

Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Project



What is Partnerships in Employment?

5-year project: In 2011 and 2012, the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities awarded funding to eight states.

Focus on integrated, competitive employment for youth with I/DD: This project promotes cross-systems and cross-agency collaboration to improve integrated, competitive employment outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). *Integrated, competitive employment* is when “individuals with disabilities earn wages consistent with wages paid workers without disabilities in the community performing the same or similar work.”

8 states form consortiums: The eight Partnerships in Employment states—*Alaska, California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, Tennessee, and Wisconsin*—formed a consortium or coalition of stakeholders that include:

- ▶ **Individual Level:** Individuals with I/DD, family members
- ▶ **Community Level:** Pilot sites, school administrators, businesses employers, providers
- ▶ **State Level:** Developmental Disabilities Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, State Education Agency, State Developmental Disabilities Council, other state agencies

AIDD contractors perform project evaluation and provide technical assistance: The Lewin Group is conducting a comprehensive evaluation and the Institute for Community Inclusion is providing training and technical assistance to states.

Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative

October 2012 to March 2015

Project Overview

In 2012, the Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) began work to ensure that employment was the option of choice for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities across the state. Through efforts focused on relationship building, AIEI worked to improve employment outcomes.

Project Goals and Vision

AIEI set out to accomplish several goals, including:

1. *Increase the percent of youth and young adults served by DVR from 20 to 25 percent.*
2. *Increase hours worked by DVR participants with I/DD from 13 to 20 hours per week.*
3. *Double the number of youth and young adults with I/DD served by SDS who are employed or self-employed from 139 to 278.*

This profile highlights AIEI activities and accomplishments from October 2012 to March 2015 related to the PIE project objectives—developing or changing policies, removing systemic barriers, building cross-system and cross-agency collaboration, and implementing strategies and promising practices to support integrated, competitive employment (ICE).

Developing or Changing Policies

Employment First Policy

AIEI’s primary policy-related goal focused on the establishment of an Employment First policy. In 2013, AIEI researched similar policies in other states. The Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE) also adopted an Employment First policy as a key goal and drafted legislation for the 2014 legislative session. AIEI and GCDSE members created flyers and disseminated information to stakeholders. After working with other states that had passed similar legislation, AIEI developed a legislative packet. The efforts were successful—the House and Senate unanimously approved the bill and Alaska’s Governor signed the Employment First Bill (HB 211) in May 2014. In September 2014, Alaska Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst formed to focus on implementation and AIEI met with three departments to discuss implementation of Employment First.

Selected AIEI Partners

Governor’s Council on Disabilities and Special Education (GCDSE)
Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS)
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
Department of Education and Early Development (DEED)
Disability Law Center of Alaska
Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority
Center for Human Development

Funding Legislation or Policies

Several Alaska funding policy changes supported individuals with I/DD and their families. In 2013, changes in state Medicaid Home and Community Based Waiver (HCBS) program regulations increased the ability to purchase employment related services from community-based organizations. In 2015, Alaska identified potential budget cuts that may affect Developmental Disabilities (DD) services. AIEI and GCDSE developed a Medicaid position paper aimed at preserving current services while finding cost-saving approaches. AIEI staff also worked closely with the Alaska Mental Health Authority (Trust) to form the Trust Beneficiary Employment and Engagement Initiative. This initiative committed one million dollars a year for five years to improving employment outcomes for Alaskans with disabilities. In addition, AIEI staff have worked with partners to refine an Employment Services Options matrix of common definitions and sequence of employment services between DVR and DSDS. AIEI recently incorporated DEED services and is in the process of incorporating Alaska Job Center services.

