

# Thinking Outside the Box-

## Lived Experience Integration And NH Parent Partner Programs

Overview



Department of  
**HEALTH &  
HUMAN SERVICES**

Division for  
Children, Youth  
and Families



# MARK ROLON

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- **Mark Rolon**, Vice Chair, Juvenile Justice Reform Commission; Member of the NHDCYF Advisory Board; Parent Champion, NH Division of Children, Youth and Families; Adjunct Faculty, Child Welfare Education Partnership UNH; Consultant for Anne E. Casey, and Administration for Children and Families

Mark is a parent champion from New Hampshire's Division of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). Mark became involved with the child welfare system when one of his sons had a mental health breakdown in school, and instead of seeing a doctor, his son was put in front of a judge. Mark now works for all families, working directly with staff and parents, advising all policy, practice, and procedure aspects. Mark currently holds two governor-appointed positions. He serves on the New Hampshire DCYF Advisory Board and is Vice Chair of the Juvenile Justice Reform Commission. Mark also advocates on regional and national levels. He's been featured on the Capacity Building Center for States (CBCS) podcast "A Look Inside Sharing Power in Child Welfare, episode 4: Partnering with Parents for System Change" and featured in the CBCS July 2024 spotlight newsletter. Mark's story has been published in the ATTACH publication "Healing Connections: A Community Approach to Childhood Trauma and Attachment" and contributed to the 2024 OJJDP publication "Partnering with Youth and Families: A Best Practices Guide for Youth Justice Stakeholders." Mark is determined that no family should ever go through what his family already has.

# EDDIE TORRES

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- **Eddie Torres**, Parent Champion, NH Division of Children, Youth and Families

Eddie is a family leader and advocate for fathers and parents to be part of their children's lives when it is safe to do so. Eddie was formerly incarcerated in Federal prison but reunified and gained custody of their daughter shortly upon release. In NH, Eddie partners with the Child Protection and Juvenile Justice Agencies to help improve outcomes for children and their families and help facilitate positive changes in policy, practice, and culture.



# Who We Are

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- We are family voice champions! We believe in the power of family voice and commit to supporting the integration of people with lived experience as partners in child welfare.
- We are parent leaders and agency staff working together. We are fathers, mothers, relative caregivers, foster parents, DCYF staff, community partners, residential providers, CASAs, allies, and other stakeholders who regularly come together in program activities. We work to impact practice and system's change, and we also lead efforts to provide peer support to families currently involved with DCYF through the Strength to Succeed.



# LIVED EXPERIENCE *INTEGRATION*

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- **Lived experience integration in child welfare** involves incorporating the perspectives of individuals who have personal experience with the child welfare system.
- *Family Voice*
- *Stories*
- *Perspective*
- *Unique expertise/wisdom*

# 2025 LEI Direction

”Grow the Better Together Community”

“Connect Better Together Activities with the field and our practice”

“Align Better Together with DCYF Strategic Priorities”

“Prioritize Family Engagement”

The Spread Plan





# Strategic Priorities Vision of Change

## Foundation of Change

DCYF will collaborate with state and local partners to meet the needs of families and maximize preventative services to strengthen families, to prevent child abuse and neglect, and to reduce the risk of future harm.

When it is determined a family requires DCYF intervention, we will engage families early, conduct an assessment of safety, risk and needs, and match them with appropriate services to meet their needs.

