

Summary Notes from CoP 8.31.21

Jean Winsor (SELN) Introduction of herself and the discussion structure for the day.

Jeanine Zlockie (SELN) Introduction of herself.

Introductions of the group.

Jean Winsor - Review of June and July meetings. Angie set the tone for what has been happening at DSPD and the Vision for these meetings. There are mutual goals between DSPD and providers in community inclusion. This came out in the June meeting through a discussion of organizational values. They demonstrated dedication to people with disabilities to have greater access to the community, working, and the things people want to be involved in. Commitment to that is exciting. Community life engagement is just life. What came out is that while both DSPD and the providers think this is important there is a disconnect on how to get there. This is due to the acute challenges providers are now facing. The daily barriers to serving people have doubled lately. You are triaging every day is the message Jeanine and I got. At our debrief we talked about how common that is in all states we talk to. Falling back on the values you have expressed is important.

Jeanine - From my perspective we heard a lot about the workforce crisis. We definitely acknowledge that. It has been in crisis for decades, and we know it has been exacerbated by the pandemic and decimated our workforce. This comes at a time of escalated demand for services and we still have the Settings Rule and understand that to do this right, you have to take a look at your rate structure that supports the service system. We hear the same sentiment across the country. This is a new opportunity. Virtual supports have risen and technology is changing and rising up. It will eventually have a direct effect on Direct Support Professionals (DSPs). We will always need DSPs and technology will hopefully help them. We acknowledge the challenges and embrace the new opportunities. We will never see this type of investment in Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) as the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) is providing now.

Jean - In June we talked about the 10 elements of high performing providers. These were based on research of providers that made changes to decrease facility-based and increase community inclusion. In our recap we wondered if that is where to focus our energy with this group. From your perspective, is that the direction to go that everyone can benefit from? We want you to have a tangible thing you can take away and make movement from. We don't want to end with having a few meetings and we don't have a tangible change from it. There is no wrong answer or need to defend an answer. Just get things out on the table. Where do you want this group to go and how can we support you? Some may have been in similar groups before, but the world has changed. What do you want to get out on the table?

Provider - Since the first meeting talking about barriers, a pretty significant one is that DSPD services seem to 'use it or lose it'. Someone on a job needs less support over time and then they lose their job and have very few hours to find a new job. Then they have to work with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and ask for funding from DSPD and it takes a long time. Can there be a small reserve for such a situation? Sometimes more services are provided than needed to not lose them and it works against the purpose.

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Sometimes we have people not motivated to find a job, they were told they need to. Why not start with those that really want to work?

Jean - Those are important. Many states change their process to be able to make changes more rapidly to make sense of the services someone needs. You identified that 1/3 of people not working want a job within your agency. How do you narrow down and help folks in the moment that are ready and move quickly so they don't lose motivation or drag on? They want a job and start services and then a blobby space before they actually work on that.

Provider - Similar situation in my agency. We are using VR and Supported Work Independence (SWI) funding. We went to VR then returned to SWI and it was not available. Funding should be set up and orchestrated to support the person. The person is penalized and not getting support.

Jeanine - That raises a few questions. When you went back after a lost job, funding was not able to be easily returned. Maintenance of the budget is important, are fading strategies in place? I am trying to understand the process.

Support Coordinator - There are two reasons for budget reductions: budget reviews for utilization and need. When it was only reduced for a need, I found that to regain Supported Employment Independent services (SEI) is pretty easy. With going through VR and appropriate documentation it is easy since employment is a push of DSPD. The big thing is when going through the VR process, include your support coordinator so a request can be done close to the end of VR services for a smooth transition. Make sure you are watching your billing and if there are changes you should have a notice. If you don't agree with a change, talk to the support coordinator and address it with DSPD if needed.

Provider - How long on average has it taken you from the person losing a job to getting that funding back in place?

Support Coordinator - There is a lag and we get creative. We can adjust some service codes, but employment is not one of those. Call your support coordinator and ask what they need. It depends on how busy the Request for Services (RFS) committee at DSPD is; the end of the month is busier. Usually an SEI request takes a couple of hours to prepare and submit to the committee. It just depends on the time of the year. Committee is busier at the end of the fiscal year and deals with emergency stuff. Best time for requests is September or November. At that point they have their new budget and are not dealing with the end of the fiscal year. Visit with your support coordinator. They may be new and not understand the system as well so then talk to their supervisor.

