

"JUST DO IT"
Creating an Environment that Enables Self-Directed Services
Project Summary

A Collaborative Self-Determination Project
Vermont Division of Developmental Services
Department of Developmental and Mental Health Services
Supported by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, Vermont has been at the forefront of developing individually-based services. We have closed the only institution for people with developmental disabilities; eliminated all but two six-bed ICF/MRs; created a system-wide crisis intervention network; and expanded self-directed respite supports to give families flexibility and choice in how they use funding. In the past two years, we have developed an innovative framework for delivering services so consumers can be directly involved in deciding what supports they receive, when and where they will receive them, and from whom.

The proposed project is statewide in scope and is designed to be fully implemented over the course of three years. It hinges on a system of service delivery for Vermonters with developmental disabilities that assures consumer choice and control while utilizing managed care principles to control the escalating cost of services. While the basic plan for system redesign in Vermont is in the final stages of completion, grant activities will focus on implementation of key components of self-directed services. To be effective, objectives need to be specific, yet interdependent, focusing on a number of related areas that work actively together to accomplish the overall goals of the project.

The *"Just Do It"* project targets resources and activities of the restructuring plan that are the most critical to the success of the overall effort, the achievement of real consumer choice and control. This will be accomplished in a number of ways. The project will provide direct support and training to people with disabilities, family members, advocates, service providers and state staff on implementing individually controlled service budgets; making and supporting informed choices; establishing different methods for consumers to direct their own supports; and resolving the myriad of technical, payment, liability, employment, funding and support issues that appear to stand in the way of consumers becoming self-determined. In order to uniformly implement our statewide plan, the project will provide specific assistance through:

Creating supports for consumer empowerment and advocacy;

Supporting self-determination initiatives within the system restructuring activities;

Establishing a consumer directed network;

Increasing alternative service options;

Resolving technical issues;

Providing technical assistance and training; and

Performing a project evaluation.

How will success be determined? Achievement of these project objectives will involve participation of all consumers, service providers, advocacy groups, and relevant state departments in a mutual problem-solving process that will evolve over time. This grant focuses on making it possible for people to choose and control their own services. The following will be accomplished at the end of three years as a result of the *"Just Do It"* project:

A system will be in place that provides the opportunity for consumers and families to personally direct the supports they receive.

More consumers and families will be receiving services that are self-directed.

More consumers will own or rent their own homes.

More consumers will receive support from volunteer Citizen Advisors.

Support teams will exist in each region of the state comprised of Peer Trainers, Peer Counselors, and representatives from service providers and advocacy groups.

Clear, user-friendly guidelines will exist that consumers, families and providers can use to negotiate federal wage and hour and tax laws.

Every agency will have consumer- and family-run programs.

Information relevant to self-directed services will be available in a simple-to-use format.

A comprehensive list of available resources that relate to supporting self-directed services will be available to consumers, families and providers.

BACKGROUND

Over the past ten years, Vermont's service delivery system has actively developed and implemented opportunities for people with developmental disabilities that shift decision-making power and control from highly centralized programs and facilities to local communities. Current self-determination activities must be viewed within the context of the overall system change that has been taking place in Vermont since the focus has changed from supporting programs and facilities to supporting people. A short chronological synopsis of this change includes:

Flexible funding

Act 248

System unification

Vermont Crisis Intervention Network

Statewide training initiative

Person centered planning

Respite & flexible family funding

Brandon Training School closure

Vermont Community Services Coalition

Restructuring quality assurance mechanisms

Vermont Peer Support Network

Self-determination initiative

Developmental Disabilities Act

Systems restructuring

In August 1995, Vermont began a process of redesigning the developmental disabilities service delivery system to improve the quality of services; enable consumers to control the nature, scope and duration of the services they receive; and control costs. The redesigned system will involve consumers and family members in all aspects of service delivery and support their capacity to determine and control the relationship they want to have with the organization or individuals who provide them with state and federally funded support. This proposal is designed to implement the planned systems

change activities by providing the resources necessary to support the capacity of consumers and their families to take charge of their lives.

