

Documenting Service Encounters with Others

As providers of behavioral health services, we strive to provide the highest quality care to the individuals we serve. One way in which providers substantiate the provision of quality services is through well-written progress notes. While behavioral health providers are generally familiar with the elements that should be evident in progress notes for one-on-one encounters with the people they're serving, they are often less certain about what to include when others are involved in services. When documenting work with others, different information may be needed.

Documenting Service Encounters with Others



When delivering services, there may be times in which you are working with others in addition to the identified service recipient. For example, it may be necessary to meet with a parent while helping a young person improve her coping skills, or talk with a clergy member who is essential in supporting an individual's recovery plan. Involving others is important, especially when it helps meet the needs of the primary individual receiving services.

Just as interactions with individual service recipients require progress notes, interactions with others need to be documented as well. In addition to basic information about what happened and how it related to the treatment goal, progress notes documenting services to supportive "others" should also include information that connects this "other" person back to the primary individual. Specifically, this means including information about the relationship of the "other" person to the primary individual, as well as how the interaction with the supportive "other" will benefit the primary individual. Notes documenting services to supportive "others" should include the following:

- ➔ Goals and objectives addressed from the primary individual's treatment plan.
- ➔ Relationship of the significant support person (e.g. parent, guardian, neighbor, etc.) and details that speak to the supportive role this individual plays.
- ➔ Description of the intervention(s) and how the intervention(s) benefit the individual.
- ➔ The response to the intervention(s) to include the changes that occurred as a result of services provided to the significant support person (e.g. *parents learned and demonstrated new ways of dealing with their child's symptoms or behaviors*)
- ➔ The plan for continued services

Case Scenario – Nathan and his mother Jacqueline

Jacqueline recently sought out community based mental health services for her 9-year-old son, Nathan, who is verbally aggressive at school and home. Jacqueline is concerned that her son's behavior is placing him at risk of being sent to an alternative school. Jacqueline has asked for assistance in managing Nathan's aggressive behaviors and after an initial assessment, it was recommended that Nathan should participate in mental health services to help him eliminate his aggressive behaviors. As part of Nathan's service plan, the mental health provider meets with Jacqueline as well as with Nathan. Below is a note from her recent encounter.

Session Note:

Provider met with Jacqueline in her home. Focus of today’s session was to assist Jacqueline in developing strategies to reduce Nathan’s aggressive behaviors in the home and at school. As Nathan’s parent, Jacqueline’s participation is necessary in helping Nathan learn new skills to manage his emotions. Jacqueline reported Nathan is yelling at his teacher every day in class, and at his mother at home, especially when frustrated. Jacqueline became teary-eyed when discussing these concerns stating these behaviors are negatively impacting their relationship. This writer provided Jacqueline with information on behavioral management techniques and worked with her on developing a behavior chart to increase consistency and follow-through of consequences for the verbal aggression. Jacqueline participated in the creation of the behavior chart and provided feedback on what has worked in the past. Jacqueline appeared unsure about implementing the behavior chart but stated she would do her best. This writer will continue to work with Jacqueline on consistency and implementation of the behavior chart.

Are all the essential elements included in this note? Let’s review

Element	Example
Goals and objectives addressed from the individual’s treatment plan	<i>Focus of today’s session was to assist Jacqueline in developing strategies to reduce Nathan’s aggressive behaviors in the home and at school.</i>
Relationship of the significant support person and details that speak to the supportive role this individual plays	<i>As Nathan’s parent, Jacqueline participation is necessary in helping Nathan acquire new skills.</i>
Description of the intervention(s)	<i>This writer provided Jacqueline with information on behavioral management techniques and worked with her on developing a behavior chart to increase consistency and follow-through of consequences for the verbal aggression.</i>
The response to the intervention(s)	<i>Jacqueline appeared unsure about implementing the behavior chart, but stated she would do her best.</i>
The plan for continued services	<i>This writer will continue to work with Jacqueline on consistency and implementation of the behavior chart.</i>

Practice: Arlo and his friend Lois



Arlo Nelson is a 32-year-old male struggling with heroin addiction. Arlo has been using heroin for about two years, shortly after he was prescribed opioids for back pain. Arlo was recently arrested for stealing and after serving a few months in jail, has decided to seek treatment. He has tried to stop using several times, but says that without a good support system, he relapsed whenever he felt triggered. Developing recovery supports is a goal on his treatment plan. Arlo has identified Lois, a friend, as a potential resource.

Session Note:

Writer had an initial meeting with Lois, an individual that Arlo identified as a potential support person in his recovery. Writer introduced myself and the goal of today’s meeting which is to identify recovery supports for Arlo. Lois indicated that she has known Arlo for the past four years and maintains that prior to his addiction, she and Arlo had been really close friends who could rely on each other for emotional support. She described Arlo as a caring and smart individual. She is saddened to see how his addiction has impacted his life and is willing to support Arlo in his efforts towards recovery. Writer talked with Lois about substance use, addiction, and relapse, and the importance of healthy social supports in managing recovery and preventing relapse. After learning how she can emotionally support Arlo, Lois indicated that she will do her best to support him in his recovery. Writer will schedule a follow up meeting with Lois and Arlo for next week to talk about Lois’s role in Arlo’s relapse prevention plan.

