An aerial photograph of a wide river winding through a dense, green forest. The river's surface is textured with white and yellowish rapids. The surrounding land is covered in thick vegetation, and the sky above is filled with soft, white and grey clouds. The overall scene is bright and natural.

**The Great Connection: Utilizing
Community Resources to Enhance
Participant Experience: Warm and Timely
Referrals**

Introduction:

Employment counselors have a unique opportunity to connect participants with community resources that align with stated goals, needs, and motivation. If we do referrals in a warm and timely manner we can help our participants develop skills, fulfill needs, and build their network of support.



As an employment counselor, you are making connections all of the time, with your team, your supervisor, the county, your participants, and—hopefully—local resources.

We are blessed in the Twin Cities to have a plethora of organizations and resources.

Successful Referrals have two parts--the front-end process of the appointment and email back-up and the back-end process--creating connections, keeping track of resources, and embedding community resources in internal programming.

Referrals in the Appointment

When you are meeting with someone pay attention to their goals, needs, and motivation. Utilize the tools to help you cement the action the participant will take to connect. That could be using the plan section of the employment plan, building out the goal section, or filling out the GAP or stepping stones tools.

- Call the YWCA CNA training program at 651-555-4343 by 6/25/2023 to enroll in the July 15th CNA program.
• Contact Eileen with class schedule when enrolled so we can update the plan and create a new childcare transmittal

Be specific when you are building out the action steps with resources--where, when, how?

I try to include one long-term goal in the EP to tie in motivation and think about how action taken today impacts the big picture



Teach the process:

When you talk about resources with participants, that is an opportunity to teach them how to find and keep track of their own resources. Make sure that you tell them how you found it and if you were in the office together you can turn your computer screen to face them and demonstrate. It is important to teach your participants this skill to use and navigate community resources to build a network of support for themselves.

I have found it helpful to build in an example when creating budgets with participants. As we go over their different expenses, we can search for community resources that could help with those specific items. For example, if a client has trouble keeping up with their energy bills, I guide them to include a link to Energy Assistance in their collection of resources

Budget:

Rent

Rent Help MN, Emergency Assistance, Neighborhood House

Food

MN Food Line, Neighborhood House, Hallie Q. Brown

Clothing

Joseph's Coat, Dress for Success

Internet

Emergency Broadband Connection

Family Fun

Discounted/Free Events: MN Zoo, Como Conservatory, Children's Museum

Phone Bill

TAP program

Encourage clients to keep a special file on their computer or a folder to collect resource information so it is all in one place and easy to refer to. This helps them navigate building their own support network.

Mass emails—Communicating about resources to clients:

Sharing/Recommending Resources:

Email is a highly effective tool because you can include all of the information about a resource in an easy-to-navigate way. I like following a picture + text + link formula. I embed a screenshot of the website or a flier into the message to create something that is visually appealing and draws the reader in. I include a brief description of the resource and always include a link to the website. (I try to do a link to the specific part of the website that has the resource I am recommending rather than a link to the main page).



Sharing Resources Internally:

Make it a practice to share your resources with your colleagues as well as your participants. Create personalized and easy-to-share emails with relevant information. Follow the picture + text + link formula. If you send your colleagues an email that is already polished, it is easy for them to forward and share with their connections and participants.

The Next Step:

Gathering Information

it is important to find out information about Resources before sending them out. Firstly you can look at the resource's web page. That gives you valuable information about what services they offer. Is it still active? Does this organization offer other services as well? There might be some eligibility restrictions with who can use the resources that they provide.

Connect with someone from the organization

Find a contact person on the website and set up a phone call or Zoom meeting to find out more about what services they offer. The more you know about the community organization, the better you can describe it to your participants. Talking to someone builds your connection network and paves the way for future collaboration.

Reach out, prepare (what do you want from this meeting), meet, and follow-up.

You can always find out more information by setting up a conversation with someone from the resource organization. You can call the main number, explain your role, and ask who a good person is to contact. Then you can call or send an email asking for a conversation to learn a little bit more about what they do. They in turn will want to know about your organization, so this is a terrific opportunity for you to have an elevator pitch.

Do your preliminary research ahead of time and come with prepared questions. if you have a few dates of future workshops that you might want them to present, it would be a clever idea to include them in operation. After the meeting send a brief email thanking them for their time and summarizing what you two talked about.

Making connections is a golden opportunity. Work in tandem not in parallel.

