**North Carolina Supported Living: Making the Difference Initiative | Year 2 Summary Findings**

In Year 2 of the Supported Living: Making the Difference initiative, evaluators surveyed and met with people who are involved with and impacted by Supported Living services in North Carolina; specifically, people who are involved in the Supported Living: Making the Difference initiative, funded by the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) and Money Follows the Person (MFP). In total, we heard from 44 people using services, family members and partnering agency[[1]](#footnote-1) employees.

**Success Story: Tammy**

Tammy and her husband live in an apartment in Woodfin, NC with their three cats. Tammy has been receiving waiver services for almost 14 years with Liberty Corner Enterprises. She was living in a group home separate from her husband prior to the Supported Living option. Tammy needs supports from a multi-faceted team to maintain her mental and physical health, as well as navigating social interactions and relationships.

Tammy and her husband moved into their current apartment in March 2017 when Tammy transitioned to Supported Living Level 2 services. Finding good staff matches and retaining staff with Tammy has been a challenge for many reasons, specifically because, like most of us, Tammy would like to have choice and control over her schedule each day. Supported Living has afforded Tammy the flexibility to manage her direct support professionals in the manner that best fits her needs and desires each week. She has had much better success with staff matching and accessing her community on her terms since using Support Living. Additionally, she is not competing for staff attention, which was sometimes an issue when she lived in a group home. Tammy and her husband dream of owning a home of their own in the future, and the team is currently supporting them on this quest. They are excited to be living together and very happy with the changes this year.

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| See the source image | One on One Interviews  | People using Supported Living Services | 18 |
| Image result for survey image | Online Surveys | Family Members of people using Supported Living Services  | 11 |
| Image result for group discussion Image result for survey image | Group Discussions and Online Surveys  | Agency Employees providing Supported Living services  | 15 | In Person26 | Online  |

**Year 2 Wins** | There have been many successes during the second year of the Supported Living initiative. Overall, for people who are using the Supported Living Services, successes have been related to the quality of supports people receive and the increased control and autonomy people have in their lives. The tables on the next pages outline the findings from Years 1 and 2 and concrete outcomes and strategies that have worked for people with disabilities and their families to access and for agencies to provide quality Supported Living services.

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| **Year 1| What we learned was Important to people using Supported Living services and their families** | **Year 2 | What we’ve learned about Supported Living services**  | **Concrete strategies that have led to success**  |
| Services that assure that people who are using supports are ultimately in control  | People who are using services have much more choice about where they live, how their homes are set up and decorated, who has access to their homes and when, etc.  | People using services choose what they want their lives to look like and determine their own support schedules and can change their minds (ask people to leave early, stay late, etc.). |
| Several people have noted that their homes feel more their own when licensing does not control their environment or have access to inspect their space.  |
| People who are using services get much needed privacy when they want (including privacy from people providing supports).  |
| Employees are able to engage one-on-one with people who are using services so they are better able to respond to their chosen day-to-day preferences, goals and needs. |
| People are choosing how and when they engage in their chosen communities and have more access to participate and belong.  |
| Flexible and Responsive services | People who are using services have more control over when and where they receive services and how they are provided. | People using services determine their own support schedules and can change their minds (ask people to leave early, stay late, etc.).  |
| Direct Support Professionals have more autonomy in their schedules; they have a say in weekly scheduling and can make in-the-moment decisions based on the wants and needs of people they support (leave early if asked, stay late if needed, etc.).  |
| As people’s lives and needs change, agencies are able to adjust the number of hours of support provided on a day-to- day/week-to-week basis.  |
| Agencies providing services report more flexible approaches to support that are led more by the wants and needs of people they support than agency traditions and norms. | Agencies have used combinations of services (both formal and community-based) and technology to supplement Supported Living services so that people have the amount of support they need and can access their communities, friends and loved ones on their own schedule.  |
| Agencies know the people they support very well, as individual persons; many agency employees are familiar with the preferences, support needs and short/long-term goals of the people they support. This has led to widespread investment in the success of individual people using services as well as collaborative and creative problem-solving to meet people’s specific wants and needs.  |

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| **Year 1| What we learned was Important to people using Supported Living services and their families** | **Year 2 | What we’ve learned about Supported Living services**  | **Concrete strategies that have led to success**  |
| Goldilocks approach to services | Agencies are working to assure that people are not under- supported and at the same time are not over supported. | The daily rate structure allows agencies to be flexible with how budgets and schedules are designed. |
| Transition support/funding has helped people receive the services they need, particularly for people who moving to Supported Living services involves a significant change in where they live, who they live with and how they are supported. This has provided people with needed short-term intensity that can decrease as people become more familiar with the service and less in need/want of heightened staffing.  |
| Technology supports people to have access to services without needing staff in their homes. Technology has also supported people to live in accessible homes and access non-human support so that they do not rely on Direct Support Professionals to meet every need.  |
| Agencies are better able to offer services that are not “all or nothing” or “one size fits all.” Each agency shared that the principles of Supported Living services were already aligned with their organizational values, Supported Living Services enables them to align values and practices by offering services designed specifically for people. |

