

Weaving Connections

[Music]

Man: It kind of makes you feel as if you can cut through a lot of the bureaucracy. And whether you just want to walk in and you have something on your mind, you feel a lot more open that you can go and you can speak to anyone about anything.

Woman: The networking among the membership of the Health Service Advisory Committee is wonderful.

Woman: And you have a canvas, you know? And you can paint what you want on it, and that can be your Health Advisory Committee. [Music]

Narrator: Head Start and Early Head Start programs offer high-quality early childhood education, health and social services, along with a strong parent involvement focus to low income children nationwide. Head Start sees every community as a fabric made up of tightly woven threads. These threads -- the children, families, and community members -- weave intimate connections to create a colorful tapestry that reflects its strengths and warmth. The Health Services Advisory Committee, as required by the Head Start Program Performance Standards, brings together staff, parents, and community members to address emerging health issues, develop plans, policies, and procedures, as well as mobilize community resources. The following stories showed different actions that advisory committees can take to help children build relationships, advocate for change, empower parents, and strengthen communities. Dr. Mimi

Kanda: A good Health Services Advisory Committee makes a big difference in terms of the outcomes for the children, for the families, and for the program itself. You know, normally, in a way, the sky is the limit. And each program has the latitude to really shape its Health Services Advisory Committee in the best way possible. [Music]

Narrator: By assisting a Head Start or Early Head Start program, and responding to the health needs of a particular child, the Health Services Advisory Committee helps improve health services for all children in the program. For Christopher and his mother Penny, this support was critical to their lives from the moment of his birth.

Penny Purser: Well, Christopher came to the Head Start at six weeks old. And his challenges were from birth. He was born with spina bifida. He has one club foot. He had a shunt put in to relieve some of the hydrocephalus around the brain. So he's had a great deal of challenges to overcome. And Head Start's been real supportive with everything.

Narrator: Planning and effective communication allow the Health Services Advisory Committee to support staff in responding to children's needs.

Kari Decoteau: I think just about every person on this reservation knows of his disability and is there to help.

Jaclyn Haight: Everyone understands the story and what his needs are. And you work together and troubleshoot along the way.

Penny: The advisory committee is there to help, and step in, and give whatever help and support that they can. So that's just part of our working together.

Danette Ives: Everybody's pretty much involved with everybody. Now, I think that's how the whole coordination comes along.

Jaclyn: A good example of how the Health Service Committee can help a Head Start or Early Head Start program is -- for us, it was the purchase of some special equipment that we needed for Christopher. We had to say, Okay, these are the costs of-- it was a Ready Racer and a stander.

Penny: With the Head Start funds and the contract health service, they were able to pull their funding together and get him a set so he had the same equipment here that he had at home.

Narrator: The Health Services Advisory Committee in Christopher's community is one part of a team of people who are working to make sure that Christopher, and other children with special health care needs, can have a meaningful Head Start experience.

Ellen Price: It's given him a chance to be mobile and to experience things that he may not have otherwise been able to do. And it's given him a sense of independence.

Danette: The team of people that work for Christopher, everybody cares so much about him. He's just so much a part of this school.

Penny: There's a lot of people out there that really do take care of him, and it takes a lot of people to raise that little boy. [Music]

Narrator: Health emergencies call for immediate action. Health Services Advisory committees help to ensure that systems are in place to mobilize community resources. This Head Start program and its committee members work together to develop policies and procedures for health emergencies.

Woman: Families have to be there --

Sandra Carton: Parents suffer a lot of isolation. They frequently don't speak English. And we do use the advisory committee as the way to link those parents with the community, and to know that there are members in that community that are interested in their well-being.

Janet Schultz: Maria and her husband are parents of a four-year-old little girl and 23-month-old twin girls. And she is now expecting her fourth child. When Early Head Start staff learned that Maria was at risk of losing her baby, they contacted the partners in the community that the Health Services Advisory Committee had helped them establish.