Jeanine - How often is there simultaneous training on the same topic for providers and support coordinators? Many states keep them separate. Do you typically do separate events or opportunities for information between the groups?

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Bryn - I'm happy to iron out process steps. They are being shared in multiple meetings separately for support coordinators, people and their families in services, and providers. We are meeting soon with all groups to share the same information and share the same questions and state responses so we can work through solutions together.

Jean - Understanding role and responsibilities in this process is critical. We don't want people to lose their job because they had a bad week and need more support. There needs to be a way for that to happen seamlessly and people to know their roles to support the process.

Bryn - We can help address any of the steps that are making things harder on an individual case.

Jean - Like the workflow for employers and that may be needed in other areas.

Amy - Maybe helpful to have a standing meeting with support coordinators and providers together

Provider - That is a really good idea because one group may have questions the other group did not think about.

Jean - How often are there conversations that VR counselors and others can have? Has that come up or would the group here find it beneficial to address?

Bryn - We collaborated with VR on the Employment Services Workflow and DSPD Employment Pathway Tool to discuss where VR counselor resources can be accessed. Two joint projects where they are made more aware of the crossover between our services. We made a few edits to talk about what long term services from DSPD providers look like. We realized from listening to you that we need more support there. Hopefully that is helpful as an initial answer.

Jeanine - I am happy we have case managers online. You are so critical in the process for employment. You support the person and are the eyes and ears of the state. Thinking about your work and starting a person on their path to employment then passing information along to the provider to help the person explore interests, do you have feedback or barriers that you want to discuss? It is helpful to talk through roles together because it usually overlaps on where you have a role as well.

Support Coordinator- I discuss employment frequently on annual reviews, visits and calls. I help them to overcome barriers if they can work, help families realize they can work and find and maintain employment. I helped someone with behaviors get hired and then they were fired in a few days due to behaviors. After that happened twice the family is not interested in trying again, they would need staff all the time they are working. I would advocate for that, but families are not at all interested. Most are not interested. A hurdle to get into day service is that I have to visit VR. Families get upset with this big shift. I want to promote employment, but it's an extra step if they are not interested. It is challenging to get a person to VR, but they need that appointment documented. It is a hard situation. Not everyone wants to, can or will work. Have to put people in that lens even though they don't want to.

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Jeanie - I was a support coordinator, I have run into family opposition too. I hear you. I have learned to be a proponent of people having informed choice. It is a buzz word so, viable options to make a decision. I had people who did want to think about employment. Try to look at other outlets or services or experience to help them make that decision. It is hard. If I sort of only know one thing, not other options, but I like this one thing, it is hard to open other options. What would you recommend or tools to help people have different experiences that might change their mind?

Provider - Trying to say to people, particularly older adults that haven't thought about asking if you want a job, what does that mean to them? It is important to see pictures or go out and see what work is. They may just think of their dad who is an accountant and don't want to do that. If someone is strongly not interested maybe there is something to do so they don't feel we are forcing them.

Jean - That is a fine line. Some people may not have the same formative experiences as others and need more help to understand how they can benefit from some of the experiences. Or to understand autonomy and goals they have set for themselves. Balancing in the moment is a skill set and not something you can just be trained on. It takes time to be competent. It doesn't mean you will change people's minds. The support coordinator caught my attention. A person had two experiences where they got fired and did not want to do it anymore. Another piece we are trying to bring along in the system is being fired from a job or being asked to apply again next time. It takes trial and error to figure things out. That formative piece that people have missed out on can make things more challenging. Do you feel you have the physical materials you need to gain these skills and share what experiences they could have and stories of others who failed before succeeding?

