State Agency
Promising Practice

Working Together: Collaboration between Colorado's Developmental Disabilities Division and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

by Allison Cohen Hall

Background

In Colorado, counselors from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation are housed on-site in Community Centered Board[1] offices so they can provide direct services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD). The goal of the project was to serve 240 customers with ID/DD and provide 134 successful employment outcomes over a two-year period[2]. Streamlined services and enhanced communication emerged through a unique collaborative effort between the two entities.

Implementation

Beginning in 2006, the Colorado Department of Human Services Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Division for Developmental Disabilities (DDD) undertook a two-year pilot project that placed vocational rehabilitation counselors in Community Centered Board (CCB) offices. As part of the project, six DVR counselors were housed at participating Community Centered Board locations. Four of the six DVR counselors started on or close to the initiation of the pilot in July 2006. The other two DVR counselors were placed on the project roughly six months after the start of the program due to recruitment challenges. Only two of the six people hired had previous public vocational rehabilitation experience, so staff orientation and development was a critical issue. The counselors had smaller caseloads than the standard caseload size for VR counselors to support more intensive involvement with job seekers. The project also paid a 25% higher reimbursement rate for both milestone and hourly payments to providers.

A statewide evaluation provided insights on implementation issues. Several strategies helped facilitate the collaboration between DVR and CCB staff. Strengths of the program included referral processes that were generally well developed and efficient, streamlined access to individual records, and enhanced communication and development of positive relationships between the agencies. This increased communication was in part facilitated by a smaller caseload for DVR counselors. This resulted in the implementation of a more efficient process for moving individuals from up-front DVR services to follow along supports coordinated by the CCBs.

The evaluation did identify some areas of concern. DVR counselors reported feeling isolated being housed separately from their DVR colleagues. Additionally, findings showed that DVR counselors used external service providers for a majority of the job development and placement activities and were therefore not taking a primary role with job

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1   Colorado's system comprises 20 local-level Community Centered Boards (CCBs). Some CCBs are actually providers of services, while others contract their services to other local organizations. CCBs serve as a single point of entry for a geographic area for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities to receive services, eligibility determination, and ongoing case management.

2   The main source for the information presented here is: Colorado Developmental Disabilities Division and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (2007). Employment services pilot project. Year One review (July 1, 2006-June 30, 2007).

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placement efforts. This may be due to pilot site counselors not having had enough hands-on training and experience in direct job placement.

Impact

DDD and DVR engaged in a programmatic evaluation of the pilot project in July 2007 (see included reference). At each pilot site, representatives took part in a full-day site visit. The evaluation included case record reviews and interviews with multiple types of staff, including program managers, case managers, supported employment consultants, adult program directors and managers, and DVR counselors and supervisors.

Major findings from the evaluation are below:

» The pilot program nearly met the goal for numbers served over two years (240 customers) within the first 12 months.

» Up-front activities for pilot cases (eligibility determination and plan development) were conducted at a faster rate than for non-pilot cases.

» Individuals served at the pilot sites moved through the DVR process—including completing up-front activities, being matched with employers, and securing a job—more quickly than individuals served by non-pilot counselors.

Suggestions for Replication

» Establish clear expectations about the goals of the pilot project (e.g., number of placements).

» Train staff on specific strategies to collaborate with one another and share information (e.g. case conferencing, standing meetings for discussing issues).

» Regularly share information within sites, as well as between each of the pilot sites, so they can learn from one another's challenges, barriers, and successes.

» Maintain a reasonable caseload for VR counselors so their ability to collaborate is not compromised.

» Coordinate trainings between entities to help staff cement the process of working together.

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