

# Gearing Up to Improve Outcomes for Families: A Collaborative Initiative

## Background

Many families are impacted by intergenerational issues including substance abuse, mental illness, trauma and domestic violence. Some studies estimate that between 40 to 80 percent of child welfare involved families have co-occurring chemical dependency/abuse problems (Semidie, Radel, & Nolan, 2001; Young, Gardner, & Dennis 1998). In response to this, New York State has undertaken to create a holistic approach to working with these families by bringing together key systems to work collaboratively with these families in order to support parents and families in their recovery while keeping their children safe.

This initiative seeks to provide guidelines and best practices to assist counties, services providers and court officials working with these cross-systems families. The guidelines, as adapted by local jurisdictions, will be recommended for use in all future initiatives and RFPs to achieve better outcomes for children and families.

## Priority Population

This initiative focuses on families affected by substance use disorders that are involved with both the NYS child welfare and court systems. These families often experience repeated involvement in multiple systems and typically are the most expensive consumers of system resources. "Family" in this context is defined broadly enough to include non-traditional constellations. It is recognized that families fall along a continuum of need, development, and strengths; therefore, services must be able to accommodate families at any point on that continuum.

## Purpose

The priority objective of this initiative is to improve child safety, permanency and wellbeing by supporting sustainable family recovery. The lead systems are committed to work together in the best interest of the child, by supporting the entire family.

The primary objectives of this initiative are to:

- Ensure that the lead systems utilize a shared approach to their work.
- Provide guidance for policy and practice change in crucial areas of collaboration

## Lead Systems and Key Collaborative Partners

The New York Partnership for Family Recovery is an initiative led by New York State's:

- Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS),
- Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), and
- Office of Court Administration (OCFS).

Several additional entities are central to the success of this initiative:

- New York City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS)
- NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA)
- New York Public Welfare Association
- Association of Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP)
- Other state and local agencies involved in the provision of services to families.

## Cross-system Values and Guiding Principles

The New York Partnership for Recovery has established a set of values and principles that serves as the philosophical underpinning for developing the policies that guide and support collaborative practice with the goal of improving the safety, health and well-being of children and families. Interactions with clients at the intersection of the three systems will be:

- **Strengths-based** –Service and treatment plans should build on the strengths and competencies of all family members. The family and the child, whenever possible, must be active participants in the service and treatment plan design because participation empowers families and increases their investment in the results.
- **Needs-driven**—Service and treatment plans should be designed to reflect the unique needs identified by the family or individual seeking assistance. Treatment and services must be provided by clinicians and professionals who are appropriately trained and credentialed.
- **Family-centered** – As understood by the three systems, this is a term wherein the family, as defined by its own members, is consistently regarded as having primary responsibility for nurturing and protecting its children.
- **Culturally competent** --*Services and treatment*- will be delivered with respect for the individual culture of the family, as well as the ethnic, cultural, social and environmental context within which the family lives. Accommodations to cultural variation will not exceed individual or human rights.
- **Community-based** -- The resources of the community will be utilized to the fullest extent to support the family's recovery, recognizing that children and families are best served in their own schools and communities.
- **Comprehensive** – Families, both parents and children, require services that are comprehensive in nature, addressing the needs for chemical dependency prevention and intervention, mental health, family reunification housing, vocational and educational habilitation or rehabilitation, etc. These services should be coordinated between the three systems in order to prevent duplication or oversight.