

# FACILITATION FOCUS

A NEWSLETTER FOR FACILITATORS OF CHILD AND FAMILY TEAMS

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## Regional News

### Welcome, Cumberland County!

The North Carolina Family-Centered Meetings Project, through funding from the Department of Public Instruction, has landed in Cumberland County. In an effort to provide facilitators with more options for support, the Project will be offering an additional Facilitator Forum in the spring of 2008 in Cumberland. We wish to thank to the hospitable folks in this county for coordinating efforts for family-centered practice.

### Western Wisdom:

The Western Forum led by trainer Billy Poindexter and training coordinator Jenny King, was held Thursday, November 13 in Wilkesboro. Participants engaged in an interactive discussion titled, "Talking the Talk with Families and Providers." Discussion in this forum focused on CFT practice, raising the question, "How are meetings affected by the words, body language, and presentation style of facilitators?" Many thanks to all who attended! The next Western Forum will be held on January 23, 2008.

### Central Chatter:

The Central Facilitator Forum took place in Graham on October 24, 2007. Invited speakers Libby and Matthew Jones shared their experiences with Child and Family Teams with facilitators. Training coordinator Kara Allen-Eckard guided a discussion about the importance of the "family voice". The next Central Forum will be held January 15, 2008.

*Check out our website for upcoming Facilitator Forum dates and locations!!!*

[www.cfface.org/dss/facilitatorforums.htm](http://www.cfface.org/dss/facilitatorforums.htm)

### Tales from the East:

On Thursday, November 29<sup>th</sup>, the Eastern Facilitator Forum took place in Wilson. Trainers Susan Gasman and Tee Henderson hosted guest speaker Claretta Witherspoon. Ms. Witherspoon, a family advocate and therapeutic foster parent shared her fifteen years of experience from the family's perspective with the group. Stay tuned for details of the next Eastern Facilitator Forum.

## CFTs: What Does the *Research* Have to Say?

Excerpted from Joan Pennell, MSW, PhD & Terri Shelton, PhD

- Including children and their families in case planning is related to better outcomes in keeping children safe and stabilizing their placements (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2005).
- When people take part in setting their goals, they are more likely to set higher goals and this leads to higher levels of performance (Staw, 2004).
- Family meetings maintain children's connections with their siblings, parents, and relatives and stabilize where they live (Merkel-Holguin, 2003). They accomplish these outcomes without endangering children's safety (Gunderson, Cahn, and Wirth, 2003) or that of their mothers (Pennell & Burford, 2000) and without significantly increasing costs (Pennell & Anderson, 2005).

## Virtual Facilitator Forum

We have exciting news! As an additional resource to our esteemed facilitators, we are now offering a *virtual* Facilitator Forum in the form of a **Google Group**. For those of you deterred by technology, fear not! It is easy to access and an opportunity to connect with your colleagues (and us) between in-person forums. Use the group to share information, pose questions, and stay current. Look for an invitation email – this is a private group which will not be accessed by the general public. An additional bit of news – you may notice

*You're not obligated to win.  
You're obligated to keep trying  
to do the best you can  
every day.*

*Marian Wright Edelman*

that we are now the Center for Family and Community Engagement. We are still the same staff working on the same project, but now have “Center” status and a great new office.

## Herd'n Cats

By Billy Poindexter

This phrase refers to situations in which you feel you can't get anything going in a single direction. Cats for all of their positive qualities have a distinct mind of their own and do not take too kindly to being directed. I recently held a meeting that produced this feeling in me. They were not hostile or uncooperative but were all over the place in their discussions and the ADHD (no medication) child was all over physically and verbally. Oh, did I mention the parent had about an 80 + -- IQ? As workers you have had these families and know that feeling - but how do you facilitate a meeting for this type of group? There are some specific things you need to do as you hold this type of meeting:

When you facilitate herding cats...

Be sure you, the case-carrying worker and the family CLEARLY understand the PURPOSE of the CFT. This will help all to limit the tangential discussions that will arise, a clear purpose will not stop all of the tangents but it will help limit them. What is the journey going to be like is essential as a facilitator to know. To have a sense before hand of the dynamics will help you prepare your mind for the skills you may need to call upon to move this group forward instead of around and around. How far do we need to go? Recognize that you may not cover all that is needed to be discussed in one meeting. Consult with the worker on the “bottom-line” needs, true safety issues, and topics relevant to why the agency is mandated to be involved with this family, and barriers to meeting the above. This will make several follow-up meetings necessary to cover all the worker needs to have addressed. This is preferable to one very long, trying session that may still not get all that worker or family needs.

*F* Careful patience is a must. Even though a smooth flow of discussion is a virtual impossibility, as a facilitator listening patiently to the “multi-directional” discussions may reveal information useful and hitherto unknown to the Worker. Skills you will need to utilize are mirroring, paraphrasing, clarifying, and summarizing to name a few.

One thing I was made quite aware of in that meeting was the need to use words, terms that were understandable to the lower functioning participant. Take time to be sensitive to this, it will help speed the process and the member to have clearer understanding. One final point, respect. It was easy to become either upset or to just laugh at what appeared to be the near chaos of this family's participation in the meeting. But be careful it is their life, and they may be doing what they think is the best thing—even if it isn't.

To project respect by listening, clarifying and helping the participants be positively involved in the meeting will create buy-in and make the workers job easier working with the family after the meeting is over.

Lessons:

How do you herd cats?

1. Know where you are going
2. What are these cats like
3. Go in short hops
4. Be patient and aware
5. Respect the ability of the cat to get where they want to go
6. Help them to want to go there

*“Don't worry that children  
never listen to you; worry that  
they are always watching you.”*

*-Robert Fulghum*

*Thank you for your dedication to children and families.*

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