NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Office of Family Voice
BUILDING A 21st CENTURY CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

VISION: EVERYONE IN NJ IS SAFE, HEALTHY & CONNECTED

BUILT ON THE VALUES OF: EVIDENCE - FAMILY - COLLABORATION - EQUITY - INTEGRITY
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- Allows DCF to collaborate with program participants as consultants
- Provides a resource and outlet for people to engage with the department, organizationally and operationally
- Includes staff with lived experience
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Increasing Level of Community Involvement, Impact, Trust and Communication

Outreach
• Some community Involvement
• Communication flows from one to the other to inform

Consult
• Community Involvement
• Communication allows community and stakeholders to answer questions or seek information or feedback from the community
• Outcomes: Optimal, establishes communication channels and channels for research

Involve
• Communication involves more participation with community on issues
• Outcomes: Develops connections

Collaborate
• Communication allows entities to form partnerships
• Outcomes: Visibility of partnership established with increased cooperation
• Outcomes: Partnership building, trust building

Shared Leadership
• Strong bidirectional leadership
• Entities have formed strong partnership structures
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Creating Opportunities for Involvement

- Healing Centered
- Authentic Engagement
- Cultural Humility
- Strategic Sharing
Strategic Sharing:

- Telling your story or parts of it in a way that is meaningful, effective and safe.
- Making sure both the speaker and audience are safe so that the message is effective, and the well being of both parties is protected.
- Minimizing risks to ensure respect for the integrity and authenticity of someone’s story.
“Cultural Humility is committing to lifelong learning, critical self-reflection, and personal and institutional transformation. Accepting cultural humility means accepting that we can never be fully culturally competent. Cultural humility is the foundation for establishing trust and respectful relationships, and for managing differences and conflict.”

Embodying Cultural Humility,
Tomás J. Aragon, 2017
Healing Centered

Views trauma, its causes, and its interventions through Healing Centered approaches (not clinical), asset driven, and culturally grounded.

The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing Centered Engagement Shawn A. Ginwright PH.D
“Authentic Engagement is active, ongoing collaboration of families, youth, and other stakeholders with the child welfare system in a way that recognizes them as equal partners in effecting practice and system change.”

Strategies for Authentic Integration of Family and Youth Voice in Child Welfare
Capacity Building
Center for States
Examples of Authentic Engagement

- **Ineffective or low Impact** – Families and youth are asked to attend a normalcy meeting. Families and youth have no explicit role or voice in the meeting.

- **Limited Engagement** – Families and youth are asked to review and provide feedback on a finished draft or the normalcy policy.

- **Better engagement** – Families and youth participate in the workgroup to develop the normalcy policy.

- **Authentic engagement** – Families and youth participate in the workgroup and provide implementation support.
“For states and jurisdictions to truly integrate family and youth voice at the agency level, families and youth must serve on decision-making bodies; inform the development of agency policies, procedures, and practices; and lead trainings for agency staff on family engagement and inclusion.”

*New Roles for Families in Child Welfare*
*Children and Youth Services Review*
*Williamson & Gray (2011)*
Youth council members work in partnership with DCF to achieve Shared Leadership, with the intent to accomplish a common vision and collaborative goals. The Youth Council helps to transform DCF policy and practice and, at the same time, empower youth to act and make decisions on critical issues.
Council Subcommittees are integrated and aligned into the work of DCF

- Aging Out and Communications Subcommittee collaborates with Communications, Information Technology and the Office of Adolescent Supports (OAS)
- Resource Parent Subcommittee collaborates with the Children System of Care and the Office of Resource Families
- Sibling and Advocacy Subcommittee collaborates with the Office of Strategic Development, CP&P, OAS, and Legal
The goal of the Fatherhood Engagement Committee is to improve the Department’s approach to involving and engaging fathers.

- The workgroup ensures stakeholder representation for internal and external partners, shares learning and develops recommendations.
- The Fatherhood Engagement Committee elevates the voices of fathers with lived experience.
- System partners are invited to bring their data to assist in understanding barriers to father engagement.
- The Committee is charged with providing updates and recommendations to DCF Executive Management.
The DCF Lived Experience Fathers Subcommittee was formed in August 2019 and is comprised of fathers from across the state. Lived Experience Fathers collaborate directly with the NJ DCF Fatherhood Engagement Committee (FEC).

DCF Lived Experience Fathers work to transform DCF policy and practice and, at the same time, empower fathers to make decisions on critical issues.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the fatherhood meetings are held virtually on the first Thursday of each month.
Next Steps

- Parent Council
- Build a team inclusive of people with lived experience.
- Youth and Family Participation in Qualitative Reviews
The Parent Council will reinforce DCF’s commitment to authentic engagement and shared decision making. The council will empower parents with ongoing and meaningful input and leadership in the policy decision making process.
Qualitative Review

Family Voice is critical to the QR process. Making changes to strengthen our work with children and families.

Parents and youth are the experts with perspective that no one else can provide.

Shifting from using family voice in stakeholders’ interviews to involving them in the process.

Looking at federal reviewer opportunities such as the CFSR and the NYTD Review.

Collaborating with the Office of Quality to train parents and youth as QR Reviewers.
"The future depends on what we do in the present."

-Mahatma Gandhi