



*"If we truly value our children, we
uplift their parents"*

1-800-264-9224

www.gearparentnetwork.org

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History of Family Involvement in Maine



1985 - BCSN Advisory Committee - With the creation of a formal children's services unit - The Bureau of Children with Special Needs, the enabling legislation called for a committee to advise the Director. The Director made certain that parent/family members of children were included on this group which he used as a 2-way communication vehicle to stay in touch with what parents really needed from the Bureau. In this process unmet systems needs were identified, validated and became strategic objectives for resource development. This Director would frequently remind the staff to "Listen to the Families".

1986 -*Child and Adolescent Service System Program (CASSP)*, envisioned as a comprehensive mental health system of care for children, youth, and their families - Maine was one of the first states that received federal funding to support 2 project positions. This opportunity allowed BCSN to focus on a then nearly totally unserved but legislatively mandated population, children and youth with mental health needs. CASSP brought the values and principles that continue to be the bedrock of today's Children's Behavioral Health Services. They were the first planning and field staff that were connected to the interests of families and children with mental health needs.

History of Family Involvement in Maine



1989 - AMHI Consent Decree The directive to close the Children's Adolescent Unit at the Augusta Mental Health Institute (AMHI now Riverview Psychiatric Center) in 1989 was seen by many as a tiny part of this lawsuit. Although the original 251 adolescent class members all aged out over the next 6 years, new Departmental funds became available to create the first level of service investment in a mental health system of care. They included:

- ❖ **Community Mental Health Staffing**. New funds provided for three Mental Health Program Coordinators who became points of connection with families of children with mental health needs. These staff were magnets to which desperate families with children with serious mental health needs were immediately drawn. Through increasing contact with real life circumstances, the Bureau of Special Needs was now hearing the real voice of families.
- ❖ **Flexible funds**. This innovative use of dollars allowed some family's unmet needs to be addressed, often through the intervention by the new MHPC's. The combination of these staff and flexible resources resulted in the first efforts at hospital diversion through tangible, direct assistance often in the form of providing "1 to 1" help in the home for families with children with serious emotional disturbance.
- ❖ **New Resource Development**. Consent Decree community development funds fueled a range of new services such as Mental Health Case Management, Home-Based Family Services, Residential Services, increased Outpatient services and additional Respite Care. New services were met with increased demand, and that demand continues today.

History of Family Involvement in Maine



1990 - 2000 “What Families Want!” Conference Annual 2-day conference became the central educational and supportive event for families with children with disabilities, including mental illness, intellectual disabilities and autism. Originally organized by BCSN as a way to give families information about topics they were interested in and to hear their voices and concerns at the time, these statewide conferences were subsequently planned and managed by parent volunteers who determined the content of each event based on statewide outreach to all interested families. A centerpiece of “What Families Want!” was a concluding “Town Hall” open microphone session where comments and feedback were open and energetic. This conference was attended by a wide cross section of families across Maine, and by parent organizations, service providers and legislators who clearly heard from families what was working for them, what was not, and what they felt was needed. **2009-2011** Maine’s Children’s Mental Health Planning committee endorsed a bi-annual “What Families and Youth Want” conference funded by CBHS organized by G.E.A.R. Parent Network and Youth MOVE Maine.

1992 - Local Case Review Committees (LCRC) A pilot funded by federal dollars in Southern Maine was based on the idea that bringing families with children with complex needs together with multi-agency providers could result in solutions. The LCRC model included parents as permanent participating members, who could offer family perspectives and values to the process. This model also recognized the value of parents of these committees by providing expenses for travel, child care with a moderate (\$30.) stipend for their time.

History of Family Involvement in Maine



1992 -Gaining Empowerment Allows Results (G.E.A.R.) Parent Network - Concurrent with the first comprehensive system of care initiative in northern Maine, the first family support program designed for parents of children and youth with mental health needs was developed, funded and was incorporated with Crisis & Counseling Centers, Inc., as their fiduciary in central Maine. G.E.A.R. focused on bringing together parents and family members of children with mental health needs to share with one another their common and unique circumstances around their own needs and the needs of their children. 1996 G.E.A.R. kicks off the state's first Children's Mental Health Awareness Week celebration with a coffee tailgate event and hand tied green yarn as ribbons to distribute.

