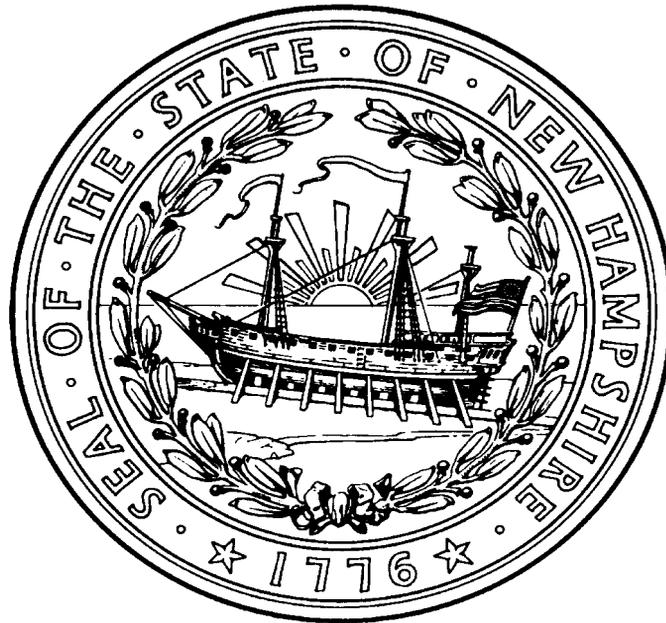


**AREA AGENCY
OF GREATER NASHUA, INC.**

REGION VI

REDESIGNATION REVIEW



CONDUCTED BY:

THE BUREAU OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES
Matthew Ertas, Bureau Administrator

THE DIVISION OF COMMUNITY BASED CARE SERVICES
Nancy L. Rollins, Director

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
John A. Stephen, Commissioner

MAY 2007



STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DIVISION OF COMMUNITY BASED CARE SERVICES

BUREAU OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

John A. Stephen
Commissioner

Nancy L. Rollins
Director

105 PLEASANT STREET, CONCORD, NH 03301
603-271-5034 1-800-852-3345 Ext. 5034
Fax: 603-271-5166 TDD Access: 1-800-735-2964

May 29, 2007

John Harrington, President of Board of Directors
Sandra Pelletier, Executive Director
Area Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc.
144 Canal Street
Nashua NH 03064

Dear John & Sandy:

As you know, the Bureau of Developmental Services has recently concluded its redesignation review in Region VI as required by the State Rule, He-M 505, Establishment and Operation of Area Agencies. The review focused on eight indicators of successful area agency operations: mission; rights, health and safety; choice, control and satisfaction; individual and family/guardian involvement; system of quality improvement; governance and administration; budget development and fiscal health; and compliance. I would like to thank all of the people associated with Area Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc. for their cooperation in assisting the Bureau in carrying out this important process. The redesignation team is particularly grateful for the assistance given by Ellen Barry and Leslie Simays who made every effort to see that meetings were scheduled and that materials were available for the team's use.

It is my pleasure to inform you that the Area Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc. has been approved for redesignation for the period of October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2011. The Bureau recognizes your agency's efforts on behalf of persons with developmental disabilities and acquired brain disorders and their families and is pleased that you are a part of New Hampshire's service delivery system.

The results of the redesignation review are contained in the attached narrative report. Please share it with the local stakeholders. Where recommendations have been made, please work with the appropriate parties regionally to consider how to improve the areas highlighted. If appropriate, please add areas of recommendation to your Biennial Plan. Finally, if support from the Bureau could be helpful in addressing any of these areas, please let us know how we could be of assistance. [Note that we are also sending you an extensive attachment, which lists all of the specific findings of the redesignation team. We hope that you will find this as a useful source document.]

John Harrington & Sandra Pelletier
May 29, 2007
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Again, thank you for your contribution to New Hampshire's community-based service system and to the lives of persons with developmental disabilities and acquired brain disorders and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew Ertas". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "M" and "E".

Matthew Ertas
Bureau Administrator

Enclosures

cc: John A. Stephen, Commissioner
Nancy L. Rollins, Director

Bureau of Developmental Services

DATE: Thursday, May 17, 2007

TO: Matthew Ertas, Bureau Administrator
Bureau of Developmental Services

FROM: John T. Capuco, Psy.D.
Redesignation Team Leader for Region VI

RE: Redesignation Review, Region VI, 2006

On July 17, 2006, the Area Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc. requested redesignation as the area agency that provides services to individuals with developmental disabilities and acquired brain disorders in Region VI.

During October, November and December of 2006, a team of Bureau staff interviewed Area Agency staff, consumers and families and reviewed the services provided by the Area Agency. The redesignation team was comprised of Kaarla Weston, Barbara Joyce Reed, Darlene Ferguson, Dawn Marquis and me as team leader. Howard Taylor of the Community Care Waiver Unit and Carolyn Stiles of the Family Support Unit provided additional information and Jane Iarussi compiled and tabulated survey data. Ann Driscoll of the DHHS Office of Improvement and Integrity reviewed financial audits and quarterly reports and participated in the interview with the Chief Financial Officer. The narrative report of our findings was written by Susan Covert and the BDS redesignation team.

Attached please find:

- ❖ A list of activities associated with the review process;
- ❖ A source document containing bullets substantiating material used in reaching our conclusions; and
- ❖ A narrative report of our findings.

The redesignation team wishes to recognize and thank Ellen Barry and Leslie Simays for their coordination of the team's activities. We also wish to thank the agency's Board of Directors, Family Support Advisory Council, Self-Advocacy Group, The Together Group, and area agency staff for sharing their valuable perspectives on the work of the agency.

If approved, the agency's redesignation would extend from October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2011, or, if conditionally approved, any time therein. The review team has agreed to meet with the Board of Directors, agency staff and other individuals or groups that the agency wishes to invite to discuss our findings and answer questions.

Please contact me or any other team member if you require additional information.

