Top Ten Linkages for Families

Families experiencing or who have previously experienced residential care with their children have listed the following linkages as top priorities for their families.

1. **Access to Peer Parent Support**: Support from another parent who has navigated the service system on behalf of their own child is crucial. Peer Parent Support Partners have a unique ability to engage and support us with empathy and understanding. With Peer Parent Support we feel:
   - less isolated after meeting a peer parent support partner
   - heard by someone who has walked in our shoes
   - better informed and able to engage with providers
   - more positive about our skills and abilities in caring for our children
   - supported and hopeful again

2. **Options other than Residential**: Create the kinds of services that will help us avoid residential placement and prevent the disruption of an out of home placement. If placement is not avoidable, we need short-term residential options, near our home and community.

3. **Options closer to home**: If residential care is necessary, smaller, de-centralized programs offered in our home community make it possible for our children to maintain stronger connections to our family, friends, school, services, and supports.

4. **Expert clinical skills**: Provide clinical expertise to support our families and our unique challenges, e.g., step and blended families; family members who have mental illness; substance abuse challenges; adoptive families; family members with histories of trauma. Invest in highly skilled staff who use best practices to accomplish our goal of helping our children successfully return home as soon as possible.

5. **Support for siblings**: Focus on our family as a whole. In an effort to secure help for our ‘identified’ child, the needs of our other children are sometimes dismissed or go unnoticed. Siblings sometimes witness traumatizing events or are the target of incidents themselves. When the unspoken needs of the siblings emerge it is often too late to get help. The child and family team should focus on the entire family, including the siblings’ needs.

6. **Put more focus on education**: Understand how much we value education and provide education to the individualized learning needs of our children. Consider what the youth needs to have in his/her tool box to be successful. Are learning
disabilities addressed? Are additional classes offered for gifted students? Partner with our children’s’ home school for classes not offered like languages, math, and sciences. Help us keep our child on track academically.

7. **Focus on our strengths rather than pathologies:** Focus on strengths and what we (youth and family) do well. Understand that most of the focus leading up to residential has been based on deficits and weaknesses.

We want:
- to feel valued as individuals with strengths
- to be listened to and heard
- to be regarded as experts on our children
- to be at the table when decisions are made
- to have access to information and records
- to be involved in a meaningful way
- to feel less guilt and less blamed
- to be informed and knowledgeable
- to feel accepted, without judgment
- to be in a position to be proactive, not reactive
- to feel hopeful for our children’s future

8. **Focus on interventions at home rather than residential:** Providing interventions in an institutional environment does not predict success once our child leaves the program and returns home. One of the biggest issues raised by families is the focus on the ‘residential milieu’ rather than a home setting. Make a commitment to really teach us what we need to know to support our child to do well at home.

9. **Be open to our presence at any time.** Do not restrict contact or phone calls because of behaviors. Contact should happen frequently both at the program and at home. We should have as much ‘family time’ as possible; these are not ‘visits.’ Expect us to be involved.

10. **All planning, supports, and services should focus on home:** Returning home must be the ultimate goal of everyone and all efforts should focus on this goal rather than alternatives (step-down lower level of care, foster care, etc.). For youth without identified families, find them and work to engage them to create a forever family for every child.

For more information visit [www.buildingbridges4youth.org](http://www.buildingbridges4youth.org) and view: *Engage Us: A Guide Written by Families for Residential Providers.*