



Metro Regional Quality Council:  
FY2021 Annual Report

Submitted by  
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## Introduction

The Metro Regional Quality Council (MRQC) was developed in July of 2016, with the contract being awarded to The Arc Greater Twin Cities (now The Arc Minnesota) as the fiscal host. The contract is held by the Department of Human Services (DHS). There are three participating counties involved in the work of the MRQC, consisting of Dakota, Hennepin, and Scott.

The MRQC is made up of various stakeholders, including: individuals with disabilities, family members, and representatives from Dakota, Hennepin, and Scott counties, a representative from the Office of the Ombudsman and a DHS Regional Resource Specialist.

The primary role of the MRQC is to work collaboratively with regional stakeholders and partners in order to monitor and improve the quality of services, person-centered outcomes, and overall quality of life for people with disabilities. The three primary ways the council accomplishes these goals are through:

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

The MRQC is one of three Regional Quality Councils (RQCs). Arrowhead Regional Quality Council is in Carlton, Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties and the Region 10 Quality Council is in Olmsted, Houston, and Wabasha counties. The three RQCs share overarching goals and work together as well as independently to achieve them.

This report will cover the continued progress of the council, results from the implementation of the Regional Quality Council Person-Centered Quality Review and information gathered, quality improvement efforts, lessons learned, and recommendations for improved services and support.

## General Quality of Life Information

### Person-Centered Quality Review Process

From August 2017 to March 2020, the Regional Quality Councils conducted Person-Centered Quality Reviews, which were interviews with people about their quality of life. The reviews asked about choice and control in different topic areas such as:

- housing
- daily routine
- community involvement
- employment
- relationships
- support staff
- safety
- transportation
- case management
- future life planning
- services and supports
- hopes, dreams and goals

To identify participants for the Person-Centered Quality Reviews, data scientists from Department of Human Services (DHS) randomly selected interview participants and their information was transferred into the secure database, Agile Apps. To qualify as a random sample, a person met the following qualifications:

- County of Fiscal Responsibility (CFR) was within Hennepin, Scott, or Dakota counties;
- were 14 years old or older;
- received Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) but were not strictly on the Elderly Waiver (EW)

From Agile Apps, MRQC staff randomly sent participants a “Selected for Interview” letter. If necessary, a “Selected for Interview Guardian” letter was also sent to guardians. An example of the selection letter can be provided upon request. The MRQC sent between 50 and 100 Selected for Interview Letters each week and followed up the letter with one to two phone calls to each participant (if the contact information was accurate).

The purpose of these interviews was to be conversational and to record the thoughts and experiences of the interviewee while also gathering specific information within each topic area. During the quality review process, there were two Quality Reviewers: one to lead the interview and one to take notes. For each of the ten topics, interviewers asked one to two ranking questions (unless the interviewee chose not to answer) as well as various open-ended questions. As a result, the specific questions within each topic varied depending on the interviewee and the Quality Reviewer.

## Quality Improvement Efforts

In addition to monitoring the quality of services through the Person-Centered Quality Reviews, the MRQC has started planning and implementing quality improvement efforts to directly impact the lives of people with disabilities in our region. The MRQC has used the findings from the Quality Reviews to direct and inform quality improvement efforts in the areas of employment, the support staff shortage, self-advocacy, equity and justice, and safety.

### 1. Employment

In December of 2018, the MRQC identified employment as an area of focus for a quality improvement project. This area was highlighted after reviewing the results of the MRQC FY18 Annual Report, additional quality reviews, and based on council member experiences and expertise.

In FY21, the MRQC planned and completed the following action steps from the Quality Improvement Project Action Plan:

- Developed employment communications plan (within larger MRQC Communications Plan) to reach key audiences through targeted dissemination methods. Messages from the employment section of 240 Person-Centered Reviews, 7 focus groups centered on the power and strengths brought to the workplace by people who have disabilities.
- Analyzed and compiled results from 7 focus group and 16 employer informational interviews to a MRQC Employment Report. This report contained findings, best practices, and targeted recommendations to promote an equitable workforce for people who have disabilities. MRQC staff also created an executive summary and a handout to share the results in multiple methods. The documents can all be found on our website:
  - MRQC Full Employment Report: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/MRQC-Employment-Report-9.25.2020.pdf>
  - MRQC Employment Report – Executive Summary: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/MRQC-Employment-Report-Executive-Summary-9.29.2020-1.pdf>
  - MRQC Employment Report Handout: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/Employment-Report-Handout-9.2020-1.pdf>
- The MRQC Employment Reports were transferred into a presentation and shared with multiple stakeholder groups listed below. View a recording of the MRQC Employment Quality Improvement Work Webinar here: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/Employment-Report-Handout-9.2020-1.pdf>
  - 7/2020 presented to Hennepin County Employment Leadership Team
  - 8/21 Person Centered Collaborative (6 participants –from DEED, VRS, DHS, Living Well Disability Services)
  - 11/2020 Arc MN program team meeting (30 participants)

- 4/2021 Presented to employers at MaxAbilities Reverse Job Fair (25 participants)
- The MRQC Employment Workgroup planned and implemented the We Work! Employment Campaign. This campaign is a journey through employment experiences for people who have disabilities. It emphasizes capability and power while also bringing to light current unfair but legal practices. The videos were posted on the MRQC's Facebook page and website as well as The Arc Minnesota's Facebook page and newsletter. Videos were also posted on the MRQC website and YouTube page for easy sharing. There were eight videos in this campaign:
  - **We Work! Introduction Video:** Tayler introduces the We Work! campaign and discusses the important employment protections provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ACA). This campaign will be a progression through employment experiences for people with disabilities. The series will emphasize capability and power while bringing to light current unfair but legal practices. Watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uy1oBRPYt4>
  - **A Job Katie Loves:** Katie is the Advocate Associate at The Arc Minnesota. In this video, she shares what she is passionate about and what advice she has for job seekers and employers. She wants everyone to know that people with disabilities want to work hard, strive, and do their best. Watch the video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOmQify9lrU>
  - **Supporting Higher Education for People with Disabilities:** Paris is a parent of an adult with disabilities. Her son is a senior in college and ready to begin his career. Paris wants everyone to know that it is important for people with disabilities to have the opportunity and choice to pursue higher education. Access to education impacts people's employment and career outcomes, and overall quality of life. Watch the video here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXgywFh2KPQ&ab\\_channel=MRQC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXgywFh2KPQ&ab_channel=MRQC)
  - **A Job Allie Loves:** Allie works with children at an early childhood center. In this video, Allie shares her story and offers advice for people with disabilities looking for their dream job. She also has advice for employers hiring people with disabilities. Her motto is, "You never know until you try it!" Watch the video here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3vXhMP0Dtc&ab\\_channel=MRQC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3vXhMP0Dtc&ab_channel=MRQC)
  - **Tips for Inclusive Employment:** Matt and his family own and operate a few metro area Culver's. Earlier this year, they shared with us how Culver's works to make Minnesota's workforce better for everyone, including people with disabilities. To Matt and his family, a great guest experience starts with a great employee experience. In this video, our partners at Culver's share their

best practices for inclusive

employment: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaL7zz53OwY&ab\\_channel=MRQC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaL7zz53OwY&ab_channel=MRQC)

