

## **The Role of the HFA Family Advocate**

The Family Advocate (FA) serves as a liaison between the family and service providers by bringing a family perspective to the table, and by helping the family understand and navigate the system, insuring that the family is fully involved at any and all levels that are comfortable for the family, working to increase family involvement, and insuring that services are family driven.

The FA is a separate but equally important discipline. Some FA have extensive formal educations but their role is based more on their experience parenting (and living with) a child with a disability, experience dealing personally with multiple systems, and their experience advocating for their own children, other individual children, and groups of children as well as advocating for systems change at program, local, state and federal levels. The experience of the FA is to be respected and valued by all staff just as the FA respects the formal education and clinical experience of the clinician.

The FA is a full, equal, active, participating member of the child's team and of the management team and should be respected and valued by all other team members from all disciplines. Other members of the child's team and of the management team should not only accept, but also seek input from the FA. When team members are resistant regarding the involvement of the FA, it is the role of the FA's supervisor, management and leadership to support the FA, to model acceptance of the FA and to insist that team members fully respect the role of the FA.

The FA should have full access to all info (clinical, anecdotal, progress notes, documentation, etc.) on all clients in the program from pre-admission through discharge and aftercare.

HFA FAs are expected to participate in quarterly FANS (Family Advocates Network of Support) meetings. They are expected to attend monthly HFA Parents Are Partners Roundtable meetings and to encourage parents to attend as well.

The HFA FA needs to connect families with external community supports so that the family is supported through transitions and when they no longer receive HFA services. They need to support families in advocating for their children externally at local, state and federal levels. FAs need to assist the family in advocating for themselves externally and to advocate for family when the family is unable to do so.

The HFA FA needs to participate, preferably at a leadership level, in external support and advocacy organizations in order to encourage innovation at a systems level, to stay abreast of current issues, to maintain knowledge to be shared with families and HFA, and to represent the family perspective as well as HFA with in those organizations.

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