

Focus Group with Spanish Speaking Parents

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On October 21, 2008, I met with a group of eight (8) parents and family members at the Mariposa Wellness Center in Watsonville, California. All of them were Spanish-speaking women. The group was conducted in Spanish. The participants were offered mixed fruit and beverages, and at the end of the session were given \$10 voucher cards for their participation.

I provided an overview of MHSA, specifically described the PEI stakeholder process and the workgroup recommendations, and asked them to provide feedback about their experiences, and their recommendations for PEI.

The participants began by sharing their stories about their loved ones needing mental health services. They are some of the participants of the Mariposa family group that meets weekly, and told me they find the mutual support and education to be extremely helpful. Here are some of their stories:

- Nephew is dually diagnosed. School told family he was taking drugs; family had not noticed. He began hearing voices and is now getting services. He is under family's care, but he does not want family involved. Staff tell them, "it is confidential," yet they get charged for services (T-house). Family was not told anything about what was going on with nephew; they sought out information (in groups).
- "Nervous" child told mom to take him to the doctor. He was diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder.
- Son was "normal," graduated from high school with good grades. He began isolating, drinking lots of water, and digging holes in the back yard. He stopped sleeping and he began talking to himself. He was jailed for a bike ticket and was referred to County Mental health, but he refused to go. He was eventually hospitalized. The hospital did a good job of explaining to the family what was happening.
- Son was aggressive as a child. He had problems in school and parents noticed he started using drugs. When he was in his early thirties he began hearing voices, not sleeping, and not eating. He was hospitalized and stabilized. He stopped using medications because he felt fine but relapsed. He is stabilized again and has stopped drinking alcohol.
- Son began isolating and getting depressed when he was a teenager. Mom looked for help, and he finally accepted services. He is on medication, but does not do much. He tends to sleep most of the day and often does not eat.

The participants recommended the following:

- Counseling services to parents about how to deal with a child with mental illness
- Group counseling with a mental health professional facilitating the group
- Mental Health education (for families)
- Counseling at schools
- Activities at no/low cost (there are lots of activities, but families can't afford them)
- Home visits when their child is sick
- For coordinators to have more time to serve their children
- Employment services