

# STRIVING FOR SHARED LEADERSHIP WITH CONSTITUENTS

Parents, youth, families and other individuals who receive services from the Department of Children and Families (DCF constituents) possess valuable knowledge and insight from their first-hand experience. The Office of Family Voice assists DCF and partners in meaningfully incorporating constituents' knowledge to improve and transform practices and services through **shared leadership** and co-design.

Through **shared leadership** staff and constituents share power and responsibility in all aspects of planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation of services. At DCF, we are striving for **shared leadership** to be the standard for how we do our work. *Ensuring that parents, youth, families, and individuals have a meaningful voice and an active role in all efforts to improve the system requires an understanding that regardless of your role and or how you work with constituents, there are opportunities to work towards shared leadership.*

## CONSTITUENT ENGAGEMENT ACROSS DCF

Across DCF, staff and providers are partnering with constituents to improve families' well-being, help individuals thrive, and co-design responsive services to best meet the needs of individuals and families in the future. There are three types of constituent engagement.

### SERVICE - LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

Partnering with families to identify their strengths, needs, and goals, bring their supports together in team meeting, co-develop service plans, and make decisions jointly.

### PEER - LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

Ensuring opportunities for people who have lived experience with child and family services to serve as credible messengers and provide peer support to other people currently receiving the same DCF Services.

### SYSTEM - LEVEL ENGAGEMENT

Partnering with constituents who have or are receiving services in system and program improvement efforts, including agenda setting, decision-making, policy review, training facilitation, and co-design of materials, policies, and practices.



Authentic engagement with constituents provides unique insight into the system's or program's strengths and weaknesses, elicits valuable feedback on the complex needs of families and communities, holds the system accountable and promotes transparency, which in turn promotes trust between DCF, community partners and the families we serve.<sup>1</sup>

*DCF Staff and Lived Experience Expert Partnership (LEEP) Consultants at a Truth to Transformation Film Screening. Pictured L to R: Jessica Trombetta, Dashaan Jennings, Tamia Govan, and Kayann Foster.*

## SHARED LEADERSHIP ON A CONTINUUM

Constituent engagement can take many forms and range from limited involvement to work that is entirely led by impacted people and communities. Thinking about engagement along a continuum, rather than just that it is or isn't happening, will help DCF and its partners engage people in different ways and grow towards genuine shared leadership. **Shared leadership** starts with a willingness and intention to meaningfully collaborate, in comfortable and sometimes uncomfortable ways, to achieve better outcomes for all families in NJ.

# DCF SHARED LEADERSHIP CONTINUUM

Levels of Engagement	Level 1 Inform	Level 2 Advise	Level 3 Involve	Level 4 Collaborate	Level 5 Share Leadership! "Transformational"
<b>Definition</b>	Families are provided relevant information and resources and expected to comply with requests, services, policies, etc.	Families are encouraged to share their views and opinions and feedback is solicited.	Families are invited to attend events, meetings, etc. Their experiences are heard and views are considered. Major decisions are generally made in the absence of families and youth.	Families attend events, meetings, workgroups, and projects, etc. regularly and are involved in the planning process. They may be involved in co-design and/or decision-making.	Families share power, investment and responsibility for planning, decision-making, implementation and evaluation as a standard practice.
<b>Impact</b>	<div> <div>Lower Impact</div> <div>Higher Impact</div> </div>				Maximum Impact
<b>Mindset &amp; Message</b>	<b>"We know what's best for you."</b> <i>Voices are silenced</i>	<b>"We hear you."</b> <i>Voices are heard</i>	<b>"We need you."</b> <i>Voices are considered</i>	<b>"We value your expertise."</b> <i>Voices are valued</i>	<b>"We are in this together."</b> <i>Voices are integrated</i>
Levels of Engagement in Action					
<b>Service-Level</b>	Providing family with a pre-determined cookie-cutter service plan.	Asking for family's feedback on the plan after its developed.	Discussing family's goals and needs and then developing plan without family.	Holding team meetings to learn family's goals and developing case plan together.	Family's self-defined needs and goals driving shared decision-making about the plan for services and supports.
<b>Peer-Level</b>	Peers sharing resources pre-identified by a peer support program.	Peers inquiring with family about how they can support their needs and interests.	Peers providing support the family wants, leading Parent Cafes.	Parents determining topics for Parent Cafes, peers providing feedback for program CQI.	Peers leading peer support programs and program participants partnering in program implementation.
<b>System-Level</b>	Inviting families to community events, workshops or to follow social media accounts.	Asking youth to participate in surveys, focus groups, or present to staff (to change hearts and minds).	Engaging families on advisory boards, asking parents to weigh in on survey questions.	Community members co-facilitating trainings, serving as voting members on interview panels or ongoing workgroups.	Youth and parents leading decision-making on agency and program priorities and co-designing policies, programs, and practice protocols.
<p><b>As you review the Shared Leadership Continuum, here are questions for consideration to maximize the impact of your engagement.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which level of engagement best reflects how you, your team, and/or organization currently engage with constituents?</li> <li>• What is the depth of engagement with the constituents you currently work with? How can you share power with families and youth?</li> <li>• What would you or your team need to do to move across the continuum to the "Transformational Level"?</li> <li>• What skills and competencies do you or members of your team possess that will foster authentic engagement with lived experience experts?</li> </ul>					