

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.

Wisconsin Let's Get to Work

October 2011 to March 2015

Project Overview

In 2011, the Let's Get to Work Consortium began work to ensure that youth and young adults with I/DD from across Wisconsin had access to integrated, competitive employment upon leaving high school or a post-secondary institution.

Project Goals and Vision

The Let's Get to Work Consortium set out to accomplish several goals.

1. *Increase access to integrated employment in communities across the state, allowing individuals to become economically self-sufficient.*
2. *Increase expectations for and awareness of integrated employment.*
3. *Evaluate, disseminate, and replicate Let's Get to Work practices both across Wisconsin and nationwide.*

This profile highlights Let's Get to Work 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” Related Activities

Wisconsin's Employment First work has focused on pursuing policy solutions within the state that supports integrated employment for individuals with I/DD. Early in the project, Let's Get to Work (LGTW) Policy Team members met with a state Senator to discuss drafting Employment First legislation. In 2013, several legislators expressed interest in co-sponsoring Employment First or “Gainful Employment” legislation and Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce also expressed interest in the Employment First initiative. The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) adopted an Employment First initiative to help establish Employment First policies. To raise awareness and increase support for this initiative, the Wisconsin BPDD developed documents to share with legislators.

Selected Let's Get to Work Consortium Partners
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Department of Health Services (DHS)
Department of Public Instruction (DPI)
Disability Rights Wisconsin
Wisconsin Association of People Supporting Employment First
Wisconsin University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities
Wisconsin Statewide Transition Initiative
Wisconsin Parent Educator Initiative

In 2014, the Governor supported the Governor's Year of the Better Bottom Line initiative, which included grants to businesses to hire and train employees with I/DD. The Governor also discussed a goal of doubling integrated employment between 2014 and 2016. During legislative visits in 2015, LGTW distributed Better Bottom Line talking points to legislators.

Funding Legislation or Policies

LGTW's Policy Team pursued several strategies to ensure funding for activities that support integrated, competitive employment. In 2013, LGTW leadership met with all 16 legislators serving on the Joint Finance Committee, the primary group that reviews all state appropriations and revenues. This legislative engagement resulted in discussions around integrated, competitive employment for individuals with I/DD.

Policy Collaboration

LGTW's Policy Team and leadership from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) held regular meetings to discuss recommendations for DPI's improvement plans around Results Driven Accountability, which the Office of Special Education Programs required for all states. LGTW recommendations resulted in DPI focusing on a broader age range of reading skills for improvement and conducting an analysis of reading's effect on readiness for college and employment.

Removing Systemic Barriers

Building Program Capacity

Early in Wisconsin's project, LGTW pilot schools received training from two coaches to help them plan their intervention, collect baseline data, and identify their current strengths and areas for improvement. The pilots also gathered for community building trainings with a subject-matter expert and participated in monthly calls. LGTW pilot schools' best practices were expanded to five Transition Improvement Grant (TIG) schools. In 2015, LGTW and TIG co-hosted a Community Based Integrated Employment Summit that included LGTW pilot school sites. The Summit was an opportunity to help the five new TIG schools get started on improving their transition outcomes. Teachers, parents, students and administrators from the LGTW pilot school sites shared "their experiences participating in the project including how they achieved excellent outcomes and how their schools have changed their culture and improved outcomes." LGTW coaches also shared the LGTW Quick Guide for Teachers with the new schools and the new schools were invited to join the LGTW consortium.

In 2014, LGTW hosted a capacity building meeting with stakeholders from LGTW partner agencies, Managed Care Organizations, community rehabilitation providers, independent service providers, and LGTW project staff to discuss strategies to strengthen the provider network for providing supported employment services in Wisconsin.

Improving or Enhancing Existing Programs

LGTW has worked with a variety of stakeholders to improve or enhance existing programs. Each year, LGTW has provided recommendations to managed care organizations to increase focus on integrated employment in managed care contracts. Several recommendations submitted by LGTW were adopted by MCOs in 2014. LGTW, in partnership with Disability Rights Wisconsin, also compiled a list of barriers on the referral process to DVR services. Additionally, collaboration between DHS and LGTW helped secure two Birth to 3 CORE mini-grants. Families led one grant, while a Birth to 3 Coordinator led the other grant.

Graduate Certificate in Transition

The University of Wisconsin Milwaukee announced that it would offer a graduate certificate in transition beginning in summer 2015.

Pilot Projects

In 2012, twenty-nine applicants responded to a RFP for LGTW pilot sites with five applications selected to be Round 1 pilot schools. LGTW disseminated a second RFP in 2012 to select four additional school sites for Round 2 pilot schools. LGTW pilot schools used the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's On the Job initiative to allow pilot students to gain paid summer employment. As of fall 2013, 29 of the 63 students in the nine pilot schools had experience working in the community. Although funding for Round 1 pilot schools ended in 2014, pilot schools continued to attend quarterly consortium meetings. In 2015, pilot schools participated in 10 scheduled and 16 drop-in visits to legislators. In March 2015, three LGTW pilot schools participated in Disability Advocacy Day, which had over 700 attendees. Since Round 1 schools no longer received grant funding and Round 2 schools were almost done with funding, LGTW coaches scaled back time spent with the schools. LGTW continued to work with the school sites to learn from their experiences with sustaining their work. As of March 2015, all of the Round 1 schools, except one who no longer reported to LGTW, had sustained the grant activities. School staff continued to reach out to new employers, students continued to get paid and unpaid work experiences and staff and administrators continued working on better inclusion practices.

