Systems Transformation Initiative
for People with Long Term Disabilities

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Abstract.: Strengthening service systems for people with long-term disabilities (e.g., developmental disabilities, head injuries, mental health) is of growing interest by local and state governments. There is recognition that current systems of care face of number of challenges in meeting the changing needs of people with long-term disabilities and their families. The Center for Community Support and Research (CCSR) is in the second year of collaborating with the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) on a 5-year Real Choice Systems Transformation Initiative. The purposes of the initiative are to (1) improve choice and control for people with long-term disabilities, (2) utilize information-technology more effectively, and (3) improve the financing of services. The initiative requires a high level of collaboration and coordination between multiple service providers, the state government, people served, and their families. The CCSR serves as an evaluator for the initiative, documenting the extent to which three statewide task teams and a statewide steering committee have made progress in achieving each of the stated purposes.

Introduction

The US Census Bureau predicts that by 2030 the population in Kansas will increase by about 252,000 people [1]. The most challenging aspect of this increase will be that it is estimated that 237,000 of the 252,000 will be over the age of 65. Importantly, an estimated 237,000 of the 252,000 people increase (94%) is expected to be over the age of 65. Since the late 1980's, the state of Kansas has taken numerous steps to improve the long term care for each of the disability systems. However, it was not until recently that state officials started working towards coordinating them. These changes were motivated by growing problems such as conflict of incentives [2] and lack of promotion of self determination [3].

In order address these challenges from happening, the Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) of Kansas initiated a 5 -year Systems Transformation project in 2006, which was funded by Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services through a Real Choice Systems Transformation Grant. According to Foster-Fishman, Nowell & Yang (2007), systems change is an intentional process designed to alter the status quo by shifting and realigning the form and function of the targeted system [5]. In order to understand and assess the success or failure of systems change (or transformations) it is essential to get a proper understanding of parts of the system (norms, resources, regulations, and operations) as well as interaction patterns between system parts [5] and then compare the desired system structure to the current system and see how they match up.

The overall goal of the Real Choice System Transformation project is to encourage community living options by enhancing consumer control and direction through a coordinated service delivery system [4]. In order to meet this goal, three different task teams have formed for this System Transformation project: (1) Information Technology, (2) Increased Choice and Control, and (3) Financing the Long-Term Care System. Each of these task teams receives input from Community Choice Reflection Teams that are comprised of primary consumers of services.

Furthermore, to assess the progress of Systems Transformation, SRS of Kansas serves as the facilitator for each task team and has partnered with the Center of Community Support & Research (CCSR) at Wichita State University for process and outcome evaluation assistance.

Results, Discussion and Significance: *(Factors Contributing to Effective System Change Effects for Long Term Disabilities)*

Alignment of system parts: Due to its complex structure, systems transformation projects, similar to this project described, require that all parts (Task Teams, CCRTs, Steering Committee, SRS, CCSR) are knowledgeable about the progress of their counterparts and adjust accordingly. For instance, if the task teams (system part) move faster through their project objectives than expected and do not receive input from the Community Choice Reflection Teams (system part) because information needed was not available as fast as originally planned or not taken into consideration to save time, the project moves away from one of its initial objectives (parts become misaligned), including the opinions of the consumers of long-term care systems. Consequently its probability of success is reduced. Furthermore, if the project is not well coordinated and input from all the stakeholders is not represented in the decision-making process as intended, the initiative loses much of its comprehensiveness and does not have the impact it should.

Stakeholder collaboration and group dynamics: As with any initiative some groups will get along and be more on the same page than other ones. The achievement of intended goals will likely depend on group characteristics, purpose, effective information sharing, and member characteristics. Ability to reach high quality agreements as well build   consensus seem to greatly affect the speed and quality of work done by task teams with very diverse stakeholder groups [6

Affecting Policy: Unless there is a cohesive collaboration on individual, group, and system levels the project will not meet its purpose (promote community living options and consumer control and self-direction) and ultimately will not affect policy, including Kansas legislation.

 The nature of system evaluation research: Given the complexity of the system transformation project, the CCSR is developing multiple methods to assess progress across task teams. These methods include analysis of task team meeting notes, interviews with key stakeholders across long-term disabilities, feedback from SRS staff, task team member feedback, and CCRT focus groups.

Conclusion: Transforming systems is a complex initiative with a lot of unexpected changes and events. In order to achieve success in transforming social systems all the system parts have to be properly aligned, there has to be a high level of stakeholder collaboration, positive group dynamics, and an ongoing evaluation that properly captures the dynamic nature of this endeavor.

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