Support Coordinator - Absolutely. We have some that work and are successful. We have had people that work with behavior needs and been in jail. They have done fantastic work and we have been able to remove most supports and shift supports back in when needed. I have talked to their mom to brainstorm solutions. The family is done with all the support and looking for a place to move. Employment is just one support and sometimes the base needs are not yet met. Maybe after stabilization in housing and medication I absolutely plan to help them find a job. In the current situation it is not making sense to get a job. If a person is experiencing abuse or drug use, a job may not be a good support until that first need is met. It's hard when everything needs to focus on employment and we want to help the person live their life. It feels like it is 75% of what is done and should be 25%. I am constantly justifying why the person is not working when I want to stabilize them and then look at employment.

Jean - Are there resources and experience you have developed, not universally available in Utah?

Bryn - DSPD has a place to submit success stories around employment, but also in other areas such as advocacy, PCSP, etc. We hope to have those hands on examples to share.

Jean - States have taken stories and developed material to continue to develop awareness and momentum. A guidebook of stories of ups and downs and sideways and goals of the system for people

to have a good and meaningful life. One state developed such a guidebook to move around their state and host conversations to bring people together on a local level and use that to facilitate change in their community and state.

Provider - I want to go back to the last question. There are a handful of providers who went through transformation, now it comes down to stability. Small providers don't have many resources and are grasping for straws. The struggle now is stability. Some are afraid to find people jobs because we will lose job coaches to higher paying jobs. We can't keep them around. Our turnover is 80% as we increase wages and do what we can, but other places keep paying more and more. Taco Bell paying \$15 to \$17 an hour. As much as I talk about other things, at the end of the day, I am worried we won't have employees. I see us there now. Staff quit at an astronomical rate. Overall wage is \$12/hr and we can't keep employees. We are shrinking in our employee numbers. People's individual services and person-centered ideals are not able to be met because we do not have employees.

Jean - Thank you for sharing. There is a push and pull of staffing to meet person-centred needs. We heard that in the last two sessions. That struggle doesn't reflect organization goals. There is pain and acknowledgement of that. Day services are all encompassing and in the past there were service definitions that would separate to be hourly or fee for service, is that something we would want to put on the table as part of an ongoing conversion? Most states have broken out day services into 15 minute units that can be billed in hourly chunks to be really focused. They have also broken out the structure to be community and facility-based and pre-vocational. The intent is that pre-vocational services led people to open a case with VR to support people in that process of informed choice. All of those things are trying to happen in Utah.

Provider - The idea behind Employment Preparation Services (EPR) is going to provide most of that the way I see it. That is where vocational training is a part of it. There will be flexibility between what day supports and EPR is and someone can work simultaneously. There is fear with the extra data and monitoring for audits to verify what services were provided when. The other component is transportation. Employment is more community-based with no additional transportation codes to break that cost out. Biggest issue is the hypothetical if there are staff to provide the service.

Jeanine - Intentional shifting of funding towards community based services has been done in other states. Ohio has changed to pull funding towards the state rather than a county focus. As we look at states with those types of changes, they have also separated non-medical transportation codes and not embedded that in all codes. They have allowed providers to increase wages as well as to meet employment goals and objectives in the community.

Provider - Additional codes will muddy the water for staff. EPR did separate out days for those pursuing vocational training. But not everyone wants to or is capable of working; they want to go to day services to see their friends. The more similar we can keep that the better.

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Support Coordinator- I have a person with three service codes that are difficult to track and need additional funds yearly as they don't use them exactly as met. We used to put an employment goal in day services and now providers spend a lot of time managing and ensuring correct billing. I worry about more service codes because it causes misbilling.

Jean - Another thing we see is that states that do that keep it simple and get rid of service codes that aren't useful. I don't know if that happened with the work with ODEP and vision quest. Get rid of the stuff that clogs up the system. I am really excited by the conversation today. It has given us a lot to chew on in terms of next steps and what you want to address. One of the things we might want to do is summarize what you have said and send it back with key action steps then let us know in the next week on what the group can have a consensus on or what to move forward on. Some tangible pieces that were shared to help move things forward.

Jeanine - We identified workflow issues and coupled that with looking at service codes as an examination of current services and offerings. Sometimes states roll different aspects of a service into one. I am interested to hear from you about employment and community supports. We are learning more about people's experiences, likes, and dislikes. Get their juices flowing. Do you have the right service array? Think about it and this conversation on service coding.