

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader. ~ John Quincy Adams



Taking the Lead

There are more definitions for 'parent' than letters in the alphabet. They are allies, bottle-washers, chauffeurs – you get the idea. When it comes to the letter 'L' parents are loving, laughable (especially to adolescents), and often, lines of credit (especially for teens). Parents are also lookouts for their children's best interests. When parents speak out on behalf of their own child, the changes they request often help improve programs and services for all children. Riding the wave of a successful parent/professional partnership, or occasionally getting caught in the undertow of a failed one, may be the incentive to continue to work to change and improve services and systems. When parents take on this role, they are **LEADERS!**

Parent leadership roles are many and varied and include:

- ♥ Participating on advisory & hiring committees
- ♥ Reviewing grants
- ♥ Helping schools & community programs develop policies
- ♥ Being part of quality improvement efforts at pediatric practices and hospitals

Some agencies and organizations consult with and even hire parents to provide a unique perspective, based on the experience of having a child receive their services.

Gone are the days when professionals invited parents to a meeting because it was the 'nice thing to do,' and involvement began and ended with filling out a consumer satisfaction survey. Nowadays, organizations seek out parents to request their input and help with the development of assessment tools. Additionally, many federally funded programs, like state Title V Block Grants, are required to document parent participation in program and planning activities.

So, where do parents turn when they want to increase their leadership abilities or reinforce skills they may not even realize they have? There is more leadership information, resources and training than letters in the alphabet. Read some examples below and select components from existing trainings to customize supports for your organization and participating parents.

The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health has created a Maternal and Child Health Leadership Skills Development Series (www.jhsph.edu/wchpc/MCHLDS). This series was designed to support Maternal and Child Health practitioners, but the modules are appropriate for a broader audience.

Partners in Policy Making®. The Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disability created this training, now available on-line, so parents and self-advocates could learn how to change systems of support for individuals with developmental disabilities. Learn more at www.jhsph.edu/wchpc/MCHLDS/modules.html.

W.K. Kellogg Foundation's mission is to support children, especially vulnerable children, and families to be successful individuals as well as successful contributors to their communities. Their communication, evaluation and policy toolkits, designed for their grantees, are useful to a broader audience. Read the contents (some *en Español*) at www.wkcf.org/default.aspx?tabid=112&NID=196&LanguageID=0.

The National Foster Parent Association offers on-line courses to help foster and adoptive parents develop leadership skills. Many elements of these on-line courses are useful for all parents. Visit www.nfpainc.org and check out the Surviving Leadership Training module where you can learn about qualities and styles of leadership and ways to support parent leaders, including ideas for mentoring new parents into leadership roles.

Parents Anonymous' goal is to prevent child abuse, strengthen families and build strong communities. They realized an essential component of strong families was to have parents who were strong leaders. Their Parent Leadership toolkit, on-line at www.parentsanonymous.org/pahtml/NPLMonth_tkI.html includes ways families can demonstrate leadership skills, and pathways to leadership. The Parent Leadership Network (www.parentleadershipnetwork.org/index.htm), a companion project, is an on-line community where parents can connect to develop and expand leadership skills.

Family Voices is a national grassroots network of families and friends speaking on behalf of children with special health needs. Our children are also part of the wider world of children. With an Improving Understanding of MCH grant, Family Voices works to encourage partnerships between families and professionals for children's good health. **Bright Futures: Family Matters** is a publication to share with your networks. Check out our Family Voices web sites at www.brightfuturesforfamilies.org and www.familyvoices.org.

Partners...

For more than 70 years, the **Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs** has been advocating for quality health care for women, children and families. Working in partnership with maternal and child health programs in each state, they provide data and information about improving the health of women and children, decreasing health problems that result from risky adolescent behaviors, and promote high quality, family-centered health care for children with special health needs. AMCHP welcomes families' insights and experiences. Their organizational activities include a family involvement component, and AMCHP works with states to encourage family involvement in their Title V programs. For information about family involvement, contact Librada Estrada at lestrada@amchp.org.

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Family Resource Corner

Family Voices has developed a Title V Toolbox equipped with resources for promoting family participation, developing advisory committees, and more at www.familyvoices.org/projects/toolbox/index.html.

4-H Clubs arose from a desire to supplement public school education with practical, hands on experience. Over the years, it has expanded to include youth-adult partnerships. Youth are encouraged to provide input into programs and participate in making community decisions. For more information and tools for developing youth leaders, visit <http://cals-cf.calsnet.arizona.edu/fcs/content.cfm?content=YAPartners>

It's great when an organization offers parents leadership opportunities. Take care not to let your excitement overshadow your responsibilities. Ask questions about your role, the time commitment and expected outcomes. The Parent Leadership Checklist at www.friendsnrc.org/download/05ConfPres/Dona's%20Parent%20Leadership%20Checklist.pdf can help you make an informed decision.

Good leaders are good communicators. Brush up on your own skills and help others learn the art of communication with the Seven Challenges Workbook (English, Spanish & Portuguese), available free at www.newconversations.net/workbook.

Ask Me 3, a website devoted to improving health literacy, has 3 good questions to ask your doctor, pharmacist and other health providers, as well as tips for improving patient/provider communication. Learn more at http://npsf.org/askme3/for_patients.php.



What's New in Research?

Directions and operating instructions help us learn to use things correctly. If we don't read and understand them we might use an item incorrectly. The same is true for taking medication and following medical advice for maintaining good health. Our ability to get checkups, carry out follow-up care, and make healthcare decisions is part of **health literacy**, which directly affects our health and well-being. Adults are the focus of most research about this subject. However, teens, especially teens with special healthcare needs, need to learn health literacy skills when they are young so they can understand medical advice, know how to ask questions when they don't, and take responsibility and **leadership** for their own health. Read more about including youth in health literacy studies at <http://her.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/abstract/cym069v1>.



Tidbits

May is **Mental Health Month**. This year's theme, "Get Connected" emphasizes social connectedness. Family, friends and community provides support and a sense of support and purpose. Connections with professionals help us maintain healthy mental health when we have difficulty coping with and managing stress. There are nice, easy-to-read materials and tools for learning about social supports and the signs of stress and depression. In addition, read some lovely tips that help children grow up healthy at www.mentalhealthamerica.net/go/may.

The Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Library has a new Child and Adolescent Nutrition Knowledge Path at www.mchlibrary.info:80/KnowledgePaths/kp_childnutr.html. Sample the databases and electronic newsletters. Indulge in the smorgasbord of websites, many with a family focus. When your appetite for nutrition information has been sated, take a moment to leave a tip or two. In keeping with the leadership theme of this issue, parents, and all 'consumers,' are encouraged to flex their leadership muscles and provide feedback about the content. Use the feedback link to let MCH know what you liked, what needed improvement and to share your ideas for future knowledge paths.

Share your news with others!

We love to hear from partner and family organizations and invite you to share news about your organization's programs and activities. To share your tidbits and/or subscribe to this publication email Betsy Anderson at banderson@familyvoices.org.

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