Employment of People with Developmental Disabilities

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Despite evolving societal attitudes and resulting public policy promoting equity, people with disabilities continue to struggle to achieve significant gains in employment levels.[1] People with developmental disabilities, regardless of the severity of disability, should have access to integrated, competitive and community-based employment. Segregating people in congregate work situations limits access to real, dignified, and meaningful employment. Louisiana citizens with developmental disabilities need to participate in the integrated, competitive workforce to have opportunities that realize their full potential and shift their need for dependency on the state. The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council supports full adoption of an Employment First policy in all agencies so that employment is considered as the first and preferred service option and outcome. According to data published in 2018 by the Institute for Community Inclusion, Louisiana continues to over-rely on congregate work situations and under-perform in supporting real job experiences for people with significant disabilities.[2] Federal policy initiatives, such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), have reinforced competitive integrated employment as the presumptive and priority outcome for people with disabilities. Competitive integrated employment also increases pressure on the public and private sectors to become the model employers of people with disabilities.[1]

People with developmental disabilities deserve individualized work evaluation and job readiness services, assistive technology, and job counseling, and if necessary, ongoing supports, to enable them to become employed, productive, tax-paying citizens and reduce or eliminate their need for public assistance. Supporting integrated employment builds an individual's earning capacity and future employment prospects, and expands their choices and natural support network. It also offers increased opportunities for participation in community events and activities and developing meaningful relationships.

Adequate funding should be invested in supports and services that result in people becoming more self-reliant and increasing their productivity. Rates for services should incentivize real employment outcomes and dis-incentivize segregated sheltered workshops.

It is time to invest in Louisiana's people and implement policies, such as Employment First, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and the Medicaid rule on Home and Community Based Services settings, which result in "equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency."[3] The systems change needed to meet evolving expectations of inclusion of people with disabilities in the workforce and society will require adaptation and cooperation by all stakeholder groups.[1]

References:

1 Kanady, S. (2018). The Future of Work and the Disability Community. The Future of Work and the Disability Community. Source America. Retrieved from www.sourceamerica.org.

2 Zalewska, A., and Winsor, J.E. (2018). State Intellectual and Developmental Disability Agencies' Service Trends. DataNote Series, Data Note 60. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

3 Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C.A. § 12101 et seq.