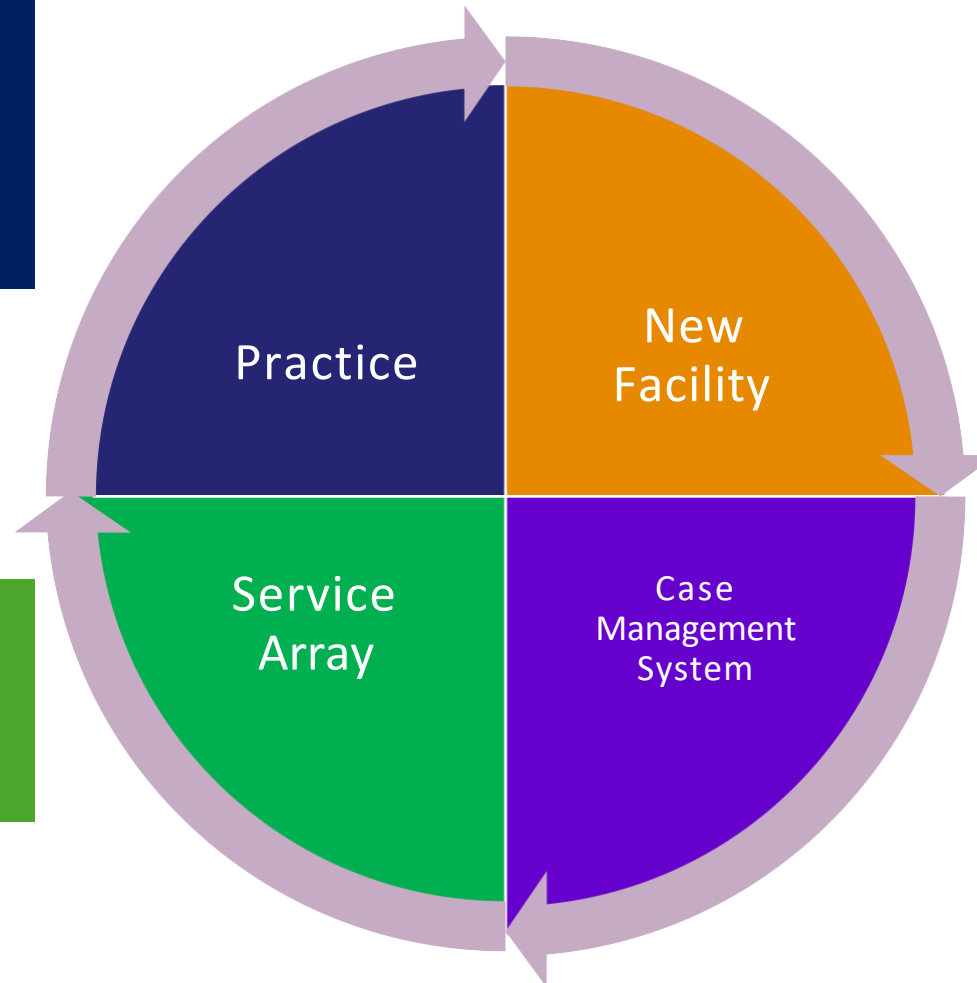
The goal of DCYF's intervention is to help the family at their earliest time of need and reduce the likelihood of the family's return to the child welfare system, reduce a family's progression more deeply into the child welfare system, maintain the family unity, and reduce the number of children and youth placed out of their homes and in residential treatment.



# Shared Beliefs



- ✓ Family engagement is the heart of DCYF
- ✓ DCYF's workforce is our foundation
- ✓ We're all in this together



- ✓ Trauma informed practice is at the forefront of the facility
- ✓ The new facility is a model facility

- ✓ Right services for the right children/youth/families at the right time

- ✓ Granite Families: A rock-solid data system



# PROFESSIONAL AND STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT

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## Professional and Strategic Development

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*The Bureau of Professional and Strategic Development ensures that DCYF staff will have increased capacity to select, implement, ensure fidelity and sustain initiatives related to the agency’s strategic priorities through coaching and support.*

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In addition, BPSD provides training and professional development programs and supports to prepare new staff for employment in child protective services, juvenile justice services and at the Sununu Youth Services Center.

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Through a Child Welfare Education Partnership contract with Granite State College BPSD provides staff, residential providers, stakeholders, foster parents and relative caregivers with core training as well as ongoing and specialized training opportunities. For more information their website is: [cwep.granite.edu](http://cwep.granite.edu)

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DCYF and CWEP offer ad hoc training in collaboration with courts and community providers. Specialized trainings are developed and conducted regularly to keep the NH child welfare staff and community up to date on new practice, initiatives and state and federal legislation.

