

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.

TennesseeWorks Partnership

October 2012 to March 2015

Project Overview

The TennesseeWorks Partnership formed in 2011 to strengthen state policies and systems and increase the number of youth and young adults with I/DD employed in the state.

TennesseeWorks pursued a data-driven approach to engaging stakeholders and pursuing policies to support integrated, competitive employment. In 2012, TennesseeWorks received funding from the U.S. Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities to continue project work.

TennesseeWorks State Partners
Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD)
Department of Education
Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DHS)
Department of Labor and Workforce Development
Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities
Tennessee Higher Education Commission

Project Goals and Vision

The TennesseeWorks Partnership identified several project objectives:

1. *Develop TennesseeWorks as a compelling, sustainable group.*
2. *Increase the expectations and capacities of young people, their families, and other stakeholders related to integrated, competitive employment.*
3. *Provide families and educators with the resources necessary to ensure early work experiences.*
4. *Develop a cross-agency data system to inform decision-making.*
5. *Encourage systems and policy change.*

This profile highlights TennesseeWorks Partnership 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.

Developing or Changing Policies

Employment First Policy

TennesseeWorks members helped draft an Executive Order to establish a Tennessee Employment First initiative. In 2013, the Governor signed an Executive Order to develop an Employment First Task Force. Several TennesseeWorks members were appointed to the Task Force to expand community employment opportunities for people with disabilities. DIDD also established an Employment First Initiative and released a new provider manual in 2014 that held providers accountable for outcomes supporting Employment First. In 2015, TennesseeWorks members serving on the Governor’s 25-member Employment First Task Force developed a draft Three-Year Strategic Plan.

Funding Legislation or Policies

Post-Secondary Education Funding: TennesseeWorks partners engaged legislators to increase funding streams for post-secondary education. TennesseeWorks advocacy efforts resulted in the legislature passing the STEP Up legislation in 2013, which provides lottery funding for students with I/DD in post-secondary education programs. An amendment supporting second-year student funding passed in 2014.

VR Funding: In January 2015, VR announced that Priority Categories 1 and 2 would not be funded for new applicants. Following advocacy efforts led by TennesseeWorks that included discussions, letters, and other compelling stories from TennesseeWorks Family Coalition members, VR resumed funding in March 2015.

Removing Systemic Barriers

Building Program Capacity

Increased Number of Schools with Contracts with VR: In 2015, TennesseeWorks reported that the number of schools with contracts with VR increased slightly with three new contracts. Tennessee's VR Transition to School-to-Work Coordinator trained all of the general VR counselors on the general principles of Transition to School-to-Work.

Provided Trainings to Build Capacity: In 2013, 48 school district staff attended a four-day professional development series focused on raising expectations for competitive employment. Private funding for this program came from the Britt Henderson Training Series. TennesseeWorks partnered with the Britt Henderson Training Series in 2014 to develop three training sessions for transition and high school staff. TennesseeWorks offered training resources both online and in-person. In 2015, the project team also worked with the state's Department of Education to create a five-part webinar training series titled "Launching Students with Disabilities Toward Adulthood" for educators, family members, and other stakeholders.

Improving or Enhancing Programs

In 2014, TennesseeWorks members provided feedback regarding the importance of services that support competitive integrated employment to DIDD and TennCare (Tennessee's Medicaid agency). TennesseeWorks feedback was incorporated into the renewed Statewide and Arlington Waivers and amendments to the Self-Determination Waiver. In 2015, TennesseeWorks partners, including VR, DD Council, and Department of Education, provided support to 10 Project SEARCH™ sites. Project SEARCH™ expanded to additional regions of the state and to a non-medical profession. The

TennesseeWorks Employer Outreach Initiative highlighted Project SEARCH™ to increase business awareness.

Alternative Certificates

In 2014, TennesseeWorks members participated in the Occupational Diploma Task Force to develop a pilot Occupational Diploma for students with disabilities. As part of this Task Force, TennesseeWorks members developed a tool for pilot schools and provided input on the Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA). Members also conducted statewide meetings to obtain feedback from employers on skills needed for employment. In the 2014-15 academic year, the Department of Education piloted the Occupational Diploma at four pilot school districts. In January 2015, the Occupational Diploma was available to all students in Tennessee who met the required level in the SKEMA.

