

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.

State agencies work to create opportunities for providers, youth and young adults, and families to make optimal use of the resources available for transition to employment.

ALASKA

Alaska is a rural state in which there is limited wage employment in rural and remote areas. This situation has led Alaska's Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) to focus on providing integrated self-employment, as well as other employment options, to transitioning youth and young adults with IDD.

To do so, the AIEI is working on increasing the representation of youth and young adults with IDD in a microenterprise grant program administered by Alaska's Mental Health Trust Authority. This program has shown success in providing start-up grants, business planning, and coaching to people with disabilities, but not yet to youth and young adults with IDD.

The envisioned program will be adapted to meet the specific needs of youth and young adults with IDD. It will incorporate principles of customized employment,

in which youth receive individualized support in creating an independently owned small business based on the strengths and dreams of the individual and the unmet needs of a local market.

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation and Medicaid waivers can fund the provision of services and supports by certified professionals trained in customized self-employment. AIEI is also in the process of hiring an entrepreneur with a disability to mentor young adults on self-employment.

AIEI developed training in customized employment and customized self-employment that was approved by DVR. This training is used to certify providers for DVR reimbursement of customized employment and self-employment services, including the Discovery process. The AIEI training coordinator has provided training on customized self-employment to families and individuals with IDD, as well.

In all customized employment trainings that the AIEI training coordinator provides, self-employment is covered as an option, and local microenterprise grant program opportunities are noted. The self-employment option is communicated when the trainer works with youth. It is also presented as an option to Project SEARCH high school transition site students. (Project SEARCH provides employability skills training and workplace internships for individuals with significant disabilities, particularly youth transitioning from high school to adult life).

In addition, Alaska is working to further improve the awareness of the microenterprise grant program through a brochure and statewide webinars. AIEI staff members are seeking to increase the number of individuals with IDD who apply for the microenterprise grant, particularly transition-age youth. This may have significant positive impact for transition-age students in rural and remote regions where providers would be able to offer self-employment support services and have them funded by DVR.

Lessons learned:

- » AIEI's development of a self-employment option for youth and young adults with IDD represents an adaptation to the necessities of Alaska's rural environment. At the same time, this option also

provides an increased level of choice to youth and young adults who live in a more urban setting. This strategy demonstrates using an existing programmatic infrastructure and adapting it to the specific needs of youth and young adults with IDD.

MISSOURI

Missouri's Show Me Careers (SMC) collaborative identified employer engagement and business partnerships as one of six focus areas for building effective school-to-work state and community policies and practices. Its guiding principle for employer engagement states that "school-to-career initiatives should engage employers as active partners and ... focus on the needs of both businesses and youth." This principle positions employers dually, as customers and partners in the transition to employment.

When the SMC issued a request for proposals (RFP) to pilot community consortia, it encouraged applicants to include partnerships with businesses. It asked RFP applicants (1) to identify practices, successes, and challenges in engaging local employers and businesses in the transition of youth with IDD to employment, and (2) to propose a plan to build partnerships with community businesses and increase the number of businesses providing early work experiences and/or inclusive employment to youth with IDD.

SMC has worked with each of its pilot communities to increase the number of businesses providing inclusive early work experience and employment opportunities for transitioning students with IDD. It has done so by providing customized training and participating in planning to build relationships with area businesses.

One strategy has consisted of working with local Chambers of Commerce. In one rural community in which there is an SMC pilot, the CEO/president of the local Chamber suggested partnering in the hosting of job-matching meetings. In these meetings, teachers present profiles of students needing work experience or employment, and Chamber members and other partners identify potential community employers and facilitate initial contacts.

Another cornerstone of efforts to build business partnerships has been community collaboration. In one SMC community, numerous employment service agencies and schools had each independently been making contacts with many of the same businesses.

They are now working towards a more cohesive approach to engage businesses by implementing a shared web-based employer contact and knowledge management system that allows them to build comprehensive profiles of businesses. An additional component of this partnership is developing a marketing strategy that promotes this collaboration, the services and supports they will provide to businesses, and access to a larger talent pool.

Lessons learned:

- » Building connections with employers and businesses to create work experience and jobs for transitioning youth with IDD can help employers realize the employment potential of these youth.
- » Diverse partners within communities (e.g., schools, providers, state agency personnel) can collaborate to promote a business case for hiring individuals with intellectual disabilities and to demonstrate successful strategies that support mutually beneficial business partnerships.
- » Building systems at the community level allows school and agency staff to develop local relationships and resources that may be unique. State systems can support these connections and promote innovation and sharing of knowledge across communities.

NEW YORK

New York State's Partnerships in Employment (NYS PIE) systems change project has facilitated the expansion of Project SEARCH. All state agencies engaged in the NYS PIE consortium had an interest in increasing the number of young adults employed in the community, but lacked a documented method of increasing these employment experiences

At the start of the project, only four Project SEARCH programs operated in New York, and all were located in the western part of the state. These four programs had impressive results: more than 80% of their students exiting school entered competitive, integrated employment. However, other areas of the state were not able to fund Project SEARCH.

Through NYS PIE, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities, the Office of Special Education, and the state Department of Education's Office for Adult Career and Continuing Education Services - Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) were able to collaboratively identify barriers to

Project SEARCH expansion and develop plans to remediate them. Then, the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council, a NYS PIE consortium partner, provided additional funding to expand Project SEARCH and track employment outcomes.

NYS PIE and its work to expand Project SEARCH helped to raise awareness of the unequal opportunities for funding high-quality transition-to-employment programs across the state. Through discussion and analysis of the barriers to expansion, it was realized that there were differences in interpretation by regions in the state regarding the appropriate use of ACCES-VR funds. This made it difficult for transition programs to partner with adult providers for job coaching and job development services. This issue is now part of the ongoing discussions with the NYS PIE consortium, as well as with the New York State Employment First Commission.

At the local level, more youth are now able to participate in Project SEARCH, with 13 programs in

operation at the beginning of 2015. Through local consortia built around these programs, enhanced relationships and dialogue between systems is now taking place. This is leading to more coordinated use of ACCES-VR and Medicaid-funded Home and Community-Based Services resources to support integrated employment outcomes.

Lessons learned:

- » Bringing service innovations to scale requires the commitment of multiple system partners to problem-solve and change the ways they work together to meet shared goals.
- » NYS PIE provided a venue through which different state agencies could objectively examine why Project SEARCH programs struggled to expand beyond the western New York region.

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