



United Advocates for Children and Families

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June 16, 2008

MEMORANDUM TO: MHSOAC

FROM: Sandra Duval
Chief Officer of Policy and Research

RE: MHSA Issues

United Advocates for Children and Families is a statewide organization comprised of parents, family members, caregivers, parent partners, youth and other advocates for children's mental health. Our mission is to promote the emotional, behavioral and social well-being of children, youth and families through transformational leadership.

In assessing whether a project, event or activity is family centered UACF applies the following seven principles.

1. Family Driven, Hope Centered and Youth Guided
2. Full Domain and Environment of the Child
3. Community Based Support Services
4. Culturally and Linguistically Competent
5. Prevention and Early Intervention
6. Strength Based Intervention
7. Interagency Collaboration

In reference to cultural and linguistic competency, we commend the Commission for the effort it is making to receive input from diverse cultural and ethnic groups. The Commission should continue its outreach, including recognizing the ways that different cultural and ethnic groups define the roles of family members and their ability and willingness to access mental health services for their children.

UACF appreciates the Commission's action at the previous meeting in Sacramento to keep the statewide projects regarding suicide prevention, the anti-stigma campaign and the student mental health initiative moving forward. These projects will help children, adolescents and their families obtain necessary mental health services and save lives. We look forward to continuing to work with the Department of Mental Health and the Commission on these statewide projects.

UACF urges the Commission to work toward making their meetings more accessible for families. Location, lack of information about the agenda, and time commitment all contribute to making it very difficult for parents or other care givers to attend meetings and have meaningful input.

Commission meeting locations are often held in expensive hotels away from public transportation routes and community centers. Our constituency has a difficult time getting to these sites. Public transportation is often their only option. Even though meetings are held in different cities, when they are far from where people live and not accessible by public transportation, family members find it impossible to attend. Hotels in areas away from inexpensive places to eat means that family members cannot afford to have lunch. Even though UACF has funding to reimburse families for their meals, the family may not have the ability to pay and seek reimbursement for expensive meals.

It would be helpful if agendas and background material were made available far enough in advance to help us prepare family members. It is difficult to get families to make a commitment to attend a meeting when we are not able to tell them in advance what relevant issues will be presented at the meetings. This also makes it impossible to prepare family members to provide meaningful input for the Commission Members' consideration prior to taking action. Because it takes so much for family members to be able to attend a meeting (i.e. time off from work, transportation, child care, etc.), we must be able to insure that attendance at a Commission meeting is accommodating for family members, to the fullest extent possible.

As hard as it is for any parent to take time from work and family to attend a two day meeting, it is even more difficult for family members who have a child with a mental illness. These family members are already taking time off from work to attend IEP meetings, go to therapy and psychiatric appointments, and go to bring an out-of-control child home from school. Making Commission meetings easier for the public to attend and having the agenda as well as the relevant information about agenda items available well in advance of the meeting would mean better participation from family members.

We look forward to working with the Commission to enhance the good work you are doing.