Guide to Forming

A Community Café Leadership Team
Table of Contents

Community Cafés – A Powerful Strategy to Partner with Parents_________________________ 1
Our Community Café Leadership Team Story ___________________________________________ 2
What is the Purpose of this Guide?___________________________________________________ 4
CONVERSATION 1: What is Our Community Café Practice? ___________________________ 4
CONVERSATION 2: What is Important about this Work? ______________________________ 5
CONVERSATION 3: What Does Our Team Mean by Leadership? __________________________ 6
CONVERSATION 4: What is the Role of a Leadership Team? ____________________________ 7
MORE ON ROLES: What about Providing Community Café Orientations to Others? ____ 9
MORE ON ROLES: What about Evaluating and Assessing Our Work? _________________ 9
CONVERSATION 5: What Does a Leadership Team Invitation Look, Sound and Feel Like? ___________ 10
CONVERSATION 6: What Resources are Helpful for a CCLT? ____________________________ 10
Acknowledgements______________________________________________________________ 12

The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance) holds the unique position of serving as the membership organization for state children’s trust and prevention funds. Children’s trust and prevention funds are the backbone of our nation’s infrastructure to support children and their families.

The Alliance leads a national Early Childhood Initiative (ECI), which includes a 30-state Learning Community of state children’s trust and prevention funds and their partners, including parents and community members. Through this national initiative, the Alliance is focusing on strategies that strengthen families, build protective factors, promote individual growth, help systems be more responsive to families and children and strengthen communities’ capacities as safe and healthy environments.

The Alliance has engaged in collaborative partnerships with members of the ECI Learning Community and expresses appreciation to the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) for supporting the development of the valuable resources resulting from these partnerships. The DDCF improves the quality of people’s lives through grants supporting the performing arts, wildlife conservation, medical research and the prevention of child maltreatment, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke’s properties.

This document is part of a series of resources that were developed as a result of the Alliance’s partnership with states. All are available at no cost. To see the full array of resources developed, please visit the Alliance web site at www.ctfalliance.org/collaborativeprojects. You may also contact the Alliance at info@ctfalliance.org.
Community Cafés – A Powerful Strategy to Partner with Parents

The National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds (Alliance) is committed to effectively partnering with parents and helping state Children’s Trust Funds (CTFs) and their grantees and partners expand and integrate the powerful role of parent leaders into their work. In recent years, Community Cafés have proven to be an important strategy for supporting CTFs and parent leaders in joining together to create positive changes for families in communities and incorporating the protective factors framework into their plans.

The Community Café approach was developed by parents working together in Washington State to adapt the World Café model to help families and communities build protective factors and strengthen families. The Washington Council For Children and Families (Washington’s Children’s Trust Fund) has been a strong supporter of this innovative strategy since the beginning, supporting the emerging work in Washington State through small seed grants and close mentoring relationships that helped to leverage community resources, create sustainability and expand the scope of the work. The Alliance helped spread these efforts nationally and provides technical assistance to trust funds interested in implementing Communities Cafés. To date, the Alliance has helped to implement Community Cafés in almost one-third of its member states.

The small group of parents in Thurston County, Washington, has grown in number and diversity of roles. They have sustained the expansion of Community Cafés in multiple sites and in multiple systems in the state. As more states have promoted and supported Community Cafés, it has become even more important to explore strategies for strong ongoing support of the work in each state. This publication documents the journey in Washington State where a group of parent leaders hoped for and dreamed of stronger communities for all families. They created a Community Café Leadership Team and others across the country may find their journey helpful in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Community Café approach.

