

CONSULTATION REQUEST: INTERNET RESOURCES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY-AGENCY COLLABORATIONS

The chairwoman of a County Mental Health Advisory Board in a southeastern state contacted the Evaluation Center with a request for resources to assist in carrying out a planning project for which they had received a small grant from a local foundation. The purpose of the grant was to develop a strategic plan to build capacity for collaboration between town social services and state funded mental health services. Specifically, the consultee asked for information and resources concerning the following:

- models for collaboration that have been implemented and their strengths, weaknesses, barriers, etc.
- collaboration models involving state funded mental health services and local services funded by towns or other community entities (e.g., county or public health models)
- collaboration models that focus on recovery
- collaboration models with the person or consumer as the driver of the services
- retreat designs that would foster development of a collaboration model

CONSULTATION PROVIDED

Our search for appropriate materials was conducted primarily through the internet, supplemented by a literature search of online databases, a message submitted to the Evaluation Center listserv (OUTCMTEN), and consultation with colleagues. The following is a description of resources available on the internet.

Overview: There is surprisingly little material on collaboration specific to mental health. This may be because much of the material on collaboration, especially that which is available on the internet, is driven by federal legislation and grant programs. In the case of mental health, the movement for recovery and community integration beyond deinstitutionalization is a relatively recent phenomenon (e.g., The New Freedom Commission) and has yet to produce case studies, etc. Accordingly, it was not possible to identify material specific to the sub-categories identified in the bullets above.

There is, however, a considerable amount of relevant material related to special populations which have been the focus of major legislative and grant funding initiatives, e.g., children with special needs transitioning from school (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), and adults with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act). Additionally, the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program, a federally funded (SAMHSA) grant program, established “systems of care” in a number of sites and resulted in a number of publications on developing collaborations of community agencies and services for children with mental health needs.

Described below are a selection of online resources for general collaboration development, an article specific to mental health service collaboration and a particularly helpful book on retreat planning.

INTERNET RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY AGENCY COLLABORATION Mental Health

One of the few resources specific to mental health is an article reporting on a study of four social agency collaboratives in Maine designed to integrate services for people with co-occurring substance abuse and mental health disorders. The study involved a survey of agency staff asking for information about various aspects of collaboration. The article is: Ridgely, M.S., Lambert, D., Goodman, A., Chichester, C.S., & Ralph, R. (1998). Interagency collaboration in services for people with co-occurring mental illness and substance use disorder. *Psychiatric Services*. Feb;49(2):236-8, and is available at: <http://psychservices.psychiatryonline.org/cgi/content/full/49/2/236?eaf>

General Community Agency Collaboration

The Web site of the National Network for Collaboration (NCCO), itself a collaboration among a number of land-grant universities, provides a variety of materials on collaboration building. The training resources are especially useful. The URL is <http://crs.uvm.edu/ncco/collab/wellness.html>. The site contains links to other relevant resources, for example a paper by Borden and Perkins, entitled "Assessing Your Collaboration: A Self Evaluation Tool" at <http://www.joe.org/joe/1999april/tt1.html>.

NCCO also offers a manual entitled "Community Based Collaboration: Community Wellness Multiplied" developed by one of their member organizations, Oregon State University, which details reasons for organizing a collaborative effort, what collaboratives can offer a community, challenges to building them, and other aspects of community agency collaboration-building. A particular useful feature in the manual is a tool for decision-making that consists of a matrix with levels of collaboration in the rows (e.g., network, alliance, coalition, etc.) and general aspects of collaboration to address in the columns (e.g., purpose, structure, and process). The cells then contain bullet-point factors to consider for each type and aspect of collaboration. The URL is: <http://crs.uvm.edu/ncco/collab/wellness.html#linkages>.

Another NCCO member, the Ohio State University Department of Education, offers a number of "fact sheets" to aid in building coalitions. These are brief, focused guides on topics such as "coalition functioning" and "communications in coalitions." They are available at <http://ohioline.osu.edu/lines/kids.html#COALI>.

The Amherst H. Wilder Foundation website (<http://www.wilder.org/>) offers a set of "free tools" for building collaborations, among other subjects. Two of these tools are particularly useful: an extensive "collaboration resource list" of published materials on the subject, available at http://www.fieldstonealliance.org/client/client_pages/tools.cfm; and an online survey to assess readiness to develop a collaboration, at http://surveys.wilder.org/public_cfi/index.php. The survey is based on the book:

Mattessich, Paul W. et al. (2001). *Collaboration: What Makes it Work (2nd Edition) A review of Research and Literature on Factors Influencing Successful Collaboration*, St. Paul, Minnesota: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.

A somewhat older (1992) but still useful online publication is “What Does Research Say About Interagency Collaboration?” by C. Bruner, L.G. Kunesh, and R.A. Knuth, downloadable at http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/stw_esys/8agcycol.htm. This document focuses on children’s services, but contains much information of a general nature about building collaborations, addressing areas such as Guidelines for Effective Collaborative Planning, Strategies for Engaging Families and Communities, and Evaluation and Accountability Challenges, with commentary on the evidence base for each. The document also contains an extensive list of resources in a variety of media.

Retreats

The most relevant and immediately accessible resource in this area is a book by Sheila Campbell and Merianne Liteman, entitled “Retreats That Work: Designing and Conducting Effective Offsites for Groups and Organizations”(Wiley, 2003). The publisher describes it as “a practical, easy-to-use guide, full of step-by-step instructions for leading a wide variety of tested exercises. You'll learn how to design and facilitate retreats that will keep participants energized and on-task. Campbell and Liteman know what can go wrong at a retreat and what to do about it. They know how to turn difficult situations around and how to deal effectively with conflict, difficult participants, and resistance to change. With *Retreats That Work*, you will too.”