

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.

Mississippi Partnerships for Employment

October 2011 to March 2015

Project Overview

The Mississippi Partnerships for Employment for Youth and Young Adults with I/DD (MSPE) was established in 2011. MSPE is a joint project between the Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities (MS CDD), the University of Southern Mississippi Institute for Disability Studies (IDS), and Disability Rights Mississippi (DRMS).

Project Goals and Vision

The goal of MSPE is to build capacity across existing state services for sustainable systems change that improves integrated, competitive employment outcomes for youth and young adults with I/DD. MSPE’s vision is that “all young people, including those with I/DD, have an equal opportunity for competitive, meaningful employment and productive lives.”

This profile highlights MSPE PIE activities and accomplishments from October 2011 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.

Developing or Changing Policies

Employment First Policy

In 2012, the MSPE Employment Workgroup’s work plan included plans to pursue an Employment First initiative. In 2013, this workgroup helped draft Employment First legislation that was introduced by APSE in both the Senate and the House. Although the legislation did not pass, MSPE advocacy and awareness efforts helped lay the foundation for future policy change. Awareness efforts included MSPE managing partners hosting four Employment First awareness sessions with 42 total attendees in summer 2013, meeting with agency leaders to discuss concerns or misunderstandings related to the Employment First initiative, providing resources during meetings with legislators and the Governor, and disseminating brochures and flyers on Employment First.

Selected MSPE Members

Mississippi Council on Developmental Disabilities
University of Southern Mississippi Institute for Disability Studies
Disability Rights Mississippi
Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services
Mississippi Department of Mental Health Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
Mississippi Department of Employment Security
Mississippi Department of Education
Mississippi Division of Medicaid
Mississippi Chapter of the Association of People Supporting Employment First

During the Disability Employment Partnerships Awareness Day at the Capitol in January 2014, the Governor signed an Executive Order that reactivated a Disability Resource Commission. With support from a legislative champion, Employment First legislation passed unanimously in the House but did not move out of Senate committee. In 2014, MSPE managing partners submitted a letter to the Governor requesting appointments to the Disability Resource Commission. Legislation was introduced again in 2015 with the Governor signing the Mississippi Competitive Employment Act in April 2015.

Changing Policies

In 2013, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitative Services (MDRS) changed policies and reimbursement rates to better support customized employment. In the 2013-14 academic year, the Vocational Rehabilitation program at MDRS partnered with 12 school districts to fund transition specialists to work with students in their final year of school. Other policy changes included Department of Economic Security (DES) modifying the language in job announcements for individuals with disabilities. Mississippi Department of Education policy revisions included the addition of a vocational assessment for children age 14 and above to eligibility general guidelines and the inclusion of a summary of the child’s academic achievement and functional performance upon exiting high school.

Removing Systemic Barriers

Building Program Capacity

In 2012, IDS hosted 16 awareness training sessions in four congressional districts with 68 attendees. Attendees completed a pre- and post-awareness test that showed an average increase on scores of 17 percent. Other opportunities included training on accessible presentations, accessible web design, assistive technology, disability benefits, transportation, and post-secondary education guides for parents. MSPE managing partners attended the first Mississippi disAbility MegaConference in 2012 and served on the planning committee for three disAbility MegaConferences to ensure the conference included sessions on employment. In 2014, MSPE managing partners invited individuals from three communities to participate in Disability Partners Community Forums with 60 people attending.

Post-Secondary Education

During a 2014 Stakeholders Group meeting, MSPE highlighted Project ACCESS at Mississippi State University, the only program in Mississippi focusing on post-secondary education for people with I/DD. In 2014, MS CDD and IDS worked on reestablishing the Mississippi

AHEAD (Association for Higher Education) program, a group involved in disability accommodations and support staff. This included hosting a webinar with 12 attendees from community colleges and universities across the state and participating in a second planning webinar. In 2015, IDS staff participated in the planning committee at the University of Southern Mississippi to develop an undergraduate disability concentration.

Pilot Projects

After two rounds of RFP submissions in spring 2012, four pilot sites received funding from MSPE. MS CDD provided administrative oversight to the MSPE pilot projects. The goal of the pilot projects was to demonstrate how schools could improve transition services, provide students with employment experiences while in school, and assist in finding competitive employment in the community. As of March 2015, three active pilot sites had assisted 59 students to find employment at 25 employer locations.

BOLTS: Building Opportunities for Learning and Transition Success:

BOLTS, a school-based training with greenhouse and pottery activities and a community-based training with internships, allowed students to move into full-time employment. Since 2012, BOLTS assisted 41 students to find employment in the community.

Customized Employment: The Arc of Mississippi used a network of provider agencies to increase the development of customized employment in Mississippi. The project worked with youth and young adults in three areas of the state to employ four young people with significant disabilities through customized employment. The project established business advisory councils in each community and worked with MDRS to change policies and procedures to create a network of customized employment providers.

