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Collaborating for Change: NH-ME LEND/New Mainers Public Health Initiative (NMPHI) – An Interagency Parent Advocacy and Information Project

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Collaboration between NH-ME LEND Program and New Mainers Public Health Initiative lead to the development, delivery and evaluation of parent advocacy training (emphasizing Individualized Education Programs and advocacy within the K-12 system) for parents with children on the autism spectrum.

Project Areas of Need Addressed

- 1) Diminished the challenges that culturally diverse parents of children with disabilities experience in education settings;
- 2) Increased culturally diverse parents' meaningful collaboration with education systems, particularly regarding Individualized Education Programs and advocacy within the K-12 education system; and
- 3) Built the NH-ME LEND Program's capacity to offer culturally and linguistically competent training experiences for long-term trainees.
- 4) Common challenges for parents navigating the special education system:
 - ◇ Structure of the special education system
 - ◇ Individual child needs
 - ◇ Teacher interpretation of system
 - ◇ Parent understanding, participation

Additional challenges for parents of different cultural background:

- ◇ Language barrier
- ◇ Conceptual barriers

Led to:

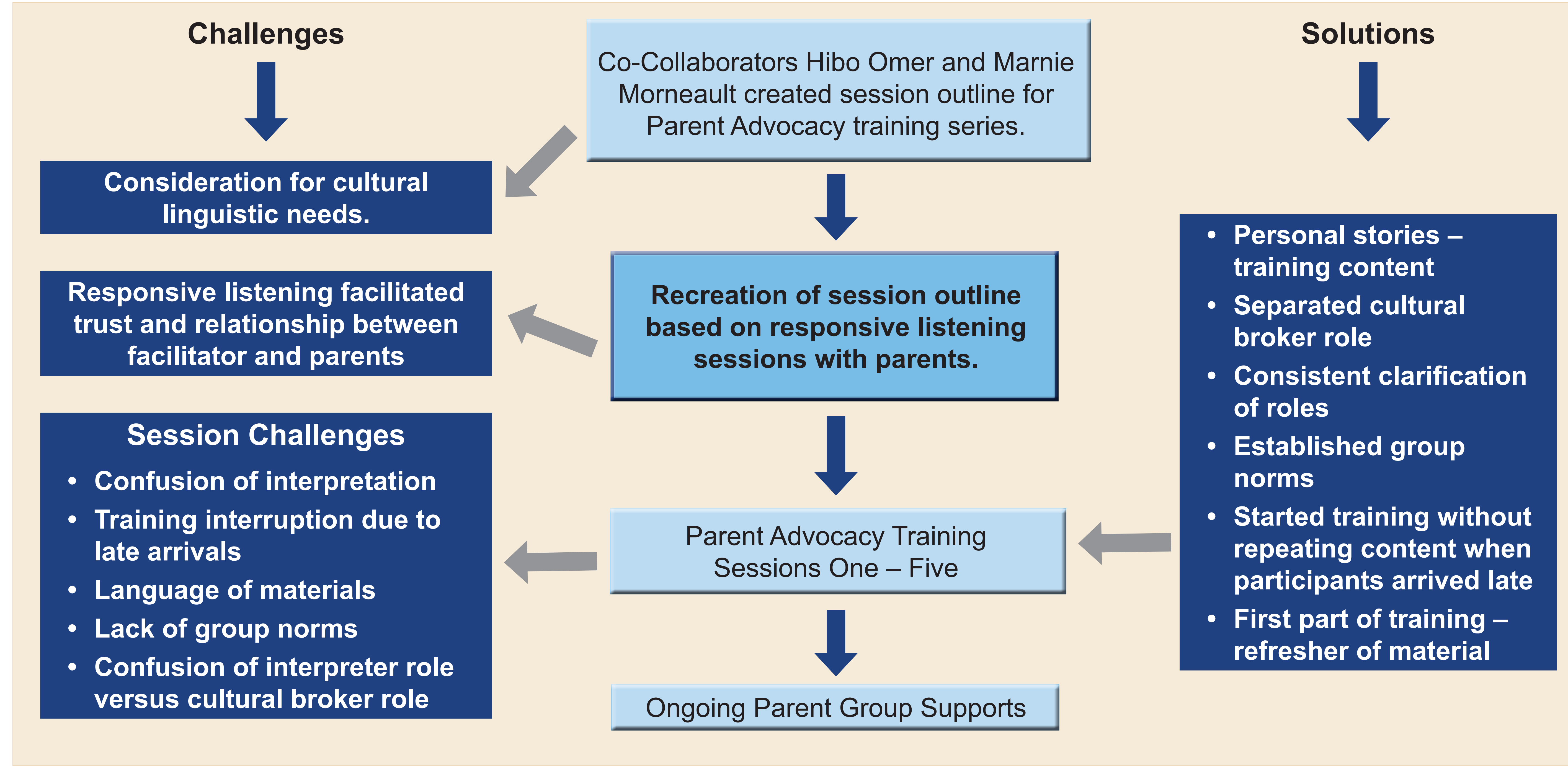
- ◇ More restrictive placements for children
- ◇ Disagreement about service quantity
- ◇ Lack of growth on IEP
- ◇ Parents sought less inclusive settings



"I advocated at my last meeting, I said LRE is my child's right."
~ Parent of a high school child with autism.



"A light has been turned on for me. I can stop the meeting if I don't feel comfortable. I don't have to just agree. I don't have to just say yes to get services, I am a part (of the team)."
~ Parent of a first-grade child with autism.



Outcomes

Project partners collaborated to develop all aspects of the project in a culturally responsive way, leading to the following outcomes:

- Parents implemented knowledge, partnered and advocated in meetings.
- Oral culture-centered individual stories of parents served multiple purposes including relationship building, connection within the training content, and data collection.
- Strategies for effective collaboration, as well as methods for conducting training with culturally and linguistically diverse parents of children with ASD.
- New possibilities for future partnerships among NMPHI, the NH-ME LEND Program and the Maine UCEDD.
- The use of both a translator and cultural broker, which deepened understanding among project participants, and secured trust with the outside facilitator.
- Interpreters who work in the community better informed about special education processes, parent perspective of special education meetings.