

Summary Notes from CoP 6.29.21

Jeanine Zlockie started the presentation by discussing the top 10 critical pieces in overcoming barriers to employment. They were developed through years of research with a wide array of expertise to have a real impact on employment.

Element 1 - Clear and consistent goals: Define what your agency wants to do better at and develop goals and timeframes to assess progress.

- Goals should be flexible, compelling, easy to understand, hairy and audacious, and reflect the mission of your agency.

Element 2 - An agency culture that supports inclusion: Values supporting people in the community. Create a culture that values positive thinking, creativity, innovation and continuous quality improvement.

- We can get our heels dug in and plug away daily. Take a step back and examine your agency culture. Does it really lead to inclusion, innovation and is a safe place for all people to contribute ideas? Sometimes you need to set aside time to have these kinds of conversations with leadership. What does continuous quality look like? What does regular training and support look like? Then align everything in the environment with inclusion and employment. Asked the group to consider what their values are. Reiterated that value, mission, and goals are areas you should start thinking about.

Element 3 - Active, person centered job placement: Values supporting people in the community. Create a culture that values positive thinking, creativity, innovation and continuous quality improvement.

- Develop the value of supporting people in their community. Create an environment where everyone can jump in with your ideas and never feel pressured so they can find jobs one person at a time.

Element 4 - Strong Internal and External Communication Plan: Communicate clear, authentic expectations to a range of people. This will provide assurance, avoid confusion and tackle resistance head on.

- Communicate, communicate, communicate, overly communicate, and communicate clearly. Be authentic and a good listener. Be open to all people you support. We offer support to a wide range of people, not just a small cohort of individuals with higher skill levels interested in work. As an agency, be transparent, exhibit and communicate simple and visible practices. Nobody wants to guess. Provide assurances that you are 'singing from the same hymnal'. Tackle resistance head on and communicate about change. Make clear and authentic decisions. Be transparent. You don't need to have an answer to everything. One of the purposes of this group is to talk about it and push through it. This is what we want to do today. This is a space you can let your hair down and talk about what you are struggling with and what you have been trying.

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Element 5 - Reallocated and Restructured Resources: How you spend your money, how your staff spend their time. Do your material, fiscal and human resources align with your mission?

- Resources are always part of the conversation, but not the only part. Money should not derail your creativity. We want highly regarded, motivated and well paid Direct Support Professionals (DSP) that want to invest in this work. How are you spending money? How are staff spending their time? What are the outcomes from how money is spent and staff spend their time? Does this and HR discussions align with the mission of your agency? Change job descriptions and how you do job development to meet your agency's priorities.

Element 6 - Ongoing Professional Development of Staff: An engaged and educated workforce is the key to high quality employment services. Invest in employees at all levels.

- We've all been in your shoes. We are coming from a place of having been there once, but we don't understand exactly what you are experiencing right now in regards to staffing concerns. Invest in employees in a way that helps them to contribute their ideas and align with your mission.

Jean Winsor continued the presentation on the 10 elements.

Element 7 - Customer Focus and Engagement: Make strong and vital connections with both individuals/families and businesses. It is a dual customer model.

- Our customers are the people we serve. We also have businesses that we engage with in community life engagement that we are customers of, or we support their employees with disabilities. Strong relationships that I am connected to helped me through COVID-19. I could see their smiling eyes above their masks, interacting with neighbors from a distance, or talking to teachers at virtual school are how I addressed the pandemic barriers. How we use our relationships to focus on those elements and our customers is important.

Element 8 - Performance Measurement, Quality Assurance and Program Oversight: Need a clear framework for implementing and measuring strategies over time. Data based decision making is key.

- I love data. What gets measured gets done. Step back and ask are we measuring the right thing? Are the things we are counting on giving us what we need to make decisions to move forward? These elements are really interconnected. Resource allocation is challenging if we don't have the right data to make a choice in the larger plan. We will keep coming back to data to address barriers notated in the surveys of Phase 1 of the Community Inclusion project throughout the CoP.

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Element 9 - Multiple and Diverse Community Partnerships:

Engaging with organizations and the state systems to create buy on for change. Consider school districts, VR, faith based organizations, and transportation resources.

- Make an intentional effort and focus on building relationships to create buy-in to reduce barriers to employment. It is important to collaborate with others like schools, transportation, local chambers of commerce, state apprenticeship programs, and the business community. Think about how we relate to those we are already connected with. Who else do we need to bring in to reduce these barriers? We will bring some examples from other states to share.

Element 10 - A Holistic Approach: Consider the whole person with wrap around supports. Break down silos in your agency and create shared responsibility for employment.

- Look at improving employment outcomes from a holistic approach. No one part of us is just what we do for one hour of our day. Nobody is defined by one hour of their day. There are 23 other hours that things are going on for people. How do we think about the whole person to break down silos within individual agencies, such as between residential, day, and employment services? Create a shared responsibility for employment across all people that touch a person's life. How can we let everyone know the person's interest in employment to support them in that goal?

Jean Winsor shifted the presentation on to the 4 Guideposts of Community Life Engagement.

How can providers break down barriers? DSPD values employment and community inclusion. Many of these concepts are universal. There are no separate employment and community buckets for things. When we are engaged in our community we expand opportunities for employment and employment can provide community connections. There is no wrong starting point.

Guidepost 1 - Individualize supports for each person.

- How can we fully support and wrap support around people so they are their own autonomous person in the community with their own relationships? Find what those strategies are for each person. Connection is developed through individualizing or person-centered support for each person. Don't get caught up in the terminology.

Guidepost 2 - Promote community membership and contribution.

- How do we think about each person, one at a time, to be involved in their community? And to contribute back. Max at Green Mountain Self-Advocates says people with disabilities want to be givers in their community. They want to be seen as not just there, but adding to the vibrancy of the community.

Guidepost 3 - Use human and social capital to decrease dependence on paid supports.

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- How do we better use natural supports? That is scary. Can we rely on people who aren't accountable or paid to look out for the best interest of the folks we work with? How do we help people themselves be more independent? Through COVID-19 families have more experience using different methods and modes to allow independence and increase social capital. Often paid support was challenging to access through the health emergency.

Guidepost 4 - Ensure that supports are outcome oriented and regularly monitored.

- How do we know if the solutions are working? Who is responsible? How do we monitor outcomes respectfully?

Keep coming back to one person at a time. It is really overwhelming. It is easy to be over anxious because change is the hardest thing any person is asked to do. At New Years we make resolutions and it is hard to make it a repetitive habit in your life. This is true whether it is ourselves, a colleague or a person you serve. It is one person at a time, one thing at a time.

The big hairy audacious goal is prevalent in leadership. How do we take a strategic plan, or the words on the page, and over these several calls make inroads or pieces that are different in your agency or your lives?

Discussion questions:

- When you think about the people you serve, what makes you the most excited about their future within their community?
- When you think about your organization or others in the state, what makes you the most anxious about change?
- Based on the 10 elements SELN presented, what are your priorities for discussion in the next CoP meeting?