

Overview of the Core Function: Engaging and Empowering Families

Definition

Ohio Family and Children First Cabinet Council and County Family and Children First Councils have a unique role to *recruit and support parents to be active contributing members on county FCF councils; be involved in key decision-making efforts; and serve as an advocate for children, families, and communities.*

Mandated Responsibility

The mandate for county FCFCs to engage and empower families is referenced in the OFCF Statute. It requires county FCFCs to have at least three family representatives, and where possible, 20% of membership as mandated members on FCF council and to obtain input from a broad representation of families. Families utilizing the council's service coordination process must be informed and invited to all family team service coordination meetings. Families have the right to initiate a family team service coordination meeting, and can invite any advocate or support person. The OFCF Advisory Board must have three primary caregivers as mandated members.

Philosophy

Families are a vital part of FCFCs as they are able to bring a unique perspective to the work. Families should be seen as equal partners and be considered a critical part of the FCFC. Families should be properly oriented to FCFC and be provided with a clear role for serving as a mandated member. When seeking input on key decisions, a broad representation of families should be sought out and encouraged to provide feedback. There should be a role for families to actively serve on and/or lead FCFC council and its committees, along with establishing a Family Advisory Committee for families. Families should also be provided with opportunities to fill leadership roles as members of the council.

State Sponsored Support

OCFC currently holds biannual regional family network meetings to educate family representatives and advocates on a variety of topics; encourage a network of families to provide support and assistance to one another; and provide tools necessary to support their work and roles to be accomplished locally.

OCFC Cabinet Council, through ODHM's contract with NAMI-Ohio, has established the Parent Advocacy Connection. Parent advocates have been trained to provide support and assistance to families going through the county FCFC service coordination process.

OCFC has contracted with a consultant to research the possibility of establishing a Network for Family Engagement and Empowerment. This proposed Network would serve as a convener of multiple parent advocacy groups; develop a clearinghouse of resources and supports available to family advocates; provide training and technical assistance to parent advocates; and advocate on behalf of parents the needs and issues of families and children.