

Inclusive Practices To Spark Change At Your Organization

Posted 8/31/2021 via Capstone Newsletter

By Angela Rapp Kennedy | CQL Vice President of Systems Transformation

Who is in the room when you're conducting job interviews? Who is presenting in your training programs? Who is providing feedback during performance evaluations? Who is sharing expertise when you're forming committees?

There are clear benefits of involving people supported in all aspects of an agency's functions. Including people with disabilities and their unique perspectives positively impacts the quality of services, responsiveness of services, and retention of staff members. In addition, it strengthens the continuity and security of people served and makes sure that organizations are clearly committed to their vision. So why are people with disabilities who receive services not playing a more active role in all aspects of human service organizations?



A number of areas should be explored when considering how people receiving services are involved in decision-making, such as recruitment, hiring, onboarding, staff assignment, training, and performance reviews of direct support professionals and other staff. Organizations should also evaluate how people are guiding strategic planning activities and contributing to the myriad committees that keep an organization operating smoothly.

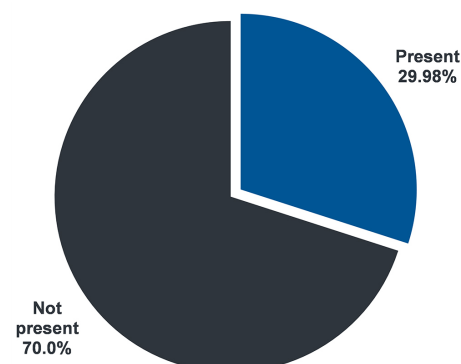
In this Capstone, we share data that reinforces just a few of the benefits of ensuring the voice of people supported is clearly included in every facet of organizational life. Then, we'll list some quick tips to establish (or strengthen) your practices so that people receiving services play a meaningful role and have a 'seat at the table.' Finally, we'll share more about including people on committees and in organizational planning through the experiences of Empower NY.

Including People Supported Improves Outcomes

By Carli Friedman | CQL Director of Research

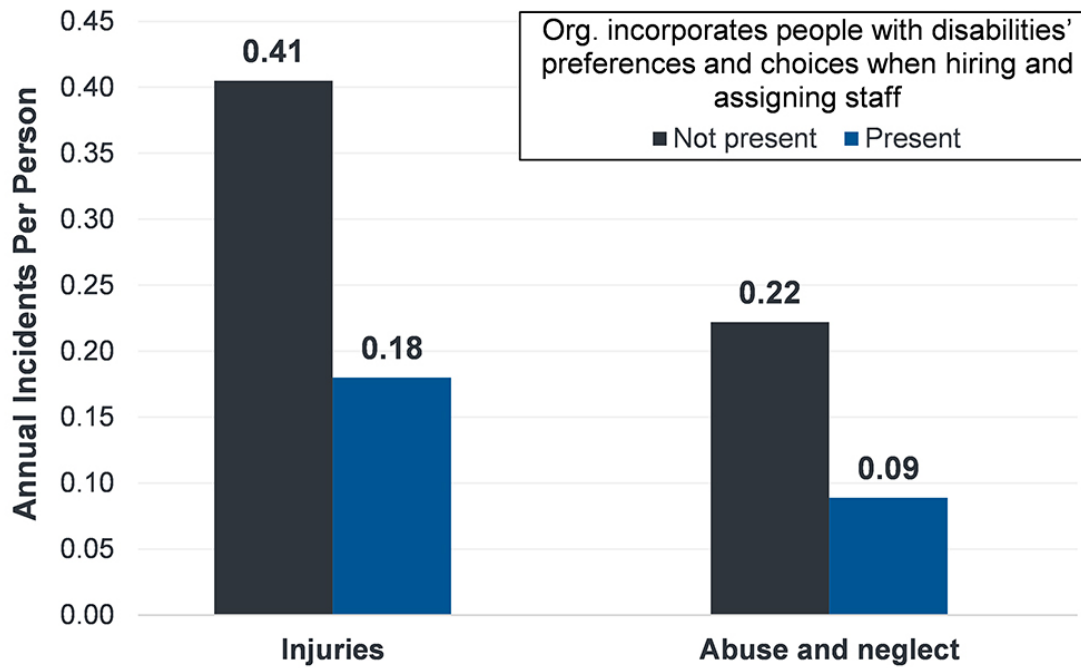
Our analysis of Basic Assurances® data revealed 77.9% of organizations had practices in place to ensure the support needs of people with disabilities shape the hiring, training, and assignment of all staff. However, only 30.0% of organizations had people with disabilities participate in staff recruitment and retention programs. In addition, only 46.6% of organizations had a system that addressed people with disabilities' preferences and choices when hiring or identifying regularly assigned staff for them.

People supported participate in staff recruitment and retention programs



Despite many organizations not involving people supported in recruitment, assignment, and retention, doing so is beneficial for both the organization and its staff, and the outcomes of people with disabilities. For example, when organizations incorporated people with disabilities' preferences and choices when hiring and assigning staff, there were 55.6% fewer injuries among people supported and 59.9% fewer instances of abuse and neglect (see figure below).

