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Abstract

This paper attempts to clarify readers' understanding of the nature and range of service brokerage in Australia and overseas. Misconceptions have included believing brokerage must operate in a set manner, whereas it can operate in a variety of ways in response to the needs and the resources of both the individuals and the community in which it operates. The author provides examples from different countries to show the flexibility of brokerage, and stresses the responsibility to the individual consumer. **Keyword: Individualisation**

SERVICE BROKERAGE

Service Brokerage is alternatively grasped at as the answer to all expectations or as an absolute model. It can operate in a variety of ways in response to the needs and resources of both the individuals and the community in which it operates. To suggest that it must operate in a set manner, ie, as a model, is to undermine its strength and flexibility. Hopefully the following items will clarify readers' understanding of the nature and range of service brokerage in Australia and overseas. Also explained are individual funding and case management which may be confused with service brokerage.

British Columbia: the original program

Introduction

There is no single definition of brokerage. The original brokerage service as developed in British Columbia was in response to a specific situation. It was not developed as a general means of service provision. A number of other programs have also developed which provide a quite different interpretation of brokerage, eg in Calgary. The possibility of different approaches and different expectations of brokerage has led to some confusion.

Origins of the Program

In Canada, brokerage came from a group of parents whose sons and daughters were living in institutions. They wanted better services and a place in the community for their sons and daughters. They were tired of looking for services and working out what services did and what they expected in return. They wanted a central mechanism to provide this information. However, they did not want to hand over the role of decision making; they wanted to share that role. They also wanted funding to be aggregated and used according to the needs of each individual rather than going directly to service providing agencies. In late 1976 funds that would normally have gone to the institution where the parents' sons and daughters lived, were allocated to the parent group. The parents then developed a "fixed point of response", a central person/place, (the broker) to assist them to make cost-effective decisions about spending the money (Ney and Sone, 1988).

So brokerage was developed by parents as a strategy to provide the mechanisms to ensure the most appropriate service and to ensure a place in the community for their sons and daughters. The prime objective of brokerage is to enable a person who has a disability to become a "full participant in the community" (Salisbury et al 1987).

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According to Dickey, Crawford and McClughan (1989) people who have disabilities have only been accepted to the extent that they have demonstrated the ability to function at a similar level to the rest of the community. The less likely a person is to achieve a similar level of functioning to the rest of the community, the less likely they are to become part of it. So services have tried to make people "less disabled, and therefore less unequal, so they can be more like real citizens". Brokerage and individualised funding are seen as eradicating the emphasis on trying to make people less disabled.

British Columbia

In British Columbia, brokerage aims to :

ensure that continuous and appropriate planning services are made available to individuals and their personal networks; assist the individual, using his or her allocation of dollars, to secure appropriate community-based services; advise the individual and network, so they will be able to make responsible and effective use of the funding allocation.

(Salisbury et al, 1987)

How it Operates

Brokerage in Canada is a planning mechanism delivered through a community-based agency which is autonomous from government and service providers. The agency assists people with disabilities to develop and present personalised plans to government that reflect the type and cost of their requirements; and to utilise funding to secure appropriate community services. The funds are linked to the individual, not to a service provider.

The service broker mediates between the people and agencies offering services. The broker is accountable to the client and his or her friends and family to the extent that they are part of the individual's support system. The broker buys services that will fulfil the client's needs. If a service is unsatisfactory, they switch to another or use the money on an alternative.

Brokerage is a technical, mediating support service whose primary objective is to facilitate individual decision-making throughout the process of identifying and meeting personal needs. In working in this way, the agency assists the individual to establish appropriate links between his or her needs, the funding body, service providers, professionals and the wider community. Service brokerage assists the individual to "walk through" various service systems, and capably to use his or her funding allocation. (Community Living Society, Vancouver)

Brokerage is used as a mechanism to assist people and their network to access whatever facilities, resources and supports that will promote the individual's participation in the community (Salisbury, et al, 1988). Brokerage can assist people to obtain the unique individual support they need to live in the community. It is not limited to making a selection from the services that are available. Brokerage determines the support the person requires to do 'X', and then gets the support.

The function of the service in British Columbia was described by a parent:

The broker knew what was available in the community. Our original plan for Sean was pretty simple. The broker got to know Sean and gave us information about the support Sean would need to live in the community. We monitor the support Sean receives. If something goes wrong we can go to the service broker to straighten things out. The broker does not owe any favours. He is completely independent. (McClughan and Salter, 1988)

[Extracted from a paper by Jacquie Ford for NCID]

In Calgary

The Calgary Association for Independent Living (CAIL) has used the concept of brokerage in a slightly different way. CAIL has operated a number of different projects described as brokerage:

The Vacation Relief Project

This project matched personal care attendants to people who had disabilities and wished to holiday. The intent was to enable people with disabilities to access ordinary holiday opportunities of their choice. It is no longer in operation.

