Connecting Families, Youth Voice & Schools

10 practical strategies

20th Annual Conference on Advancing School Mental Health

Presenters:
Jenah Cason & Mike Paget
Our experiences

• Jenah Cason, MSW
  • Federation of Families of SC
  • Youth MOVE SC Director
  • Currently chairing the Youth Involvement & Leadership Practice Group

• Mike Paget, M.Ed.
  • Formerly with the SC Dept. of Ed.; emotional, behavioral, & MH challenges; collaboration with the FOF and Dept. of MH
  • Currently an independent trainer for schools & districts
We’ve been working in a “Community of Practice”

• Federation of Families of South Carolina
• SC Departments of Education & Mental Health
• SC Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders
• Schools
• Mental health centers
• Families
• Youth
• Other state agencies and partners
• National CoP for School Behavioral Health
National Community of Practice on Collaborative School Behavioral Health

- A national dialogue with experts & concerned professionals
- Friends & colleagues
- The IDEA Partnership
- www.sharedwork.org
What we will accomplish

• **6**: We will share six principles that help schools meaningfully engage families.

• **4**: We will share four youth voice initiatives that help students feel connected to their schools and communities.

• **1+**: You will select one or more of the strategies, and talk with another participant about ways to implement the strategies.
In the clouds or in the hands?
6 principles that help schools meaningfully engage families

Welcome
Listen
Positives
Engage
Share strategies
Value the relationships in the family
# 1 Clearly welcome parents

- Attractive front entrance, easy parking for visitors, clear signage
- Make it clear that the building is safe – security is ensured – all visitors report to the office
- Someone to warmly greet everyone who enters the building
- Comfortable waiting area for parents – seating, refreshments
# 2 Listen deeply

- Schools should hear the thoughts and feelings of parents
- Go beyond hearing – respond to the thoughts and feelings
- Listen more than talk
- Value *and include* parent input when developing any plan
- Be available for any questions or concerns
# 3 Positives

• Your first, and the majority, of your interactions with parents should be positive

• A serious commitment to seeing each student’s strengths – always keep those up front
# 4 Engage families

- Partnership
- Variety
- Value
- Appreciation
# 5 Share strategies

- Positive behavior supports in the home and school
- Teaming with families, schools, and other services
- Schools intentionally building relationships with parent supporting entities, e.g., FOF
# 6 Value relationships in the family

- The Search Institute – “Don’t Forget the Families”

- Families are critical in developing character

- Character is grown through “Developmental Relationships”
What a child needs from their family to nurture their character

• **Express Care:** Show that you like me and want the best for me.

• **Challenge Growth:** Insist that I try to continuously improve.

• **Provide Support:** Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.

• **Share Power:** Hear my voice and let me share in making decisions.

• **Expand Possibility:** Expand my horizons and connect me to opportunities.
Examples that embody the 6 principles

• Developing plans
  • Cautions: drafts, jargon, monitoring for effectiveness
• Parent Academy
• Date night
• The roof repair
• Parent resource center
• Parenting classes
• Perhaps school staff reading and discussing “Bringing Developmental Relationships Home”
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From your experience…

What are some strategies or practices for engaging families in the school’s work with their children?
A true story of the authentic compassionate voice of youth: Chapin High School: “Students Loving Students”
Where should the voice of youth be heard?

• Youth should be active in their own meetings – graduation planning, 504, IEP, medical decisions, etc.

• Youth should be active in improving their school climate – bullying, school safety, stigma, etc.

• Youth have an “authentic voice” when they speak out compassionately for the challenges to success & happiness they and their friends experience
The Youth Voice Projects

The more we do this work, the more important it becomes to hear the real voices of youth.

We assist youth in learning how to understand their stories and we support their personal development as youth spokespersons through their participation in advocacy, activities, conferences and trainings.
# 1   Children’s MH Week poster contest

- Groups of youth in schools and mental health centers
- Emails for PR
- Posters displayed on a website for viewing & voting
- Posters are displayed at a statewide conference
- Onsite and online votes are tallied, and the winning submission is announced at awards luncheon
- From 500 to 36,000 votes
South Carolina

Turning the tide on children's mental health

Children's Mental Health Week; May 1-7, 2006
Children’s Mental Health Week: May 7-12, 2007

Caring Communities, Successful Children

Don’t Bully
I Love Health
Love Yourself

By Joshua and Devin
How to be Healthy and Happy

Approximately 135,000 South Carolina students experience mental health issues, 88,000 have mental health issues that are not addressed.

