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PROMISING PRACTICES

Innovation in

Human Services

Sometimes life does come with a manual

Life skills manual breaks learning down into manageable and attainable goals

Prior to being accredited by CARF in 2004, North Shore Disability Resource Centre's (NSDRC) one-to-one life skills staff members were responsible for implementing individualized service goals primarily through their own resourcefulness. Staff member creativity and the individual needs of persons served determined the direction and method of lessons, resulting in a wide spectrum of approaches toward teaching life skills across the organization. From a performance improvement perspective, the variety of teaching practices made it difficult to assess and ensure that true learning and progress were taking place. Furthermore, pluck and go get 'em aside, most staff members really wanted a more structured approach to teaching specific skills.

In response to life skills staff members' requests, NSDRC produced a Life Skills Training Manual. The overall goal of the manual was to



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News From CARF

New sets of CARF standards focuses on consumer-focused and consumer-run services

New standards for Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach complement recently revised CARF standards for Employment Transition Services.

Standards for Benefits Planning

provide foundation skills for individuals seeking to increase their self-



confidence and independence. NSDRC consulted many excellent resources during the development of the manual, but discovered that most preexisting resources focused on only one or two life skills areas instead of a comprehensive curriculum that included the full range of skills needed by the persons served.

Development of the manual was funded by grants, enabling NSDRC to customize it to meet the needs of the diverse population of individuals served, the varying skill levels of staff members, and the huge array of possible life skills. After reviewing the different contract goals of the persons served and soliciting input from staff, a list of skill sets was finalized. Topics included:

- Anger management
- Communication and social skills
- Conflict resolution
- Decision making
- Home environment skills
- Money skills
- Personal and self-help skills
- Relationships
- Self-esteem
- Time management
- Transportation skill

NSDRC started by building a series of lesson plans that broke down skill learning into manageable and achievable goals. The plans are user-friendly, clear, and adaptable to individual learning styles and are divided into objectives, handouts, action steps, and signs of generalization sections.

Assistance and Outreach are written to support persons with disabilities with individual and family benefits planning. Trained and professional benefits planning specialists provide service consultation and guidance in choosing how and when to access needed economic resources and to advocate for benefits.

Employment Transition Services helps achieve successful post-school activities. CARF's Transition from School to Employment and Economic Self-Sufficiency standards seek to strengthen the collaboration between schools and service agencies. These services might be either based in schools, in service agencies, or both. These standards, while not new, were revised based on input from the field.

For information about the new and revised standards and CARF accreditation, please contact CARF's Employment and Community Services customer service unit toll free at 888-281-6531 (voice/TTY) or ecs@carf.org

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The objectives section is used to identify the goals of the lesson. Handouts, when included, provide supplemental information or worksheets to accompany the action steps, which are a logical sequence of activities

to follow in order to reach

the objectives. They involve a variety of teaching methods, including instruction, discussion, modeling, role playing, and doing. The signs of generalization section lists signs for staff members to look for in order to determine if the person served has understood the objectives of the lesson, has incorporated this knowledge, and is ready to move on. Teaching tips are included to provide suggestions and strategies for teaching particular skills.

Published in March 2005, the manual is now used as a supplemental resource to help with the teaching of specific skills in a person's individualized plan. Currently, fifteen persons served use this manual, and the intent is to dramatically increase this number upon completion of the review and revision. NSDRC uses this manual, in combination with its self-sufficiency scale planning tool and person-focused plan, to ensure that a comprehensive individual plan is created with tangible and measurable outcomes. Staff members appreciate the structure, user-friendliness, and thoroughness of the manual and enjoy the sense of

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achievement they and the persons served experience when using the lesson plans. Management loves it because staff members are maintaining a high level of teaching practice, and everyone is benefiting from a standard learning approach.

Interested in finding out more about North Shore Disability Resource Centre's Life Skills Training Manual? Contact Margot Beauchamp, Director of Quality Assurance and Program Development, at 604-904-4087.

For more information please contact Reneé Bibby at rbibby@carf.org or (888) 281-6531.

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