

## **Six Quick Ways to Begin Family Engagement**

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- 1.) Build awareness of family perspectives among front line and administrative staff by bringing in parent and family experts to help staff understand the family voice, the obstacles they face and what they need from you.
- 2.) Survey families of the kids to see why they don't engage more in the program. You can't fix it if you don't know what's broke. Don't be afraid to hear what they say, families can be the best source of quality control in the business.
- 3.) When they get there, treat them as equals. Believe me we know when we are being patronized. You may know my yearly income but you don't know about my work ethic, so don't assume that you do. In over a decade of doing this work, I have yet to meet one family without a strength to bring to the table. Our assumptions stop us from seeing the strengths of families.
- 4.) Level the playing field. Anyone in the room know what the acronym CYPB stands for? Of course, you don't. I don't expect you to; don't expect families to understand the professional jargon we put out there without thinking.
- 5.) No one knows what it is like to struggle with a child in the system better than another parent. Encourage and support the creation of family networks or fund family centered organizations to bridge some of these gaps. Connect your families to us at Justice for Families if nothing exists in your localities.
- 6.) Lastly, if you only take away one thing from what I have said today, please let it be this. My partner, Bart, talks about it often but it can't be addressed often enough. Whatever you want from families, whatever you do for kids, ask yourself, "If this were my child, is this what I would want for him/her?" If it doesn't pass the "my child" test, then it's time to look for other solutions.