

# New Research on Quality Family Peer Support Services Programs



Family support services are a set of services delivered by parents (often called family peer advocates or family support specialists) for parents, aimed at helping them better access, understand, and actively participate in decisions about their child's mental health treatment. Family peer advocates (FPAs), usually parents who have children with mental health needs, are increasingly being used by organizations to augment the delivery of mental health care. New research from [The IDEAS Center](#) has documented the services FPAs provide, and how these services are being delivered as part of an array of mental health services for children with serious emotional disturbance (SED). This new research outlines how to implement a high-quality family support program and develop a strong family peer advocate workforce.

## Creating and Maintaining a High-Quality Family Support Services Program

High-quality **family support services programs** employing family peer advocates have:

- **FPAs with clearly-defined roles.** Clearly-define and insure that all staff understand the FPA role.
- **Dedicated Funding Stream.** A stable, dedicated budget for FPAs, with salary/benefits provided to FPAs, and spending flexibility in the family support program areas to meet parent needs.
- **FPA Practice Standards.** An established FPA service delivery protocol that clearly defines how services are to be provided, complemented by FPA training and certification, and hiring of FPAs with 'lived experience' (e.g. parent who had or currently has a child go through the mental health system).
- **Detailed Family Support Services Program Structure.** The program provides specialized supervision of FPAs, makes efforts to integrate FPAs on the overall team, has program flexibility to allow for innovation, and insures FPA representation on agency/organizational boards.

## Creating and Maintaining a High-Quality Family Peer Advocate Workforce

High-quality **family peer advocates** have the following characteristics:

- **Role Clarity, Team Relationship, and Ethics.** FPAs who can describe their role on the team, manage boundaries with families, respect all team members, and operate ethically (e.g. confidentiality).
- **Knowledge and Skills.** FPAs who have demonstrated knowledge of community supports and resources, have skills in priority-setting, and in providing linkages to formal and informal supports.
- **Educate and Model.** FPAs who target services to family needs and preferences, exercise sound judgment when providing recommendations, and model/coach parent use of new skills (e.g. role plays).
- **Emotionally Supporting and Engaging Families.** FPAs who engage and support parents by using strengths-based language, avoid criticism/judgement, and promote family preference through shared decision-making.

See our website, <http://www.ideas4kidsmentalhealth.org/quality-indicators-of-fss-programs-and-fss.html> for more information on creating quality family support services programs and a strong family peer advocate workforce.