

The Supports Intensity Scale (SIS) in the Netherlands

A project to implement SIS as the basis for person-centred planning and resource allocation

Recently, the Arduin Foundation started a 3-year pilot to further empower people with intellectual disabilities and family members. We wanted to do this by restructuring the entire organization and dividing it into several units dedicated to specific issues such as employment, home care services, etc. Then we wanted to create an independent Regional Support Bureau where people with intellectual disabilities and families could get help in making decisions about the types and intensities of supports needed, and in evaluating and monitoring supports when they did receive them. We see this as a way of empowering the clients and reducing the power of service providers. At present, Arduin is still one organization, but if this pilot succeeds, the Foundation will be restructured into several independent units.

When we first learned about SIS, we saw the potential for using the instrument in our region to enhance the quality of life of our clients. The SIS is based on the supports paradigm. It is a multidimensional scale designed to determine the pattern and intensity of an individual's support needs. The SIS was designed to (a) assess support needs, (b) determine the intensity of needed supports, (c) monitor progress, and (d) evaluate outcomes of adults with intellectual disabilities. Professionals and families can then provide the person with the supports required to engage in age-appropriate activities in community settings consistent with personal goals and preferences. (Thompson et al. 2004).

At Arduin, the SIS tool will be used to develop individualized, person-centred support plans in keeping with the four-component planning process as suggested by Thompson et al. (2004) in the Supports Intensity Scale User's Manual. These include, (a) identifying a person's desired life experiences and goals, (b) determining the pattern and intensity of an individual's support needs, (c) developing an individual support plan, and (d) monitoring the progress of the plan. This process is conducted by the Regional Support Bureau along with the client. The independent status of this bureau should empower the client and his/her family to choose the services provided by staff.

We developed an electronic version of the SIS in Dutch, and started using SIS with a random sample of 30 clients already served by Arduin as well as new clients starting January 2005. Using SIS, we conducted an interview with the client, family members, and support professionals. All participants were questioned on the person's desired life experiences and goals. Until now, this method has proven very useful, although we had to develop some procedures to get an unambiguous interpretation of the items ranked by the Scale. We conducted a simple validity check by correlating the SIS scores with the levels of intellectual disability and we saw a good correlation.

Further, we developed a formula to translate the SIS scores to a financial allocation model. In the Netherlands, an organization gets paid for the number of clients it serves. The support needs of the individual do not count. On the basis of the SIS results, it appears that it is indeed possible to re-allocate the support budget of the organization in keeping with the individual scores of the client. It also is important to note that the family members who participated in the random sample were very enthusiastic about their involvement in determining the support needs of their child / relative. Compared to the actual Personal Plan method, SIS provides a more complete and refined picture of the support needs of a person. Consequently, it is easier and more effective to evaluate and measure person-referenced outcomes.

At present, we are in the process of interviewing other clients within our organization. By mid-2006, we hope that all clients will have a support plan based on SIS.

About Arduin

Arduin is a Dutch organization providing services for people with intellectual disabilities. First established in 1969, up until about ten years ago, Arduin functioned, under the name 'Vijvervreugd', as a residential care institution, day nursery, and a day care centre serving persons with intellectual disabilities. In 1994, when the organization came under new management, it was clear that quality of care in several respects was insufficient. An independent study done at the time reached the conclusion that 35% of the inhabitants had fallen through the care net and that the agency needed to change its focus. With the help of substantial political pressure and two committees of advice, Vijvervreugd became an independent organization under the new name Arduin, by January 1 1996.

Today, Arduin has become an example of the shift from facility-centred services to a quality of life and individualized supports approach in providing services and supports for persons with intellectual disabilities.

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