A basic tenet of this plan is that true cost effectiveness is something that has to be pursued at both the consumer and agency levels. While agencies can achieve savings through the effective application of group purchasing, processing and management strategies, consumers can and will select and arrange their services in a manner that is cost effective if given the support and flexibility to do so. The systems change plan represents a strategy for balancing three distinct factors: 1) cost savings, 2) consumer choice, and 3) successful accomplishment of individual and system outcomes (quality services).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The plan actively supports the efforts of consumers to control the course and direction of the supports they receive. Designated agencies will be responsible for working with individuals eligible for services to complete an annual assessment and budget. Consumers will be given a choice of services, who and how those services will be provided, and receive the assistance they need to define the role the service system will play in their lives. Included is the choice of the degree of control they have over these services. The plan is designed to support choice and involvement at any and all levels regardless of intensity of service. This flexible and individually tailored support is at the crux of consumer directed services.

Along with the increase in consumer control comes an increase in responsibilities. The system restructuring plan highlights the following expectations for consumers:

- 1) Active participation in planning and arranging for services and supports;
- 2) Register sources of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with services and supports;
- 3) File grievances and complaints through proper avenues;
- 4) Learn and exercise their rights and obligations as consumers;
- 5) Share relevant information;
- 6) Make informed choices;
- 7) Take advantage of opportunities to serve on policy boards; and
- 8) Complete information on progress toward outcomes and quality of service received.

An important aspect of the "*Just Do It*" project is to provide support and meaningful information to consumers and their families so they can be successful in taking on these new responsibilities.

The effectiveness of this self-determination project will hinge to a significant extent on the ability of the support system to help consumers take deliberate control over the treatment and allocation decisions that affect their lives. The plan for system redesign is structured to facilitate informed individual decision-making and is based on a support planning process that is designed around the consumer's perspective. Placing consumers in direct control over the services they receive, through the use of individually controlled service budgets, requires a level of technical expertise and flexibility on the part of consumers, family members, guardians and service providers that is unprecedented.

The proposed project will provide the means for these changes to be implemented through: establishing a consumer directed network; providing technical assistance and training; creating supports for consumer empowerment and advocacy; increasing alternative service options; supporting self-determination initiatives within the system restructuring activities; resolving technical issues; and performing a project evaluation.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES & ACTIVITIES

The project objectives present a multi-leveled approach to systems change and are based on a continually evolving learning process. It is the responsibility of the project staff ; the Project Coordinator, Training Coordinator, and the Consumer, Family and Provider Facilitators; to coordinate, facilitate and/or perform the following objectives and activities:

Objective 1 Create an environment of support for people with disabilities to determine the nature, duration and extent of services. Provide training, technical assistance and support to people with disabilities to be self-determining through the development of regional resources.

Activities:

Develop four regional facilitation teams consisting each of a consumer facilitator, a family facilitator and a provider facilitator. Facilitation teams will respond to referrals from individuals, families or agencies for training, technical assistance and support as issues concerning self determination and self-directed services arise.

Provide operating budgets to a consumer advocacy group (e.g., Vermont Peer Support Network), a parent advocacy group (e.g., Vermont ARC), and a provider group (e.g., The Vermont Council) for support of the facilitators and to enable them to pursue relevant activities that promote the development and realization of consumer directed services.

The regional facilitation teams will work with the Vermont Peer Support Network, the Training Task Force, the UAP at the University of Vermont, and other consumer and family advocacy groups and community members to recruit, train, support, and develop a method to access Citizen Advisors, Peer Trainers and Peer Counselors.

Objective 2 Promote self-determination initiatives within system restructuring activities.

Activities:

Self-advocates and project staff will advise and work with DDS on system redesign implementation activities that interrelate with self-determination initiatives.

Self-advocates and project staff advise and work with DDS to reevaluate and modify statewide policy, as well as advocate for changes in state and federal legislation that serve as barriers to self-determination to better support consumer directed services.

Objective 3 Establish the Self-Directed Services Network. Establish a statewide support network of stakeholders that will meet on a regular basis to share information (successes, failures, creative ideas, resources, etc.) among themselves and others, and develop local resources to enhance consumer and family directed services.

