

# Integrating the Law into Community Based Care

A true “wrap around” systems of care concept.

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## Overview

One case in particular which I would reference involved a Spanish speaking Ecuadorian family of immigrants. The mother and boyfriend emigrated to the US from Ecuador legally on visitors visa but stayed after it expired. The patients mother immigrated first and left her child in the care of relatives. The patient was enfolded into a gang culture and was forced to do acts of sexual and physical violence on younger children in order to “prove worth.” When the patient immigrated to the US on a visitor’s visa the mother was horrified to hear what had taken place. Almost immediately difficulty arose in school, outbursts of violence, tantrums, sexual advances towards peers, and physical threatening in the home, leaving at all hours, refusing limits, and had started to experiment with drugs. The mothers boyfriend who was supportive was picked up in a routine traffic stop as an illegal immigrant, was deported back to Ecuador. It took a this crisis situation to allow a referral for assistance. She was introduced to her Spanish speaking family partner (FP) first with an intensive care coordinator (ICC) and after almost 6 months finally started to engage with the FP which led to also working with the ICC and then allowed services like in home behavioral therapy and others to enter the home to support. The team attempted convince mother to seek legal aid and work on legal citizenship but she resisted for a significant period fearing involvement of another agency (this fear was culturally based and based on her legal status) “just another who knows we are here illegally, and why would then help us.” If legal assistance had been available through the community based provider organization that could come under the same umbrella perhaps they may have engaged sooner and could have alleviated some of the mothers stress and struggle with state resources for help managing a child with significant attachment disruption, trauma, and mental health difficulties. Eventually the FP helped the patient and his mother engage legal aid and start paperwork for citizenship and engage state resources.

## BACKGROUND

- Immigrant populations tend to be tightly knit cohorts and getting trust especially in the context of mental health is challenging.
- This void in community based services was exposed during a rotation with a wrap-around agency providing Intensive Case Coordination as well as Family Partner services.
- Commonly Immigrant and the families of mentally ill children will identify more readily with family partners initially and allow the Case coordinators, mentors, and mental health professionals to get a foot in the door. However these families will often refuse legal aid due to having to leave the organization.
- This barrier can often lead to delays in seeking legal representation or lack of informed decision making due to no legal representation.
- This case study suffered both these difficulties, delay in legal representation caused increased difficulty for the patient and his family and lack of legal counsel likely affected the ability to address deportation concerns as well as treatment options for the patient.

## Components of Wrap Around in Massachusetts

**Individualized, Family Voice and Choice, Community-Based, Collaboration, Culturally Relevant, Team Based, Natural Supports, Strengths Based, Unconditional, Outcome Based**

**Notably Absent: Legal Aid and the multitude of ways that it is integral in many families difficulties. Especially Immigrant families who are likely currently feeling more vulnerable in this political climate and less likely to seek new organizations and providers due to concern for their citizenship status.**

### Phases of Wrap Around



- There are four phases of Wraparound:
  - (1) engagement and team preparation;
  - (2) initial plan of development;
  - (3) implementation; and
  - (4) transition.



### How Wrap Around is different than the traditional approach to mental health delivery:

**Traditional:** Professionals are in charge and families are expected to be passive participants and accept what is offered.

**Wraparound:** turns this model on its head and puts families in charge. Wraparound is about family empowerment.

**Challenges:** Because the Wraparound planning process listens to families, values their participation, honors their preferences, and respects their culture, it is a new opportunity for families to be in control of the care provided to their children. But it is up to families to seize this opportunity.



### How to Improve Families Engagement

Family Partner Engagement

Provision of information and services with support.

Access to professional consultation when necessary

Hub Service provision

## RATIONALE

- ▶ Legal aid has been shown to offer significant benefits to individuals especially families with mental health difficulties.
- ▶ Studies done by legal aid in Minnesota have shown that the most at risk for being unable to access Legal Aid are those with mental illness or mental illness in their families especially immigrants.
- ▶ One way to address this lack of access or engagement is to bring legal aid to where these people are. One way to allow increased access for families is to utilize the already existing hub system used in wrap around and include legal aid.
- ▶ By bringing legal aid into the system currently existing it would also legitimize peoples perception that they can have access to legal aid and allows already formed relationships to encourage individuals to engage legal aid.

## CONCLUSION

Legal aid is an integral part of recovery and stability for families utilizing wraparound. However, all too often this aspect is missing and can lead to families having increased difficulty finding employment, managing their shelter, finances, and all too often navigating their immigrant status. Family partners and the hub provided by the intensive care coordinators is an ideal way to create a sense of comfort and legitimacy to families accessing legal aid and creating a bridge of trust between clients and professionals. Especially in the current climate of tumult having a bridge between trusted providers who have empowered clients to make their own choices and legal aid could create an increased sense of stability to aid in providing increased resources to address other challenges in their lives.

## REFERENCES

Minnesota Bar Association: Overcoming Barriers that Prevent Low-Income Persons from Resolving Civil Legal Problems. <https://www.lsc.gov/sites/default/files/attach/resources/LegalNeedsStudy-MinnesotaBarAssociation.pdf>.

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