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Partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services on Employment-Focused Systems Change

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Massachusetts DDS Theory of Change Model

CONTEXT

Activities

- Improving the political context that surrounds the system
- Establishing high-performance programs and services
- Creating strong & effective linkages across system components
- Developing the supports systems need to function effectively and with quality

CONNECTIONS

Findings

- Better employment outcomes throughout DDS system
- Better outcomes for individuals served by targeted providers
- Better outcomes for those served by partners in collaborative efforts
- Employment Manual and other publications
- Shared vision for leadership
- Policy changes
- Improved program quality for individuals receiving better employment supports
- Better integrated DDS/MRC education services
- Procurement initiative
- Better coordination of employment and other services (e.g. residential, non-work day)
- Better collaboration among service providers
- MOUs, referrals, etc.

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Improved data collection, use, & reporting
- MOA with MRC
- Procurement better emphasizes employment outcomes
- Improved use of data system-wide
- Not directly related
- Adoption of employment first policy
- Greater expectations for employment from "demand side" (consumers & families)
- Employment First Policy
- Work with self-advocates
- Work with families
- School Days to Pay Days

SCALE

- More people accessing employment supports
- Better employment outcomes throughout DDS system
- Changes in the procurement mechanism for employment and day services have clarified service definitions and sent a message that DDS is moving away from funding center based employment
- DDS' Systems Solutions Team has brought together stakeholders within the DDS community
- There have been local examples of transition focused partnerships with schools and of collaboration with MRC
- The MOA with MRC starts to lay the groundwork for developing more consistent partnerships across the state
- Development and implementation of an Employment First Policy was a key scale activity
- The "Explore, Prepare, Act" training series gone by and for people with disabilities has been a key activity in raising expectations of work. Other training efforts and publications have focused on family members.

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Abstract

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (MA-DDS) has been working to make its system of day services and supports more focused on competitive employment outcomes. This effort has involved a partnership among DDS, the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), the State Employment Leadership Network, and the Work Without Limits project. ICI has worked alongside DDS throughout this effort, providing consulting, technical assistance, training, and evaluation activities.

Goals and Objectives

The overall goal of this effort is to improve employment outcomes for individuals served by DDS. Objectives include establishing an Employment First policy and focus at the leadership level, increasing the capacity of local service providers to support people in finding and maintaining employment, and increasing interest in and demand for employment services among individuals with disabilities and family members.

Approach and Impacts

Using a systems initiative framework developed by the Build Initiative (Coffman, 2007), ICI staff have developed a theory of change model for DDS, indicating how the major strategies being undertaken collectively work toward systems change. The framework groups systems change activities into five Build “Focus Areas” - Context, Components, Connections, Infrastructure, and Scale. The illustration at right describes activities and impact in each area.

Conclusions and Next Steps

DDS has clearly made strides to date. DDS' leadership has communicated a clear preference for “Employment First” and the adoption of an official Employment First policy is an important step forward, setting the standard for employment to be available for all. Recent and ongoing improvements in data collection and use, as well as in employment services procurement, have also played a role in infrastructure change. Training, technical assistance, conferences, and symposia, and publications have all targeted improvement at the local service provider level.

Most recently, DDS has continued to shift the Employment First emphasis to the implementation level by requiring local service providers to craft transformation plans for moving people from sheltered to community employment. In addition, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) has been signed between DDS and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to collaborate in serving young people transitioning from school to adult services. The “Explore, Prepare, Act” project, a training effort by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, has also been a recent highlight.

The next steps involve continuing to emphasize implementation at the service provider level and to improve connections with other agencies. DDS will need to follow through on the transformation plans required of providers by giving feedback on the plans, providing technical assistance and training as needed, and maintaining a focus on goals and timelines in those plans. Following through on the MOA with MRC, and also coordinating with statewide and local educational entities, could enable DDS to further improve services and outcomes for youth and young adults.

Finally, continuing to work with self-advocates with disabilities through efforts such as “Explore, Prepare, Act” will be an ongoing focus. ICI will continue to support these efforts through training, technical assistance, and expert consulting.

References


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