Maria Hercules: When I started having complications with my pregnancy, she's calling, asking to [Inaudible] see me.

Janet: She was monitored for a few days and was prescribed a medication to prevent premature contractions early in pregnancy.

Woman: Very good. 100 over --

Maria: When I start to buy the medicines, it's a little hard. Because I have to take it every four hours. It's expensive medicine.

Narrator: Following the policies and procedures developed by the Health Services Advisory Committee, Early Head Start staff started a plan of action that called on the resources of the committee. The medication was delivered directly to Maria at no charge.

Maria: These people, they gave me the medicine for keeping my baby.

Janet: As a result, we have this wonderful, beautiful healthy little boy.

Maria: It was a little hard, but now I'm so happy. They always, always, when I need it, they'll be here with me. That's truly great. Dr.

Kanda: Like many, many other things in Head Start, you know, it's relationship building. It's partnership development. It's patience, and it's the willingness to really work with people and the willingness to listen to people and to be creative.

Narrator: The solution to some health policy issues may mean going beyond the local level. This Head Start program used its committee to work with other local programs to form a state Health Services Advisory Committee.

Woman: Some things cannot just be solved within your community. It has to be dealt with by the state agencies.

Woman: I'd like to welcome you to the Health Advisory Committee.

Woman: Sometimes, the people on the local level don't have the power. They don't have enough power where, when we take it to the state, we get more answers.

Anne Taggart: We have, at our local community level, we have a Health Service Advisory Committee. Then we also have representatives who go to our state Health Advisory Committee.

Man: For every dollar that came in from Medicaid, the dentist was losing about 25 percent.

Woman: The Medicaid reimbursement rate for dentists was extremely low. And our families were trying to get-- access dental services. They were looking in the larger community for dentists who accept Medicaid. There was not that many dentists that were taking Medicaid.

Narrator: The local Health Services Advisory Committee took this issue to the statewide committee for action at the state level. Head Start staff, parents, health care providers and others worked together to convince the state to increase the Medicaid rates. This allowed families to have greater access to oral health care. Dr. Valsala

Pal: Since the Medicare reimbursement was higher, I was able to get specialists to help me out with handling these children.

Narrator: Parents like Richard care deeply about the quality of oral health services their children receive. Parents participate on the committee to make sure their voices are heard.

Richard Black: It makes you feel really good to know that they have people here who are in the forefront and almost pioneers on issues like this. It just lets you know that, I mean, even at the grassroots level, if you start small, this can be something that can have a big effect nationwide. How do your teeth feel? Do they feel nice and clean? [Music]

Narrator: This Health Services Advisory Committee empowers parents by teaching them about the health care system and how to make it work for their children.

Woman: And still disseminate --

Mary Varela: The Health Service Advisory Committee is doing something that's really unique. And that's that they're taking a problem that seems like it belongs to a certain group, and they're exposing it. You know? They're shining light on it.

Tracey Yee: Our Health Advisory Committee helped us write a grant. And a few of those members sort of became a peer health committee. And we wrote a grant all around, helping parents teaching other parents how to navigate the health care system. -- more comfortable when they go to their doctor if --

Shannon Blas: We train Head Start parents. They learn to navigate through the managed care system and how to partner with their doctor. Then they go back to their site, and they do what's called a "teach back."

Tracey: When we tell them they're going to get up in front of a group of other parents, a lot of them say, I can't see myself doing that. But then, weeks later, they are doing it. And the response they get from their parents that they're teaching I think is so wonderful that they really do become energized.

Marty: In the description, it says, how big is the gash?

Narrator: Parents like Marty actively participate on the committee and help teach other Head Start families to understand the health care system. With three small children of her own, Marty knows how difficult it can be to manage the health care of children.

Marty: This program has given me some information. It's just like, you know, you've got a secret, and you want to tell as many people as possible. They're much more willing to listen to you, because they perceive that you're one of them, and I am. I'm, you know, first and foremost a Head Start parent.