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

~ Margaret Wheatley
Our Community Café Leadership Team Story

The Community Café Leadership Team (CCLT) journey started in Olympia, Washington with two parents who wanted to help their local prevention board (Thurston Community Network) build relationships with communities and parents from marginalized neighborhoods. They hoped these relationships would better inform the board’s work and other agency practices. They also wanted to discover whether the Strengthening Families Protective Factor Framework, (www.cssp.org) could work as a mobilizing tool for diverse communities and agency partners. The local board was interested in promoting parent leadership so invited this team to write a proposal. This team also volunteered for Strengthening Families Washington (SFWA), asked for their feedback and got their endorsement before applying. SFWA agreed to put time on their agenda to hear updates. They would ask the board to fund five neighborhood projects the leadership team would later call “Community Cafés.”

The leadership team started first with an orientation which surfaced people interested in hosting. Small project grants were budgeted and managed by parent hosts, some who did not have checking accounts. Hosts budgeted for child care, food, supplies, mileage and a gratitude stipend for hosting. (See the Community Café Orientation Guide for a copy of this proposal.) Most would use the World Café method of convening community conversations. Hosts from very diverse communities would design conversations to fit the culture and issues of their community and extend broad invitations. Harvests and leadership team learning was shared with the Thurston Community Network and SFWA.

In a very short time, the leadership team grew as hosts also volunteered to coach other parents to start a similar effort. Tools were developed to help hosts who had little or no experience working with agencies, to help with communication, planning, fiscal requirements and share café harvests. A partnership with the National Alliance of Children’s Trust & Prevention Funds was established to share the approach with other states’ trust funds who were interested in building partnerships with parents.

Currently, this team now refers to itself as the Community Café Leadership Team (CCLT) and the entire collective in Washington the “Community Café Collaborative of Washington.” The team continues to meet regularly, support Community Café practice in Washington and other states, and maintain the Community Café website. CCLT used cafés as a strategy to build partnerships with parents and formal systems. Within the first year of hosting cafés, parents were invited to join local state and national boards and councils. They brought with them the stories and harvests of their café conversations.
Why a Guide? Why Now?

Individuals or groups in other communities have wondered whether they might form their own local leadership team. Those inquiries and conversations have led to this guide at this time. In addition to providing some practical guidance about how to form a CCLT, we also intend it as a larger invitation to others in our country to join a growing collective of people dreaming of and contributing to a stronger community.

Why does this leadership team feel the need for more leadership teams across the country?

- More CCLTs would increase the number and availability of Community Café orientations and personal relationships between hosts
- Regional leadership teams would have greater capacity to work more deeply in communities and share what they are learning with others
- Hosts would be able to increase the quality of our learning as a larger, more diverse group shares what is happening in states and communities
- Local context and culture are so important; Community Café work may be strengthened for other regions if they had their own leadership team.

This Community Café approach will continue to develop as the journey unfolds: building relationships, creating tools and learning from each other about ways to build social capital that strengthens families. Who knows what the collective great idea or action will be that will shift this country into a new social norm that strengthens all families? Perhaps more leadership teams could help create the needed momentum for that magic to happen.
What is the Purpose of this Guide?

The purpose of the Community Café Leadership Team Guide is to help new leadership teams form and develop to support Community Café practice in their region. We intend for this guide to spark conversations between you and our leadership team and hope it will be the basis for ongoing conversations about how to develop, sustain, and connect other leadership teams across the country. This guide defines what a leadership team can be and describes possible roles and purposes, based on our leadership team’s journey. It describes tools and resources that a team would find useful in forming their own leadership team. This guide draws on the experience of the original CCLT, and shares this experience as just one example of how a leadership team might emerge. Your experience will be your own and be based on your strengths, and the strengths of the people you convene, within the context of your community.

Based on our leadership team experience, we are offering six questions to help a new team get organized. Our team’s authentic attempts to respond to powerful questions have a way of exposing what we value and hold in common. We think any one of these suggested conversations can be a starting point for you and your team. As well, these conversations can help us see possibilities we all aspire to, gifts and commitments we bring to the work.

