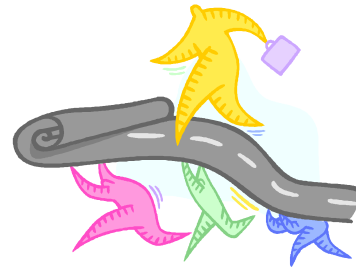


Supporting *individualized access*

IDEA 4: STAFF MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT INDIVIDUAL OUTCOMES



IN A NUTSHELL:

Anyone who has worked in an organization understands that middle managers - those managers between the executive director and the “frontline” staff - are interpreters. They help interpret the organizational vision to those they manage and they interpret the perspective of “frontline” staff to the organizational leaders. While some organizations are shifting away from traditional “hierarchical” management models, in most organizations the middle manager remains a critical position in ensuring that both the direct support staff and organizational practices facilitate meaningful days for the people they serve to support individual outcomes. This section outlines some of the skills effective middle managers of community-based support organizations possess and some of the strategies they have used to facilitate meaningful,

community-based, outcomes for the people they serve.

LIVING IT: A SUCCESS STORY Middle Managers Customize Staffing Schedules to Meet Need of People!

The manager at one day service in the Metro area is encouraging staffing flexibility to meet the needs of people. When Stan wanted to go to see *Mama Mia* on a Friday night, one of his staff offered to go with him, though doing so was outside her typical schedule. Her manager then allowed her to shift her schedule the following week to accommodate the change.

At an organization in the Northwest region, staffing schedules are customized to each person and even adjusted *again* in the summer to accommodate people’s desire to be out later.

BRINGING IT TO LIFE: **THOUGHTS AND IDEAS**

Some Qualities of An Effective Middle Manager

- She commits to always deepening her understanding of person-centered values.
- He knows the people served and their families well and in various capacities - both professionally and personally.
- She sees people's gifts and possibilities before their "deficits."
- She matches people and staff based on interests and personalities.
- He finds ways to identify and support success – and "catches people doing it right".
- She knows the staff she manages well.
- He is comfortable in his community, has a good reputation and knows people throughout the community.
- He enjoys understanding people: both appreciating the positive qualities people have and analyzing the challenges people often present.
- She can get things done through her positive outlook, creativity and by inspiring others to do their best work.
- He has a brain for logistics and the ability to synchronize and

manage multiple and potentially conflicting staff, transportation, meeting and activity schedules.

- She is persistent in getting what she needs from other departments in the organization to do her job well.
- He has access to and influence on the part of the organizational budget related to his scope of work and influence.
- She has access to and advises the organizational leadership.

A Proposed Framework for Managing Person-Centered Supports:

- **Begin by knowing the people you support really, really well, including how each person chooses to spend her time.** This information may be captured in the person's meaningful day definition and ISP but may also include subtle things that aren't formally documented anywhere. A person's family is often a wonderful source of history and information.
- Based on that knowledge, **work to find a direct support staff member who is a "good fit" with the person she serves.**

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- **Support the person to interview (or help interview) applicants who potentially will serve her.**
Create ways of folding the person's feedback into your own evaluation of the staff person's performance. Work in collaboration with the person to make termination decisions.

- **Match a person's interests with the appropriate staff person based on interests, personality, communication style, cultural and scheduling preferences.**

Consider using scrapbooks and home movies to support the staff member in getting to know the person he now serves. If Sharon loves horses, is there anyone on staff who knows local ranchers? If Brad loves to talk about the same subjects over and over, a direct support staff who is a patient and a good listener may be a great fit.

- **Develop a support schedule that accommodates the person's needs and interests.** If Brent really enjoys playing pool at the local bar on Tuesday and Thursday nights, his direct support

staffing schedule needs to accommodate this.

- **Link staff's performance to the outcomes the person supported wants to have in life.** At the end of the day, staff are paid to support a person to live the life he designs for himself. Tying a direct support staff's *own* performance reinforces to this primary responsibility and creates clear opportunities to celebrate both the person's accomplishments and the staff's role in making them happen.

Cultivating A Culture of Conversation Among Staff

Work to create a workplace where people feel comfortable sharing both good stuff and hard stuff. Creating this culture will allow good ideas about supporting people to have meaningful days to be shared and challenges to be openly discussed and resolved. Some practical ways middle managers can cultivate this culture:

- **Meet regularly. Meet informally. Meet individually. Meet as a group.** A sense of staff isolation is one of the most challenging by-products of community-based services.

