
- How do we begin?
  - Small enough to achieve
  - Big enough to matter
- How do we know it’s working?
  - Engagement
  - Policy changes
- Where do we go from here?
Getting & Keeping Involvement

• We believe the issue is important to us and our family/community
• We believe we have something to contribute
• We believe that we will be listened to and our contributions respected
• We believe that our participation will make a difference
Opportunities to Participate

• Tell story verbally to an advocate & give permission to share

• Tell story verbally within a small group (focus group)

• Tell story verbally to policymakers (at public hearing, meeting with monitors, at school or district forum, etc.)
Participation Opportunities

• Share story in writing through:
  - Letter to the state
  - Letter to the editor
  - Letter to the monitors
  - Letter to an advocate with permission to disclose
Reaching Families

• Go to where parents go
• Use media families read/see
• Disseminate info through mediating institutions
• Speak at forums
Mobilization

• Moving from spectators to participants
• Turning opinions into actions
  – Making a phone call
  – Sending a fax or e-mail
  – Writing a letter
  – Visiting a policymaker
  – Demonstration, march, sit-in
• Being culturally competent
Building New Leadership

• Nurture it
• Have a plan to:
  – Identify potential leaders
  – Build capacity
• Allow mistakes
• Make the space
• Provide support
• Listen, respond
Key Leadership Qualities

- Challenge the process
- Inspire shared vision
- Enable others to act
- Model the way
- Encourage the heart
Key Leadership Qualities

• Communicators
• Team players
• Problem solvers
• Self Aware
Leaders Know Themselves

• Who am I?
• What am I doing here
• What are my:
  – Goals, purposes
  – Expectations
  – Motivations?
• What strengths & challenges do I bring?
• How can I best use my leadership skills?
• How can I make space for others?
Leadership Development

- Individual advocacy

- Peer advocacy

- Public policy advocacy
Advocacy Leadership Knowledge

- Laws & regulations
- How institutions work
- Key decision-makers
- Formal & informal decision-making
- Facts; current status
- Barriers & solutions
- Qualities of effective systems
- Existing resources
Moving Forward

• Individual & organizational self-assessment
• Developing an Action Plan
• Who can help?
Democracy is not a spectator sport!

• Empowering families to participate in advocacy for our children, our community, the larger society, is its own victory, regardless of the specific outcome of any particular effort.
A circle of hands will receive us...