Components of the 2006 Redesignation Review in Region VI

The redesignation review process in Region VI included:

- Review of Region VI's Biennial Plan for fiscal years 2006 & 2007.
- Review of the area agency mission statement and organizational chart.
- Review of the rosters of the Board of Directors, Board Committees, and Family Support Advisory Council.
- Review of the Bureau's summary reports of the Adult Consumer Outcomes Surveys (ACOS) for fiscal years 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 and review of aggregate data for Adult Consumer Outcome Surveys collected from fiscal year 2002-2006.
- Review of Employment data collected as part of the Department's Employment Advisory Group during calendar year 2006.
- Review of Bureau of Health Facilities Administration program certification data from 2002-2005.
- Review of Early Supports and Services Family Outcomes data collected in calendar year 2006.
- Review of results of written surveys of the following:
 - ❖ Area agency Service Coordinators (12 respondents);
 - ❖ Area agency Family Support Coordinators (15 respondents);
 - ❖ Direct Service Providers (45 respondents);
 - ❖ Home Providers (33 respondents); and
 - ❖ Early Supports and Services Providers (14 respondents).
- Review of Community Support Network, Inc. (CSNI), Family Survey data for 2002, 2003 and 2005.
- A review of financial audits and quarterly reports of the area agency.
- A review of 19 service agreements at the Region VI office in December 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Service Coordination staff on October 4, 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Family Support Staff on October 11, 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Consumer Directed Services Account Managers on October 11, 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Region VI Family Support Advisory Council on October 16, 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Region VI Families on October 16, 2006 (21 attendees).
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Region VI Board of Directors on October 25, 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Nashua Self Advocacy Group, The Together Group, on October 30, 2006.
- An interview conducted by the redesignation team with the Region VI Management Team November 20, 2006.
- An interview conducted by selected members of redesignation team with the Area Agency Nurse.

- An interview with the Director of Quality Improvement by selected members of the redesignation team.
- An interview with the Complaint Investigator by selected members of the redesignation team.
- An interview with the Human Rights Committee Chairperson by selected members of the redesignation team.
- An interview with the Training Coordinator by selected members of the redesignation team.
- Phone interviews with 11 agencies identified to the redesignation team by Region VI as subcontract agencies in providing supports and services.
- Phone interviews with 13 agencies identified to the redesignation team by Region VI as cooperating agencies in providing supports and services.
- Phone interviews with families of individuals who receive Respite supports from the area agency.
- A review of the agency's Fiscal Policy Manual and interview of the Chief Financial Officer was conducted by a member of the Department's Office of Improvement and Integrity and a BDS Bureau Liaison.
- Review of documentation, including:
 - ❖ Area agency policies and procedures;
 - ❖ Job descriptions of key personnel;
 - ❖ Board of Directors Orientation manual;
 - ❖ Board of Directors meeting minutes;
 - ❖ Management Team meeting minutes;
 - ❖ Human Rights Committee meeting minutes;
 - ❖ Training curricula;
 - ❖ Data regarding complaint investigations;
 - ❖ Data regarding medication administration occurrences;
 - ❖ Human Rights information;
 - ❖ Area agency Newsletters; and
 - ❖ Area agency Website.

MISSION

Expectations:

The area agency is unequivocal in its mission: supporting people who have a disability in being valued members of their communities, and educating communities to recognize the value of individuals who have a disability. Individuals who receive services in the region and/or their families and guardians have a clear understanding of the mission and its implications. All staff members of the area agency and of its provider agencies are committed to this common mission and understand the purpose of their work.

"The Area Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc. believes that all people are of great value and strives to be innovative when providing quality supports needed for individuals to lead meaningful lives in their community."

Mission Statement for the Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc.

The mission statement for the Area Agency of Greater Nashua, Inc. (AAGN) is more than a decorative plaque in the organization's front office. AAGN's commitment to providing quality services, its expectation that individuals with disabilities and their families will be treated with respect and dignity, and its efforts, at every level, to forge strong community connections make their mission statement a living document.

AAGN makes individuals and families feel that they are a *part* of the organization, not just recipients of services. The agency has a vital Family Support Council and Self Advocacy Group; parents and individuals with disabilities are well represented on AAGN's Board of Directors. The area agency also has recruited and hired staff members who have family members with disabilities. These connections make for a strong agency partnership with individuals and their families, and ensure that the entire organization benefits from regular input from those who receive services.

The area agency is not only innovative in its approach to services, it also aggressively pursues opportunities that expand options and increase community connections for those it supports. AAGN is a nationally recognized leader in its promotion and widespread implementation of Consumer Directed Services (CDS). Its Respite Program provides a break for families and also creates opportunities for long-term friendships by connecting individuals with disabilities with respite providers who share the same interests. AAGN recognized the value of New Hampshire's In-Home Support Medicaid Waiver and worked with individuals and families to help them take advantage of this option. The AAGN also has developed supports for underserved populations, including individuals with Acquired Brain Disorder.

The area agency actively promotes community membership and fosters positive interpersonal relationships for individuals with disabilities. With support from a dynamic advisor, the region's Self Advocacy group has expanded the social and recreational opportunities for its members. Service Coordinators agreed that there are a great variety of opportunities available to individuals on their caseload to participate in a variety of social activities. In the past year the Family Support Program hosted an evening event with representatives from community recreational programs.

In a survey of 13 collaborating agencies all reported that they were well aware of AAGN's mission. The collaborating agencies portrayed an area agency that embraces a holistic approach in its work with individuals and families. Personal interests, special needs, and unique circumstances of each

individual and his or her family are taken into account when making decisions about the best way to provide supports. Those agencies interviewed expressed their appreciation that AAGN kept them informed about activities and issues relevant to their own work. They said that the agency provided information about transition from home to school, transition from school into adult life, and notice of upcoming professional conferences and community events.

At every level, from the Board of Directors to part time respite workers, AAGN promotes its mission of providing quality supports that enable individuals to have meaningful lives in their community. In talking about their work, Service Coordinators emphasized, "It's all about relationship building."

The Board of Directors enthusiastically promotes the agency as demonstrated by one Board member's statement, "Quality is the foundation of the Area Agency." By their example, the Board helps the broader community to see individuals with disabilities as valued citizens. Board members have actively promoted the hiring of employees with disabilities by community businesses and through their affiliations with local organizations have helped the community better understand both the contributions that citizens with disabilities can make, as well as the challenges that they face.

The Family Support Council (FSC) is an integral part of the AAGN's efforts in fulfilling its mission. The Council has sponsored trainings on how to support community inclusion and promote friendships. The Council uses their discretionary funds to enhance the quality of life for individuals and their families. This "value added" option enables individuals to pursue interests that are meaningful to them and expands their opportunities to participate in their community. These include camperships, paid conference registration fees, and financial help with health club memberships.

The agency has implemented a significant number of initiatives that expand community opportunities for and promote community acceptance of people with disabilities. These include local media features that illustrate the accomplishments and contributions made by individuals with disabilities, the Time Exchange, a barter program, and the Main Street Program caring for plantings in the downtown area.