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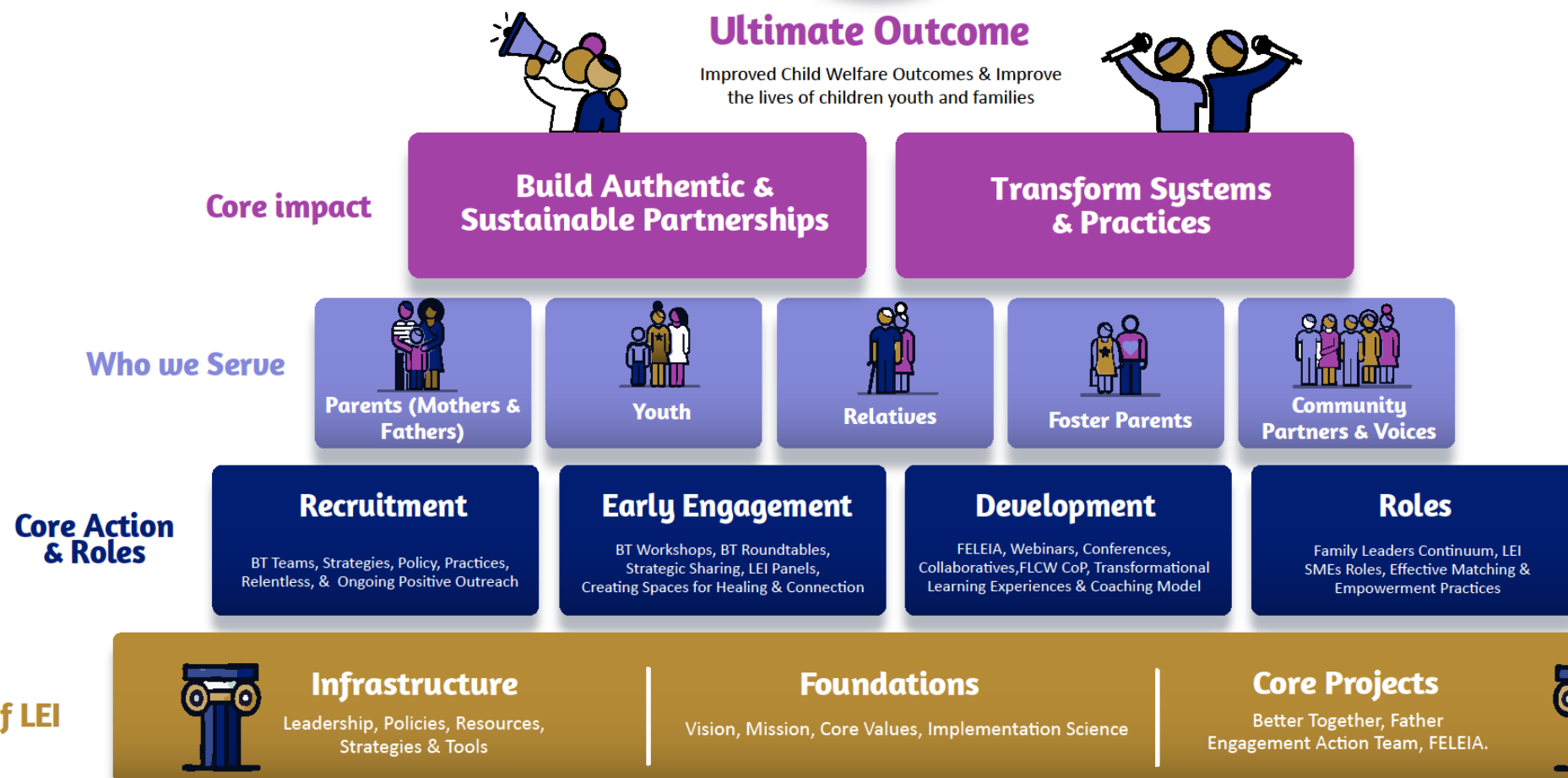
BPSD collaborates and contracts with UNH and PSU Social Work departments to offer robust internship opportunities for undergraduate and graduate level students who are pursuing a career in Social Work. The intern program offers tuition reimbursement and a small stipend in exchange for a commitment from the student to work for DCYF following their graduation.

