

Worker/Community Rollout Process

Rationale for Service Area Based Community Trainings

Participants in focus groups of DHS and community providers agreed on the need for better community collaboration to support youth in transition. DHS staff also saw untapped opportunities in the community for connecting youth with non-traditional agencies and community mentors. There was a shared sense that DHS staff at all levels, but especially supervisors, must become more visible in the community and involved in collaborations with community entities.

There was, however, considerable variation among service areas in how community agencies were working together, with some having established effective community partnerships for transition planning. Because of the variations, and because we wanted to create opportunities for the DHS supervisors to take visible leadership roles, we decided rather than to hold a single statewide event for community providers, we would instead offer community trainings in each of the eight Iowa Service Areas and involve supervisors in planning and hosting the events.

To maximize resources, where feasible, the community training was scheduled the day after the worker training at the same location.

Planning Process for the Community Trainings

On the second day of each of the four statewide supervisor trainings, we asked supervisors to group themselves by Service Area and jointly complete a planning questionnaire for the community rollout.. (A sample questionnaire is included at the end of this document). They were asked to make recommendations on the goals for the community day, suggest topics for training and facilitated discussion, and draft a suggested invitation list. We also elicited volunteers for a planning committee. At the completion of the four trainings in September, 2007, the NRC collated the results by Service Area and sent a letter to the eight Service Area Managers (top regional administrators) asking them to appoint a planning committee. We suggested that the committees include one Social Work Administrator (the supervisors' supervisor), the DHS Community Liaison, the Transition Planning Specialist, and some or all of the supervisor volunteers. Those recommendations were accepted; additional committee members included a DCAT coordinator (Des Moines and Sioux City), a Juvenile Court officer (Sioux City), and facilitators of the local foster youth ELEVATE chapter (Sioux City, Cedar Rapids).

The NRC team, consisting of the co-trainers and a consultant hired to manage coordination for the rollouts, travelled to each Service Area and met with the eight planning teams between October 12 and November 16, 2007. We reviewed the recommendations made by the supervisors and discussed the best way to approach the community rollout, including:

- Where is your Service Area currently in terms of community collaboration to improve outcomes for youth in transition?
- Where do you want to be a year from now? What are your priorities?
- How could training and/or facilitation resources help?
- What would constitute success for a day of training?
- Who do you need to have at the community day to make that happen?
- What kind of preparation would need to be done to facilitate a successful day?
- How should youth be involved in the day?
- Who do you want to invite?

The committees were given choices about the length of the training day (depended on the target audience and travel times), the relative proportion of the day to be spent on training and facilitated discussion, and the number of topics to be addressed. Each planning committee was responsible for managing invitations and RSVPs.

Following the planning meeting, the NRC worked with the designated committee lead to finalize the agenda and manage the extensive logistics. The training schedule and number of attendees is included in Table – below.

Two sample agendas are attached, for a half-day and full-day. Each agenda called for a box lunch to be served; (costs for non-DHS staff covered by another source of funds) followed by a presentation by older foster youth and youth who had aged out of the system. A number of the Service Areas were beginning or had recently completed special initiatives for transitioning youth, including Family Finding (Dubuque) and youth centered team planning (Iowa Youth Dream Team in Sioux City and Cedar Rapids and the Child Action Team in Ames). We made space on the agenda for representatives of these programs to share their programs with the community. The Cedar Rapids service area invited youth to stay for the entire afternoon and participate in small group work.

During the development of the supervisory curriculum we worked with two creative Transition Planning Specialists (TPS) who created tools to help workers track the transition planning process, understand the available resources for transitioning youth and how to access them. These included charts, grids, and an index of resources. We also developed a presentation and materials on how to make better use of the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment in transition planning. The local planning committees felt it was very important to give their local transition planning specialists the opportunity to be seen as leaders and experts in their regions. We met twice with the TPSs, invited them to present, and reviewed our materials; what resulted was another TPS creating an even richer PowerPoint presentation which was used by his peers. The process of each TPS “owning” the work was an important benefit of the regional approach.

We felt that the presence of supervisors at the community training was a critical component, so we worked very hard to secure their attendance and to offer them visible roles during the day, including welcoming participants, offering introductory remarks, and leading table discussions. The interactive nature of the day allowed for supervisors to show their leadership through skillful discussion of the topics.

A variety of training methods were used, including short PowerPoint presentations, large group and small group discussions, and videos. A key goal was infusing the training with the voices of youth, which we did in a variety of ways, including presentations by youth, incorporating comments from the focus groups with youth into the presentations and training manual, and using a variety of videos, including a music video created by the Iowa ELEVATE group especially for our training.

Most of the planning committees asked that we save time at the end of the day for community attendees to make “commitments” about how what they intended to implement in their individual practice and what they intended to take back to share with their agencies. Those commitments were memorialized in a variety of ways. In Dubuque, for example, the workers in their training the previous day created paper dolls signifying a youth in care with whom they were working. The dolls were on display at the community training, and community participants were asked to write their commitments on paper umbrellas which were then attached to the hands of the paper youth. This idea was generated by the local planning team.

Participant evaluations were collected for each training event and shared with the planning committee along with the written commitments of participants.

Planning Process for the Service Area Based Worker Training

We used the same planning process described above for the worker training, but approached the day with fewer options. We asked the supervisors to review the content of their two-day training and recommend which topics would be most useful for a one-day worker training. While engaging all of the supervisors in this initial process, we emphasized the importance of their role in coaching and reinforcing best practice.

When we met with the regional planning committee, we proposed a full day training, but offered some options about the relative emphasis on training topics and offered some workshop options to allow for worker choice. We also gave the committees the choice about whether to involve child protective assessment workers in the training; all decided not to include the assessors but the Des Moines committee asked that we work with them to create a half day training for assessors and that is in the works. The committees were very engaged in thinking about how best to use the day. The Dubuque group came up with the idea of asking each worker to bring in a case to work on, and created the paper doll activity around that case. All of the committees decided to include a youth panel.

We knew from the focus groups that we needed to address the challenged of transitioning special needs youth into the adult mental health system; because of a wide variation in practice we decided to do that at the regional level. We recruited the two DHS staff who work with the county Central Point of Coordination staff to transition youth into adult services. They offered a 75 minute workshop on the process, and invited local county CPCs to join them in the presentation. This was a great plan, as it engaged these folks in the community day and encouraged them to make public commitments to collaborate. Several CPCs registered for the entire community day.