

# **Madison County Board of MR/DD**

## **Areas of Excellence Application**

### **Quality Framework Domain I**

#### **Leadership and Organizational Management**

*ODMRDD Expected Outcome: People have access to an organization that is financially and functionally responsive to its constituency and to people served, and effectively advocates for full participation of individuals with disabilities in their communities.*

Before addressing this Domain and all of its varied components, two recent events that have exponentially impacted our Board, our programs, the staff and the individuals which we serve need to be considered.

In January of this year our Superintendent of 21 years underwent surgery for a brain aneurism that resulted in his fight for his life. Over the next 6 months as Jim battled for survival and recovery (and words here can't begin to scratch the surface of what Jim and his family went through and his continuing efforts towards getting his life back) it was very uncertain what the future held for him and our agency. It went quite a bit deeper still at an emotional level here—Jim's never been just the boss—he has provided leadership over the years that has developed in each staff member a sense of worth and their view of him as a friend. This closeness is magnified all the more in Jim's relationship with his Management Team. As we struggled with this uncertainty as well as our emotions and concern for Jim and his family we made three basic decisions that would greatly influence services over the coming months. First, when it was determined that Jim would not be returning soon the Management Team made the commitment to carry on with the weekly meetings that Jim always chaired. Our Management Team is comprised of 5 Directors who each have their point of view and usually aren't afraid to express it. To this end as we worked through challenges that weren't business as usual (explained later) our second decision was made—we all came to an agreement that we would do our best to continue to operate the agency as we felt Jim would. "What would Jim do" became a common saying in our meetings as we worked through problems and attempted to develop solutions. The common ground that Jim has always established in our program—the guiding force—was still in the room and enabled us to work together effectively on the same level to keep things heading in the right direction. Finally we recognized the need for Superintendent support during this time and it turns out our line of thinking was in sync with one of our Board members as Randy Beach, Pickaway County Superintendent was called upon by us at the same time our Board member had called upon him. Randy's leadership style is very much compatible with Jim's and his willingness to assist us was greatly appreciated.

The funding cuts that we were forced to deal with during this time presented a challenge for our agency as well as our partners in serving individuals with disabilities. Prior to his medical leave Jim and members of the Management Team had begun to have meetings with Provider agency administrators to discuss ways in which we could preserve the essential services while maximizing efficiency. We have

devoted a considerable amount of time during the first half of this year to this end and remain committed to insuring availability of services through maximization of effectiveness and efficiency.

A key indicator of the stability of our organization as well as its importance to our community has been the unparalleled passage of every levy since 1988. We've seen county boards as well as other agencies struggle in their quest for community support in getting levies passed. Our success in this area is no accident. Our Superintendent is very visible and active in the community and his leadership and activities are carefully structured to reach the very diverse demographic venues of our community from Rotarians and Chamber of Commerce members to the large agricultural force that makes up Madison County. We have dedicated much time toward public awareness activities with a goal (that is often exceeded) of seeing at, a minimum, weekly news articles about our individuals and our services in local newspapers. Our Special Olympics Teams, the Madison Tigers are widely known and supported in this community and are often featured in these articles. Our agency's operation of Madison County Ride, which provides a public transportation system to our community and makes affordable transportation services a reality is recognized throughout Madison County as our agency's way of "giving back".

Careful long-term planning in the use of Levy funds has been a priority with our Board. We maintain a strong sense of commitment to insure that the citizens of Madison County that have entrusted us with these public dollars receive the best possible services in the most efficient and effective manner. Open communication with all community partners such as the County Commissioners and Department Heads of other community agencies insures that our goals are visible and promotes opportunity for input from others as to how we can better serve residents of Madison County who have disabilities. Each expenditure is carefully analyzed to insure that it not only meets the needs of the agency and those we serve, but that it would pass the test of public scrutiny. Each member of our Management Team is well versed in ethics and we work together to insure that all decisions are in the best interest of the people we serve. Our Superintendent reviews and signs each voucher prior to payment being authorized.

In addition to the utilization of local levy funds in providing services our Board has been very active in pursuing any and all state and federal funds that assist in supporting individuals with disabilities. Since the passage of HB 94 and 405, through refinancing efforts we have maximized available resources by enrolling individuals on the Home and Community Based Waivers as well as referring individuals, when appropriate for Home Care Waivers and the Home Choice Program.

Our Board is active in pursuing available grants. An example of creativity in this area is our recent application for the New Freedom Grant. If dollars are awarded we intend to use them to promote community participation via increased outings in our Adult Program. Securing Grant funds has enabled us to become a force in the community with regard to transportation. This is well outlined within Quality Framework Domain IV.

Given space constraints we can't begin to make even a dent in the list of local support that we receive. Without this support much of what we do would not be possible. Some examples---JCC Camp was made possible this year for 11 children through collaboration with Cluster as well as contributions from local community members such as Ernie Sparks of the Medicine Shoppe. Free vision and dental care are provided to Fairhaven students through the Lion's Club and the Mobile Dentist respectively. Christmas would not be the same for our kids without the annual event sponsored by the Senior Class of Jonathon Alder High School and the men and women of the Armed Forces at Beightler Armory. The Eagles Club purchased \$7,000 in car seats to assist us in safely transporting children. Active involvement in our community from the individuals we serve, no doubt leads to this high level of support. In addition to the

many men and women in our program that work in competitive jobs throughout the community many of the individuals we serve have been very active in “giving back” through volunteer efforts at the Senior Center, the Madison County Hospital through Project Search, as greeters in their churches, and most recently our Circle of Friends group spent an evening making costumes for a community play. Our Board as well finds every opportunity to give back and to touch upon community members and groups whenever possible. Our gymnasium is available for use by community members. Web checks (BCI and FBI) are completed at our Board Office at cost for community members and agencies.