Bureau of Professional and Strategic Development



# LIVED EXPERIENCE INTEGRATION (LEI) STRATEGY

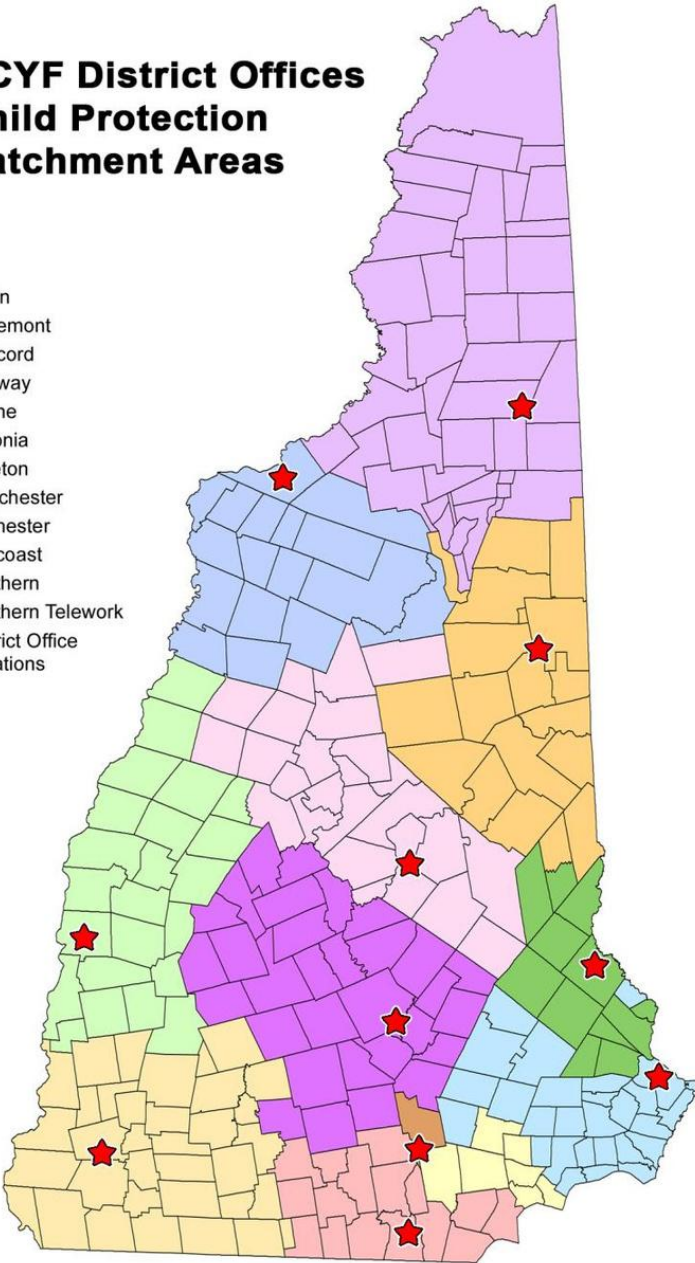
DCYF Practice Model





## DCYF District Offices Child Protection Catchment Areas

- Berlin
- Claremont
- Concord
- Conway
- Keene
- Laconia
- Littleton
- Manchester
- Rochester
- Seacoast
- Southern
- Southern Telework
- ★ District Office Locations



Amanda Letendre  
Seacoast, Conway & Rochester

Ciaira Kyden  
Concord, Laconia & Keene

Jaylee Suarez  
Manchester, Southern & SYSC

Joseph Schlesing  
Berlin/Littleton & Claremont

## 2025: Family Leaders Recruitment

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**Goal: Grow the pool people with lived experience referred to the Program**

