

Focus on Quality: Using a Mentoring Process to Create Small Agencies

Presenters:

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Avenues Supported Living Services

Our history...

- Avenues Supported Living Services was initially mentored through CHOICESS and Joe & Becky Donofrio beginning in 1993.
- NLACRC identified a need for a new, “unique” agency to provide person-centered services in the North LA County area
- In 1997, the umbilical cord was cut, and Avenues became its own non-profit entity.
- Avenues & CHOICESS continue to share some training and other resources (ex: non-profit resources, insurance quotes, problem solving, etc.).



From 1993 - 2003

- Avenues expanded its services to support 20 individuals in SLS, plus some additional persons receiving individualized day services only.
- Avenues assisted one individual to “self-direct” her services and control her own funds.
- Avenues assisted a family to become self-vendored and coordinate the supports needed for their family member.



From 2003 - 2006

- Avenues mentored 2 colleagues who had the goal of forming their own agency, and expanded services to the Westside area.
- Avenues assisted 6 persons to re-enter the community from institutional settings.
- Avenues provides technical supports to other agencies interested in starting or converting existing services to supported living services.



From 2003 – 2006 (continued)

- Avenues begins to mentor an additional 2 colleagues in the Antelope Valley area (Andre & Tiffany) who wish to start their own agency.
- “*Diverse Journeys*” branches off to become its own non-profit agency in October 2006. (Avenues is back to supporting 20 people in SLS. Whew!)



Why Mentorship?

- To diminish waiting lists
- Expanding isn't always an option
- Expansion can dilute quality of services
- Creates an opportunity for like-minded dedicated employees, families and/or self-advocates to start and direct their own services.
- Provides more service choices.



Who/what is a mentor?

- Someone who takes the time to nurture growth in another.
- No magic formula
- Relies on trust and confidence (relationship)
- An agency or persons who are respected by their peers and people receiving support as providers of high quality services.



Joe Donofrio, Director of CHOICES and long time mentor:

- *“It is important that the individuals selected to operate a new (SL) agency must be committed to remaining a small agency and committed to the mentoring process, including the willingness to mentor others in the future. New agencies must be committed to the philosophies of person centered planning and remain connected to the mentoring agency, agreeing to share in the learning and training of future employees and people receiving support.”*

Who benefits from mentoring?

- New people who are able to receive quality services
- New agency (through training, use of an existing operation base, able to start slow)
- Funding sources
- Existing agency
- Overall service quality in the area due to increased choices/competition.

If it's so easy, why doesn't everyone do it?

- It takes solid commitment from both parties
- Must have a collaborative working relationship
- Geography (distance between the parties)
- The learning process is based on experience and learning how to “walk the path” with the people we support, learning along the way...it takes time!
- The learning process also includes financial, billing, payroll, insurance, paperwork, etc.



Beth Gallagher, on going through the mentoring process in San Diego:

“We actually share physical offices. We have purposefully and deliberately taken a look at our gifts as directors and created shared tasks that overlap agencies... we share responsibilities for doing budgetary and financial roles while creating a tutoring atmosphere at the same time. Just as we ‘person centered plan’ for the people we support, we also do for our agencies. Work with your gifts and teach to the deficit”

(Being mentored through Creative Support Alternatives)

Different ways to provide Mentorship:

- Mentor one or more colleagues who have a shared commitment and vision to provide person centered services (one person at a time, with individualized supports)
- Mentor or assist a family to become a “self-vendor”, and learn how to coordinate services for a family member

Different ways to provide Mentorship: (cont.)

- Mentor or assist an individual/self-advocate to self-direct their own services and become self-vendored. This will include identifying needed supports related to service coordination, paying staff, insurance needs, as well as going through the processes that the funding source(s) may require to make this happen.



Different ways to provide Mentorship: (cont.)

- A large agency may work with their Board to identify existing staff who have already developed positive, lasting relationships with people they support, and who may be interested in becoming mentored. These staff can be assisted in branching off from the larger agency over time, thus creating two or more smaller agencies from an existing large agency.

First Steps to becoming Mentored

- Conduct a person centered plan (a PATH is an excellent tool for a new agency) for the individuals and/or agency to be mentored.
- Decide on whether to become a non-profit or for profit agency.