Keeping track of resources:



There are already several different comprehensive guides to community resources. There is no need to replicate what is already being done, but it is handy to keep a reference for commonly used resources.

The clearer the organization you have in this list, the easier it will be for you to copy and paste when you are recommending resources to participants. I suggest first putting down the name of the resource, then the name and contact information of your connection (if you've established one) in parentheses, and lastly a short section of what the resource offers. Organize your list under resource topics: medical, food, clothing, etc.

The top line is for you only—put the name and contact information for the person you've talked to at the organization. The second line is what you might copy and paste for a client who wants this resource. You can always edit the information to tailor to the client, but it is best to include all of the offerings the resource provides

Example:

Dress for Success (connection: Jane Doe, Community Outreach Coordinator,
jane.doe@dressforsuccessmn.org 651-555-5555)

Dress for Success www.dressforsuccessmn.org Dress for Success is an organization that provides business and job seeking classes as well as supplying professional outfits for female jobseekers. They have a series of 10 classes—participants get a certificate if they complete the whole program. Clients must complete one class before outfitting session-classes can be remote and don't have to be taken in order. No children at session. Self-referral.

Building Programming: Bringing the Resources to Them



Creating collaborations: a wonderful strategy is to bring as many outside community resources as possible into internal programming or space. Creating warm handoff opportunities strengthens relations between your agency & community partners. Once you've developed relationships with participants, they are more likely to engage with the resources you offer. Inviting representatives of community organizations to come and present at internal programs gives participants a chance to learn about resources and ask questions directly.

YWCA has invited partners from: Dress for Success, Women Venture, Club Mom and Dad, Prepare and Prosper, The Lift Garage, Cooking Matters, NdCAD, JK Movement, etc.

Warm and Timely:

We know that time counts a lot when you're talking about motivation. I try to send the email follow-up the same day I do appointments.

Having a standard "next-step" email I can alter + dictation makes this a snap. I dedicate part of my workweek to finding and connecting with resources.



GOAL



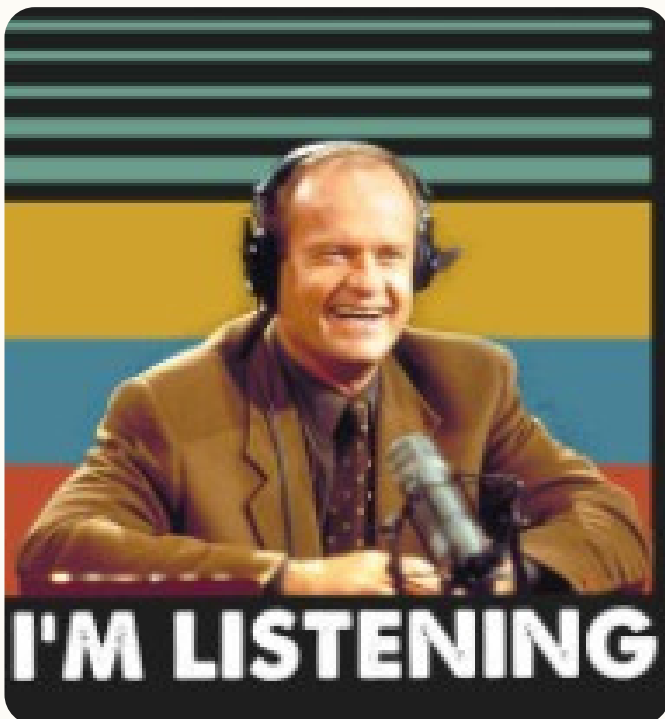
Why Is This Goal Important?



Behavior Change



Make Your Goal SMART



Feedback: It is extremely helpful to encourage feedback and sharing from your participants. It's good to know what clients' experiences were when they contacted the resources you recommend. Were they able to get through to someone right away? Was the application process complicated? If it is good, I want to hear about it; if it's not, I want to hear that too. I also invite participants to share resources they like so that I can pass it on to others.

Conclusion

Finding and tracking resources, building connections, and disseminating information about community organizations to participants are an essential part of the process to help your clients achieve stability.

Tracking your commonly recommended resources in a cleanly organized list saves you time

Building connections *strengthens* your professional network, *deepens* your knowledge, and *opens doors* for collaboration. Knowing resources and engaging with participants to assist them to build their own support networks teaches critical skills and increases engagement.

Being responsive to their needs builds a holistic, not transactional, relationship.

Creating ongoing internal programming to bring in external resources increases engagement and learning opportunities.