- **Poppy's Career in Education:** After working 20 years as an educator, Poppy is a leader in the field of education. While she has dedicated her career to supporting and advocating for her students and their families, she has also had to advocate for herself as an employee with a disability. Learn more about Poppy's career and how to advocate for yourself at work by watching this video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYDiAbEVnk4&t=3s&ab\\_channel=MRQC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AYDiAbEVnk4&t=3s&ab_channel=MRQC)
- **Customized Employment:** Josh Dean is the Customized Employment Specialist at Vocational Rehabilitation Services. He is committed to improving the employment outcomes for people with disabilities through customized employment. Learn more about customized employment and why you might use this best practice to find meaningful employment by checking out this video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXAMhcdO1BA&ab\\_channel=MRQC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXAMhcdO1BA&ab_channel=MRQC)
- **Why Volunteering is Important to Nicole:** Volunteering helps job seekers build skills and relationships that can lead to employment. It can also help form friendships and support networks. Learn about why volunteering is important to Nicole in this video: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Fl4C7RmyWc&ab\\_channel=MRQC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Fl4C7RmyWc&ab_channel=MRQC)
- Planned and implemented the National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NADEAM) celebration. To lift up and celebrate NDEAM, the MRQC developed and shared materials, events, and information to highlight employment for people with disabilities. The following materials were shared on the MRQC Facebook page:
  - Introduction to NDEAM:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2428788887426298>
  - CareerForce Online Workshops (event highlight):  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2441658282806025>
  - MN Disability Employment Fact Sheet:  
<https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/MRQC-Disability-Employment-Fact-Sheet-10.2020.pdf>
  - A Job Allie Loves – We Work! Video (see link above)

- 3 Ways to Improve Access and Opportunity in Employment:  
<https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/3-ways-to-improve-access-and-opportunity-in-employment.pdf>
- Historical Moments of Self-Advocacy in Creating an Equitable Workforce:  
<https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/Nothing-About-Us-Without-Us.pdf>
- Tips For Your Job Search:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2440926296212557>
- CareerForce Workshops (event highlight):  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2429835660654954>
- How Culver’s Promotes an Equitable Workforce – We Work! Video (see link above)
- Universal Design:  
<https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/Universal-Design.pdf>
- 6 Ways to Foster a Disability Inclusive Workplace:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2435195026785684>
- The Payment of Subminimum Wages to Workers with Disabilities:  
<https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Payment-of-Subminimum-Wages-to-Workers-with-Disabilities.pdf>
- How Subminimum Wage is Calculated:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2451144041857449>
- Phasing Out Subminimum Wage:  
<https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/Phasing-Out-Subminimum-Wage.pdf>
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 30th Anniversary (event highlight)
- Developed resources for self-advocates and people with disabilities to understand their employment rights and advocate for themselves during all stages of the employment process. Resources will be posted on The Arc Minnesota’s website and Job Board.
- Worked with employers to foster positive workplaces and challenge traditional employment. Developed and shared the following handouts:

- DEI Benefits and Impact: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/MRQC-DEI-Benefits-and-Impact-Final-4.2021.pdf>
- DEI and Disability: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/MRQC-DEI-and-Disability-Final-4.2021.pdf>
- Advocated for a livable wage for people with disabilities (end subminimum wage). MRQC staff participated in the Systems Transformation workgroup, who proposed legislation to improve competitive, integrated employment for Minnesotans with disabilities. MRQC staff also partnered with The Arc Minnesota to update their Employment Position Statement: <https://arcminnesota.org/resource/position-statement-employment/>

Planned a disability employment awareness campaign to improve employment outcomes and career development for people with disabilities. Co-led by the MRQC Co-chair, Jeffery Nurick, this campaign centers lived experience and covers topics about disability, employment, and quality of life. Our goal is to raise awareness and educate Minnesotans on the importance of creating an equitable workforce.

## 2. Support Staff Shortage

The MRQC voted to devote time, energy, and resources to a second focus area, the support staff shortage. The MRQC refers to it as a “shortage” and not a “crisis” because we recognize that it has been a systemic failure over the period of decades. To refer to it as a “crisis” would indicate that it is an acute problem and therefore does not do justice to the long-term impact that this shortage has had on people with disabilities.

In the fall of 2020, the MRQC collaborated with two provider agencies in the Metro area to assess and improve their practices in the areas of staff recruitment, retention, and turnover strategies. To support this work, we utilized the Recruitment and Retention in Supports for Minnesotans with Disabilities toolkit published by the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) to address the support staff shortage for providers and people who hire their own support. This toolkit suggests that using best practices in recruitment, even when there are challenging labor markets, can improve the number and quality of job applicants.

To gather holistic and well-rounded data from all involved stakeholders, the MRQC developed three surveys to be distributed to support staff, agency leadership, and service recipients. These surveys asked various questions about staff recruitment and retention practices as well as job satisfaction. Provider agencies distributed surveys electronically to all groups through email. Participants were given three weeks to complete the surveys. Individual answers were anonymous and participants received a \$15 Amazon gift card for their time.

MRQC staff also offered a focus group alternative for service recipients who did not or could not fill out the survey; though, there was no interest. Some service recipients filled out surveys with assistance from support of staff.

A total of 265 people were surveyed for this project. The breakdown of people surveyed can be found in Table 1 below:

Table 1: People Surveyed			
Leadership	Support Staff	Service Recipients	Total
25	219	21	265

Table 1: Sample size (n) of each survey and the overall response total

The surveyed leadership and support staff self-reported their position titles. The position titles are listed in below:

- Program Manager
- Regional Director
- Assistant Program Manager
- Direct Support Professional
- Advanced Assistant Program Manager
- Advocate
- Advanced Direct Support Professional
- Support Director
- Human Resource Manager
- Human Resource Assistant
- Nurse

### Support Staff Results

This section will review the combined results of the surveys and highlight best practices and areas for improvement as reported by leadership, support staff, and service recipients.

It is important to note these results are focused on actionable changes. Therefore, there will be limited reporting on wages, income, and benefits. Support staff have historically reported being underpaid and generally unsatisfied with wages and benefits but the legislative and systems changes necessary to achieve those outcomes is outside the scope of this report.

The results are divided into three main categories: Recruitment and Hiring, Training and Onboarding, and Retention Practices.

### Recruitment and Hiring:

**FIGURE 1: HOW STAFF FOUND OUT ABOUT JOB**

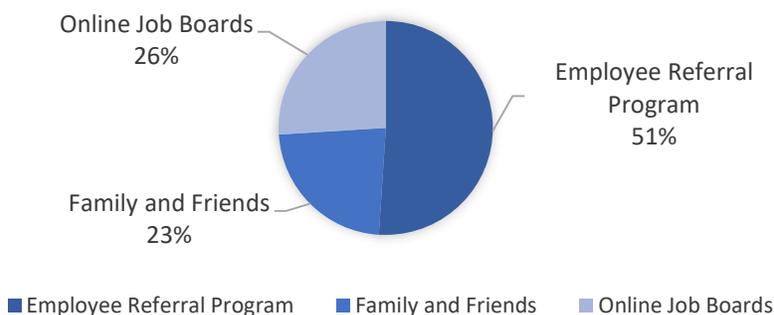


Figure 1 illustrates the top three ways support staff found out provider agency was hiring.

