

## **TIPS FOR DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE FAMILY-RUN ORGANIZATIONS**

Regardless of who they are or when and where a group of families decides to organize, they will be building an engine for system change. This task is both demanding and rewarding. It is, first and foremost, a developmental process that takes time, skills, and resources. The fuel for this new engine will be the passion generated by the experiences of many different families as they rise to the challenge of raising a child who has mental health needs.

Ten years of experience with working to build family-run organizations within systems of care indicates there are some fundamental tasks that must be accomplished for family-run organization development and sustainability. These tasks appear to apply to all kinds of family groups regardless of the cultural grounding, race, ethnicity, or demographics of individual organizations or their communities. Family-run organizations from all over the country, their leaders, members, and system of care partners all contributed to the TIPS presented here.

### **TIPS for Building Relationships**

- ✓ Work on relationships inside and outside your organization from the very start.
- ✓ Be patient, persistent, respectful, and listen carefully.
- ✓ Get to know key policy makers and keep them informed of your activities and priorities.
- ✓ Build coalitions with other organizations that have similar goals and interests.
- ✓ Put aside personal differences to maintain a focus on the issues.
- ✓ Work for win-win solutions to controversies. Choose your battles carefully, conserve your energy for principled struggles that really matter.

### **TIPS on Cultural Competence and Diversity**

- ✓ Ensure the board and staff reflect the diversity of membership and of the community.
- ✓ Spend time getting to know and understand the cultural values of diverse groups in your community.
- ✓ Use an inclusive definition of diversity that covers age, gender, economic status, sexual orientation, geography, language, race, ethnicity, religion and disability.

### **TIPS on Independence and Autonomy**

- ✓ Obtain a not for profit tax status (501c3) as quickly as possible.
- ✓ Build a board that is dedicated to promoting and realizing the mission of your organization.
- ✓ Secure operating funds from a variety of sources.

- ✓ Make sure there are (unrestricted) funds that your organization can use for advocacy work and other activities.
- ✓ Be a good 'organizational citizen' in your community.

### **TIPS on Communication Networks**

- ✓ Use database technology to maintain contact lists of members, individuals served, partners, key community leaders and officials and others involved with your organization.
- ✓ Provide training for grassroots organizing and advocacy.
- ✓ Establish telephone trees, list serves, and broadcast fax systems to get the word out quickly on key issues and events that require grassroots action.
- ✓ Set up a toll free phone line families can use to get information and help.
- ✓ Connect with national information networks (such as the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and the Technical Assistance Partnerships for Children's Mental Health).

### **TIPS on Running a Business**

- ✓ Seek out free or low cost sources of advice and technical assistance to small businesses and not for profit organizations.
- ✓ Establish sound financial management procedures.
- ✓ Establish sound procedures for managing work flow and staff assignments.
- ✓ Perform your work so high quality products and services are delivered in a timely manner.
- ✓ Contract with a payroll agency service to handle payroll, taxes and benefits.

### **TIPS on Funding and Accountability**

- ✓ Stay alert for new sources of funds to support activities.
- ✓ Make sure budgets for all grants and contracts include sufficient funds for doing the work and recovering the cost of managing the project responsibly.
- ✓ Ensure the payment the organization receives is equal to that of other system of care partners doing similar work and effort.
- ✓ Conduct quarterly reviews to monitor project activities, budget, staff assignments and outcomes and make adjustments as necessary.
- ✓ Be vigilant regarding funding and plan in advance for sustaining key activities as funding sources shift and change.
- ✓ Use a qualified accountant to prepare audits and tax returns.