- **Better Together Activities Workshops, Round Tables and FEAT**
  - Father Engagement Action Team-monthly meetings and panels
  - 9 Better Together Workshops – In person
  - 13 Better Together Round Tables – Virtual
    - 4 BT Round Tables for Seasoned Staff
- **Field Administrators, Supervisors and Providers Help**
  - Include referral to BT in the **Supervisor Closing Check List**
  - Promote BT Activities, facilitate staff involvement and join when you can

## 2025: Development of Family Leaders

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- **Match Family Leaders with learning experiences on a ongoing basis**
  - BT Workshops, Strategic Sharing, Webinars and other growth opportunities
- **The Family Empowerment and Lived Experience Integration Academy**
  - 50 hours of intensive leadership development
  - Develop agency staff and Family Leaders together like Better Together
- **Coaching Model**
  - One of one support to Family Leaders
- **Field Administrators and Supervisors Help**
  - Facilitate BT leaders share program updates at staff meetings
  - Facilities staff engagement

## 2025: Matching Family Leaders with Projects

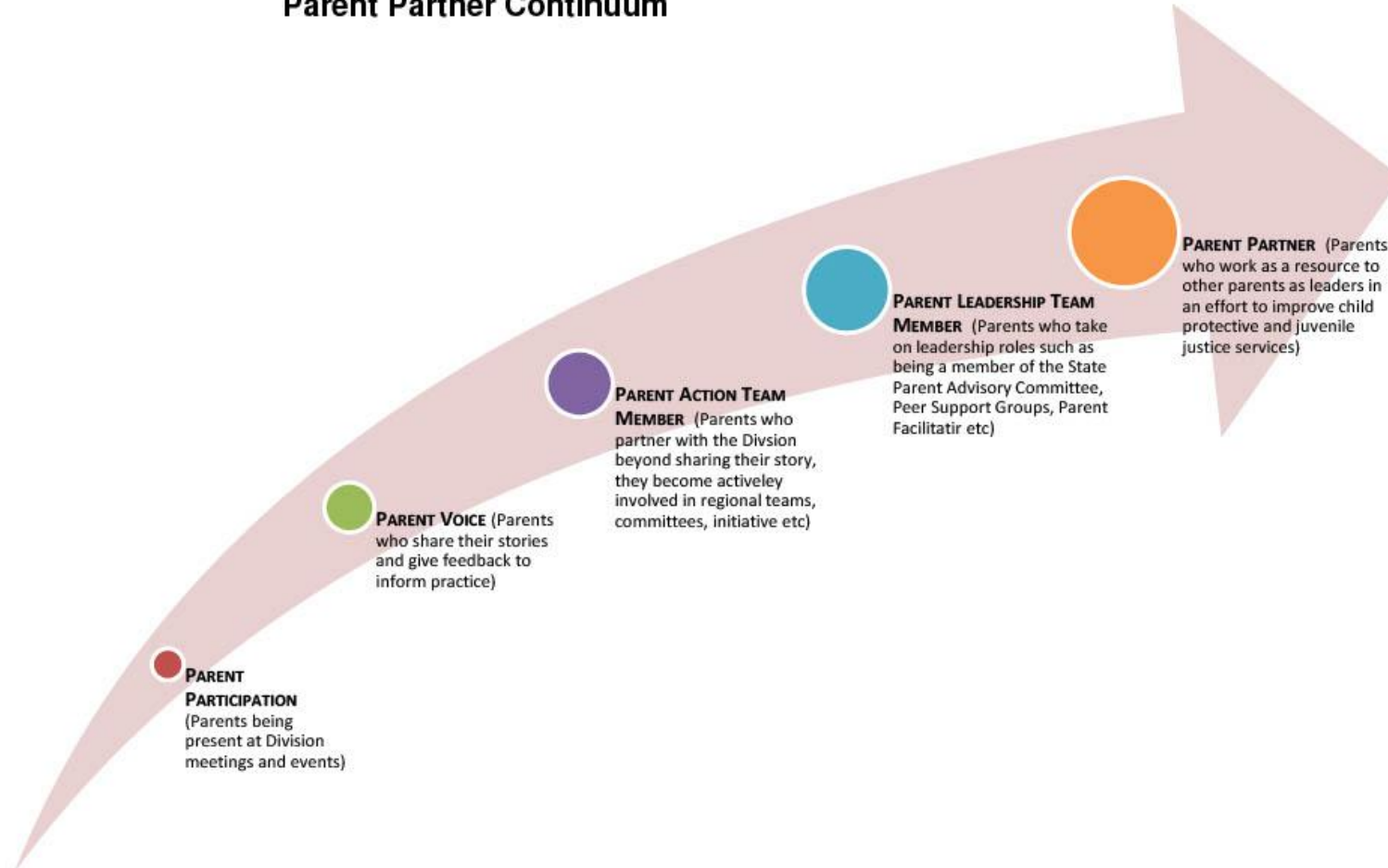
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- **Ongoing matching**
  - Field level projects and engagement opportunities
  - Program Level projects and engagement opportunities
  - System Level projects and engagement opportunities
- **Matching Process (Scope and meaningful Roles)**
  - 1500 hours funded (350 for system transformation work)
- **Coaching Model**
  - One of one support prior to and during and after projects
- **Field Administrators, Supervisors and Providers Help**
  - Support the inclusion of Family Leaders in practice improvement efforts
  - Facilitates staff engagement