These conversations are organized around six open questions:

1. What is our Community Café practice and how does that practice promote an approach rather than a model?
2. What is important about the work you want to do?
3. What do we mean by “leadership”?
4. What could the role of our Community Café Leadership Team be?
5. What does the invitation look, sound and feel like?
6. What resources are particularly helpful?

Start with what interests you right now, or with the conversation that feels most closely connected to your own questions. Or you could arrange a series of gatherings and invite your team to work through each conversation in order to create a foundation for your team. At any point our leadership team wonders and welcomes the questions you have, concerns, ideas, and feedback about the usefulness of this guide – thecommunitycafe@gmail.com.

CONVERSATION 1: What is Our Community Café Practice?

The Community Café approach uses meaningful conversation to spark leadership that builds the relationships needed to strengthen families. Meaningful conversations invite diverse perspectives and are culturally relevant to the community and are typically designed by people who live there. Much of our practice of hosting conversations is based on The World Café and Art of Hosting principles, which the team learned from experience, self-study and discussion, and participation in workshops. We use the word “practice” because we are promoting an
on-going process for organizations, neighborhoods and communities and our learning is continuous. Practice and approach is contrasted with a “model” which has predetermined parts, sequences and outcomes. This thinking has helped our team respond to requests for help as learners and coaches rather than teachers.

The continuous process is based on the 4 D’s of Appreciative Inquiry: dream, design, discover, and deliver. Our Dream is for beloved community based on collective wisdom with and in human systems that fosters equality, respect and inclusion. We hope to accomplish the dream through a Design that focuses our attention on reweaving the social fabric for children. Through this work we Discover what is possible if we work together to assure all children have a birthright to the five protective factors they need to thrive: courage, freedom, health, community and compassion. Each person on the leadership team commits to Deliver or contribute based on their self-assessed strengths and what they want to learn more about. At this point, Dream has not changed for our leadership team but every year we revisit design, discovery and delivery as part of our strategic planning.

Our Community Café practice is also about nurturing the growing web of interconnections (relationships) that exists among the numerous individuals and teams and communities doing this work. And it can be helpful to focus on other relationships beyond people directly involved in strengthening families, such as health, education, early childhood, faith based, policy makers and local business owners. The relationships that are important to your work will become visible to you as you engage with each other in these leadership team conversations.

CONVERSATION 2: What is Important about this Work?

What work feels important to your team at this point? What more does your team want to learn about? If you can answer this question perhaps you will have a good sense of the direction your team needs to take, and also a way to begin explaining your work to others. Here are some comments from members of our leadership team about what they think is important about the work. It is important to:

► Promote the value of meaningful conversations.

“I was first introduced to the Community Cafés through AmeriCorps, and the idea instantly ‘clicked’ with me. I feel that Cafés are a really wonderful way for people to have meaningful conversations about what is important to them, and to build initiative for change. I have seen them happen in various settings, and from what I can see, when they are done well and with intention they always have insightful and exciting results.”

► Grow leadership.

“This work provides a mechanism to learn with others who share a common purpose of reweaving social fabric—the protective factors children need to thrive become a birthright. Rather than my old view of us against the system and trying to convince
“I was initially invited by de Grupo Familias Latinas to attend a meeting regarding gangs but thought, “My kids aren’t involved with gangs.” The second invite had to do with underage drinking which again did not apply to my kids. The third invite was the lure because it was on education. I found myself very interested so I volunteered to help organize and plan the event. It was a very successful and well-attended Community Café; I was hooked! This is where I met one of the Community Café founding parents, who invited me to join the CCLT.

As a result of my involvement with CCLT, I was able to start a café in another rural area. All the harvests of our cafés were shared with the Community Impact Coordinator for Early Learning. Because of her support and belief in strengthening families and the credibility of our work this led to a bilingual early learning resource center right from the start.

It was unbelievable what was happening but most inspiring was that I was an active participant in all this. Now, I am fortunate to be a board member of the Alliance Council; I am extremely honored to be a voice for all families and children in my community as well as the state and the nation. I link up parents nationwide to resources, programs, information that they otherwise would not receive and in return I get to meet amazing people, develop my skills, personal growth but most important further our strengthening families work.”

