



EVALUATION SPOTLIGHT

Engaging Families: Best Practices

PARENT EVALUATOR BEST PRACTICES

This Evaluation Update will **Spotlight** the practices of the National Evaluation FACES of Miami Parent and Community Evaluators. Retention rates for the FACES project are higher than national levels. The purpose of this Spotlight is to share what works within our diverse community and begin to build best practices.

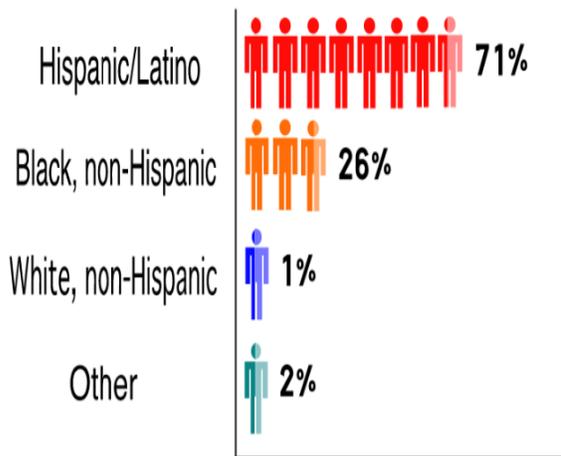
Background

As part of the local System of Care, the FACES project is a collaborative effort to expand and strengthen existing community-based services in Miami-Dade County to better serve youth who have serious emotional disturbances (SED) and co-occurring substance abuse disorders and their families.

Miami-Dade has over 2.5 million residents and the county is rich in cultural diversity. Nearly 65% of the population is Hispanic/Latino, 17% is non-Hispanic Black, and 16% is non-Hispanic White. Approximately 73% of all residents report speaking a language other than English at home, with the majority preferring to speak Spanish (64%).

Similarly, the youth and families enrolled in the FACES project are also culturally and ethnically diverse.

Ethnicity of FACES Youth, n=99



Language Spoken at Home, n=99



43% of FACES Families speak Spanish at home

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Parent and Community Evaluators represent the most important component of the FACES Evaluation Team. These evaluators help to engage youth and families into the FACES project while conducting interviews that provide important outcome information for the local system of care. Each Parent and Community Evaluator possesses unique qualities and culturally and linguistically competent skills which allow them build rapport with youth and families in honest and meaningful ways. This has greatly contributed to high rates of retention in the FACES project.

Parent & Community Evaluator Bios



Rene was born in Havana, Cuba. He immigrated to the United States in 1960 and settled in Miami. He is a veteran of the U.S. Army and a retiree of the U.S. Postal Service. He received his B.S. in Special Education from Florida International University in 2008. He is married and has two sons and two grandchildren. His family's experience with substance abuse led him to become a Parent Evaluator for FACES.



Laqonia started her career with Spectrum Programs, Inc. over five years ago assisting Federal inmates with their re-entry process. She has a degree in Criminal Justice because she believes in "fair" justice for all. She's a mother of five children, two of whom have ongoing mental health/behavioral issues. She became a Parent Evaluator because she has experience dealing with different provider agencies that treat adolescent mental health and she enjoys engaging families.



Nitza was born and raised in Miami, Florida but kept close to her roots by visiting her parent's native country of Peru every summer. At an early age, she discovered that she wanted to study psychology and eventually pursued her Masters in Mental Health Counseling at Nova Southeastern University. Her first internship and job was in the child welfare field. She has had over 10 years experience in doing assessments with children and families and currently works as part of the Evaluation Team for FACES.



Loraine is originally from the Dominican Republic and is mother to 4 wonderful children. Her experience raising two youth with ADHD led her to work as a Family Life Coach at Miami Behavioral Health Center. Here, she had the ability to use her personal experiences to help other families navigate the mental health system and access services. In 2012, she became a Parent Evaluator for the FACES project. She is also currently completing her degree at Miami Dade College to become an ESE teacher.



Laura was born and raised in Miami, Florida to Cuban parents. She discovered her passion for working with youth while she was a summer camp counselor for in high school. She earned her Master's degree in Mental Health Counseling at FIU. She did her internship at the psychiatric unit at Miami Children's Hospital, working with youths in crisis. She joined the research team at Spectrum Programs, Inc. in June 2010 as a research assistant and evaluator for the FACES project.



What Works?

By: Rene Castillo

We gain the trust of most caregivers and youth:

- Emphasize that we are not clinicians, instead we are parents. Also make it clear that Parent Evaluators do not work for their service agency
- Clearly explain what the FACES project and the evaluation are to families and youth
- Maintain honesty (be transparent)
- Fulfill any promises made (call when you say you will, be on time for interviews, and keep their experience as non-intrusive or disruptive as possible)
- Non-judgmental (includes not giving advice)
- Caregivers connect with our ethnicity/race/gender

Building a Connection:

- Caregivers know that we personally understand the crisis they feel because of our family experience
- When caregivers or youth tell us about problems that they are experiencing , we try to direct them to helpful resources
- Youth are generally non-trusting. Sometimes you must wait until the youth start to feel at ease (usually about halfway through the interview) to connect with sports/music (learn a little about rap)- **Every youth will not be comfortable with you**
- When working with youth, you must maintain a non-judgmental attitude. Youth may tell you extraordinary things, but you should not express approval or disapproval. This will ultimately affect the level of trust they feel toward you.
- Try to make notes of specific things that youth share with you and then refer to it when possible during the next interview. (i.e., I make sure I bring up Kobe Bryant to a young man who has told me that he loves the Los Angeles Lakers)

Keeping it Real

By: Laqonia Johnson

What is “keeping it real”? A caregiver stated to me that she appreciated how “real” I was with her. I asked her to explain and she said, “when you arrived to my home, you didn’t pass judgment”. Since this was my first time meeting her, I made her feel super comfortable. Most importantly when she shared with me that her house wasn’t clean, I told her, “please, I know how it is. I have five children that destroy my home. I am thankful you invited us here, so thank you.” That’s keeping it real!).