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| **Year 1 | What we learned was important to agencies providing Supported Living services**  | **Year 2 | What we’ve learned about Supported Living services**  | **Concrete strategies that have led to success**  |
| Responsiveness, flexibility on behalf of the state and Managed Care Organizations (MCOs)  | The state has revised service definitions and waivers to better meet the needs of people using services; feedback and input from stakeholder groups across the state have been considered  | Changing state regulations to allow transition funds for people who are moving into Supported Living services will allow agencies to bill for transition services (including helping people find a home of their own, access community supports, etc.). This makes it much for feasible for agencies to support people to transfer to Supported Living services, as it does not put a financial strain on the agency to provide non-billable services.  |
| Managed Care Organizations have provided flexible options for agencies to provide quality Supported Living Services that meaningfully meet the needs of people they support. | MCOs have approved temporary budget increases to assure people have the support they need as they transition into services or during a significant life change. This helps agencies provide increased supports as people need them, making them more responsive.  |
| Managed Care Organizations have invested in developmental opportunities for agencies (training, technical assistance, etc.) to assure that agencies have the knowledge, information and resources needed to provide quality Supported Living services. For instance, Managed Care Organizations sponsored a behavioral health specialist to provide a day of training and development to agencies and families across North Carolina who are involved in Supported Living Services.  |
| **Year 1 | What we learned was important to agencies providing Supported Living Services**  | **Year 2 | What we’ve learned about Supported Living Services**  | **Concrete strategies that have led to success**  |
| Staff need adequate training, support and resources to provide quality Supported Living services  | Staff see that person centeredness extends beyond the people they support to others in their agency. Staff who feel that they are working for agencies that invest in their development and well-being are better able to provide supports that are responsive and respectful of the people they serve.  | Agencies that explicitly invest time and resources in staff development, support and appreciation shared that Direct Support Professionals were prepared and on board with principles of Supported Living.  |
| When Direct Support Professionals had, and/or are able to access the resources (both financial and not) needed to meet the needs and desires of people they support, they felt that they were better able to provide quality Supported Living services.  |
| When staff had a supervisor who was available and responsive to answer questions, address concerns, respond in a crisis or provide guidance and encouragement, they felt that they were better able to provide quality Supported Living services.  |

**Year 2 Barriers |** In Year 2, people using services, families and agencies continued to work through barriers that hinder successful Supported Living services in North Carolina. Interview and survey results showed that, although there are still challenges to using and providing Supported Living services, many people still see this as an ideal service for themselves, their family member(s) and the people they support. Further, many have identified strategies to work through and/or within current barriers to assure that people have access to quality Supported Living services. The barriers outlined in the charts below and on the following pages show opportunities for continued support and growth in Year 3 of the Supported Living initiative.