~ Community Café Leadership Team Member

others to help reform that system, I now practice seeing a relatedness in everyone and creating action as part of one human system”

❖ Build partnerships and relationships.

“I feel the practice is a powerful leverage point for change. As we shift the nature of the conversation and build relationships based on partnership rather than differences in power, different actions become possible. A virtuous reinforcing cycle can begin in a community, as more and more people are drawn to meaningful conversations about ideas and issues that truly matter.”

❖ Strengthen all families.

“I am involved in Community Cafés because of its unique non-threatening way of bringing people together and giving them a voice; empowering them to take the necessary action to improve the lives of their children; connecting them with their community and its resources; and strengthening families. This work is important to me because I want all children and families to feel like they belong; to be active participants in their community; to have the same opportunities for a better life.”

CONVERSATION 3: What Does Our Team Mean by Leadership?

A conversation about leadership will help make visible your individual and collective:

❖ Beliefs and assumptions
❖ Understanding about how your team best learns and works together
❖ Perceptions about scarcity and abundance
❖ Curiosity, and comfort with uncertainty and/or not knowing
❖ Comfort convening and hosting diverse groups

Or, conversely, a conversation about such things as our deep beliefs about people, teamwork and team skills, abundance, and inquiry will help make visible our individual and collective beliefs about leadership.

From our perspective, leadership is not about getting someone (else) to do something. Instead, leadership is about working on ourselves in order to issue an authentic, compassionate invitation to engage, to contribute to strengthening families, to develop community culture together and be fully present to host.
Each of us on our team has a sense of what they mean by “leadership.” For example:

“Leadership is the ability to help a group make full and effective use of its time and discover its true potential.”

“Leadership means having the ability to work with a group of individuals to create a team focused on specific goals; to also have the ability to make decisions and act to get things done while motivating and inspiring others.”

“Leadership is about convening people for meaningful conversations.”

“Leadership means showing up powerfully and confident of your own voice.”

“Leadership is practicing being a learner. For me this requires reflecting on past experience and how it impacts my perspective. Reflection increases my ability to be present, accept people without judgment and arrive curious about what is working well rather than looking for what’s wrong and trying to fix it.”

One result of our team’s conversation about leadership yielded what we call our Principals of Cooperation. Some might call them work agreements:

- Work in partnership
- Honor and respect every contribution to the work
- Honor and respect every person’s leadership and culture
- Act like everyone arrives with the best of intentions
- Build and share collective wisdom and consensus
- Promote equality, self determination and reciprocity
- Acknowledge our own role in building healthy community
- Maintain safety and kindness in our words and environment
- Strive to make every decision and contribution with compassion

CONVERSATION 4: What Is the Role of a Leadership Team?

We believe that the primary role of a CCLT is to form new important relationships and then nurture them, and that in doing so you must have an ongoing conversation among yourselves about the high priority of relationships that are dependent on the changes you want to see happen. This begins with the formation of the team itself, and continues as the web of relationships is gradually expanded through the community. Outside of the leadership team, relationships with others will come to include hosts at individual café sites, community members, parent groups, local, state and national organizations and others.

In addition to nurturing relationships which is the basis of all of our activities, here is a list of some other leadership team activities that have developed over the last three years. We would be happy to have more conversations with you about any of these activities. This list is offered...
to stimulate a conversation among prospective members of a new leadership team in order to further explore the nature of the work you would like to do:

- Promote the adoption of the Protective Factor Framework at the local, state and national level
- Help others to start hosting Community Cafés or use the approach into their work
- Provide mentoring and coaching on a continuous basis
- Maintain and use a contact list
- Gather and share stories and café harvests
- Advocate to include marginalized communities and build parent partners in policy and programs and institutions
- Identify learning opportunities for the team and other hosts
- Challenge our perspectives and world views
- Develop tools, materials and ways to communicate in different settings
- Advocate for policy that strengthens families
- Create bridges for communication between diverse human systems such as non-English speaking neighborhoods and policy makers

