Strengthening Knowledge, Skills and Partnerships among Service Coordinators through Communities of Practice

A community of practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic that come together to deepen their knowledge and expertise through interactions with one another on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Structure

**L1, L12, TC2**

1) Service Coordinators and
2) Those who train/prepare SCs at local level (program managers, supervisors, lead service coordinators, etc.)

**Demographics**
- 10-12 active participants for each meeting (on average)
- 14 of 25 System Points of Entry Participate
- Participants represent urban and rural regions

**Leadership Groups**

- Open/Ongoing recruitment of leaders to help plan/facilitate meetings
- Meet once in between quarterly meetings
- 2-3 active leaders in each leadership group

**Data Collection Points**

- Post SC required training
- Needs assessments (ongoing) to plan meetings/topics
- Post-meeting evaluations
- Comprehensive CoP Evaluation (after 2 years)

**Impact of CoP**

**L1, L12**

Effectiveness of CoP:

- Effective on Local Initiatives: 64%
- Effective on State Initiatives: 43%

As a result of CoP participation:

- I am changing the way I think about or approach my work: 62.56%
- I am trying or applying something new in my practice: 56.25%
- I am setting new goals for myself and my practice: 43.75%
- I am thinking about trying something new in my practice: 31.25%
- I am refining or changing the way that I have always done something: 25.00%

**Key Elements**

- Strong facilitator
- Multiple ways to participate
- Effective communication
- Opportunities to network
- CoP members valuing their participation
- Having a shared interest
- Opportunities to get credit

**Next Steps**

- Cultivate/Recruit leaders
- Continue to evaluate/assess
- Use data to focus meeting agendas
- Identify discussion topics
- Model strong facilitation to grow leaders

**Division of Early Childhood Recommended Practices**

L1: Leaders create a culture and a climate in which practitioners feel a sense of belonging and want to support the organization’s mission and goals.

L12: Leaders collaborate with stakeholders to collect and use data for program management and continuous program improvement and to examine the effectiveness of services and supports in improving child and family outcomes.

TC2: Practitioners and families work together as a team to systematically and regularly exchange expertise, knowledge, and information to build team capacity and jointly solve problems, plan, and implement interventions.

**Presenters:** Susan Connor, Maria Kastanis and Sarah Nichols

Early Intervention Training Program at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, College of Education, Department of Special Education