



REAL CHOICE

SYSTEMS CHANGE

EVALUATION REPORT

on the

THE INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY/UCED

Educational Series for Legislators

A Component of NH's Real Choice Systems Change Project

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REAL CHOICE SYSTEMS CHANGE EDUCATIONAL SERIES FOR LEGISLATORS – EVALUATION REPORT

Introduction

In June 2001, President Bush launched the New Freedom Initiative outlining his clear intent “to help ensure that all Americans have the opportunity to live close to their families and friends, to live more independently, to engage in productive employment, and to participate in community life.” As part of this initiative, the president authorized funds for Real Choice System Change Grants to help design and implement improved ways of providing community supports and services that enable children and adults of any age who have a disability or long-term illness to live and participate in their communities. New Hampshire received an award in 2001 under this grant program and the Department of Health and Human Services contracted with the Institute on Disability/UCED at the University of New Hampshire to lead this work.

The Real Choice Advisory Council is a broad cross-disability coalition of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and others in need of long-term services and supports, as well as professionals and family members. The council was established to guide the work of the Real Choice Systems Change project as well as other systems change efforts in New Hampshire. The project is designed to create and implement improvements in community-based care systems to improve health and long-term care services and supports to assist individuals with disabilities and long-term illnesses to live in the community.

This systems change effort includes goals that:

- Fill identified gaps and address identified weaknesses in the current long-term support system;
- Identify barriers to real choice and consumer-directed services, and recommend reforms;
- Develop educational and technical assistance activities and strategies for implementing consumer-directed services and supports;
- Develop a comprehensive evaluation strategy that uses both empowerment evaluation methods and summative evaluation methods within and across all project components; and
- Develop creative dissemination strategies designed to support change and empower consumers.

As a part of the Real Choice Systems Change initiative, the Advisory Council, with support from the Institute on Disability/UCED, sponsored *Supporting Older Adults and Individuals with Disabilities in Your Community: An Educational Series for Legislators*. The series, which ran during the 2003-2004 session of the New Hampshire General

Court, included the following presentations by nationally renowned speakers: Changes in Disability Policy, Financing Long-Term Care, Workforce Issues, Access to Home-Based Care, Coordinated Transportation, Mental Health Reform, and Affordable Housing. Each session was held twice – once during a breakfast meeting and once during a luncheon meeting. Fliers for each of these presentations are included in an addendum to this report.

Rep. Peter Batula, chair of the House Health and Human Service Committee and Sen. Jane O’Hearn, chair of the Senate Education Committee, collaborated with the Advisory Council in planning and promoting the series. The involvement of these legislative leaders was critical to the series’ positive reception from legislators: 115 state representatives and seven state senators attended one or more of the presentations. (The total number of those attending the series is actually higher because not every legislator took time to sign attendance sheets.) With the General Court comprised of 400 representatives and 24 senators, more than a quarter of the House members and nearly a third of the Senate participated in the Educational Series.

Methodology

The evaluation of the Educational Series for Legislators included a review of the written evaluations that were collected at the end of each presentation and telephone interviews with 20 legislators who attended three or more sessions in the series. A standard survey instrument was used for the interviews, which is included as an addendum. Interviews were conducted in May and June of 2004. Legislators were asked to assess the quality of the series, its relevance to bills before the Legislature, and its impact on their votes. They were also asked if a series like this should continue, what topics related to long-term care should be presented, and for recommendations to improve the series.

Profile of Legislators

Legislators interviewed for this evaluation included 19 state representatives and one state senator, 12 republicans and eight democrats, 12 men and eight women. Nearly half of those interviewed (nine) were in their freshman term, while seven legislators had served eight or more years, including a representative who was completing his 20th year in the House. Rep. Batula encouraged members of the Health and Human Services Committee, which he chairs, to attend the series; seven of the legislators interviewed are members of this committee. Other House committees represented included Elderly Affairs, Ways and Means, Veterans Affairs, Transportation, Environmental Affairs, Municipal Government, Executive Department and Administration, and State and Federal Affairs. The senator interviewed serves on the Senate’s Education, Ethics, Internal Affairs, and Health Committees.

Legislators’ Assessment of the Series

Nearly all of those interviewed (18) reported that the Educational Series was informative; two legislators said the sessions were fairly or somewhat informative. One lawmaker noted, “They were fairly informative as far as the information at hand; whether I agree or

disagree (with the presentations) is another matter.” Asked if the series was helpful to them in their work as legislators, 12 stated that it was helpful, one representative reported it was somewhat helpful, four members were uncertain, and only one lawmaker found the series not to be helpful in his work as a legislator. The four representatives who were uncertain about the impact of the series noted that legislators are bombarded with information. They said it was difficult to sort out whether information about a topic came from this series or from testimony before their committees, other formal presentations, or the huge volume of written material they receive from lobbyists and special interest groups.

