

NEW AVENUES FOR INDEPENDENCE
Assessment Report
Building Innovative Service Strategies Grant
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New Avenues for Independence Team Members

- Karen Knavel (CEO)
- Amie Gonzalez (COO)
- Jennifer Allen (Program Director)
- Allen Berkenfeld (Manager, Employment Services)
- Dawn Elersic (Site Supervisor, Adult Day Services, Lake County)
- Rita Hughes (Site Supervisor, Adult Day Services, Parma/Snow Road)
- Sharde Morgan (Site Supervisor, Adult Day Services, Main Campus)
- Linda Malicki (Resource Development Director)
- Sara Murphy (WorkLink/TransCen, inc. SME)
- Britta Hough (Employment First Lead, DODD)

History and Current Service Model

For more than 65 years, New Avenues for Independence (NATI) has been providing services in Northeast Ohio for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The organization's mission is to support people who have developmental disabilities to achieve healthy, fulfilling, and enriched lives. In the beginning, NATI's main emphasis was residential and children's services. But in 2005, New Avenues established a Day Services program that expanded in 2007 to include vocational services linking individuals with disabilities with meaningful employment opportunities. Today, New Avenues' programs are serving over 300 individuals, in Ashtabula, Cuyahoga, Lorain, Lake, and Summit counties, through an array of programs and services.

NATI started as a family-led service to increase opportunities for children and adults with disabilities. The organization continues to strongly support person-centered programming and the idea of community inclusion and employment. NATI leadership actively participates in Ohio's *Employment First* initiative and is making significant efforts to reallocate program resources to support integrated services and community job placements.

As part of this service transformation effort, NATI closed *Buckeye Industries*, a segregated recycling center in 2017. The agency is now working to create an individualized, community-based service model that assists people to become active, productive members of society. Currently, in the Adult Day Services program, *Assessments, Training and Career Exploration* are conducted through a combination of classroom training and community activities. NATI's Employment Services currently have 13 job seekers enrolled and have made 13 community placements since 2017.

Transformation Assessment and Planning Process

Strategic Planning

New Avenues completed an extensive Strategic Planning process in December of 2018. Over 40 people participated in the process, including Board members, senior staff, family members and other stakeholders who are experts in the fields of I/DD, finance and other specialized areas. The 2018-2020 Strategic Plan defines the organization's future model of service provision as client centered, specific to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, taking place in small setting over a long period of time. It outlines the transformation of day and employment service from facility-based services to the new model of community-based service provision.

To determine how to meet the goals outlined in their strategic plan, NATI applied for a *Building Innovative Services* grant from Ohio's Department of Developmental Disabilities. The grant provided technical assistance for developing an implementation/action plan for service transformation. In conversations with Sara Murphy (the assigned SME), NATI's team decided to use a *Value-stream Mapping* process to assess the agency's current processes and resources and develop a roadmap for making change.

Value Stream Mapping

On April 26th, the service transformation team met to map NATI's current service processes. The team looked at employment services, facility-based day services and the new "facility-free" day services program in Lake County. Together, the group reviewed the goals presented in the strategic plan and outlined the agency's current processes for Referral, Intake/Assessment, Service Planning, Service Provision. The team used the mapping process to identify "*bright spots*", available resources, inefficient processes and challenges.

On May 8th and 9th, Sara Murphy worked with the service transformation team to analyze their current state map and outline a plan for moving the agency forward. Using Lean principles, NATI's team discussed current methods and desired service outcomes. The group then created a *Future State Map* that envisioned an individualized, consumer-focused service model that centered on integrated settings and incorporated best practices. The *future state map* helped the team identify available resources and brainstorm ways to address service gaps and significant challenges. The Future State Map will serve as the group's roadmap for change and the foundation for developing an *Implementation/Action Plan* for next steps.

