## SPOTLIGHT: NATIONAL DELPHI STUDY—RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

The Research and Training Center on Service Coordination (RTC) is in the third year of a five-year project to study early intervention service coordination. This month, project staff will begin the final phase of a Delphi study of service coordination practices. A Delphi methodology was chosen as the best way to reach consensus across stakeholder groups on the practices that lead to high quality service coordination.

### What is a Delphi methodology?

A Delphi approach draws on the collective wisdom and opinion of people who are knowledgeable about a particular topic or issue. It is a consensus-building technique that involves "rounds" of data collection in which participants are polled separately with each person's opinion having equal weight in the process of reaching consensus. This method has been widely used in other studies to reach consensus on topics such as educational innovations, organization development, and children's thought processes.

The Delphi study being conducted by RTC differs from most Delphi studies in one important way. Typically, the method involves a small number of expert respondents. The RTC Delphi study intentionally includes a large number of focus group participants and other stakeholders who have diverse experiences with service coordination.

RTC's study of service coordination practices first began in April 2001 with a series of focus groups held in four states (Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts and North Carolina). Two hundred and seventy-five people participated in the focus groups. This included 73 family members, 93 service coordinators, 23 service providers, and 86 program administrators.

Participants were presented with the top eight service coordination outcomes that resulted from a previous RTC study and were asked to list the service coordination practices that would lead to the eight outcomes. These outcomes were:

1. Children and families receive appropriate supports and services that meet their individual needs.

2. Children reach their full potential.

3. Children are healthy.

4. Children's development is enhanced.

5. Children have successful transitions.

6. Families are involved in decision-making.

7. Families are informed about resources and services.

8. People work together as a team.

The focus groups generated over 2000 practices. A data reduction process, which combined similar statements and eliminated redundant items, reduced this list to 228 practices. The next step in this study is to distribute Delphi surveys to a national sample of approximately 2,500 parents and providers. The survey will have eight parts, one for each of the eight outcomes of effective service coordination. For each outcome, there will be a list of the practices generated from the first round of this study. Participants will be asked to rate their level of agreement that each practice would lead to the particular outcome.

Surveys will be distributed by Part C coordinators and Parent Training Institutes (PTIs) in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. Each Part C coordinator will select 24 providers in their state to complete a survey. PTIs will distribute surveys to 24 family members per state. This survey will result in a final list of practices that lead to high quality service coordination.

## FAMILY AND SERVICE COORDINATION INTERVIEWS

RTC project staff completed interviews of 100 families and 100 service coordinators in four states (Connecticut, Indiana, Massachusetts, and North Carolina) in order to identify the outcomes that are important to each family and the practices that led to specific outcomes. Project staff are in the process of analyzing data from these interviews. Below are some preliminary findings:

Families were asked, "How important was service coordination in helping you reach the goals you have for your child or family?"

Thirty-six percent of the family members rated service coordination as "very important" in helping them reach the goals they have for their child/family. Comments included:

- " A good service coordinator can reduce stress for a family."
- "My service coordinator provided my family with resources. I didn't know what resources were out there or how to get them."
- "By working with my son in different settings, the service coordinator has been helpful to his development."
- "My service coordinator helped get my child into school and helped me to know what's out there."

Thirteen percent of families wished that their service coordinator had provided more support or assistance to their family. Other things that service coordination could have done for families included:

- "They could have been better informed about resources."
- "I could have used some suggestions to understand what some of the doctors were saying."
- "They could have included me on the team."
- "My service coordinator is overloaded and can't give us the attention we need."

When asked what it was that members of their team did when they provided great service coordination, 25% of the family members said, "[They] involved my family in the process." Comments included:

- "I can call them anytime and they will meet with me when I need to."
- "They communicate among each other to provide services."
- "They are knowledgeable and stay informed about resources that are available."
- "They ask me what I want."

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