



EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES:
EXAMINING LOUISIANA STATE POLICIES AND PRACTICES

FINAL REPORT

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Abstract

The purpose of the Employment Study was to gain an understanding of the state of employment for Louisiana citizens with significant disabilities. To achieve this goal it was necessary to first take stock of and document the availability of services/supports for people with significant disabilities who wish to acquire and maintain integrated, competitive, community-based employment. In addition, this study documented the extent to which available employment services and supports are accessed and received by eligible citizens. Finally, to the extent possible, we determined the relationship between various employment services/supports and outcomes achieved for Louisiana citizens with significant disabilities. The results of the study identified five critical issues affecting the employment of individuals with significant disabilities, including:

- Preparing transition-age youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (ID/DD) for integrated community employment
- Funding concerns
- Access to Supported Employment services
- Quality of Supported Employment services
- Interagency partnerships.

This report includes policy recommendations related to each identified critical issue designed to improve access to employment services/supports and enhance community employment outcomes for Louisiana citizens with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Executive Summary

As a result of this study, we have identified five critical issues identified as being of highest importance to the employment pathways of individuals with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities in the state of Louisiana. Based on the results of this study, it is apparent that we need to increase access to employment services and integrated employment opportunities for all individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities within the state of Louisiana especially those with the most significant disabilities. To this end we offer the following recommendations to address each of the five critical issues identified by this study. Our recommendations are provided below.

Critical Issue #1: Preparing Transition-age Youth with ID/DD for Integrated Community Employment: Focusing On Our Future

Recommendations:

1. Establish, fund, and enforce policies requiring schools and adult service providers to collaborate to ensure students with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities experience paid, integrated community employment *prior to their exit from school*.
2. Statewide data should be collected to identify the employment experiences, supports, and outcomes for transition-age youth with significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (a) while in school and (b) upon exiting school.
3. To achieve seamless transition services, schools should adopt and monitor quality assurance measures to ensure that students' transition plans include paid integrated community employment and career goals; *and* "Adult Service" agencies should

support those plans provided throughout the initial post-school exiting period, or until a new person-centered plan is developed.

Critical Issue #2: Outcomes Reflect Funding

Recommendations:

1. Advocate for increased funding to go into integrated community employment supports and services for persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.
2. Even when properly supported, most people with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities work significantly less than 40 hours per week. Therefore, to make integrated community employment a viable option for many persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities viable, services to support participation in integrated/normalized settings and activities to augment the hours spent working must be created and funded.
3. Without adequate data to document the quality of life enhancing value of supporting all citizens to contribute to society through employment efforts to advocate for fiscal support may prove ineffective. Therefore, we recommend that longitudinal measures of outcomes for those in integrated community employment using quality of life and consumer and family satisfaction measures (as well as traditional employment indicators such as hours worked, wages, benefits, etc.) should be devised and implemented to measure the varied impacts of integrated community employment on persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (see Critical Issue #5, below).

Critical Issue #3: Access to Supported Employment: Focusing on Integrated Community Employment

Recommendations:

1. Establish a common definition for persons with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities for purpose of identifying and tracking access, services, and outcomes for this population across the various funding (e.g., LRS, OCDD/DHH, DOE) and service agencies (e.g., Community Rehab Providers, Waiver service providers, School programs) responsible for providing employment supports and services to members of this group (see Critical Issue #5, below).
2. Establish and enforce policies that require employment service providers to actually place and support persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in integrated community employment for a sufficient period of time to determine the person's support needs (e.g., one month) prior to making the determination that the person can't be successful in integrated community employment.
3. Establish a means to accurately identify and track the number of persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities who are, and are not, receiving employment supports and services in integrated community employment settings.
4. Supported Employment providers should be required to include the option of post employment services in their manual material with a standard method outlined for reimbursement. Once this option is included in Supported Employment manual

material, providers as well as counselors should be trained on how to use, access, or authorize this resource for discrete, post closure needs.

Critical Issue #4: Quality of Supported Employment: Ensuring that Employment Support Providers are Adequately Trained, Supported, and Compensated

Recommendations:

1. Identify who will be training, monitoring, supporting, and providing professional development to “OCDD” supported employment providers. Currently, LRS does this with their Supported Employment vendors but does not do this for OCDD and Waiver funded personnel who may be providing Supported Employment services in the future.
2. Establish core competencies for Employment Support providers and secondary transition teachers and paraprofessionals (LRS currently has competencies identified; other competencies could be adopted from the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE), or a number of other sources). This recommendation is related to Critical Issue # 5, below.
3. To recruit and maintain a viable workforce, policies and funding should be provided to establish incentives/rewards for persons obtaining skills/demonstrating competencies in the area of providing Employment Support services.

Critical Issue #5: Interagency collaborative: Focusing on partnerships

Recommendations:

- 1) Establish common vision, values, and goals related to paid, integrated community employment among partner agencies as basis for interagency agreement(s).
- 2) Strengthen the working relationship between partners by, for example

- a. identifying where services are coordinated and where they not
 - b. establishing formal lines of communication between agencies
 - c. requiring partners to publicly state their fiscal contribution and/or other commitments to achieving common goals espoused in the interagency agreement(s)
- 3) Adopt a statewide, universally used definition of employment to promote understanding among funding agencies, service agencies, users of employment support services, and advocacy groups. In addition, clear definitions of significant disabilities would also promote clearer communication within and among groups.
 - 4) Identify a recommended series of trainings for employment specialists and job coaches targeting established competencies.
 - 5) Identify organizations and/or individuals qualified to provide competency-based Employment Support service provider trainings using Louisiana policies, examples, and reflective of regional needs to establish and sustain qualified personnel within the state.

**SECTION 1: Critical Issues Affecting Employment of Individuals
with Significant Disabilities**

Critical Issues in Employment

The overarching purpose of the Employment Study was to gain an understanding of the state of employment for Louisiana citizens with significant disabilities. To achieve this understanding it was necessary to first take stock of and document the availability of services/supports for people with significant disabilities who wish to acquire and maintain integrated, competitive, community-based employment. In addition, this study documented the extent to which available employment services and supports are accessed and received by eligible citizens. Finally, to the extent possible, we determined the relationship between various employment services/supports and outcomes achieved for Louisiana citizens with significant disabilities. Collectively, these data provided the basis for policy recommendations to improve access to employment services/supports and enhance community employment outcomes for Louisiana citizens with significant disabilities.

