

Service Provider Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Community Life
Engagement

Flexible Scheduling and Creative Staffing: KFI's Support Solutions

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Background

Headquartered in a small rural town in northern Maine, Katahdin Friends, Inc. (KFI) provides community employment and life engagement supports, as well as home supports, to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). KFI's services extend throughout northern and southern Maine, including the cities of Portland and Bangor.

A flexible approach to staffing and support scheduling helps KFI ensure customized daily support schedules that meet individual goals. This approach also allows individuals to interact with a variety of direct support professionals, which is important for having a more engaged and meaningful life in the community. As of July 2016, KFI supported 66 people with IDD through combinations of home, community, and work supports, and 28 people with a variety of disabilities in short-term job development funded by the public vocational rehabilitation program.

Implementation

While most providers assign a group of individuals with IDD to each staff, KFI takes the opposite approach, assigning a team of three to five staff members to each individual. Because of this unusual staffing system, they are able to offer one-to-one support to many individuals at once via a rotating weekly schedule. This means that one staff spends one to five hours with one individual, and then goes on to support another individual, sometimes in the same day. Other individuals have staff live with them at their home in revolving, 56-hour shifts. Support schedules are customized by day and continuously updated by KFI's regionally based support teams to accommodate last minute changes in individuals' schedules, as well as any staff changes.

Using this flexible staffing approach was a natural

outcome when KFI closed its center-based facilities and began supporting individuals in their homes and communities, says Gail Fanjoy, KFI's CEO. Several KFI staff had different community connections that they could use on behalf of the individuals who they were serving. Staff used these connections across individuals to more deeply integrate them into their communities.

To ensure a flexible staffing arrangement, KFI staff need to be well versed in both employment services and community life engagement. "Our staff who work in these support schedules do everything," explains Fanjoy. "They may be job coaching. They may be helping individuals connect in their community. They may be at a music jam in the evening, helping individuals to explore their love of music and entertainment." Forty-seven of KFI's 84 direct support professionals are certified employment staff. While not mandated by the state of Maine, KFI expects all of their direct support professionals to take the College of Employment Services online training that incorporates the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) nationally recognized supported employment competencies.

The direct support professionals that KFI hires need to be "joiners" who participate in their communities. Especially in the smaller, more rural communities, KFI staff know almost everyone, making it easier to connect community members to the individuals they support. KFI also looks for staffers who have proficiency with family engagement, and who understand the process of "person-centered thinking" and the concept of self-determination for people with IDD.

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KFI prioritizes staff training and encourages staff feedback to make sure the goals of individuals with IDD are being met, and that those individuals are continually afforded full choice (including the occasional bad choice) in what activities they want to do. KFI has frequent staff meetings, pre-established quarterly goals, and required benchmark reports. Goals are intentional, but with a certain amount of flexibility when it comes to carrying them out. Direct support professionals together with their clients modify activities to meet individual goals and interests.

Impact

Staff flexibility allows for variation in each individual's schedule, discourages prescriptive "programming," and maintains KFI's "person-centered thinking" ideals. Support providers become experts about each individual they support. This means that KFI clients have access to a range of supports based on their particular needs, up to and including 24/7 support in the home.

Individuals respond well to the rotating staff perhaps because this staffing pattern more authentically represents how most people spend their days: with a variety of people rather than just one. Each staff member brings their own interests to the individual for them to explore. This makes the training and fading of staff easier, as each newcomer is surrounded by several familiar staffers who know the individual's routine inside and out.

Transportation barriers are addressed as support providers use their own cars and are reimbursed for the miles. This allows for flexibility to mold to people's busy schedules. KFI staff appreciate

the flexibility that comes with their job, allowing them to better balance family and work life. The amount of flexibility granted to a staff member increases with seniority on the job. Staff flexibility not only positively impacts staff retention but also works as an incentive to recruit new staff members, says Fanjoy.

Suggestions for Replication

- » **Root all practices in a clear philosophy.** KFI has a strong, philosophical approach in everything they do, including how their supports are designed and delivered. These values are manifested in every aspect of the organizational culture, from hiring, to training, to individualized and highly flexible supports.
- » **Focus on individual experiences.** For KFI, community life engagement is all about building experiences for people and creating opportunities for individuals to be engaged in natural settings. Their services do not involve personcentered planning so much as person-centered thinking throughout all aspects of the organization.
- » **Cross-train staff for multiple roles.** Staff need sufficient training to fill various roles, including providing home, community, and work supports.

KFI website

www.kfimaime.org

Another KFI promising practice: "Making Mission-Driven Choices About Funding and Service Innovation" www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?page=article&article_id=396

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