

Transition

Best Practice Update

Supports for Transition Community Staff Training Project

Community Staff Training Project Overview

For over twenty years, North Dakota has provided staff training through the cooperative efforts of the North Dakota Department of Human Services (NDDHS), the North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD) at Minot State University (MSU), and community agencies serving persons with developmental disabilities (DD). All of North Dakota's full-time direct support and professional staff employed by community-based DD provider agencies are required to demonstrate knowledge and skills learned through training modules and a series of field-based practica. Service providers employ state-certified regional trainers to teach these modules. MSU faculty offer regional workshops, audio-conferences, and statewide conferences specific to interests of community-based staff. Quarterly meetings are held with the agency trainers for training and curriculum development.

Key program elements include cooperation among NDDHS, NDCPD, and service providers; comprehensive, flexible training materials; a statewide system of individual training records; comprehensive resource lending library; state standards for staff training; a career training sequence leading to academic degrees (AS, BS, & MS); and program consistency across North Dakota. Partners in the training program collaboratively develop and revise training curricula to keep the training program up-to-date. DHS provides funding for salaries of agency trainers, training time for direct support staff, and MSU's materials development and training activities.

Educator's Role in the Transition to Community Services

Teachers can fulfill a crucial role in assisting students with DD and their families to navigate the transition to the community-based service system. While exiting high school will mean a change in where youth spend their daytime hours, the transition to community-based programs also includes a shift in philosophy, responsibilities for decision-making, and funding sources.

Changes students and families must consider include:

Work/career opportunities. Has the student had the opportunity to explore a variety of work experiences during transition? The range of career development options for students with disabilities can be as broad as it is for every high school graduate – wage employment, self-employment, or training and education programs leading to employment. Those who leave school with a job and work experience are more likely to experience meaningful employment outcomes. Challenges for educators include assisting families to understand the implications of various employment options on benefits and the various systems of community-based support networks for employment.

Living arrangements. Will the student continue to live at home after transition, or is he or she interested in living in an apartment? Will the student want to share expenses and household chores with a roommate? Is a group living situation a better plan for this student? Has the student been linked up with DD case management for referral purposes?

Person-centered planning, self-determination, guardianship, and choice. Is the family prepared for the shift to person-centered service delivery? Has the student had the opportunity to make decisions throughout transition? Will the student be the person responsible for decision-making after transition? Will a family member apply for guardianship? Is the family aware that its control of the student's life will change drastically after transition even if they obtain guardianship? Adult service providers support the relationship and community participation choices of the service recipient rather than the family. This can be very threatening to families who are accustomed to signing permission slips for field trips, screening communications, providing transportation, and accompanying their son or daughter on all medical appointments.

Getting Connected

Tom Newberger, C.E.O., Red River Human Services Foundation and president of the North Dakota Association of Community Facilities, recommends:

...the best thing parents can do is to get their child involved with DD Case Management as early as possible. Many times the "system" doesn't know who is transitioning from education to adult services.... this places a burden on everyone and can slow down access to services. If the "system" knows what's coming down the pike, then we can adequately plan and avoid emergencies. For example, if we know with certainty that six (group) homes need to be built and we have a year or two for planning, we can accommodate the need. If we have only a few months of planning, then we can't help.

Emily K. Hilgers, Region 5 Case Manager for students with DD as they transition to adult services, suggested:

One of the things that is difficult at this time is the waiting period for housing assistance. Many of our adult options would require folks to have some assistance paying for housing....waiting lists have reached two years, so if families would apply for housing in time for that to be in effect when folks complete the school year in which they turn 21 years of age, they would be better prepared to “launch” into community settings. Also, the DD Division now has a mandate for folks to be on MA (Medical Assistance) in order to be screened into adult services, so if the MA is in place, this helps also. Some people who are working will qualify for [Workers with Disability Coverage] which requires a greatly reduced cost sharing if that person might have a recipient liability under straight MA., so that might be a cost savings for folks.

It is also helpful if schools/teachers are willing to arrange for tours of adult supports when folks reach about 18 years of age, so that they know what they are working toward. A re-touring of those settings the last year of school helps get referral packets out to agencies, as some of the waiting lists for services in communities like Fargo have delayed some folks from moving into adult services. Some people may even wish to have referral packets sent the year before graduation. If folks can get some work experience, job shadowing, etc. completed so that they have some understanding of the kind of work they would like to do after graduation that is pretty terrific. The functional curriculum on the DPI website has some nice information on it. It would give people a chance to identify skills they think they might need that last year of school.encouraging teachers to connect to this site would be helpful for transition students. Maybe the parents would also be interested in the web-site capabilities.

NDCPD Resources for Educators and Families

Through the ongoing Community Staff Training contract with the Department of Human Services, NDCPD has developed a resource library of over 250 videos on topics related to community based supports of people with DD. The library can be accessed by teachers and family members within North Dakota through the center’s website @ http://165.234.216.143/webapps/library/video_cassette_library_request.asp The web-based request form makes it possible for individuals to borrow any of the titles for up to two-weeks. Borrowers who are not service providers are asked to pay the mailing costs. The video library includes titles on employment, person-centered planning, and inclusive supported living arrangements.

The project's library also includes many resource manuals, books, and curricula on transition, employment, benefits-planning, self-determination, sexuality, advocacy, behavior intervention, wellness, and functional skills training. While these reference materials are not listed online, a list may be obtained from Mary Mercer (800-233-1737). Training manuals from the Community Staff Training Curriculum can also help families understand how community services support individuals with disabilities. The order form for these materials can be accessed at: <http://165.234.216.166/proj/cstp/order.pdf>.

NDCPD sponsors a variety of workshops and conference each year that focus on the education and support needs of individuals with DD in North Dakota. Several of these conferences offer stipends to assist individuals with DD and family members with registration fees and travel expenses. Each year the North Dakota Association of Community Facilities includes a track devoted to transition issues such as employment, housing, and inclusive community supports. This year the event will be in Fargo on April 27-29, 2005. Both educators and families may be kept informed of upcoming NDCPD training opportunities by requesting to be added to the mailing lists for these events or by watching the NDCPD Training Events website @ <http://165.234.216.166/events/index.htm>

NDCPD faculty also teach an online course called *[SPED 101: Introduction to Developmental Disabilities Services](#)* each semester through MSU online. The three-credit undergraduate course is a survey of the various types of DD, the philosophy of community-based service delivery, person-centered planning, and legal and ethical considerations for persons with DD. Parents, paraprofessionals, and educators have found the course a helpful introduction to community-based services.

Several of NDCPD's staff have experience working in the state's community programs and educational settings. Staff members, who are also family members or guardians of individuals with DD, can provide technical assistance based on their personal and professional experience. For more information, contact the following NDCPD staff at (800)233-1737.

- Mary Mercer, Community Staff Training Project Director
- Cathy Haarstad, Family Support Project Director
- Amy Armstrong, Medicaid Infrastructure Consumer Liaison
- Brent Askvig, NDCPD Associate Director
- Dawn Olson, Youth Leadership Conference Director
- Alison Dollar, Transition and Resident Teacher Project Director