Method

A policy study was conducted of statewide agencies engaged in creating legislation, regulations, position statements, or opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities in the work force. Policy studies include both a component of policy analysis and a component of program evaluation (Weimer & Vining, 2004). By selecting statewide legislation, regulations, position statements by advocacy groups, and tracking the actual demographics of individuals served or not served by these policies, we evaluated the current policies and established programs to identify where gaps, barriers, or supports lie. In addition, a complete review of the literature was conducted to offer a broader, national perspective of current, evidence-based practices in the employment venue for individuals with significant disabilities (see Section 2, p. 29). All documents reviewed are publicly accessible. Confidentiality is not an issue for this study.

For the purpose of this study, the following employment policies related to eligibility determinations, supports, and actual services offered (duration, frequency, etc) of the following agencies were reviewed.

- State Rehabilitation
 - Louisiana Rehabilitation Services
 - Louisiana Rehabilitation Council's State Plan
 - Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (Work Pays)
 - Department of Labor (basic statistics, programs)
 - The Governor's Office for Disability Affairs
- Community Rehabilitation
 - Statewide Independent Living Councils

- Training Agencies
 - Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (policies, trainings, positions)
 - APSE (APSE training standards and policies, workshops, & trainings)
 - UNT—Technical Assistance Center (training offerings, focus on significant disabilities, types of courses)

- Advocacy Agencies to include:
 - The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council
 - The Advocacy Center
 - The ARC of Louisiana
 - La Citizens for Action Now

In addition to these published agency documents, several other documents were reviewed. Also included were results from the 2009 Annual Supported Employment Project Report, results from the 2009 Community Living Ombudsman Survey-Phase 1, results from the 2009 APSE Statewide Employment Provider survey, and early findings from the ongoing Employment Consortium Project at LSUHDC.

Exploring Louisiana State Employment Policies and Practices: Critical Issues

According to (<http://www.bls.gov/web/laumstch.htm>), in October 2008 the

unemployment rate in Louisiana was 5.5% . In October 2009 the same source cited the unemployment rate as 7.4% resulting in a 1.9% change. With more individuals in the current labor pool, individuals with significant developmental disabilities could potentially be overlooked and contribute to the decline of Louisiana's employment outcomes. In 2006, there were a reported number of 185,478 working-age (16-64) individuals with an intellectual disability of which only 44,755 were employed (Butterworth, Smith, Hall, Migliore, & Winsor, 2008). These statistics do not disclose the severity of the intellectual disability. In 2007, Louisiana's rehabilitation rate for individuals with intellectual disabilities was 42%, falling well short of the national average of 60% (Butterworth et al., 2008). Additionally, in 2007, OCDD served 4,139 persons of which only 1,405 (34%) of these were served in integrated employment settings while 2,656 (64%) were served in facility-based work or facility-based non work environments (Butterworth et al., (2008). It is important to note that these data include individuals with mild intellectual disabilities as well as individuals with more significant intellectual disabilities. Because severity of disability is not reported in the data, we cannot be sure how many individuals with significant intellectual disabilities were included in these counts. Either way, the numbers reflect poor outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities (mild or significant).

Critical Issue #1: Preparing transition-age youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (ID/DD) for integrated community employment: Focusing On Our Future

The passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, P.L. 101-476) and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 provided a definition of transition. The various reauthorizations continue to demonstrate their commitment for transition to post school outcomes, yet a void remains in the area of employment in the secondary educational experience and in post school years which current legislation will not alter. We continue to provide transition and post school services in ways that do not necessarily promote employment.

Louisiana Outcomes

LRS transition data for all LRS transition-age youth consumers show that the employment outcomes for its transition population decreased from 602 in FY 2003 to 381 in FY 2007, resulting in a decrease in the employment rate of 53.6 percent down to 44 percent over this period. The percent of transition-age youth served by LRS decreased from 32.4 in FY 2002 to 21.5 percent in FY 2007. It is unknown how many of these transition-age youth consumers are individuals with significant disabilities.

Participants in the Employment Consortium, an ongoing project with LSUHDC, report difficulty with transition services from high school to employment/adult agencies. All of the participants are in their twenties and graduated from high school within the past decade. None of the participants had open LRS cases upon graduation from high school. When joining the project, three of the five participants either had no open LRS case or had been determined ineligible for services.

Current Louisiana Efforts

LRS has initiated projects to combat the decrease in transition-age youth being served and attaining successful employment outcomes over the past five years. A major initiative throughout the country has been efforts aimed at serving transition-age youth. LRS currently has existing local cooperative agreements with the 65 parishes and 4 special schools systems in Louisiana. LRS has designated transition coordinators to each of the 8 LRS regions. Having designated transition coordinators demonstrates the commitment to working with high schools to provide seamless transitions to post-school environments for youth with disabilities. One specific initiative taking place in the Houma-Thibodaux area is the pilot program “Bridging the Gap”. This initiative provides training and job placement services to students during their exit year. Also, a regional transition core team was formed to ensure the successful linkage of transition-age youth with disabilities and appropriate adult agencies. Further, LRS plans to form more regional teams throughout the state as part of the state transition plan. Another pilot initiative (Lafayette region) designed to provide training to transition-age youth during their exit year is the “*Pathways to Success*” project. This project was developed in 2008 utilizing needs assessment data to identify skills needed for the transition-age population. While many efforts have been made to advance the overall mission of transition to post-secondary employment, barriers still remain.

Barriers

- (1) Despite current efforts to combat negative employment trends, transition initiatives are only in place for a few regions in Louisiana;
- (2) The two recognized projects outlined in the 2009 LRS State Plan both provide services only within the **exit year** of the students. Existing literature suggest that active VR

participation prior to their exit year (i.e., age 14 or earlier) in providing service consistently leads to better post-school outcomes;

- (3) LRS has not conducted any Quality Assurance activities related to the transition program to determine the scope and nature of outcomes and make changes to improve.
- (4) According the 2008 RSA State Monitoring Report, LRS are not initiating new projects targeting transition-age youth due to the fiscal constraints and the reduction in the state fiscal 2009 budget; however, will be considered in the future.
- (5) No identified initiatives center on youth with significant disabilities in developing, securing, or maintaining employment.
- (6) While regional VR counselors do provide supports for transition, those supports are delivered primarily during a student's **exit** year of high school. Students with significant disabilities require job development, shaping, and training many years prior to their exit year. Providers, school personnel as well as LRS, need to rethink the point at which employment is sought for youth with significant disabilities. Students who begin working at a real job and or have real community based training opportunities in true community environments (not school) before exiting high school are far more likely to experience successful post school employment (White & Weiner, 2004).

Recommendations:

1. Establish, fund, and enforce **policies requiring schools and adult service providers to collaborate** to ensure students with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities experience paid, integrated community employment ***prior to their exit from school.***

2. Statewide data should be collected to **identify** the **employment experiences**, **supports**, and **outcomes** for transition-age youth with significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (a) **while in school** and (b) **upon exiting** school.

