The Impact of Technical Assistance to the thrive by five collaborative in Volusia and Flagler Counties

EVALUATION SHORT REPORT

The thrive by five (tb5) collaborative was formed after the February 2009 release of a study published by One Voice for Volusia’s Community Agenda initiative titled *thrive by five: ensuring hope, healthy and happiness in early childhood*. A Steering Committee of agency leaders was named and tasked with developing a Strategic Plan.

Goals of the tb5 collaborative:
- Volusia and Flagler Counties children are prepared to enter kindergarten ready to learn.
- Volusia and Flagler Counties children are emotionally and physically healthy.

Values of the holistic service delivery system:
- Collaboration not competition.
- Networking not fragmentation.
- Screening and assessment should initiate service.
- Dollars and assessment information follow the child.
- Begin with prevention not treatment.
- Service providers have to build a “no wrong door” culture.
- Services are family centered.
- All sectors of the community are engaged in and supportive of the systems.

The Florida Department of Health (FL DOH) contracted with the Georgetown University Center for Child and Human Development to provide the Georgetown Model of Relationship-Based Technical Assistance (TA)© to support the Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative (ECCS) grant program’s goals of strengthening partnerships and building an integrated community system that supports the healthy development and well-being of young children and their families, within safe and supportive neighborhoods in Volusia and Flagler Counties.

Direct and targeted TA was provided to the tb5 collaborative to strengthen current system building efforts. The area of focus chosen was family involvement. The TA team engaged in face-to-face TA in September 2010, November 2010, February 2011, and May 2011, held conference calls and were involved with planning and facilitation for the PYRAMID Partnership Summit.

To better understand the quality, utility, impact, and effectiveness of the TA, online surveys and key informant interviews were conducted by the Georgetown Research and Evaluation Team. Progress, outcomes and lessons learned are highlighted in this evaluation short report.

The vision of The Early Childhood Comprehensive Systems Initiative grant program is that Florida’s children are healthy and prepared to be successful.
Mission of the FL DOH:
- To protect and promote the health of all residents and visitors in the state through organized state and community efforts, including cooperative agreements with counties

Goals of the ECCS Grant Program:
- Stable and nurturing families
  - Parents and caregivers have the resources, knowledge and skills to foster safe, stable and nurturing home environments
- Healthy children
  - All young children are physically, socially, emotionally, and mentally healthy
- Quality early learning experiences
  - All young children experience nurturing, developmentally appropriate early learning opportunities

Goals of the TA funded by the FL DOH to support the ECCS Grant Program:
- Increase effectiveness
- Improve efficiency
- Strengthen partnerships
- Encourage cost-savings

Evaluation Tools: To learn whether the TA helped to accomplish the goals of the ECCS Grant Program and further the mission of the FL DOH, two evaluation tools were developed. An online survey and key informant interview protocol captured information on:
- how the work to build and maintain family involvement progressed,
- how the TA fit with the mission of the FL DOH and the goals of the ECCS Grant Program,
- the issues facing the tb5 collaborative,
- challenges encountered,
- outcomes and accomplishments achieved,
- how the TA might have facilitated the outcomes and accomplishments,
- the relationship with the TA providers,
- the most helpful components of the TA, and
- suggestions for improving the TA process

Respondents: Eight respondents completed the short online survey and seven interviewees shared in-depth feedback during the key informant interview process. The respondents participated in most of the TA sessions, conference calls and PYRAMID Partnership Summit. They are high level leaders including Executive Directors, Clinical Directors, Community Providers, Service Coordinators, Management Staff, and Parents most of whom were members of the tb5 collaborative
Family Involvement

**Major Outcome:** The work of the tb5 collaborative has been successful in engaging, supporting, building, and maintaining family involvement in the early childhood system of care in Volusia and Flagler Counties. The TA process helped to facilitate a deeper and more substantial partnership between families and provider organizations that has led to numerous noteworthy outcomes.

The PYRAMID Partnership Summit was an experiential example of partnership providing an opportunity for families and providers to work together to support and implement a multi-pronged action plan.

**Families as full and active partners:**

- Members organizations of the tb5 collaborative have become more inclusive of families in the decision-making process/role.
- More specifically:
  - A family member will be on the tb5 collaborative Steering Committee.
  - A family member will be on the board of a member organization.
  - A family member will be on the quality committee of a member organization.
  - Family engagement forums have been created by a member organization.

