

## Employment First National Report

### Employment First: An Introduction

Employment services have long been available through state intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) agencies. However, the focus on improving the numbers of individuals with IDD working in integrated jobs in the community as a priority policy goal has varied over time and across states.

An estimated 114,000 individuals received integrated employment services from state IDD agencies in 2010. While there was significant growth in participation in integrated employment through the 1990s, this number has remained unchanged since 2001, and the percent of individuals supported in integrated employment has decreased from a peak of 24.6 percent in 2001 to 20.1 percent in FY 2010 (Butterworth, Hall, Smith, Migliore, Winsor, Timmons, & Domin, 2012).

Of pressing concern are data suggesting that the focus of service provision has, in many states, shifted away from employment and job supports to non-work services that do not assist participants in accessing a productive career path and meaningful work in the community (Butterworth et al., 2012). A recent survey of community rehabilitation providers suggests that between 2002 and 2010, participation in non-work services grew from 33 percent to 43 percent for individuals with IDD (Domin & Butterworth, 2012).

In spite of these national trends, several states have been successful in promoting integrated employment services. Researchers from the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston examined 13 state IDD agencies that in 1999 reported more than 30 percent of individuals in integrated employment, and then conducted in-depth case study research in three states (CO, NH, and WA).

These efforts led to the development of a theoretical model that identified how contextual factors, system-level strategies, and system goals support integrated employment outcomes (Hall, Butterworth, Winsor, Gilmore, & Metzger, 2007). The model illustrates the common strategies and approaches found across states with high levels of integrated employment outcomes, identifying seven characteristics of high-performing states.

**Table 1: Elements of High-Performing States**

Leadership	Local and state level administrators are clearly identifiable as “champions” for employment.
Strategic goals and operating policy	State mission, goals and operating policies emphasize employment as a preferred outcome.
Financing and contracting methods	Funding mechanisms and contracts with providers emphasize employment as the preferred outcome.
Training and technical assistance	There is a sustained and significant investment in employment-related training and technical assistance.
Interagency collaboration and partnership	Through interagency agreements and relationships, provider collaboration, and outreach to stakeholders, employment is shared

	as a common goal.
Services and service innovation	The state IDD agency works to create opportunities for providers, individuals, and families to make optimum use of the resources available for employment; includes disseminating information related to creative strategies to support individuals in employment.
Performance measurement and data management	Comprehensive data systems are used as a strategic planning tool to further the state’s goals of increasing employment.

Over the past 10 years, stakeholders in many states have begun championing integrated employment and advocating for states to develop strategic goals and operating policies that prioritize employment as the first choice and preferred outcome for individuals with IDD. Collectively, these actions have been united under the idea of Employment First.

**History of Employment First Initiatives and Policies**

Employment First strategies consist of a clear set of guiding principles and practices. These practices are promulgated through state statutes, regulation, and operational procedures that target employment in typical work settings as the priority for state funding, and the purpose of supports furnished to persons with IDD during the day. Employment First policies anchor a service delivery system, focusing funding, resource allocation, training, daily assistance, and even the provision of residential supports on the overall objective of employment. This makes it easier for individuals receiving publicly financed supports to enter the workforce and become contributing members of society.

Employment First represents a commitment by states, and state IDD agencies, to the propositions that all individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (a) are capable of performing meaningful work in typical integrated employment settings, (b) should receive as a matter of state policy employment-related services and supports as a priority over other facility-based and non-work day services, and (c) should be paid at least a minimum or prevailing wage.

Employment First policies are becoming increasingly prevalent. Many state IDD agencies are exploring, legislating, or implementing these policies, including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Kansas, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, and Washington. Policies are unique to each service system, and states are at varying stages of formal policy development and implementation.

Other states have strong grassroots initiatives that are working to infuse the idea of Employment First throughout the state. They include Georgia, Iowa, Indiana, Minnesota, Montana, North Carolina, and Wisconsin. Currently, 33 states have some form of policy or grassroots strategy that addresses Employment First; 19 have a formal policy or legislation.

At the federal level, APSE, the Alliance for Full Participation, and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) have issued policy statements emphasizing the importance of integrated employment, as has the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor (2009). The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (2011) released guidance to the field clarifying their commitment to

individual integrated employment as an outcome of employment services under the Home and Community-Based Services waiver program.

### **Analysis of Employment First Initiatives and Policies**

*Level 1.* A first-level analysis of states with Employment First policies or initiatives was conducted. This initial analysis consisted of document review of state policies, regulations, and data on state employment outcomes. The review included current state policies and legislation, previous ICI case study work, and ICI/NASDDS State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) project activities and site visits. States that were included in this first level analysis were California (CA), Connecticut (CT), Delaware (DE), Indiana (IN), Kansas (KS), Louisiana (LA), Massachusetts (MA), Minnesota (MN), Missouri (MO), Montana (MT), New Mexico (NM), Oklahoma (OK), Oregon (OR), Pennsylvania (PA), Tennessee (TN), and Washington (WA). Appendix A provides a summary of adoption and implementation dates for Employment First policy, origin of Employment First initiatives and policies, the length of time the policy has been implemented, the level of success with the policy, the level of integrated employment when the policy was implemented, and the geographic location of the state.