1993 -System of Care Grant = Wings for Children and Families Awarded a five year Center for Mental Health Services grant to develop a system of care in 4 northern Maine Counties. This initiative focused heavily on community based case management services with access to flexible funding to address the needs of children and youth with severe emotional disturbance and their families.

History of Family Involvement in Maine



1993 - United Maine Families - Maine's first affiliate of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, supported initially through System of Care federal funding. Formed through the interest and advocacy of parents from throughout Maine, this statewide family organization was dedicated solely to children's mental health. Its role was to coordinate family involvement to inform public policy decisions. UMF was instrumental in identifying parents of children with mental health needs and organizing support for their active participation in a sustained planning process which culminated in legislation (L.D. 1744). This organization closed in 1999.

1997 - L.D. 1774 Planning Process - A collaboration of stakeholders from the 4 child-serving state agencies along with parents and parent organizations, service providers and members of the Maine legislature engaged in comprehensive planning process to design a comprehensive effort was sanctioned by a legislative Resolve (L.D. 1774) and concluded in a planning document titled: "A Plan for Children's Mental Health Services". Over 30 parents of children participated on workgroups that resulted in legislation based on the Plan. Families were instrumental in both defining and validating 6 core services in the plan-prevention/consultation, crisis intervention, case management, clinical services, residential treatment and family & child supports which included respite, parent/sibling support groups and social/recreational services. This process gave meaningful opportunity for parents and families to participate as equal and valued partners in state level planning and policy development of the services and system designed to address their well being and the needs of their children.

History of Family Involvement in Maine



1998 - Chapter 790 – Children’s Mental Health Program This legislation signed by the Governor in April, 1998, incorporated the fundamental system of care values and principles embodied in the L.D. 1744 Plan for Children’s Mental Health Services, as endorsed by family participants and other stakeholders. The legislation clearly established what is now Children’s Behavioral Health Services as the state children’s mental health authority, and its coordinating relationship with the other child-serving entities in implementing an integrated system of care. In short, the law captured the essence of the planning document, preserving the intent of parents and families as they assisted in the formulation of state children’s mental health policy.

Children Mental Health Oversight Committee This committee was established as part of Chapter 790 as the formal vehicle to oversee the implementation of the Children’s Mental Health Program. Notable among the membership of this 17 member committee appointed by the legislative leadership is the inclusion of 3 seats reserved for parents of children with mental health needs and 1 seat for a statewide children’s advocacy organization. Parent members have spoken clearly and frequently in representing the views and values of their peers during the period when this committee was active. Committee protocol had always reserved time for families to be heard during its proceedings and many families have done so. This Committee transitioned under Chapter 34b, Subsection 3608 and is named the **Quality Improvement Council** with 50% of committee members having behavioral health lived experiences.

History of Family Involvement in Maine



2002 - Family Organizations Statewide family organizations provide highly valued support services to parents and families of children with mental health and other behavioral needs. Over the past several years CBHS has prioritized communication with these organizations in order to better understand what families are thinking and to inform these agencies of the most current information about what the Department is planning on changing the future. This partnership aids families who often make the first inquiry about the Department and its services to a family organization rather than to a state agency office.

Also 2002 CBHS was pleased to support a Family Collaborative project using federal Mental Health Block Grant funding in a mutual and successful effort to foster closer relationships between these agencies. A major part of this effort was geared to inform the public at large of how to contact the statewide partners: The Autism Society of Maine, NAMI Maine, the Maine Parent Federation, the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council and the G.E.A.R. Parent Network, to assure families that any of these contacted programs would make a referral to a more appropriate peer agency when necessary. A second goal of the Family Collaborative addressed the beginning steps in training parents, consumers and advocates to participate in the public policy making process and to effectively serve on DHHS sponsored task forces, committees, public forums or other working groups that could benefit from family input and perspective.

Maine's Family Organizations Today



MAFO

Maine Alliance of
Family Organizations

Member
Organizations

Offering a
voice to concerns
& needs of Maine
families since
2010



Call or visit our members today &
discover all the support we can provide



**Adoptive & Foster
Families of Maine, Inc.
& The Kinship Program**

Adoptive & Foster Families of Maine, Inc. (AFFM) provides statewide support services for adoptive, foster and kinship families. Services include 24/7 listening support, support groups, 1:1 mentoring, clothing and material goods, a statewide conference, Kinship Navigation and referral services.