In a caregiver’s own words “keeping it real” is:

- Relating to any individual
- Being able to express yourself
- Having the ability to adapt to any situation
- Remaining nonjudgmental
- Utilizing Active listening skills
- Expressing empathy
- Understanding and providing sympathy
- Using words and language that the family understands

Advice from Loraine

By: Loraine Ramirez

I believe the pivotal element on our success as Parent Evaluators cannot be encapsulated in just a single action on our end. There are various factors that we take into consideration in order to establish adequate rapport with the family. For example, families are matched with Parent evaluators taking in consideration their race, language and cultural heritage; being culturally competent is key.

On the other hand, one has to admit that the fact that the Parent Evaluators share similar experiences to the one’s the families might be encountering at the moment plays a key role in the engaging process. It is simple; the caregivers identify themselves with us as equals and this definitely creates a bridge between caregiver and Parent Evaluator. These families are in constant crisis, therefore when they find someone they can relate to, someone who will care, listen without bias and empathize with them; undoubtedly a bond is born and it works in our favor when reaching out to the families to be interviewed. In addition, because of our diverse personalities and values we accommodate diverse types of families accordingly and it shows on a constant basis with the great relationships and retention rates we maintain with the families.

Tips for Rapport & Retention

By: Nitza F. Sevilla

- Rapport starts at the first phone call. Be friendly & explain who you represent (i.e. Evaluation Team), how you obtained the family's contact information & why you are contacting them.
- When you schedule an appointment with the family, it should be tailored to their schedule. Please be sure to make weekends and evenings an option for the family and make sure it is in a location convenient for the family.
- During your first meeting, try to find some common ground with the families by sharing a little about your own background for ex: language, cultural background, reasons for being part of the study team (i.e. parent/youth evaluator, researcher)
- During first meeting, try to obtain additional contacts' information in case the family's contact information changes or is out of order.
- Be observant of the family and write detailed notes of your visit therefore you can review before making monthly phone calls and going to the next follow-up assessment.
- During monthly phone calls, obtain updates of contact information and confirm additional contact information. This is the time to touch base with the family & give them the space to share what they wish to you.

Working with Youth

By: Laura Alonso

I have found that the easiest way to engage a youth is to communicate with them at their level. Speak to them less formally than you would a parent, and look for some sort of connection. At the time of consent, I like to casually chat with the youth a bit after signing the forms and ask them about school, what they do for fun, if they are involved in any afterschool activities, etc. in order to build rapport. If the youth isn't very talkative, I try to be observant and see if there is any way I can connect with them (for example, if I see a guitar lying around, ask if they play and how long they've been playing, etc.). These kids deal with many adults like teachers, therapists, and their own parents, and the last person they want to talk to personal things about is "parent figure". It is important to stress to them that their answers will not be reported to their parents (unless they report harm to themselves or others), which I always do at the time of consent, and again remind them before beginning the baseline.

RETENTION RATES



6 Month Retention
75% vs. 64%



12 Month Retention
72% vs. 54%



18 Month Retention
67% vs. 38%

BEST PRACTICES

CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

- Our community is unique and diverse. The majority of youth and families enrolled in FACES are Hispanic and Black/African American. Due to cultural stigma, very few of these families feel comfortable talking to their friends about mental health and substance abuse issues. Parent Evaluators give families a chance to speak openly and honestly about these topics.
- Evaluators must show sensitivity and be comfortable with different gender identities and sexual orientations.

CONNECTION AND RELATIONSHIPS

- If youth and families don't like you, they will not agree to be interviewed. You need to establish a connection and find a way to "click" with them
- Always keep good notes and follow up with the family- "How was your trip to Disney?" Conducting monthly calls and sending birthday cards are also a great way to maintain engagement and let the family know that they are important
- It's a "give and take relationship". Parent Evaluators just don't sit there and ask the family questions; they also share their personal stories as well. Families seem to respond well to that.

OPEN, TRUSTWORTHY AND NON-JUDGMENTAL

- Parent Evaluators are not seen as clinicians, instead they are viewed as equals because they can relate to families experiences. They are not just here to ask interview questions. It is a more open relationship, so that youth and families feel they can be honest.
- Families will not trust you if you are judgmental. You must be open-minded as well as honest and reliable.

COMMUNICATION

- When you communicate with youth, you have to talk to them on their own level. You can't speak to them like another parent or authority figure. You shouldn't be too formal. You have to engage at the basic level first.
- Parent Evaluators listen to families concerns and give them an opportunity to vent.

AVAILABILITY

- Evaluators must establish and maintain good rapport. They also must be accommodating to the locations and times that are most convenient for youth and families to meet.

It is a combination of these small details that together make best practices and contribute to better engagement rates and higher retention.