

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVE AT TDM MEETINGS

At the Team Decisionmaking table, we often have three different types of “community” people:

1. Support persons who are invited by the family (as many as they like and whoever they are.)
2. Service providers, either formal or informal, who serve the family either presently or potentially (in the second case, family permission is required at an initial meeting.) They can be invited by anyone, and can be community-based or agency-based.
3. Specific “Community Representatives” who are invited by the agency: these are the people whose role is defined in this document. While there is no easy definition for this kind of a community representative, it’s often useful to ask, “is the family likely to relate to this person as a member of their [the family’s] own ‘community’, however they define that?”

F2F’s TDM database and data reporting form distinguish between these different kinds of “community” participants, so that the impact of various persons’ attendance can be tracked.

When we talk about a “TDM Community Representative” in F2F, we are referring to a person whose involvement comes about as a result of the following process:

- The public child welfare agency makes a commitment to invite a Community Representative to all TDM meetings, and most especially to those involving the potential removal of a child from his/her birth family.
- The TDM Community Representative is a person invited by the public child welfare agency, through its continuing effort to forge new relationships with members of the communities from which children are often removed. These representatives are best identified through the joint efforts of the agency’s Family to Family Community Partnership and TDM strategy work groups. Optimally, the representatives attend meetings with the support of the community’s F2F “collaborative” group, which serves as their home base for pre- and post-meeting discussion and ongoing support.
- The TDM Community Representatives agree to attend TDM meetings, especially those involving the possible removal of a child from his/her birth family, with the permission of the parents.
- The public agency provides an orientation to TDM, along with basic training on the role and responsibilities of the child welfare system, to all TDM Community Representatives prior to their first meeting. (Hopefully, the community has also provided basic training to public agency staff on its role in supporting those families it serves.)
- The TDM Community Representative attends the meeting (in addition to those support persons who may be present because the family asked them to participate); s/he is a person the public child welfare agency invites to ensure that every family has a natural ally at the TDM table.
- The TDM Community Representative may assume one or more of the following roles at the meeting:
 - To serve as a natural ally, and potential advocate, for birth parents at a TDM;
 - To represent the birth family’s “community,” whether because of a shared home neighborhood, or a shared community of faith, ethnicity or other natural connection; this

- supportive connection can continue throughout the family's involvement with the system and beyond;
- To share an awareness of resources which might support the family, especially those available within the family's home community;
- To make the birth family feel more comfortable in whatever way they can;
- To help the agency's staff and its partners better understand the family's community of origin, especially its strengths;
- To assist the family in understanding the agency's concerns in relation to safety and risk;
- To fully participate in the meeting, and particularly to share ideas for ensuring the child(ren)'s safety while supporting the family.