Most of the legislators interviewed were very enthusiastic about the Educational Series. A freshman legislator commented, “It was helpful in giving background information. Our committee has been working on long-term care insurance and the whole idea of having lectures that give an overall view of issues was helpful.” The chair of Health and Human Services reported that the Educational Series had been very beneficial for members of his committee. He said that having committee members well informed had made his job as chairperson easier.

Even legislators who found that the sessions were not applicable to the work of their committees reported the series offered important networking opportunities:

“It was most helpful in being able to carry on a dialogue with some of the conservative legislators who came for the free lunch – walking out with them, talking with them, and trying to reinforce points with them.”

“It’s a good way to get to know legislators better; I was able to compare notes with fellow progressives.”

All those interviewed felt they knew who to approach if they needed additional information about the topics covered in the series. Many of the representatives serving on the House Health and Human Services Committee said they would talk with their committee chairs. Others interviewed said they would contact Real Choice Project Director Sue Fox, call the Institute on Disability, or work through the State’s Department of Health and Human Services. Several people said they appreciated having the handout materials available for later reference.

Review of Individual Sessions

Asked which session they found most worthwhile, legislators provided the following responses.

Financing Long-Term Care	6	All were Worthwhile	4
Coordinated Transportation	4	Mental Health	1
Affordable Housing	4	Not Sure	4

One representative expressed his appreciation for the session on Coordinated Transportation: “I found some very positive suggestions from Vermont that could be

done in New Hampshire. They were not just generalities, but very specific and instructive about where the Legislature can be useful. I've been impressed by the outreach the University [of NH] is doing."

While no legislator identified a session that wasn't worthwhile, two representatives said that the presenter on Mental Health, while he had good information, was not a strong speaker. Seven legislators stated that every presentation was worthwhile. A freshman representative who attended all seven sessions said, "The format worked tremendously well. I never regretted going one day."

Responses to the telephone survey mirrored the assessment that legislators gave in the evaluation forms that were completed at the end of each presentation. Asked to rate presenters from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), the vast majority of legislators ranked presenters as either 4 or 5. For the seven sessions, 101 evaluation forms were collected; of these only six rated presenters as 2 or 3. No presenters were given a 1, the lowest rating.

Asked if the information presented would be useful for making policy decisions in the future, nearly everyone gave top ratings of 4 and 5. Of the 101 evaluations, only five scored usefulness of information as a 3 and there were no scores lower than this.

Relevance to Legislation

Surveyed about the relevance of the Educational Series to bills that came before the Legislature, lawmakers gave the following responses.

Long-Term Care Financing	4	Coordinated Transportation	1
Affordable Housing	4	Not Sure	7
Mental Health	2		

Not surprisingly, representatives serving on the House Health and Human Services Committee were the ones who found the sessions most relevant. One member stated, "The Health and Human Services Committee has been dealing with home care for the elderly, disability issues, and medication for mental illness." These were all issues covered in the series. Several legislators interviewed mentioned that the series was relevant to legislation concerning funding of the state's Katie Beckett Medicaid program. The state senator interviewed credited the series with helping secure enough votes to preserve funding for this program.

While none of the legislators interviewed believed that the Educational Series was instrumental in helping them decide how they voted on a bill, several representatives commented that information from the series helped them be better informed about the issues. A freshman legislator said, "It gave me more knowledge to deal with those subjects when they came up. It got me thinking."

Continuation of the Educational Series

All 20 of the legislators interviewed said they would like to see an educational series such as *Supporting Older Adults and Individuals with Disabilities in Your Community* continue. Several people remarked that with one third of the Legislature turning over every two years, it is especially important to provide quality training and information for incoming freshmen. As one representative put it, “Anything you can do to educate the Legislature is a good idea.”

Legislators suggested the following topics for a future educational series.

Supporting People With Disabilities	8	Medicare	1
Changes in NH’s Medicaid Program	5	End-of-Life Choices	1
Mental Health Issues	4	How Tax Rates Affect Seniors	1
Lower-Cost Prescription Drugs	2	Reorganization of Dept HHS	1
Insurance for Low-Income People	1		

Many legislators expressed concerns about the lack of adequate resources and programs for people with disabilities and were worried about the dramatic changes being proposed for New Hampshire’s Medicaid Program:

“People need to know what parents (of children with disabilities) are contending with, what the cost is, and more about home-based care for adults and elderly.”

“What are the programs and resources that should be in place where individuals with disabilities can learn to be contributing citizens? Show the benefits to the family and the state. With Laconia [New Hampshire’s former institution for people with developmental disabilities] we would pay the bill without asking – because we had to. Now we don’t pay for basic community services because we are saving money. We have already saved money by closing Laconia.”