## Parent Partner Continuum



PD 14-26



Better Together  
Workshops: Workforce  
Development & Agency  
Culture/Climate

Father  
Engagement  
Action Team:  
(FEAT): Positively  
Engaging Fathers  
- Responsive  
Practices

Family  
Engagement  
Core  
Strategies

Support Birth Parents  
& Foster Parent Build  
Trust: BT Workshops:  
Round Tables and  
Roadmap to  
Reunification

Strength to Succeed:  
Sustain and Deepen  
Peer Support

**4 PILLARS**

## 2025: Better Together Teams

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- **BT teams are Family Engagement Action Teams**
  - Liaisons serve as Co-Leads
  - Monthly meetings with clear Agenda and clear Focus
  - Plan and host activities to promote **Family Engagement Best Practices**
    - Family Voice Panels
    - Practice Dialogues
    - Reunification Celebrations
    - Regional BT Workshops & BT Round Tables
- **Lead the Recruitment of Family Leaders**
  - Set target measures and keep track of referrals and engagement
- **Field Administrators, Supervisors and Providers Help**
  - Include regular BT program updates at staff meetings
  - Facilitate the Coordination of dates for Panels and Practice Dialogues

# BETTER TOGETHER TEAMS

(IN EVERY D.O.)

Monthly  
Meetings

Parent  
Recruitment

Promoting  
family  
engagement  
best practices

Elevating family  
voice and lived  
experience

Reunification  
Celebrations

## Parent Leaders in Action



Train the Trainers

# *Better Together Guiding Principles*

- ▶ Honoring parent voice and promoting parent leadership
- ▶ Share decision-making
- ▶ Communicating respectfully, honestly, and often
- ▶ Acknowledging shared purposes and common values
- ▶ Understanding the impacts of race, culture, and disproportionality on interactions
- ▶ Encouraging behaviors and attitudes that lead to success
- ▶ Understanding the needs and perspectives of fathers and other parenting partners
- ▶ Engaging extended family members and other supports within the community
- ▶ Understanding and then overcoming the disparity in power between parents, foster parents, and DCYF staff
- ▶ Providing parents with a forum in which they can express what they need and can offer



Integrating people with  
lived experience

The power of  
Better Together  
community





## Better Together in person Round Table



## 2024: Reunification Celebrations



**The Father Engagement Action Team (FEAT)** focuses on the inclusion of fathers in all aspects of the work we do with children, youth, and families, ensuring that:

- Fathers have an active role in protecting and promoting healthy relationships among caregivers, children, and families;
- They have a seat at the table as we address the concrete needs of families, remove barriers to success, and promote active skill-building for parents;
- We build our capacity to identify, locate, and include fathers in all program areas;
- We work to shift perceptions and build a culture and climate that is inclusive of fathers; and
- We capture data around father engagement and use it to inform our policies.