Currently, there is no clear data on the outcomes for this population within the LRS system.
3. To **achieve seamless transition** services, schools should adopt and monitor quality assurance measures to ensure that students' transition plans include paid integrated community employment and career goals as well as consideration of post-secondary education and community living preferences; ***and*** "Adult Service" agencies should support those plans provided throughout the initial post-school exiting period, or until a new person-centered plan is developed. Quality assurance measures should be put in place to determine the scope and nature of outcomes of individual's transition plans.

Critical Issue #2: Outcomes Reflect Funding

Louisiana had \$21,084,000 total employment services funding for all ID/DD agencies services with only \$7,788,000 (38%) going to integrated employment funding (http://www.statedata.info/charts/trends_2.php?agency=agency_mrdd&state=LA&vars=Total+funding&vars=employment+money&variable1=Total+funding&variable2=employment+money&chartType=bar). The remainder of this funding was spent on facility based work and non-work options (62%). The funding data (38% integrated employment/62% facility based & non-work options) closely parallels the actual distribution of work experiences for individuals with ID/DD (34% in integrated employment/ 64% in facility based & non-work options). Clearly, the percentage of dollars spent to support an area of vocational experiences matches the number of individuals placed in those experiences. This data demonstrates that state, county and local ID/DD dollars are not trending towards integrated employment. This raises concerns about the clarity of the service system's goals for community employment.

Barriers

The disproportionate use of funding distributed between integrated employment and facility based/non-work options clearly promotes outcomes that reflect the funding base. Over two-thirds of all funding in this area is spent on facility based & non-work options, which produced over two thirds of individuals served by OCDD supported in facility based/non-work options.

Recommendations:

1. Advocate for increased funding to go into integrated community employment supports and services for persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

2. Even when properly supported, most people with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities work significantly less than 40 hours per week. Therefore, to make integrated community employment a viable option for many persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities viable, services to support participation in integrated/normalized settings and activities to augment the hours spent working must be created and funded.
3. Without adequate data to document the quality of life enhancing value of supporting all citizens to contribute to society through employment efforts to advocate for fiscal support may prove ineffective. Therefore, we recommend that longitudinal measures of outcomes for those in integrated community employment using quality of life and consumer and family satisfaction measures (as well as traditional employment indicators such as hours worked, wages, benefits, etc.) should be devised and implemented to measure the varied impacts of integrated community employment on persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Critical Issue #3: Access to Supported Employment: Focusing on Integrated Community Employment

“Despite numerous national and state policies promoting integrated employment, 76% of adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities are served in facility-based, segregated programs - usually work activity centers or sheltered workshops” (President’s Committee, 2004). This trend is supported by the fact that Louisiana committed approximately one-third (i.e., \$7,788,000) of total funding for all ID/DD agencies services to integrated employment funding in the most recent fiscal year for which data were available. The remainder of funding was spent on facility based work and non-work options. If access to Supported Employment for people with the most significant intellectual and developmental disabilities is a priority in Louisiana- then the majority of funding should be directed toward achieving this goal.

Louisiana Outcomes

In 2006, there were a reported number of 185,478 working-age (16-64) individuals with an intellectual disability of which only 44,755 were employed (Butterworth, Smith, Hall, Migliore, & Winsor, 2008). In 2007, Louisiana’s rehabilitation rate for individuals with intellectual disabilities was 42%, falling well short of the national average of 60% (Butterworth et al., 2008). As reported earlier, in 2007, OCDD served 4,139 persons of which only 1,405 of these were served in integrated employment settings while 2,656 were served in facility-based work or facility-based non work environments (Butterworth et al., (2008). In FY2007, LRS served 12,263 individuals and closed 4,030 individuals after receiving services. 2,378 were closed successfully, of those only 83 achieved a supported employment outcome (Butterworth et al., 2008), a decrease from 110 reported in FY 2006.

This finding is supported by the recent Community Living Ombudsman Survey (CLOP) (2009). The CLOP survey was distributed to approximately 4000 individuals living in group homes with the intent to gain a better understanding the residents' daily activities. As of 9/23/09, the first round results indicated that of the 2, 428 respondents, only 50 residents reported that they were in a supported employment situation. 325 respondents reported they "have a job." However, 1,886 residents responded that they attended a day program of some type. When asked "...what would you prefer to do?" 473 of the 644 responding to that question answered 'work' or 'train for a job.' These results parallel the numbers cited above. They also indicate that individuals with disabilities have a keen interest in working even when their current situation does not support that. More residents responded that they were interested in working or being trained to work (473) than currently have a job (325) (Rowe, J., *personal communication*, September 23, 2009).

Similarly, participants in the Employment Consortium project reflect similar outcomes. At the beginning of the project, none of the five participants had secured integrated employment. However, all five participants held volunteer positions, with most volunteer experiences occurring in settings predominately occupied by others with disabilities.

Current Louisiana Efforts

Several years ago OCDD embarked upon the process of designing and obtaining approval for a special waiver, ostensibly to support employment related services for people with the most significant disabilities. Recently, this waiver was approved- although Medicaid requirements resulted in the waiver being broader than originally envisioned. The waiver provides a means for shifting services from facility-based/non-work focus to integrated community employment. However, a note of caution is required. It should be recognized that if the same support workers

who provided services in facility-based/non-work settings are now charged with supporting the same consumers in integrated community employment- that significant values clarification and competency-based training will be required to achieve the desired outcomes.

It appears that LRS has scaled back their focus on increasing both access to and quality of Supported Employment services due to funding concerns (see Critical Issue #4, below). It is unclear if this is a temporary or long-term shift in focus. As previously stated, it is encouraging to see OCDD engage in the process of shifting employment services from primarily facility-based/non-work to integrated community-based options. However, this development in no way minimizes the important role of LRS in increasing access to and quality of Supported Employment for persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities.

Barriers

- (1) The issue of access has many components. First, due largely to definitional issues, it is difficult to determine the extent to which persons accessing LRS funded Supported Employment services experience the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. As in many other states, with currently available data it is not possible to state whether or not some persons who receive (LRS funded) Supported Employment services do not actually require this resource intense service. Anecdotal evidence does exist that this does happen at times. If Supported Employment services are being accessed by persons who do not require this intense (and expensive service) it means that persons with truly significant disabilities are left with even fewer resources to address their complex and pervasive needs. This situation would further diminish access of individuals with the most significant disabilities to Supported Employment; a service that was developed and funded to support people with the most significant disabilities.