Phone: (800) 833-9786 / www.affm.net



**Autism Society
Maine**

Autism Society of Maine (ASM) promotes lifelong access and opportunity for all individuals on the autism spectrum to become participating members of their communities. Autism Information specialists provides 1:1 help for families and individuals with Autism navigating services in their area. Services include workshops, Family Retreat Weekend, children play dates, teen support group, autistic adult support group, family support groups and referral services.

Phone: (800) 273-5200 / www.asmonline.org



G.E.A.R. Parent Network is a statewide, family driven, totally parent-run organization whose primary mission is to empower parents and caregivers of children and youth who have emotional and behavioral health care needs to effect their own life decisions through sharing our lived experiences and knowledge, while promoting hope and self-reliance with no shame, no blame and no judgment. We offer no cost authentic parent to parent support through phone support, support groups, resource information, educational workshops, advocacy, parenting education and skill building, and 1:1 long term in-home family peer support.

Phone: (800) 264-9224 / www.gearparentnetwork.org



Maine Parent Federation (MPF) is a non-profit, grant funded family organization that assists families of children with disabilities navigate all systems of care. All of our resources are no cost for families and there is no qualifying criteria in order to receive any assistance. Services include the Family Support Navigator program, referrals, workshops, printed materials and a newsletter.

Phone: (800) 870-7746 / www.mpf.org



G.E.A.R. Parent Network Mission

A grassroots, statewide, family driven, totally parent-run organization funded in 1992.

Our primary mission is to empower parents and caregivers of children and youth who have emotional and behavioral health needs to effect their own life decisions through sharing our lived experiences, skills and knowledge, promoting hope and self-reliance with no shame, no blame and no judgment.

We believe in systems of care that help children, youth and families function better at home, in school, in the community across their lifespan.

Have 7 parent staff who have a total combination of ***181 years of lived experience*** parenting children/youth with behavioral health concerns!

" Before you start to judge me, step into my shoes and walk the life I'm living and if you get as far as I am, just maybe you will see how strong I really am.



Funding Sources



Primary:

1. Maine's Children's Mental Health Block Grant via RFP (for 5 years) – Family Support Services Statewide for families with children/youth with SED ages 3-21; Began 10/2025

Secondary:

1. Contracts – Behavioral Health Home (BHH) Mental Health Agencies to provide certified Family Peer Specialist staff to support the families referred who are enrolled in Children's (BHH) Services.
2. Donations

2026 Family Peer Support in Maine



Family Peer Specialists in Maine may also be known as “*parent support professionals, navigators, mentors, family partners, parent partners, and information specialists*”. They each offer a wide range of assistance and support which is determined by the training they receive, the settings in which they work and if the families’ needs are short or long term.

Information & Referral

Phone only)
Self-referral

Navigation

Short term - less than
90 days
Face-to-face or phone

Wraparound

Partner in wraparound team
Eligibility for program and
must be referred
Long term - more than 90
days - depends upon
program

G.E.A.R. Parent Network Offers at No Cost:

Family Peer Supports that are short term and community based:

- Parent to Parent Support: Via 800#/Phone.
- Meeting in the community for emotional support/sharing of lived experiences or reviewing information.
- Providing resource information & referral options.
- Navigation of Maine's child serving systems of care.
- Parenting education, child behavior management, skill building and mental health education.
- Advocacy in the child serving systems of care.