**F.E.A.T.**





# FEAT Strategy Scope Overview:

**Vision:** fathers are consistently included in all aspects of our work and children/youth are thriving as their fathers are there for them.

## Project Goal

**Goal:** “DCYF will improve engagement with fathers resulting in an increase in fathers’ presence and participation in all case activities, through building staff capacity and increase use of tools to identify, locate and engaging fathers.”

## Objectives



Build Staff Capacity to identify, locate, and positively engage fathers



Increase use of Tools and Strategies to identify, locate and positively engage fathers

## Core Values

Fathers and mothers are partners in raising their children/youth even when they do not live in the same household

Fathers as “subject matter” experts in fatherhood, and leveraging “lived experience”

Synergy between field-based expertise and the best science can offer us

# FEAT Strategy Scope Overview:

**The Child Welfare Transformation Context** represents an unprecedented opportunity for this PIP strategy to succeed and for us to achieve the overall goal of more consistently engaging and empowering fathers

## Core Principles

1. **Reduce Sources of Stress** for fathers, mothers, children, youth, staff and community partners;
2. **Promote healthy connection and relationships** between fathers and children/youth;
3. **Focus on concrete needs and concrete skills building** for fathers

## Three Pathways

Practice Changes

Training: workforce  
development

System's Level: Policy and  
Service array

## Core Activities



**Monthly Meetings**



**Small group work for  
targeted work:**

1. Practice changes
2. Product creation
3. Training
4. **Data**



**Activities in the District  
Offices**

1. BT teams
2. Panels
3. Practice Discussions
4. **Training sessions**
5. **Consult Sessions**

## 2025: FEAT “Toolbox” and Strategies for Spread

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### Tools for spread

- **Training:** Engaging and Including Incarcerated Parents Toolbox
- **Practice Profiles** – Our Core Strategy to Spread practice changes – 2025 roll out
- **Fatherhood Practice Consultation Model** – Ongoing support to the field
- **Sustain and Deepen Strategic Partnerships**
  - Within DCYF and DHHS (Child Support and other colleagues)
  - Other systems and community partners



# Engaging and Including Incarcerated Parents

- Co- Presenters:

- Eddie Torres, Parent Leader and FEAT Co-Lead

- - Jaylee Suarez, JPPO and FEAT Co-Lead

- [Jaylee.n.Suarez@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:Jaylee.n.Suarez@dhhs.nh.gov)

- 603-931-9065



# DCYF Father Engagement Practice Profiles

FEAT Practice Profile 2.5.2025 NEW

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Engaging Fathers Practice Profile NH Division for Children, Youth and Families			
Practice	Exemplary	Proficient	Emerging
<i>Initial efforts to identify and locate fathers during child protection assessments or Juvenile Justice Involvement</i>	DCYF staff will make three attempts to locate fathers <b>within the first (7) business days</b> of an assessment or family involvement with juvenile justice.	DCYF staff will make three attempts to locate fathers within the <b>first 30 days</b> of an assessment or case being received.	DCYF staff make three attempts to locate fathers <b>prior to closing the assessment or case.</b>
<i>Ongoing efforts to locate and engage fathers during family involvement with the Division</i>	DCYF staff will make <b>regular ongoing attempts</b> to locate and engage fathers that are at home or out of home, using all available tools.  DCYF staff will also meet with fathers monthly to address case planning needs, being prompt to let them know when there are changes or new information in the case or with their child.	DCYF staff will <b>utilize the absent parent affidavit monthly</b> to document efforts to find absent or missing fathers.  DCYF staff will, at a minimum, make monthly efforts to have contact with fathers.	DCYF staff will <b>use the "absent parent affidavit"</b> and submit it to the court prior to any court hearing.  DCYF staff will make efforts to have contact with fathers during a review period.