Impact of incorporating people's staffing preferences and choices on injuries and abuse and neglect



Now that you have greater insight into the transformative impact of inclusion on the lives of people receiving services, let's take a look at specific ways that you can improve your practices and support people to take on leading roles across your organization.

Action Steps To Improve Inclusive Practices

By Angela Rapp Kennedy | CQL Vice President of Systems Transformation

Wherever you find yourself as an organization in terms of including people receiving services, here are just a few thoughts about how to begin (or hopefully continue) including people supported in all aspects of organizational life.

Quick Tips For Inclusive Recruitment Practices

When looking at strengthening how people receiving services are part of the staff recruitment process you could consider the following:

- Ask for their input as to the characteristics of the ideal employee and what should be highlighted when recruiting.
- Include people served by the organization in all recruitment materials whether print, video, realistic job previews, or in-person.
- Request feedback as you develop job descriptions and interview questions.
- Train people supported in interviewing skills, interview 'dos and don'ts,' and ensure their presence and active involvement during the interview and hiring process.

Quick Tips For Inclusive Onboarding/Orientation/Training Practices

As you review your onboarding, orientation, and training process for new employees, you may want to adopt some of these approaches:

- Include people supported as you develop the training materials and have them actively involved in all those training activities – beyond just a one-hour orientation activity.
- Ask people supported what staff need to know about the organization and specifically about how to be an exceptional DSP.
- Gather input from both DSPs, as well as people supported, as to beneficial training topics that allow for DSPs and people supported to be joint participants.
- Offer other options for people receiving services, who may not want to be in front of people talking or who don't use words to communicate, such as recording a video that could be used during training activities.
- Explore other avenues for including people, such as someone receiving services assisting with the creation of PowerPoint slides or other training materials.
- Ensure that training is an ongoing process – not just an initial (or even annual) activity.

Quick Tips For Inclusive Performance Evaluation Practices

Organizations can also better utilize the experiences of the people supported when it comes to performance evaluations, through practices such as:

- Create a robust 360-evaluation process that includes input from people receiving services.
- Encourage people receiving services to provide honest, meaningful feedback through the 360-evaluation process.
- Leverage the feedback received to improve upon the supports that DSPs provide to ensure excellent services.
- Utilize information gathered through performance evaluations for more effective assignment and matching of DSPs to people receiving services.

Now that you have some ideas for inclusive practices for recruitment, onboarding/orientation/training, and staff evaluations, we'll turn to our partners at Empower. They'll share their initiatives for including people receiving services on organizational committees.

Empowering People To Be A Part Of Committees

By Eric DesSoye, Director of Analytics and Special Projects, Empower

As an organization, the goal of Empower is to have a cross-section of stakeholders at the table for committee meetings. Towards that end, one of the first challenges we faced was recruiting people we support to participate on committees that occurred during their workday. People were concerned that time spent working on committees would not count as work time, and that they would lose pay. Once people were assured that they would earn their usual pay rate for the time spent at committee meetings, they became eager participants.

Once assigned to a committee, some people live close enough to walk to committee meetings, while others need a ride. Empower is in a rural community that does not offer a lot of public transportation, especially for people that use wheelchairs. As a possible solution, we look to direct support professionals (DSPs) who have also recently been recruited as committee members, to see if "carpooling" is a possibility. As a result, we have been able to add DSPs and people we support to committees, while at the same time ensuring transportation is available. Win-Win!

Examples of Inclusive Committees

For example, Kendalynn Goeddert, a person receiving services, and Paulette Rinker, a Direct Support Professional, carpooled together and attended Empower's Minor Incident Committee monthly until the pandemic forced meetings to occur virtually. Kendalynn is looking forward to the end of the pandemic and the return of in-person meetings.

In addition to recruiting people we support as committee members, a Self-Advocate Board Representative has also been recruited. The process started with a description of the role being circulated throughout Empower. People made their interests known and candidates were identified. The Selection Committee then interviewed applicants and made an offer to Robin Warren, a person with a long-standing history of self-advocacy.

The August 2, 2021, meeting was only Robin's second Board meeting, and she looks forward to getting to know the Board of Directors better and to share things with them from her perspective. "I am a self-advocate, and I just graduated from Leadership Niagara, where I learned a lot," says Robin relative to her new role.

Prior to Board meetings, Robin receives the same materials that other Board members receive. Similarly, support is available to her should she want any help reviewing materials and preparing for Board meetings. Like other committee members, Robin has made arrangements to have either staff or other Board members pick her up for Board meetings, and then to bring her home afterwards.

Ultimately, what keeps Robin and Kendalynn returning to their committees month after month is having the opportunity to be involved, and to feel good about their contributions.

Sharing Your Practices To Promote Inclusion

While this Capstone was in no means an exhaustive, all-encompassing list of strategies to promote inclusion and meaningful participation, hopefully it provided some additional insight for either initiating or strengthening your organizational practices and promoting person-centered approaches.

Beyond just the information included here, we also encourage you to join our Facebook E-Community, where members are regularly sharing resources, information, support, and guidance about a range of topics such as inclusive, person-centered practices.