

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK
THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

To: All Independent Living Centers
From: Robert Gumson
Date: November 26, 2003
Subject: Field memo regarding improving consistency in community and systems change results reporting

This memorandum seeks to clarify parameters and remedy inconsistencies in the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID), Independent Living Service Unit's review and approval of achievement of Independent Living Center goals and outcomes of community and systems change initiatives. Any changes to the review parameters listed below are effective immediately and are to be reflected accordingly in 2003-2004 mid year report and end of year report.

The content of the memorandum derives from input from six Independent Living Centers including: ARISE Inc., Center for the Independence of the Disabled in New York, Independent Living Project of Western New York, North Country Center for Independence, and the Independent Living Center of the Hudson Valley. Representatives from these centers met with VESID in October, following a discussion of this topic at the New York State Independent Living Council's Fall 2003 statewide conference workshop presented by Fred Ayers and myself, entitled "The Art of Systems Change Goal Planning."

The issues addressed and positions arrived at to improve systems advocacy goal reporting as a result of the meeting are as follows:

Definition:

The group held an engaging dialogue on the current definition of "systems change" adopted within New York State's CIL Standards, Performance Measures and Data Collection Guide, October 2002 as follows:

- Systems change is the permanent change to policies, practices and decisions in the public and/or private sector that control resources necessary to enhance integration, inclusion and independence of people with disabilities as a group.

The group attempted to distinguish between advocacy and systems change. Questions were raised about what resources are controlled by the change. Are there more types of "change" than the definition currently calls for? How do we account for a partial change such as one building on a college campus, or one polling site in a county or one curb cut at a major intersection? The group resolved to modify the overarching definition of "systems change" by adding the word "environments" to the definition and apply the revision to all uses of the term for each of the six domain areas of Education, Employment, Health Care, Commerce, Social and Citizenship. The new definition will read as follows:

- Systems change is the permanent change to policies, practices, decisions and environments in the public and/or private sector that control resources necessary to enhance integration, inclusion and independence of people with disabilities as a group.

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CLARIFICATION OF REVIEW PARAMETERS

Pro-active and Re-active Systemic Change:

Both pro-active and re-active methods for approaching systems change may lead to a result. The IL Services Unit in the past has granted, and will continue to grant, credit for systemic change when activities documented support the prevention of a policy, practice, decision or environment that is contrary to the integration, inclusion or independence of people with disabilities as a group. An example of this instance is when documented efforts are undertaken that stop the establishment of a new segregated program.

Contracted and Uncontracted Goals:

The IL Services Unit has credited ILC's with systems change results for goals that were reported on in the end of year report but not stated in the contract document or mid year contract revision document. VESID will continue this practice and encourages ILC's to count all systems change activity from all funding sources in a comparable manner to which people served and other statistical data is counted from all sources. VESID also continues to encourage ILC's to make use of the mid year report to add or revise goals.

Systems Change Through New Programs:

When a new program or "practice" is added in a community to the current system in a manner that results in greater integration, inclusion and/or independence of people with disabilities as a group, then an outcome has been achieved. In many instances, the program is the result of a grant or new resource funded for the first time. The outcome credited for these instances are not related to the funding but rather to the new opportunity that previously did not exist in the community.

Categorical Duplication in the Outcome Inventory:

The group voiced confusion and concern about the perceived overlap of inventoried results. VESID maintains that it is conceivable that the same category of outcome, i.e. transportation, may appear in multiple areas such as Commerce and Social, and results of building access appear in multiple areas of Education and Commerce. The placement of an outcome in the inventory depends upon the system it has changed. For example, changing public transportation systems will go under Commerce, while improving transportation specifically for seniors to attend a social event would go under Social.

Documentation Necessary to Be Credited with Outcomes:

Documentation will be required by VESID on a case by case basis. The type and scope of documentation requested could vary depending upon the advocacy area or type of outcome. Well described steps taken to achieve an outcome should be noted under the reporting of "activities". Improving access in the business community, educational facilities and elsewhere should be described in detail but verification is difficult and unless otherwise indicated, will remain on an honor system. Other outcomes should be supported with documentation such as: if a curriculum developed by the

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ILC was added into a training model then it should be attached, if a new committee or task force gained representation of a person with a disability then an appointment letter or minutes of a meeting should be attached, and if legislation was passed through a bill or proclamation then the detailed extent of ILC involvement should be attached along with a summary of the bill or proclamation.

CHANGES TO REVIEW PARAMETERS

Attitudinal Change:

A lively discussion of the impact of attitudinal change on achieving results of “systems change” occurred. The group agreed that changing attitudes of others does not constitute systems change. Attitudinal change is a bi-product of other ILC activities and is perceived as a worthy endeavor, i.e., technical assistance to the community. All future references to the viability of outcomes related to changing attitudes of others will be removed from VESID’s criteria of measurement of systems change.

Outcomes That Are Unmeasurable:

The group discussed and agreed upon the elimination of goals that are not readily measurable. The two types of goals that appeared most inconsistent with the system developed for measurement occurred in Education and Employment. The goals address increases in parental/student involvement in the IEP process and numbers of employers hiring people with disabilities for the first time. Neither goal outcome describes a change to a system but rather the goals represent a trend upward in activity level. Neither goal outcome provides convincing evidence that a permanent change has occurred to a policy, practice, decision or environment affecting people with disabilities as a group. The two goals will no longer be credited with systems change inventory results beginning in the 2003-04 contract year are as follows:

Education:

- There will be a measurable increase in parent/student involvement in the IEP process from one reporting period to the next reporting period.

Employment:

- There will be a measurable increase in the number of integrated employment opportunities with employers that have previously not hired persons with disabilities.

Milestone Versus Outcome:

Consensus was reached that a milestone toward “systems change” is a “significant” step in the work plan to achieve a result that is absolutely necessary to achieve the outcome. One example that clearly describes a “milestone” would be in relation to, i.e. the passage of legislation. If a particular legislator has voiced opposition to legislation and his/her support is key to its passage, and activities undertaken by the ILC lead to his/her change of position by signing onto the legislation, then a “milestone” has occurred. Additionally, a written commitment by a town or county to remove

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architectural barriers to public space with a timetable for modification may also constitute a “milestone”. VESID reserves the right to review and determine the extent of activity toward an outcome in relation to achievement of milestones of systems change.

SUMMARY:

VESID appreciates the time and effort of the work team that helped further shape the measurement system for results of community and systems change. We remain committed to foster the achievement of community and systems change as a primary role of Independent Centers. We will periodically review our internal practices to ensure consistency and continuity as our model is implemented.

If you should have any questions or need additional information, please contact Fred Ayers or myself at (518) 486-7462.

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