AAGN expects subcontract agencies to carry out the area agency's mission. Contract language reinforces this expectation; for example, supported employment providers are required to, "Support individuals to become valued members of their communities. Provide and promote individual opportunities for social integration through workplace employment and awareness, involvement in work-related groups/meetings and social gatherings." The ten representatives interviewed from subcontract agencies, all stated that the AAGN's mission is central to their work. These vendors collaborate with organizations such as Garden Clubs, Lions Club, and Rivier College to create opportunities for community participation.

The area agency provides a wide array of inclusive opportunities for individuals served in the region. Responses to a Service Provider Questionnaire strongly demonstrate efforts of the agency to assist individuals and families to have inclusive opportunities, maintain relationships in the community and to provide appropriate training for all staff. Training is provided to area agency staff regarding Social Role Valorization and the provision of appropriate supports for inclusion and community integration. The Direct Service Professional (DSP) training program, College of Direct Support is utilized in the region to enhance training of DSPs beyond the Introductory Training Curriculum. Overall, it is clear that AAGN excels in supporting inclusive opportunities for the individuals it serves.

AAGN is implementing strategies to address the continuous challenge of providing new opportunities for individuals to gain competitive, rewarding employment. For example, AAGN recently applied for and was awarded a Medicaid Improvement Grant (MIG) focused on enhancing employment opportunities for individuals it serves. AAGN requires day services vendors to develop improvement plans, most frequently focused on increasing employment opportunities. Individuals enjoy attending job fairs and tours where they are able to connect with area businesses and employment resources found in the community.

RIGHTS, HEALTH AND SAFETY

Expectations:

The area agency has systems in place to promote the health and well being of the individuals who receive services. It is proactive in its efforts to protect individuals from abuse, neglect, and exploitation; and, when there are rights violations or questionable injuries, these are thoroughly investigated and the information is used to prevent future occurrences. Individuals, families, guardians and service providers receive on-going training regarding rights and rights protection.

Both in policy and practice, the AAGN demonstrates an uncompromising commitment to protecting the rights and ensuring the health and safety of those receiving services. AAGN's Quality Care Coordinator is also the Vice President of Individual and Family Services, guaranteeing that, at the highest levels, the agency is responsive to individual and systemic concerns. The agency utilized an extensive array of measures that ensure individuals' health, safety, and protection of rights.

The agency's response to a recent critical incident underlines its willingness to do whatever is necessary to safeguard individuals with disabilities. AAGN not only addressed the situation in their own region, but also have begun research with the intention of introducing new safety protocols statewide for individuals using belting systems in various seating situations. Subcontracting agencies reported that the area agency provides assistance and resources to help ensure the health and safety of people in their programs. Examples include: use of AAGN crisis intervention funds to support an individual whose provider moved unexpectedly, referrals to medical and behavioral specialists, and consultation to an Early Supports and Services (ESS) program serving a family troubled by domestic violence.

AAGN has a veteran Service Coordination Department; staff longevity has been a critical factor in the agency's ability to provide quality services and ensure rights, health and safety for individuals that they serve. Many Service Coordinators have been with the agency for years and enjoy long-term relationships with the people on their caseloads. They know individuals well; they are aware of any changes in the person's life and advocate for needed interventions. Their role of coordinating services from other providers has been especially critical for assuring consistent supports for individuals with challenging behaviors. All 12 Service Coordinators surveyed in the Redesignation Review, stated that individuals served by the area agency system are safe.

With so many people in the region opting for Consumer Direct Services (CDS), the area agency has developed protocols for managing crisis situations for this population. Individuals served through CDS have contingency plans and access to providers in case of an emergency. AAGN's emphasis on maintaining strong community connections has proven invaluable in time of crisis and in providing an additional safety need for potentially vulnerable citizens. Recently, a local church came forward to help an individual whose home was damaged in a flood.

Under AAGN's current structure, subcontracted nurses are directly responsible for individual health care needs and Service Coordinators receive health related information for the individuals on their caseloads. The area agency Nurse Consultant does not assess health needs of individuals, unless specifically requested by a vendor nurse, and is not routinely informed about critical events or allegations of abuse or neglect that have health care ramifications. The area agency Nurse reported that her primary responsibilities are monitoring and following up on corrective action plans related to medication errors and performing administrative functions such as signing off on

Patient Care Referral Forms and providing the Summary Health Profile establishing eligibility for community care waiver services.

Recommendation:

- As the lead contracting agency as well as the enrolled Medicaid provider of developmental services, the area agency has ultimate oversight responsibility regarding the health and safety of the individuals it serves. Given the above job description and the limited time available to the area agency by the Nurse Consultant, it is recommended that the area agency work with the Bureau of Developmental Services to develop additional nursing resources to address, monitor and facilitate the health care needs of individuals on both an individual and systemic level and to enable its nurse to be consistently involved in the review of deaths, critical events, and allegations of abuse and neglect with health care ramifications.

Individuals and families in the region are aware of their rights. The vast majority of those interviewed in the Adult Care Outcomes Surveys from 2002 through 2006, said they understood their rights and knew who to go to if they had a problem or did not feel safe. Approximately half of those interviewed said they were aware that they could file a complaint if they had a problem with services. Families at the Redesignation Forum reported that they annually received information on their rights.

Individuals and families/guardians consistently reported a high degree of satisfaction with the opportunities made available to learn or maintain skills and/or develop personal interests, in both day and residential services. In addition, they indicated that services and supports were delivered in accordance with individuals' service agreements, which had been developed based on their unique needs, interests and preferences.

During redesignation interviews Service Coordinators discussed the importance of setting meaningful goals that reflect the individuals' interests and dreams. This challenge was reflected in the record review when personal profiles for some individuals did not correlate with the goals in their Individual Service Agreements. In addition, coordinators acknowledged that writing "realistic" goals can be a challenge, particularly for individuals who are aging or have complex needs.

Consideration: The area agency needs to assure that the goals in the Individual Service Agreement are related to the needs, preferences, and interests documented in the personal profile.

AAGN's Training Coordinator reported that the agency's orientation and training encompasses a wide variety of topics including: agency mission, customer services, safety, confidentiality, HIPAA compliance, blood borne pathogens, and client rights. AAGN contracts with Plus Company to provide first aid, medication administration, and CPR training. In the Redesignation Survey, Service Coordinators and Family Support workers indicate that as a result of area agency training they are able to respond to rights violations and medical and behavioral emergencies. While vendors provide their own orientation, their employees also are invited to attend the AAGN's orientation and other training sessions.

