Consumer Empowerment in Case Management

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Purpose

- The purpose of consumer empowerment is to provide tools and resources to consumers so they may plan for and address both current and future needs.
- The ability to plan and address one's own needs is essential to self-advocacy and independence.
Goal of Consumer Empowerment

- To increase consumer knowledge of available resources, and provide tools and skills needed to manage resources so the consumer can obtain a higher level of independence.

- Emphasis on informed choice
  - Educate the consumer so he/she can make the best possible choice
Informed Choice

- Consists of providing information on all possible options, including barriers, likelihood of success, and level of support so the consumer can choose the option they wish to pursue.
  - Case managers should direct the person towards the best possible decision.
  - Consumers have a right to make a bad decision.
  - Consumers and case managers may disagree.
Barriers to Consumer Empowerment

- **Needs Assessment**
  - Consumers may not be aware of future or current needs, or may need assistance planning for their needs

- **Resource Awareness**
  - Consumers may not be aware of available resources within the community

- **Access to resources**
  - Functional limitations and/or attendant factors may limit access to resources even when they are available

- **Resource Management**
  - Consumers may have access to resources, but may lack the skills needed to manage and use resources effectively

- **Self-Advocacy**
  - Consumers may lack self-advocacy skills

- **Limited resources**
  - Resources may be limited due to cuts in funding or geographic issues
Needs Assessment

- Consumers will vary greatly in their ability to determine and plan for current and future needs
  - Case management should include an assessment of needs
    - Types of assessment
      - Open ended questions
      - Interest inventories
      - Aptitude assessments
      - Psychological assessments
      - Medical Assessment
Once consumer needs have been identified, case managers should match needs to available resources in the community.

- Resource Awareness includes:
  - Identifying available resources that may match consumer needs
  - Contacting the resource regarding current program availability
  - Gathering applications, forms, and other needed paperwork
  - Informing the consumer and making a referral to the appropriate individual
Access to Resources

- Functional limitations and/or attendant factors may limit access to resources even when they are available.

- Environmental barriers may exist as a result of functional limitations:
  - Architectural Barriers
  - Service Barriers
  - Societal Barriers
    - Having a disability does not mean an individual cannot work.
    - Benefits consultants are available to inform consumers of the impact of employment on Social Security benefits.

- Attendant factors such as lack of public transportation or poor family support may also limit access.
Resource Management

- Resource management consist of a plan regarding how and when to access needed resources
  - Plan should include a timeline with deadlines and specific contact information for each agency
  - Access specific barriers for each resource and identify ways to overcome these
  - Look for opportunities to coordinate services between resources
Self-Advocacy

The ability to self-advocate will vary greatly from consumer to consumer.

Caseworkers will need to assess self-advocacy skills and if necessary provide support.

- Cognitive deficits
- Social Anxiety
- New to area
- Communication barriers
  - Reading/language/visual deficits
Limited Resources

- In rural areas resources may be limited; however, efforts should be made to address needs.
  - Natural supports
    - Mom, dad, brother, sister, friend, teacher, preacher
  - Library
  - Support groups
  - Community Rehabilitation Program/Supported Employment
  - Religious Organizations
Case Studies
Case Study One Susan

Susan is thirty-five year old single mother of two referred by KTAP for assistance with continuing education. She plans to complete a two year degree in Medical Office from the local community college. Susan left high school after completing the 10th Grade. She earned her GED last year after her second attempt. She has been diagnosed with epilepsy and as a result she is not able to drive so transportation will be a barrier. Her work experience consists of seven years experience working in fast-food.
Open Ended Questions

- Why did you leave high school?
- How hard was the GED?
- How old are your children?
- Describe your support system?
- Do you live on a bus route?
- What do you feel is the biggest barrier to reaching your goal?
Assessments

- **Interest inventory**
  - To assess appropriateness of vocational goal and to reveal other options to the consumer

- **TABE/Compass Test**
  - To access academic skills

- **Review of medical records**
  - To identify functional limitations from epilepsy

- **Psychological Evaluation**
  - Open ended questions may reveal a need for a psychological if they indicate difficulty with memory, depression, or learning problems
Issues/Resources

- Transportation
  - May be eligible for a discounted bus fair rate
- Disability Coordinator
  - Classroom accommodations
- Remedial Training
  - Adult education
- Vocational Goal
  - O*NET
  - Interviews/Job Shadowing
- Child Care
- Education
  - FAFSA
  - WIA
  - OVR/OFB
Case Study Two

A 19 year-old woman with a High School Certificate and her family come into your office. She is considered “Deaf-Blind”. Her vision is 20/600 in both eyes and her hearing loss is considered profound but is fairly well corrected with hearing aids. She also has an intellectual disability with an IQ of approximately 68. She is interested in working but is unsure what she wants to do. No one else in her family has a job and they are concerned about her losing her SSI.
Open Ended Questions

- Does she have any job history?
- Interests or Hobbies?
- What are the family’s concerns?
- How do you get around? Do you have a reliable transportation resource?
- What do you feel is the biggest barrier to reaching your goal?
Assessments

- Interest inventory
  - To help guide vocational goal
- Review of medical records
  - To identify functional limitations from vision and hearing loss
- Psychological Evaluation
  - Case worker may determine the need for a new psychological based on how long ago the previous tests were done or if it seems that IQ may not be her true IQ based on vision or hearing loss.
Issues/Resources

- Transportation
  - May be eligible for reduced fare
- Concern of Loss of benefits
  - Referral to Social Security benefits counselor
- Appropriate clothing for interviews
  - Goodwill, Saint Vincent DePaul, Independent Living Centers, etc.
- Job Accessibility and Communication
  - Assistive Technology assessment and services
- Soft Employment Skills
  - Vocational Rehabilitation and Office for Employment and training
Case Study Three

- John is a thirty year old dislocated worker. The factory where he was a production laborer recently closed and he is now considering a return to college. He is unsure of what educational program would be best for him. John is an Army Veteran, but is unsure about what benefits he would qualify for. He has a GED and is unsure about his academic potential. He has a driver’s license and transportation. His greatest concerns include finances, choosing an appropriate training program, and his academic potential to complete college training.
Open Ended Questions

- What do you know about applying for financial aid?
- Do you have any relatives who have completed college?
- How did you do in School/military training?
- Do you have a copy of your DD-214 (Proof of service)
- What is your ideal job?
- Will you work while going to school?
- How far do you live from the college you hope to attend?
- What are your computer skills and access to a computer?
- Can you and your family manage a reduced income while you are in school?
Assessments

- Interest inventory
  - To help guide vocational goal
- Review of work history including military experience
  - To identify issues related to successful employment
- Academic Assessment
  - TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education)
  - Compass
    - To determine ability to compete on a college level
Issues/Resources

- Loss of income
  - May be eligible for Unemployment Insurance
- Funding for Education
  - Complete FAFSA, apply for WIA funds
  - Refer to VA for possible veteran’s benefits [www.veterans.ky.gov](http://www.veterans.ky.gov)
- Job Search Assistance
  - One Stop Career Center Veteran’s Representative
  - College/University Veteran’s Representative (VA Workstudy program)
- Adult Education
  - If remedial training/or computer skills are needed
- Basic Medical
  - Local VA clinic and/or health department
- Financial Courses
  - May benefit from financial planning to adapt to the change in income. Availability of such services will vary across the state.