

TRUMBULL ADVOCACY & PROTECTIVE NETWORK (TAPN)

Organizational Outline

Problem Statement

The Trumbull County human service systems often face the challenge of addressing the needs of older adults and their families whose problems are multi-dimensional. Addressing their needs requires the specialized expertise offered by numerous systems. These older adult high-risk cases, often Adult Protective Services cases, can involve systems from the usual human service areas like mental health, Area Agency on Aging, and senior support agencies to systems such as hospitals, courts, and law enforcement. Yet the existing systems are like islands in an ancient sea. The communications between lands were tenuous at best. The multiple systems bring with them inherent differences in rules, procedures, philosophies, funding requirements, regulations, missions and goals. They were not necessarily organized for the rapid response needed for high-risk cases, nor were they routinely experienced in working with high-risk clients or with all the other organizations. TAPN enhances the administrative and casework structures, allowing for the communication and coordination necessary for complex, high-risk cases¹ to be managed appropriately.

A multi-system case can enter the human service system from diverse sources. The case might initiate at Lifelines (ADAMS board), Fairhaven (MR/DD), S.C.O.P.E, the Trumbull County Probate Court, the Trumbull County Sheriff's Department, or the Forum Health system to name a few. Further, any one of these organizations might be actively addressing the presenting issues within their arena and not know of another's existing role, let alone create a mutual effort on behalf of the customer. Also, one entity might be addressing particular client needs, recognize that additional services are required outside their own domain, and have only, at best, an informal network of contacts on which to rely. TAPN was created, in part, to address these types of needs.

We believe the majority of TAPN cases will have an adult protective services dimension. So, to explicate the reason and goal for TAPN's creation, adult protective services will be used as an illustration. The issues presented are systemic and apply in one degree or another to all of Trumbull County's adult programs.

The responsibility for Adult Protective Services in Ohio rests with the county offices of the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services. In the most general sense protective service should "stop abuse, treat its effects and prevent its recurrence."² Within the Ohio law adult protective services includes not just abuse, neglect or exploitation by another but self neglect or abuse.³

¹ A high risk older adult will be defined for the purpose of this paper as a person of 60 years of age or older who by their actions or inactions or by the action or inaction of another is at personnel risk to their health or safety or places another at such risk, and a reasonable man would find such action or inaction dubious and requires the intervention of one or more human service or other entity to meliorate the situation.

² Swantha Baleswamy, "Evaluation of Ohio's Adult Protective Services: Structures, Operation, and Cost: Phase III Final Report", prepared for the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 10/26/2001, p.60.

³ Ohio Revised Code, paragraphs 5101.60 (A), (G), & (K).

Ideally local protective service workers are to:

- 1) Assess and investigate abuse reports,
- 2) Substantiate the need for protective services,
- 3) Develop protective service plans,
- 4) Assist clients in accessing services and benefits, and
- 5) Help clients through short term counseling to mitigate their physical and emotional risk.⁴

Ohio Revised Code delineates the worker's responsibilities by listing the following Adult Protective Services activities⁵

". . . case work (sic) services, medical care, mental health services, legal services, fiscal management, home health care, homemaker services, housing-related services, guardianship services, and placement services as well as the provision of such commodities as food, clothing, and shelter."⁶

This is a major responsibility to the community for Trumbull County's Job and Family Services. It meets its obligation, employing in-house staff and contracting with community agencies to meet certain needs of its protective service clients. Unfortunately, while the mandate is great, the fiscal resources available from either the state or national level are inadequate. The result is a system that requires well-intentioned people to struggle to do too much with too little. And because of the number of and intense needs of some of their protective services clients, and the limited resources, they can be sometimes overwhelmed thereby creating a triage system juggling the cases and trying to meet the most pressing needs of their clients.

Frequently, the Protective Service workers turn to the Area Agency on Aging, the county mental health system, local housing authorities, etc. for help. Each of these systems is administratively separate with their own governance, funding streams, mandates and clients. Further, their responsibility does not include a protective services responsibility, except for reporting. Thus, while these organizations will acknowledge an ethical responsibility regarding protective services and a desire to help, they are not necessarily organized or equipped to rapidly respond with resources to help with protective service cases.

Beyond the social service systems there are police, prosecutorial and judicial systems that sometimes play vital roles in case outcomes. For example, one conclusion to a protective service case could be guardianship and nursing home placement. Another ending could be a forensic investigation followed by a criminal prosecution. On top of this aspect of adult protective services you can add doctors, hospitals, neighbors, city officials, and even news media. Many protective service cases are, to say the least, challenging and exceedingly complex.

The ongoing response to protective service cases is, in reality, still somewhat fragmented. Once you move beyond the mandated services provided by Trumbull County Office of Jobs and Family Services, case outcomes are still impacted by limited fiscal resources, internal and external organizational barriers, and occasional cross-system frustration. The collection of adult

⁴ Baleswamy, p.60.

⁵ N.B. This list should not to be taken as exhaustive.

⁶ Ohio Revised Code, paragraphs 5101.60 (N).

focused programs is not as responsive to the needs of the protective services clients, families or community as it could be. Nor does the current system always serve the organizations appropriately, exposing them to potential criticism from the community, political leadership, and press.

The leadership of Trumbull County's social service community is strongly committed to continued improvement in the way we do business. We are maintaining our focus on moving from a disjointed structure to one focused on the older person with multiple needs that crosses the existing systems. We are working to increase the resources (money and staff time) available for older adults in need and to create appropriate care planning interventions by bringing together the right entities to concentrate on the case and the system.

Mission

We established the following Mission Statement for TAPN:

To address the special needs of older adults who are being served by more than one system and whose situation warrants extraordinary interventions,

To advocate for efficient and effective allocation of resources to address these needs,

To promote the highest level of collaboration for the ultimate good of older adults, their families and the community.