**Realistic Job Previews:**

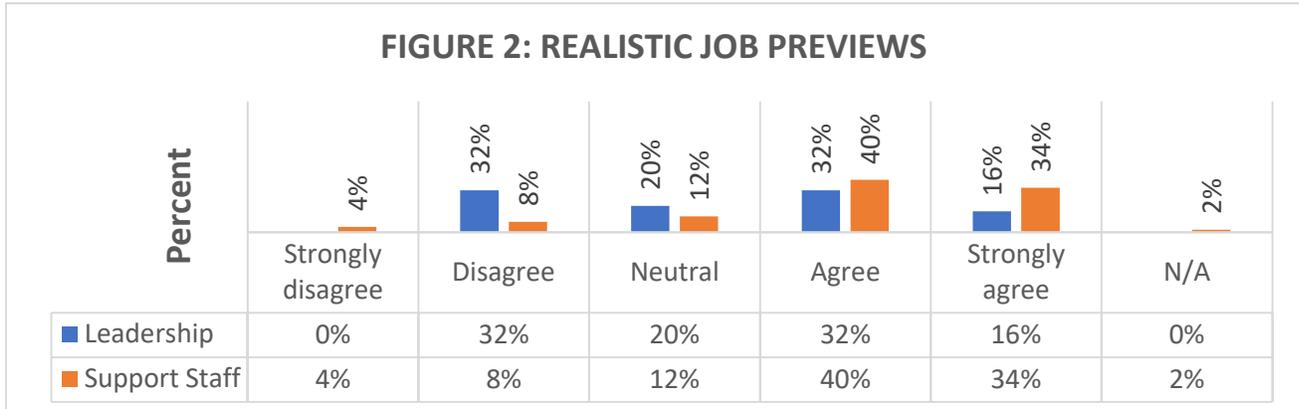
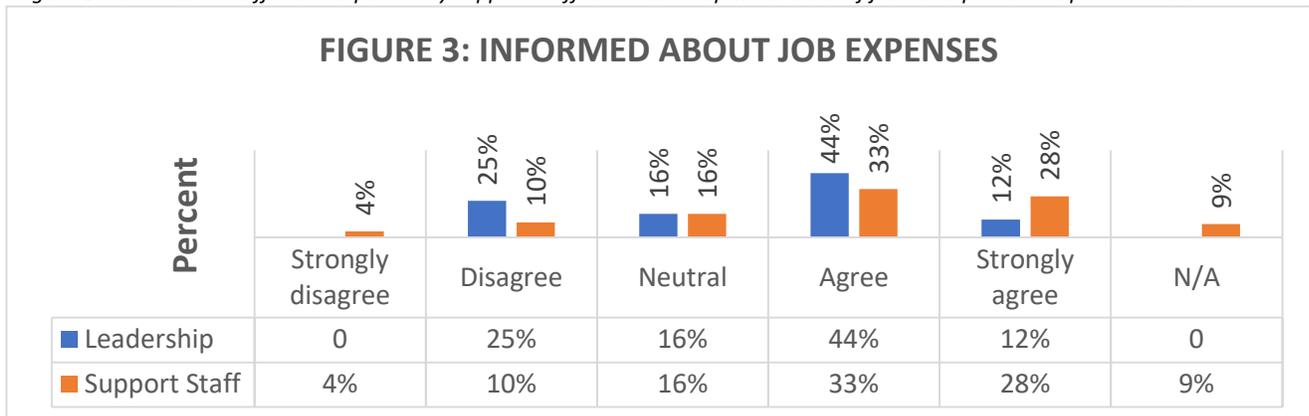


Figure 2 illustrates the different responses by support staff and leadership when asked if job descriptions and previews are



accurate

Figure 3 illustrates the different responses by support staff and leadership when asked if applicants are informed about potential expenses that accompany the job

**People Receiving Services Involved in the Interviews:**

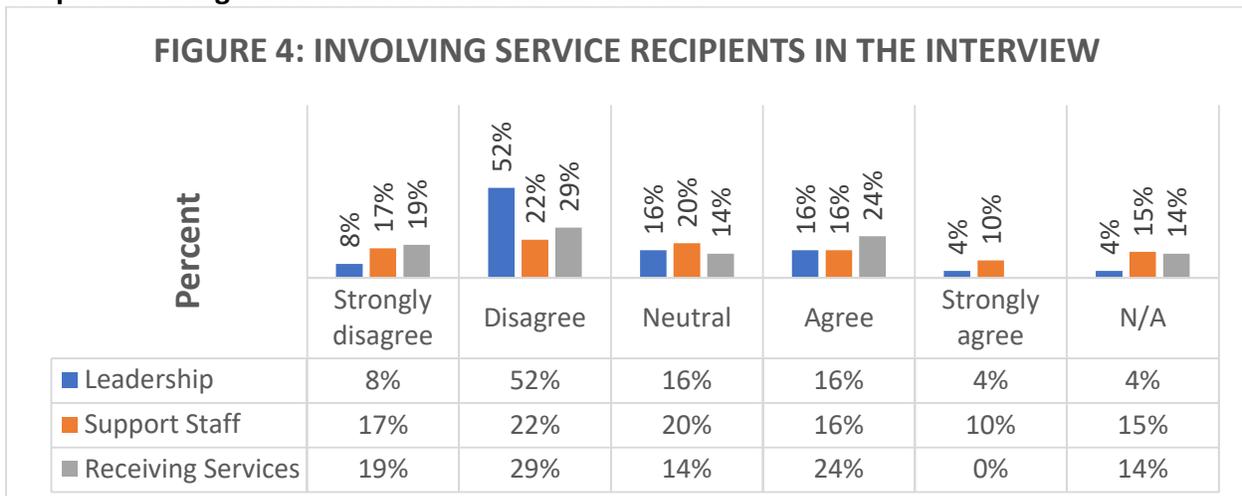


Figure 4 illustrates the different responses by support staff, leadership, and service recipients when asked if the people receiving services are involved in the interview process

### Training and Onboarding:

#### Effective Onboarding and Training Process:

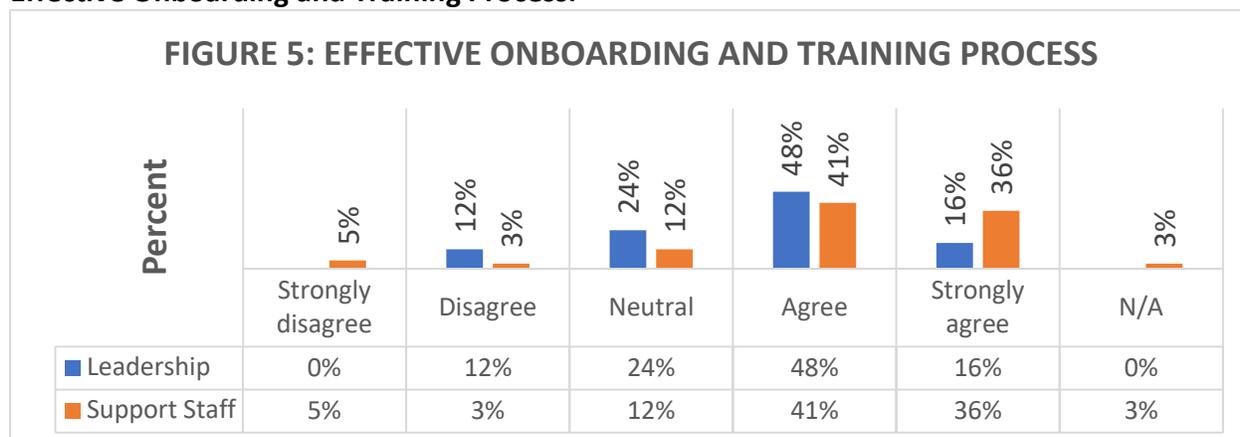


Figure 5 illustrates the different responses by support staff and leadership when asked if the training and onboarding process was effective

#### Mentoring Program:

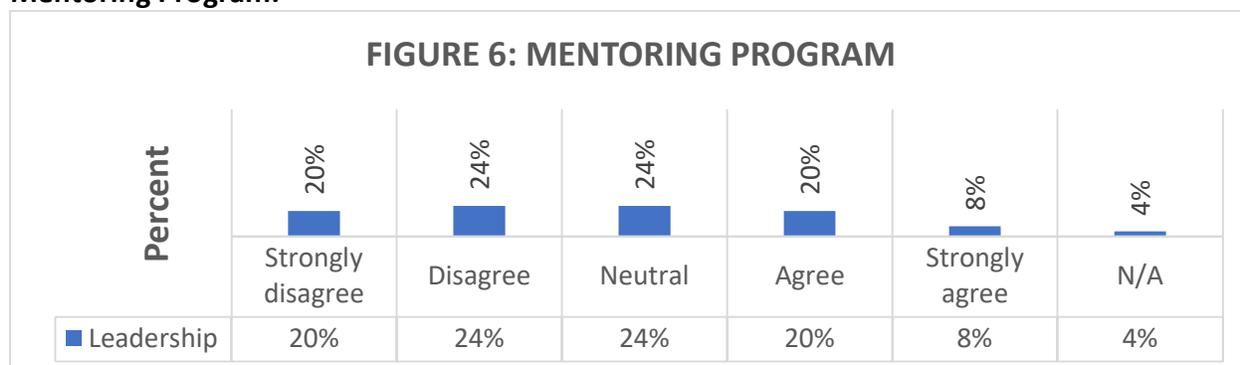


Figure 6 illustrates the responses by leadership when asked if there is a mentor program

