

Questions to consider

- Why is collective family leadership needed?
- What is the source of family leadership?
- In what ways are the worlds of families and service providers distinct?

Family Leadership

Collective family leadership within the context of a dynamic movement, a cause

families in partnership with each other; to gain power, influence, effect social change, ideologically driven, multi-generational/long term

AACL as a means of

exercising grassroots family leadership collectively and in support of individuals

sustaining and enhancing collective leadership
increasing capacity for action

linking issues, the big picture, keeping the movement's eyes "on the prize"

ensuring clarity of vision

providing analysis from a critical theory perspective, that includes knowing your opposition

honouring variations in participation

Family Leadership

Partnerships – business, personal, marital, legal, ownership, contract, agreement

Shared - interests, commitment, power, goals, profits, accomplishments

Terms - termination, length, distribution of resources or earnings, roles and responsibilities, means of change (negotiation &/or distribution of power)

Family Leadership

- Family advocacy organizations can form relationships, alliances, coalitions or partnerships but must retain their autonomy and capacity to act unilaterally
- Partnerships are best with other advocacy associations, community organizations that share common interests, with shared power
- Short term strategic alliances with service providers can be beneficial and useful

Family Leadership

- Partnerships with service providers are often not ideal in the long term – conflicts of interest, change in leadership and staff, shifts in values, resource changes
- However families and service providers can and should strive to have positive and helpful relationships; to work together, when the right ethical conditions exist or are created

Family Leadership

Families take up leadership to create better lives, to impact community, to gain power and influence with government

Families recognize the need for a positive relationship to providers and services but only to the limited degree absolutely necessary to achieving an inclusive life and its realization

Family Leadership

Some aspects of the “right” relationship between families and service providers

Recognition of the natural authority of families

Vesting power in families

Service doubts itself, questions itself, and invites critique and analysis

Service is committed to humility

Understand servant role of provider

Constant effort to create trust

Organizations and staff know precisely their competencies and their limits

“At any one time there is only a small amount of capable and dynamic leadership available..., and every quantum of leadership which is drained into service operation is a quantum that is withheld from change agency, while each quantum of leadership invested in change agency produces many more results than an equal amount of energy invested in service operation.” Wolfensberger, 1973

“...volunteer leadership is so very precious, and cannot be bought very readily for any amount of money...”

“... professionals can be trained and hired, but we cannot produce volunteer leaders in this fashion.” Wolfensberger, 1973

Why Family Leadership Development?

- Valued action irrespective of the times
- Strengthen the grassroots of the 'community inclusion' movement
- Increase capacity of families to act proactively and collectively
- Increase capacity to address government decision-making structures, policies and funding

Why Family Leadership Development?

- Sustain and renew hope
- Foster future leadership for a wide variety of personal and public roles
- Increase advocacy knowledge and skills in addressing a more complex, techno-bureaucratic, dysfunctional human service world

Why Family Leadership Development?

- Expand and sustain a vision of inclusive lives
- Learn more about how to bring people from across generations into leadership roles
- Commitment to sustain and renew leadership on an ongoing basis
- Necessity to develop leadership development approach particular to families

How we do leadership development

- By invitation and mentorship of new families by previous participants
- Belief in the wisdom within the group
- 5 intensive weekends together over 8 months
 - Weekends are thematically organized (e.g., seeing things for what they are; societal devaluation and wounding; sustaining hope in these times; leadership; advocacy strategies; families at the heart of community; vision of inclusive lives, etc.)
 - Provoke reflection and analysis
 - Progressively deepen analyses - discernment of moral and values-based issues/decisions
 - Consistent rhythm to weekend
- No packaged “curriculum”

How we do leadership development

- Content shaped by the group
- Mentorship development and implementation
- Take as much time as required to deepen and clarify learning and understanding - more important than adhering to content schedule
- Approximately 20 -30 parents/individuals with developmental disabilities
- Create a safe place for reflection and debate
- Belief in community inclusion and “the struggle”
- Entire family invited - high quality child care; teenager and adult support