Structure

TAPN began meeting in late 2002 and “organized” by contracting a part-time coordinator/director in 2004. The day-to-day administrative functions of TAPN (such as publishing the electronic newsletter, scheduling Full Network and Executive Board meetings and recording their Minutes, membership contacts, and file maintenance) are carried out by the Director. In 2006, TAPN further solidified its role by formally becoming a private, non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization. The organization has operated on funding from a variety of sources including foundation grants, senior services levy contracts, private donations and member contributions.

Full Network

As from the beginning, for TAPN to remain successful it needs to continue to assemble specific representatives from specific systems on a regular basis. It achieves this with the Full Network – the “management body” of the TAPN. Current Full Network members include representatives from the major funding, nonprofit and governmental organizations within Trumbull County that address the needs of high risk older adults requiring protective services. Members represent the following systems: medical, judicial/law enforcement, senior/social services, governmental, mental health/substance abuse, disability services, senior housing and long term care. Because of the nature of the problems it addresses, the Full Network is comprised of the chief executive officers (whether their title be judge, mayor, executive director, or president) of the member organizations.

The Full Network's current goal is to identify and transform existing barriers, such as domestic (barriers that exist within an organization that can be changed unilaterally by that organization), multi-system (barriers that exist for at least two organizations and can be changed unilaterally by each organization), and governmental/policy (barriers caused by federal or state law, regulation, policy, procedure, or rule) to provide appropriate and efficient services to high risk older adults. Some examples of efforts that meet this goal are:

- 1) Providing ongoing cross-system training to line staff (annual TAPN cross-training),
- 2) Developing special points of entry for protective services cases within each organization,
- 3) Establishing an efficient and effective structure for mental health assessments (LifeLines Access Center),
- 4) Creating, with the local housing authority, a temporary stay apartment,
- 5) Creating an account for client needs that cannot be covered by other dollars (TAPN Clinical Support Fund).

In a wider sense the Full Network's role is to identify/verify issues getting in the way of the direct care worker, understand the nature and cause of the problem and when appropriate seek change. That change may include advocating for resources on the local, state, and federal level, developing and nurturing the local network, providing training, amending laws and regulations preventing appropriate service delivery or improving marketing of available services.

The efforts of the Full Network are spearheaded by the Executive Board. The Executive Board currently includes representatives from the 10 founding TAPN agencies as well as the more recently created Guardian and Protective Services, Inc.

TAPN Executive Board Agencies

Area Agency on Aging 11 (a funding agency for aging programs)
Fairhaven - TCBMRDD (the county's mental retardation and developmental disabilities program)
Lifelines - ADAMHS (the county's drug, alcohol and mental health funding agency)
S.C.O.P.E. Inc. (a long-time community senior services agency)
Guardianship and Protective Services, Inc. (guardianship program substantially for seniors)
Trumbull Metropolitan Housing Authority (the county's subsidized housing program)
Trumbull County Department of Jobs and Family Services (the county's adult protective services among other programs)
Trumbull County Probate Court
Valley Counseling Services (a community mental health agency)
Community Solutions Association (a substance abuse agency)
Trumbull County Commissioners – Office of Elderly Affairs (meals and transportation programs)

Clinical Committee

The first permanent operating committee established by the Full Network was the Clinical Committee. This committee provides the forum for the systems to (1) manage the most challenging older adult high-risk cases, (2) identify the barriers to providing necessary service, (3) offer informal training opportunities to address needs as they are identified by members, (4) launch advocacy projects on behalf of Trumbull County seniors, (5) oversee the TAPN Clinical Support Fund and (6) build a cohesive team of providers with shared vision and goals. Please note that TAPN is not a case manager, nor does it deliver any direct service. Cases brought to TAPN remain the responsibility of the individual agencies/organizations. TAPN is an additional

tool available to member agencies in the process of service delivery to their clients. Generally, the membership of this group includes caseworkers, clinical supervisors, and/or program directors from TAPN member organizations.

A secondary goal of the Clinical Committee is to inform the Full Network of:

1. barriers to service delivery,
2. proposed system changes,
3. gaps in current services.

A system that blocks or otherwise impedes the efforts of the workers is grossly ineffective. In order to promote open communication between the Clinical Committee and the Full Network, TAPN holds meetings and/or trainings that include the Full Network, Clinical Committee and involved staff from member agencies, publishes a periodic electronic newsletter, appoints an Executive Board member with extensive clinical experience to serve as Committee Chair, etc.

Training Committee

Another active committee within the TAPN organization is the Training Committee. They continue to focus on meeting both the cross-training needs within TAPN as well as the senior service professional development needs within the community. Their two major ongoing programs are the annual TAPN Cross-Training for members and the TAPN Senior Focus Series of brown-bag CEU sessions for community professionals.

Synopsis

In closing, TAPN addresses systems-level integration and coordination of programs, case-level coordination and integration of services and training/cross-training relating to the needs of the senior services system. The enduring goal, as stated in the TAPN Mission Statement, is to promote the highest level of collaboration for the ultimate good of older adults, their families and the community. We endeavor to accomplish the above while adhering to the following guiding principles...

- Affirm the community as part of the solution to the needs of older adults.
- Provide that families are partners in defining issues as well as solutions.
- Strive to improve the self-worth of older adults through analysis of their strengths and weaknesses.
- Remain culturally sensitive in the provision of services.
- Meet the needs of older adults by utilizing the least restrictive community based services.
- Provide services in the most cost-effective manner to minimize public subsidy whenever possible.
- Promote community awareness and involvement in the various systems that provide services to older adults.