

Engaging Children, Youth and Families – More Than a Good Idea

Relationships, intent, commitment and a little serendipity – the ingredients that create the magic that make the real difference toward improving the mental health of children, youth and their families. *Flashback...2003*...a new wet behind the ears psychiatrist and a passionate parent advocate crossed paths and unbeknownst to each it would lead to a partnership, friendship and shared desire to create a future where children, youth and their families could flourish, succeed in life and be understood and valued. *Flashforward...2010*...here we are co-guest editing this special issue of the Journal on engaging children, youth and families in all aspects of child and youth mental health.

We have attempted to secure articles that can speak to the importance and necessity of engaging children, youth and families to inform and improve systems, policies, practices, programs and research.

There is no doubt that full engagement is possible and fruitful as described by Spencer, Blau & Mallery in their article on the impact of “family-driven” care in America. As they point out there are facilitating steps which promote the success and uptake of engagement with children, youth and families. However, as Goplan et al. recognize, engaging families into mental health treatment remains a serious challenge. This is not an insurmountable hurdle; however, it is one that impedes efforts to engage when there is only so much time, limited resources and too many kids in crisis – impacting not only the families but also all those working in the systems – all of whom would benefit from the engagement.

Parents and families in this country are thinking and worried about their children’s mental health. In 2009, Today’s Parent Magazine published a Healthy Kids 2009 series which featured four topic areas; mental health, fitness and nutrition, environment and health, and injury prevention. As noted in Anderson et al., the

Editor of the magazine stated that mental health was the most powerful of the four topics.

The youth with lived experience that were engaged in developing the framework for the BC Provincial Family Council, co-chaired by a youth and a parent, stated that a primary motivator for their engagement was their worry about having children and the potential impact of their own mental health on their kids and their children’s risk of developing mental health concerns as noted in Davidson, et al. When provided an opportunity, youth and families are very frank and contribute significant energy in describing what worked, what they need and what they hope for. This is clearly evident in Chovil & Panagiotopoulos who engaged families in determining the health literacy needs related to the use of second-generation antipsychotic medications.

Each article in this special issue demonstrates the importance of relationships, intent, commitment and a little serendipity. How does one achieve this? We and these authors know that these ingredients were necessary to bring about the engagement that they desired.

Find other champions and be champions together. It is the magic of relationships that make possibilities real.

“Real isn’t how you are made,” said the Skin Horse. “It’s a thing that happens to you.” (The Velveteen Rabbit or How Toys Become Real, Margery Williams).

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