

How Community Mental Health Providers can Adopt Fortalezas Familiares

[GENTLE PIANO MUSIC PLAYING]

EMILY JAIME: Catholic Charities was really motivated to participate in the FF program for a variety of reasons. We definitely see the benefit of collaborating with schools to provide services to students and to reach students and families better. And we also recognize the need for culturally-specific interventions for students and families.

One of the big things, I think, for me that really motivated me was seeing that there was a really strong family piece within the intervention. So a lot of times the interventions that happen at the school site don't involve a lot of family work, and so with this one I was really, really excited to see that the family piece was a big part of it. So not only do the students get support, but the parents get support in really recognizing that depression does impact the entire family.

The resources that we needed in order to participate really had to do with making sure that we had a bilingual therapist on staff to provide the intervention. We needed to have somebody who could supervise that clinician, talk over what they were doing in their groups, make sure that they were on the right track, make sure that there was a licensed clinician available to do that.

As far as training for clinicians to be able to implement the program, you would definitely want a clinician that has a background in working with both students and families and really understanding family dynamics. So a clinician that has had a really strong background in that already, that kind of comes with that foundation so that then when they're trained in the model it's not totally new.

The model itself might be new to them but the foundation of understanding how families work and how mental health challenges impact the entire family and how to talk to different members of the family, that's kind of what you're already hoping the therapist knows already. And then that way when they're trained in the intervention, they can just kind of add that onto it and really be able to go in there and hit the ground running.

But as far as ongoing training, I would say just making sure that you have-- you're able to provide supportive consultation to that clinician. So that if things do come up that they feel supported in kind of problem-solving and working through those so that they could go back the next week kind of with fresh ideas, and just making sure that they're on the right track, clinically.

I think the benefit of having the community clinician co-lead the intervention with the school staff really has to do with the fact that the community clinician just has a different and broader mental health lens than the school person does. The school person certainly has a broad kind of background in meeting the needs of students and families at the school site.

But there's something that happens when the community clinician comes in, and that has to do with just having a different lens. And often when those two frameworks kind of come together,

it's a really, really nice marriage of being able to really meet the student and the family's needs a little bit more fully.

We also see that sometimes when community clinicians come in and co-lead interventions with the school person, we're seeing that the school person is actually learning from the community clinician. And so for them there's a little bit of professional development that happens just through the course of providing the intervention and watching the community therapist in action.

So that way when that intervention is done, ideally the school person then has a little bit more of a foundation of what they can do when the community clinician isn't there if things come up with students or families around social and emotional needs, mental health needs, crisis situations. So that certainly is a benefit that we see kind of time and again in collaborating with school staff coming in as a community clinician.

I think the FF program is beneficial on a lot of levels to both families and schools. So for families, these are families that often have a hard time trusting systems, often have a hard time accessing the support that they need, often have a hard time even recognizing that they might need some support. And so this particular program utilizes the relationships of the school staff with the family to identify those families, and then really brings in community support via a community therapist to come in and provide that mental health lens. And so it's really the school and the community provider working together to really create this full picture of an intervention, a supportive intervention for the students and the families.

Without a doubt, we would participate in the FF program again. We loved knowing that it was happening. We loved being a part of the project. We would love to see it expand into other schools and districts. We just really love collaborating with schools. And the school that we were at was one that we already had an existing relationship with, so that was really nice. But yes, we would without a doubt participate again. It was a really great experience and yeah, we hope to see it continue.