

Community Collaboration

Embracing Authentic Community Collaboration

Authentic community collaboration brings together a diverse group of changemakers to share power and learning that animates co-design of solutions for social change that directly impacts their respective communities. By engaging the lived experience of families, communities, service providers, mandated reporters, and organizational and systems leaders, together we can improve systems and service coordination that prioritizes family empowerment and support over mandated reporting. To accomplish this, we will need to reach across many systems, build trust through power-sharing with each other and the families that we serve, so that we may amplify our impact. Together, we can advocate for policy changes, share best practices, and create a network of support that fosters the well-being of families, particularly families of color who have been disproportionately affected by family separations.

Essential Ingredients for Authentic Community Collaboration

- **Open communication:** Encourage honest and transparent conversations among changemakers to promote understanding and empathy.
- **Shared language and goals:** Establish common language and objectives that everyone can share and understand, ensuring collective efforts are rooted in lived experience and evidence, and focusing on achieving meaningful change.
- **Inclusive decision-making:** Involve all those impacted in the decision-making process, respecting the diverse perspectives and experiences they bring to the table.

The Need for Systems Change and Coordination

In Wisconsin, families of color experience disproportionate rates of family separation and longer stays in foster care. Native American and Black families make up about 13% of our population, and yet make up 27% of all reports to Child Protective Services (CPS), 34% of all CPS investigations, 38% of all family separations, and a staggering 47% of group home placements. To truly combat historical inequities that are further exacerbated by family separation, we must advocate for systems change that addresses the root causes of these issues.

At the same time, we have nearly 40,000 non-profits statewide that support our children, families and communities, yet families too often need support or services that are unknown to them or hard to access. Our greatest challenges, therefore, lie in how we coordinate our services to ensure that they are meeting the real needs of all that seek them. We must work smarter, not harder, to elevate solutions to ensure all families can access the help they need when they need it. By building bridges between service providers, community organizations, and the families we serve, we can create a more equitable, cohesive, and impactful support network.

The Path to Community Collaboration

By fostering authentic and inclusive community collaboration among our systems, service providers, communities, and families, we can effectively address the historical inequities that have resulted in disproportionate rates of family separations among families of color and poor families. Through co-design with families and service providers, we can shift more efforts and resources towards community empowerment and maltreatment prevention, improve our systems and service coordination, and strengthen social connectedness and trust, which can alleviate the stress that overloads families and reduce the risk of neglect and family separation.