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# DCYF Father Engagement *Practice Consultation Model*

## Engaging Fathers Practice Consultation for DCYF Staff



If you're a DCYF staff member looking for support in locating, including, and engaging fathers in your case practice, the Father Engagement Action Team can help.

- Get ideas, strategies, tools, and support from trusted colleagues and fathers with lived experience
- Services are offered during our regular team meetings (first Friday of each month, 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.)

To learn more about FEAT, send one of us an email!

[Benjamin.J.Yolda@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:Benjamin.J.Yolda@dhhs.nh.gov)

[Jeffrey.I.Trahant@dhhs.nh.gov](mailto:Jeffrey.I.Trahant@dhhs.nh.gov)



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# Your Role and Responsibilities as a Member of FEAT

## Leader and Champion

- **Attend monthly FEAT Meeting**
  - Actively participate in group discussions to help the team achieve the goal of: DCYF will improve engagement with fathers resulting in an increase in fathers' presence and participation in all case activities, through building staff capacity and increase use of tools to identify, locate and engaging fathers.
  - Take on tasks to support the works of the team; examples of tasks may include serving as note-taker or task master or joining small group work to develop a product; for example, a tip sheet.
- **Engage in learning and collective discoveries**
  - By being an active consumer of good research on the subject matter;
  - Helping plan, test, and analyze small tests of change.
- **Promote best practices in engaging fathers in your context**
  - By consistently modeling best practices in engaging and empowering fathers;
  - By helping plan and facilitate activities in the DO to promote engaging fathers;
- **Partner with Better Together Teams to plan action such as:**
  - Round tables with fathers to promote culture shift;
  - Practice discussions to build field staff capacity to identify, locate, and engage fathers.
  - Training and Coaching Sessions!



## 2025: Summarizing the ASK

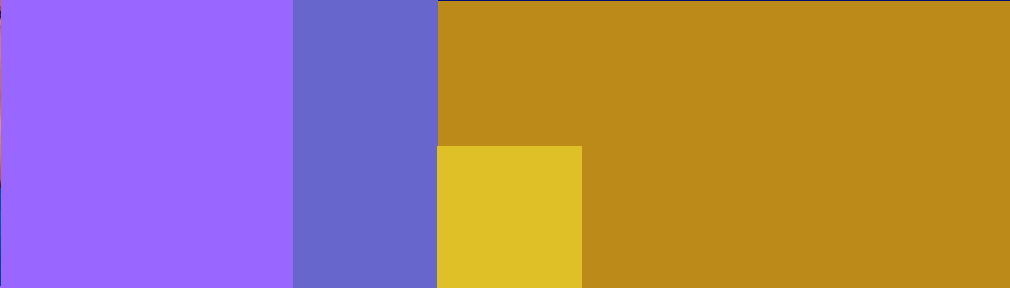
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Help us help you!

- **5 ways we are bringing Family Voice to your District Offices**
  - **Reunification Celebrations!** Celebrating the extraordinary work you and your staff do
  - **Family Voice Panels!** Powerful stories to nurture empathy and hope!
  - **Practice Dialogues!** Support staff refine family engagement skills
  - **Better Together Round Tables for Seasoned Staff**– A space to pause & recharge!
  - **Better Together Virtual Round Tables for Providers**-Discuss barriers families experience and together find solutions!
- **4 Concrete Ways YOU can support Better Together and FEAT**
  - **Support recruitment** – inform the families you serve!
  - **Support/ & Facilitate Staff participation in Better Together Activities**
  - **Join Better Together Activities**
  - **Promote the value of LEI!**







# Thank you.



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