- (2) Because most people with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities work far fewer than 40 hours per week, even with appropriate supports/services- additional services are required to provide these individuals access to integrated and normalized activities. Failure to address the “non-work” part of the person’s day creates an obstacle for the individual and his family/care-providers which may result in the person having to choose between rejecting employment, or spending part of his day in an integrated setting and the rest of his day in a segregated setting- or perhaps worse still, with no services at all.
- (3) Access may be limited by knowledge and values of LRS counselors and/or Supported Employment vendors. The Vocational Rehabilitation system places a premium on “return to work” outcomes. For many people with the most significant disabilities- working at, or near, the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) – defined strictly in terms of dollars earned- may not be attainable. This year SGA is set at nearly \$1,000 per month. As a result, an individual LRS counselor with a very large case load may have a disincentive for opening or maintaining an open case for a person with a significant disability, for whom obtaining the SGA level of earned income (currently about \$1,000 per month) may not be feasible, and thus the likelihood of achieving a successful employment outcome are low. In addition, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), or LRS approved Supported Employment providers may also experience disincentives for taking on an individual with complex needs- who may not achieve a high, or even moderate level of income even when provided supported employment services. These systemic and financial disincentives represent huge barriers to increasing access to Supported Employment services person with the most significant intellectual and/or

developmental disabilities. Succinctly, data from the SECIP project documents that LRS counselors and CRPs have concerns about the milestone system in which LRS operates (see Table 2).

- (4) Both LRS and OCDD leadership have expressed interest in blending their two systems to allow optimal use of resources to increase access to Supported Employment services. However, to date, much remains to be done to operationalize the manner in which these two systems will best work together. Coordination between LRS funded Supported Employment services, OCDD Supports Waiver funded employment services, and other potential support partners is largely lacking.

To following example is provided to illustrate one specific issue. Data from the SECIP project revealed that in some regions LRS counselors do not provide extended employment services in supported employment at the time of closure. Therefore, at the point of transition to extended services, individuals do not receive the necessary supports to maintain employment, resulting in loss of employment and return to LRS for additional services. The Counselor can provide short-term post-employment services (refer to Part 416 of the Technical Assistance and Guidance Manual) for individuals in Supported Employment if such services are necessary to maintain the Consumer's job placement that are not provided as ongoing extended services”¹ However, there is currently no mechanism in place through which post-employment services can be effectively authorized for payment statewide.

- (5) Ticket to Work (TTW) is a program designed by the Social Security Administration’s Office of Employment Supports in conjunction with the US Department of Labor. This

¹ Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) Chapter 4 Technical Assistance and Guidance Manual Part 412 Services Section 14 Supported Employment Services, Page 18, IX.A. (October 15, 2007)

program is designed to provide incentives to individuals with disabilities to work, or work more- and as a result go off the cash benefit portion of SSA. As of July, 2009, only eight (8) of LRS's Supported Employment providers statewide had the *capacity* to provide services and receive Ticket to Work funding, e.g. they are registered Employment Networks.² Unfortunately, even for these established Employment Networks, without implementing the Partnership Plus option *OR* receiving a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) from LRS, TTW funding is not easily obtained. In addition, providers can only access this source of funding if the individual's case is closed through LRS with earnings at the Substantial Gainful Activity Level measured by net income for the first 12-18 months and then gross income thereafter. Most folks with significant support needs will not reach those income limits; therefore service providers will not be incentivized to use the TTW program. The net result is that TTW may have a positive impact on returning folks with disabilities to work- but it appears unlikely that TTW will end up being a major driver in increasing access to Supported Employment services for people with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Table 2

TTW Partnership Plus
EN Milestone-Outcome Payment System (2009 figures)*

Payment Type	Beneficiary Earnings	EN Payment per SSDI Ticket Holder	EN Payment per SSI Ticket Holder
Phase 1 Milestones			
Milestone 1	\$350 for one calendar month	\$1, 211	\$1, 211
Milestone 2	\$700/mo. x 3 mos. w/in 6 mos. (cumulative)	\$1, 211	\$1, 211
Milestone 3	\$700/mo. x 6 mos. w/in 12	\$1, 211	\$1, 211

² Retrieved from "Your Ticket to Work" at <http://www.yourtickettowork.com/endir?action=state&state=LA&Find=Find> on August 16, 2009

	mos. (cumulative)		
Milestone 4	\$700/mo. x 9 mos. w/in 18 mos. (cumulative)	\$1, 211	\$1, 211
Total Potential Phase 1 Milestones		\$4,844	\$4,844
Phase 2 Milestones	Gross Earnings > SGA (\$980/\$1640)**	\$363 a month for up to 11 months	\$207 a month for up to 18 months
		\$363 x 11 = \$3,993	\$207 x 18 = \$3,726
Total Potential Phase 1 + 2 Milestones		\$8,837	\$8,570
Monthly Outcome Payments (Phase 3)	Earnings > SGA (\$980/\$1640/month)** and federal cash benefit = \$0	\$363 a month for up to 36 months	\$207 a month for up to 60 months
		\$363 x 36 = \$13,068	\$207 x 60 = \$12,420
Total Potential Milestone and Outcome Payments		\$21,905	\$20,990

* The payment rate in effect at the time the Milestone or Outcome is attained is the rate that will be paid for that particular month, regardless of when the payment request is submitted.

** The 2009 monthly SGA amounts are \$980 for non-blind and \$1,640 for blind individuals.

Recommendations

Recommendations:

1. Establish a common definition for persons with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities for purpose of identifying and tracking access, services, and outcomes for this population across the various funding (e.g., LRS, OCDD/DHH, DOE) and service agencies (e.g., Community Rehab Providers, Waiver service

- providers, School programs) responsible for providing employment supports and services to members of this group (see Critical Issue #5, below).
2. Establish and enforce policies that require employment service providers to actually place and support persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in integrated community employment for a sufficient period of time to determine the person's support needs (e.g., one month) prior to making the determination that the person can't be successful in integrated community employment.
 3. Establish a means to accurately identify and track the number of persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities who are, and are not, receiving employment supports and services in integrated community employment settings.
 4. Supported Employment providers should be required to include the option of post employment services in their manual material with a standard method outlined for reimbursement. Once this option is included in Supported Employment manual material, providers as well as counselors should be trained on how to use, access, or authorize this resource for discrete, post closure needs.

Critical Issue #4: Quality of Supported Employment: Ensuring that Employment Support Providers are Adequately Trained, Supported, and Compensated

A 2009 statewide survey conducted by the La APSE chapter in partnership with the Human Development Center, job coaches and employment specialists identified training needs for their profession across the state. Employment specialists and job coaches identified the lack of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities as one of the largest barriers to finding or developing the right job for individuals with disabilities. Also identified as a barrier was finding job leads and making cold calls to employers. These findings suggest that more training should be done with those serving individuals with disabilities in creating job opportunities. In addition, the application of funding to integrated employment outcomes should be beneficial in creating additional opportunities.