No: qualifications, paperwork, asking of family details, income or insurance information! Call 1-800-264-9224 or at gearparentnetwork.org

Community Based Education & Training

- Participate in local/regional/national committees
- Education and advocacy for child-serving systems to become family driven, trauma informed and culturally and linguistically competent
- Community Resource Fairs, Community Baby Showers & Outreach
- Individualized Mental Health/Parenting education to families
- Educational Supportive Workshops (**register at www.gearparentnetwork.org**)
- Family Social & Recreational activities to reduce isolation/stigma
- Two-day Family Empowerment Institute training for parents
- 21 years as the sponsor of Children's Mental Health Awareness Acceptance/Action week education, activities and the **Green Ribbon** Campaign (Occurs 1st full week in May)



Long Term In-Home 1:1 Family Peer Support

R.A.M.P. (Restorative Approaches Maine Project)

- **“Restorative” Family Peer Support**
 - Restores relationships with families
 - Restores control by the family over their own future
 - Restores social connectedness and a sense of community
- **Offer no cost long term 1:1 in Home Family Peer Support** – We work “with” families (not for) and the family creates the conditions in which this may occur.
- **Offer strategic education of:** Youth’s mental health diagnosis, What is Family Driven Care, ACE Study Outcomes, What is Trauma Informed Care and Importance of Self-Care.
- Create a **“Family Vision Plan”** with parents/caregivers to help them reconnect with thinking about their future goals again – for themselves and their family.

Essential Qualities of G.E.A.R. Family Peer Specialist Staff

Are parents who have 5+ years of “lived experience” raising a child/youth with a behavioral health concern, have navigated the child serving systems of care and are able to articulate that experience.

- Have moved past anger/frustration; ready to pay it forward
- Are comfortable with self-disclosure at appropriate times
- Builds partnerships with professionals
- Builds connections and provides linkages
- Recognizes and builds on the family/youth strengths
- Provides non-adversarial advocacy
- Practices and teaches self-care
- Maintains a stance of acceptance
- Preserves a respectful and non-judgmental attitude

What Makes G.E.A.R. Family Peer Specialists Unique? National CFPS Credentialing!

Certification is required within 2 years of employment through the **National Federation of Families** (www.ffcmh.org)

In August 2010, the National Federation of Families began developing criteria for national certification for “Parent Support Providers” with the support of parents and family run organizations from all states, territories and Canada. The first National certifications were awarded in June 2012.

Eligibility criteria:

- Describe your lived experience raising a child with SED,
- 88+ hours of domain specific training/education; (1000 hrs) currently- 500 hours of work/volunteer related experience;
- Successful passage of the National Exam;
- Adherence to the Code of Ethics
- Recertification every 3 years (submission of 44 hours training).



Advantages of National Family Peer Specialist Certification

- **Standardization and Credibility:** Provides a uniform, reliable, and defensible standard for the certified family peer specialist™ (CFPS) credential, ensuring a well-trained and qualified workforce.
- **Professional Mobility and Recognition:** Allows peer support specialists to carry their credentials across state lines, improving portability and recognition of their role in behavioral health systems.
- **Enhanced Outcomes:** Improves family engagement and results in lower overall service costs, while supporting recovery and strengthening family relationships.
- **Workforce Development:** Supports professional development, increased earnings potential, and career advancement within the behavioral health field.
- **Ethical and Peer-Driven Practice:** Ensures that peer workers adhere to high ethical standards while using their lived experience to mentor and guide families.
- **Reduced Stigma and Better System Collaboration:** Reduces shame and blame in families, and helps bridge the gap between families and professionals in community and clinical settings.
- **Increased Access to Services:** Offers easier connection to and retention of qualified peer staff to support families and improve access to care

G.E.A.R. Parent Network is the **only** family run organization in the state of Maine that employs only parents and requires National credentialing of their family peer staff.



Measuring Parental Progress

1. **Targeted Parent Assistance (TPA)** Measures the stages of parent engagement as well as the number of specific targeted domains the FPS has supported/discussed/empowered parent on.

Level 1
Initiation/Engagement

Level 2
Solution Focused

Level 3
Linking/
Implementation

Level 4
Expanding
Interests/Transition

2. **Family Journey Assessment (FJA) @ baseline/90 days** The (FJA) examines in 37 questions parental progress in five areas: ***Self Knowledge, Family Well-Being, Information Seeking, Collaboration and Knowledge Utilization.***

The FJA helps to track the journey and provides indicators for the specific level and content of peer-to-peer skill-building and support depending on the stage the family member is in at a particular point in time.

Goal is for parent to reach TPA Level 3 and FJA score of 99+

Referrals: Criteria for R.A.M.P. Acceptance

Family has a child/youth who:

1. Is living in the parent/caregiver home; includes Kinship care
2. Has a mental health diagnosis (or is in process of receiving one)
3. Is involved in two or more of Maine's children's systems of care.