### Retention Practices:

#### Diversity and Inclusion:

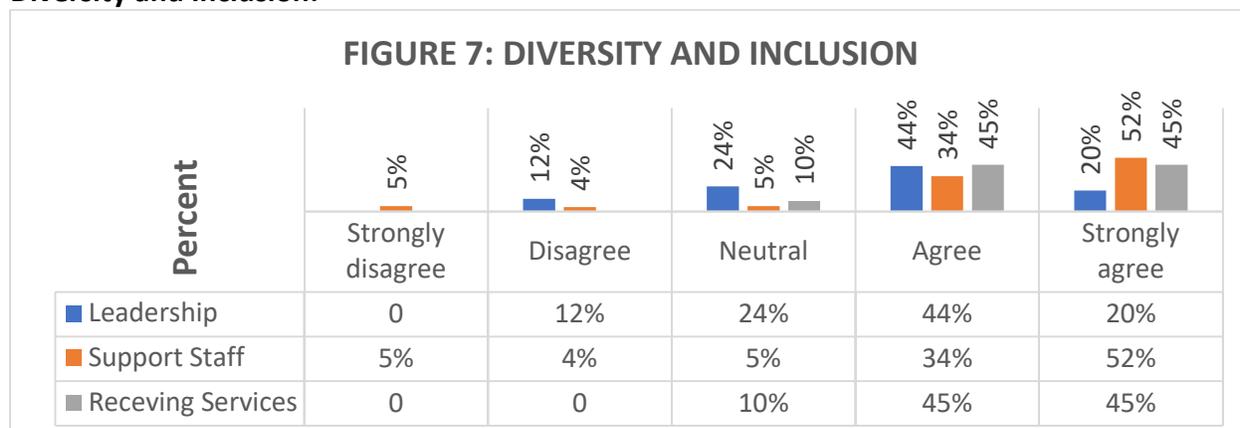


Figure 7 illustrates the different responses by support staff, leadership, and service recipients when asked if provider agency respects diversity and promotes inclusion

**Person-Centeredness:**

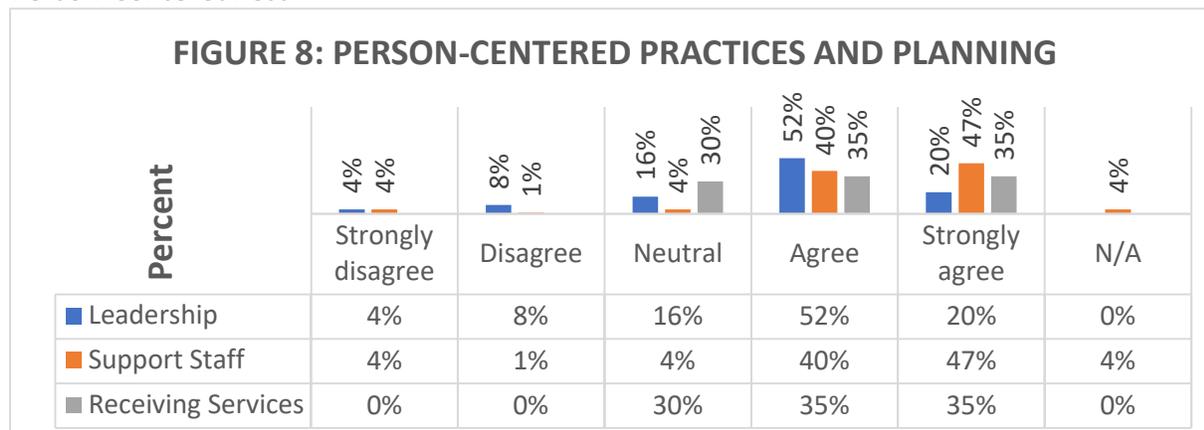


Figure 8 illustrates the different responses by support staff, leadership, and service recipients when asked if they know about or are trained in person-centered thinking/planning

**Schedule Flexibility:**

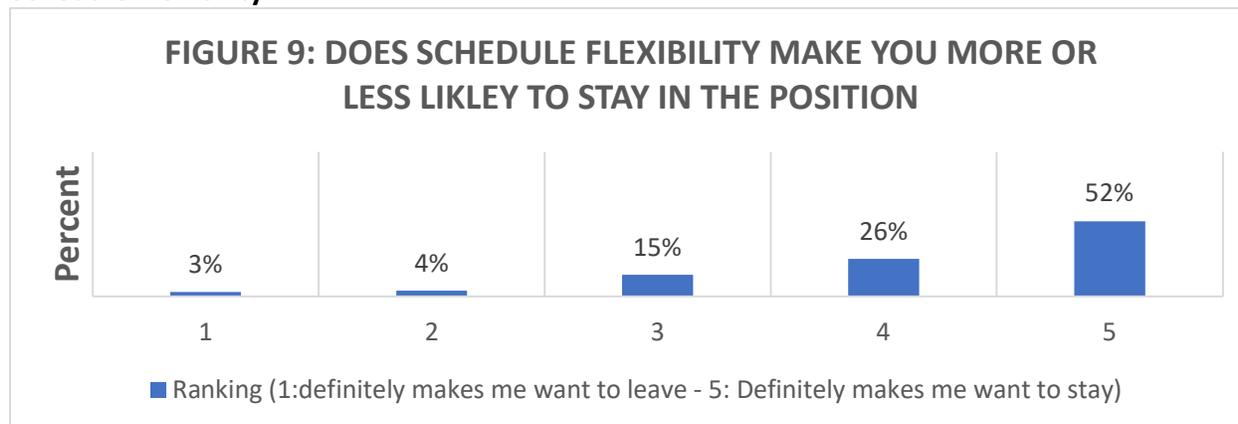


Figure 9 illustrates the responses by support staff and leadership when asked if the flexible schedule made people more or less likely to stay in their position.

**Relationships with Staff and Supervisors:**

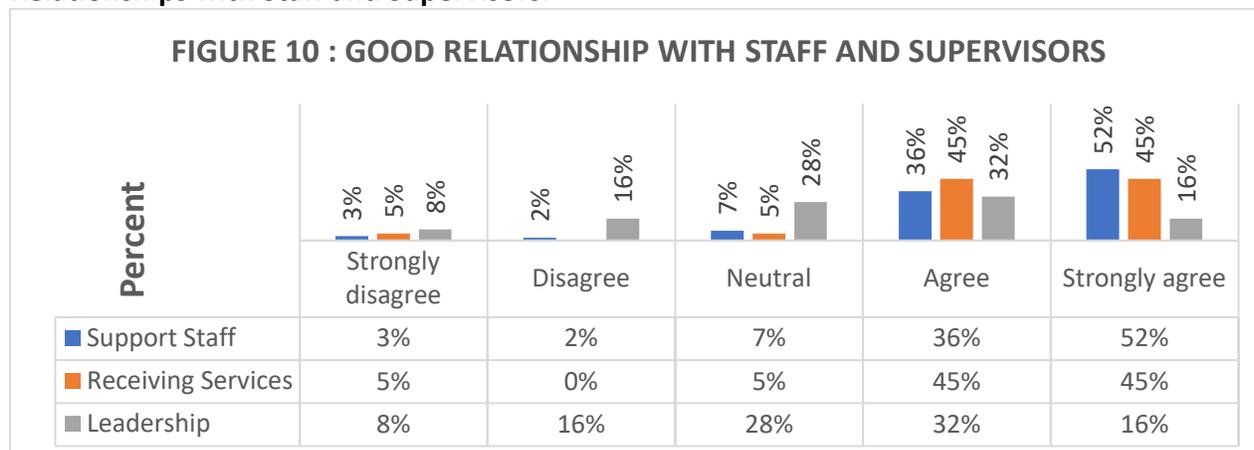


Figure 10 illustrates the different responses by support staff and leadership when asked about the quality of relationships between staff and supervisors.