As with every other public agency and most private business our current financial times dictate doing more with less. Not a new concept to our agency, but we have kicked it up a notch over the past several months. In lieu of adding an IT person to the payroll we have solicited the use of the Madison County IT Department and realized a \$50,000 annual savings. We recently changed phone service providers and combined with our email have realized another \$12,000 in savings. Our chairs, our desks, and most other furnishings were secured either for free or at minimal cost utilizing State Surplus. I can’t remember the last time we purchased paper as we have been getting it free for sometime (if this is printed on perforated sheets you’ll know why).

We value the local commitment of levy dollars as well as the state and federal funds used to operate our programs. We take very seriously our responsibility as wards of these funds and each action is taken with effectiveness and efficiency in mind. Over the past several months in particular we have had to take an even closer look at the true relationship between services provided and individual need. Our goal being to provide necessary services to individuals with disabilities and to insure the availability to all eligible individuals has required us to look very closely at needs versus wants. When we were first faced with looming funding cuts and discussions centered on not only maintaining mandated services, but also those services that are essential to our community and the people we serve such as School-Age services, Pre-School, Recreation and Special Olympics we realized that this would take effort at all levels. “If you want to live in the community you need to learn to live in the community”, our Superintendent emphasized in more than one meeting. We take this to heart in each Team meeting being sure that ISPs outline skill development goals and strategies to further educate, empower and prepare individuals to, as our mission statement says “live, work, and play in the community”.

Stability in an organization cannot be attributed to financial resources alone. An agency is only as good as the people of which it is made. Ours is a small agency with a total of 75 staff. Out of this number 7 staff have worked for us for 25+ years, 5 have worked for over 15 years and 14 have been with us for over 10 years. Management maintains an open door policy and staff value the fact that their input is taken seriously. An extremely low incident rate of disciplinary action speaks well for the relationship between management and staff and the clarity of expectations. Again, the tone that is set by the Superintendent serves as a constant guide towards fairness and positive relations. Management takes seriously its responsibility for maintaining the highest standards of ethics and works closely with staff to insure that this is carried over outside of the workplace. Staff understand that they are representatives of our Board at all times.

Our approach to cultural diversity has been very simple. We’ve learned the importance of respecting the wishes of individuals and their families. Whether it is a religious observance (we learned to have fall dances rather than Halloween dances in deference to the Amish culture) or a less obvious but equally important consideration---that Doug will be off for the week of the Fair (strong agricultural force in this county) we do our very best to accommodate. We’ve made dietary adjustments for a child that due to

religion cannot eat pork, we've provided translators for families, and in short we make every effort to make each individual and family feel welcome and part of our program.

In looking at the Core Indicators for our Board Membership we can easily show that our Board members have attended the required annual trainings—we take advantage of the training opportunities offered by the OACB. Active recruitment for Board members is conducted by our Superintendent. A close examination of the plaque in our front office with all of the past Board member names on it serves as a testament to the effectiveness of the recruiting efforts---we've been blessed with great Board members throughout our history. Ten minutes into any Board meeting in our county though and it is obvious that the Core Indicators here don't really begin to give you a complete sense of our Board. The meetings flow with a true sense of community---these are genuinely nice, caring people with one mission (that's already outlined in Framework Domain III). The members have a clear understanding of their role and take their charge very seriously. Policies and numbers are a part of these meetings, but more importantly are the discussions that evolve out of the members' interest in our people and programs---“how did we address MUI #000?” “how many kids went to the circus?” “how will making this change lead to better services?”. It is evident that each member is truly interested in all aspects of our program. Our Board does an exceptional job of maintaining a true balance of its ultimate role in oversight while imparting very personal touches at an individual level. Each member, through personal, family, or professional experiences lends unique perspective to how we run our program. Their commitment and support have served to inspire, to guide, and to lead us.

Leadership is tested through adversity and change. Like other county boards we've had our share of each—we've had to learn our way around continual funding system changes, new rules, new laws, and are now facing the challenges associated with changing our very identity. We've worked with our Adult Program through the privatization process and have taken on the burden of providing community transportation. Some of our direction is mandated (rules and laws) and other is driven by what is in the best interest of the individuals and families we serve. Our approach to problem solving is very team oriented and each member of the Management Team has the sense that he or she can rely on any other member for support. We won't paint a rosey picture here---each member of the Management Team can be opinionated and outspoken and ready to defend their position, but in the end we always find a way to work together to work through the problems and challenges. Beneath the surface the respect that each member has for the others is apparent. Our Superintendent has used the word Family more than once to describe our Management Team and after the past several months we don't think there would be a more accurate word to describe it.

Like other county board programs we do all of the things that we are supposed to do—we send out an annual survey to individuals, providers, families, and staff. We review the survey carefully looking for gaps or things that we can do better and we develop our Annual Action Plan. But more importantly we listen and we keep listening. Our Superintendent has taken pains to instill this into each member of his Management Team and consequently this funnels through to agency staff. Why we do what we do in our county is dictated by the needs of individuals and their families. Non-mandated services such as Recreation and Special Olympics were developed and continue to operate because individuals and families in our community have asked for these services. We continue to operate two School Age classrooms (also non-mandated) because this is what parents have asked of us. We are facing very tough and uncertain economic times, but through our dedication to the individuals with disabilities and their families we'll continue to develop and manage resources to meet their needs.

Number of eligible individuals with disabilities in our county: 303

Number of individuals that have benefited from this area of excellence: 303