

Building Stronger Families

Decreased Caregiver Stress—95% (n=48) of MSFA caregivers reported either a decrease or remained stable in their overall stress level that is directly related to the caring of the child with emotional or behavioral needs.

Better Family Functioning—86% (n=50) of caregivers report that the family functioning (communication, interaction, and ability to work together) remained stable or improved after one year.

Greater Emotional Strength in Children—After being in the Mountain State Family Alliance Project for 6 months, 76.7% of the children reported stabilized or improved strengths. After being in the project for 1 year, 83.1% reported stabilized or improved strengths. These represent positive emotions, behaviors and aspects of an individual's life.

“Nothing about us without us” - families are becoming true partners in Systems of Care

Mountain State Family Alliance has demonstrated better family outcomes by expanding the “tool kit” for families of children with special emotional needs:

- **Family Care Notebook**—a tool for organizing crucial documentation
- **Valuable Training**—on child & adolescent mental health issues and child-serving systems (education, juvenile justice, child welfare/DHHR, health, etc.)
- **Parent-to-Parent Support**—family members who have “been there” and can share experiences and expertise
- **Partnerships with Professionals**—building more effective working relationships on planning teams (from individual service planning to agency & policy work teams)
- **Building on family and child strengths and resources**

What West Virginia Families have to say:

“MSFA helped us to identify resources to attend some intensive trainings so I could work directly with my son. I am confident the work I am putting in with him is making a difference. His behavior at home has really improved. Now we are able to sit down and talk about some of his choices and the things that made him upset.”

- Putnam County Mom

“Shortly after I was invited to participate in the MSFA project, I met our parent liaison, who sat down and talked with me, and about our child, and asked me what it is our family needs. She didn't have any magic answers and told me that from day one. But I know someone cares who is a phone call away to at least help brainstorm possible solutions.”

- Kanawha County Mom

Removing barriers to true family involvement means better results for child-serving agencies

Local, state and national efforts to reform child and family services consistently mandate family involvement. Examples include the *No Child Left Behind* Act, the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, and the DHHR Strategic Plan for Reducing Dependence on Out-of-State Placement of Youth. Staying involved means that family members feel respected, are treated as valuable partners, and see changes as a result of their work. Agencies and professionals can involve families by:

- Learning and implementing the key elements of Family Centered Practice
- Actively recruiting families to participate in forums, events and activities
- Equipping families to participate by providing transportation and reimbursements as needed
- Helping families to understand your system's rules, procedures and language
- Understand that there is a ladder of possibilities for family roles (participants, volunteers, organizers, evaluators, training partners and paid staff)

Source: *West Virginia Family Leadership Project*

The Mountain State Family Alliance partnership and providers of community services include: WV-DHHR Office of Behavioral Health Services, IWV-DHHR Bureau for Children & Families, IWV Division of Juvenile Services, IWV Department of Education—Office of Special Education, IRegion 2 Family Network, IMarshall University—Joan C. Edwards School of Medicine/Robert C. Byrd Center for Rural Health, IRegion 2 Children's Summit, IGovernor's Cabinet on Children & Families, ICounty Family Resource Networks, IRiver Park Hospital, IBralely & Thompson, Inc., IPrestera Center for Mental Health Services, IWestbrook Health Services, IAlliance for Children, IWV Youth Advocate Program, IChildren's Home Society, IKVC, Inc., IStepping Stones, Inc., IPressley Ridge, IGolden Girl, Inc., ICammack Children's Center, IAdditional private service providers & faith-based groups

