



OHIO DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

Office of Children's Services and Prevention



ODMH Kids News: Building Ohio's Future

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The Access to Better Care (ABC) Initiative: Giving All Children a Strong Start in Life

Children's behavioral health problems (including mental illness, substance abuse, trauma due to child abuse, and developmental problems) are growing in urgency and impact. These problems are the top adolescent health care challenge, a leading cause of school failure, the major factor in youth suicide, and a growing challenge for the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

For too many of our children, service systems designed to prevent and treat emotional and behavioral disorders are not working. The services and supports intended to promote healthy development and to help kids avoid high-risk behaviors are not fully effective.

This is the basis for the Taft Administration's Access to Better Care (ABC) Initiative. Building on the work of the Family and Children First Council – and on creative, collaborative solutions already being implemented statewide and in communities across the state – this initiative reflects a determination to change the way public and private sector organizations do business. It promotes the creation of partnerships that allow state and local agencies to work collaboratively, just as it calls for changes in how we support parents and children even within the constraints of an austere budget.

There are many promising solutions – many of which already are being used in Ohio communities and across the nation. The strengths of these solutions include prevention (such as Partnerships for Success (PFS), an evidence-based community planning model), early intervention (such as assistance to parents and child care personnel in managing and reducing disruptive behavior), collaboration (such as teams working to reduce school violence and discipline problems), use of proven programs with a track record of success (such as "Multi Systemic Therapy" or MST, which reduces juvenile offending and lowers the use of costly institutional care).

Additionally, successful programs are family centered and parent driven, and give parents practical assistance and support. These successful home and community-

based models have reduced problem behaviors, institutional placements, and school failure—while increasing positive school and family outcomes.

Major changes and improvements in the way Ohio meets the needs of its most at-risk and vulnerable kids can be initiated with limited, albeit essential funding. The Governor's executive budget recommendations call for an appropriation of \$26.1 million in FY 2006 and \$27.7 million in FY 2007 to improve access to and enhance the quality of behavioral health services for Ohio's children. Most of the dollars needed to support the ABC Initiative –more than 80 percent of them – will come from existing resources, redeployed to permit the carefully evaluated testing of solutions that have a track record in Ohio and in other states and communities. Providing limited additional funding to all counties, contingent on a collaborative plan that is developed by local officials, child advocates and parents, is essential to ensure the most effective and efficient use of currently allocated funds. Through careful evaluation of this initiative, the need for additional funding in subsequent years can be carefully assessed.

Submitted by: Kay Rietz

Architects of a resilient children's mental health system: A youth and family-driven process for developing Ohio's vision for resilience

On January 29, 2005, ODMH convened a group of youth and family consumers to initiate the first statewide resilience workgroup for children's mental health. The purpose of the group is to develop a consumer-driven resilience initiative for children's mental health in Ohio. The depth and richness of each youth's and family's experience contributed to making this a truly energizing event. The workgroup is facilitated by Charlotte Williams and co-facilitated by Rick Shepler of the Center for Innovative Practices. Charlotte brings her rich knowledge on family advocacy and systems of care, as well as her own story of resilience. The main charge of the workgroup is to design and recommend a dynamic set of resiliency policies and practices that are responsive and supportive to youth with special mental health challenges and their families. The recommend-

ations developed will focus on building a resilient-based mental health system across both prevention and intervention, and spanning from birth to adulthood.

The launch of the workgroup culminates a series of events that focused on youth and family resilience in Ohio over the past two years, including the Resiliency Ring around the state capital and a regional study of what makes families resilient. Terre Garner, Director of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health was integral in the planning and implementation of both of these projects. Terre will be bringing this knowledge, as well as her life experience to the workgroup.

The group will learn from the accomplishments and knowledge of existing resilience projects already thriving in Ohio, including evidenced-based programs such as the Devereux Early Childhood Assessment (DECA) early intervention program. ODMH Children's Services and Prevention staff also bring their special expertise, as well as life experiences, to assist the workgroup in their progress.

Through these events and projects we are already beginning to better understand qualities and components of Ohio's resilient youth and parents. Two important concepts have already been generated by members of the workgroup, facilitated resilience and nurtured resilience.

- **Facilitated Resilience:** All youth are capable of achieving resilience. Youth who present with unique challenges may need additional assistance in the form of services and supports to facilitate their achieving resilience and well-being.
- **Nurtured Resilience:** Internal qualities and supports that can be developed through relationships of those around us (core people: family, close friends, natural supports) to help develop our children's talents, skills, and abilities.

Of course the most important members of our workgroup are the youth and families that have so willingly agreed to participate and offer their life experiences and stories of resilience to the workgroup. It is quite evident from the initial meeting that there is much to be learned from each youth and family member and that this promises to be a growth experience for everyone involved.

Some of the expectations voiced by youth and families during our first meeting include: making resilience a concrete and tangible concept for families; development of a resilience initiative that is less system driven and more family, faith, and friends driven; developing system partnerships that foster resilience for kids and families; increased service and support options other than just therapy; kids and families empowered as their own advocates in the system; individualized approaches for all children in all settings; and an initiative that truly reflects and supports the full diversity of Ohio's residents and their experiences.

Core values identified as important to members of the group include: the development of supportive community environments for youth to be successful; the importance of building solutions early on in a child's life; recognizing that everyone has something to learn and to teach; and the central importance of language. Bernie Schell of NAMI believes that language must change to change how youth with mental health challenges are viewed.

As we begin to develop our workgroup mission, participants recommended that we need to "develop a blueprint for lifetime achievement for children with emotional and behavioral challenges" and become architects of a resilient mental health system. As Terre Garner proposed we need to, "develop and disseminate tools that will empower youth and family to expect and effect change in their lives and the mental health system."

One of the key elements of resilience that the youth and families identified is using your own personal experiences to help other people down the road. Youth at the meeting were particularly helpful in identifying the current challenges that make it difficult for youth to be successful including: the pressures to conform and fit in; being different sometimes make you a target; and systems that do not reach out and accommodate diversity of mental health, personalities and learning styles.

The workgroup is clearly on its way to helping other youth and families in a very real way. We are very excited to partner with Ohio's youth and families in the development of a truly resilient children's mental health system of care.

*Prepared and submitted by: Rick Shepler,
Charlotte Williams, and Robin Gilbert*
