

Background on Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Projects

In October 2011, the Administration on Developmental Disabilities awarded grants to lead agencies in six states: California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin. Two additional states, Alaska and Tennessee, received grants in October 2012. These states proposed activities to spur improved employment and post-secondary outcomes for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Institute for Community Inclusion and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services are providing training and technical assistance (TA) to the eight state projects through the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Training and TA Center.

Partnerships project work is framed by the High Performing States Transition Model which contains 8 key elements: collaboration, leadership, state goals and policy, funding and contracting, staff training, service innovation, performance management and quality assurance, and youth leadership development and family engagement. This document is one in a series of PIE Project Fact Sheets that have been developed to chronicle how PIE grantee states are making change under the elements of the High Performing States Transition model.

Funding mechanisms and contracts with providers emphasize employment for transition-age youth and young adults as the preferred outcome.

IOWA

The Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), a partner in Iowa's Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE), is redesigning the state's funding mechanisms to support individual integrated employment outcomes. The goal is to ensure that rates result in sufficient numbers of qualified providers to support the movement of individuals with IDD into integrated employment.

The redesign recognizes that payment rates for job development and employment supports, particularly early on in the employment process, must be high enough to adequately compensate employment specialists with advanced community employment competence. To build support for changes in the funding system, DHS is partnering with multiple state agencies, service providers, families, and advocacy groups to understand the ways in which

the current funding system impedes integrated employment for individuals with IDD, including transition-age youth, such as insufficient rates that do not cover the actual cost of the services being provided. Regional forums provide the venue to solicit comments and recommendations regarding rate restructuring.

Representatives of these groups also serve as members of a formal workgroup and provide feedback on proposed changes to funding structures and payment rates. ICIE serves an important role in this process as a member of the DHS funding workgroup. A multi-organizational collaborative body, ICIE helps to make sure that what is happening with rates is coordinated with other competitive employment policy change efforts.

Lessons learned:

- » Provide opportunities statewide for multiple stakeholders to diagnose what does not work within the current funding system, to provide feedback on what would work better, and to react to proposed revisions to funding practices.
- » Ensure that there are enough resources in terms of funds and people to facilitate and promote regional forums consistently over time.
- » Connect efforts to restructure integrated employment funding processes to other state systems change efforts.
- » Encourage sometimes-difficult conversations (the elephants in the room) so that all stakeholders can express themselves and honestly provide feedback about what can be done and what can no longer be sustained.
- » Send periodic updates to keep messaging moving in the intended direction—keeping people on message and clearing up misinterpretations and rumors.

NEW YORK

The New York State's Partnerships in Employment Systems Change project (NYS PIE) completed an analysis of state policies and regulations. The project identified that a significant barrier to employment for youth with IDD was the incorrect understanding of what services could be reimbursed by state agencies while youth were enrolled in school. This misunderstanding arose from the state's large geographic size and culture of regional state agency autonomy.

Several state agency members of the NYS PIE consortium have made use of the consortium's collaborative structure to clear up these misunderstandings. For example, state agency representatives have discussed concerns raised by employment providers that services for high school students could not be reimbursed through ACCES-VR (Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation). As a result of these discussions, ACCES-VR identified a group of allowable Youth Employment Services activities. The change was enacted on January 1, 2014 and has brought greater awareness to supported employment providers that giving services to high school students is an allowable and billable expense within existing funding regulations.

Knowledge of the change was spread not only through the ACCES-VR regional office but also through all of the NYS PIE consortium partners, ensuring that a unified message was disseminated across the state. Since clarifying this funding language, ACCES-VR reports an increase in the number of employment provider agencies seeking to provide services to transition-age youth.

Lessons learned:

- » Collaborating to identify the barriers funding systems can have on access to integrated employment is an important first step in the systems change process.
- » Efforts to remove these barriers require both individual system and cross-system responses. The relationships established through the NYS PIE network ensured that information from VR was disseminated broadly across the state system. This dissemination facilitated the scaling up of the use of ACCES-VR services for youth across the state.

We thank the Partnerships in Employment grantees for their contributions to and reviews of the emerging practices in their state.

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