As previously stated, it is encouraging to see OCDD engage in the process of shifting employment services from primarily facility-based/non-work to integrated community-based options. However, this development now creates the need for large scale values clarification and competency training for those workers who previously supported individuals with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in facility-based/non-work settings. To ensure quality Supported Employment for persons with the most significant intellectual and/or developmental disabilities will require a major investment in (re) training and maintaining a professional workforce equipped to achieve the outcomes we seek.

Current Louisiana Efforts

In 2006, LRS contracted with LSU HSC, Human Development Center (LSUHDC) to implement a Supported Employment Continuous Improvement Project (SECIP). SECIP was designed to implement a best-practices approach to providers of supported employment services

Paid for in part by Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council

thereby hoping to increase the successful use of supported employment services. From 2006-2009, the SECIP project provided continuing professional development to supported employment providers across the state. No replacement strategy to ensure that CRPs continue to have opportunities for professional development has been identified by LRS.

Plans to train the workforce of facility-based and non-work programs may be under way at OCDD. However, at the time of the writing of this report it is unclear what values clarification and community employment support competencies are being adopted- or who will provide the training and attest to the competence of the workers whose job responsibilities will dramatically change as a result of the adoption of the Supports Waiver- and the philosophy that undergirds it.

Barriers:

1. There is a lack of licensing requirements for supported employment services provided by providers who are not LRS vendors. Since DHH and DSS no longer require licensing of stand-alone supported employment programs, LRS site reviews are the only mechanism through which oversight may occur. Furthermore, there is no written agreement that compels LRS to provide oversight to providers who are not LRS approved vendors. To the extent that persons with significant ID/DD will rely on services from OCDD funded providers rather than LRS funded providers there is no clear plan for providing oversight of these providers, or ensuring that such workers are adequately trained, supported, and provided ongoing professional development opportunities to serve persons whom even LRS has not provided the highest level of access to community employment services/supports.

2. LRS has not identified replacement strategy to provide CRPs with continuous improvement activities and continuing professional development.
3. Large scale change such as the changes that will result for workers at here-to-for facility-based/non-work programs will almost certainly result in resistance and in extreme cases sabbatoge by workers who were comfortable with their previous work responsibilities/expectations.

Recommendations:

1. Identify who will be training, monitoring, supporting, and providing professional development to “OCDD” supported employment providers. Currently, LRS does this with their Supported Employment vendors but does not do this for OCDD and Waiver funded personnel who may be providing Supported Employment services in the future.
2. Establish core competencies for Employment Support providers and secondary transition teachers and paraprofessionals (LRS currently has competencies identified, other competencies could be adopted from the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE), or a number of other sources). This recommendation is related to Critical Issue # 5, below.
3. To recruit and maintain a viable workforce, policies and funding should be provided to establish incentives/rewards for persons obtaining skills/demonstrating competencies in the area of providing Employment Support services.
4. Strong messages from the State and local administration of programs will be required to convince some workers that if they want to continue to work at a particular agency

they will need to acquire a new set of skills and competencies- and will have to adopt a “community employment” orientation and philosophy.

Critical Issue #5: Interagency Collaborative: Focusing on Partnerships

A network of identified interagency collaboration and interagency agreements exists in Louisiana. The 2009 LRS State Plan indicated that LRS continues to have cooperative agreements with the Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Mental Health, and Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD). LRS plans to expand interagency agreements with other community or state organizations such as SSA, Workforce Development Commission, Employment Network of Louisiana, Associations for Citizens with Disabilities, State Department of Education, Independent Living Centers, and other volunteer organizations. LRS also plans to work with employers through various established networks, such as the Business Leadership Network. For the last five years, LRS has partnered with the Louisiana Department of Health & Hospitals' Medicaid Purchase Plan and the Louisiana Business Leadership Network to offer free statewide job fairs specifically for citizens with disabilities. The goals of these job fairs are to bridge the needs of the business community with the employment needs of citizens with disabilities who are job-ready and looking for work. The nine regional job fairs enabled more than 1,400 job seekers to connect with 155 businesses and 21 resource groups. The fairs included booths from a number of community partners who provide resources and services to individuals with disabilities. However, it is unclear how many of the participants in these fairs are individuals with significant disabilities. Those numbers are not reported. LRS Management Staff has appointed a Core Team consisting of personnel at LRS State Office to assure that LRS' VR Program has a coordinated and unified statewide system in place consistent with the National VR Business Network.

LRS has worked collaboratively with the Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) to conduct a readiness pilot project in one region that emphasizes a convergence of LRS and LWC

to develop a model that targets the VR program's consumers ready to begin employment. These consumers are strategically matched with the available job-openings from LWC's job bank of employers. Also, LRS is currently partnering with PRIDE Industries, a national service company with a mission to create jobs for people with disabilities. This partnership consists of an effort to fill more than 60 contract jobs at Fort Polk with pay rates ranging from \$9.17 to \$18.54 and include full benefits. Again, it is unclear as to whether or not any of these positions have targeted or been filled by individuals with significant disabilities.

Since April 2009, the LRS-CRP Program Coordinator for supported employment has been partnering with the SSA hiring initiative that involves the hiring of 5000-6000 persons with disabilities for a variety of positions throughout the country. The State Plan indicated that LRS has received and forwarded 28 applications to the SSA regarding these available positions. It is not clear that any of the applications forwarded are from individuals with significant disabilities.

These are just a few noteworthy partnerships that exist within the state. Although some partnerships exist, advancing the outcomes in integrated employment for individuals with significant disabilities does not seem to be a priority of any of these partnerships. Even though these partnerships exist, there is a pronounced lack of cross-agency training efforts, data sharing, and accountability checks for many of these initiatives remains. Although interagency agreements exist, it is difficult to track in practice where these interagency services and programs are implemented on a statewide level. More difficult to track is the number of individuals with significant disabilities that are currently benefitting from such efforts.

Barriers:

While interagency agreements can be identified, lack of substantial, statewide data was identified on the impact on services and programs for individuals with significant disabilities as a result of these interagency agreements.

Additionally, OCDD, LRS and public schools define significant disabilities differently. Each group has historically placed different parameters around the meaning and importance of providing employment supports to persons with the most significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. This makes it virtually impossible to track outcomes for individuals with significant intellectual/developmental disabilities across the three key partners. Finally, these three partners do not have a long history of working collaboratively on the same issue, let alone sharing resources to address a common goal.