Key Findings

Current Resources and Strengths

- NATI strongly supports Ohio's *Employment First* initiative and the idea of community inclusion. Leadership and the management teams seek to apply best practices and are excited about developing a more comprehensive service approach that braids program services and focuses on community engagement and employment. The agency is actively seeking training opportunities and other resources to increase employment outcomes and move NATI's waiver services into compliance with the CMS settings rule.
- NATI believes in *Competitive Integrated Employment*. In 2017, NATI closed Buckeye Industries and no longer provides facility-based employment training. They are working to increase community placements and expand employment services in all service areas. They are looking to increase their partnership with OOD.
- NATI supports the idea of using Adult Day services to encourage the idea of working and create pathways to employment. They are seeking to eliminate site-based programs and have transitioned one site-based program into community-based services (Lake County). This program focuses on social recreational activities and building confidence and skills in community settings.
- NATI has been providing quality services in northeastern Ohio for more than 65 years. They have the motivation, values and leadership needed to create inclusive, person-centered services.

Challenges

- Staffing is a major concern for all site locations. Coverage was a concern as the team looked at smaller ratios and more individualized services.
- New Avenues will need to expand Employment Services in order to support job seekers with more intensive support needs to achieve CIE. The team discussed *Customized Employment* methods, the need for re-focusing the assessment process on discovery, and ways to motivate individuals to go to work. Staff and stakeholder buy-in and an expectation of Community Employment needs to be established for all program participants of working age.
- NATI provides a broad range of services, across a number of counties. While there is administrative oversight and a degree of continuity across site locations, services are managed and administered locally by separate program teams. Communication, collaboration and/or cross-training between staff, sites and services (i.e. residential, employment, day programs) needs to be improved. Service processes and administrative procedures need to be streamlined and standardized across programs and site locations.

- Service plans and schedules are created with general input from the individuals served, but are not consistently based on personal goals and individual interests.
- Currently, two of NATI's three Day Services programs are facility-based (with some community-based activities). Although the instructors emphasize life skills, community engagement and employability, many of the community activities are not goal-oriented or person-driven. These activities are seen as social/recreational outings or special events. Volunteer opportunities are now being established in some service areas. However, volunteering is viewed more as an "activity" than a work-based experience for discovery, exploration and/or skill building.
- Referrals to NATI's programs are low. The team stated that most of their new referrals come from their Residential Services. Currently, referrals are made to each program separately and there is not a standardized, system-wide referral/assessment process. Providing more holistic, braided services will require a single point of entry into the agency. Creating programs that emphasize employment and independence means services will be expected to fade over time. Providing these kinds of services will require NATI to have a more person-centered enrollment process and a more robust referral pipeline.
- Many of the current participants are aging or have significant support needs. Managing small groups of people in community settings requires programs to have a more "balanced" enrollment.
- Assessment methods are not consistently individualized or goal-oriented. For some services, information collected is limited to what is required by the funding agencies, not based on an individual's personal goals and interests.
- Transportation is a major challenge in regards to scheduling and managing community-based services, especially in the more suburban and rural counties. Currently, NATI provides van transit for most people in their site-based services. People in these services rarely use public transit and the organization's fleet of vehicles is aging. The group discussed ways to provide services near a person's home and how to make program participants as independent as possible through the use of public and personal resources.
- Tracking and billing is done by the Day and Employment Services Director and Regional Manager with little participation or communication with fiscal services. This is not necessarily a good use of personnel and does not provide needed information to fiscal services for budget projections.

Identified Priorities and Goals

At the conclusion of the mapping process, NATI's service transformation team identified the following priorities for their agency:

1. Create an expectation of "community engagement" and "integrated employment" and encourage an "everyone can work" mind set within staff and program participants.
2. Braid or blend NATI's program services, streamline and standardize service processes across programs and site locations, and establish clearly defined outcomes for all services. Build a Community-based service model utilizing public resources whenever possible.
3. Utilize vocational training and day program services to build confidence in community settings and create pathways to employment and meaningful community engagement.
4. Individualize services and make them more goal-oriented. Increase the use of discovery and customized placement methods.
5. Expand Employment Services and increase staffing.

The team agreed on the following goals:

1. NATI will provide 100% of day and employment services in the community by 2022.
2. Staff will identify currently served individuals for referral to employment services, resulting in increased CIE. Employment services staff will place 3 individuals in 2019, 8 individuals in 2020, and 16 individuals in 2021.
3. New community partnerships will be developed – target of 10 new partnerships per year, for a total of 30 partnerships by 2022.
4. Public transportation will be utilized for 70% of services by 2022.