We think a leadership team needs to decide on the number of people needed for the work you want to do. This is part of the role conversation because the size of the team is related to how much work you can do. A team could be just one and one more. Too few members might have difficulty getting all the work done and attending to all the emerging relationships. The larger the team, the more time needs to be invested in organizing and maintaining a healthy team that functions well. Whatever the size of your leadership team, it should be a group that is diverse and representative of the community. If the beginning group is not representative, this is not an obstacle to getting started, but is a serious goal to pursue early on.

We have historically built our strategies and work plans around the strengths of our team. As the work grew, so did our skill set and strengths, especially as we built relationships in other states and organizations. We suggest that you have a conversation about the skills and talents of your team and design your work plan based on your assets. Every member has a compassionate heart and also adds to a team skill set. Here are a few examples of team member gifts:

- Ability to communicate through public speaking or writing
- Openness to learn how to work in diverse, formal and informal settings to include agency meetings and community organizations
- Experience hosting a welcoming, safe space
- Strong ability to empathize, listen without giving advice or coming up with a solution
- Energetic, enthusiastic, well cared for
- Basic computer skills and appreciation of email etiquette as a team member
A Guide to Forming a Community Café Leadership Team

- Able to receive and provide mentoring and coaching
- Likes to plan group activities and community organizing
- Team builder-sees themselves as an interdependent part of a whole
- Can design and facilitate a productive meeting
- Tendency to laugh a lot and engage others in humor
- Advocacy and networking

This broad list developed over time. Your leadership team will no doubt identify a long list of skills and capacities. We ask each new team member to share the gifts they bring and what they would like to learn and how they see our team supporting that learning.

MORE ON ROLES: What about Providing Community Café Orientations to Others?

We are often asked to provide orientations and presentations on the Community Café approach. We host orientations mainly to groups, large and small, and also to individuals. We hope that other leadership teams will develop the capacity to present Community Café Orientations. The work of providing orientations does not start or stop with the event but usually involves an appreciative interview, working together to plan the orientation, then maintaining as much of a relationship as you desire with those you meet at the orientation. Our team is prepared to help others who would like to learn how to host Community Café orientations. We can provide example designs for full day and mini orientations and help you prepare to host them.

MORE ON ROLES: What about Evaluating and Assessing Our Work?

Our leadership team collects and shares harvests from cafés, conducts pre- and post-appreciative interviews with hosts and organizational partners and communicates our findings with others. One of the potential benefits of having a leadership team is that your team can act as a central place where other hosts can convene in person or by phone to share their harvests. Interview and survey tools are available on the website. The website currently invites any café host to be listed on our contact page and to send us their harvests for posting.

Along with harvests, we also share individual and community stories. We elevate the value and influence of these stories by sharing them with formal and informal service systems. Collected stories help to inform the program, policy and practice decisions that may often be made without the voices of parents and communities.

If you already have multiple café conversations happening in your area, you may want to start documenting and communicating to your organizational partners and with other leadership teams: What issues do communities care about? What have people decided individually and as a group as a result of being in conversation with each other? What questions have they found valuable to talk about? Who is showing up for these conversations and what do powerful invitations for these communities and people look and sound like? What partnerships have developed as a result?

Two questions the team asked its members the first year were:
1. What do we dream, accept, call to action?
2. What do we challenge ourselves to build and notice in order to learn?
CONVERSATION 5: What Does a Leadership Team Invitation Look, Sound and Feel Like?

We believe it is a key beginning step, for those seeking to form a new leadership team in their community, to first participate in a Community Café Orientation. This assures that we all share the vision of the Community Café approach. The shared experience of an Orientation is often where a leadership team starts to form.