For more information about children’s mental health and family support, call the Federation of Families of South Carolina 866-779-9412 or toll free 966-779-0482
Children’s Mental Health Week
May 4-10, 2008

Approximately 135,000 South Carolina students experience mental health issues, 88,000 have mental health issues that are not addressed.

For more information about children’s mental health and family support, call the Federation of Families of South Carolina at 803-779-0402 or toll free at 1-800-779-0402.

Coordination of the campaign is a project of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, Division of Mental Health, Intellectual Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services.
May 3rd - 9th, 2009
Children's Mental Health Awareness Week

Approximately 135,000 South Carolina students experience mental health issues; 80,000 have mental health issues that are not addressed.
May 2-8, 2010
Children's Mental Health Awareness Week

Approximately 135,000 students in South Carolina experience mental health issues; 88,000 have mental health issues that are not addressed.

For more information about children's mental health and family support, call the Federation of Families of South Carolina toll-free at 1-866-779-0452.
# 2 PhotoVoice

- Youth took pictures that portrayed some aspect of behavioral health from a personal perspective
- The photos were captioned by the youth, framed, and presented in an art gallery opening
- The exhibit has continued to tour
“Being Picked On”
by Libby Perry

When people pick on me, I feel like an old beat up piece of cardboard that no one cares about and runs over.
“My Sickness” by Phillip deKrafft
I cut myself to make sure I am still alive.
The dead tree is symbolizing the negative things people think about mental health. In actuality, the people with mental health issues are blossoming flowers who enjoy life
Morbid Perception
by Chelsey Bivens

Everyone has those moments when they feel all alone and abandoned. Depression and anxiety can cause these feelings and it’s hard to ask for help. However, there are “community changers” out there who will fix up your abandoned feeling; you just have to ask for them.
Current national project

The Youth Lens Project

The Youth Lens Project provides a way for young people to express what they know about isolation and stigma through words and pictures.

Create
Take an original photo

Relate
Choose a photo from our gallery

Write
Describe what the picture means to you

Visit us at www.youthlens.org or scan this QR Code

@YLPContest #YouthLens
# 3    Children’s Story Project

• Developing a document that covers an array of youth challenges
• Creation of an annotated bibliography
• Free distribution of the document
Process

- Find youth who are interested in reading & reviewing books
- Figure out the topics to be covered
- Find examples at both the elementary & secondary levels
- Give guidance on how to write the reviews
- Think about graphic design issues
The Issues

- ADD/ADHD
- Anger
- Anxiety/Divorce
- Anxiety/New Environments
- Anxiety/Separation
- Asperger’s Syndrome
- Bipolar Disorder
- Bullying
- Grief and Loss
- Learning Disabilities
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Trauma
Keeping it Cheap

• Emails
• PDF publications
• Limited hard copies of the document
• No cost websites
  • www.fedfamsc.org
Shifting the Process

**Challenges**

- High school honors/magnet class
- Elementary school students
- Richland/Lexington Local Support Network
- Youth MOVE SC Advisory Council
- Competing demands on students’ time
- Quality graphic design
  - HS graphics class or Professional graphics designer?
- Adjusting our deadlines
The Results

• ..\Desktop\csp-final.pdf
• Want a copy?
• http://fedfamsc.org/?p=4254
• http://fedfamsc.org/advocacy/storybook-project/
# 4 Youth focus groups

• Maximum of 6 – 8 youth
• A discussion facilitator
• A scribe
• Rules: safe, confidential, kind
• Exit interviews
• School commitment to “hear”
Examples of topics

• What do you like best about your school?

• Talk about what it takes to be a good teacher.

• Talk about bullying at your school.

• Talk about “respect” at your school.

• If you could change something about your school, what would it be?
Encouragement for this work:
Youth Involvement & Leadership Practice Group
(Jenah chairs this group)

- Expanding youth leadership, participation, and input at local, state, and national levels;
- Organizing a dialogue around greater inclusion of youth in all facets of school mental health;
- A resource to help advance youth involvement and leadership in schools and communities.
From your experience…

What are your experiences with hearing the “authentic compassionate voice of youth?”
Intentional commitment

• FAMILY ENGAGEMENT: Think about your current successes & challenges. Write down at least one improvement idea.

• YOUTH VOICE: Think about your current successes & challenges. Write down at least one improvement idea.

• Share with a neighbor.
Thank you for your important work & for your interest in engaging families & supporting the voice of youth!

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