

County Cumberland
Department of Social Services

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Project Title Guardianship Coalition

Category Profiles in Community Collaboration
(Please select one)

Project Description and Summary

What did you do?

Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?

Project Description and Summary – What did you do?

In 2014, DSS established the Guardianship Coalition for the county and surrounding areas, which included a joint network of partners and agencies who share our vision to provide superior standards of excellence in services to the disabled and mentally ill adult population.

Describe your program or project.

The purpose of the Guardianship Coalition is to keep the lines of communication open between healthcare professionals, fiduciaries, caregivers, and other organizations, thus creating networking opportunities for these providers and ourselves to work together and stretch our combined resources to benefit the people in our community.

What did you do?

We fashioned a system, an “informational highway”, to exchange information with other agencies that would help us determine the needs of our disabled and mentally ill customers, and provide the appropriate services to meet and supply the demands in a timely manner. We immediately began developing training sessions (conducted by coalition members and affiliates) for individuals in the community who regularly provide services to this adult population.

What is the history behind the program/project?

Guardianship Coalition began with a series of meetings that were held to discuss what the goals of Guardianship Coalition would be and how we would accomplish them. Even before our first meeting, we realized that there was a need to explore the many gaps in services provided to this often-marginalized population. These gaps often result in negligence of care, and lack of quality customer service with dignity. Many of these individuals are unable to care for themselves; at times, both they and their caretakers are unaware of the programs available; they unknowingly lack adequate resources, thus posing a risk to their health, safety and welfare. Within the scope of guardianship is a deprivation of virtually all legal rights from an otherwise incapable individual. These individuals often have caregivers who are family, friends and acquaintances. Without working within this realm of services, how can these caregivers offer sustained support for their wards? That is where the true need lies. We knew that they needed a voice, an advocate, and we sought to be that on their behalf. We wanted to generate an avenue in which to exchange information with community partners that would help determine the needs of the customer and provide the appropriate services in a diligent and efficient manner. During our initial meetings, we discussed how we would determine what we wanted to accomplish. We wanted everyone’s input so we would have buy-in from different viewpoints and angles.

What did you hope to accomplish?

One of our goals has been to develop training sessions [conducted by coalition members] for individuals in the community who regularly provide services to this adult population. The Guardianship Coalition strives to be able to provide a tangible resource directory to these caregivers and support entities, that will allow wards or potential wards to experience a smooth transition between community agencies. We hoped to take away the difficulty, and stigma of uncertainty involved in transitioning through care entities.

We have been focusing on how each agency manages disabled and/or mentally ill adults and how we can take advantage of the resources that are in the community. Coalition members are working to educate ourselves on the social and legal aspects of guardianship before we develop procedures within our individual agencies. We are also looking at the limitations each agency has and the alternatives to guardianship. One of our projects is to create a multi-agency transition plan so that individuals could go to any of the coalition agencies and they would have information on hand to initiate the guardianship process or refer the individual for the appropriate service.

What was your timeline?

Planning for this coalition started in December 2013 and the first meeting took place February 17, 2014. Additional meetings/trainings were scheduled according to the trainer's schedules.

What was your budget?

Meeting space is free, as it is held internally within one of our conference rooms in the agency. Correspondence and information is sent through email, so there are no current budget costs for this project. All we require is the time and energy of the participants, to help make this a successful endeavor.

How did you identify your objectives?

The objective was to bring together people in the community who work with disabled and mentally ill individuals every day, and establish a

partnership that would open lines of communication and benefit the people we serve through our respective agencies. The Guardianship Coalition membership consists of professionals throughout the city, county and surrounding areas.

How well did you use available resources?

Correspondence with community partners is done through email. Invitations to join the coalition are sent to department/agency directors to ensure a representative would be present at the initial meeting. Once all the attendees saw that this forum would benefit their agencies, we received verbal commitments to be a part of the coalition. We are using our Administrative staff to keep minutes of our meetings, and our guardianship and legal staff assist with the scheduled trainings.

Project Success and Impact

What was the outcome?

Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?

Project Success and Impact – What was the outcome?

One outcome of the establishment of this coalition has been the creation of an Adult Review Committee through our Managed Care Organization [MCO]. This idea was one of the original goals of the coalition. Through this conception, members of the coalition can now bring complicated cases involving disabled or mentally ill adults to the Adult Review Committee for a multidisciplinary assessment. Additionally, we have conducted several successful trainings involving the local hospital, MCO and the Clerk of Court, and have met several times with the MCO about treatment and placement issues. We also helped to create a position for a Mental Health liaison who is stationed within our agency.

We are planning additional trainings with law enforcement and adult care homes.

Was your program/project a success?

The trainings have helped to clarify the roles of the different participating agencies and open the way for dialogue between agencies; within the

same scope, this has also been an opportunity to establish transparency in educating the participating agencies about DSS, the often-daunting process of obtaining guardianship over an individual, and some of the limitations we have as an agency. The Guardianship Coalition has helped DSS form collaborative relationships with agencies that serve the same customers we do.

What was the impact?

Members of the coalition are knowledgeable about the guardianship process and the services each agency provides. It also gives the coalition members an idea of the limitations all the agencies have. We have better communication because we now have a “point-of-contact” at each agency, for questions that we each may have. Having this knowledge makes obtaining the necessary services for our wards easier, and has been mutually beneficial.

How did you measure the impact?

Some of our Administrative staff have been tasked with keeping minutes of our meetings. With these minutes, we are able to quantify the number of attendees and have on hand any information that has been discussed, and that can be used to answer future questions and needs. These trainings have been well attended and coalition members have benefited from the trainings.

How widespread is the impact of your program/project?

This project involves the Police Department, Legal Aid, Clerk of Court, Hospital, MCO, Sheriff’s Department, Veterans Administration and others who have contact with DSS wards or potential wards. All of these agencies/organizations have a stake in assuring that wards are treated with respect and receive the services they need.

How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges?

Obtaining guardianship over an individual can often become a daunting process. As an agency, we also experience some limitations in the assistance that we can provide. Forming the coalition has helped to keep the line of communication open, and has aided in triumphing over some of these limitations.

Did your program/project meet your established objectives?

Yes. Once all the attendees saw that this forum would benefit their agencies, we received verbal commitments to be a part of the coalition. We assured each agency that was invited, that their issues and concerns would be reviewed and addressed, and the community partners decided what the coalition would focus on; training and education. These trainings have also indirectly improved our service delivery within our own agency. When the agencies know “whom to call” and the “point of contact” for information at each agency, it lowers the number of misdials and “run-around” that often occurs. This in turn liberates our employees to spend more time assisting the customer, rather than answering questions, or becoming an ombudsman in an area they themselves may not be knowledgeable in. Additionally, the local hospitals are even doing a better job of calling in Adult Protective Service referrals; now they know what information we need; therefore, we spend less time on the phone and have more time to dedicate to our sometimes-overwhelming caseloads.
