

Linkages to Adult System: Supported Education and Supported Employment

A collaborative children and adult behavioral health system is critical in helping young people with serious behavioral health concerns to reach their full potential when transitioning into adulthood. Although both systems recognize the need, a genuine and comprehensive collaboration has been difficult to reach. This is due to multiple factors such as differences in system philosophies and cultures, system management, financing, community stakeholders, to name just a few. In Utah, youth-in-transition services grew out of children's program. The initial attempt at collaboration with the adult system was trying to influence the adult system into adopting children's program practices (e.g., wraparound and children's developmental theory.) It soon became apparent that such an approach brought out resentment from the adult system, because we failed to recognize the strengths of the adult system and take advantage of the infrastructure it has, evidence-based practices being one. The Project recognized the mistake and changed the approach of collaboration by asking the adult system for suggestions to enhance youth-in-transition services. As a result, the Project is implementing three evidence-based or evidence-informed practices: supported employment, supported education, and peer support services. The stages of implementation are at varying degrees.

Supported Employment:

Supported employment is one of the five Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) evidence-based behavioral health tool kits to improve community-based service delivery. It is an approach to vocational rehabilitation for people with serious mental illnesses by placing them in competitive employments in integrated work settings and providing them with ongoing support services in order to perform their job. Support services include job coaches, transportation, assistive technology, specialized job training, and individually tailored supervision.

Both San Juan Counseling Center and Tooele Mental Health used project funding to hire Supported Employment Specialists. It is a part-time position at the San Juan Counseling Center. Tooele Mental Health used other funding to supplement the project funding to make the position full time. Both agencies received training from the State Office of Rehabilitation and Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services on supported employment and the funding stream to sustain the practice. Both San Juan Counseling Center and Tooele Mental Health are approved to be Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), which allows them to receive payments from Vocational Rehabilitation (voc. rehab.) to support voc. rehab. eligible individuals in employments. Furthermore, Tooele Mental Health is approved to be a Social Security Employment Network (Ticket to Work program), which allows it to receive additional funding

for supporting people who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits in employments. In Tooele Mental Health, supported employment became an instant hit. The Employment Specialist receives numerous referrals from both Transition Facilitators and general clinicians. He develops a good network with service agencies and community businesses. He has successfully placed several voc. rehab. clients in employments that Tooele Mental Health reasonably expects to sustain the position beyond the project funding through revenues received from Voc. Rehab and Social Security. Supported employment also proves to be of great value to Transition Facilitators. It enables them to have a larger caseload because the Employment Specialist is able to take over the employment-related transition facilitation tasks. In the past year, 45 PASSAGES program participants received supported employment services in Tooele. Supported employment is not as well-implemented in San Juan County. The first and foremost challenge is that the local Rehabilitation Counselor is not familiar with the supported employment program and the networking has been slow. The other reason is how San Juan Counseling Center fills the position. It provides additional hours to a part-time Transition Facilitators to perform the supported employment tasks. Everyone assumed that it would be advantageous to have a well-liked and well-connected part-time Facilitator to take on additional supported employment duties because she knows the community resources and young people well. However, it proves to be problematic because the staff has difficulty separating the two programs and becomes overwhelmed.

Supported Education:

Mental illness often begins when young people are still in school, and thus, impedes their educational accomplishment. This directly affects their abilities to obtain and maintain meaningful employment. Supported education, a promising practice, is similar to the supported employment in the philosophy and approach. It provides individualized support to people with psychiatric disabilities so they may succeed in their educational pursuits. Based on the flexible fund expenditure, it is evident that many program participants choose education as a way to enhance their outlook in adulthood. However, many program participants experience difficulties with registration, financial aid, time management, stress, and symptom management, etc. These affect their success in the educational program. The mandatory academic counseling and accommodations for people with disabilities are not sufficient to address the issues faced by people with psychiatric disabilities. Tooele Mental Health allocated some project funds to hire a part-time Education Specialist. Like supported employment, supported education is instantly recognized to be of great value to the project and the agency. In the past year, 20 program participants received supported education services in Tooele. San

Juan Counseling Center chose not to start the supported education program in FY2012 because of the way it struggled with the supported employment services. The Project collaborated with the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, Utah State University to provide community wide training on supported education. Five (5) people from the Tooele Mental Health and a local university attended the training at Tooele County. Twelve (12) people attended the training at San Juan County. They represented young people, San Juan Counseling Center, school district, college, and State Office of Rehabilitation. Both training received high marks in evaluation. One reason for the well-attended training at San Juan County was due to the active involvement of a youth advocate to market the event.