

Questions to ask an organization*

When you decide to contact a service organization of any kind, make sure that you are within its catchment area and that you speak with someone who is well informed about the full range of services the organization offers (e.g., an intake worker).

You can certainly tell the staff person about the person's needs, but don't forget the person's strengths and interests. Remember to record the names and phone numbers of the staff members whom you speak to, as well as the dates and the responses. If you aren't getting informed responses, you can always ask to speak with a manager.

The next few pages suggest questions to help you identify what the agency can provide. (The notes in parentheses will help you interpret what you hear.)

- What is your experience with people who have a dual diagnosis? What have been some of your successes and challenges? (The organization is required to work with people who have a dual diagnosis; but you want to know that it has the capacity and interest.)
- How do you define a dual diagnosis? (Compare this with what you know and what you read in this guide.)
- When was the last time you accepted someone with a dual diagnosis into your program?

IF IT'S A MENTAL HEALTH AGENCY

- Are there other people in your program with a developmental disability? How long have they been there? What services do you offer them? If they can't manage the demands of the program, what do you do? How do you adjust your services to meet their needs? How do you communicate with them?

IF IT'S A DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES AGENCY

- Are there people in your program with significant mental health problems? How long have they been there? How comfortable are your staff in responding to them? (Give example of an individual similar to the person you are working with—e.g., hears voices that aren't really there.)
- How do you manage many different types of behavior, including disruptive behaviour? (You need to know how tolerant the environment is so that you can match the person's needs to the environment.)

* Adapted with permission from Concerned Parents of Toronto, Inc. (2002). *Supports & Services Resources Handbook*. Toronto: Author.

- Can your program be tailored to the individual? How do you do that? Give an example of someone who has an individualized program within your agency. (You need to know that the agency is prepared to take an individual approach, rather than assuming that all participants will follow exactly the same routine.)
- How do you decide if more specialized input is needed? (You want the agency to be open to collaboration and to know when to ask for help.)
- Do you have consultants for your program? (You need to know that if there is a knowledge/expertise gap, the organization will call on someone who knows what to do.)
- Are you a member of the Griffin Community Support Network? What role do you play? (If the organization is a member, it will likely have more understanding and knowledge about people who have a dual diagnosis, and will be able to call on the network if it needs help.)
- Do you ever ask for mental health consultations from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health or Surrey Place Centre? If not, would you be open to a consultation from a specialized service that knows this person well?
- What specific training do your staff have to work with people with a dual diagnosis? Do they have any other special training qualifications?
- Do you include families and other supporters in planning services for the person? (You want to be able to stay involved to make sure needed supports are in place.)
- Have you implemented the abuse policy? (This is a multi-agency training response to minimize potential for abuse. It's an important initiative for agencies to be aware of and put in place.)
- What age are most of the people in the program? Do people spend most of their time there, or do you arrange for them to take part in activities outside the program?