

PROMISING PRACTICES



University of Wisconsin–Stout, Wisconsin’s Polytechnic University, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute Achieves the First CARF Accreditation Award in Comprehensive Benefits Planning

Persons living with significant disabilities often consider their benefits vital to their well-being and that of their family. Dynamic and visionary professional service providers recognize the need for individualized and long-term benefits, as well as financial planning, to help prevent premature loss of benefits and create a successful foundation of income and health benefits.

An organization that provides comprehensive benefits planning creates and continuously enhances services, and staff competencies can improve the economic standing and self-sufficiency of persons served. Through trained and professional benefits specialists, the service enhances lives, helps individuals learn how to advocate for benefits, and provides support in learning how to utilize existing work incentives.

The University of Wisconsin–Stout, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute (SVRI) became the first organization to achieve CARF accreditation in Comprehensive Benefits Planning. It began this innovative service in 2004. To achieve SVRI’s mission of creating innovative and responsive services for Wisconsin citizens, it considered a variety of important quality elements in its service design. Among them were access needs of the populations targeted to be served, including using effective communication designs that accommodate the various populations served, service locations for convenience, and learning styles. Other design considerations encompassed the outcomes they wish to achieve, including the achievement of economic self-sufficiency for the persons served, enhanced economic well-being of the

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Putting Out the Good Word: Some Information about the Promising Practices Series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we will follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization’s community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an

persons served as they progress in education and employment, and operation of the program to minimize the time from referral to the accomplishment of the benefits plan.

Benefits planning and analysis is an individualized, person-centered service. Although many organizations may briefly record upon intake or consider that the person served is on benefits, it has become apparent to many community service organizations that an individualized benefits planning goal is vital to successful long-term living and employment outcomes. So often the fear of losing benefits can be a road block to pursuing and fulfilling success and self-sufficiency goals in the individual plan if the fear of economic loss is not addressed by ethical and competent individuals and community organizations.

Comprehensive benefits planning is a collaborative and dynamic service. For SVRI, initial referral information is received from various sources, including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), placement specialists, human services agencies, managed care organizations, school districts, health services, local service organizations, self-referrals, and others. Following its program design based on consumer input, SVRI's outcomes system requires an initial contact with the person served to be made within two business days following receipt of referral information. The intake meeting is scheduled and conducted in person or via the telephone, depending on the choice of the person served, and includes discussion of the questions to be answered by the analysis/report and a work/earnings scenario on which to build the analysis.

Striving for Professionalism and High Quality Service

Pursuing CARF accreditation in the new area of benefits planning provides SVRI with a unique opportunity to further enhance and monitor quality outcomes and credibility. As part of its mission for education and research, SVRI, in collaboration with numerous state and local agencies, is developing a quality assurance process for benefits specialists in Wisconsin. Among the objectives is requiring "qualified" or "certified" benefits specialists in future contracts after the process is developed and implemented.

A registry with an accompanying code of conduct, as well as a random selection process for auditing completed benefits summaries, is currently in place. A credentialing and continuing education process is in development.

National Association of Disability Benefits Specialists

The National Association of Disability Benefits Specialists (NADBS), a

exemplary rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series. We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

Promising Practices issues now archived online!

Do you remember a past article coming out that you'd like to forward on to a colleague? Did you just join Promising Practices and want to see issues we covered in the past? Well, now you can! Old issues of Promising Practices are now available online. Visit archived issues at www.carf.org/newsletter and follow links to past issues. Past issues are categorized by topic so you can easily find articles of interest.

division within the National Rehabilitation Association, offers an opportunity for benefits specialists to identify themselves in this capacity as individual professionals. NADBS is dedicated to enhancing the knowledge and skills of current benefits specialists, as well as providing a professional network of support for those working in the field. For more information on NADBS, please visit

www.nationalrehab.org.

For further information on the comprehensive work incentives benefits program of SVRI and information on getting started, please contact Cheryl Fine at (715) 232-1794 or

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