

Region adopts high fidelity wraparound approach

Calgary and Area Child and Family Services Authority is adopting an approach that builds on the strengths of families to help them work through crises and prevent their children from coming into care.

The high fidelity wraparound approach reaffirms a family's voice and decision making by using small teams of helpers to assist vulnerable children and their families in creating a single plan based on each family's needs, strengths and culture. This integrated team is made up of a neutral facilitator, representatives from all relevant systems (justice, education, health, mental health, children's services, etc.), the family, and the family's own identified natural supports.

"Some people think that when you say 'wraparound' it means you get everyone involved around the table to consult about a particular case. That's really high intensity case management," says Executive Manager Joni Morrison O'Hara. "The difference with wraparound is that the people at the table are chosen by the family so they're not just professionals. The other difference is that there is one plan for the family."

Our Region has enlisted the help of one of the world's leading experts on high fidelity wraparound to help us integrate this approach into our practice. Dr. John VanDenBerg managed the first demonstration of a cross-agency wraparound process for youth with complex needs and their families in Alaska in 1985 and has been honored with numerous awards for his groundbreaking work in this area. Now more than 30 U.S. states and some parts of Canada use this approach.

"Wraparound is about strengths," says VanDenBerg. "We look at the strengths of the family, the culture of the family and the needs of the family and we match them together ... we start by asking the families what they need."

VanDenBerg says in addition to integrating all of the systems involved with a child and family, wraparound has proven successful in dealing with the really tough cases, the ones that keep caseworkers up at night.

"Five per cent of your caseload can easily take 50 per cent of your time," he says. "Wraparound allows caseworkers to spend time with the other families on their caseload."

In one Michigan county, caseloads were reduced by half as workers were able to provide more services up front and didn't need to bring as many children into care. In Milwaukee, where funding was reallocated from residential care to early intervention, a formal study found that the numbers of children coming into custody dropped significantly and the numbers of children in long-term residential care were reduced 75 per cent.

Wraparound ties in with the intent of the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* to provide more services to families before they reach crisis, more quickly establish permanent homes for children in government care, and strengthen the involvement of families and communities in planning for their children.

The approach will first be applied in the Multi Risk Youth Hub, where facilitators have already been trained to use wraparound to transition young people into the community successfully. Wraparound will also be used to preserve families and keep children from coming into care, to transition children in residential placements into the community, and to support reunifying families. The Region is now in the process of tendering in-home supports to include a service that delivers that wraparound approach.

"Wraparound has a good track record," says Morrison O'Hara. "It has been evaluated and has shown success in the outcomes we're striving for."