- Healthy Start of Flagler and Volusia Counties and the Early Learning Coalition of Flagler and Volusia with significant parent leadership successfully applied for the County of Volusia Children and Families Advisory Board Family Based Violence Prevention and Intervention Grant.
  - With the recommendation and guidance of a parent leader, the grant utilizes the Strengthening Families framework to build five evidence-based protective factors and increase family involvement as a valuable resource in the process.
  - The purpose of the grant is to implement 3 family run Community Cafes where families can gain social, technological and concrete support in setting and accomplishing goals to strengthen their families through guided conversations.
  - Initial response to the opening of the first Community Café has been tremendous.
  - The grant will also utilize the state chapter of the National Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health to train parent leaders and project staff.

“There is now an active parent/family group dedicated to building and maintaining family involvement in partnership with health and human service organizations. There is a great amount of excitement and energy among families and provider organizations.”
Progress

**Before:** Prior to the involvement of the TA team, 93% of respondents thought progress to build and maintain family involvement in Volusia and Flagler Counties was poor or fair.

**After:** During and/or after the TA process, 93% of respondents rated progress to build and maintain family involvement in Volusia and Flagler Counties as very good or excellent.

- Overall, the positive increase in ratings indicates substantial and definable progress to build and maintain family involvement from the beginning to the end of the TA.
- Respondents relayed a sense of optimism and excitement for continued growth in the future.
- As one interviewee stated, “In the very near future, our progress will move from very good to excellent!”
- Interviewees described family involvement in Volusia and Flagler Counties as a movement with family members leading the charge with support from provider organizations.

**Greater relationship-building:**
- Respondents described how relationship-building was critical to starting the family involvement movement.
- Relationship-building occurred at many levels:
  - Between the TA team and tb5 collaborative Steering Committee members.
  - Between provider organizations and families.
  - Across child-serving agencies.
  - Between peers or family-to-family.
- Trust, support and respect were cited as critical components to building strong and positive relationships.

**Enhanced collaboration and leadership capacity:**
- The focus on relationship-building emphasized by the TA team led to true collaborative efforts around family involvement.
- Member organizations joined together to provide philosophical support, in kind support, financial support, and outreach support to move the work forward.
- Collaboration was cited as the primary strategy for engaging in the work to build and maintain family involvement.
- A collective intelligence formed as a result of collaboration to create change with family involvement as a core value held by member organizations.
- The involvement of families as an essential partner in the collaborative process increased the community’s capacity to better serve the needs of young children and their families.

“For me, the most dramatic shift was the expectation that families will be equal partners in the process…families have a voice now.”
TA Process Outcomes

**Increased knowledge, awareness and understanding:**
- 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the TA experience helped to facilitate greater knowledge and awareness around how to build and maintain family involvement.
- More specifically, respondents thought the TA:
  - Provided definitions, content and process expertise to re-conceptualize family involvement and broaden perspectives.
  - Presented a framework for leadership to support change and innovation (adaptive leadership).
  - Shifted attitudes about how to view and treat families.
  - Reinforced the importance of family involvement in the decision-making process.
  - Facilitated the greater use of family perspectives and family voice to help guide the work.
  - Enabled better understanding of how to meaningfully engage and outreach to families.
  - Affirmed the value of relationship-building and peer supports.

**Enhanced vision and embraced new values and principles:**
- 100% of respondents agreed that the TA helped facilitate a more fully developed vision to build and maintain family involvement.
- 93% of respondents also indicated that the TA helped facilitate the embracing of new values and principles to guide the work.
- Specifically, respondents thought the TA:
  - Helped develop a common language and collective understanding across members to create a shared vision.
  - Led to a paradigm shift in thinking with regard to how the value of family involvement should look in practice.
  - Led to the incorporation of family-driven as a part of family involvement.

“The values of the holistic service delivery system in the tb5 collaborative Strategic Plan were impacted. We changed one value from services are family centered to services are family driven. We also added a value of strengthened families become empowered families.”

**Developed a collective sense of direction and an achievable action plan:**
- Approximately 80% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the TA helped facilitate a collective sense of direction by determining the structures and/or processes needed to build partnerships between families and providers.
- 100% of respondents also indicated that the TA helped facilitate the creation of an achievable action plan to build and maintain family involvement.
- More specifically, respondents thought the TA provided opportunities for families and providers to openly and honestly communicate and work in concert to develop concrete and innovative action steps to strengthen family involvement.
Created a tipping point:

- 100% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the TA helped create a tipping point to move the work to build and maintain family involvement forward
- Further, 100% of respondents indicated that the TA created new opportunities for families to come together to support an action plan to build and maintain family involvement
- First off, the TA provided knowledge that changed attitudes ("180 degree shift"), broadened perspectives and opened mindsets
- The TA also helped bring about a sense of urgency to move towards a family driven system of care
- Lastly, the TA helped create multiple opportunities for change
- It seemed that the combination of knowledge, urgency and opportunities led to the creation of a tipping point towards families as full and active partners
- Respondents described the momentum created at the PYRAMID Partnership Summit for families to support an action plan
- Family involvement is now a integral part of tb5 collaborative Strategic Plan
- Very importantly, there has been an emergence of parent leaders who meet routinely and collaborate with community agencies
- Family voice is being embedded into leading structures with parent leaders in critical decision-making roles including membership on boards and committees with responsibility for planning and implementation of family driven initiatives
- Structures and processes have been developed to support the building and maintaining of family involvement including:
  - Community Cafes
  - Peer-to-peer or family-to-family support groups
  - Family engagement forums
- The needs of families are driving the creation of new and creative opportunities for social connections including:
  - Community garden
  - Clothing swaps
  - Coupon clipping clubs
  - Fingerprinting for babysitting
  - Mentoring other families
- In talking about the change process, a few respondents referred to the statement, “It takes a village,” to describe the amount of collective willpower needed to incite widespread change in a community
- The work to date has poised the community for future funding opportunities using the Strengthening Families framework
- Provider organizations and parent leaders are working together to write grants and further the work to build and maintain family involvement in Volusia and Flagler Counties
Achievement of Goals

Fit with mission:
- When asked whether the TA fit with the mission of the FL DOH to protect and promote the health of all residents and visitors in the state through organized state and community efforts, 100% of respondents agreed that there was alignment with the mission.
- More specifically, respondents thought the TA with the tb5 collaborative was a way of:
  - increasing prevention and early intervention activities,
  - interacting to promote the health and well-being of young children and families outside of scheduled appointments,
  - developing peer supports to promote strengthened families.

More specifically, respondents agreed that the TA helped in the four goal areas:

Increased effectiveness
- Respondents thought effectiveness was increased with the use of an evidence- and strength-based framework to guide the work to strengthen families.
- Respondents also mentioned the use of evaluation to demonstrate the effectiveness of strategies and programs.

Increased efficiency
- Respondents mentioned a decrease in the duplication of services as well as serving families in a more streamlined and integrated manner.

Strengthened partnerships
- Respondents spoke about the development of partnerships and more opportunity for collaboration...
  - Among child serving agencies
  - Between families and provider organizations
  - Family to family.
- Respondents also talked about how the focus on collaboration has led to increased effectiveness, improved efficiency and strengthened partnerships.

Encouraged cost-savings
- Respondents described how the tb5 collaborative was initially set up to develop low cost no cost solutions to improve the early childhood service delivery system.

“There are ongoing efforts to sustain the progress made at the PYRAMID Partnership Summit. Through thrive by five collaborative efforts, families may reach a tipping point of self-sufficiency in partnership with agencies...”
Most Significant Takeaways

Respondents shared the following most significant takeaways from the TA experience:

- “Knowledge of the need for paradigm shift.”
- “A shared vision.”
- “The value of partnership. The benefits of collaboration. The potential value of peer support/relationships is also really going to be a new way of doing things.”
- “Parents know better than us what they need.”
- “Thinking outside our box and reframing assumptions. It is better to ask and have families own their decisions.”
- “Families are strong and agencies need to capitalize on their strengths and listen to them. They are the experts. They do not have to do this alone. Families will be active partners and are a powerful force when given the opportunity and a voice. Our system of care needs help to meet families’ needs! Families can be equal partners in strategic planning and implementation.”
- “There must be a genuine effort to empower families to help us design ways to assist them rather than expecting families to follow our rules of engagement.”
- “That we have the power to make a difference and change the family involvement experience.”
- “It was wonderful to see all the agencies and partners engaged and that as a result more parent activities are taking place in this county.”
- “The excitement of families who participated in the Summit that they could work in full partnership with provider representatives and that the Summit was a beginning of a new way of working together not simply a two-day event.”
- “There might be a change for us to actually improve the negative relationships experienced between agencies and families.”
- “I have been working with families for a long time and saw how they were left out. Now parents are included. There is no longer a disconnect.”
- “Seeing the gaps filled in and not having duplication of services. The communication between the families and agencies has been improved.”
- “That what we are doing works, that we what are doing has value, and that what we are doing is honorable.”
- “The sense of purpose in my community and the value of building new relationships.”

For more information on the TA provided to the tb5 collaborative, please contact Ellen B. Kagen, MSW, at kageneb@georgetown.edu

For more information on the evaluation of the tb5 collaborative, please contact Lan T. Le, MPA, at ltl5@georgetown.edu or Bruno J. Anthony, Ph.D., at bja28@georgetown.edu