Post-Secondary Education

Course Load Hours: A major barrier in Tennessee was the 15-hour course load requirement for individuals with disabilities for post-secondary education, which exceeded the course load standard set by institutions (12 hours). TennesseeWorks achieved the goal of reducing the course load standard to those set by institutions for individuals without disabilities. The reduced course load was expected to result in an increase in post-secondary education graduates with disabilities.

Financial Assistance: As a result of advocacy work by TennesseeWorks, DHS began providing financial support for eligible students in Tennessee's post-secondary programs. In 2014, DHS released a memorandum to the Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services staff and Postsecondary Education Alliance Tennessee regarding the availability of financial support for VR-eligible students participating in Postsecondary Education Alliance programs. The availability of financial assistance in combination with the STEP Up legislation (2013 and 2014) and Pell grant assistance made post-secondary education an option for young adults with disabilities. Results from the TennesseeWorks Family Expectations Survey indicated "strong statewide interest in post-secondary education programs among families of young adults with I/DD."

Expansion of Programs: In 2015, TennesseeWorks announced expansion of Post-Secondary Alliance Programs from 4 to 5 sites. Broader support for this program was partly due to a Community Conversation held in 2013. As of March 2015, TennesseeWorks reported that graduates of the post-secondary education programs had an employment rate of more than 80 percent.

Building Cross-System and Cross-Agency Collaboration

Consortium

The TennesseeWorks Partnership formed prior to receiving federal funding from AIDD in 2012. The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center served as the administrative lead. By March 2015, an average of 45 members from 41 organizations attended the quarterly meetings. The four TennesseeWorks Partnership workgroups included Policymakers, Educators, Families and Youth, and Employers and Providers. The workgroups met at and in between the quarterly meetings. As part of the Families and Youth Workgroup, TennesseeWorks created the Tennessee Family Coalition

Community Engagement

Held 8 Community Conversations: In 2013, TennesseeWorks hosted six Community Conversations across the state. In collaboration with TennesseeWorks Partnership, a local planning team organized each event. Based on positive results from the initial Community Conversations, TennesseeWorks offered two additional Community Conversations in 2015 that were supported by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development, the lead agency for the Disability Employment Initiative. TennesseeWorks relied on the Department of Labor and Workforce Development's local contacts to build an employer-network that focused on employer outreach and employer needs. TennesseeWorks issued a call for proposals and awarded seven Community Conversation mini-grants in 2015.

Hosted 16 Conversations that Matter: In 2014, TennesseeWorks partners, including the Arc Tennessee and DIDD, facilitated 16 Conversations that Matter in eight communities across the state. Approximately 200 stakeholders attended the meetings, including 107 parents and 12 self-advocates. The meetings focused on movement away from sheltered employment toward integrated employment.

Held Meetings with Legislators: Youth, parents, and other TennesseeWorks Partnership members participated in a Disability Day on the Hill in 2014. Self-advocates and families made 49 visits with Tennessee legislators and discussed issues related to employment. Family Coalition members were active participants in Educate to Advocate, a reception for state legislators, and Tennessee's Disability Day on the Hill. Results from a survey indicated that 80% of participants "would not have participated in the Day on the Hill without the assistance from TennesseeWorks."

National Disability Employment Awareness Month: In October 2014, TennesseeWorks developed a social media

campaign for National Disability Employment Awareness Month that used the TennesseeWorks video interview with Randy Lewis of Walgreens discussing the "value in hiring people with disabilities." TennesseeWorks also shared information on the project website and provided suggestions for how stakeholders could share the campaign through social media.

Youth Self-Advocacy

Participated in Think Employment! Summit: Over 200 students with disabilities, families, service providers, and others attended the TennesseeWorks Think Employment! Summit in 2014. Students met with 15 local employers to practice networking skills, presented their one-page employment profiles, and participated in mock interviews.

Shared Success Stories: TennesseeWorks featured individual employment success stories, including Tennessee's Employment Idol video success stories on the project [website](#). Individuals also shared their stories about employment on Vanderbilt's Kindred Stories [website](#).

Family Engagement

Opportunities to engage parents included development of a transition video series for families; a presentation on supporting integrated, competitive employment; a series of meetings to gather input from families and providers on revising the state's waivers; and dissemination of resources on the TennesseeWorks website.

