A Brief Overview of the Review of the Individual Support Plan System For Comprehensive Services

Findings and Recommendations

Prepared for the
OREGON DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
Seniors and People with Disabilities

By
Allen, Shea & Associates
October 2005
Primary Purpose of the Review\textsuperscript{1}
To see how the Individual Support plan (ISP) process is working and, to see what changes could make it a better process.

What's in the report?
Themes gathered from: a) Conversations with sixty-nine residential and vocational services providers and family members, two hundred forty-five surveys, and two hundred seven plan reviews; and b) What we learned from the nine hundred plus comments of individuals, families, providers, and county staff.

ISP process in three parts
It was suggested that we look at the process as three components: those events and activities that happen before the planning meeting (for example, risk-tracking pre-meeting, development of agenda, personal focus worksheets); the meeting itself (for example, developing action plans); and, the events and activities that happen after the planning meeting (for example, carrying out and updating the plan).

What We Learned About ‘Before the Planning Meeting’

What Makes Sense?
\begin{itemize}
  \item The concept of a blended plan supports greater communication and collaboration between residential and vocational service agencies.
  \item The addition of the risk-tracking record, protocols, and the safety plan makes sense.
  \item Gathering information about the individual through the Personal Focus Worksheets.
\end{itemize}

What works well?
\begin{itemize}
  \item Identifying a strong team leader.
  \item Updating protocols, support documents, safety plans, financial management, and behavior plans at pre-meeting.
  \item When residential and vocational staff and the service coordinator attend the pre-meeting.
  \item The pre-meeting is successful when all team members have been communicating throughout the year about the individual.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{1} Note: This brief overview does not include the tables and charts that summarize information learned from surveys, plan reviews, or focus groups.
What Doesn’t Make Sense?

- The ‘default’ for leadership goes to the residential provider.
- Expectations and responsibilities of each team member before the meeting aren’t clear.
- The wide variation in how agencies complete activities before the planning meeting.

What isn’t working well?

- Scheduling two meetings with all team members is very difficult.
- Team members often come to pre-meetings unprepared.
- Personal focus worksheets often produce incomplete information.
- The worksheets can’t typically be used as an interview tool.
- Developing and distributing a planning meeting agenda is difficult.

Considerations for Changes

1. Develop ways to support greater efficiency in the use and review of the Risk Tracking Record.
2. Revise Protocols to incorporate individual needs and to make them more ‘accessible’ for staff.
3. Redesign the Personal Focus Worksheets and add a summary.
4. Clarify and expand the role of Service Coordinators.
During the Planning Meeting

What makes sense?
- Asking individuals and families before the meeting whether or not to discuss personal topics.
- Holding the pre-meeting can help the team manage time for the ISP meeting more efficiently.
- A single signature page for the supporting documents and the service page summary makes sense.
- Reaching agreement about what and how changes to the plan can be made.

What works well?
- Individuals can have a ‘voice’ in the meeting.
- When team members have attended the pre-meeting and when everyone has received and reviewed the agenda and materials.
- Sending out a letter to all team members before the meeting as a reminder to bring meeting materials and be prepared.
- Holding the meeting in a comfortable, casual place and offering snacks.
- A skilled facilitator, recorder and a timekeeper (if needed) supports a smooth and efficient meeting.

What doesn’t make sense?
- There is ‘no room’ for [individuals with disabilities and their families] at the meeting; the focus is most often on getting the paper completed.
- The focus on the individual can be lost in the timelines and process.
- The personal focus worksheets don’t seem to mean anything. They don’t really get addressed in the meeting.
- There is often no discussion of what has occurred with the individual in the past year.

What isn’t working well?
- Lengthy meetings often occur when team members haven’t attended pre-meetings.
- Families just want to know about health, happiness and activities, etc.
- When an agenda isn’t distributed before the meeting.
- Vocational services representatives aren’t always trained on the process and sometimes not very involved.
- Health-related information that doesn’t meet the ‘criteria,’ is not reported in the risk-tracking document or in the ISP.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHANGES

1. Focus on ways to ‘invigorate’ or redefine the planning meeting that includes opportunities to discuss health, happiness and activities with individuals and families.
2. Consider reworking Discussion Records to allow the flexibility to summarize individual progress and issues that need to be addressed for the next planning meeting.
3. Develop guidelines for non-annual or special ISP meetings.

After the Planning Meeting

What works well?
- The team has the freedom to choose how to document (For example: notes, calendar, logs, observations) the Action Plan. Such documentation is usually easier for families to understand.