First Steps to becoming Mentored (cont)

- Identify one or more agencies/ organizations that you respect and admire for the quality of services they provide, their philosophy, etc., and approach them with the idea of mentoring. (This can also be done with existing employees within a larger agency by assisting them to become mentored)



First Steps to becoming Mentored (cont)

- Identify the service(s) you are interested in providing and insure that there is a need for those services.
- Identify where services are needed geographically and find out if that fits within your personal plan of where you are able to provide services.



First Steps to becoming Mentored (cont)

- Approach your existing funding source(s) along with your mentoring agency to solicit support for your venture by sharing your plan with them.

How to develop the culture of an agency :

- Smaller can be better
- One person at a time
- ALL agency staff provide direct services
- Limited middle management (less is best, NONE can be done!)
- Put resources into people, not buildings
- The most valued services are those that are closest to the person being supported

Every Agency develops its own personality

Unique aspects we feel define Avenues:

- Staffing patterns
- Benefits
- Hiring is relationship based
- Respect is a 2-way process
- A strong focus on annual vacation opportunities
- LOW staff turn-over

Myths & Facts about Supported Living

- *Only people who are “independent” can live in their own homes*
- **FACT:** All needed support services can be provided to someone in their own homes and the community
- *People who need 24 hour care are not eligible*
- **FACT:** People can receive 24 hour care, 365 days a year as needed, to be safe in their own homes
- *People with medical challenges can't receive necessary services and life supports in their own homes through Supported Living Services*
- **FACT:** Even people with respirators and other intensive medical support needs can receive these necessary supports through Supported Living

More Myths about Supported Living

- *People who display problem behaviors won't be successful living in their own place*
- **FACT:** It is generally easier and more successful to support individuals with behavior challenges to live in their own homes. Many behavioral issues actually arise because the person is living in a facility with other people with behavior challenges
- *You will need to live with another person with a disability*
- **FACT:** Regardless of whether or not you need 24 hour support, you should NOT be required to live with another person with a disability unless you want to.
- If you want or need to live with someone else (sometimes you can't afford the rent without splitting it with someone; or you may need someone available to support you 24 hours a day), you should be able to choose your roommate(s).

The 3 “R’s” of Supported Living

- Relationships
- Rights
- Responsibilities

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Relationships

- Relationships with family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, people who provide paid support (support staff), and other community members. We need to look at *the opportunities that people have to develop & expand their relationships.*



Relationships (cont.)

- *We can improve people's opportunities to develop relationships by increasing the time they spend in community settings and by connecting them to community places & activities (like religious activities, social groups, sports activities, hobby groups, volunteer groups, political groups, People First groups, adult education & community college, YMCA & YWCA, gyms, aerobics classes, parks & recreation activities, etc.).*

Rights

- Every person should have the chance to live the American dream... *through the use of Person-Centered Planning approaches and self-directed planning approaches, self-determination, self-actualization, assertiveness, creativity, pride & self-advocacy, meaningful relationships, and have access to Assistive Technology.*

Rights

- The right to self-determination is about being the causal agent in your life, not having the capacity to perform every behavior yourself. Enhancing capacity, opportunity, services and supports are the intervention!



Rights (cont.)

- *Did you choose where you live?*
- *Did you choose your attendant or support person?*
- *Did you choose your roommate?*
- *Did you choose your job or day activity?*
- *Do you choose your leisure activities?*
- *Do you control your personal money?*

Responsibilities

- Having the opportunity to make mistakes and learn from natural outcomes (example: spending all your food money in one week and ending up with little choice over the food you get from the food bank until your next check comes).
- Making the rules in your home.
- Utilization, whenever possible, of self-management strategies to enable people to “do for themselves”.
- Learning basic social & interpersonal skills as well as learning that being a friend is a give and take process.
- Learning how to treat your support staff & others with respect (this helps you to keep the staff you like).



Other important things to consider:

-Karen Green McGowan, reprinted from TASH Connections

Regardless of how the person looks, there is a competent person dwelling inside, and our job is to figure out how to find her/him.

- Everyone communicates in some unique way.*
- Why should the person perform if he or she can get us to do it for them?*
- Our job is NOT to protect the person from experience, but to make experience a reasonable learning opportunity.*
- People with complex disabilities deserve to learn from the same types of discomfort that the rest of us experience.*
- People labeled “medically complex” are not as delicate as they seem.*

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