AAGN expects subcontract agencies to offer rights protection training for their staff and to send documentation of this training to the area agency. They also are expected to train and support their staff on managing challenging behaviors. Vendors reported that as a result of an enhanced focus on meaningful days, positive practice approaches, and Gentle Teaching, the frequency of negative behaviors has decreased and few individuals have behavior protocols at this time.

Direct Service and Home Providers in the region report that they know what to do if an individual's rights are violated and state that the area agency has been responsive when rights violations have been reported. They also report a high degree of satisfaction with the training and support they receive from AAGN and vendor agencies concerning how to respond to health care needs, medical crises, behavioral emergencies, and safety concerns for the individuals they support. Both groups stated that individuals served by the system are safe.

AAGN has an effective complaint process. The area agency contracts with two independent investigators who investigate all complaints or service concerns. The agency's Human Rights Committee (HRC), which includes community members and staff, reviews the investigator's findings and issues a report and recommendations. The agency's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) reviews all final recommendations that are made as a result of complaint investigations.

All complaints and service concerns are discussed at the bi-monthly Senior Staff meetings. The Quality Committee of the Board of Directors, the area agency Management Team, and the Executive Directors of subcontractor agencies receive a summary of the HRC reports. AAGN uses the complaint process to identify trends and support needs; if there are systemic problems, appropriate actions are taken to assure that any underlying causes are addressed.

All individuals who were interviewed as part of the annual ACOS process said they felt safe at home, during the day, and at work. All reported having their own doctors and 90% said they had annual dental cleanings and check ups. A significant majority of families participating in the ACOS reported that the agency addressed the health, safety, and behavioral needs of their family members. The lowest level of satisfaction was in FY2002-2003; only 61% of families reported that they were satisfied with the area agency addressing the dental needs of their family member.

The area agency has an independent HRC comprised of three family members and one community member and is actively recruiting two additional members. Current committee members have served for six to seven years, providing the region with significant expertise and experience in addressing human rights issues.

The HRC reviews individual behavior plans and the individual's Service Coordinator oversees the plan's implementation. The HRC meets with the independent investigator, reviews the written report, and votes on recommendations. The Committee also has the authority to provide additional recommendations, if they deem necessary. AAGN is in the process of writing a policy to ensure follow-up on any corrective actions recommended by the HRC.

CHOICE, CONTROL, AND SATISFACTION

Expectations:

The unique needs, strengths and preferences of individuals and families are acknowledged, respected and supported. Individuals and families/guardians have the knowledge, authority and support they need to direct and manage their supports and services and to decide who will provide them. Supports and services are designed to address the needs of individuals and their families, and to improve the quality of their lives.

“Those we serve will have the home of their choice, the job they desire, and complete access to health care, community, recreation, education and retirement security.”

Area Agency of Greater Nashua website

The area agency is firmly committed to providing individuals and their families with all the information and support that they need to design and direct their own services. Information about service options appears on the AAGN website and in agency publications, including *Family Support Connections* which is published in both English and Spanish. As part of the high school transition process, Service Coordinators organize tours of vendor agencies and provide individuals and families with information about traditional and Consumer Directed Services. Adult Custom Services Managers work with individuals who have expressed interest in directing their own services. They provide information about the individual's rights and responsibilities and do all planning and budgeting with the individual. One manager observed, “Partnership and validation are key components to the success of CDS because we educate, listen, and speak with families who discern and choose services for themselves.”

Results from the 2002 through 2005 NH Developmental Services Family Surveys and discussions at the Family Forum include positive feedback with regard to the information and support that the agency provides. There has been significant improvement in families' satisfaction with the agency's provision of information about estate planning and future care options.

At the Family Forum, parents expressed their deep appreciation for the agency's efforts in supporting them, helping them understand and complete applications for benefits, obtain funds for home modifications, and arrange for respite care. Families said they received help to resolve problems with vendor agencies and shared examples of how Service Coordinators went beyond what was expected. Parents suggested additional ways that the area agency could support families, including continued distribution of “Maneuvering Through the Maze,” increase opportunities for parents to meet and share information, future Parent Support Forums to provide families with the information and assistance they need to access services.

In response to families' concerns regarding the transition to adult services, AAGN restructured its high school transition services and instituted a protocol to keep families informed at each step in the transition process. The agency now has five Transition Coordinators working with 150 high school students, ages 16 - 21. Coordinators provide students and their families with information on a variety of topics, including vocational opportunities, Medicaid benefits, and CDS. In conjunction with the FSC, Transition Coordinators hold informational sessions for families. Changes in the transition services have resulted in better collaboration between AAGN and local schools. For example, the area agency now participates in school open houses and schools are sending representatives to the agency's family information sessions.

While transition services are much improved, one parent at the Forum said the transition information came too late for their family; others agreed and said that transition services should start at age 14, not 16. It will be important for AAGN to continue refining its support to families during the transition process and to explore whether to begin transition planning at age 14.

AAGN is nationally recognized for its work in Consumer Directed Services. A quarter of the adults served by the agency have Consumer Directed Services; in the past year, 60% of all individuals coming off the agency's Wait List was served through CDS. AAGN also has a pilot program that incorporates CDS into family support. In its CDS power point presentation, the agency says of this approach, "Your schedule, your home, your worker, your community, your vision." The presentation also notes that CDS outcomes include, "Extremely high customer satisfaction, lower average costs, flexible and changeable programs, more services for same service dollar. Decreased crisis situation, longer worker retention, and built in self-sufficiency."

Interviews with individuals receiving services, families, Service Coordinators, and Account Managers demonstrated that Service Coordinators and Account Managers have trusting relationships with the people on their caseloads, a factor critical to the quality of their work. Individuals are encouraged and supported to actively participate in all aspects of service planning. Staff utilizes creative approaches to engage individuals and to support them in communicating their wants and needs. For example, in developing a plan for a man who is passionate about cars, his Account Manager used automotive analogies to help this individual better understand his options for services.

Individuals participating in the Adult Outcome Surveys between 2002 and 2006 reported that they are given a high degree of choice and control in most areas of their lives. They did not, however, have as much say about who provided their residential supports; only slightly more than a third said they chose their home staff. Even with this, nearly everyone surveyed reported they liked where they lived, indicative of the effectiveness of the process for matching providers with individuals.

Subcontract agencies also support consumer and family involvement. Managers noted that there is no preconceived service delivery model and that individuals and families have input into customizing their supports. One manager commented that the extent of individual and family involvement in decision-making was determined by their "capacity, interest, and imagination." Individuals and families visit homes and interview providers before deciding on residential services. Those receiving day and employment services are matched with staff based on work choices and interests. Families receiving ESS help write their Individual Family Support Plans. Families have input regarding the types, frequency and scheduling of services. ESS agencies assist families in finding resources and making connections. One agency reported that a mother of twins who was looking for support was put in touch with a family who has triplets. As a result, these parents organized a support group for families of "multiples."

