



Metro Regional Quality Council: Support Staff Quality Review Executive Summary

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Introduction

The Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC) is a group of self-advocates/people with disabilities, their families, county workers, the Department of Human Services, community members, and service providers. We serve people that receive supports and services in Hennepin, Scott, and Dakota counties.

The purpose of the MRQC is to connect with and promote all communities of people with disabilities so that services and supports help them to live a life based on their hopes and dreams. The three primary ways the council accomplishes these goals are through:

- The implementation of a quality improvement system based on person-centered principals.
- Promoting best practices and addressing gaps in services through quality improvement work.
- Making recommendations for statewide changes to improve the quality of services and supports.

This summary will outline the current status of support staff for people with disabilities and will cover best practices and challenges/barriers collected by the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC). It will end with recommendations to improve support staff, and next steps for the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC).

The full report can be found on the Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC) website <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/metro-quality-improvement-work/>

Current Status on the Support Staff Shortage for Minnesotans with Disabilities

Minnesotans with disabilities and older persons in need of long-term services and supports rely on direct support workers (DSWs) to have a life based off their wants and needs. DSWs in Minnesota are primarily women (78 percent) with an average age of 43 years old.³ Looking at Minnesota as a whole, the direct support workforce is more diverse than Minnesota's overall population. Support staff have many roles and are known by many job titles (e.g., Direct Support Professional (DSP), Personal Care Assistance (PCA), Job coach, etc.)³ For the purpose of this summary, support staff will be the term used. The skills that support staff bring to their jobs are vital to people with disabilities being able to live and participate in their communities.

The direct care workforce is large and is one of the highest-demand and anticipated growth sectors in the U.S. and Minnesota.³ One significant barrier that affects this workforce is direct support turnover and shortage. According to the Minnesota Direct Support Worker Survey (2019), the turnover rates in Minnesota for organizations that employ support staff is 39

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percent compared to the national average of 51 percent.⁴ Low wages, unaffordable benefits, limited training, and lack of career advancement opportunities make this work undesirable by some workers and unsustainable by existing workers.³

The challenges the direct support workforce faces impacts people with disabilities, their families, employers, and community providers who are finding it increasingly difficult to find and keep high quality support staff. Expansion of this workforce is impossible without significant improvements in worker recruitment, retention, and turnover prevention.

Person-Centered Quality Review – Support Staff Section

The Metro Regional Quality Council conducted 240 Person-Centered Quality Reviews between November 2017 and January 2020. Quality Reviews are interviews with people about their quality of life. The reviews asked about choice and control in different topic areas such as housing, daily routine, community involvement, employment, relationships, support staff, safety, transportation, case management, future life planning, services and supports, and hopes, dreams and goals.

This section will focus on the data gathered from the support staff section of the Person-Centered Quality Reviews, looking for best practices and barriers.

Support Staff Ranking Questions

All Quality Review participants were asked to rank, “To what degree do you feel your staff treat you with respect?”

The rankings options are as follows:

- None: No control - control 0% of the time
- Some: Less than half control - control 50% of the time or less
- Most: More than half control - control 51% of the time or more
- Full-Full control - control 100% of the time
- Not Applicable (N/A) - Does not apply to the person

The results to the question, “To what degree do you feel your staff treat you with respect?”:

| Table 1: To what degree do you feel your staff treat you with respect? | |
|--|-----------------|
| Ranking Choices | Percentages (%) |
| Full | 58 |
| Most | 28 |
| Some | 10 |
| None | 1 |
| Not Applicable (N/A) | 3 |

Table 1: participant’s responses to the question, “To what degree do you feel your staff treat you with respect?”

