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Robert Wood Johnson
Medical School

THE BOGGS CENTER ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

New Jersey's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities Education, Research, and Service

Selecting a Support Coordination Agency

Making Choices, Becoming Empowered A Guide for Families



People receiving support through NJ's Division of Developmental Disabilities are able to choose the agency with which they receive support coordination services. The opportunity to do this can be empowering as people with disabilities and their families select an agency that they believe will do the best job helping them plan for and obtain the supports and services they need.

This pamphlet provides people and families with information and ideas that can help in the selection process.

What is a Support Coordination Agency?

A support coordination agency is an organization qualified by the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) to provide services that assist participants in gaining access to needed program and state plan services, as well as needed medical, social, educational, and other services. Support Coordinators complete a variety of responsibilities in partnership with the person, his/her family, DDD, and service providers which include:

- Identifying the person's support needs and preferences
- Developing the NJ Person Centered Planning Tool and NJ Individual Service Plan
- Locating options for services that include: traditional disability providers, generic community supports, government supports beyond DDD, and/or natural support based on funds available in the person's individual budget
- Ongoing monitoring of supports and services
- Responding to emergencies and other service related needs of the person and/or family

How do I Choose?

The ability to choose a support coordination agency is a new experience for most. Choosing a support coordinator can make it possible for people and their families to:

- Match the person's wants/needs with the skills and expertise of the support coordination agency
- Find an agency that knows the person's local community and the supports that exist
- Select an agency with which they feel comfortable working
- Discuss what is expected from someone providing support coordination services
- Change to a different agency if the need arises

This pamphlet provides information on what to consider when selecting a support coordination agency. Choice starts with understanding the preferences and support needs of your family member and what s/he needs from the support coordination agency. On **page 2**, there are some topics about **Your Family Member's Life** that are important to consider and communicate to the support coordination agency.

You and your family member will want to take time to learn about potential Support Coordination agencies. Suggestions for **Interviewing a Support Coordination Agency: Questions to Ask** can be found on **page 3**. On **page 4** you will find reflection questions to **Help You Decide** which Support Coordination agency will meet your family member's needs.

What is Quality for My Family Member?

Quality is defined by you and your family member based on his/her individual needs, preferences, and goals. It is the responsibility of the support coordinator to plan for and connect your family member to supports and services that meet the person's needs and address his/her preferences. When the support coordination needs of your family member are not being met, you and/or your family member have the right to seek services that are a better fit.

On **page 5** of this booklet you will find **A Tool for Evaluating Support Coordination Services** that will help you assess if your support coordinator is meeting your family members needs.

Your Family Member's Life...

The first thing to do when selecting a support coordination agency is to look at your family member's life and what s/he wants and needs.

- What is important to your family member to have in his/her life? Consider people, places, things, and environmental factors (e.g. friends, hobbies/interests, enjoyable activities, feeling included, following a routine, etc...)

- What are some supports your family member needs? Consider health and safety, transportation, behavior, wellness, and/or supports related to employment, daily living, community engagement, etc...

- What does your family member want for his/her life? Consider ideas related to: Community Participation, Employment, Health and Well-being, Life-Long Learning, Home, Relationships, etc...

- Given this, what do you want/need from a support coordinator as s/he helps you and your family member get the supports and services s/he needs?

Questions to Ask Support Coordination Agencies

Basic information:

- How many people do you provide support coordination services to? What is the typical caseload of one of your support coordinators?
- What is the average turnover of a support coordinator at your organization?
- How do you match people using supports with support coordinators?
- How long have you provided services in New Jersey? In this region?
- How does your agency respond to issues/needs that occur after typical business hours?

Knowledge & Experience:

- How would you describe the experience your support coordinators have working with individuals with disabilities?
- What training and mentoring do your support coordinators receive to give them the knowledge and skills needed to help my family member obtain the supports and services needed to live the life s/he wants? Please describe some of the key skills your support coordinators have.
- How do your support coordinators develop or adapt services and supports to address the needs and preferences of culturally diverse communities? Provide some examples.
- How are your support coordinators connected with the local community and resources? Please give examples.
- How do you educate and empower people and families about the support options that are available to them?

