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Some Brief Comments on Safeguards Enablement By Formal Organizations

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Safeguards Enablement

There is a need in all publicly accountable service systems to develop intentional safeguards to help both reduce the vulnerability of persons with disabilities, and to offset the many vulnerabilities existing in the system in regards to its performance and quality. Both people and services can be better safeguarded by implementing thoughtful measures that help accentuate what is needed, and constrain factors that create unfavorable conditions. Conceivably, much of this could be left to chance, but such a strategy would likely invite criticism as being negligent.

As a consequence, most systems need to both be proactive about establishing sensible safeguards, and conveying a sense of responsibility about their importance. In almost all instances, “intentional safeguarding” needs to involve the creation of an interlinked array of intentionally designed safeguards, given that the target of such safeguarding differs as to the precise vulnerabilities that need to be countered. In most instances, public authorities need to assure that vulnerable people are responsibly safeguarded. On another level, such authorities are customarily expected to take active measures to ensure that the operation of their system does not result in significant deficiencies in terms of either performance or quality. Obviously, these major tasks of safeguarding are interrelated to some degree, but it is also apparent that they are distinct challenges requiring their own special strategies.

In order to properly safeguard individuals, it is important to recognize that public systems can best do this by working with other partners to combine their efforts to maximum effect. The key partners are interested elements of communities, families and friends, service providing organizations, government agencies, grass roots organizations and independent advocates. Each has a contribution to make in ensuring that vulnerable people are properly

supported, and the combining of their contributions within a common strategy offers the most hope for a comprehensive approach to safeguards development.

Broadly speaking, intentional safeguards could be organized around the following key functions *as it relates to individuals*. These are;

- Creating consciousness, concern and an ethic of “responsibility taking” about vulnerabilities.

This will require the establishment of specific training and education initiatives targeted to both staff of the system and community partners. Safeguarding is highly dependent on developing a “safeguarding” mentality” that assures the proper vigilance and conscientiousness that vulnerable people will require.

- Strengthening the attentive monitoring of what is happening (or not) in people’s lives.

This will require the establishment of a broad base of citizens and staff who see it as their role to be very alert to what is happening with people who are vulnerable, and being trained and willing to act if they are alarmed. By relying on the combined effort of both government and community partners it increases the mass of people involved in monitoring and enlists their sense of concern proactively.

- Creating the capacity to devise, negotiate and implement targeted individual safeguards as per each person’s specific vulnerabilities.

It is important to recognize that “across the board”, standardized and bureaucratized safeguards are highly ineffectual when it comes to

dealing precisely with the very unique vulnerabilities of a given person. This is why it is advantageous to allow people close to such individuals to be able to propose, negotiate and amend as needed, highly targeted individual safeguards.

- Ensuring that the system must respond promptly and conscientiously to concerns when they are surfaced.

It would be extremely useful for the system to put in place mechanisms that would ensure prompt attention to conditions in people's lives that are thought of as being worrying to either formal or informal monitor "partners". Monitoring without prompt and proper follow up would be extremely neglectful and should be avoided.

- Setting system wide priority on the most vulnerable and accompany this with specialized initiatives with these persons.
- With the most vulnerable of people it is important that there be proactive outreach and priority given to those judged to be most endangered.

This determination can be made on regular occasions by convening government leaders in this area with their community partners such that priorities for preventive outreach are set, and plans to ameliorate the conditions that are producing vulnerability are undertaken in time to make a difference.

- Providing all partners with a measure of independent technical assistance and consultation so that they are more competent to create highly specialized safeguards.

In regards to safeguarding *services and systems*, as opposed to individuals, the challenges are addressed by attending to the broad functions that follow;

- Developing an independent training, consultation and technical assistance capacity that helps prepare people to do better on quality and performance.

It is important to recognize that the basis of quality and performance is ultimately a function of human capacities, and these can be strengthened with the right support and assistance. It is also important to make this available to all “partners”, since these partners are integral to the way services and systems operate.

- Developing the independent capacity to help evaluate, design and reconfigure services so that they have the highest degree of relevance to people’s actual needs.

As will be mentioned in the section on service transformation, it is unlikely that many services will be able to take up this challenge without the provision of additional independent assistance to perform better. This assistance is developmental in nature, as it is an investment in “capacity building” such that more can eventually be expected from people and organizations.

- Developing the independent capacity to undertake both targeted and random independent evaluations in order to monitor quality, stimulate improvement and to produce recommendations for change.

While there may be some merit in producing evaluations and accreditation exercises that focus on compliance with minimum

standards, these are usually not rigorous enough to enhance quality nor do they particularly assist with foreseeing serious performance and quality problems. For these purposes, a type of more optimal standards evaluation is more useful as it permits a deeper probing of issues.

- The possible creation of an independently governed Institute on leadership, safeguards and quality that acts to bring together people and organizations into initiatives that can enhance quality, performance and innovation.

This proposed Institute would house the various independent functions mentioned and serve as a catalyst for both quality and safeguards, as well as provide a support mechanism to encourage leadership and innovation.

Conclusion

What are suggested here are various means by which public or formal organizations might act thoughtfully to ensure that vulnerable people might be supported by mindful and effective safeguards, intentionally created and maintained. Naturally, even with such measures in place, it would be unwise to assume that all vulnerabilities have been properly managed, as such a hope is utopian given the imperfections inherent in even well meaning safeguarding.