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| **Barriers to providing Supported Living services**  | **Impact of barriers** | **Steps taken to overcome barriers**  | **Recommended actions/ next steps to overcome barriers to Supported Living\***  |
| Lack of Affordable Housing | Supported Living services can be limited to people who have family members who can afford to pay for housing and people who have received housing vouchers. | Vaya Health is working with HUD agencies to determine solutions to housing shortages in their catchment area. | Agencies would benefit from clarification about Supported Living services and where/how many people can live together or in a shared complex. Agency leaders recognized that there is a fine line between supporting multiple people to live meaningfully in an apartment complex and developing an intentional community that secludes people with disabilities to a specific area of the complex or to have more access to other people with disabilities than the entire community.  |
| Agencies have begun to develop relationships with developers and apartment complexes to discuss options for affordable housing for people using Supported Living services.  |
| Families have invested in properties/ homes or are paying/subsidizing rent for their adult children who are transferring into Supported Living services.  | Agencies and family members have recommended statewide efforts focusing on affordable housing options for people in need across North Carolina. They recommend statewide support so that families/agencies can learn/strategize collaboratively.  |
| **Barriers to providing Supported Living services**  | **Impact of barriers** | **Steps taken to overcome barriers**  | **Recommended actions/next steps to overcome barriers to Supported Living\***  |
| Lack of use and understanding of Supported Living services  | Agencies that are providing Supported Living services to a small percentage of total service users still treat Supported Living services as a niche service. Rules and training are different, so staff who are providing and overseeing Supported Living and more traditional services have to navigate different service models and expectations on a day-to-day basis.  | Agencies have begun developing marketing and educational materials for staff and families to help them see Supported Living as a viable option.  | Agencies would benefit from educational and marketing materials developed by the MCO or state that they could share to promote Supported Living Services as a sustainable option to many people they support and their families.  |
| Agencies have been reallocating resources to assign staff to oversee and provide Supported Living services. One agency that primarily provides Supported Living services shared that this has benefitted them significantly as they have a team of staff who understand the service and support the successful implementation.  |
| Several agencies can’t afford to have staff solely dedicated to Supported Living services because there is not enough income to support full time staff. Similar to the issue identified above, staff have to navigate dual roles and expectations that are often very different from those under traditional services.  | Agencies have asked for learning/ collaboration opportunities with other agencies providing Supported Living services. They could benefit from regular meetings with others to learn about strategies to overcome barriers and assure that more people thrive in Supported Living services.  |
| A Supported Living guidebook is under development: The guidebook provides resources, exercises, stories and evidence-based practices to promote access to, transition to, provision of and understanding of quality Supported Living services.  |
| Few people using Supported Living services doesn’t position the service as a viable and available option to many families and people using services. Some families don’t trust that the service will be around in a few years, causing further disruption to their families.  | Webinars have been hosted for families, agencies and stakeholders to provide information about the services, education about topics that are relevant to Supported Living services and success stories of people who are thriving in Supported Living services. These webinars are archived and will continue to be developed and available.  | Families would benefit from materials and educational opportunities to better understand the statewide investment in the sustainability of Supported Living services so that they continue to trust that this is an ideal option for their family member now and in the future.  |
| Service Coordinators don’t consistently understand Supported Living services because so few people are using them. Agencies are having to educate Service Coordinators about the rules and qualifications, and many Support Coordinators tell people they do not qualify because they have high support needs.  | A day-long training was offered to Service Coordinators to help them understand the principles of Supported Living services.  | Agencies and families request further training and support for Service Coordinators so they understand the service, can make recommendations and support transitioning to Supported Living Services. |
| Agencies and families have requested that MCOs have appointed staff who are dedicated to Supported Living services, including education of staff and families, marketing and assuring that Service Coordinators are offering Supported Living services and have the tools, resources and information needed to help people transition smoothly.  |

\*Recommendations from people using services, family members and agency responders

**Success Story: Barbara**

Barbara has received waiver services for almost two decades. She has lived in institutional settings, congregate living arrangements, and an AFL setting in the past. Thanks to the Supported Living option, Barbara now lives in her own apartment.

Barbara has been employed with the Town of Black Mountain for 8 years. She is very social and enjoys going to the YMCA throughout the week. Barbara moved into her own apartment in West Asheville through the Key Program/NCHFA. Because of Barbara’s level of behavioral and health care support needs, she received 12 hours of staff each day and had an alarm system on her doors to keep her from being vulnerable to others when staff was not with her. As she was settling into her apartment, her team connected her to Simply Home to seek out assistive technology to address her multi-faceted safety needs and reduce the need for staffing. Supported Living services through Liberty Corner Enterprises and Simply Home technologies have been paired to support Barbara in her apartment. She is currently receiving an average of 6-7 hours of 1:1 staff supports each day and is very satisfied with the flexibility and control she has in her home. She has met neighbors who act as natural supports for her. She lives near her guardian, who also assists with Barbara’s success in living the life that she chooses, on her terms. Barbara has control over her money, how she spends it, where she shops and manages to live comfortably. She is living a healthy lifestyle, and for the first time in more than 20 years, her diabetes is controlled with her diet and exercise. She has lost a significant amount of weight and says she feels “great.”

**Success Story: Jennifer**

Jennifer grew up in her family home. Because of her significant need and limited options, she moved into 6-bed group home in early adulthood. Though Supported Living Level 3 services offered by Liberty Corner Enterprises, Jennifer is living in her own apartment. Jennifer chooses to have a housemate with whom she shares time and expenses. She lives with a friend of hers who also receives services. Both women express their happiness and satisfaction in sharing an apartment. Jennifer uses a wheelchair and has complex medical support needs. She needs assistance with mobility and all daily living functions. Jennifer is very social and likes to fill her days with activities that are meaningful to her. She is upbeat, loves to go to the Drum Circle in downtown Asheville on Friday evenings and is an avid fan of Asheville’s minor league baseball team, the Tourists. Jen also enjoys music and particularly likes live concerts. She seamlessly transitioned to Supported Living services in the spring of 2017.

1. The Arc of North Carolina, First Resource Center, Liberty Corner Enterprises, Turning Point Services, Inc. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)