

Update on Vocational Futures Planning and Support Training and Technical Assistance

Only 2% of people with physical disabilities participating in Family Care are working. One of the reasons identified in the 2007 Managed Care and Employment Task Force Report was lack of an established provider network for people with physical disabilities. In response to this identified need the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant provided resources in 2010 to revise and update the vocational futures planning and support training curriculum and provide training for at least one staff member at each of the eight independent living centers. In addition, each of the Managed Care Organizations received resources to improve the employment outcomes of people with disabilities served through the Family Care program.

Vocational Futures Planning (VFP) was originally developed in response to the need for a vocational service that would improve the employment outcomes of people with physical disabilities who were participating in the Community Options Program and home and community-based waivers in 1993. In 2000 the VFP became a covered service in the Community Integration Program II and Community Options Program Waiver for people with physical disabilities. In 2010, the Family Care Waiver VFP service definition was expanded to include "support" in recognition of the need for ongoing supports for individuals who require long-term support services.

A revised and updated Vocational Futures Planning and Support (VFPS) training manual was used to successfully complete a series of four face to face trainings for 24 individuals employed at the eight independent living centers at the end of June 2010. Each of the Independent Living Center staff who participated in the training were working with at least one individual with a physical disability and have been applying the training they received to complete the vocational futures planning and support service with technical assistance from our VFPS trainers and consultants. Finally, to assist the ILCs with negotiating a provider contract with an MCO and DVR, a proposed fee structure was drafted and information was provided on justification for the VFPS fee structure.

As we begin 2011 we have received additional Medicaid Infrastructure Grant resources to begin Phase II, utilizing the experiences and lessons we learned in 2010. One of the important things we've learned was the importance of mentoring and technical assistance as follow-up to the face-to-face training. In 2011, our consultants Mary Ridgely, Shannon Munn, and Myrt Sieger will therefore have a primary responsibility to mentor and provide technical assistance to individuals who have received training in the VFPS.

We also learned that it is important for those who received the VFPS training to have an opportunity to communicate on an ongoing basis with one another. We have responded by setting up an online Google group for individuals who participated in the VFPS training. Each of the individuals receiving training in the vocational future planning and support service have been invited to join this group so that they can stay connected and use the online community to ask questions, respond to questions, and share ideas and lessons they are learning.

In 2011 one of our primary goals is to ensure the sustainability of VFPS training. Efforts will begin shortly to develop online VFPS training modules. The development of online training modules is a sustainable way to allow individuals who are interested in becoming providers of the vocational futures planning and support service a convenient process to become trained. This will also allow providers the opportunity to have their staff take refresher training and provide opportunities for new staff members to learn the process at their own pace over the Internet.

Efforts will continue on developing justification for a VFPS fee structure with the expectation that various components may be funded by an MCO, IRIS, or other long-term support program, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, or other funding source. A research team will be helping us develop the justifications for the fee structure.

Finally in 2011 we will be working to ensure the quality of the VFPS service through the development of a fidelity scale. As you know through your own process of ensuring quality of your independent living centers through your peer review processes, offering a quality service is of vital importance to its success.

Over the last five years, the work that Pathways to Independence has done with the managed care organizations on improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities has met with much success. The 2010 focus on training and technical assistance in the VFPS benefit has improved the opportunity for the development of a network that eventually will include at least two providers of the VFPS service. We have been informed that a number of the MCOs will use their individual grants to expand their provider networks to include two or more VFPS providers. So, in addition to having the resources for continuing the training and technical assistance of the independent living centers staff, some of the MCOs will be using their resources to identify individuals and providers who are interested in achieving their members' employment outcomes.