Element	Example
Goals and objectives addressed from the individual’s treatment plan	
Relationship of the significant support person and details that speak to the supportive role this individual plays	
Description of the intervention(s)	
The response to the intervention(s)	
The plan for continued services	

Practice: Josie and Sarah



Josie is a 22-year-old single female who recently obtained custody of her two younger siblings ages 10 and 12. Josie says she is ill-prepared to care for her two younger siblings, which makes her feel anxious and has caused frequent panic attacks. Recently, Josie connected with her therapist to get help managing her feelings of anxiety. Josie mentioned to her therapist that her neighbor, Sarah, has been instrumental in helping her care for the children when she is overwhelmed, and stays with Josie until she is able to calm down. Without Sarah’s support, Josie feels that she would be at risk of losing custody of her siblings and sinking into a “deep dark depression.” In recognition of the critical role that she plays, Sarah has been identified as an important resource in helping Josie accomplish her goal of developing strategies to manage her anxiety and improving her parenting skills.

The therapist meets with Sarah one day to talk with her about how she can support Josie. Use the information above to write a progress note for this interaction (*feel free to use your imagination to fill in needed details*).

Look at Your Own Work



Step 1 Write a progress note for a recent service you provided to a significant support person on behalf of a primary service recipient.

Step 2 Use the information above to make sure you included all the necessary information.

Step 3 Share your progress note with a supervisor or colleague. Ask this person to review your note and provide you with feedback about whether or not your note includes the essential information.

Remember



- Well-written documentation substantiates quality service provision
- Include information about the supportive “other” in progress notes, such as their role and why they are important to the service plan
- Describe how the individual’s behavioral health or mental health goals were addressed through a service to a supportive “other”

This material is to be used for training purposes only. This material is intended to assist helping professionals as they strive to improve the quality of documentation. This information must be understood as a tool for improving documentation, rather than an exhaustive statement of an employer’s legal obligations, which are defined by statute, regulations, and standards. Please consult state guidance documents and state oversight agencies for specific requirements. For more information, please contact ctac.info@nyu.edu.

Answer Key



Practice: Arlo

Arlo Nelson is a 32-year-old male struggling with a heroin addiction. Arlo has been using heroin for about two years, shortly after he was prescribed opioids for back pain. Arlo was recently arrested for stealing and after serving a few months in jail, has decided to seek treatment. He has tried to stop using several times, but says that without a good support system, he relapsed whenever he felt triggered. Developing recovery supports is a goal on his treatment plan. Arlo has identified Lois, a friend as a potential resource.

Session Note:

Writer had an initial meeting with Lois, an individual that Arlo identified as a potential support person in his recovery. Writer introduced myself and the goal of today's meeting which is to identify recovery supports for Arlo. Lois indicated that she has known Arlo for the past four years and maintains that prior to his addiction, she and Arlo had been really close friends who could rely on each other for emotional support. She described Arlo as a caring and smart individual. She is saddened to see how his addiction has impacted his life and is willing to support Arlo in his efforts towards recovery. Writer talked with Lois about substance use, addiction, and relapse, and the importance of healthy social supports in managing recovery and preventing relapse. After learning how she can emotionally support Arlo, Lois indicated that she will do her best to support him in his recovery. Writer will schedule a follow up meeting with Lois and Arlo for next week to talk about Lois's role in Arlo's relapse prevention plan.

Element	Example
Goals and objectives addressed from the individual's treatment plan	<i>Identify recovery supports for Arlo</i>
Relationship of the significant support person and details that speak to the supportive role this individual plays.	<i>Lois indicated that she has known Arlo for the past four years and maintains that prior to his addiction, she and Arlo were really close friends who could rely on each other for emotional supports.</i>
Description of the intervention(s)	<i>Writer talked with Lois about substance use, addiction, and relapse, and the importance of healthy social supports in managing recovery and preventing relapse.</i>
The response to the intervention(s)	<i>After learning how she can emotionally support Arlo, Lois indicated that she will do her best to support him in his recovery.</i>
The plan for continued services	<i>Writer will schedule a follow up meeting with Lois and Arlo for next week to talk about Lois's role in Arlo's relapse prevention plan.</i>

Practice: Josie and Sarah

Josie is a 22-year-old single female who recently obtained custody of her two younger siblings ages 10 and 12. Josie says she is ill-prepared to care for her two younger siblings, which makes her feel anxious and has caused frequent panic attacks. Recently, Josie connected with her therapist to get help managing her feelings of anxiety. Josie mentioned to her therapist that her neighbor, Sarah, has been instrumental in helping her care for the children when she is overwhelmed, and stays with Josie until she is able to calm down. Without Sarah's support, Josie feels that she would be at risk of losing custody of her siblings and sinking into a "deep dark depression." In recognition of the the critical role that she plays, Sarah has been identified as an important resource in helping Josie accomplish her goal of developing strategies to manage her anxiety and improving her parenting skills.

The therapist meets with Sarah one day to talk with her about how she can support Josie. Use the information above to write a progress note for this interaction (*feel free to use your imagination to fill in needed details*).

Writer met with Sarah at her home. Sarah, Josie's neighbor, has been instrumental in helping Josie care for the children, especially when she is feeling overwhelmed. The focus of today's session was to identify ways in which Sarah can continue to support Josie in helping her manage her anxiety as well as helping Josie improve her parenting skills by helping her generalize the skills she is learning to the home environment. Writer provided psychoeducation about anxiety disorders, panic attacks common symptomology, and coping strategies that can assist Josie in managing her symptoms. Sarah and this writer engaged in a role play in which Sarah was taught to provide verbal prompts in an effort to support Josie in the consistent use of her coping skills. This writer also reviewed how Sarah could be helpful in reinforcing Josie's implementation of positive parenting skills. Sarah was very attentive during our meeting and grasped the concepts fairly quickly. This writer scheduled a follow up meeting on 6/19 to review progress and address any concerns.