How we do leadership development

- Belief in collective leadership
- Invite “known” guest facilitators steeped in values-based training and experiences
- Ensure discussions about moral conflicts/issues of our times (e.g., deathmaking)
- Develop a critical stance for thinking and acting in a morally confusing world
- Talk about the conditions of the lives we lead
- Share overriding hopes for families that bring the best out in each other
- Families from across the province; new and old to the movement; of older and younger children; multi-generational; couples; parents alone; adoptive; foster; parents with developmental disabilities; single parents; grandparents; siblings

How we do leadership development

- Engagement in dynamic interactive participation (personal reflections, small groups, large groups, assignments, readings) -majority of participants time is spent in active engagement
- All costs covered - travel, meals, accommodations, child care, etc. - grants and organizational commitment
- Annual weekend reunion of all past participants
- Invitations to participate in leadership activities (e.g., family network development), actions (e.g., input on social policies), provincial and national conferences (e.g., annual family conference) and workshops (e.g., facilitating relationships)
- Journaling

How we do leadership development

Content over the five weekends includes:

- exploration of the nature of values-based leadership;
- history of the community living movement;
- examination of inclusion across the life-span;
- nature and strategic aspects of networking;
- strategies and values inherent in personal and systems advocacy;
- personal inventory of strengths and capacities;
- critique of service trends and innovations;
- analysis of legislation and social policies;
- and action implementation.

Leadership Qualities That Emerge

- Clearer vision
- Shared and deepened values
- Commitment to witness
- Humble courage
- Renewed hope
- Recognized necessity for strategic thinking
- Increased capacity to act
- Persistence
- Deeper understanding of the struggle
- Better understanding that words and actions have consequences
- Greater awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses
- Understanding of collective leadership roles and responsibilities

Lessons learned with families

- Leadership skills develop from taking the time to build relationships that link people with common visions and different experiences and perspectives.
- Families want to engage in dynamic interactions that are rooted in a clear vision of inclusion and a deep awareness of the difficulties that come from the rejection of people with disabilities. They gain wisdom from shared stories and learnings.

Lessons learned with families

- No “packaged curriculum” can be used to teach each other the “right and wrong” things to do to resolve the issues we face. Instead, we can allow ourselves the flexibility and the time to hear from each other, to look at different perspectives, to compare and contrast different issues, to ask hard questions, to clarify our dreams and hopes and to look to others who have modeled “good” leadership.

Lessons learned with families

- If we choose to take time to step outside of the fast paced lives we lead - to think, to reflect, to feel our way through the experiences, to listen quietly, and to talk in safety with each other - it will be immeasurably profitable.
- Trust is built through the above.
- Trust enables collective action to be effective and sustained, even if it fails at times.

Lessons learned with families

- A belief that creating opportunities for and invitations to other families to develop their leadership is fundamental to mobilizing future leadership and action.
- Current and past participants identify and encourage future participants. Mentoring other families from home communities to attend future series is expected of each other.
- Some participants act as facilitators in future leadership series.

Lessons learned with families

- There are social practices and themes that must be evaluated thoroughly, even when it is painful to face the resulting analysis. Such practices must be examined, understood and addressed in the series.
- We believe that together we can think deeper, speak the truth from our hearts, face the broken places within our hearts and gain awareness about what it takes to create capacity for action. It is from these places of understanding that we find ways to address oppression and make necessary social changes.

Lessons learned with families

- When we acknowledge that there are many forms of leadership and that our strength comes from our collective knowledge and actions over time, we are more influential.
- Value of being tied to a powerful, values-based family advocacy organization
- This leadership development approach is complimentary to other values-based training experiences/approaches

Actions

- Many families/individuals have spoken out in community meetings, written commentaries or had their stories reported in community newspapers, agency newsletters, journals and magazines.
- Most participants from the series have been invited to be speakers and workshop presenters at seminars, symposiums and meetings to present their views on community inclusion and family advocacy.

Actions

- Participants have taken up leadership roles in organizing new family networks in regions throughout Alberta.
- Assumed formal leadership roles at community, regional and provincial levels, within and allied to our struggle.
- Increased personal advocacy.
- Increased advocacy on behalf of and with others.
- Participants and leaders in strategic planning processes at different levels (e.g., regional, provincial).
- Engagement in political and social policy actions.
- Created and sustained local family advocacy organizations.
- Created and sustained innovative community initiatives (e.g., Rotary Employment Partnership)

How can Family Leadership be advanced in Ireland?

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