Mental Health Services
Oversight & Accountability Commission

STAFF INNOVATION SUMMARY— ORANGE COUNTY

Name of Innovative (INN) Project: Community Employment Services

Total INN Funding Requested for Project: $2,404,815

Duration of Innovative Project: Five (5) Years

Review History

County INN plan approved by County Board of Supervisors on June 2, 2015.

Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission (MHSOAC or Commission) consideration of INN Project: September 22, 2016. Continuance to October 27, 2016.

Project Introduction:

Orange County proposes to increase the quality of services, including better outcomes by providing 100% on-site job coaching by peers to help participants living with a persistent mental health challenge manage symptoms that are interfering with workplace performance. The program aims to improve participant employment skills and abilities, behavioral health outcomes and their global health.

In the balance of this brief we address specific criteria that the Commission looks for when evaluating Innovation Plans, including: What is the unmet need that the county is trying to address? Does the proposed project address the need? Are there clear learning objectives that link to the need? And, will the proposed evaluation allow the county to make any conclusions regarding their learning objectives? In addition, the Commission checks to see that the Innovation meets regulatory requirements that the proposed project must align with the core MHSA principles, promote learning, funds exploration of a new and/or locally adapted mental health approach/practice, and targets one of the four allowable primary purposes.

The Need

The County notes that employment is often identified by individuals with mental health challenges as a significant goal towards recovery, but that the very large majority of individuals with mental illnesses are unemployed. Indeed, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported recently that only 17.5 percent of persons with a disability were employed in 2015. While the County has not demonstrated that employment for persons with mental illness is especially high within Orange County, it has explained that this proposal emerged from a series of stakeholder meetings designed to develop INN project

concepts. Pilot projects that cost-effectively improve the job skills and employment success of clients could have wide appeal beyond the case of Orange County.

The Response

Orange County intends to determine if a comprehensive coaching model will ease participants' transition into currently existing supported employment programs and assist in moving participants toward employment stability and independence. The County intends to contract with a provider to supply and manage trained peer specialists to work alongside participants and provide comprehensive supportive services related to employment readiness. Peer Specialists would be placed with up to five participants at the same job site and provide on-site coaching for up to 6 months per client. Participants would work up to 15 hours a week earning minimum wage. The County expects that the selected contractor would staff the project with one full-time, Masters-level clinician, four peer specialists and one clerical support person. The program is intended to serve 40 participants annually.

The County notes that this proposal makes a change to an existing approach in mental health, but is somewhat unclear as to the model or approach that the County is adapting. Hence it is challenging to clearly articulate what is novel or innovative about their proposal. The County could better articulate the degree to which the proposed INN project differs both from two existing supported employment programs in the County and from such well-established supported employment strategies as Individual Placement and Support (IPS), the best-known evidence-based practice in supported employment (Rockville Institute). The County may also find useful examples to consider from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's "Bridges to Work" demonstration projects from the 1990s (see, e.g., Watson and Palubinsky), although these projects were not designed to serve persons with mental illnesses.

Orange County recently completed a prior INN project for supported employment entitled "Volunteer to Work," focused on helping clients build job skills by connecting them with volunteer opportunities. The County transitioned that program into Community Systems and Supports (CSS) funding in FY 2015-16 (Orange County, p. 3). The County is currently working on the final report which will discuss nine INN projects. They plan to submit the report in October.

The County also maintains a Supported Employment program as part of its CSS program. This program was budgeted for $1,021,417 for FY 2015-16 and included job coaching, counseling, and peer support services, among other attributes. Specifically, "each individual placed into competitive employment has the ongoing support of an Employment Specialist (ES). The ES is responsible for providing the consumer with one-on-one job support to ensure successful job retention" (Orange County MHSA Annual Update, p. 68). The County reported some successes in that program in "graduating" participants who had successfully retained paid employment for more than 90 days. The County states that the currently proposed INN project is targeted at participants who were not or likely would not be successful in this CSS program because they required greater levels of support or persons who have not had any prior work experience.

The Community Employment Services project builds on gaps in services and areas of need identified during these two projects. The County maintains that the 100% on-site coaching and specialized trainings prior to and following the work day are what is innovative about the project.

The Community Planning Process

The County reports that it held a series of stakeholder meetings across the county to solicit and develop INN project concept proposals. This appears to have been a robust process to generate meaningful stakeholder participation in the development of the County's INN proposals. See, e.g., the "Innovation Idea Form" for this project (Orange County Community Employment Services Plan). However, the proposal presented to the Commission has evolved somewhat from the project that was approved by the County Board of Supervisors on June 2, 2015 and included in the County's 2015-16 Annual Update (Orange County MHSA Annual Update, pp. 244-5).

Learning Objectives and Evaluation

Orange County states that its primary learning goals with this program are to determine whether on-site peer support will increase the quality of their supported employment services, improve participants' employment skills and abilities, and, ultimately, improve participants' behavioral health outcomes and participants' global health.

The County proposes to measures these outcomes with intake/enrollment and project exit data, self-report outcome measures, employment retention rates following project exit and satisfaction surveys. The County could more clearly articulate how it will test the marginal impact of on-site peer support on outcomes for program participants relative to the County's standard Supported Employment approach or other models.

At the end of the fourth year, project services will be concluded. The fifth year will be used to draft the final report and document the lessons learned from the project. Given this timeline, it is not clear how long the county intends to track employment retention rates of employees if they extend beyond the project. The standard for "graduation" from supported employment programs appears to be retention of paid employment for at least 90 days, but the degree to which existing programs follow up with "graduated" participants to track job retention after exit from the supportive services is unclear.

The budget narrative states that included in the expenditures is an estimated percentage for evaluation.

The Budget

The proposed budget includes $2,404,815 in expenditures all of which are being attributed to Innovation funding. The budget includes an estimated $219,644 (9 percent) for evaluation. Clarification needs to be obtained from the County on the budget plan. In particular, the County attributes in documents submitted to the Commission $994,035 of its estimate to "Other expenditures," such as "the County Procurement Process, Flexible Funds, Work Plan Management, and Innovation Project Final Report." Much of this latter

line-item appears to be administrative costs associated with the project. The total amount of funding for administration is not specified explicitly.

Additional Regulatory Requirements

The proposed project appears to meet or exceed minimum standards for compliance with other requirements under the MHSA. This program aligns with the core Mental Health Service Act principles. The program makes a change to an existing employment approach by providing 100% on-site job coaching by peers. The primary purpose is to increase access to mental health services.

References

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