**Opportunities to Communicate Concerns:**

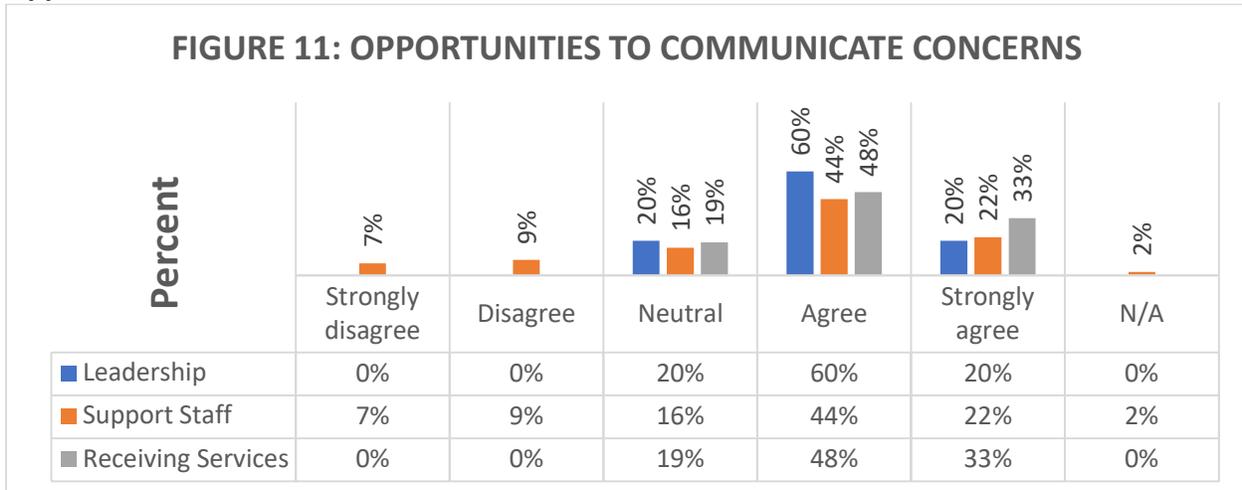


Figure 11 illustrates the different responses by support staff, leadership, and service recipients when asked if they were able to communicate concerns to supervisors.

**Support Staff Recognition:**

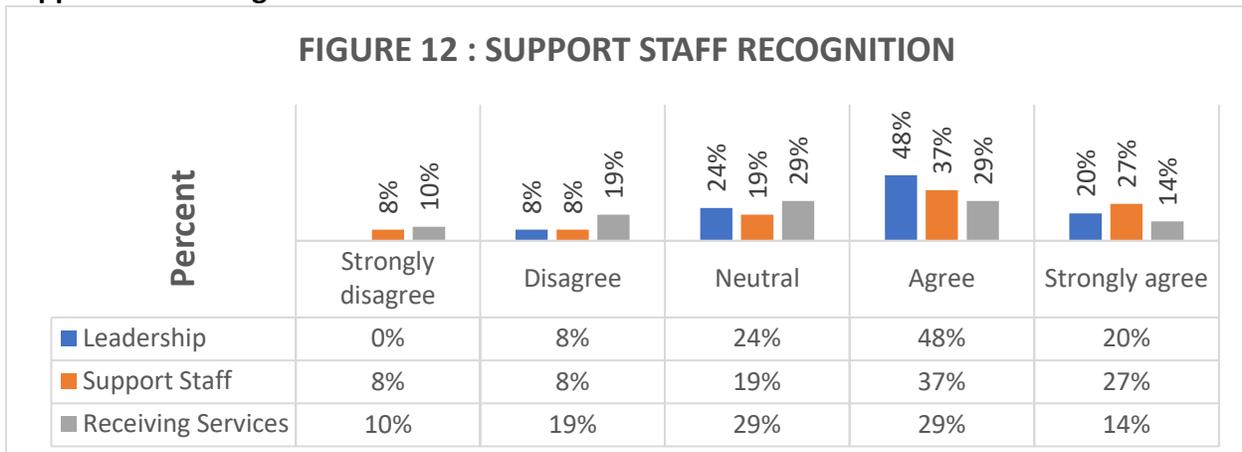


Figure 12 illustrates the different responses by support staff, leadership, and service recipients when asked if there are opportunities to recognize staff for quality work.

**Opportunities for Advancement:**

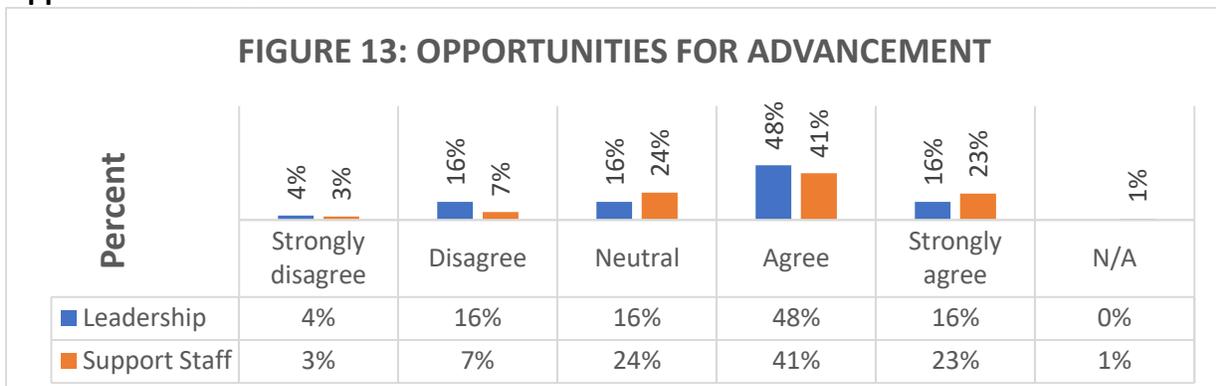


Figure 13 illustrates the different responses by support staff and leadership when asked if there were advancement opportunities for support staff.

### 3. Safety

The MRQC staff have been involved in various efforts to change the systems to prevent harm, abuse, and neglect for people with disabilities.

The MRQC's primary efforts around harm reduction and safety were done in collaboration with the Department of Human Services' Culture of Safety pilot project. The goal of this project is to better understand the systemic influences of critical incidents and utilize Safety Science to shift the safety culture away from blame to one of accountability and prevention. The MRQC participated by developing a Data Action Workgroup to review critical incidents and make recommendations to DHS on how to better support staff, providers, and people with disabilities to create systems that prevent harm rather than respond to it.

The MRQC staff and some members participated in the Collaborative Safety Advanced Practical Training to learn more about Safety Science and develop the tools and skills to engage in this work.

The MRQC staff continued to participate in the Vulnerable Adults Act Redesign process. MRQC staff provided input in many meetings with DHS, lead agencies, providers, and other stakeholders to continue and inform changes to the Vulnerable Adults Act (VAA).

Additional efforts around harm reduction and safety related to local tracking and training.