Families and guardians are very satisfied with their involvement in the planning process. A parent at the Family Forum said that families have a "big part in implementing our own vision." Others said they appreciated that the agency listens to and responds to their concerns; they cited the development of the Sibling Program as one example of AAGN's responsiveness to families.

AAGN's Management Team and Service Coordinators emphasized their commitment to working "in partnership" with individuals and families to ensure people are adequately supported to meet their goals. In the Adult Outcome Surveys from 2002 through 2006, nearly all those interviewed

said that the agency supported them in reaching their goals. In the Developmental Services Family Survey for the same time period, a significant majority reported that they were satisfied with the assistance that the area agency provided to meet these goals.

As the popularity of CDS has grown, the area agency has made changes in how it does business. The program is staffed by Account Managers, a newly created position that combines the responsibilities of service coordination and fiscal intermediary. For families who are having difficulties managing and achieving their goals, CDS now has a "Family Agent" where families can access up to 20 hours of free consultation and assistance. For families utilizing individualized CDS budgets, AAGN's business office reorganized its bookkeeping to create individual cost centers and modified its fiscal reports to make them more family friendly.

In nearly all instances, individuals and families served by the AAGN say that they are pleased with service options and the quality of services provided in the region. However, some parents at the Family Forum mentioned needs that were beyond the immediate scope of services offered by the area agency. These parents hoped that the area agency could help by creating a resource center to assist families in accessing specialized services. These include services for individuals who have chronic health conditions or a dual mental health/developmental disability diagnosis, identifying child psychologists, long waits for psychological services, and lack of coverage for naturopathic services.

AAGN is working to improve its ability to support individuals to find and maintain employment. According to the 2007 employment survey conducted by the NH Department of Health and Human Services, only 35% of individuals served by the region have paid employment and only 42%, had Service Agreements that included employment goals. The 2002-2006 Adult Outcome Surveys found that a significant number of individuals who were unemployed wanted to work and those working wanted additional hours. Half of those doing volunteer work wanted to change their volunteer activities. To address this issue, AAGN recently applied for and was awarded a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant to increase employment options for individuals with disabilities in the region.

Overall, AAGN does well in providing assistive technology to those who need it. However, some dissatisfaction was reported concerning the agency's help in obtaining assistive technology that could enhance communication and self-care.

Recommendation:

- Because these skills are so critical to the quality of an individual's life, the area agency should explore how it can better support individuals to access this particular assistive technology.

Overall, it appears that the great majority of individuals and their families/ guardians are satisfied with their services and appreciate the opportunity to exercise choice and control regarding many aspects of their supports provided through the area agency.

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT

Expectations:

The area agency believes that people who need and/or receive services have the greatest investment in and understanding of how those services should be designed and provided. Individuals and families/guardians are invited, welcomed, and supported as full participants in system planning and decision-making. The opinions of individuals and families/guardians are continuously sought to inform policy making and system improvement. Financial and other assistance is available to enable individuals and families/guardians to play leadership roles and participate in all activities that affect them.

The AAGN regularly informs individuals and families about upcoming agency events and invites their participation in regional planning and quality assurance efforts. To communicate with families, the agency has an extensive email list, distributes a quarterly newsletter, direct mailings, and posts upcoming events on their website.

The area agency works in partnership with individuals and their families. Family members and individuals serve on the Board of Directors, as well as on the Human Rights, Autism Initiative, and Waitlist Committees. The agency has an active and vital FSC that helps develop the region's Biennial Plan. AAGN supports the involvement of individuals and families in the decision-making process regarding a variety of topic areas, including providing respite care, mileage reimbursement, interpreters, and holding events in accessible locations.

The area agency's Legislative Liaison keeps individuals, families, and guardians up-to-date on legislation and regulatory changes that could impact services. At the monthly FSC meeting, the Family Support Coordinator provides updates on policies or program initiatives that affect individuals and families. AAGN hosts community meetings to inform individuals, families, and lawmakers about critical issues. The agency's quarterly newsletter also includes policy updates.

The Legislative Liaison works with the FSC to ensure individuals and families in the region have input into the legislation process; this includes providing legislative updates, notices about hearings, contact information for legislators, model letters, and help in preparing testimony. The FSC regularly holds forums for legislators and other elected officials, giving them an opportunity to hear directly from individuals with disabilities and their families about pressing concerns.

Area agency's recent outreach about the new Medicare Part D plan illustrates its commitment to keep individuals and families/guardians well informed. AAGN informed Medicare recipients served by the agency about upcoming changes and held trainings for subcontractors to explain the Part D and how AAGN would enroll people. They also hosted information sessions to educate families about Part D and to help them enroll for coverage. The agency sent out mailings, newsletter articles, and provided follow up support for those who receive this Medicare benefit.

Members of the FSC describe their relationship with the area agency as "always open, friendly, and respectful" and report that the organization values their expertise and contribution. The FSC works in partnership with the area agency on regional planning activities and helps develop the Biennial Plan. FSC members serve on the Board of Directors, HRC, the Waiting List Committee, and the

Autism Initiative. Area agency program directors regularly make presentations to the FSC and ask for their feedback and ideas.

The Council plays a significant role in decision making for the region's family support services. The Council reviews the results of annual satisfaction surveys for Respite Care and family support services and receives the ACOS regional reports. The Council works with the agency to develop plans for addressing issues identified by the surveys. For example, the FSC worked to increase the number of respite providers qualified to support individuals with behavioral challenges. FSC participates in hiring program staff and has input to the performance review for the Family Support Coordinator. FSC reviews and approves budget allocations for the program.

The Council enjoys a close collaborative relationship with AAGN administration and Board of Directors. The Council and Board share a member in common and both groups come together for an annual planning retreat. The Vice President of Individual and Family Services attends monthly Council meetings; this helps to ensure that a family perspective is brought to the area agency's Management Team. Twice a year the agency's CEO meets with the Council to update them on new initiatives and discuss any pressing issues. The CEO also has an open door policy and encourages Council members to come directly to her with questions or concerns.

SYSTEM OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

Expectations:

There is a resolute and continuous commitment to excellence and quality improvement. The area agency is committed to assessing the quality of services on an ongoing basis and is accountable to individuals and families who receive services. Individuals, families, as well as others are active partners in evaluating system quality and provider performance. There is continuous evaluation and improvement of services and supports to achieve better outcomes for individuals and families.