Gathering Grounds: Gathering Grounds is a community-based business where students with disabilities learn work and social skills. Since the beginning of the project, 14 students moved on to jobs in the community.

Table 1: Number of MSPE PIE Pilot Participants by Academic Year
Number of Participants by Academic Year

	'12-'13	'13-'14	'14-'15
<u>High School Programs</u>			
<i>BOLTS</i>	16	32	41
<i>Gathering Grounds</i>	4	8	14
<u>The Arc of Mississippi</u>			
<i>Customized Employment</i>	-	-	4
Total MSPE PIE Participants	20	40	59

*Reported by MSPE on a semi-annual basis to The Lewin Group

Building Cross-System and Cross-Agency Collaboration

MSPE Consortium

Between October 2011 and March 2015, MSPE held 15 MSPE Consortium meetings with 20 representatives from agencies and organizations and five self-advocates. DRMS managed logistics for the Employment Workgroup meetings and developed three MSPE annual reports. MS CDD coordinated the Consortium meetings and IDS coordinated 10 Stakeholders Group meetings with 12 to 20 attendees per meeting. In 2013, the Stakeholders Group disseminated a short survey to identify current and future training needs. Results from the survey led to the inclusion of young adults with I/DD at MSPE meetings.

Memorandum of Understanding

After working on a Memorandum of Understanding for more than a year, MDRS, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Department of Mental Health (DMH), Bureau of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities adopted a new referral method for DMH to refer individuals with disabilities who want to work to VR.

Youth Engagement

MSPE engaged youth in activities each year during National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October. Attendance at the National Disability Mentoring Day at the University of Southern Mississippi increased each year with 10 high school students attending in 2012, 30 students in 2013, and 55 students in 2014. MSPE also hosted the Disability Employment Partnerships Day at the Capitol in February 2013, January 2014, and March 2015, coordinated a meeting with legislators during the Disability Policy Seminar in 2013, and facilitated "Take Your Legislator to Work Day" with two legislators in 2014.

Employer Engagement

Policy Brief: In 2014, MSPE issued a Policy Brief titled "Hiring People with Disabilities is Good Business." This brief provided employment facts and examined ways in which Mississippi employers can benefit from hiring youth and young adults with I/DD. Employment data for 2010 to 2012 found that the average gap in employment rate between Mississippians with disabilities and without disabilities was approximately 40 percent.

Two Annual EmployAbility Job Fairs: In 2014 and 2015, Mississippi's DES and VR, co-sponsored two annual EmployAbility Job Fairs. In 2014, more than 650 applicants received 60 job offers from 33 employers and, in 2015, more than 400 applicants received 88 job offers from 46 employers. MSPE disseminated materials at both job fairs and hosted seven youth with disabilities in 2015.

Implementing Strategies and Promising Practices

Disseminating Promising Practices

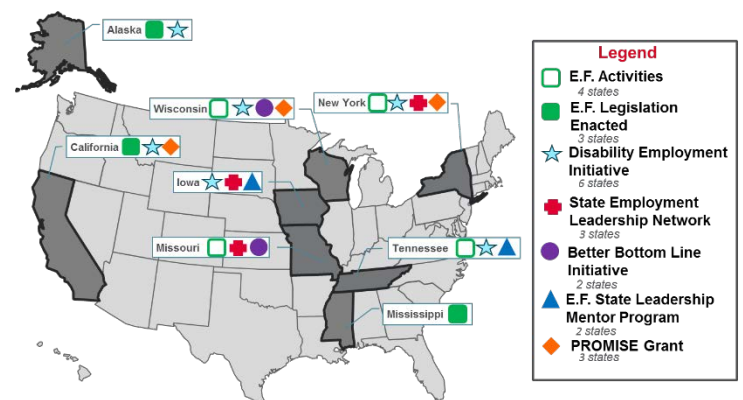
In 2012, MSPE launched the "Live.WORK.Achieve" listserv to share best practices, news, training, success stories, and resources. Distribution increased each year with 125 recipients in 2012, 169 in 2013, and 204 in 2014. In 2015, MSPE combined with the STEP UP Notes listserv and tripled the number of recipients enrolled to 574. MSPE also developed an Employment Resources document and a fact sheet on the Myths and Facts about Employing People with Disabilities.

Continuing to Support Integrated, Competitive Employment

Other Initiatives

While other PIE states participated in federal employment initiatives, Mississippi did not receive funding for federal employment initiatives prior to PIE.

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



Sustainability Beyond PIE

Since the beginning of the project, MSPE provided support for Employment First legislation. MSPE noted that the passage of the Disability Employment Bill and the inclusion of the Disability Resource Commission "set the foundation for continuation of MSPE work beyond the grant." MSPE also reported there is now a mechanism to "monitor employment of youth, young adults, and others with disabilities and provide recommendations to the Governor and legislators on a yearly basis."

MSPE is a joint project between MS CDD, IDS, and DRMS.

Website: www.mspeidd.org

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