Table 1: Let's Get to Work Pilot Sites by the Numbers

LGTW Pilot Site Accomplishments	
3x	Increase in number of LGTW students with paid jobs in their community after one year.
66%	Proportion of LGTW students working in their communities after three years in paid positions, as of fall 2014.
2x	Increase in number of employers who hired LGTW over a six-month timeframe.
9	Number of high school pilot sites as of March 2015.
35	Number of unique employers of pilot site participants as of September 2014, a 75 percent increase from March 2014.
100%	Proportion of students at Grafton pilot site gaining paid jobs in fewer than three years. 67 percent of these students continued to work after the grant ended.

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

Building Cross-System and Cross-Agency Collaboration

Consortium

Through the Let's Get to Work Consortium meetings, Wisconsin continued to engage stakeholders and increase membership. Early in the project, LGTW established the LGTW Youth Track to engage LGTW pilot school students, both with and without I/DD. LGTW also formed the Policy Team to develop and submit policy recommendations to the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Health Services, and the Department of Public Instruction. LGTW meetings focused on how to share promising practices, implement project practices into existing work at various agencies, and share successful project outcomes with legislators.

Youth Engagement

In addition to LGTW pilot school activities, LGTW engaged youth through the Youth Track at Consortium meetings. LGTW pilot school students, both with and without I/DD, attended several consortium meetings that focused on self-advocacy specific projects. Topics included learning about employment and postsecondary education programs similar to AmeriCorps, Project SEARCH™, and Think College available across the state as well as training for youth to identify their strengths, weaknesses, abilities, and interests. In May 2013, students and staff from three LGTW pilot schools traveled to Washington, D.C. to discuss integrated, competitive employment with policymakers. Students from pilot schools also participated in the "Take Your Legislator to Work" campaign, which allowed legislators to visit employees with I/DD at their workplace.

Family Engagement

Project staff collaborated with the state's Parent Training Initiative, a parent training discretionary grant, and other family trainers to develop family and parent trainings. In 2012, a town hall meeting was held with 150 individuals in attendance including a state senator. The event featured presentations from students with disabilities on "why they want to work in the community." In 2013, parents and other stakeholders participated in trainings focused on what youth with I/DD are capable of doing. In 2014, a Wisconsin State Journal article about employment possibilities for young people with I/DD featured the LGTW project coordinator who discussed the need for families to increase expectations of their children's abilities.

Community Conversations

During the project, all nine pilot schools held Community Conversations that engaged individuals including parents, teachers, legislators, and community members in conversations about employment for youth with I/DD. LGTW also collaborated with the BPDD Employment First initiative to award mini-grants to two communities, allowing them to replicate Community Conversations that were part of LGTW in areas of the state that had not focused on youth employment.

Employer Engagement

In 2014, LGTW representatives attended the Governor's Small Business Summit. LGTW provided information on hiring people with disabilities to employers, the Governor highlighted a disability employment video, and the Department of Workforce Development trained employers on the Wisconsin Fast Forward Worker Training grants. In spring 2014, a 90-second [video of one of the LGTW pilot students working](#) at American Family Insurance was created and disseminated to 10,000 American Family Insurance employees. After viewing the video, American Family wrote a supporting article including background on the student and the agency that supported the individual. LGTW embedded this video on several websites and in three employment trainings for Aging and Disability Resource Center staff, for the Wisconsin Statewide Parent Educator Initiative's parent trainings, and the statewide Transition Improvement Grant trainings. LGTW also recorded video footage of a student working at Best Buy that features the use of natural supports in the workplace.

Implementing Strategies and Promising Practices

Shared Data Systems

After a year of meetings between LGTW project staff, the Protection and Advocacy Organization, and Department of Workforce Development, a sub-minimum wage electronic data collection system was created in 2014. This publicly searchable system requires sub-minimum wage employers to report on several data elements. These elements included “the number of workers earning sub-minimum wage, how frequently they are assessed, what their age is, how many years they have been at the facility, how much time they have worked, and how much down time they experienced.”

Disseminating Promising Practices

In 2012, LGTW project staff worked with a web developer to create a website to disseminate stories from individuals with I/DD, resources, and project updates.

Continuing to Support Integrated, Competitive Employment

Other Initiatives

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

Sustainability Beyond PIE

Promising practices from the Let’s Get to Work project have been embedded into other Wisconsin projects including the Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) grant and the Statewide Transition Improvement Grant (TIG). The PROMISE grant adopted Let’s Get to Work strategies including parent trainings and community conversations. The PROMISE grant staff continued to revise and retool the Let’s Get to Work parent training to determine the best strategy for delivering the training. In addition, the PROMISE grant has held several Community Conversations throughout the state, which have raised awareness of the issue of youth with disabilities working in their community. During a LGTW Consortium meeting in 2014, the LGTW Youth Track participated in interactive activities from the Soft Skills to Pay the Bills curriculum, which allowed the PROMISE grant to “test” some activities on LGTW students before using them with the students in the PROMISE intervention group. TIG also participated in Community Based Integrated Employment Summit and reviewed LGTW Quick Guide for Teachers.

The Board for People with Developmental Disabilities provides administrative support to the Let’s Get to Work project.

Website: www.letsgettoworkwi.org

The Lewin Group, under Contract HHSP23320095639WC Task Order HHSP23337017T, developed the Wisconsin PIE profile.

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