The area agency is committed to ongoing quality assessment and improvement. AAGN has a comprehensive quality improvement policy that was developed in collaboration with its Board of Directors. The agency's Vice-President of Individual and Family Services is responsible for the overall monitoring of customer satisfaction and quality improvement. The Board's Quality Assurance Committee oversees quality improvement activities for the area agency. AAGN's Quality Improvement Policy is in the process of being revised to clarify the role of the provider network in assessing and reporting on quality. This policy revision will establish a minimum benchmark of 75% customer satisfaction for services in the region. (It should be noted that the area agency and its subcontractors typically exceed this level of customer satisfaction.)

The area agency assesses quality through a number of means including Regional Complaint data, ACOS, BDS Community Employment Surveys, Biennial Consumer Satisfaction Surveys, and Department of Health and Human Services Certification Reviews. As importantly, AAGN staff provides critical insight into the effectiveness of services. Service Coordinators, Family Support Coordinators, and Adult Accounts Managers spend time with individuals in their homes, at work, and in the community - both on scheduled and unannounced visits - and see first hand services being delivered. These workers know when things are going well and are often the first to hear about problems. During the CDS Account Mangers' interview it was reported that a process for timely submission of incidents reports for individuals utilizing the Consumer Directed service option has not been developed.

Consideration: The area agency's policy regarding incident reporting for CDS needs to be reviewed and revised to ensure timely documentation and response to any critical incidents.

AAGN considers quality assessment and improvement the responsibility of all area agency programs and subcontracting agencies. In the Redesignation Survey of Home Providers, Service Coordinators, ESS staff, and Direct Support Providers, an overwhelming majority reported that the area agency asks for their ideas for improving the quality of services and that these discussions do, indeed, result in improved services to individuals. Interviews with Service Coordinators and record reviews confirm that individuals and families are routinely asked to provide feedback about services. The Vice President of Individual and Family Services, along with the Management Team and the Board's Quality Assurance Committee, analyze assessment data to determine trends and develop strategies to address systemic problems.

The area agency widely shares information about quality assurance activities and the results of satisfaction surveys with AAGN staff, vendors, individuals and families, and the community at large. The agency also solicits ideas for improving services. For example, the agency adopted a respite voucher in response to families' suggestions for improving respite care. As a result from input from families and Service Coordinators, AAGN significantly expanded its role in supporting young people who are making the transition from school into adult services.

The area agency is greatly respected for its leadership in advocating for needed systemic changes, both at regional and state levels. The Vice President of Individual and Family Services has been a driving force in a statewide effort to improve services for people with acquired brain disorders.

Subcontractors regularly conduct quality assessments and share this information with the area agency. AAGN meets with subcontractors quarterly to discuss this data and identify areas that need to be addressed. During redesignation interviews with vendor agencies several managers reported that they were unaware of the contractual requirements for quality improvement.

Consideration: It is suggested that AAGN meet with the vendors to review the region's quality assurance process and procedures and determine what additional processes may be needed.

The area agency has identified forensic services as an area of need and is taking steps to address this issue. AAGN has hired a consultant to help develop programs that support individuals in these circumstances while, at the same time, ensuring community safety.

Consideration: The recent efforts of the area agency to expand its expertise in this area are appreciated. Due to the rising number of forensic cases where this form of expertise is keenly needed the agency is encouraged to build on its recent efforts to enhance their services and expertise in this particular area.

The area agency demonstrated its commitment and ability to provide timely and effective follow-up in service agreements where progress was questionable. Service Coordinators, Family Support Coordinators and Account Managers were mentioned by individuals, guardians, and vendor staff as being attentive and promoting individual choice, respecting individuals' decisions and successfully enhancing quality services.

A few ways in which teams and Service Coordinators solve problems, overcome barriers, and remain committed to assisting the individuals to obtain their personal and career goals are through sharing observations, discussing service options, disseminating knowledge about community activities, organizing tours to vendor sites and facilitating introductions between family members and vendor directors. As a result, teams are able to mobilize quickly in the event there is a problem and avoid a crisis. Quarterly satisfaction assessments are routinely conducted and Service Coordinators depend on these assessments to make "course corrections" as necessary pending changes in the individuals' interests, needs and goals.

The documentation review confirmed that feedback relative to satisfaction of services is always welcomed and formally requested and documented by the area agency on a quarterly basis and during the annual service agreement.

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Expectations:

The area agency Board of Directors and Management Team play crucial leadership roles in administering an effective regional service system. A well informed and active Board and Management Team fulfill their responsibilities by engaging in and promoting effective communication with and among all stakeholders in the agency and region, achieving quality services, individual/family/guardian satisfaction, and employing a well trained, supported and supervised work force. The Board and Management Team engage in activities to enhance the area agency's association with the community at-large on behalf of individuals with disabilities.

The area agency has a talented Board of Directors that provides able leadership for the organization. Its members include strong consumer representatives, people who have expertise on disability issues, and respected business and civic leaders. Board responsibilities include review and approval of agency policies, setting long-term organizational objectives, evaluating management performance, and providing direction to the CEO. The Board works in close collaboration with the CEO and the Management Team. Senior staff reports that they "take their marching orders from the Board."

The area agency's bylaws were adopted in March of 1998 and continue to be up-to-date. Agency policies and procedures reflect current practices and have been routinely updated. AAGN's organizational chart is accurate and reflects the agency's current structure.

Area agency job descriptions are current and set expectations of excellence with regards to the provision of innovative and personalized services. Responsibilities for senior management include a comprehensive understanding of the service delivery system and a commitment to customer service and quality supports.

The area agency provides its Board of Director with a thorough orientation and ongoing training. New Board members receive a comprehensive orientation manual that includes both agency-specific information and extensive material on New Hampshire's developmental service system. Board meetings frequently include guest speakers and the agency's managers regularly make presentations about their programs. Board minutes reflect that members are kept up-to-date on both regional issues and statewide initiatives. Members of the Board are encouraged to attend any agency trainings of interest.

AAGN's Management Team has extensive opportunities for professional development. Recent trainings have focused on Leadership, Computer Skills, Mentorship, and creating a collaborative work environment.

Several Board members are responsible for quality assurance in their own organizations and bring that expertise to their work with the area agency. AAGN management provides staff support to Board Committees; this gives Board members an understanding and appreciation for the agency's services and has resulted in productive working relationships.

The Management Team works closely with the Board, and especially with the Quality Assurance Committee, to ensure that they have the information they need to oversee quality improvement.

