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US Public Policy Update

Improving Preparedness and Flexibility in Web-Based Trainings for North American START Teams

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Participant preparedness and flexibility are essential components of successful online training programs that are targeted to diverse audiences. Families, clinicians, direct support staff, community partners, administrators, and others who work to improve the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) have complex schedules and differing levels of experience with technology. Online preparedness measures and flexibility reduce barriers to access and promote effective delivery for online trainings and technical assistance.

In 2010, the Center for START Services expanded its services and began to offer a blended approach to technical assistance and trainings using techniques that are both synchronous (in-person or live web-based and conference call sessions) and asynchronous (pre-recorded training videos). This approach allows the Center to provide services at a decreased cost while also saving participants additional costs associated with travel such as time and mileage reimbursements (Hurley & Beasley, 2011). Using technology to provide services has also provided projects with a way to involve community mental health partners in assessment and treatment planning, while increasing their knowledge about I/DD and mental health needs (MH).

START (Systematic, Therapeutic, Assessment, Respite and Treatment) is a systems linkage model to provide community services, natural supports and mental health treatment to people with I/DD and mental health issues (Beasley, 2002). The model was first developed in 1988 and cited by the Surgeon General's Report (U.S. Public Health Service, 2002) and has been used as a basis for the development of services in Arkansas, Maine, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Washington (Jacobstein, Stark & Laygo, 2007).

The Center for START Services, part of the University of New Hampshire's Institute on Disability/UCED, is responding to emergent research and evaluation feedback to provide

a blended learning approach to trainings. Our 2011-2012 National Online Training on MH & I/DD was well attended with more than 1,430 participants logging in to view the sessions. Participant feedback during the registration process and in evaluations indicated that two major areas for improvement were access to appropriate technology and time, which is in keeping with online learning research. While advances in technology have made it easier to produce and deliver web-based trainings and technical assistance, research shows that considerations such as appropriate access to technology, support from organizations to take time for training, and varying levels of participant experience with technology are crucial factors when developing effective training programs (Noe, 2010).

Our primary focus is on producing and delivering world-class trainings and technical assistance related to the START model and I/DD. Although we are not responsible for participant preparedness (access to and familiarization with the appropriate technology) or flexibility (whether an organization supports participants by providing them with the adequate time), we consider these issues to be an important part of a successful training program. The emergent and growing body of research on online education programs highlights the importance of preparedness as it relates to educational outcomes (Wojciechowski & Louann, 2005) and flexibility (An & Frick, 2006). To ensure that participants get the most from our blended training approach, the Center for START Services is responding through a mix of short- and long-term approaches.

Our short-term responses include both synchronous and asynchronous offerings tailored to each training group based on their preparedness level. We have developed a new online course with pre-recorded video trainings to provide opportunities for self-paced individual and group learning sessions with exercises to enhance communities, conversations and networks. The online course has been developed in a way that is

nimble and may adjust easily to new information and the changing landscape of learners, and we have implemented polls to measure basic participants' experience with web-based learning environments.

Finally, long-term responses to address participant preparedness and flexibility will include an in-depth study to examine various characteristics of participants to measure preparedness and learning outcomes. Self-assessment surveys will be conducted at least one month prior to each new training group to allow us time to provide an orientation process that is tailored to specific groups and addresses gaps and potential barriers for the specific audience. Over time, aggregated data from these surveys will help us develop a comprehensive orientation process for all participants based on responses to the self-assessment survey. The goal is to help participants become more comfortable with the online learning environment and web-based offerings so that learning and positive outcomes for individuals with I/DD and their communities take center stage over anxiety about technology and time.

Through trainings offered, there is the capacity for all to learn and improve outcomes, including both professional and natural supports/families. This is key to our mission. The ability to provide effective ways to access training in our ever-evolving field can foster the provision of effective services in an environment with scarce resources. Improving strategies that are timely and allow for all to be involved is an aim that we hope to achieve with this effort.

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The "U.S. Public Policy Update" is an ongoing column in The NADD Bulletin. We welcome your comments and submissions for this column. To learn more or to contribute to this column you may contact Joan Beasley, Editor of the U.S. Public Policy Update at joan.beasley@unh.edu.

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related to supports for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities and mental illness. Details about manuscript submission are available at <http://thenadd.org/nadd-bulletin/submitting-articles-for-the-nadd-bulletin/>. Inquiries or submissions may be submitted to Lucille Esralew, Ph.D., Co-Editor, at lesralew@trinitas.org.

Upcoming Conferences/Trainings

NADD 29th Conference & Exhibit Show – 2012

October 17-19, 2012 (W-F)

Omni Interlocken Resort • Denver/Broomfield, CO

NADD Fall/Winter 2012 Webinar Series

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|----------------|---|----------------|--|
| Sept 12 | Repetitive Verbal Arguments and Behaviors | Nov. 27 | Fostering Friendships for People With and Without Disabilities |
| Sept. 7 | Technology-Based Service Models: Planning for Sustainability in New Budget Environments | Dec. 4 | Early Identification of Cognitive Decline in Person with I/ DD |
| Oct. 4 | “Compassion Fatigue” | Dec. 12 | The Inclusive Recreation Resource Center: Helping ALL People Play- |
| Oct. 30 | Learning More about Medication-Induced EPS | Dec. 19 | Update on Complementary and Alternative Medical Treatments for Individuals with DD |
| Nov. 1 | Making Sense of Autism and Anxiety | | |
| Nov. 15 | Understanding and Responding to Persons with Personality Disorders | | |

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