

*April 27, 2005*

## ***The Philadelphia Alliance*** **Mental Retardation Domain** **Position on Supports Coordination in Philadelphia**

The Philadelphia Alliance commends Philadelphia Mental Retardation Services (MRS) for its leadership in the transformation of the system for supports coordination for citizens of Philadelphia with mental retardation. The change from assignment to one of the twelve Base Service Units which was based on location of residence to a choice of four citywide organizations, not only offers people options, but has also resulted in more clearly defined goals that are person-focused and more openly communicated. The members of the Mental Retardation Domain of The Philadelphia Alliance have appreciated being part of the change process and offer our views on ensuring the new system grows into a strong and vibrant one that well serves individuals with mental retardation in our city.

As is well recognized, quality supports coordination is an important determinant in people receiving the assistance they need throughout their life. As such, The Philadelphia Alliance holds the following views.

- Choice of supports coordination organizations must remain a top priority with a minimum system of four organizations with citywide scope in operation. Furthermore, while it is recognized that consistency across the system and the ability to work closely with MRS and one another is a value of the Supports coordination system in Philadelphia, each organization should be encouraged to function with its own unique identity and culture. The Alliance believes that each organization's primary focus on customer service (customers being defined as individuals first, their families, then MRS, OMR, providers and the community as a whole) will strive to meet the "right" outcomes using ethical approaches.
- The system should move toward manageable caseload size. As we move ahead we can expect to learn more about optimum size of caseloads to achieve both quality of service and cost efficiencies. During this transition phase, caseload size should be closely monitored and changed to allow Supports coordinators to effectively enter all information into the HCSIS database as well as establish supportive working relationships with individuals and families and handle urgent needs of individuals and families as they arise.

- Philadelphia MRS and the Office of Mental Retardation in the Department of Public Welfare are urged to take action to deliver additional resources so that Supports Coordinators have direct-service options for people on their caseloads. The list of people eligible for service but not funded is growing in Philadelphia. We have previously shared our great concern for people on the Waiting List and now offer our concern that the next victims of insufficient funding will be the system's best Supports Coordinators who will leave out of frustration and "compassion fatigue".
- It is recognized and strongly endorsed by The Philadelphia Alliance that Supports Coordinators' first loyalty is to individuals with disabilities and their families. The Alliance also seeks a sensitization of Supports Coordinators to the issues facing providers of direct services that directly impact the quality of outcomes for people. Objective monitoring for quality must be underscored by an understanding of such issues as recruitment and retention of Direct Support Professionals and the need for agencies to continually change and adapt programs to be more efficient in order to better meet the needs of both existing and future consumers. A good working relationship with the goal of achieving effective teamwork processes in meeting people's needs and support for achieving personal outcomes is sought. This issue applies equally to Supports Coordinators in the four new entities and Supports Coordinators within Philadelphia MRS.
- Future discussion points need to focus on areas that have been difficult to resolve for many years including changes that accomplish the following:
  - ✓ Accountability for the Support Coordinator Organizations to complete ISPs, enter all data into HCSIS and independently support consumers in the event a position is not filled or is temporarily vacant.
  - ✓ Improved communication between Supports Coordination Organizations and providers on caseload assignments.
  - ✓ Considering providers as a customer including routinely surveying provider's satisfaction with services rendered by organizations.
  - ✓ Determining the possible economic and service (choice) benefits of moving supports coordination out of the Philadelphia MRS system by transitioning responsibility for plaintiff class members into the four SCOs.

The Philadelphia Alliance seeks ongoing involvement in the continuing transition of the system for supports coordination. We will be helpful partners as everyone grows and adapts to changes in the needs of people who are eligible for Mental Retardation services in our system. Members of The Philadelphia Mental Retardation Domain seek to be a resource not only for direct services, but also in the professional training and development of Supports Coordinators, in networking with communities and social service systems and in the creation of new services and supports requested by individuals. It is in this spirit that The Philadelphia Alliance submits this position statement at this critical point in the change process.