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- While most middle managers have regular staff meetings (sometimes weekly, sometimes monthly), consider “touching base” each day, either through short group briefings or individual phone calls to communicate logistics and hear how things are going.
- Consider regularly going out to lunch, to a movie, to a ballgame with a person who uses services and his direct support staff member. Doing so creates relaxed ways to get to know people, model effective support, learn what’s going well and learn what isn’t.
- **Shamelessly Find and Celebrate the Good Stuff**
 - Celebrate what you value. As people are supported to live the life they choose, celebrate the significance of this. It doesn’t have to be a big accomplishment: even just celebrating that Jo now begins every day with a trip to the coffee house is meaningful to Jo and celebration-worthy.
- Consider randomly asking staff and the people they serve at regular intervals questions like:
 - “Tell me a good story;”
 - “What’s been the highlight of your week?”
 - “What are you doing when you enjoy your work the most?”
 - Capture and share what you hear.
- **“Catch people doing it right.”**
 - If you see a direct support employee doing good stuff, thank them.
 - Invite other direct support staff to brag on their coworkers during group conversations and meetings.
 - Make it a point to pass on compliments you hear about a person.
 - Consider submitting a person’s success story and the staff’s contribution to it for an award to DDSD!
- **Push Out the Bad Stuff**
 - Do not, under any circumstances, engage in organizational gossip.
 - Do not, under any circumstances, gripe about

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- other managers or organizational leaders.
- Use mistakes people make (including your own) as an opportunity for staff and organizational learning.

Model the Joy of “the Work”

Supporting people with disabilities to lead full lives should be profoundly positive work. That doesn't mean it's easy or always fun (do any of us enjoy late night trips to the emergency room?). But this work *matters* and is about *building* positive things. Middle managers can set a wonderfully positive example for others by having fun and appreciating the cool things going on in people's lives. By highlighting the wonderful dimensions of supporting people, we potentially inspire staff to think in a positive and creative ways. For a few ideas for doing this, go to *Try it Out*.

Promoting Effective Problem Solving: Never Be Totally Hands Off.

When people come to you with challenges, be supportive. Supporting people with significant needs in a community-based setting is not always easy. “Just handle it” is

not a very helpful to tell an employee; it shuts down essential communication between the manager and the direct support staff. Consider your role as facilitator, by creating space for direct support staff to develop their own solutions.

Work to be Solution-Focused

While creating space for venting is initially helpful, after people “get it out of their system,” ask questions that direct them to finding solutions. Like “So, what do you see as the next step?” “How could we better ensure this doesn't happen again?” “How can we ensure this problem doesn't distract us from our work?”

Think People, Not Programs: Building Supports Around a Person and Across Service Programs

It seems to be a tension that's been present since the development of human services: “residential program staff” versus “day program staff.” The tension is understandable: two managers, often two completely different organizations, two different sets of responsibilities and

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usually no real sense of team between the two groups of staff. We create organizations based on this model and then continuously struggle with the resulting tension.

What if we could get rid of that tension? The classic relationship-building ideas apply here:

- Get to know people.
- Thank and acknowledge people when they do right by the person, regardless of the organization.
- Bond together, both formally and informally.
- Start from a positive, optimistic perspective.

See some probing questions for people's teams to ask about any tension between different groups of staff in *Try it Out*.

Know the Organization's Money...or at Least How the Budget Impacts the Services You Manage

Providing person-centered support often requires a fundamental restructuring of services and budget priorities. In order to assist their organization in restructuring services, managers need to have access to the budget.

Having authority over a portion of the budget also streamlines procurement practices, provides managers with a stronger sense of expenses and provides interdependence so that responsibilities are covered by more than one person.

Reinforcing and Modeling "Community" for Direct Support Staff

- When looking for community-based activities that reflect a person's interests and ISP outcomes, begin the conversation by asking the person and her staff, "**WHO DO WE KNOW?**" Developing activities and community-based opportunities for people through the network of people we already have better ensures success.
- **Some direct support staff are fearless and natural connectors.** For someone like this, introducing a person she serves into a community activity is fun and easy. However, for some direct support staff, this process is more difficult. Consider spending time with this staff member and the person she serves with the sole purpose of modeling how to interact with

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the public as the person's ambassador.