Removing Systemic Barriers

Building Program Capacity

Benefits Analysis Training: A major barrier in Alaska was a limited number of benefits counselors. To increase the number of trained benefits counselors in Alaska, AIEI partnered with the Trust to fund training. The Trust provided funding to send six professionals in 2014 and one in 2015 for benefits counseling training provided by the Virginia Commonwealth University. The Trust also initiated a Trust Beneficiary Employment Initiative that focused on benefits counseling. AIEI staff also worked with the Trust and the Center for Human Development (CHD) to develop a two-tier benefits analysis training. Alaska held two Tier 1 Financial and Work Incentive Navigator trainings in 2015 with 19 people completing the training. The AIEI Advisory Board submitted a recommendation to the Trust to invest seed money to create the Disability Benefits (DB) 101 Benefits and Work calculator for Alaska.

Increased Medicaid Buy-In Participation: In 2014 and 2015, AIEI continued to raise awareness about and increase use of the Medicaid Buy-In program through job fairs, event resource tables, presentations, and trainings. From March 2014 to March 2015, AIEI staff noted a 12 percent increase in Medicaid Buy-In program use that coincided with extensive marketing efforts by AIEI staff. AIEI will also hold Medicaid Buy-In trainings with CHD.

AIEI Monthly Trainings: The AIEI training coordinator continued to offer monthly trainings, both in-person and distance delivery, and awarded certificates of completion

to 69 individuals in 11 communities from October 2014 to March 2015. The AIEI training coordinator and CHD developed surveys and protocols to solicit outcome data from customized employment trainees. AIEI continued to distribute monthly training flyers via the Trust Training Cooperative listserv, GCDSE listserv and Facebook page, provider organizations, and other networks. AIEI staff assisted GCDSE with the transition to the new GovDelivery listserv system, which increased subscribers from 250 to 2,500 individuals in 2015. Through increased marketing efforts for the trainings, AIEI noticed a higher turnout and through distance delivery, AIEI has increased training capacity in more areas of the state.

Improving Programs

Project SEARCH™: AIEI staff continued to provide support and technical assistance to the four Alaska Project SEARCH™ sites. In March 2015, AIEI facilitated site visits for the National Director of Project SEARCH™ to meet with all four sites. AIEI staff also provided specific technical assistance around recruitment, sustainability, new staff, and rotation opportunities in new departments. Expansion efforts are in progress for different industries and other cities, including a rural site location.

Alternative Certificates

Early in the project, AIEI identified Alaska's High School Graduation Qualifying Exam (HSGQE) as a major barrier that resulted in lower graduation rates for youth with disabilities. In 2014, AIEI conducted research of other state approaches to alternate certificates or diplomas. AIEI advocacy efforts helped lead to the repeal of the HSGQE through legislation. In 2015, AIEI continued to work with individuals with disabilities and their families to raise awareness of the new law repealing the HSGQE as well as the retroactive provision for former students to obtain their diploma. AIEI staff also monitored the new regulatory changes that resulted from the repeal and submitted comments, in collaboration with GCDSE, to the State Board of Education on participation guidelines for Alaska students in State Academic Assessments.

Building Cross-System and Cross-Agency Collaboration

Consortium

AIEI held the first bi-annual Advisory Board meeting in 2013 with state agencies, Alaskan businesses and industries, providers, self-advocates, and family members. Advisory Board meetings included more than 30 attendees. AIEI also held monthly calls with the AIEI Policy and Regulations Team and the AIEI Management Team that included the Trust, GCDSE, and other members.

Youth Engagement

AIEI engaged youth through Peer Power Alaska, a self-advocacy organization. A student intern from a local university helped start the group and began holding monthly teleconferences with 10 self-advocates. A group advisor was hired in 2013, and group membership reached 31 people. In 2014 and 2015, the group hosted a table at five job fairs across the state and co-sponsored a Youth Job Fair with GCDSE that had 46 businesses in attendance. In 2015, Peer Power was awarded a grant to work with self-advocate organizations in four states to create the Equal Partners Interstate Congress. As of March 2015, membership included 68 youth from 15 cities in Alaska.

