

Research and Training Center on Service Coordination

A.J. Pappanikou Center for Developmental Disabilities



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SPOTLIGHT: DELPHI STUDY -- RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

The Research and Training Center (RTC) is currently undergoing the next phase in its study of service coordination outcomes and practices. Focus groups were held in four states (Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, and North Carolina) to identify recommended practices of service coordination. Participants were presented with the top eight service coordination outcomes resulting from a previous RTC Delphi study that centered on the question "If service coordination were of the highest quality for children, families, and systems, how would you know it?" These outcomes were:

1. Children and families receive appropriate supports and services that meet their individual needs.
2. Children reach their full potential.
3. Children are healthy.
4. Children's development is enhanced.
5. Children have successful transitions.
6. Families are involved in decision-making.
7. Families are informed about resources and services.
8. People work together as a team.

A total of 39 focus groups were held between April 2001 and August 2001 in urban, suburban, and rural locations. Stakeholder groups included family members, service coordinators, service providers (Indiana only), and program administrators.

Two hundred and seventy-five people participated in the focus groups. This included 73 family members, 93 service coordinators, 23 service providers, and 86 program administrators.

The focus groups generated over 2000 practices. Project staff sorted these statements by stakeholder group and combined similar statements into clusters. A practice statement was generated for each cluster that encompassed all the ideas in the group. These statements comprised the Delphi survey. Surveys were distributed to focus group participants in November 2001. Survey respondents were asked to rank each practice statement according to the likelihood that it would result in the outcomes listed.

Results from the Delphi survey are still being collected. Following the completion of the study, the recommended practices will undergo additional validation using a large-scale survey which will be distributed to practitioners, administrators, family members, and higher education faculty across all 50 states and the District of Columbia.

RTC Staff Present Findings

On December 3, 2001, members of the RTC staff presented data from multiple studies at the 17th annual conference of the Division of Early Childhood: "Early Childhood in the New Millennium: Recommended Practices for the Future." The conference was held in Boston, Massachusetts, from December 2-5. The presentation included findings from the Part C survey, the parent leader surveys, the training survey, as well as preliminary findings on outcomes and practices of high quality service coordination.

MEASURING OUTCOMES: FAMILY AND SERVICE COORDINATOR INTERVIEWS

RTC project staff are in the process of interviewing 100 families in four states (Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, and North Carolina) in order to identify outcomes of effective service coordination. In addition, we are measuring the importance of the outcomes to each family and the practices that led to specific outcomes.

A recruitment grid was designed for this survey to ensure that the participant sample included a diversity of family backgrounds, child characteristics, and community characteristics. A sample of the questions include the following:

1. What was life like for your family at the time you enrolled with early intervention?
2. What role did service coordination play in your entering the early intervention system?
3. Was it easy or difficult to enter the system?
4. Was it always clear to you who your service coordinator was?
5. Have you had more than one service coordinator?
6. Overall, how important was service coordination in reaching the goals that you have for your child and your family?
7. If service coordination were working well for your family, how would you know it?

Additionally, staff are contacting and interviewing the service coordinators for each of the 100 families participating in the family interviews. The purpose of the interviews is to confirm and augment information about the families to record factors related to the delivery of service coordination.

A sample of the service coordination questions include the following:

1. How long have you been a service coordinator?
2. What kinds of training prepared you for the specific work required of a service coordinator?
3. How much time do you spend on service coordination for this family (on average) per month, including paperwork, phone calls, and other things?
4. How frequently do you call this family and how long are the phone calls?
5. What early intervention activities take place during your visits with this family?
6. If you were to ask this family what outcomes are important to them, what do you think they would say?
7. If service coordination were working its absolute best for this family, how would you know it?

We will use the information obtained from these interviews to develop a tool for service coordinators to measure how a family reaches the outcomes they have set for their child/family. Also, the tool will help to determine practices that result in the desired outcome(s).

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