

## Lessons Learned: The Role of Mentoring in Organizational Change

The Training and Technical Assistance for Providers project (T-TAP) advocates the use of an array of strategies that Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) can use to increase the number and quality of *customized employment* outcomes for adults with disabilities. T-TAP has provided direct technical assistance to a number of CRPs who applied and received direct support from the project to facilitate organizational change within their organizations. One of the strategies used to assist these programs has been the concept of mentoring. T-TAP staff matched CRPs to “mentor” organizations who were selected for their knowledge and proven experience in navigating organizational change issues with a measure of success. These mentors formed T-TAP's CRP Leadership Network. To learn more about the T-TAP project, visit <http://www.t-tap.org>.

### Case Example

Mentoring is proving to be a successful strategy based on the experiences of *mentor* and *mentee* agencies participating in T-TAP. A goal for T-TAP has been to identify key factors known to foster change when using a mentoring approach. In other words, what *qualities* are necessary to build a successful mentoring relationship and help CRPs to increase successful customized employment outcomes?

Rise, Incorporated, a *T-TAP mentor organization*, and Coastal Center for Developmental Services (CCDS), a *T-TAP mentee organization*, offer some insight into the lessons learned about successful relationships. This includes the importance of fundamental qualities within both the mentor and mentee organizations. Rise was introduced CCDS staff members by phone and at an initial project meeting during an annual APSE, The Network on Employment conference. The two agencies maintained regular contact through monthly telephone meetings, two visits to CCDS by Rise staff over a one year period, and one visit from CCDS staff to Rise.

Rise and CCDS have identified the following as characteristics of a successful **mentor organization**.

- Holds essential *content knowledge* and *competencies* at the management, administrative, and direct service levels.

- Is willing to commit the necessary *time* and *resources* of multiple professionals within its organization.
- Is non-judgmental and offers encouragement to the mentee organization and its staff
- Approaches mentoring as a collegial not a subordinate relationship.
- Recognizes its own limitations.
- Is willing to share relevant information, materials, policies, organizational infrastructure, direct service strategies, funding streams, staff development training, resource management, and other areas crucial to obtaining integrated employment in the workforce
- Offers support from a framework that includes specific training & technical assistance goals and timelines for achieving them.
- Shows commitment by offering *regular and timely responses* to scheduled and ongoing requests from the mentee agency.
- Solicits honest feedback about the relevance and quality of the support provided to insure efforts are responsive to needs of the mentee organization.

A successful **mentee organization** can be characterized by the following.

- Is committed to change as evidenced by the visible support of the organization's *leadership* including its board of directors, executive officers, management team, and direct service staff.
- Is committed to change as evidenced by a *written plan of action* that includes measurable goals, a division of labor among managers and staff, and progress check points to guide present and future activities.
- Is willing to openly and honestly assess its *strengths* and *challenges* in meeting established goals for change including increased job placement objectives.
- Is willing to open its organization to a mentoring organization to establish a mutual consensus concerning needs, goals, and support activities.
- Is willing to temporarily suspend its own judgment about organizational change possibilities to consider a full range of ideas, suggestions, and strategies.
- Is dedicated to *management/staff action* to carry out defined systems change goals encourages all levels of its management and staff in the desired planning and implementation of its systems change objectives.
- Is *committed to measuring progress* and systems change outcomes through a quantifiable and qualitative measurement strategy.

- *Celebrates* the achievement of its participants with disabilities who obtain integrated employment in the local workforce.
- Is *committed to long-term change* by embracing ongoing problem-solving and quality improvement procedures.

In addition to these above qualities, Rise and CCDS found that mentor and mentee organizations should have mutual opportunities to visit and examine the operations of their respective organizations. This gives both organizations a frame of reference and clarity about their respective business structures, policies, direct service practices, and organizational capacities to obtain and support integrated employment outcomes. Actual visitations by the mentee organization can increase theory-to-practice applications by viewing direct service methods and seeing customized employment illustrations. In addition, mentees benefit from analyzing administrative strategies critical to organizational change such as business marketing methods, use of funding streams, agency resource management, transportation issues, staff development training, and family education programs.

### **Summary and Recommendations**

The use of *mentoring* as an effective organizational change strategy works best when the mentor and mentee organizations are well matched, share a consensus about their respective roles, and have clear expectations of each other. The organizations must work together from a structured plan of action with identified goals. Both must be willing to commit the necessary time and resources to building a successful relationship. When these identified qualities are in place, mentee organizations can extend and build upon their internal capacities to reach organizational change goals more effectively, efficiently, with a greater degree of confidence.

This lessons learned brief was developed by Don Lavin of Rise. Mr. Lavin served as the primary mentor matched to CCDS from T-TAP's CRP Leadership Network. Rise is a private, non profit vocational rehabilitation agency that provides career planning, vocational training, employment, job placement, and support services to adults with disabilities and other barriers to employment. Named Minnesota's Outstanding Community Rehabilitation Agency by its peers three times, it is a progressive non-profit corporation serving more 2,400 adults with significant disabilities annually.