The Disability Information Brokerage Service (DIBS)

This is a computerised information referral service, operated by people who have disabilities, that lists attendants, jobs and services:

- **attendants:** people willing to work directly with people with a disability;
- **jobs:** volunteer and paid jobs to people with high support needs and,
- **services:** services identified as needed by people who have disabilities. (Hope, 1988)

The Independent Living Broker

This service assists people locate the support they need to live and work in the community. In selecting supports every attempt is made to locate people who

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will assist with participation in the community. The individual receives the funding dollar and that money is directed specifically to that person's supports. Funding requests mostly are made by CAIL on behalf of the individuals. (Marlett and MacLean, 1988)

In New Zealand

A service brokerage project began operation in Palmerston North in 1988. The approach used in New Zealand depends upon the interplay between the two components: individualised funding and the independent planning mechanism which is the broker or the "fixed point of response".

Individual Funding

The individual's funds are allocated on the basis of identified need, according to a service plan which has been endorsed by the individual and his/her personal network, and agreed to by the funding body. This process has the potential to act as a prescription for meeting diverse individual needs, while retaining an openness to scrutiny by the funding body. With individual funding people are able to choose only those services they need.

If an individual moves from one service to another, the funding moves with the person. This enables the consumer to access the most appropriate service available.

The Service Broker

People with disabilities and their networks may require a mechanism that can advise and assist them to plan for individual service needs. This mechanism also needs to be able to liaise with services in the best interests of the individual.

This planning mechanism is controlled by the consumers of the service. This is done as a community based agency which is independent of funding bodies or service provision agencies. The agency is consumer led and directed by an elected Board.

The service broker and the person with a disability draw up a plan, detailing the individual's needs and the possible options available. The broker then proves assistance with the implementation of the plan. This support is available to the individual as needed. If no appropriate services exist the broker will assist the person and the network to identify what must be developed.

The final plan when agreed to by the funding body, then serves as the basis upon which the individual's allocation of funding is made. The resulting money is used by the individual to purchase the services identified in the plan.

It is important to stress that the broker does not make decisions about needed services and supports. She facilitates this process by providing advice and support. The broker also assists the individual to purchase services once the funding allocation has been made.

The brokerage service remains available over time to the individual to help address changing needs. It is portable from service to service and renegotiable as the person's needs change. This means that the individual is empowered to access those services that are actually required.

The use of the brokerage agency must be optional. If the individual chooses to deal directly with service providers or funders, they have the right to do so.

Personal Networks

These are an integral part of this project. The personal network consists of family members and close friends who are trusted by and have a personal commitment to the person with a disability. The involvement of the personal network is also at the discretion of the person. It must not usurp the individual's right to make his or her own decision.

The personal network can assist the individual with planning, provide input and feedback when decisions are being made, help to interpret the individual's needs to service providers and planners, play an advocacy role if needed, and help monitor the services provided to the individual.

[Extracted from "Service Brokerage the New Zealand Experience" by Brian McKenney]

(Note: Service brokerage does not have to involve funding individuals directly. In some projects the broker receives the funds which must be spent on the individuals. The Palmerston project uses both concepts together to achieve their objectives.)

In Barwon

Barwon in Geelong, Victoria, has a pilot service brokerage project. This project is also based on funding tied to the individual; the client's personal network; and an independent planning agency which provides brokerage as required.

Money is attached to each individual (not given to them directly) and they are assisted in purchasing the services they require. The broker is involved in: assisting to assess service needs; planning the services required; negotiating those services; and co-ordinating and monitoring service delivery.

In its initial stage the service identified fifteen people with multiple disabilities to be assisted to continue to live within the community.

Case Management

Service Brokerage is NOT case management. Case management is a popular approach to services for people with physical disabilities.

It involves one worker acting as a link between the client and the service system. Part of the role is to ensure that the client receives appropriate and timely services. The case manager is usually employed within an organisation which provides either funding or services.

Most case managers are responsible for the provision of some direct services to their clients. The case manager may also have some control over discretionary funds for each client. So the case manager may have a number of roles for any one client: case co-ordinator; funder; counsellor; or advocate. The case management approach is not based on the essential element of client decision-making. It focuses control on the case worker rather than on a group of professionals who do not have a personal knowledge of the individual, but it does not automatically give control to the individual.

Many of the functions of the case manager are similar to that of a service broker but they are responsible to the agency and its policies and procedures rather than to the individual.

[Extracted from "Service Brokerage the New Zealand Experience" by Brian McKenny]