- **Model community-building skills with "the hard people."** Everyone knows who they are: the people an organization serves that for whatever reason, staff often struggle to support. Ask the staff who to identify a person for whom they struggle to build community. Focus your attention and modeling on that person. Assume some of the personal responsibility for cultivating a community network for this person. Doing so both expands the person's community and provides managers with a "real life" sense of the direct support staff's responsibilities and the community's circumstances.
- **Ask "favors" of staff that encourage them to think about their communities.** For example asking a staff person, "We know that Susan wants to learn to read. Do we know of any local efforts that offer literacy classes? Could you find out for us?"

Lead Staff to Apply What They've Learned and What They Know

- Middle managers can be the most effective ones in making sure that trainings, conferences and other continuing education opportunities for direct support staff are applied.
- Debrief together after a training to discuss what pieces could be used to improve the organization's service.
- Try to implement new strategies within two weeks of learning them. They're more likely to stick.

Language Matters

Direct support will take cues from the language you use. If you don't already, consider using language that supports the idea that people who use services are individuals and equal to the rest of the population. Words and phrases like:

- "clients,"
- "functions at a 3 year old level"
- "consumers"
- referring to other people with disabilities as an individual's "peers"

all reinforce the idea that people with disabilities are separate (and not equal to) "the rest of us."

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This kind of thinking also makes it harder to use our intuition about how to respect a person and facilitate community for them.

Make Documentation as Relevant and Rewarding as Possible

When an organization receives public funding (like Medicaid Waivers) to provide services, documentation is almost always required. Middle managers can influence direct support employees' attitudes about "the paperwork." The following are some ideas for keeping documentation as meaningful as possible.

- **Value over Compliance:**
Instead of discussing documentation in terms of "something we have to do," invite staff to identify why documentation can be valuable to the person's life and to the organization. Some reasons may include:
 - It captures history:
Sometimes, when we've known the person for a long time and see him every day, it's hard to appreciate how many good things have happened in his life. Invite staff to see daily

documentation as an opportunity to tell a person's story. Every so often, take time as a group (and include the person) to re-read the daily notes and reflect on the person's year.

- Ask direct support staff to participate in the development of the documentation. Doing so will better ensure they have "buy in" into the process.
- **Involve the Person:**
Documentation becomes a much richer and more respectful process when the person who the documentation is *about* is actually part of the process. Amazingly, people who use the services rarely look at the documentation written about them. Sometimes they're not interested, but oftentimes they don't think they're allowed to look at their "book." People have a right to look at information written about them and staff have a responsibility to include a person in the documentation process if the person wishes to be involved. For some suggestions about how to do this, see *Try it Out*.

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- **Know What's Required and What Isn't:**

Oftentimes, staff don't know *why* a particular part of the paperwork is required and as a result, don't see it as important. As a middle manager, it's important for you to understand the requirements and why documentation has to be structured in a certain way. If you're not sure, ask others in the organization and within DDS. Oftentimes, organizations use forms to track unnecessary information. When this happens, it creates additional work for everyone. Make sure that the forms used in your organization are up to date.

- **Supporting Good Staff Who Have Trouble Writing Good Notes**

Sometimes a great direct support employee has a hard time writing "good" notes. A few suggestions for supporting this employee with the documentation:

- Model what you want. Invite another employee who writes good notes to lead a training or tutor other staff who may need help.

- Take a look at *Documenting Community Building: Tips for Staff* contained in the *And Yet More* section of this Idea Book to give staff examples of how to put more useful information into the daily notes they write.

"Seek first to understand..."

Managers are often energetic, talkative and full of great ideas to share. Sometimes it's hard for many of us to do the one thing that will give us the most valuable insight into the quality of supports we provide: listen.

While listening is always important, it becomes even *more* important when there is a power difference. Direct support staff and the people they support are often intimidated by managers. For many, it's safer to simply say nothing and allow the manager to do all of the talking.

When managers stop, sit down, take the time to ask open ended questions to others and remain quiet until people answer (even if it takes some time) we have increased access to the best source of information for improving the supports we provide.

Embrace Capacity Thinking

- **Model the practice of “seeing people in their best light.”** Celebrate the accomplishments of people you support. Reframe “negative” traits. For example, if staff complain that Jake laughs too loudly in the library, help brainstorm on roles and places where his laughter would be accepted or even embraced: workplaces with loud machinery, or places where he can be outside, farms, football games, fairs, etc.
- **Play to staff’s strengths.** Celebrate that each of us has gifts and a contribution to make. Invite people to share their gifts: if you have a direct support staff who is well-connected in her community, invite her to mentor others who may not know the community as well. If a staff member is an artist, ask him to advise on how to best promote the artwork of someone served. If someone is really good with documentation, ask her if she’d be willing to mentor others.

