Understanding Financial Education and Savings among Persons with Disabilities and their Caregivers

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Overview

• Focus groups held with two population groups:
  – Adults with disabilities receiving SSDI or SSI who work or want to work
  – Parents/Guardians of children receiving SSI/Medicaid who are aging out of the school system (primarily 16-22 years old)
Overview

• Four Focus Groups with Adults with Disabilities: Wisconsin and Iowa
  – Total Participants: 26
  – Age Range: 19 to early 60s
  – Race/Ethnicity: Majority White
  – Gender: Mixed gender
  – Income: Primarily lower-income
Overview

• Four Focus Groups with Parents/Guardians of Children with Disabilities: Wisconsin and Iowa
  – Total Participants: 25
  – Age Range: late 30s to 60s
  – Race/Ethnicity: Wisconsin – Mixed Race; Iowa – Majority White
  – Gender: Wisconsin – Majority Female; Iowa – Mixed Gender
  – Income: Range of incomes
Overview

• **Core Research Questions**
  – How do individuals and families plan for their financial future
  – What are people’s attitudes about employment
  – How do people interact with their local school district to address their child’s needs
  – How well do people understand SSA rules and regulations
  – What sources of financial information do people find most useful
Findings

General

• Need to navigate complex network of programs and agencies
• People under considerable stress to address current and future financial needs
• Vital importance of medical coverage
• Critical need for accurate information
• Favorable experiences with SSA
Findings

Adults with Disabilities

– Employment Attitudes and Behaviors
  • Current employment status
  • Employment barriers

– Financial Planning
  • Motivations, impediments and techniques

– Understanding Rules and Regulations

– Financial Education
  • Current sources of financial information and advice
  • Opinions about forms of financial education
Findings

Summary of Findings

• Manage limited resources as best they can, but believe they have significant impediments to savings and financial planning. Very limited income. Living day-to-day.

• Do not want to jeopardize their SSDI, SSI, Medicaid, or Medicare benefits

• Overall, people want to work
  – Concern about lack of vocational training
  – Reduction in pay and stature
  – Income limits

• Reliance on community resources to provide information about SSA
Findings

• **Parents/Guardians of Children with Disabilities who are aging out of the School System**
  – Financial and Estate Planning for Families
    • Current source of information about financial and estate planning
    • Motivations, impediments, and techniques
    • Wills, guardianships, special needs trust
    • Legal counsel
  – Involvement of Local School Districts in Addressing Family Needs
    • Resources for transitional planning, vocational rehabilitation
    • Program model
  – Understanding Rules and Regulations
    • Sources of information
Findings

• Parents/Guardians of Children with Disabilities, who are receiving SSI or SSDI
  – Scrambling for information about financial and estate planning, benefits, and legal issues
    • Limited resources in rural communities
    • Don’t want to jeopardize loss of benefits or medical coverage
  – Special Needs Trusts, Legal Guardianships
    • Finding legal assistance
  – Involvement with Local School District
    • Information center for parents/guardians
    • Programs vary by district
    • Limited resources
    • Ideal role for school district and the family
    • Budget cutbacks – transportation, vocational training
  – Critical need for accurate information – as soon as possible
Implications

• **Financial Education**
  – Not a lack of financial education
  – Beneficiaries are living on very tight budgets
  – Beneficiaries do not have a “nest egg” of funds for emergencies
  – No extra funds to save or build assets

• **Benefits**
  – Confusion about programs/resources
  – Importance to remain in compliance
  – State programs

• **Employment**
  – Strong interest in employment and increasing ability to be self-sufficient
  – Fear of jeopardizing social security benefits or Medicaid waiver
  – Frustration at not being able to accept raises, bonuses, or other cash incentives

• **Rules and Regulations**
  – Mixed confusion about SSA regulations and policies. Rely on local staff to validate current information
  – Critical need to ensure that that parents get information as soon as possible
Implications

Four Financial Planning Concerns
Described by Participants

1. Maintain income eligibility
2. Access to experienced legal and financial planning resources
   • Limited resources available, especially in rural communities
3. Cost of legal and financial planning services
4. Impact on other family members
Implications

• **Role of School District Working with Parents**
  – Focal point for information
  – Parents want to be viewed as “partners”
  – Families moving to school districts based on special needs programs
  – Parents as advocates and navigators for their children
  – Concern about cutbacks impacting transportation, vocational training, transition services
  – Role for school districts helping to educate parents and families on SSA regulations, legal issues, financial and estate planning, community resources, family support
Implications

• Important to look at sources of information
  – Role of community organizations, informal networks of parents, co-workers
  – Understanding where “sources” are getting their information
  – How do people access and validate information
  – Suggestions for interaction with SSA
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