

State Agency Promising Practice

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Oregon's Keys for Case Managers Initiative: Ensuring Case Manager Technical Capacity, Investment, and Engagement in Employment First

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Background

After the adoption of the Employment First policy in Oregon in 2010, state administrators identified the critical role of case managers for people on the support services waiver, and acknowledged the need for their buy-in and investment in the Employment First agenda. The case managers' knowledge of the individuals they serve, the conversations they have with individuals and their families, and their knowledge of the community are critical to each individual's success in finding employment, as well as to the forward movement of the Employment First initiative.

At that time, the state agency serving individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities IDD conducted a statewide survey of case managers to determine the challenges to finding community employment for their customers, and to learn more about their training needs.

Implementation

Survey findings were the basis for developing the Keys to Case Managers initiative, a full-day training. Once the training was developed, trainers toured the state. While these trainings were not attended by each and every case manager in Oregon, there were roughly 250–300 attendees representing all regions of the state.

The Keys to Case Managers training included a review of case managers' roles and core functions, employment-related conversational talking points, a planning guide for employment, and a graphic

called Pathway to Employment that helps individuals visualize their current employment status as well as goals. The emphasis was on the provision of tangible and practical resources for case managers to support effective job development.

Training content was complemented with other in-person opportunities to build relationships, not only among case managers, but also in the larger stakeholder community. These efforts included a series of forums, an annual summit, and the establishment of local Employment First teams. This allowed for coalition-building at several different levels within the state.

Forums brought a range of people together (including case managers) to discuss the new Employment First policy and how it applies to service delivery. The year's activities began with a summit and culminated in another summit. At these events, participants reviewed what had happened over the year, and what could happen over the next year.

Local EF teams consisting of IDD case managers, school personnel, and vocational rehabilitation counselors were developed at the local level following this summit. These teams now bring local stakeholders together to discuss challenges and strategies for finding community employment.

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Impact

While the Keys to Case Managers trainings addressed technical capacity building, the other efforts facilitated the alignment of philosophical beliefs, as well as relationship-building throughout the state. The combined efforts showed success in increasing community employment from 21% in 2010 to 24% in 2012. Oregonians also believe this increase was also due to the establishment of the clear goal of raising integrated employment by 5%.

The largest impact as a result of this initiative appears to be relationships formed between team members, which sustain the Employment First efforts. These relationships will add to the initiative's viability despite any future changes in the economy or other unpredictable factors that may arise.

Highlights

- » IDD agency administrators realized the importance of case manager investment and engagement in the EF process, and designed training to increase their skills in this area.
- » The Keys to Case Managers content emphasized concrete, practical resources that gave staff the tools for effective job development.
- » While the Keys to Case Managers training increased the technical capacity of case managers, the in-person coalition-building developed working relationships between key stakeholders, further increasing their investment and engagement in the Employment First effort.

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