



Champions for Inclusive Communities

Star Community

Coos Bay Area, OR

In Oregon, the counties of Coos, Curry, and Western Douglas act like one big county in many ways. All three are located on the central/southern Oregon coast, otherwise known as the Coos Bay Area, and have relatively small, rural populations – numbering about 190,000 between the three of them. Most importantly, residents, providers, and organizations in these three counties have a reputation of being able to collaborate over issues, especially those related to children and youth with special health care needs and their families.

The biggest facilitator of the connections among these three counties around children with special health needs is the Community Connections Network. CCN began 15 years ago when the Oregon Health and Sciences University's Child Development and Rehabilitation Center (CDRC) received a grant to demonstrate the effectiveness of community-based teams to help children with unresolved health issues. Later, the CCN Teams were incorporated into the Title V CSHCN Block Grant program as part of what became the Oregon Center for Children and Youth with Special Health Needs (OCCYSHN). Initially, CCN Teams focused on assessment and evaluation. Now, CCN Teams focus on improving the organization of community-based services to make them easier for families to use.

CCN Team Provides Wraparound Services

CCN is well known around the state for being able to successfully draw together a multidisciplinary team made up of local physicians; health care agencies; education and social service providers; community members such as neighbors, relatives, or religious leaders; and a Family Liaison (a local parent skilled at identifying resources and supporting the family perspective). This team convenes monthly to review referrals and decide if CCN services are appropriate.

The next step is to schedule a CCN meeting for the child with special health care needs and his or her family. A local physician examines the child and/or reviews the child's medical records beforehand. The meeting brings together family members and professionals involved in the child's life to brainstorm and collaborate ways the community can meet that particular family's needs. This includes working together with families of any culture and providing interpreters when needed, as well as considering the families' economic circumstances. Jenny Van Rooyen, a Speech/Language Pathologist with Early Intervention Services who is part of the team says, "One of the greatest things about CCN is that because we are a small community, we know we're the only professionals available to meet the needs in our area. Because we provide wraparound services, we can think outside the box of who we are and what our agency may stand for and look for how we can merge and collaborate with other agencies and share responsibilities to see that the child's and family's needs are met."

One valuable addition to the CCN team is the CaCoon ("care coordination") nurse from the Coos County Public Health Department. With the losses of fishing and logging industry jobs in the area, the CaCoon program is important - it provides nurse home visits,

assessments, and case management for children with special health needs who belong to families with low socioeconomic status. CaCoon nurses are specially trained to help families coordinate care for their children with special health needs. While in the family's home, the CaCoon nurse often performs developmental screening assessments and pinpoints the child's basic needs. The nurse then can then contact the child's primary care provider to trigger an early intervention evaluation. The CaCoon nurse is an indispensable part of the multidisciplinary team. They have a strong sense of what the family needs and wants, having connected with that family in their own home.

Another professional on the CCN Team to whom is attributed much of the team's success is Dr. Donna Rabin, one of the team's pediatricians. She has served as a local champion of CCN since its inception. Her steadfast commitment has brought energy, credibility, and cohesiveness to CCN's efforts to serve CYSHN.

Family Liaisons: A Lesson in Empathy

Another key part of the CCN team is the inclusion of Family Liaisons. Family Liaisons are community members who are specially trained to support families through the CCN process and to represent the family

What makes a Star Community?

ChampionsInC has created the Star Communities program to recognize exceptional communities.

Star Communities will show excellence in 6 Performance Measures:

- Families are partners
- A "Medical Home" provides coordinated care
- Children receive early and continuous screening
- Families have adequate funding/insurance to pay for services
- Services are organized so families can use them easily and are satisfied
- Youth receive necessary services to make the transition to adult life

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perspective on the CCN team. The Family Liaison is in a unique position to empathize with each family because they themselves are parents of a child or children with special needs. Tracie Skinner is a Family Liaison. She is very grateful for how CCN helped her meet her child's needs. "My child at the time was a foster child and it's really difficult to get them care because [services and procedures] need to be approved by everybody. Going through CCN, all of that was taken care of, and it was very helpful." Working with CCN as a parent has made it easy for her to relate to the families she assists as Family Liaison. "It helps to know what to expect and to be able to tell someone what your needs are. The Family Liaison understands what you are going through."

Family Liaisons work directly with the family who will be attending CCN to ensure they are comfortable with the upcoming process and don't feel intimidated talking to a room full of professionals. They also can learn more about the family's needs and relay that information back to the team. For example, Family Liaisons might find out that the child and parents want to include non-professionals such as neighbors or faith-based organizations, and ensure that they are part of the CCN meeting. Each family completes a Satisfaction Survey following the meeting, and Family Liaisons follow up with the family later to ensure they are finding the services recommended in the meeting.

An Embedded Medical Home

Although the CCN team doesn't use the term "medical home" much in their daily conversations, their program is true to the medical home model. The very idea of providing wraparound services to the family during their individualized CCN team meetings is a good example of a medical home. The care coordination that takes place in CCN is also in keeping with the medical home model.

Working Together to Provide Financial Support

Another example of the way Coos, Curry, and Western Douglas Counties collaborate is by helping to ensure families have funding and/or insurance to meet their complex health care needs. Most children and their families who cannot afford private insurance are on the Oregon Health Plan. Even though this provides for the basic healthcare needs of families, some costs, like those for durable medical equipment, are not covered. This is where CCN steps in and networks with agencies in the area to meet the child's needs.

Medical practices in the community have also been known to pitch in to benefit children, youth, and families in the area. Dr. Jon Yost, a local pediatrician and member of the CCN team, points out that a

local physicians organization called Doctors of the Oregon Coast, South (DOCS), which administers Medicaid Managed Care, provides some funds to help with things like local free or reduced-cost medical clinics. In the past they contributed to school-based health centers that provide immunizations and healthcare counseling to teens. The physicians' group is currently considering ways to help fund school nurses because the local school districts' budgets are strained.

Financial resources are also an important part of the success of the Coos Bay Area CCN. CCN is a program of OCCYSHN, which is funded through the Title V Block Grant. OCCYSHN in turn contracts with local agencies to staff the CCN Team Coordinator and Professional Adjunct positions. OCCYSHN provides a small reimbursement to CCN team physicians for their time. They also provide support and technical assistance to the CCN team. Funds are available for training and consultation from specialists, to help the community increase its capacity to serve children and youth with special health needs. The Family Involvement Network, which provides Family Liaison services, is also a program of OCCYSHN. Wider collaboration happens when other agencies pay their personnel for time spent in CCN team meetings. School districts, public health departments, and child welfare agencies often dedicate staff time for professionals to sit on the CNN team.

Transition

CCN has recently increased its focus on transition issues throughout their community. The multidisciplinary team has convened a number of times recently to discuss the situations of young adults up through age 21 who were ready to transition to adult life. CCN provides a bridge between families and services provided in the community. They also have the help of local public schools, which provide adaptive life skills training and independent living programs. One integral part of the CCN Team, the Education Service District (ESD), represents the child's educational needs as they transition into and through the school system. Together, these services help youth with special needs move towards the goal of independent living and work with appropriate support and health care.

Finding Common Ground to Help Families of CYSHCN

Overall, the community that includes the Coos Bay Area in central and southern Oregon is a stellar example of collaboration when it comes to working with families of children and youth with special health care needs. Instead of having "turf wars," they easily find a common ground. They come together to provide community-based services to the families that need them. And they could not accomplish this cohesiveness without the help of the Community Connections Network, the glue that holds them together.

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