Tracey: To hear parents say that they're advocating for themselves in their doctors' offices, and that they're carrying histories of their child's health with them from provider to provider, or when they move, for us to hear that, I think, is the biggest success.

Woman: Her fever was 99 --

Dr. Stuart Shorr: There's a lot of personal satisfaction. I find that I'm able to use my pediatric expertise to help make certain policies and give certain guidelines which are beneficial to preschoolers.

Marty: I think the most important component of Head Start is that they're not trying to do it all by themselves. They're collaborating with community members.

[Music]

Dr. Kanda: Because Head Start has such a strong emphasis on prevention, that the Health Services Advisory Committee's mission is not just to address problems as they arise, but to be very proactive and to think of prevention and early intervention and how wonderful things can be need to happen in the community.

Bontivia Ben: Okay, ready? I have three kids. One is one year old, three and seven.

Narrator: Bontivia's children were suffering from a health problem that had broader implications for the entire community.

Bontivia: They were tested at the regular health assessment, and I was called a couple of days later. And they told me that their lead level was high, and that they needed to be retested, and my house needed to be checked.

Narrator: Bontivia, a member of the Health Services Advisory Committee, informed the committee about this community problem.

Bontivia: I had a problem with them coming out. I called. I talked to the director of Lead. And he informed me that they had a backlog. But as far as being a parent and other parents, there should have been some kind of communication of telling -- letting you know that there's a backlog or what's going on. Nobody told me anything.

Dr. Habib Shariat: We have like, about 20, 25 members coming from different areas of the community, bringing their expertise, listening to the needs of the community members.

Bontivia: As advocates in this community, that that's totally unacceptable. Right? That we will not accept that they have a backlog.

Woman: Most of the homes are over 60 and 100 years old. So the chances are that any place you've lived, there is lead based paint.

Bontivia: Lead is a priority. They just boosted me more to call. Because I wouldn't have called on my own. Or I probably would have just waited till somebody might have called me back.

Theresa Shivers: The parent becomes her own advocate. I don't have to be there to hold her hand, but I do have to be there to be a role model, to give her an example to go by.

Bontivia: The people encouraged me to keep calling, so I did. And I got a great response back. Right now, I'm happy to say that everything is in process. Last week, someone from the Lead Department came and did an evaluation of a whole house, to do the estimate, so everything could be fixed that needs to be fixed. And I'm happy to say, too, that the lead level has gone down tremendously [Inaudible]

Woman: Great.

Narrator: By bringing the resources of the committee to focus on the issue, the whole community will now benefit from Bontivia's actions.

Theresa: What about all of those other parents out here who don't have anyone else to march down, or walk with them down this road?

Dr. Shariat: I would like to see this group maybe put that on the burner as an issue to be addressed. Participating in more meetings, it gave me the strength and the courage to speak up.

Dr. Janet Unonu: She goes to meetings now and speaks to other parents. And that's what we really want to see. Because she is the one that is going to make that change in her community.

Bontivia: It turns out that they really are happy that I am there. And that they can find out more things that goes on in parents' lives and their kids' lives. So they could find a better way of helping people.

Dr. Kanda: The more you can engage people in the community, and one group brings another in. And before you know it, you have a whole tapestry of people involved. This is something that's bigger than any one of us. And that really has such an impact for the future.

Narrator: The Health Services Advisory Committee, helping children, building relationships, advocating for change, empowering parents, and strengthening communities. Weaving connections that create a healthy future for children and families.

Woman: Doors begin to open up in your own mind, about my goodness, I didn't realize how much power we had. My goodness, I didn't realize how many lives get changed. My goodness, I didn't realize how many health issues come out.

Woman: It's dynamic. It's responsive. It involves parents.

Woman: I think the role of parents becomes really important, because they are the voice of their reality.

Richard: It makes you feel really good to know that your kid is going to get the quality care.