The Value of Being Hands On

- **Know every person you are “responsible” for really, really well.** Spend time with

them outside typical services: over meals, through going to the movies, spending time with their families, etc.

- **Spend lots of “community-based” time with new staff as they are supporting a person.** Do not come with an agenda or an eye for “monitoring” but rather as a team member supporting a person to learn her job.

Work with Others in the Organization to Ensure the Various Components of the Organization Promote a Person-Centered Culture and Values

- Do job descriptions and hiring practices support person-centered approaches?
- Do staff training practices allow direct support staff to get to know a person, and his interests and support needs *before* services begin?
- Sometimes leaders need to be inspired too: share positive stories and outcomes with your leadership, even if you haven’t been invited to do so.
- Advocate for what is needed for direct support staff to do their work well. Come with solutions. Follow up.

Tips for Managing Staff “Out in the Community”

Whenever support services become community-based, management and oversight approaches must be more “virtual.” Mutual trust and open communication between the middle manager and the direct support staff become increasingly important when there is not an immediate way to provide “eyes on” supervision. Having a management relationship that encourages these qualities is critical when supervising community-based services. Below, are some of the ways managers of community-based services can manage effectively even when you don’t see anyone!

- **Daily briefings:** Touch base with a person’s staff regularly (ideally, daily) just to check in, see how things are going, what the plans for the day are, and make any last-minute adjustments.
- **All weekly schedules mapped out on dry erase board:** Consider mapping out everyone’s schedule on one large

board. This ensures a manager can know at a glance where everyone is.

- **Use of cell phones:** Cell phones may be the best bit of technology to influence community-based services! Through using cell phones, managers can have immediate access to staff regardless where a staff member is. Some organizations provide additional oversight by requiring staff to call if the person’s schedule changes unexpectedly.
- **Spot visits/checks:** Some middle managers have found it useful to do unannounced visits to the person and her staff according to the person’s schedule. This provides managers an opportunity to observe staff’s interaction with the person during an activity and also ensures that a staff is following the person’s desired schedules.
- **Listening to others in the community:** Communities can be very effective at keeping people safe. Many towns in New

Mexico are small with tight community networks. Occasionally, community-based managers will learn of a problem with staffing through another community member. Sometimes, the observation reveals a genuine problem that the managers then work to address. And sometimes, the “problem” is simply a skewed or uninformed perception. When this is the case, the manager has an opportunity to clarify the concern and potentially build new bridges with members of the community.

✓ **CHECK IT OUT:** **GOOD RESOURCES**

- Make a Difference: A Guidebook for Person-Centered Direct Support by John O’Brien and Beth Mount, Inclusion Press at www.inclusion.com
- The Minnesota Frontline Supervisor Competencies and Performance Indicators: A Tool for Agencies Providing Community Services, Available for downloading through the National Association of Direct Support Professionals at

<http://www.nadsp.org/training/competencies.asp>

TRY IT OUT: ACTIVITIES, EXERCISES AND COMPELLING QUESTIONS

A Few Ideas for Celebrating the Joy of the Work:

- **Occasionally invite staff to share how their life has been enhanced by supporting people with disabilities.** What “life lessons” have the people they serve taught them? Consider capturing these lessons on big paper in colorful markers that can be posted in the organization’s office.
- **Celebrate anniversaries between a person and her direct support staff.** Sometimes people have had wonderful and committed working relationships for years and it’s not celebrated.
- **We should take our work seriously but not ourselves.** Laugh. Play music. Create opportunities to be silly from time to time. Inject humor into traditionally boring trainings and meetings.

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A Few Probing Questions About Tension Among Staff

- How would our perspective change if people hired their own staff, lived in their own homes, and decided their own schedules?
- How would the staffing dynamics change if a person's staff and services were coordinated by one manager?
- What would change if we built supports around the person's scheduling preferences instead of an organization's or home's operating hours?
- What would change if organizations saw themselves as resources to each other instead of competition, or objects of suspicion or blame?

Ways to Have a Person Participate in his Own Documentation Process

- Invite the person to sit with you as you are writing the notes and ask him questions about how you all spent the day like "So, Ryan, what did we do today?" "What was the best part of the day?" "Who did we meet?" Even if the person doesn't respond and you're responding for him, the

person may be listening and enjoying being included in the process.

- Invite the person to sign his daily note.
- Read your notes back to the person. Ask him if you have forgotten anything or if there is anything else he wants to add.