Recommendations:

- 1) Establish common vision, values, and goals related to paid, integrated community employment among partner agencies as basis for interagency agreement(s).
- 2) Strengthen the working relationship between partners by, for example:
 - a. identifying where services are coordinated and where they not
 - b. establishing formal lines of communication between agencies
 - c. requiring partners to publicly state their fiscal contribution and/or other commitments to achieving common goals espoused in the interagency agreement(s)
- 3) Adopt a statewide, universally used definition of employment to promote understanding among funding agencies, service agencies, users of employment support services, and

advocacy groups. In addition, clear definitions of significant disabilities would also promote clearer communication within and among groups.

- 4) Identify a recommended series of trainings for employment specialists and job coaches targeting established competencies.
- 5) Identify organizations and/or individuals qualified to provide competency-based Employment Support service provider trainings using Louisiana policies, examples, and reflective of regional needs to establish and sustain qualified personnel within the state.

Section II: A Review of State and National Policies and Practices

Introduction

In recent years, the emergence of supported employment has developed further opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities beyond segregated environments (Rogan, Novak, Mank, & Martin, 2002). Supported employment initiatives have been central to the community employment movement for citizens with significant disabilities. With the emergence of supported employment providers, services, and funding has come the unintended outcomes of an increase of individuals with disabilities entering segregated work settings (Novak, Rogan, Mank, & DiLio, 2003). Nationally, there are roughly as many people in supported employment as sheltered settings, resulting in four times as much spending on sheltered settings than that spent on supported employment (Rusch & Braddock, 2004). In addition, the majority of those employed continue to access jobs in the same fields (i.e., janitorial, maintenance, food service) since the inception of supported employment services. Moreover, most individuals with significant disabilities are working less than 20 hours/week, with average earnings just over \$100.00 per week, and no benefits (e.g., paid leave, health insurance) (Boeltzig, Gilmore, & Butterworth, 2006; Cameto & Levine, 2005). The study by Boeltzig et. al. revealed that 10% of individuals with significant disabilities in competitive employment positions spend some of their time in either sheltered employment or a non-work setting (i.e., day training) to fill their days because they do not have a full schedule at their competitive jobs (2007). Indeed, “despite numerous national and state policies promoting integrated employment, 76% of adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities are served in facility-based, segregated programs - usually work activity centers or sheltered workshops” (Braddock, Hemp, Rozzolo, 2004).

Comparison to employment for the general population provides a stark contrast to the employment of people with disabilities. Of the general population, 78% are employed while 37% of individuals with developmental disabilities are employed (National Organization on Disability, 2004). To further the divide, Maag (2006) reports a significant difference in median family income for those with a disability versus those without a disability (\$26,100 versus \$39,700). Since the early 1990s, the labor market activity rates for working age people with developmental disabilities has been consistently declining, (1991 – 37.1%; 1996 – 33.6%; 2001 – 32.3%; 2004 – 27.5%) (Houtenville, 2007). The critical need for employing individuals with disabilities is well established. As a result, there has been a long-standing commitment to employment services for adults with developmental disabilities (Migliore & Butterworth, 2008).

Novak and her colleagues (2003) suggest that the increase in both community and segregated outcomes demonstrate two competing philosophies from states that often result in intricate service delivery practices and ultimately poor outcomes for individuals with developmental disabilities. Employment systems, policies, and services vary from state to state. It is critical that individual states implement effective policies and practices and/or amend current ones to maximize community-based outcomes for citizens with the most significant disabilities (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1998). Still recovering from the economic fallout resulting from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita compounded by the national economic crisis, Louisiana remains at a critical precipice where efficient and effective employment systems must increase competitive employment opportunities and outcomes, especially for individuals with developmental disabilities. To aid in that mission, the Louisiana State University Human Development Center was charged by the Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council to conduct a study identifying the current practices, advances, and barriers to the employment of

individuals with significant developmental disabilities in the state of Louisiana. Specifically, this study examined Louisiana's current employment related policies and initiatives intended to increase successful employment outcomes and fill in existing gaps within the Louisiana service delivery system for individuals with significant developmental disabilities.

The purpose of this study was three fold. First, to document the availability of services and supports for people with developmental disabilities who wish to acquire and maintain integrated, competitive, community-based employment. Second, to document the extent to which available employment supports and services are accessed by individuals with developmental disabilities determined eligible. Third, to the extent possible using available documents and policies, to determine the relationship between various employment services and supports to outcomes achieved for individuals with significant developmental disabilities.

To meet this purpose, a policy analysis of statewide annual reports to include agency and project reports, national data sets on employment and employment services, and results of two statewide surveys were analyzed. Data from these sources were analyzed across sources to identify mutually acknowledged barriers and advances in the areas of employment of individuals with significant disabilities in Louisiana's current employment efforts. Additionally, studies discussing successful initiatives from other states and the existing literature on employment policy and practices for citizens with developmental disabilities were reviewed. To conclude, the authors make recommendations addressing identified barriers based on best practices literature in the area of transition and employment.

Legislation Impacting Individuals with Significant Disabilities

Despite the poor outcomes for individuals with disabilities, there is a strong history of legislative mandates to ensure availability of quality services (as shown in Table 1). For example, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112) extended civil rights to people with disabilities by mandating equal opportunity (Section 503) and nondiscrimination (Section 504) in public workplaces and educational settings. The Rehabilitation Act was the initial piece of legislation that focused on self sufficiency and full participation of individuals with disabilities into mainstream society (Miglone & Butterworth, 2008). The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 (P.L. 99-506) defined supported employment for state Vocational Rehabilitation programs and encouraged interagency cooperation between Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies to promote more effective services (Miglone & Butterworth, 2008). The Policy Statement of the Rehabilitation Act provides a solid foundation of key principles to guide the field of rehabilitation: self-determination, equal access, inclusion, full and partial participation, and support for individual and systemic advocacy community involvement. This foundation aims to “direct all programs, projects, and activities receiving assistance under the Act to be carried out in a manner consistent with the principle” (Rogan et al., pg 49). Most recently, *Olmstead v L.C.* (1998) echoed the sentiment of inclusive services by stating integrated employment outcomes (e.g., competitive employment, individual supported employment, group supported employment, and self-employment related supports) to be the preferred outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Also, in 2001, President Bush enacted the New Freedom Initiative, a nationwide initiative set forth to remove barriers for individuals with disabilities and promote community based employment. However, despite continued efforts such as a strong legislation and an increase in public investment to combat the static employment rate for individuals with

disabilities—employment efforts for this population remain weak and unstable. Although the presence of legislation provides recourse to individuals with disabilities willing to challenge agencies, employers, and others who do not follow the law, the mere presence of the law does not appear to be enough to ensure integrated employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities.