Senior staff shares findings from the Adult Consumer Outcome Surveys, ESS Self Assessment Report, BDS Family and Employment Surveys. Staff also provides the Board with updates on the Biennial Plan, progress on the waitlist, and information regarding complaints and incidents.

AAGN has an extremely competent Management Team committed to providing outstanding services. The CEO has been with the agency since its inception more than twenty years ago and is a leader in the State's developmental services system. The agency is fortunate to have senior staff members who have more than 15 years experience with organization. The Management team is committed to excellence and leads by example. They are accessible *and* responsive to AAGN staff, the Board of Directors, and the FSC. The CEO attends department meetings throughout the year and is well informed about all aspects of the organization. Senior staff reports that they are "absolutely" supported by the agency in their work.

AAGN does an excellent job of communicating across all levels of the agency. At monthly all staff meetings the entire organization is informed about new agency initiatives, statewide issues, and proposed legislation. Departments hold regular staff meetings and department heads come together several times a year to ensure coordination of the area agency's programs. In the Redesignation Surveys, staff expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the agency's supervision and support. They also said that the agency includes them in discussions about services and welcomes their ideas for making improvements.

Representatives from subcontract agencies give the area agency high marks for providing support and assistance. Of the ten agencies contacted as part of the Redesignation Review, eight reported that have been able to informally work through any disagreements that they have had with AAGN. Two subcontract agencies reported that they had used the agency's process for dispute resolution and found this to be ineffective.

Consideration: The area agency may wish to review its policy for addressing grievances with subcontract agencies to determine whether revisions are needed to make it more effective.

The area agency is to be commended for its exceptional work in community outreach. Promoting the agency's mission is encouraged at every level of the organization, from the Board of Directors to Direct Service Providers. The AAGN has hired a Development Coordinator who is responsible for expanding outreach and increasing the agency's visibility. The agency has an effective marketing plan that includes at least monthly area agency coverage in the Nashua Telegraph and other media outlets. AAGN's website, newsletters, community forums, and family support activities also help to keep the agency and its mission in the public eye.

Both the area agency's Board of Directors and its staff are leaders in their community and well connected. Board members have been good will ambassadors, educating the Greater Nashua business and civic community about the mission of the agency. AAGN's staff is involved in a number of community initiatives and frequently takes a leadership role; among their affiliations are Rotary, Nashua Regional Planning Commission, Service Link, and St. Joseph's Hospital. The Area Agency also collaborates on community projects including the Lamprey Project, Minority Mentorship Program, WRAP, and the Autism Network.

The area agency's outreach efforts extend beyond their service region. AAGN has been a trailblazer in the development of Consumer Directed Services; the agency provides technical assistance and training both in New Hampshire and beyond for organizations interested in this service option.

AAGN has a strong and collaborative relationship with its FSC. A member of the FSC serves on the area agency's Board of Directors, ensuring coordination between the two bodies. The Family Support Coordinator and the Vice President of Individual and Family Services attend all Council meetings; the agency's CEO attends several FSC meetings a year. Members state that the Council's primary purpose is to advise the agency on issues that affect families; they play an integral role in developing the agency's Biennial Plan. Council members report that the area agency has welcomed and been extremely responsive to their input. When the FSC has questions about a service or policy, the staff person who is most knowledgeable about the issue meets with the Council.

AAGN recognizes the value of a well-trained workforce and devotes considerable energy to providing quality orientation and training for its staff. Results of the Redesignation Staff Surveys confirm that the agency has been very effective in this area. Overwhelmingly, staff in *all* programs reported that they were very satisfied with the training they've received.

AAGN expects its subcontract agencies to provide quality orientation and training and offers them assistance with this. The area agency has been supportive in the establishment of the College of Direct Support and encourages developmental services workers in the region to take advantage of this opportunity to continue their education. In Redesignation Interviews, representatives from subcontract agencies stated they appreciated the area agency's support and found recent training and technical assistance on fire safety issues to be particularly helpful. Some vendors said that they wanted clarification on the area agency's requirements for orientation. There was also a request that AAGN create and distribute a monthly calendar listing all available training opportunities.

AAGN continues to refine its training program. The agency and Moore Center Services are sharing resources and working collaboratively to enhance the quality and scope of training available to staff in both organizations. ESS providers are combining resources and coordinating training for staff in all three programs.

AAGN has been proactive in providing supports and services that reduce the need for long-term services. The area agency expects its staff, especially Service Coordinators, to be resourceful and creative in their efforts to support individuals with disabilities who live at home with their families. The agency has provided consultation to address behavioral and medical challenges. Additional respite care is offered to families who are under stress. The agency coordinates parent-to-parent connections to help families expand their support networks.

The area agency has made a concerted effort to enroll children on the IHS waiver; this has expanded available community supports and reduced the need for out-of-home placements. AAGN also has been very successful in obtaining grants and community funds to pay for home modifications that have allowed children to continue living in their community with their family.

The area agency has instituted a financial representative-payee service that assists 100 people with their Social Security benefits and another 150 people with their Medicaid benefits. This service ensures adults with disabilities are able to pay routine bills in a timely manner. With this support people who receive minimal community services are able to maintain their independence and decrease their reliance on more intensive agency programs.

BUDGET DEVELOPMENT AND FISCAL HEALTH

Expectations:

The Management Team and Board of Directors provide leadership in achieving financial health in the pursuit of the area agency mission. The agency's resource allocation, budget oversight, and billing procedures reflect sound fiscal management. The development and management of the agency and individual budgets are achieved through the involvement of appropriate stakeholders. The agency reviews its fiscal status on an ongoing basis, maintains good financial health and considers cost effectiveness in resource allocation. In responding to requests from individuals and families/guardians for assistance, the area agency draws on generic community supports and services as key resources to enhance its own funding, including its efforts to address the needs of those who are on waiting lists.

AAGN is financially sound; its Management Team and Board of Directors provide effective management of the agency's fiscal resources. The agency benefits from the expertise of several Board members who have financial backgrounds. The Board Finance Committee, which includes agency management, meets quarterly to review the agency's financial statements in detail.

The area agency's formal financial policies and procedures establish effective accounting practices that support the efficient operation of the organization and provide strong internal controls. AAGN's Chief Financial Officer participates on the Board Finance Committee. The agency's financial status, including utilization of resources, is reviewed and analyzed monthly by Board and the Management Team. All Board members receive monthly summaries that are concise and easy to understand and contain charts that highlight year to date revenues and expenses. As mandated by the Board, the area agency periodically reviews programs with an eye to increasing cost effectiveness and improving quality. There are several policies that the area agency may want to consider incorporating into their financial manual, such as policies for: writing off old outstanding checks, requirements for receiving proposals on services, property or major purchases, the use and accountability of credit cards, and travel and expenses.