Activities:

Develop an agreement with each designated agency and service provider; each consumer, parent and advocacy group; and DDS, to work collaboratively toward the goals of the project and to participate, or designate someone to participate, in a statewide Self-Directed Services Network.

Establish and facilitate regular Network meetings to share information and resources with Network members.

Organize a representative group of the Network, a majority of whom are consumers and families, as the Project Advisory Board. Obtain regular input from the Network on the use of project resources and the direction of project activities.

Disseminate information about self-directed services and self-determination through the Network and to stakeholders throughout the state. Develop an effective process of communicating general information about self-determination and self-directed service options that can exist for consumers and families, as well as necessary information and innovative ideas for making it happen.

Work with the Network and other relevant individuals and organizations to foster local problem-solving capacity. Develop regional resources/support teams made up of Network members and others who will consult and collaborate to help in the provision and procurement of self-directed services.

Work with DDS, designated agencies and the Network to convene local focus groups to share and receive relevant information and feedback concerning services for people with developmental disabilities in general, and self-directed services in particular.

Establish formal relationships with other organizational groups, including the Developmental Services Advisory Board, Vermont Peer Support Network, Developmental Services Directors, Vermont Council of Community Mental Health Services, Disability Law Project, etc., to support responsiveness by the service system to the needs of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Objective 4 Facilitate the development of alternative support options. Develop alternative support options for consumers that facilitate consumer and family choice and control. Develop the capacity of service providers to support self-directed services.

Activities:

Explore a variety of alternative support options, approaches and service structures that enable people with developmental disabilities and families to control their own services and that center on the needs of individuals. Find creative ways to tailor the development of supports around an individual's unique circumstances to build local capacity.

Provide direct technical support and assistance to service providers to aid their implementation of consumer directed services.

Provide support to assist consumers and families to develop and initiate programs. Work with consumers, families and providers who are interested in pursuing alternative support options.

Work with consumers to facilitate people with disabilities taking control of their living space (e.g., renting or owning their own home) as a primary step in developing real consumer control.

Objective 5 Identify and resolve technical issues. Develop the capacity to identify and resolve technical, structural, administrative and regulatory issues that block the implementation of consumer directed and managed services.

Activities:

Secure consultation and support to identify and evaluate the impact of state and federal regulatory policies regarding such things as independent contractors, employment, liability, tax, labor and finance on the ability of people with disabilities to control their services. Network with existing resources.

Provide direct technical support to service providers and consumers to resolve technical problems that stand in the way of program implementation.

Establish a common practice for addressing technical issues statewide. Facilitate an identification and assessment of associated risks and a collective understanding by service providers, consumers and family members.

Objective 6 Build statewide capacity for training and technical assistance. Develop and implement flexible training and technical assistance capacity to educate consumers, families, guardians, agencies, service providers, contracted workers, state staff and community members on a variety of aspects of consumer directed and controlled services.

Activities:

Contract with the UAP at the University of Vermont to provide part time staff to administer training and consultation allocations. Work with the DDS Training Task Force, the UAP, and the Network to create a training plan and implementation strategy; cultivate a different conceptualization of training within an evolving framework; develop creative and flexible provision and arrangement of training and technical assistance at all levels.

Coordinate with the UAP, Training Task Force and the Self-Directed Services Network to build a database of training, consultation and technical resources.

Evaluate the effectiveness of training and consultation through the use of post-training evaluations and follow-up surveys/interviews. Amend training as appropriate, according to evaluation results.

Objective 7 Perform a project evaluation. Develop a project evaluation methodology incorporating qualitative and quantitative measures and an independent review of the project.

Activities:

Contract with an external group, such as the Center on Human Policy at Syracuse University, to provide an independent project evaluation.

Work with DDS to develop an ongoing process of review that includes consumers, families, agencies, service providers, advocates and state staff that focuses on how well the project facilitates the implementation of a system of individually controlled service budgets within the broader systems change activities being accomplished in Vermont.