Table 1

Legislation that impacts the Social and Economic Participation for Individuals with Disabilities

Legislation	Description
American's with Disabilities Act (ADA)	Introduced the principle of nondiscrimination against workers with disabilities, with the goal of reducing the risk that this group be denied work opportunities without appropriate justification.
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990	Mandated that schools take steps to ensure that students with disabilities achieve employment after graduation.
The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992	Promoted the streamlining of service delivery and encouraged the diversification and choice of the available employment services.
The Workforce Investment Act of 1998	Created the One-Stop Career Centers, with the goal of consolidating employment programs for people with disabilities into a single entry point.
The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act	Focused on improving access of recipients of social security benefits to employment services, developing Medicaid buy-in programs, and assisting people to maximize their benefits from work incentives.
Olmstead v. L.C. case of 1999	Stated that services for people with disabilities must be delivered in the most integrated employment is the preferred outcome, compared to facility-based day services.
The New Freedom Initiative of 2001	A document emphasizing that every step must

	be taken to fully implement all existing regulations designed to assist people with disabilities in becoming employed.
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Source: “Trends in Outcomes of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program for Adults with Developmental Disabilities: 1995-2005” Migliore & Butterworth, 2008

Employment Service Providers

The State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency acts as the primary point of contact within the context of employment services for individuals with disabilities (Butterworth, Foley, Kiernan, & Timmons, 2006). VR agencies have become primary linkages in implementing collaborative service delivery models. VR aims to provide services to eligible individuals so that they may achieve successful employment outcomes that are consistent with their strengths, abilities, and interests (OSERS, 2007). State VR agencies provide services to over one million people annually with approximately 600,000 completing services and have their cases closed in each fiscal year. The VR program is a governmental initiative that dates over 80+ years and is one of the largest suppliers of rehabilitation services in the United States (Wheaton & Wilson, 1996).

What has been historically the realm of the federal-state VR system is now attended to through multiple service delivery systems. A plethora of existing programs and services that assist people with disabilities to achieve employment have been established to include WIPA and Ticket to Work. This increase in adult employment services has expanded the array of systems who participate in employment policy and practices. Collaborative relationships with other agencies and partners have been emphasized in disability legislation including the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its subsequent amendments, the Persons with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998

requires the development of cooperative agreements with mandated partners, including state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, to develop a comprehensive one-stop approach to workforce development.

Although the primary functions of VR professionals have remained consistent over the past several years, various trends in policy and legislation have contributed to the development of new roles and functions in new work settings (Ethridge, Rodgers, & Fabian, 2007). In 2007, Ethridge, et al. discussed the emerging roles, functions, specialty areas and employment settings for contemporary practice. VR professionals interact with a number of different service delivery systems (e.g., State ID/DD agencies, special education, community rehabilitation providers, Social Security). Existing literature suggests that no one service provider can accomplish the desired outcomes without coordinating with other professionals (Eber, Nelson, & Miles, 1997; Oertle & Trach, 2007). One clear shift in the policy landscape for disability issues and employment has been the increasing need to address disability and employment policy from the perspective of systems other than state VR. For example, ***State Intellectual and Developmental Disability (ID/DD) agencies*** constitute the major supplier of long-term funding and service coordination for individuals with ID/DD. This includes individualized community employment supports and facility-based employment work and non work services (Butterworth et al., (2008)). Also, ***Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs)*** are not mandated under legislation, but are contracted by State VR to provide a majority of the employment supports. Menz (2004) reports that there are over 8,100 CRPs throughout the U.S. (Butterworth et al., 2008). Louisiana currently has 53 CRPs that provide supported employment services including job development, placement and extended follow along. In Louisiana, the state ID/DD agency is the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities or OCDD.

CRPs are funded through a variety of state and federal funds. In Louisiana, Community Rehab Providers (CRP) are approved by a funder (either LRS or OCDD) to provide employment supports and services. VR or OCDD purchases supported employment services from these CRPs for eligible individuals. However, extended follow along services are not provided by VR but are funded through other programs such as the Ticket-to-Work program.

Various other service providers contribute to the goal of economic self-sufficiency and community employment. For instance, the *Social Security Administration (SSA)* has a variety of work incentives to assist individuals in the rehabilitation process. For example, the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) allows individuals to set aside money to pay for services needed to achieve work goals. SSA also administrates the Ticket to Work program, designed to provide beneficiaries more choices for receiving employment services such as purchasing services from any participating employment network or state VR agency of their choice (Butterworth et al., (2008)). Additionally, *one-stop career centers*, established under the Workforce Investment Act, provide a wide array of assistance to individuals seeking employment (e.g., training referrals, career counseling, job searching). *Medicaid* is another source of funding for employment services under the Home and Community Based Services waiver program.

Current Research and Practice: A Summary of the Literature

Prior to the 1980s, all employment services for people with disabilities were delivered in facilities (e.g., sheltered workshops) that were separate from the community (Butterworth et al., 2005; Rusch & Hughes, 1990). Even though agencies continue to offer these segregated services, there has been a value shift within the field of disability from these special programs to community-based, inclusive services. These changes in employment services reflect society's value shift from institutionalization to deinstitutionalization, which grew out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Nirje, 1969), as well as the growth of the knowledge base in the fields of education and rehabilitation, and supported employment success (Rubin & Roessler, 1995). However, systems change is slow.

Today, many individuals experience situations that mirror values reflective of old and new practices (i.e., segregated, facility-based and inclusive, community-based services). Best practices have been identified as those that move individuals from segregated services to community-based, inclusive services (Boeltzig, Gilmore, & Butterworth, 2006; Brooks-Lane, Hutcheson, &, Revell, 2005; Oertle & Plotner, n.d.). The movement toward inclusive practices is strongly supported by the national Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) policy. Under RSA leadership, beginning in Fiscal Year 2002, professionals working for state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies could no longer consider nonintegrated employment settings (i.e., sheltered workshops) as a positive outcome for people with disabilities accessing VR services (U. S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration Annual Report, Fiscal Year 2002, [OSERS, RSA, FY

2002, Annual Report] February, 2006). Nationally, social movements, knowledge, strategies and funding have shifted in favor of inclusive practices for people with disabilities.

Many states, including Louisiana, are still changing systemic structures and practices to reflect the more inclusive national philosophies. For example, the majority of states are still operating large segregated institutions. Concurrently, the majority of community service agencies are still conducting segregated services and practices (e.g. day training programs; sheltered workshops; enclaves), utilizing marketing strategies that focus on “helping the unfortunate”, and practicing fund raising techniques that devalue people with disabilities-- especially people who have intellectual, developmental, psychiatric, and significant disabilities (DiLeo, 2007).

