

SELF-DETERMINATION PROJECT POLICY GUIDELINES

"WORKING DOCUMENT"

October, 1998

Mission:

The mission of the Vermont Self-Determination Project is to empower individuals with developmental disabilities to create the quality of life they desire for themselves and, by discovering and sharing their natural gifts and talents, nourish and enrich both their own lives and that of their communities.

Vision:

Self-Determination is a journey we all begin at birth. With the support of our families or those people we choose (our circle), we live our lives and experience successes and setbacks. In the past, individuals with developmental disabilities have had little or no opportunity to have this experience in their lives. The people surrounding them have often been service providers or paid support staff, and not necessarily persons chosen by the individual with disabilities. Self-Determination means that these individuals will be able to experience this journey of discovery throughout their entire lives.

- All people have the right to take control over their own lives and future.
- All people are capable of making the important decisions in their lives.
- Self-Determination facilitates a person's ability to make these decisions.

The Self-Determination Project makes it possible for individuals -with the support of persons they choose- to take control over their own lives as they envision it. This control is the birthright and responsibility of each of us. The Self-Determination Project is dedicated to helping individuals with developmental disabilities make the crucial decisions which define the quality of their lives.

Definition:

In the past, individuals with developmental disabilities had little or no opportunity to plan their own futures or realize their dreams. Self-Determination for these individuals means that now, with the support of people they choose, each can determine his/her own future, and thus realize previously impossible dreams. This can include deciding how to spend support monies (Medicaid Waiver, Respite, SSI, etc.), and hiring one's own support staff. Self-Determination is the transfer of control over the lives and resources of individuals with developmental disabilities to these individuals themselves.



Project Goals:

To help individuals self-determine, the Vermont Division of Developmental Services is engaged in a three year Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Self-Determination Grant (1997-2000). The Project will provide technical assistance and training to individuals with developmental disabilities and to their family members, advocates, and service providers on:

1. establishing methods for control of service budgets by the individuals themselves
2. establishing methods for individuals to direct their own supports
3. resolving many of the technical and support issues that may stand in the way of individuals becoming self-determined

In addition to the issues mentioned above, some precise goals have been identified. By the end of the Project:

- More individuals will find their voices.
- A system will be in place that provides the opportunity for individuals, with their families and circles, to personally direct the supports they receive.
- More individuals and families will be empowered to direct their own lives.
- More individuals will own their own homes and lease their apartments.
- More individuals will receive support from their communities.
- Facilitation teams will exist in each region of the state comprised of peer trainers, peer counselors, and representatives from advocacy and provider groups.
- Clear user-friendly guidelines will exist which individuals, families, and providers can use to negotiate federal wage, hour, and tax laws.
- Every agency will have individual/family-run supports.
- Information and resources related to self-directed services will be available in a simpler to use format for individuals, families, and providers.

Fundamental Principles Which Guide the Project:

In order for the Project to succeed, we must be guided by a set of principles in our day-to-day work to ensure that self-determination can be achieved by the participants in the Project:

- Self-Determination means that every individual has the right to make decisions and exercise control over his/her own life. This control is the birthright and responsibility of each of us.
- All people can communicate. There is a commitment to discover ways in which an individual can express his/her wishes and dreams.
- There is a commitment to encourage and nurture an individual's ability to dream. By listening and facilitating, the circle of support will assist the individual to create a support plan for realizing his/her own dreams.
- Individuals have the right to associate with whomever they choose. A circle of support, chosen by the individual, helps him/her to self-determine, and provides an important safety net to ensure the individual's well-being.
- Individuals have control over their money and the power and responsibility to spend it directly on what they want and need. They also have the power and responsibility to determine what supports are needed, who provides them, and in what way. Budgets are built with the individual and his/her circle.
- Paid services may not be the only option for supports. Natural supports will be discovered, nurtured, and encouraged.
- Supports are creative and flexible in order to meet the unique needs and desires of the individual.
- Individuals are allowed to make mistakes and experience the risk of failure. This does not minimize the importance of safety, but acknowledges that in all of our lives, some risk must be taken to allow us to grow.
- Individuals are recognized and supported as participating members of their communities, and are encouraged to share their unique talents and viewpoints.
- The attitudes, roles and responsibilities of community members at large will change. All of us need to re-examine our way of working and interacting with individuals with disabilities and act to remove barriers that interfere with dreams coming true.