“We’re going to need some real support for the Katie Beckett children who are really disabled. There is a strong move by the commissioner [of Health and Human Services] to remove these kids from programs. There is the whole [Medicaid] block grant issue and the state saying they have no money.”

“Let people know why home-based care is so important and what happens if Medicaid is cut down. The pitch should be that people like to stay home and it’s more cost effective.”

All the topics for future training that were suggested in the telephone surveys were also found in the written evaluations. In addition, these evaluations included recommendations for presentations on the shortage of direct-care workers, a community support system for elders, collaboration for treatment of co-concurring disabilities and conditions (mental illness, addiction, infectious disease, and homelessness), and Social Security eligibility.

Recommendations for Improving the Educational Series

Asked what could be done to improve the Educational Series, legislators talked about making training relevant to pending legislation, collaborating on presentations, bringing in quality speakers, and taking steps to ensure good attendance. A longtime legislative leader stated that lawmakers are overwhelmed with information and recommended no more than two presentations during the legislative session.

One legislator said that he wanted to have presentations that could be applied to New Hampshire in the short term. Another wanted training that “provided pointed information in a timely fashion.” A freshman representative elaborated on this theme:

“Make training relevant to New Hampshire legislation. Show incentives – how can New Hampshire do this? Give specific, useable tools to those who are writing legislation. If you can’t show that there is a dollar benefit the Fiscal Committee won’t go for it. Show what other states have done on this issue.”

Another freshman legislator recommended that the Institute on Disability, Franklin Pierce Law Center, Citizens Alliance, and Doug Hall (policy expert) work collaboratively to educate legislators on issues. He noted, “You get bombarded from the right with lots of very glitzy materials. You need to combat that with readable and factual information.”

Several legislators commented on the importance of bringing in presenters who are not only experts in their field, but who also are engaging speakers. A veteran legislator appreciated hearing from presenters who have national reputations. People liked the opportunity to ask questions at the forums and wanted this to continue. They also valued written handouts from the presenters that provided summary information and contacts for further exploration of the issue.

Legislators liked the format of the series and recommended keeping it the same. Having presentations scheduled for legislative days and within walking distance of the State House was a plus. The senator who was interviewed asked that training not be held on Thursdays, as the Senate doesn’t break for lunch on this day. Legislators liked the noon sessions better than morning, and almost everyone commented on the importance of food. One representative observed, “Lunch is a huge draw. You have to have food. I was surprised to see some of my colleagues who were there. When you offer lunch, you get people who wouldn’t otherwise give you the time of day.”

Legislators made several recommendations for publicizing training. They wanted chairpersons to encourage their committee members to attend, asked that information about presentations be put in the legislative calendar, and that House and Senate leadership announce trainings to their respective bodies. One representative talked about the importance of encouraging bipartisan attendance. “The great majority who were there were democrats and I’m not surprised about that. We think government should be there to help people. You need to be sure to get people in the majority party to attend.” It is

interesting to note that while this was one legislator's perception, sign-in sheets actually show that 80 republicans and 42 democrats attended the Educational Series.

Conclusion

The Legislative Education Series conducted by New Hampshire's Real Choice Systems Change project was well received by state representatives and senators. Those completing written evaluations, as well as the 20 legislators interviewed for this evaluation, found the Educational Series informative and well worth continuing. While legislators did not believe that the series ultimately influenced their vote on a particular bill, they did see it as valuable means for learning more about issues affecting individuals with long-term care needs.

Legislators recommended keeping the format of the series, with minor adjustments (lunch presentations are more likely to draw people than morning sessions). Future topics for legislative training should be relevant to pending state legislation and include specifics on how New Hampshire can respond to pressing issues. New Hampshire's current move to change its Medicaid program was seen by many legislators as the most significant threat to older citizens and to individuals with disabilities, and many recommended that this be a presentation topic for the Legislature's next session.



REAL CHOICES - LEGISLATOR TELEPHONE SURVEY

1. Republican/Democrat
2. Male/Female
3. What committees do you serve on?
4. How many years have you served in the NH Legislature?
5. Did you find the Legislative Series informative?
6. Was the series helpful in your work as a legislator? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
7. Which session did you find most worthwhile and why?
8. Which session was least worthwhile and why?
9. Were any of the sessions relevant to bills that came before the Legislature? If yes, which bills?
10. Did information from the series help you in deciding how to vote?
11. Would you like to see a series such as this continue?
12. If yes, what topics related to community-based care for individuals and elders would you like to have presented?
13. Would you know who to approach for additional information on topics raised in the series? Would you be comfortable making this contact?
14. What suggestions do you have to improve the Legislative Series?
15. What is the most significant change that you believe has occurred as a result of this series (either for yourself, your constituency, or the legislature)?
16. Is there anything else about the series that would be important to know?