Thoughts for Professionals on Increasing Family Involvement in the Planning, Development, and Monitoring of Supported Employment

Roles families can have in the provision of supported employment

☐ Families can increase the likelihood of a successful supported employment outcome for a family member by providing:

- Information about the individual gathered across multiple years and settings that is essential to an effective vocational assessment.
- Off-the-job support to help the individual adapt to the employment situation.
- Early warning signals for problems an individual is having with a job.

☐ Families can identify employers interested in hiring persons with disabilities.

☐ Families can foster the development of natural support networks to facilitate individuals with disabilities becoming successfully involved in the community.

☐ Families can advocate for appropriate services for their own family member and for persons with disabilities in general.

☐ Families can organize consumer support of businesses that hire persons with disabilities.

Communication tips to increase family involvement

☐ Support families as they explore and identify their roles in the life of their adult family member with a disability; emphasize beneficial family involvement rather than "letting go."

☐ Respect family concerns and work together to seek mutually acceptable solutions at the outset of a service.

☐ Urge families to be proactive in seeking appropriate services.

☐ Empower family members at meetings with professionals:

- Seat them at a central location around the table.
- Make frequent eye contact with them.
- Actively include them in points being discussed.
- Stress that their participation and concerns are valuable, and they need not hesitate speaking.
- Urge them to prepare for the meeting and to take notes during it.

Information to facilitate informed family involvement

☐ Information about funding agencies: eligibility criteria, types of services, the role of the counselor/case manager in obtaining services, mandated services and procedures, and the appeal process.

☐ Information about written plans: their purpose and significance, required content, implementation time lines, review schedules, and the role of family and consumer in their development.

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- ☐ Copies of written plans and revisions.

- ☐ Existing program options, and the nature of appropriate programs that need to be created to meet a person's assessed needs.

- ☐ The procedures and timeframes for getting on waiting lists for services.

- ☐ Guardianship: purpose and process.

- ☐ Application procedures, income limits, and reporting requirements for income maintenance or assistance programs.

- ☐ Other county, state or federal services for which an individual might qualify.

- ☐ Names of disability advocacy organizations, protection and advocacy agencies, support groups, and families willing to network with other families.

- ☐ Certification and legislative rule requirements for programs and facilities.

- ☐ National trends in service delivery.

- ☐ Information about presentations, meetings, and conferences on supported employment and related topics.

- ☐ County or agency hearings, task forces, boards of directors and other avenues for making an impact on decisions concerning service delivery.

Considerations in interactions with family members of persons with disabilities

- ☐ Family involvement in supported employment increases the likelihood of a partnership with professionals in finding solutions to problems that arise rather than their being adversaries who assign blame.

- ☐ It is likely professionals and families have had many of the same questions and concerns about supported employment. Unlike professionals, however, families have not had access to conferences, trainings and on-the-job information to address these questions and concerns.

- ☐ There are no societal role models or legally defined avenues for families to be involved with their adult family members with disabilities in getting services or fostering their involvement in the community.

- ☐ We are all learning to refocus our perceptions of persons with disabilities in order to recognize their abilities and understand the relation between supports and independence.

- ☐ A family provides a relationship that is likely to continue throughout an individual's life, and family involvement is often the key to understanding and obtaining services appropriate to an individual's needs.

- ☐ Transition into the adult service system is a difficult process:
  - For parents and families experienced with the special education system, the move is from a single agency to multiple agencies, from mandated services to nonmandated services, and from a system that assumes no rejection, least restrictive environment, accountability, and the importance of family involvement to one that does not.
  - Families of persons whose onset of disability occurred after graduating from high school must focus their energy on understanding the complexities of the disability and their emotional response to it, and recognizing the role of public services in providing support to persons with disabilities.