What doesn’t make sense?
- Making sense of the paperwork is difficult for families.
- SPD doesn’t seem interested in outcomes for individuals, just whether or not the ‘paper’ is in compliance.
- Including pages even if they are blank.
- The amount of paper that is generated by the plan itself just doesn’t make sense.
- Going through the entire process again when a plan is completed and, soon after, an individual changes vocational service agencies.

What isn’t working well?
- Differences in interpretation among Licensing, service coordinators, and trainers regarding what should be in the plan and support documents is a big problem and a constant drain on agency resources.
- The technical language used in the process is sometimes upsetting to individuals and families. The forms and the process aren’t ‘user’ friendly.
CONSIDERATIONS FOR CHANGES

1. The mantra should be ‘consistency’ in how the planning process is interpreted between all agencies that fund, monitor, or support residential and vocational services.

2. Recommit to a ‘blended’ plan by distributing the planning process responsibilities and providing better integration of vocational services.

3. Streamline the paperwork, including the plan.

4. A fifth step should be added to the planning process, that is, how to revise the initial plan. Most plans are developed as ‘initial’ plans year after year.

5. A more balanced approach to reviewing and monitoring both the plan content and compliance.

6. Revise templates for all planning documents to be more ‘user friendly.’

7. Revise the manual as a working reference document with examples that reflect people with significant disabilities.

8. Additional training in areas like meeting facilitation and gathering information from people who do not use ‘typical’ communication.

Responses to Questions in Work Plan

*What difference, if any, are plans making in people’s lives?*

To the bottom line survey question has the plan contributed to a better life for the individual; there were high rates of agreement with all team members (in spite of the many issues raised about the process).

*Are individuals and families satisfied with the planning process?*

As indicated from the survey, individuals are mostly satisfied with the activities that occur before the meeting. Only about half of families are satisfied or very satisfied. Individuals are less satisfied with the planning meeting than are their families. Most individuals and families who responded to the survey are satisfied or very satisfied with the plan.
Who participates in planning meetings?
The information gathered during the plan review shows that most individuals and about a third of their families attended the planning meetings (along with staff from Residential and Employment/Community Inclusion agencies and the service coordinator). About 16% of individuals and 65% of families said they did not attend these planning meetings.

Is the plan connected to information gathered by the team? Does it reflect someone’s lifestyle preferences? Is it a balance between what’s important to and for the individual?
Fifty-two percent (52%) of the Action Plans reviewed were about things that are ‘important to’ the individual, while 42% of the items focused on ‘what was important for’ the individual. About 20% of these ‘important to’ Action Plan items reviewed in the ISPs did not appear to be identified as priorities on the Personal Focus Worksheets.

Does the plan provide good guidance for direct support staff? Does it make their work easier?
General agreement from survey responses that the plan makes working with the individual easier, however, this information is clearly at odds with what we learned from focus groups. In fact, some agencies have developed separate, easy-to-understand summaries that serve as outlines for direct support staff on how to successfully support someone.

How do agencies view the planning process? Has it made a difference in the ways that agencies collaborate? What about one plan versus two or more?
Focus group information indicated that among those who attended, there was a high level of dissatisfaction. Participants in focus groups often mentioned increased communication between residential and vocational service agencies. Many feel that the blended plan is best described as a residential services plan.
How do counties view the planning process?
While a small number of responses, in general, about one-third of County staff were somewhat or not satisfied with the activities before and during the planning meeting and with the plan itself.

What is the amount of time that the process takes?
Survey information indicates that the average time spent by those who are involved in pre-meeting activities is about eight hours (range of 1-40 hours). The average of planning meetings reported by providers in response to the survey is about two hours (1-3+ hours). Provider focus group participants suggested that, by and large, the payoff is not worth the current investment of resources.

IN SUMMARY: TWO PROVIDER’S PERSPECTIVES

“...The new ISP results in a clumsy document that’s very hard for staff to understand and implement. It’s also extremely confusing to families. In the [third] year of implementation, providers [are] taking shortcuts, for example, using [the] same personal focus worksheets as last year...[Its believed that this is done] because of being overwhelmed by process, paperwork, and general confusion...”

“...We recognize how stressed community organizations are and how important it is to spend our resources wisely. Many have commented that there are lots of good parts to the new ISP - much of what I hear people saying is that they want it to be more efficient...”

DISCLAIMER

Opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Oregon Department of Human Services, Seniors & People with Disabilities.