For example:

- Behavioral Health Services
- Special Education
- Juvenile Justice/DOC
- Healthcare
- Child Welfare/Protective

**We make referral or
self referral easy!**
Simply call 1-800-
264-9224

*If child is enrolled in a BHH/CCBHC it disqualifies the family for this support as is considered by MaineCare a duplication of service as those services must offer/provide Family Peer Specialist supports.

Family Peer Communication – Heart to Heart



To the Parent reading this, if you are carrying the weight of raising a child or youth with emotional or behavioral health challenges, there is something we want you to know:

We see you. We understand you. And you do not have to figure this out alone.

Everyone at G.E.A.R. Parent Network have been in those places where the days felt heavy... where phone calls went unanswered... where school meetings were overwhelming... where we questioned if we were doing enough — or doing it “right.” We know what it is like to advocate when you are exhausted. To love your child fiercely while trying to navigate systems that can feel confusing or unreachable. To wish that someone would just walk beside you and say, “I get it.” That is exactly why Family Peer Support exists. We are not someone telling you what you “should” do. This is parent-to-parent support from someone who has lived it.

A G.E.A.R. Family Peer Support Specialist can walk alongside you to:

- **Listen without judgment, Share information and resources**
- **Empowering you and to help you navigate schools, services, and next steps**
- **Strengthen your voice as your child’s advocate**
- **Remind you of your capacity on the days it feels hard to find**

From one parent to another — we are ready to walk beside you.

Benefits of Family Peer Supports

To Individuals

- Improved self esteem, quality of life and health.
- Reduced sense of isolation and a rediscovering of hope.
- Development of trusting relationships and mutual respect.
- Reduced use of crisis services and hospitalization.

To the Service Delivery System

- Are creative and non traditional.
- Peer support is recognized as evidenced based.
- Can be effective or more effective than non-peer services. (Gates & Akabas, 2007)
- Recovery, wellness and resiliency are components of peers services.
- Improved relationships with providers and social supports, and increased satisfaction with the treatment experience overall.



2023-24 Family Support Outcomes

Long Term 1:1 In Home FSP Supports:

Goal: 100 families in a minimum of 1000 direct support hours per year.

Outcomes:

- Served total of **118 Families**
- Over an average of **5.5 months**
- A total of **1082.75** direct support hours
- 1 year = **94.25% success rate** Participants who **scored Level 3** on the TPA and FJA 85+ at discharge

Community Family Peer Specialist Support, Outcomes:

96 Educational Workshops held (64 required)

58 Support Groups held (0 required)

7 Social Events (4 required)

5112 Contacts (phone, text, email, 1:1 in community) with 100% parent satisfaction

Family Peer Specialist Story & Parent Feedback

I supported a grandmother who was the kinship guardian of three grandchildren. I provided lots of emotional support around the stress and drama created by the daughter in law of the children and the constant false allegations to Child Protective Services. I coached and role modeled limit setting and behavior management in addition to teaching her how to advocate for her grandkids best needs. I helped grand mom understand the importance of self-care and in expanding her natural supports. I left this grandparent empowered as she now has the knowledge and skills to use appropriate behavior management, has rebuilt her relationship with and has the support of her son, and has regular respite is in place.

I wanted to reach out and express my boundless gratitude for G.E.A.R. Parent Network and specifically Linda! She has been such an amazing support in my families' life and has given such wonderful guidance & advice since I have started working with her! This program pushed my DCF case in a direction that seemed unreachable!!! I honestly can say I do not know where I would be with DCF if it was not for G.E.A.R. Network/ Linda!!! Thank you so very much for having this program and allowing me to utilize the resources provided to have my family be together again!!

Conclusion



“At the end of the day, the most overwhelming key to a child's success is the positive involvement of parents.”
- Jane D. Hull

Family Peer Specialist supports are a critical component of systems of care for children and youth, builds effective engagement and can facilitate more positive outcomes for a family.



How to reach us:

Call 1-800-264-9224

or visit us at:

www.gearparentnetwork.org

Find us on Facebook or Instagram!



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