- MRQC staff attended the following safety-related trainings and webinars:
  - Publicly tracking monthly maltreatment reports in our region and across the state. Tracking documents can be found here: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1H62nm\\_RydVybFBEGIQ44GOCMV89H43CR2RHtPLxWY/edit#gid=0](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1H62nm_RydVybFBEGIQ44GOCMV89H43CR2RHtPLxWY/edit#gid=0)

### 4. Self-Advocacy

The MRQC staff have been closely involved in self-advocacy efforts at The Arc Minnesota by providing support, guidance, and technical assistance in the following areas:

- **Self-Advocacy Page:** MRQC staff participated in The Arc Minnesota's self-advocacy initiative. This group created a dedicated space on The Arc Minnesota's website for resources to help keep people with disabilities advocating, connected, and learning during COVID-19. Find the page and resources here: <https://arcminnesota.org/self-advocacy-page/>
- **Future Leaders of Self-Advocacy Training:** This training is to help youth and young adults with disabilities learn about and get engaged in self-advocacy. There are four sections to this training where participants will learn about topics around confidence-building, civil and human rights, identity, boundary setting, anti-bullying, and leadership skills. The training will be offered online and will come with a workbook.
- **Self-Advocate Advisory Committee meetings:** This monthly meeting led by and for self-advocates covers topics related to quality of life as well as civil and human rights such

as: legislative updates, COVID-19, intersectionality of race and disability, racism, police violence, transportation, employment, service and supports, and more.

- **Calling all Self-Advocates meetings:** This bi-monthly statewide meeting welcomes self-advocates and people with disabilities from across the state to connect and advocate for topics that impact their lives.
- **Self-Advocate Zoom Happy Hour:** In this weekly event, self-advocates and allies from across the state are welcomed to connect, meet others, and enjoy activities.
- **Arc at the Movies:** In this bi-monthly event, self-advocates and allies are invited to watch movies that highlight disability-related topics and include actors and actresses with disabilities.
- **Voting Resources:** MRQC staff developed Plain Language Voting Resources to help people with disabilities know their rights, understand accessibility requirements of voting, and how to seek help with voting if needed. You can access the voting resources here: <https://arcminnesota.org/self-advocacy-page/advocate/voting-resources/>
- **Zoom 101 Webinar:** MRQC staff developed and offered a Zoom 101 Webinar and tailored classes to support self-advocates, people with disabilities, and allies navigate and feel comfortable using Zoom. Access the webinar here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYh763TYs0&ab\\_channel=TheArcMinnesota](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JYh763TYs0&ab_channel=TheArcMinnesota)
- **Connecting and Advocating During the Time of COVID-19:** In partnership with self-advocates and Arc MN staff, MRQC staff developed and presented “Connecting and Advocating during the Time of COVID-19” at a virtual self-advocate conference.
- **Accessibility:** MRQC staff developed and facilitated a focus group with self-advocates to assess and improve accessibility of The Arc Minnesota’s website.

## 5. Equity and Justice

The Metro Regional Quality Council is devoted to operating under an equity and justice framework. In order to be intentional in this work, we have identified 3 main outcomes that we are working towards:

- Improving quality of services and supports for all people with disabilities
- All stakeholders know about equity, intersectionality, and Disability Justice Principles
- Principles of Disability Justice are applied within internal MRQC and Arc Minnesota services and systems

To support this effort, the MRQC staff developed a plain language Equity Glossary. This resource is intended to be a guide to common terms used in social justice and equity work. You can find the fluid document here: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CfgN-fNznm0Q2e7xe3frLNdbTQBgBh-YQEBdp4-LuM/edit?usp=sharing>

Metro Regional Quality Council staff also developed and launched a disability justice educational campaign in January 2021 on our Facebook Page. We also shared how the MRQC plans to use disability justice principles in our work as we believe justice and liberation are crucial in improving the quality of life for people with disabilities.

Disability Justice educational resources include:

- Person-first, Identify-first, and Reclaimed Language:
  - <https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/2503022503336269>
  - <https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/2503022513336268>
- <https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/2503022523336267> Disability Rights versus Disability Justice:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2504337913204728>
- An introduction to Disability Justice
  - <https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2506260926345760>
  - <https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2506260936345759>
  - <https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2506260946345758>
- The Disability Justice Framework Ten (10) Principles
  - Intersectionality:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2507483492890170>
  - Leadership of those most impacted:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2508752376096615>
  - Anti-Capitalistic Politics:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2511178795853973>
  - Cross-movement solidarity:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2512575125714340>
  - Recognizing wholeness:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2515121732126346>
  - Interdependence:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2523614477943738>
  - Sustainability:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2517613491877170>
  - Cross-disability solidarity:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2520677364904116>
  - Collective Access:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2524903897814796>

- Collective Liberation:  
<https://www.facebook.com/MRQCMN/photos/a.1703688826602978/2529839130654606>

### **Justice Advisory Committee**

MRQC staff participated in The Arc Minnesota's Justice Advisory Committee (JAC). Following the Murder of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, the Executive Leadership team met and started discussing ways The Arc Minnesota can contribute to transformation, especially around the intersection of disability and race.

In June 2020, The Arc Minnesota formed a Justice Advisory Committee (JAC) to serve in an advisory capacity to the Executive Leadership Team to assess and promote equity and justice within The Arc Minnesota's policies, practices, procedures, and services. The JAC serves also to make recommendations on vision and direction, capacity building and training, consultation, organizational assessment, resources and engagement and outreach.

MRQC staff led the Assessment Subcommittee and worked to develop, conduct, analyze, and report on an organization-wide diversity and inclusion assessment. They surveyed 61 staff at The Arc Minnesota and 107 staff at The Arc's Value Village for a total of 168 participants.

### **Regional Quality Council (RQC) Collaboration**

#### **Statewide Technology Needs Assessment:**

The Regional Quality Councils and The Arc Minnesota developed and implemented a technology needs assessment in February and March 2021 to identify barriers to accessing and navigating technology for people with disabilities in Minnesota. The information we collected will help us identify and develop resources and trainings related to technology rights and access for Minnesotans with disabilities and those who support them. Our full analysis and report with recommendations along with an executive summary can be found on our website at [Technology Needs Report - Minnesota State Quality Council \(qualitycouncilmn.org\)](https://qualitycouncilmn.org/technology-needs-report).

#### **Legislative Efforts:**

In January 2021, Governor Walz shared his proposed budget for 2022. As a cost-savings measure, Governor Walz proposed that the appropriation for the State Quality Council be permanently eliminated, which includes funding for the Regional Quality Councils (RQCs).

In response to this proposal, RQC statewide staff and supervisors have engaged in legislative outreach and grassroots advocacy efforts by meeting and communicating with legislators, the governor's office, and staff at the Department of Human Services (DHS). You can find the RQC 1-Pager resource used in our outreach efforts on our website: <https://qualitycouncilmn.org/wp-content/uploads/RQC-Resource-Final2.2021.pdf>

## **Diversity and Equity Lunch and Learns:**

In May of 2021, the Regional Quality Councils (RQC) collaborated to organize and fund statewide weekly 90-minute Lunch and Learn trainings related to disability and racial equity. The RQCs contracted with Diversity Council in Rochester, Minnesota to facilitate conversations around the following topics:

### **1. Gracious Hosting**

A workshop about developing cultural inclusivity by exploring the tenets of gracious hosting as they apply to organizations and communities.

Objectives:

- Participants will draw parallels between their own heritage and culture and those of others.
- Participants will explore universal tenets of hosting and their application to workplace and public policy.
- Participants will discuss potential policy and practice shifts that increase inclusivity.

### **2. Equity Level Set - Shared Language around Race and Racism**

A workshop providing preparatory team building around shared language, definitions and knowledge of equity and inclusion and the unique attributes and challenges of your market.

Objectives:

- Participants will gain shared language and definitions about diversity, equity, and race.
- Participants will explore barriers to talking about race and racism and the importance of such discussions.
- Participants will develop practical techniques for discussing race at individual and organizational levels.