The area agency's Management Team, with input and review from the Board Finance Committee, develops the agency's budget. The Management Team reported that senior staff is responsible for providing input on department budgets. The Management Team works with the FSC regarding allocation of discretionary Family Support funds. Each Service Coordinator is responsible for managing certain line items within the Service Coordination budget. Account Managers and Service Coordinators work with individuals and families to develop and manage individualized budgets. Those using CDS receive monthly financial statements that allow them to track spending and make adjustments as needed. The Finance Committee recommends the final budget to the full Board of Directors for approval.

Subcontract agencies are required to submit annual budget requests, quarterly financial statements, daily attendance reports, and annual audits. AAGN's Management Team provides feedback and assistance to subcontract agencies as needed. Several venter agencies reported that the area agency was responsive to their financial concerns.

The area agency's Wait List Committee, comprised of four senior staff, meets weekly to review the status of individuals on the priority one wait list. This Committee is able to respond when

individuals are in crisis and if necessary reallocates current funding to provide needed supports. The agency's Fiscal Team receives weekly updates from the Wait List Committee. Board representatives and Management Team members serve on the Board's Waiting List Committee; they meet monthly to review the wait list and share their findings with the full Board of Directors. The Board has developed a process to prioritize and allocate available wait list funds. In Redesignation Interviews, Service Coordinators and Family Support staff reported that individuals on the wait list receive short-term financial assistance from AAGN and help to access community resources.

AAGN does an exceptional job identifying and tapping community resources and generic services prior to spending area agency funds. Service Coordinators have helped individuals find pastoral counseling, sign up for Meals on Wheels, utilize Vocational Rehabilitation and mental health services, and apply for federal housing assistance. They have established good relationships with local realtors and have an inside track on affordable housing. Before allocating discretionary funds, the FSC first directs families to community resources.

The Development Committee of the Board engages in a number of fund raising activities including the agency's annual appeal and endowment program. AAGN has aggressively pursued private and public grants and expanded its contracts with the Bureau of Elder and Adult Services and Partners in Health. The agency seeks private contributions to help families pay for home and vehicle modifications. Fundraising initiatives have been organized to support projects, such as the adult education, art programs, and a sibling group, that otherwise would not be funded.

COMPLIANCE

Expectations:

The area agency and its subcontract agencies are knowledgeable of and in compliance with the basic state and federal standards regarding services. The area agency and its subcontract agencies fulfill requirements regarding certification of day and residential services, medication administration, determination of eligibility for area agency services, establishment of service agreements for each person being served, authorization for Medicaid's Community Care Waiver funding stream, provision of Family Support and Early Supports and Services, and management of waiting lists. The area agency and its subcontract agencies also submit to the Bureau requested information and data regarding services provided under the contracts with the State.

On the whole, the AAGN complies with all federal and state laws and regulations. The area agency is in compliance with State regulation He-M 503. Requests to obtain prior-authorization for services under Medicaid's Community Care Waiver meet the documentation requirements in state regulation He-M 517. The area agency and the FSC maintain policies, procedures, and guidelines as required by He-M 519. The agency, for the most part, has been responsive in submitting corrective action plans in a timely manner. This process is more efficient now that information is submitted directly by the area agency instead of by its vendors.

Over a four-year period, FY02 – FY05, ESS providers in the region have improved their compliance with federal guidelines. There are, however, areas where ESS compliance has decreased during the past year or is still in need of improvement.

Recommendation:

- Because Federal Part C funds are contingent upon ESS program compliance it is critical that the area agency provide additional, intensive oversight of this program to determine the cause(s) of regulatory non-compliance. Strategies for ensuring long-term compliance with the Federal Part C and state requirements should be identified and monitored to determine and measure improvement.

The Bureau of Developmental Services staff reports that the area agency submits accurate and timely budget and contract information, as well as documentation of ongoing budget modifications and quarterly financial reports. Routinely requested waiting list information and employment data meet reporting guidelines for submission. Biennial plans and subsequent updates meet all guidelines. Quarterly Family Support, Respite and ESS reports are accurate and submitted in the correct format. However, ESS information is often submitted after the requested deadline. The agency is always prompt in submitting information to the state's Medication Committee. Medicaid waiver prior authorization requests include all relevant information and are submitted within the established timeframes. Mortality information is submitted to the Bureau within the required guidelines and in the correct format. In all instances, when further documentation is needed the area agency responds in a timely manner.

SUMMARY

The Area Agency of Greater Nashua (AAGN) is respected for its provision of innovative, quality supports and services. The area agency's success can be attributed in great part to exemplary leadership and its dedicated staff. The agency is fortunate to have a creative and talented Management Team working in close collaboration with a committed Board of Directors. The organization's CEO, who has headed the agency since its inception more than 20 years ago, sets high expectations that the area agency and its subcontract agencies will be responsive to the unique circumstances, preferences, and needs of each individual.

The agency's responsiveness includes supporting those individuals and families who want to have increased choices and more control over their services. AAGN is nationally recognized for pioneering Consumer Directed Services; a quarter of those supported by the area agency currently direct their own services and the interest in CDS continues to grow. Service Coordinators are committed to supporting individuals and help to create community connections that lead to personal growth and friendships. AAGN also works in partnership with a strong FSC and its Board of Directors to increase community acceptance and inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

AAGN has been proactive in providing supports and services that reduce the need for long-term services. Service Coordinators have been resourceful and creative in supporting individuals with disabilities to live at home with their families. The agency has provided additional respite to families who are under stress and provided funding for home modifications. The area agency has been diligent in its efforts to obtain appropriate supports and services for individuals with behavioral challenges. In recent years, AAGN has increased its collaboration with community agencies to enhance its supports and services to individuals with acquired brain disorders, a group that historically has had limited community services.

AAGN has developed a number of effective quality assessment and improvement processes. The area agency is conscientious in seeking feedback about its services and welcomes ideas for improvements. The agency brings everyone into this conversation including area agency Board and staff, the FSC, vendors, and, most importantly, the individuals and families it serves. The agency takes the information it receives in quality assessment seriously and has been responsive in making changes to programs or introducing new initiatives that improve the quality of life for individuals and families in the region.

AAGN is to be commended for its outstanding work on behalf of individuals with disabilities and their families.