



Core Competencies of Options Counseling: Facilitating Self-Direction/Self-Determination

Long-Term Support Options Counseling is an interactive decision-support process whereby consumers, family members and/or significant others are supported in their deliberations to determine appropriate long-term care choices in the context of the consumer's needs, preferences, values, and individual circumstances.¹ The Technical Assistance Exchange (TAE) has worked with states implementing options counseling in their Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) programs to identify six core competencies of options counseling that should underpin the process:

- 1) Determining the need for options counseling;
- 2) Assessing needs, values and preferences;
- 3) Understanding and educating about public and private sector resources;
- 4) Facilitating self-direction / self-determination;
- 5) Encouraging future orientation; and
- 6) Following-up.

This series of handouts details some key considerations for program planners and managers and key staff involved in options counseling. The information is based on current practices in the field, and will continue to evolve as more ADRCs develop robust options counseling programs. Over the next year, the Administration on Aging (AoA) will be working with a group of states to develop national standards for options counseling, and this work will also impact and contribute to these concepts.

This handout discusses strategies and resources for facilitating self-direction / self-determination. Please let us know if you have comments, suggestions, or questions about these handouts by contacting the Technical Assistance Exchange at adrc-tae@lewin.com

¹ Definition developed by Technical Assistance Exchange including National Association of State Units on Aging and ADRC grantees

Facilitating Self-Direction / Self-Determination

In Self-determination, “the individual, not the service system, decides where he or she will live, and with whom; what type of services he or she requires, and who will provide them; how he or she will spend his or her time, which may include the type of vocational or educational opportunities he or she wishes to engage in, and how he or she will relate to the community, which may include joining in community events, taking part in civic groups, and developing and maintaining relationships with others in the community”.²

Strategies for Staff Providing Options Counseling

As an options counselor, it may be easy to accept self direction and determination when the individual’s decision seems right. It becomes more difficult when personal opinions clash with what the individual or family chooses. Additionally, options counselors are often faced with conflicts within a family about the appropriate decisions to make. This can present a challenge in supporting decision making. Perhaps a caregiver calls and seeks assistance and has an idea of what is needed to “solve” his or her parents’ issue, but the parent sees no problem or need to change the status quo. What can an options counselor do to support the caregiver, but also respect the older adults’ right to self determination?

“Self-determination is a process that differs from person to person according to what each individual determines is necessary and desirable to create a satisfying and personally meaningful *life*.”³ Options counselors should provide consumers with opportunities for involvement and control in selecting the types of services/supports they receive. Asking, “what do you need to help you make this decision better?” can be helpful. In the scenario above it may mean educating the caregiver about the importance of listening to his or her parent’s desire and educating that if that step is skipped it is likely the problem will not be “solved.” At the same time, the options counselor must acknowledge the caregiver’s need for support.

An important tenet from the disability community is the “right to fail” which captures the spirit of self-determination. It may be difficult to let go of the need for consumers to do the “right thing” in the opinion of the options counselor. However, if individuals are competent to make their own decisions, they have the right to chose options and then revise those based on personal experience.

Strategies for Program Planners and Managers

Program managers should consider the background and prior work experience of existing staff who will provide options counseling. Staff who have traditionally provided Information and Referral/ Assistance (I & R/A) may not have as much experience in facilitating groups or family meetings. Staff who had been in case management prior may have worked in a traditional model of service authorization rather than person-centered model and he or she may also be used to having long-term relationships with individuals rather than the shot-term work options counseling demands. Both of these positions will need support in shifting to the role of options

² National Resource Center on Supported Living and Choice. Fact Sheet: Summary of Self Determination. Available at <http://thechp.syr.edu/determination.pdf> Accessed July 6,2010.

³ Ibid.

counselor. In hiring new staff managers should look for people who can speak from experience about facilitating self-determination and how they have handled conflicts and challenging situations in the past. Another strategy is to engage the disability agencies involved in the ADRC network to offer training about person-first language, person-centered thinking, and other topics for which the disability network has valuable strengths.

Additional Resources on Facilitating Self-Direction / Self-Determination

- *New Hampshire's Long-Term Support Counselor Job Description.* http://www.adrc-tae.org/tiki-download_file.php?fileId=28904
- *The Learning Center for Person Centered Practices, Reading Room Resources.* Online compendium of person-centered practices related resources. <http://www.learningcommunity.us/room.html>
- *Person Centered Education Site: Cornell University, IRL School – Employment and Disability Institute.* The website aims to introduce the learner to the basic concepts of person-centered work. Completion of the coursework by itself will not provide the learner with the skills necessary to facilitate person-centered planning processes. Site includes list of additional resources and publications around person-centered planning concepts. <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/pcp/courses.html>