Established 3 Family Coalitions: Early in the project, TennesseeWorks established a Families and Youth Workgroup to provide information about employment to parents and young adults. In January 2014, two chapters of the Tennessee Family Coalition were created as part of the Families and Youth Workgroup. By September 2014, a third chapter was established. During monthly meetings, parents engaged with DIDD and DHS-VR agency representatives to provide comments on state plans. In total, the Tennessee Family Coalition held 11 meetings in three regions of the state. The Arc Tennessee is now the lead agency for the Family Coalitions.

Administered Family Survey: In 2014, TennesseeWorks launched a statewide Family Expectations Survey to understand family expectations related to employment and community engagement. TennesseeWorks exceeded the recruitment goal and received over 2,400 responses. Family responses on expectations supported paid, integrated employment in the community. Based on these results, TennesseeWorks developed an infographic that was shared with legislators at the Disability Day on the Hill and included in the Governor's Employment First report.

Employer Engagement

TennesseeWorks continued to engage employers through community and business outreach. In 2015, TennesseeWorks developed a business case presentation for employers that outlined why employers should invest in hiring people with disabilities. TennesseeWorks trained 31 individuals to present this business case to employers and conducted five presentations with 130 attendees in four counties. TennesseeWorks also developed four products focused on the needs of businesses hiring people with disabilities, including fact sheets on a business case, federal tax incentives, Tennessee tax incentives, and Office of Federal Contract Compliance Section 503 guidelines.

Implementing Strategies and Promising Practices

Shared Data Systems

Expanded Involvement and Access to Tennessee

Longitudinal Data System: Prior to TennesseeWorks, only a few state departments accessed or updated data in Tennessee's Longitudinal Data System. Due to TennesseeWorks efforts to expand the system to provide outcome-based reporting on employment of youth with disabilities, several state departments joined the project. In 2014, TennesseeWorks was granted approval to access and analyze data in the system. TennesseeWorks supplemented data from the system with data collected from the statewide Family Expectations Survey. Although Tennessee DIDD data is not included in the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System, TennesseeWorks continued efforts to include DIDD data. In 2015, DIDD solicited 105 provider agencies for employment outcome data with 56 responding.

Developed Data Dashboard: TennesseeWorks developed a Data Dashboard on the TennesseeWorks [website](#) titled Employment and Disability by the Numbers. This dashboard presents employment-related findings from multiple Tennessee projects that provide insight into the current employment landscape and suggest possible pathways for making change.

Disseminating Resources

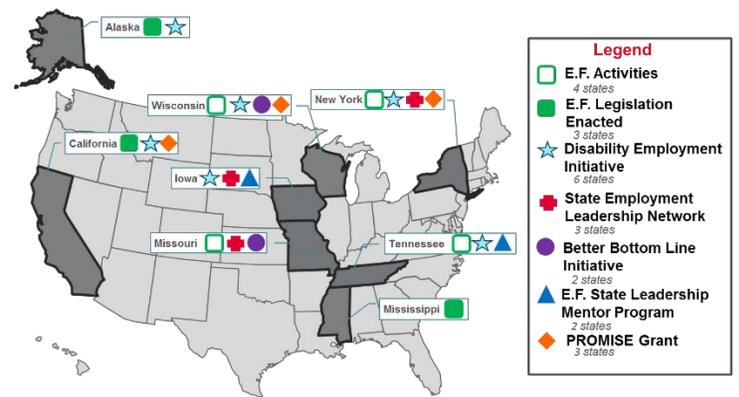
Between October 2014 and March 2015, TennesseeWorks identified an increase in the number of newsletter subscribers from 727 to 1,071 and in the number of users accessing employment-related resources on the TennesseeWorks website to 5,097 users.

Continuing to Support Integrated, Competitive Employment

Other Initiatives

In addition to PIE, several other initiatives are underway in Tennessee that support improving employment outcomes for youth and young adults with I/DD.

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



Sustainability Beyond PIE

TennesseeWorks has held early discussions about plans for sustainability beyond PIE. TennesseeWorks held its annual Think Employment! Summit in September 2014 and continued discussions on developing a self-sustaining Summit. TennesseeWorks collaborated with several partners on providing funding for speakers or staff to assist with presentations. TennesseeWorks discussed forming a planning committee to secure funding commitments from state agencies. TennesseeWorks also wrote Summit funding into a contract with the Department of Education that is awaiting confirmation.

The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities serves as the administrative lead for the TennesseeWorks Partnership.

Website: www.tennesseeworks.org

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