Researchers have shown that professionals hired to promote participation of their clients in the community through community living, participation, and employment were a major roadblock to organizational change (Hagner & Murphy. 1989). In a study conducted by Pirttimaa & Saloviita (2004), 70% of direct service staff working in 57 adult service agencies did not approve or were in doubt about delivering employment services in the community. Compounding this resistance to change, West, Revell, & Wehman, (1998) found that only 24% of personnel in 385 employment agencies considered staff a barrier to conversion to community based agencies. Research conducted by Novak, Rogan, Mank, & DiLeo (2003) suggests that lack of qualified staff, negative attitudes, and low expectations on the part of employers, rehabilitation service providers, and community members are barriers for employment and perpetuate the marginalization of people with disabilities. It seems clear that the ways and means to actualize full inclusion are still emerging. To advance the actualization of inclusion, The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) recognizes these issues,

making employment related research a priority: “research is needed on strategies to enable Americans with disabilities to access careers, integrate into the workforce, and participate as full citizens in the economic marketplace” (p. 9, NIDRR, 2007).

The crucial nature of state-level policies and practices concerning integrated employment is demonstrated by the disparity in state outcomes (McGaughey & Mank, 2001). Few studies have attempted to identify key characteristics of state-level factors contributing to more successful employment outcomes. Characteristics shared by high performing states are consistent with having a shared mission, employment or collaboration work groups at the central office level, and have invested in interagency training (Foley et al., 2002). The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) identified seven themes after interviewing key informants of 13 states to explore the organizational variables that have resulted in successful integrated employment outcomes. These characteristics of “high-performing states” were: (1) Clearly defined goals and data collection, (2) Strong agency leadership, (3) Interagency Collaboration, (4) Ongoing training and outreach, (5) Communication through relationships, (6) Local control; and (7) Flexibility and respect for innovation (ICI news brief). In 2003, Rogan et al., identified exemplary state efforts by sharing numerous examples of how states implement Rehabilitation Act principles. One example given was a systems change initiative that sought to empower consumers to make their own choices throughout the VR process launched by Vermont’s Division of VR. In an effort to remove barriers to consumer autonomy while encouraging self-determination principles, the traditional clinical approach taken by many counselors was replaced with a model that focused on consumer decision-making skills, problem solving, and accessing resources within the community. Consumer ownership led to primary responsibility for selecting services (e.g., choosing vendors). Also, eligibility determination occurs in one day as opposed to the traditional

54 days that Vermont VR operates. Twenty-one percent less funds per successful closure was spent after purchased services after three years of the project (Rogan et al., 2002).

Vermont is also well known for recently eliminating all sheltered workshops. Across several years, Vermont limited and ultimately eliminated all state funds for sheltered workshops or enclaves. Through a rigorous priority-setting process, Vermont's Division of Disability and Aging Services *System of Care* plan described this new direction that was committed to individualizing supports and eradicating group employment and congregated residential settings. DDAS, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the University of Vermont, and provider management collaborated to successfully convert sheltered workshops to individualized supports by 2005. Vermont's strategy was to partner with providers to convert all remaining workshops before setting a policy directive that prohibited funding for non-inclusive environments (Sulewski, 2007).

Another promising practice discussed by Rogan and her colleagues was the Participant Empowerment Project (PEP) implemented by Washington Division of VR. PEP was created to ensure a consumer-driven service delivery process where teams were used to assist consumers build quality career plans. During consumer plan implementation, consumers are provided support from the teams which allows consumers to assess and determine their strengths to plan their own services (Rogan et al., 2002). Focusing on interagency collaboration, Rogan et al., (2002) gave an exemplary example that described Ohio's MR/DD and VR agencies working together to develop a joint vision statement. In 2002, the two agencies stated a mutual goal for both agencies to provide services to citizens with disabilities geared to "wrapping services around a paycheck rather than a benefits check" (p. 2). Regional meetings were held to

communicate this collaborative effort and joint vision statement to reiterate this partnership and new dual focus of both agencies.

Most recently, Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore and Metzel (2007) interviewed state agency administrators from three high performing states as defined by high rates of integrated employment per state population and/or rapid growth of integrated employment. They found several practices that can lead to positive outcomes when paired with dedicated professionals and stakeholders who have a strong inclusive values base. The practices identified were flexibility in funding and practices; funding incentives; communication of values through data; and innovation diffusion through relationships and training.

The available literature base is informative and promising in terms of inspiring change at the state level; however, the literature is nearly all anecdotal. In addition, many of the characteristics that emerged in the literature are difficult to measure. Varying demographic information, policies, practices and outcomes makes comparisons across states very challenging. Yet, states that are progressive in supported employment implementation and systems change can offer valuable perspectives to other states that are more conventional in nature (Rogan et al., 2002). It is important for states to examine policies from other places to learn from their experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have identified five critical issues identified as being of highest importance to the employment pathways of individuals with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities in the state of Louisiana. These issues include:

Critical Issue #1: Transition-age Youth: Focusing On Our Future

Critical Issue #2: Outcomes reflect funding

Critical Issue #3: Supported employment: Focusing on integrated employment settings

Critical Issue #4: Order of Selection- Focusing on people with the most significant disabilities

Critical Issue #5: Interagency collaborative: Focusing on partnerships

Recommendations are also offered in this report and were made following a thorough review of state employment efforts and the descriptive and the research literature. Continued attention including funding and research is necessary to further strengthen the efforts to keep individuals with significant disabilities engaged in their communities via employment.

An alarmingly low number of citizens with significant disabilities are obtaining no or low community employment outcomes and are less likely to gain access to viable employment opportunities (Swanson, 2008; Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2002). Rather, many citizens with significant disabilities are engaged in vocational alternatives such as sheltered workshops (receiving subminimum wage), volunteer programs, or receiving no employment services. Most likely there always will be some individuals who need varied and complex supports to succeed in obtaining and sustaining community employment. Therefore, policies and programs that ensure quality services to these individuals are critical. Although policies and procedures are in place that should support the development and maintenance of individuals with significant intellectual

and developmental disabilities in employment, we have seen that there are barriers and gaps between the policies and their implementation. Policies and procedures must match implementation. It is clear that although Louisiana has multiple policies that seem favorable to integrated employment, actual implementation of programs and services lead to outcomes that reflect facility based/non-work options. Based on the results of this study, it is apparent that we need to increase access to employment services and integrated employment opportunities for all individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities within the state of Louisiana especially those with significant disabilities. A unified approach to service delivery and a commitment to accountability of program implementation are necessary to reach this aim.

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