CCLT’s beginnings were the two parents who started Community Cafés, (they did not call themselves a leadership team at that point.) As more café sites started, hosts gathered regularly to share what was happening in their community. The idea that they were a “leadership team” did not emerge until others started asking them for help to start their own cafés. The reasons for meeting together changed and the team became more intentional about building their capacity to coach or lead.

If there are already multiple cafés happening in your region, you might start having conversations with at least one other host and see if they would see a benefit in talking on a regular basis. The team emerges when your conversations begin to feel a sense of shared purpose and an agreement that working together is better. This perspective may release you from trying to convince someone to join a team and keeps open ended your invitations to have conversations with other hosts.

If you are not aware of other cafés in your area, perhaps your beginning may be similar to ours. The invitation to become part of a team is really based in having meaningful conversations with at least one other, about what matters to you. Here is one leadership team member’s invitation idea:

“I would ask if they would be interested in being part of a team whose focus is on building a community that is inclusive—where people and children have a sense of belonging. I would add that their skills, special talents, compassion, etc. would be an asset to the team and that together we could work at transforming our community.”

CONVERSATION 6: What Resources are Helpful for a CCLT?

We believe the best resource is to practice having conversations with an appreciative and learner’s ear. If you have not attended Community Cafés yet, attending an orientation or asking for help from the Community Café Leadership Team in Washington could be an important step. If you are already hosting and curious to learn more, there are books and websites we could strongly recommend.

We feel the list that follows is a list of key resources for a new leadership team. Certainly you will have ideas about other resources, some of which might be particularly helpful for your cultural context. Each resource below will lead to other resources, which you might also find helpful depending on your team’s experience and interests.
If you are already hosting Community Cafés and are interested in providing others with a Community Café Orientation, the Community Café Leadership Team (CCLT) in Washington may be a useful resource as well. The CCLT can provide a one-day workshop on starting a leadership team which includes learning how to host an orientation. This resource could also be available via email, phone, Skype or conference call – thecommunitycafe@gmail.com or phone Robin Higa at (360) 870-7106

The Community Café website is a key dual language resource. You will find our contact information, an invitation to add your café site to our directory and full list of resources and tools including The Community Café Orientation Guide and the Kid Café Guide. The Community Café Orientation Guide is designed to accompany a full day orientation. It is an interactive guide for those interested in the approach and includes tools for hosting, inviting, communicating and documenting the work. We hope that you will join our contact list. We also hope you will post your harvests to the website, adding to the body of knowledge we are collectively building.

- The World Café at www.theworldcafe.com is a useful site with downloadable graphics and some guidance documents.
- The Art of Hosting website at www.artofhosting.org/thepractice/ explains the stance of “hosting” (rather than facilitation) and also provides excellent resources and information about workshops.
- Internal Family Systems (www.selfleadership.org/about-internal-family-systems.html) is the source of information about Self Leadership as presented in Community Café orientations.
Acknowledgements

We are incredibly grateful to those who have paved the way and who currently contribute to this work including dozens of agency partners. An agency or organization becomes a partner because individuals with an intention to promote social justice invest their precious time to create with us. We thank and acknowledge Strengthening Families’ Illinois for giving the original leadership team the idea of using the World Café model. Gratitude is deep for the National Alliance of Children’s Trust & Prevention Funds (www.ctfalliance.org); the Council for Children and Families who leads Strengthening Families Washington, Foundation for Early Learning, Children’s Trust Foundation of Washington, United Ways of Washington, Family Friends and Neighbor Care (CCRRN Washington,) and the Thurston Community Network for supporting the growth and development of this work.

We are especially appreciative of the efforts of Martha Reeder, Program Director of the Alliance’s Early Childhood Initiative, for providing technical support for this guide, to Norma McReynolds for the graphic design, to Teresa Rafael, Executive Director of the Alliance for the stone photos and to Claire Bronson (www.c2bdesign.com) for the visual harvest artwork.