Family Engagement

In 2013, CHD surveyed parents and youth with I/DD to understand “what they perceive as barriers to employment.” The survey compared parent and youth expectations around employment, career goals and other measures. CHD presented key findings from 20 youth and 55 parent responses at a 2014 AIEI Advisory Board meeting. When asked about five-year goals for youth, top responses for both youth and parents included “obtaining a job or career, developing healthy relationships, having skills to live as independently as possible, and opportunities to pursue higher education.”

Employer Engagement

State As a Model Employer: In 2014, Alaska's State As a Model Employer (S.A.M.E.) Task Force focused efforts to increase the number of provisional hires in state government. As a result of this work, all Alaska Hiring Managers sign off that DVR's Provisional Hire option was considered before posting state positions with Human Resources. AIEI also developed a Provisional Hire program step-by-step guide and reported an increase in the number of provisional hires in state government and hiring managers familiar with the process.

Partner Events: In 2014 and 2015, AIEI staff engaged employers at four partner events, including the State Chamber of Commerce Conference, Anchorage Chamber Academy, State Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM) Conference, and Alaska Processing Industry Careers Consortium (APCC) Conference.

Co-Hosted Diversity Job Fair: In 2015, AIEI planned and collaborated with the Alaska Department of Labor, DVR, and Job Centers to host the Diversity Job Fair and Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) Workshop and State Agency Networking Sessions for federal contractors. Over 430 job seekers and 66 employers participated (25 identified as federal contractors). AIEI staff also planned and led the OFCCP Workshop and State Agency Networking Session with 35 federal contractors.

Implementing Strategies and Promising Practices

Shared Data Systems

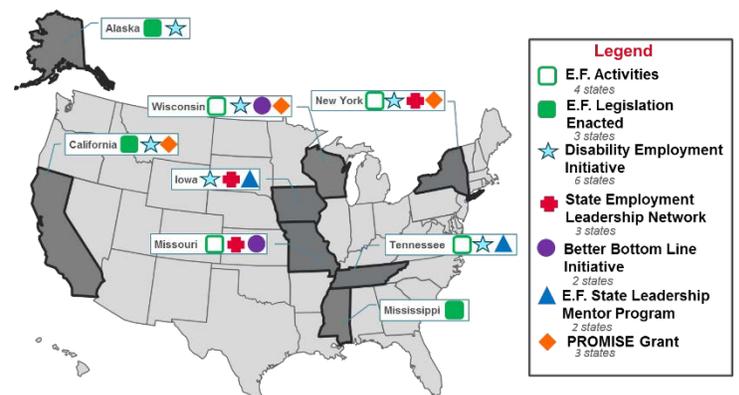
Alaska's Employment First legislation requires agencies to submit data on integrated, competitive employment activities annually to the Trust. To address challenges related to existing data systems, AIEI staff worked as a subject matter expert with DSDS to build employment data into the new DSDS data system. AIEI collaborated with the Trust to facilitate a data workgroup with more than twelve state agencies. The workgroup compiled a list of system indicators collected by each agency.

Continuing to Support Integrated, Competitive Employment

Other Initiatives

In addition to the PIE project, several other initiatives are underway in Alaska that support improving employment outcomes for youth and young adults with I/DD. AIEI closely partners with the staff of the DEI in Alaska.

Figure 1: Partnerships in Employment States Participating in Other Initiatives to Support Employment for Youth with I/DD



Sustainability Beyond PIE

Between October 2012 and March 2015, AIEI improved relationships and partnerships among state agencies and stakeholders. AIEI also collaborated with the Trust and GCDSE to increase employment opportunities for youth and young adults with I/DD. AIEI is in the early stages of identifying plans for sustainability beyond the project, including identifying strategies to engage consortium members, to hold trainings, and to enhance data systems.

The Governor's Council on Disabilities and Special Education is the lead entity for the Alaska Integrated Employment Initiative. **Website:**

www.trusttrainingcoop.org/training/aieip.html

The Lewin Group, under Contract HHSP23320095639WC Task Order HHSP23337017T, developed the Alaska PIE profile. **Email:** PIE-EVAL@Lewin.com