Ongoing Support:

- How do your support coordinators monitor the quality of supports received and work with the person, family, and providers to ensure that quality is achieved?
- How do you get feedback from the people you serve and how do you use this information to improve services?

Additional Questions:

- How is your agency different from others? How do you stand out from other support coordination agencies?
- Are there people or families using your support coordination services I can contact as a reference?
- Other questions specific to your/your family member's needs and preferences...

What did you think of the support coordination agencies you interviewed?

Take time to review your notes from your conversations with the support coordination organizations.

- What are your thoughts and feelings?

- Which organization do you believe...
 - Made you feel respected, comfortable, and at ease?
 - Shares your beliefs and values?
 - Understands your/your family member's disability?
 - Will be responsive to what you/your family member wants, needs, and prefers?
 - Have the skills and knowledge needed to support you/your family member?
 - Is dedicated to helping people to get what they need in their lives?

Some questions found in preceding sections were adapted from:

The PA Training Partnership for People with Disabilities and Families, Temple University/UCEDD. "Choosing a Support Coordination Organization."

Maryland, Developmental Disabilities Administration, Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene

National Resource Center for Participant Directed Services. (2010). "Developing and Implementing Participant Direction Programs and Policies: A Handbook."



A Tool for Evaluating Support Coordination Services

Are your family member's needs being met?

Ongoing evaluation of the support coordination services your family member receives is important. It can help you to reinforce your expectations, provide feedback, and improve the partnership. Below is a tool you can use to help you assess whether the support coordinator is meeting your family member's needs.

Is Your Support Coordinator Meeting Your Family Member's Needs?

Useful Questions for Families to Ask Themselves

Questions	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree			
								
1 The support coordinator takes the time to get to know my family member and his/her support needs and preferences.	4	3	2	1				
2 The support coordinator treats me and my family member with respect.	4	3	2	1				
3 My support coordinator helps us feel comfortable when we talk about my family member's supports.	4	3	2	1				
4 The support coordinator understands how my family member communicates and takes the time to communicate with him/her.	4	3	2	1				
5 The support coordinator asks my family member what s/he wants.	4	3	2	1				
6 The support coordinator takes our family's cultural preferences and language into account when planning and finding supports.	4	3	2	1				
7 The support coordinator takes our family's needs and preferences into account when helping to find supports.	4	3	2	1				
8 The support coordinator makes sure that my family member's person-centered plan addresses his/her needs and preferences.	4	3	2	1				
9 The support coordinator is knowledgeable about a variety of support options near my family member's home.	4	3	2	1				

(continued) 

A Tool for Evaluating Support Coordination Services (continued)

Questions	Strongly Agree				Strongly Disagree
					
10 My support coordinator helps us understand the different options for the supports and services my family member wants/needs.	4	3	2	1	
11 The support coordinator helps my family member get the supports s/he needs to live the life s/he wants.	4	3	2	1	
12 The support coordinator helps my family member get supports that connect him/her with the community.	4	3	2	1	
13 The support coordinator advocates with my family member to make sure the services s/he receives meets his/her needs and preferences.	4	3	2	1	
14 The support coordinator helps us access resources other than those provided by DDD to help my family member get the supports s/he needs. (For example: housing, food, etc...).	4	3	2	1	
15 The support coordinator contacts me and/or my family member on at least a monthly basis	4	3	2	1	
16 The support coordinator is available when I/my family member needs him/her.	4	3	2	1	
17 The support coordinator helps my family member change service providers when needed.	4	3	2	1	
18 The support coordinator provides us with the info and education my family needs to be empowered consumers.	4	3	2	1	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What is your family member's support coordinator doing well? 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are some things you'd like your family member's support coordinator to do differently? 					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What feedback would you like to give your Support Coordinator: 					

Some items found in this tool were adapted from:
 HSRI (2013). *National Core Indicators*. <http://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/indicators/domain/system-performance/service-coordination/>

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