### **3. Bystander to Upstander**

Bystander to Upstander is interactive scenario-based sessions that prepare participants for real life encounters. Unlike traditional diversity training, these activity-based workshops focus on tactical interventions. Bystander to Upstander trainings include general instruction in bias interruption; courageous listening exercises; and culturally-specific insights and role-playing with tips and real tools for effective de-escalation, respectful intervention, and social accountability.

### **4. EquityLogic**

A tactical approach to building cultural agility and diversifying organizational strategies in workgroups of all sizes. These trainings are designed to impact: workgroup and individual productivity, inter-workgroup cooperation, organizational innovation and adaptability, problem solving and crisis management, talent pool diversification, employee retention, customer/client satisfaction, cross-organizational collaboration, and market penetration.

### **Website Content Maintenance:**

The State and Regional Quality Councils realize the importance of informing stakeholders of who we are and what our purpose and goals are, and how we are going to achieve our goals. The website not only offers information about State and Regional Quality Council activities and events, but it also offers resource information to individuals with disabilities, families of people with disabilities, and professionals who work for people with disabilities. Please visit the Minnesota State Quality Council website at: <http://qualitycouncilmn.org>

Due to the different geographical locations of each council and the onset of COVID-19, most of the collaborative work of the three councils was conducted via conference calls, video conferencing calls and email exchange.

The council staff will continue to work together in the coming year, as the cohesive work of the Regional Quality Council staff across the state is essential in continuing to build and grow the work of the councils in each region.

## **Overarching Recommendations**

The recommendations are organized to correlate with Quality Review topic area but the MRQC acknowledges that there are recommendations that are repeated due to their systemic nature rooted in ableism. These recommendations are reflective from the information the MRQC gathered in the Quality Reviews, focus groups, interviews, and other data collection methods. They are not intended to be fully exhaustive.

### **Employment:**

To improve the quality of employment experiences for people with disabilities, there needs to be immediate and sustained societal, systems, community, organizational, and individual change. The MRQC makes the following recommendations:

#### **Eliminate the Fair Labor Standards Act, Section 14©**

- People with disabilities who are working should not be treated or paid differently than their peers or colleagues.
- Employers and providers must not pay below minimum wage.
- Minimum wage should promote economic mobility for people with disabilities.
- End segregated employment and continue to promote integrated, competitive employment.
- Publicly funded employment programs must strive to build the infrastructure and supports needed to phase out the issuance of subminimum wage certificates.

#### **Do Away with Income and Asset Limits**

- Income and asset limits perpetuate poverty for people with disabilities, negatively affecting access and overall quality of life.

- People with disabilities should be able to make and save money for their work without limits.
- People with disabilities should not be held in poverty to maintain their benefits.
- People with disabilities should not have to give up their benefits or earn less income if they choose to get married.

### **Education and Development**

- We must close the gaps in education and employment attainment for people with disabilities
- Educators should provide all information available to promote informed decision making to support and improve education/transition experiences and workforce options.
- Increase funding for schools and more specifically special education teachers, equipment, and facilities.
- Intentionally invest in non-traditional career paths.
- Invest in Minnesota's colleges and universities to ensure access and affordability for people with disabilities.
- Shift Focus to Careers People with disabilities should have the support, education, and resources to pursue a career that works for them.
- Case managers and employment support professionals must educate people with disabilities and their families about career opportunities and success stories so that they can make informed decisions about their employment
- People with disabilities should have the opportunities to build skills, experience, and understanding of different employment options through practices such as volunteering and job shadowing
- Employers must provide equal career advancement opportunities for people with disabilities such as trainings, skill development, and promotions

### **Challenge Traditional Employment**

Providing flexibility and options for employees can improve their experiences, workplace environments, and employment outcomes.

- Provide opportunities for people with disabilities to volunteer in roles (if they desire).
- Offer flexible hours and remote work options for each employee.
- Work with employees to provide a tailored job description to emphasize their strengths and focus on their interests and career goals.

### **Simplify the System**

The employment systems for people with disabilities are convoluted and confusing. The partnership between the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), State Services for the Blind (SSB), and the Department of Human Services (DHS) is a start but it cannot stop there.

- Partnership should include specific strategies for addressing the racism and ableism that permeate our service system.

- Messaging and instructions for accessing services needs to be written in plain language and must be direct, consistent, and straightforward. Paperwork and processes should not be a barrier that keeps people from accessing services.
- Streamline administrative processes and increase communication across agencies to reduce unnecessary barriers faced by people with disabilities and family members.
- Messaging must be widely available in multiple languages and formats.
- All employment options must be clearly laid out to people with disabilities and their families from the beginning of the job search process, supporting informed-decision making.
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) should have the funding, staffing, and resources so that people do not experience long waiting lists before they receive services.
- There must be an evaluation process to ensure high quality services and so that people are not receiving services for years without finding employment.

### **Customized Employment**

Customized employment is the gold standard of employment support for people with disabilities. Customized employment utilizes tools and techniques within three stages - discovery, job development, and systematic instruction - to help people with disabilities gain competitive employment that works for them.

- All people with disabilities and their families should know what customized employment is and how to access it.
- All people who access employment services should receive the option of customized employment services.
- Customized employment training should be offered at a sliding scale to accommodate smaller provider organizations and make these services more widely available to people with disabilities.

### **Foster a Positive Workplace Environment**

Workplace environment is one of the leading indicators of employment satisfaction. For Businesses, organizations, state agencies:

- All staff, including HR professionals, leadership, marketing staff, program staff, and other workers, should participate in people-first language training.
- All staff should participate in frequent and comprehensive diversity and inclusion training.
- All staff should be invited, welcomed, and part of organized events such as holiday parties, happy hours, and celebrations.
- Leadership should be leading inclusion efforts with all staff by example.
- Develop a creative plan for success that fits the unique needs of each employee.
- Options should be available for employees to process, talk about, and work through their emotions and mental health experiences as it relates to their position or workplace.
- Facilitate networking groups for businesses to share best practices and problem solve to overcome barriers and challenges that arise employing people with disabilities.

## **Universal Design as the Standard**

Universal design involves creating an environment that is welcoming and accessible to all.

- All businesses should implement universal design to improve the experiences of all employees.
- State funding should be available to support businesses in implementing universal design.

## **Support Staff:**

Barriers to quality staffing has the potential to affect all aspects of life for people with disabilities.

- Legislation should support reimbursement rate increases for direct support providers to ensure the increase of competitive wages and benefits for support staff.
- Streamlined, consistent, and comprehensive training needs to be provided and required of direct care staff. Trainings should be developed and evaluated by people with disabilities and family members and should cover the following topics:
  - Comprehensive cultural sensitivity and responsiveness training
  - Person-centered thinking and practices
  - Professional boundaries and how to set and address them
  - Prevention of [physical, emotional, sexual] abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation
- People with disabilities who hold other historically oppressed identities need to be given support that takes into consideration the barriers they may face due to their intersecting identities.
- Person-centered practices will be contradictory if they are not also applied to staff and the environment that they are placed in, i.e., better pay, more support/resources/training, breaks during shifts, etc.
- Resources and technical assistance should be available to support the recruitment, retention, and turnover prevention of high-quality staff for provider agencies as well as people and families who hire their own staff.
- People should be aware of, and encouraged to use, natural supports. Natural supports are supports and relationships that are developed in natural environments such as the family, school, work and community. Natural supports tend to reduce staff turnover and improve the quality of care and overall quality of life.

## **Safety:**

Too often, people with disabilities are segregated from their communities or discriminated against because of others' false perceptions that they are vulnerable or at risk.