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Support Staff Best Practices

Participants were also asked open-ended questions to better understand their experiences with their support staff. Their answers have been organized into two categories: Working with Support Staff for People with Disabilities, which discusses general best practices and barriers, and Support Staff Treating People they Support with Respect, which looks into the specific best practices and barriers that go into being treated with respect by support staff.

| Table 2: Working with Support Staff for People with Disabilities | |
|---|---|
| Best Practices | Barriers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treats person with respect • Helpful, friendly, caring • Long-term staff • Going on outings in the community • Listens to person • Flexible schedules • Good communication • Person has control over who staff are • Provides transportation • Well trained • Able to talk to supervisors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff turnover/shortage • Disrespectful staff • Poor communication and lack of attentiveness • Lack of training and scheduling flexibility • Staff being late, cancelling or no showing • Lack of trust • Low-wages for support staff • Abuse, neglect, and theft (severe) |

Table 2: list common best practices and barriers working with support staff for people with disabilities

| Table 3: Support Staff Treating People they Support with Respect | |
|---|--|
| Best Practices | Barriers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treats person with respect • Helpful • Good relationships with staff • Listens, attentive, responsive • Good communication • Community outings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff turnover/shortage • Disrespectful • Not proactive • Poor communication • Staff having limited time • Poorly trained • Abuse, neglect, and theft • Having to fire staff • Having to train staff |

Table 3: list common best practices and barriers to support staff treating people who they support with respect

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Recommendations

Support Staff Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Maintaining a quality workforce of care providers for people in Minnesota who have disabilities can be a challenge, especially during times of lower unemployment. Recently, The Department of Human Services published the *Recruitment and Retention in Supports for Minnesotans with Disabilities toolkit* to address the support staff shortage for providers and people who hire their own support.¹

Strategies that can help improve recruitment, retention and cost of turnover for support staff include:

- Use a range of effective and non-traditional strategies to reach potential employees
- Use Behavior Trait Interviewing; Behavioral-trait interviewing uses interview questions that not only ask about work experience, but also about more general life experiences
- Supporting state and local legislation that increases wages and benefits for direct support staff
- Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) participate in person-centered planning/thinking training opportunities
- Track Direct Support Professional (DSP) turnover and tenure organization wide
- Track financial and non-financial cost of support staff turnover
- Have an effective onboarding and competency-based training system for new hires; onboarding includes getting to know people who receive supports, coworkers and the organization
- Have many ways to reward and recognize employees for excellent support and performance

Creative Thinking for Supports Staff

People report better outcomes and experience more success when they, a case manager, and/or family member finds creative solutions to the support/staffing crisis. To see the most success, creativity is needed to come up with a solution. Dedication and follow through from case manager or other supports are also necessary to get the solution funded and put into practice. One promising way people are creatively filling their support staff needs is through natural supports.

Natural supports are supports and relationships that are developed in natural environments such as the family, school, work and community. These relationships and the support and assistance they offer, maintain and enhance the quality and security of life for people with disabilities.² By building a robust network of natural supports, people can receive support and care from people they know and trust in ways that work for them and honor their wants and needs.

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Person-Centered Practices as the Expectation

Person-centered practices indicate respect, foster positive relationships, and improve overall quality of life. Service recipients and family members should be informed about person-centered practices to give them the knowledge and language to advocate for themselves, understand their rights, and promote autonomy and self-determination. All staff should be trained in and practice person-centered principles and thinking. Specifically, staff and supports should:

- Facilitate choice and participation in meal preparation and planning, with special emphasis placed on taste and cultural preferences.
- Foster an environment with clear and respected professional boundaries.
- Encourage independence and autonomy within relationships. This may look like, but is not limited to: welcoming visitors without time restrictions, allowing private phone calls/not screening communications, unrestricted access to technology that cultivates relationships, and increasing transportation options.
- Respect and follow one's personal life pace and routine. Activities, treatments, meals, etc. should be scheduled in ways that fit into their life pace rather than disrupting it.
- Respect one's personal space and privacy.

Next Steps:

Based on the results from the support staff section of the person-centered quality reviews, the MRQC is working to change the quality life for support staff and the people they support.

The council has started this work by:

- Completing a needs assessment to understand the current status of the support staff shortage within Minnesota.
- Reviewing all active legislation relating to support staff, followed through the legislative process, and provided support for various pieces of legislation.
- Further identifying the sub category we will focus on: "Building Viable Careers."
- Developing a project to support provider agencies assess their current practices and give them actionable steps to improve to better recruit and retain staff.

Barriers to quality staffing has the potential to affect all aspects of life for people with disabilities. The Metro Regional Quality Council is working to improve access to, and reducing turnover of, high quality support staff for people with disabilities.

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References

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4. National Core Indicators. (2019). National Core Indicators 2018 Staff Stability Survey Report. <https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/resources/staffstability-survey/>