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PROMISING PRACTICES

Innovation in

Human Services

Consumers can guide human resource decisions better than anybody else

An Ohio-based supported living organization creates harmonious housing situations using consumer input

It's the 21st century, when consumers who live in some type of supported living situation want and deserve the right to choose who will provide support for them. It's one of the most basic choices individuals exercise daily without any conscious thought, much as they decide on roommates or whom to dine with every night. However, nearly every service provider can affirm that just because it's important, doesn't mean it's easy to implement on behalf of consumers. So, how can consumers rights to exercise legitimate choice about who works and lives with them be balanced with an organization's need to attract, train, and retain quality staff?

Supported Community Living (SCL), an organization providing supported living services to 55 consumers in 29 locations in the central Ohio area, decided these goals were not mutually exclusive. It developed a system that gives consumers a say in the initial selection of staff, as well as a say in who will serve as substitute staff.

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Including consumers from multiple locations in the interview process proved unworkable on a timely and consistent basis. As a next-best practice, applicants are interviewed and selected by



human resources and assigned to work with specific individuals on a probationary status. Early in the new employee's on-the-job training, each consumer (and/or guardian) in a shared location is given the opportunity to voice his/her opinion on the new employee's performance. Consumers are asked specific questions regarding their satisfaction and if they are in agreement with having the new employee continue to provide their regular services. They sign a consent form that records their agreement or disagreement with the assignment. The reason for any disagreement is asked for, but not required. All consumers at the location must be in agreement for the employee to continue the assignment in that location. If one of the individuals disagrees, the assigned program specialist will meet with the resident to determine if retraining of the employee can be worked out or a continued trial be arranged. If the consumer is not agreeable to either of these, the employee is reassigned to another location.

This system would work perfectly if every regular staff member never got sick or took vacation time. Of course this never happens, so SCL had to create a mechanism for assigning substitute staff. To do this, the organization maintains a list of the staff members preferred by each consumer. New employees are photographed during their orientation and included on the employee master photo list. On an annual basis, each consumer is interviewed privately by the assigned lead staff member and asked to identify by picture which staff members he/she would like to have included on his/her preferred staff list.

communities have a richness of diversity and culture. Meeting the needs of persons throughout these communities in the 21st century requires service providers to continuously learn and change to meet the expectations of persons and their families. The 2007 Employment and Community Services Winter Conference March 10-13 will be an ideal time to share innovative ideas, network to solve issues of mutual interest, examine the latest service delivery and management practices, and discuss visions for superior service provision. [Register online now.](#)

Putting Out the Good Word: Some Information about the Promising Practices Series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we will follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue



A satisfactory preferred staff list doesn't come without some work on the staff's part! Staff members preferred by all consumers are added to the list, but this process doesn't always yield the desired number of alternate staff members. When the alternate

staff list is too short, the program lead may go back through the list with all of the residents as a group to ask if there are any compromises possible to increase the list to at least fifteen. The process is strictly voluntary for the consumers and is intended simply to increase the likelihood of a preferred substitute being available for a vacancy. When a consumer is unable to participate in the selection process, or if there is insufficient agreement between housemates, the assigned program specialist will then designate the selections as "first" and "second" priority, based on the level of agreement among consumers who live in the same location.

Ultimately, when it comes to staff substitutes, consumers understand that there is no guarantee that a preferred staff member will be available for each vacancy. What SLC has worked to guarantee is that consumer input is of the utmost priority in deciding direct care staff members. Over a two-year period, approximately 72 percent of the initial assignments were approved by consumers within the first 30 to 60 days. Those staff members who were not approved have been reassigned. Although specific data are not available, the extra efforts at implementing this

with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization's community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an exemplary rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series.

We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

procedure are believed to have paid off in fewer incidents of misunderstanding and conflict, reduced consumer grievances, fewer service errors, and generally improved satisfaction for all when consumers and staff members who enjoy one another are matched together.

Interested in finding out more information about Supported Community Living?

Contact Craig Gladwell at craig.gladwell@scl-col.org.

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

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