- People with disabilities must have information and education to make their own decisions around their safety, whenever possible.
- People with disabilities have the right and must have the opportunity to receive educational trainings around cyber safety, comprehensive sex education, health and wellbeing, and interpersonal relationships. These trainings should be accessible, affordable and ongoing.

Trainings should be developed and implemented by, and/or in partnership with, people with disabilities.

- People with disabilities must have dignity of risk. Family members, providers, case managers, and other members of their support team must promote informed decision making and respect their dignity of risk.
- People with disabilities have their right to privacy and that must be respected and withheld unless they are a direct threat to themselves or others.
- We must continue to expose and call out discriminatory practices that continue to restrict, restrain, and incarcerate people on the basis of disability.

### **Housing:**

Affordable and accessible housing is a human right and a basic need. People with disabilities often need stable housing before they are able to fully participate in other areas of their life such as employment or community involvement.

- Housing providers and supports should provide (or partner with other organizations to provide) physical assistance for movers with disabilities.
- Housing providers, advocates, and partnering organizations must promote the right for people with disabilities to live among the community and not in segregated housing.
  - People with disabilities should be given the tools and resources to make informed choices about different housing options, such as location, type of residence, and whom they live with, regardless of their support needs.
- Legislation should support the ongoing development and upkeep of accessible and low-income housing in safe and desirable locations. People with disabilities and family members should be involved at all stages of this work.
- Funding should support the implementation of technology-enhanced supports to increase independence.

### **Transportation:**

- Access to affordable and reliable transportation can impact a person's ability to build and sustain relationships, participate in their community, and find and maintain employment.
- Funding should be available so that transportation services can be provided to communities in rural areas.
- Case managers must share alternative and creative transportation options that are covered by waivers to reduce the dependence on inconsistent, inconvenient, and timely methods.
- Redesign Metro Mobility and similar transportation services to allow for independence and self-determination in the community. Specifically, increase funding and staffing to:
  - Increase and expand hours of bus operations, including weekends
  - Create options for last second transportation
  - Streamline scheduling process by
  - Offering same-day scheduling for rides
    - Creating online and app capabilities.
    - People with disabilities should be included in all stages of redesign.

- Cities must ensure accessibility of public transportation stops and terminals all year around, with timely response to weather events such as snowstorms and extreme cold.

### **Person-Centeredness:**

Person-centeredness is putting the person, their culture, and their wants and needs at the center of all planning and decisions. Cultural norms and traditions influence what it means to be person-centered. To be truly person-centered, one must also be culturally responsive.

- All systems, processes, and discussions about and for people with disabilities should center what is important to them.
- Service recipients and their families should be informed of and trained around person-centered plans and person-centered practices upon receiving waived services or employment supports and frequently thereafter. This will support informed decision-making, encourage accurate promotion within their community, and reduce reliance on the system.
- Funding needs to reflect the actual time and work it takes to practice person-centered planning methods with intention and integrity. Currently, the flat rate does not cover true exploration, accountability, and targeted follow through.
- Person-centered practices must also be culturally responsive. People conducting person-centered planning must receive ongoing training and education relating to the culture of those they work with.
- Intentional, structured follow up needs to be included in all person-centered planning meetings. Roles, responsibilities, and timelines should be made clear during the meeting and a process for evaluation and follow-up should be set and mutually understood.
- There must be targeted outreach and training to ensure support staff, family members, case managers, and employers implement person-centered practices in the home and workplace.
- There must be support, resources, and training available to help people who have disabilities navigate technology in ways that ensure a quality experience. It is not enough to provide access alone.
- Technology resources and trainings must be responsive to individual needs and focus on the types of devices that individual prefers (such as a smartphone, tablet, or laptop) as well as the applications they want to use (such as Zoom, Facetime, and Facebook Messenger).

### **Case Management:**

Case managers are integral for people with disabilities and their families to know about, understand, and access services that work for their unique needs.

- Case managers' roles and responsibilities should be clearly communicated to people receiving services and their families as soon as they start receiving case management services.
- Consistent and uniform on-boarding and ongoing training must be provided to both county and contracted case managers in order to increase the reliability and quality of their information and guidance.

- Case managers need a broad and comprehensive understanding of systems and available resources to disseminate relevant information to people in an efficient and timely manner.
  - Case management must also be culturally responsive.
  - Case managers must receive ongoing training and education relating to the culture of those they work with.
- Case managers should inform all persons they support about the Person-Centered Planning (PCP) process and how it may benefit them. After initial conversation, PCP options should be brought up on a regular basis.
- Meetings and communication between case managers and the people they support should be consistent and reflect the needs and desires of those they support. Timelines should be established and mutually agreed upon with a plan for evaluation and follow up as necessary.

### **Community:**

Participation in one's community can lead to increased confidence, a sense of belonging, and the building of a social network.

- Advocacy organizations should build networks that will support people with intersecting identities. They should offer opportunities and avenues for people with disabilities to connect and develop relationships with communities that share their other identities (i.e., Race, Ethnicity, Gender Identity, Sexuality, Religion). These spaces must be accessible and made with ongoing input from the populations it aims to serve.
- Natural supports in place of formal services should be promoted through community inclusion.
- Intentionally Fund Equitable Access. There must be funding dedicated to increase and improve access to technology that promotes participation in ways that fits individual needs.

## **Lessons learned:**

### **Quality Improvement Work**

The region-specific quality improvement work is an effective way to improve peoples' quality of life on a local level. In order to expand current quality improvement efforts, the MRQC needs:

- To continue to inform projects by gathering information from a diverse and representative group of service recipients.
- Ongoing guidance and support from DHS and the SQC.
- Expanded collaboration and communication with state and lead agencies such as DHS, MDH, MDE, DEED, in addition to Hennepin, Scott, and Dakota counties.
- To continue to develop partnerships and working relationships with providers, advocacy organizations, and self-advocates/people with disabilities.

### **Connecting During COVID-19**

The way the MRQC connects with people with disabilities has shifted as a result of the COVID19 Pandemic. Meeting in person became a health risk and, as a result, many outreach and educational efforts have shifted to a virtual platform. While this was successful for engaging with professionals and some people with disabilities, it is not accessible for many.

- Continued funding must be available for people with disabilities to have the training and materials necessary to utilize technology to engage with others during this time.
- Targeted education must support people with disabilities (as well as their family members and their staff) to support their use of virtual platforms.
- Professionals working with people with disabilities must be trained and proficient in all methods of virtual engagement. Professionals should modify the connecting platform based on the wishes of the person with a disability that they are supporting.
- Though there are comprehensive resources available through various websites and resources such as Disability Hub, DB101, and the DHS website, service recipients and their families still experience widespread confusion, misunderstanding, and mistrust of the system. In order to improve the understanding and navigation of the service system, resources should:
  - Be developed in partnership and with input from people with disabilities and their family members.
  - Be evaluated on a regular basis, considering what groups are accessing or not accessing the information, how they are accessing the information, and if the information is presented in plain language.
  - Be available through multiple formats and languages.

### **Systemic Ableism**

It has been clear that disability services and supports are undervalued and, as a result, underfunded. Minnesotans with disabilities deserve access to services without feeling the burden of funding-related barriers in their service systems such as understaffing/high staffing turnovers, limited options, wait lists, and inaccessible systems. People with disabilities should not be held in poverty to obtain their services and should have equitable economic and political power.

Minnesota lawmakers need to acknowledge and confront how their ableism manifests in their decisions and policies. Programs and systems that are developed for people with disabilities should utilize the 10 Principles of Disability Justice, which emphasizes leadership by the most impacted, intersectionality, collective access, and sustainability.<sup>2</sup>

## References:

1. National Core Indicators. (2019). National Core Indicators 2018 Staff Stability Survey Report. <https://www.nationalcoreindicators.org/resources/staffstability-survey/>
2. Skin, Tooth, and Bone: The Basis of Movement is Our People. Sins Invalid. 2nd ed., 2019.