



Support Development Associates LLC

Becoming a Person Centered Organization Frequently asked questions 2012

What is “becoming a person centered organization”?

It is an international effort to support organizations in having better outcomes for the people that they support. The efforts address methods to support organizations to become more person centered in their day to day practices and structures. It supports organizations in becoming more efficient in their work while helping the people who use their services have lives of their own choosing as a part of their communities.

Efforts have taken place in 10 states and in the United Kingdom and Canada. The organizations participating include both large and small service providers, as well as organizations that only provide service coordination.

What are the benefits?

Organizations which engaged in full participation have found that the people they support have better relationships, and are listened to by the people who provide support. There are also fewer crises, challenges are more effectively addressed, and those who deliver the services feel more valued. Managers report that they have better tools for problem solving and communication with other agencies has improved. Managers have greater clarity about roles and responsibilities for those they supervise. Senior managers have a better idea of what is working and needs to be maintained and what is not working and needs to change within the policy and practice of their organizations. Everyone reports that meetings are more productive and effective.

How does it work?

The effort integrates person centered thinking skills with specific best practices in management and quality improvement. Those who participate learn how to apply a basic set of person centered thinking skills within day-to-day life for the people they support and within the practices of the organization. At the same time they learn and apply skills such as process mapping and how to make meetings more positive and productive. As the person centered thinking skills are used in supporting people there is learning about what is and is not working in the way the organization and the system structure is designed.

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Learning which results from supporting individuals drives the changes that are made at the organization and the system level.

How is it structured?

Coaches and level 1 changes- People who receive supports

If learning is to drive change then those who are doing the learning need clear and regular ways to communicate with those who can act on the learning. Those who are using (and spreading) the skills in supporting people with disabilities are referred to as *coaches*, person centered thinking coaches. They are typically front line managers, service coordinators, and interested professionals. They are responsible for assisting direct support professionals in applying the skills to make positive changes in the lives of those supported. They meet every other month to practice skills, problem solve, share learning and be supported in their own efforts to create change.

As coaches use the person centered thinking tools they discover things that need to change that are within their authority to change. Most of these are related to the presence of what is important to the people whom they support. Sharing stories about what they have changed creates motivation and encouragement for all coaches to continue their efforts. These are referred to as level 1 changes. But they also find things that need to change which are beyond their scope or authority to change without involvement from more senior managers. Those practices, policies, rules and approaches which coaches cannot change on their own are passed on to the leadership group.

Leadership and level 2 changes- Organizations

To act on the learning coaches engage in, leaders within the organization must have a structured way to hear about the learning. To accomplish this, a leadership group is created that consists of executive administrative staff people who receive support from the organization (and family members), managers and supervisors from each tier of the organization, board members (if a non-profit organization) and. If the effort is aimed at changing systems, then leadership from highest level office of the administrative/funding agency and the service coordination agencies must also participate on the leadership team.

The Leadership Team meets with the coaches every other month to listen to what is working and not working in the lives of those who are receiving support. Success is celebrated while obstacles to success are identified, analyzed, and acted on. Changes in structures, policies, and practices needed within the organization providing support are referred to as level 2 changes. These may include changes in service delivery (assessment methods, approaches to plan development, action plan implementation by direct support professionals), personnel policies (employee performance appraisal, monthly supervision) or financial/administrative practices (how services are approved, data is kept). All level 2 changes must create level 1 opportunities – opportunities to improve the quality of services or outcomes of the people served or of direct support professional employees.

Level Three Changes- The System

As Leaders and Coaches meet together to listen to each other and learn from each other, additional opportunities to improve the overall system are often identified. Changes needed in structures, policies, practices and rules which impact an entire system of support are referred to as Level 3 changes. Rather than letting these challenges stop their progress, members of the leadership team who are responsible for system design and implementation commit to working through the changes needed at this level. At times, the Level three changes may be rules, or interpretation of rules, or the methods and approaches applied when two or more agencies interact with each other. Much of this focus is on communication, respect, trust, and the effectiveness of support teams. Not all “Becoming a Person Centered Organization” efforts include this level of involvement by administrative/funding agencies, but most efforts result in the identification of improvement opportunities at this level.

How does it get started?

Becoming a person centered organization efforts begin with an overview day so that those who would potentially participate can look at the possible benefits, costs, and the requirements for success and make an informed decision.

Those who commit to participation begin their efforts by developing a leadership group and selecting likely person centered thinking coaches. The leadership group is formed to lead the efforts, listen to the learning from the efforts, and recommend actions based on what was learned. *The best leadership groups have a diverse membership that includes senior managers, board members, key family members, people who use services, and person centered thinking coaches. A key factor in successful organizational change is support from those with power and those with influence. The leadership group should represent both.*

In some areas, where Person Centered Systems are desired, the leadership group includes representatives from the highest levels of leadership within the Supports Coordination agencies (where free-standing) and the Administrative/funding organizations. In these areas, leaders are expected to fully participate in the efforts.

Person centered thinking coaches are the people who will take the skills from training to habit. The initial group of coaches should be chosen from among those who have the day to day responsibilities where the skills would be most useful. These are typically front line and middle managers. As it is critical to start with success they must also be people who have a gift for this work and a passion to see it happen.

What are the activities and time commitments for the first year?

- A “getting started” day with senior managers, likely person centered thinking coaches and some of the other key stakeholders including those who use the services, family members, board members, and other key “opinion molders”

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- Review the activities including the commitments needed for success and the likely benefits
- Define success
- Look at what should stay the same and what should change
- Developing the leadership group
- Person centered thinking training (2 days)
- Leadership group organization (1 day)
 - Introduce positive and productive meetings
 - Define success statements for people supported, employees and the organizations involved.
 - Review commitments and activities
 - Learn about process maps
 - Next steps
- Coaches training (1 day)
- Coaches support and learning groups (bi-monthly)
- Bring the learning from the coaches group to the leadership group and supporting problem solving (bi-monthly)
- Learning and reflection days – 1 day – coaches and leadership together

What are the requirements for success? What commitments are expected from organizations?

Success in these efforts requires that organizations make a clear set of commitments –

- 100% of senior leaders and managers and all of those to be part of the leadership group participate in the 2 day person centered thinking training.
- Leadership group meetings and activities are seen as a priority and every effort is made to attend and actively participate.
- Potential coaches must attend the 2 day person centered thinking training
- Coaches must be -
 - supported in their efforts to practice new skills within their daily work at the organization including the time needed
 - supported in attending monthly coaches groups and other becoming a person centered organization activities
 - listened to as they learn what is working and not working in the efforts to help people who use services get lives of their own choosing.
- The leadership group must not only listen to the learning from the coaches but act on what is heard. They must –
 - Celebrate what is already working within the organization
 - Share the learning from the changes that are successfully made with all members of their organization
 - Design and implement actions to address the opportunities for implementing person centered practice which require changes in structures, rules or practices

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- In places where person centered ***systems*** are desired, the leadership team includes executive and senior management staff of the service coordination and administrative/funding agencies. These members commit to learning how to apply the person centered skills in their own work, in their own day to day efforts, and share their learning with all other members of the leadership team. They agree to design and implement an action plan that includes their agencies in change efforts, recognizing that changes in their actions will impact changes within the service organizations.