*Level 2.* Based upon the first-level analysis, a subset of eight states was selected for more in-depth study. Selection criteria were the presence of an established policy, employment outcomes (high levels of and/or growth in integrated employment outcomes), state characteristics (factors such as state size, demographics, state agency structure that is comparable to Florida), and the basis for the initiative (e.g., grass-roots, state-level, or both). The subset of states was CT, DE, KS, MA, MN, MO, TN, and WA.

This report contains a summary for each state. The summaries are organized by the following topics: definition of Employment First; background on the development of the policy or initiative; state agencies' values, mission, and goals; state operating procedures; funding for employment; training for employment; interagency agreements and collaborative efforts; outreach; use of resources and strategies to support individuals to obtain employment (e.g., targeting transition-age youth, benefits planning); and state performance measures and oversight. In a few cases, information under each subcategory is not available (e.g., state operating procedure regarding Employment First does not exist in states that do not yet have a formal policy).

Table 2 identifies the origin of the state policy or initiative, the type(s) of employment supported within the policy or initiative, and the percentage of people with IDD served in integrated employment.

**Table 2. Policy Origins and Service Data**

State	Policy origin	Employment type	% receiving integrated employment services (FY2011)
Connecticut	Formal	Individual integrated, integrated group supported employment	51
Delaware	Formal & Grassroots	Competitive and integrated employment	21*
Indiana	Grassroots	Competitive employment	19
Kansas	Formal & Grassroots	Competitive and integrated employment	15
Massachusetts	Formal	Integrated individual employment, self-employment, and person-centered career planning	25
Minnesota	Grassroots	Integrated employment with minimum or competitive wages and benefits	19
Missouri	Formal	Community integrated employment, career planning, person centered planning	6
Tennessee	Formal & Grassroots	Integrated employment	18
Washington	Formal	Individual supported employment, group supported employment, and prevocational services	88
Florida	N/A	N/A	20

\*(data from FY2008)

### **Connecticut**

*Definition of Employment First.* Connecticut policy defines Employment First as follows:

In order for individuals with an intellectual disability to achieve full citizenship, employment opportunities in fully integrated work settings are the first priority. This shall be the first option explored in the service planning for working age adults. This process will begin during the child's school aged years and may even begin prior to school.

While all options are important and valued, integrated employment is more valued than non-employment, segregated employment, facility-based employment, or day habilitation in terms of outcomes for individuals. For those individuals who successfully achieve the goal of employment in an integrated setting, future service planning will focus on maintaining employment as well as the consideration of additional career or advancement opportunities. For those individuals not yet achieving employment, annual service planning will include and reflect employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup>

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* Connecticut began its Employment First planning by gathering support for an initiative before announcing or working towards a formal policy. The goal of the initiative was to make changes in the service delivery system that would support successful implementation of an Employment First policy. Although not formalized initially, the initiative was rooted within the state IDD agency, the Department of Developmental Services (DDS), as opposed to through a network of advocates (as was the case in other states like Tennessee and Kansas). In April 2011, a formal Employment First policy was developed by the state agency.

*State agencies' values, mission, and goals.* In the past two years, Connecticut has made some significant changes in terms of how they work with their provider community around employment. The state agency's most recent five-year plan is focused on building economic self-sufficiency through employment with the goal of moving people with IDD out of poverty.

*State operating procedures.* DDS has instituted a career-planning process and developed a career-planning tool to support individuals to pursue integrated employment. A career plan is implemented when the individual planning team determines that more information is needed to help plan for the supports that an individual may need to find, get and keep a job.

Providers can request one-time funding to complete a career plan assessment. Payments are made for face-to-face assessment activities (interviews, observations, and pen-and-paper assessments), and an additional payment is made when the completed career plan is turned in to the individual's resource manager.

DDS also reassigned staff to newly created self-determination employment regional positions. Self-determination employment coordinators are responsible for implementing self-determination, employment training, and technical assistance activities for DDS staff and for agency providers. Self-determination employment instructors are responsible for assisting self-advocate coordinators to promote employment and self-determination to consumers.

Initially, DDS developed a group called the Employment Marketing Committee, made up of staff from every division in the department. The committee met every other month to discuss the status of DDS's employment goals and to provide a review of current employment news and issues. Recently, the committee was expanded to include consumers, families, providers, vocational rehabilitation agency staff, and Department of Education staff. The group was also rebranded as the Employment Steering Committee.

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<sup>1</sup>CT policy statement 4.13.2011.pdf

*Funding for employment.* DDS case managers use a standardized tool, the CT Level of Need Assessment and Screening Tool (LON), to assess each individual's level of need for supports and services. The LON is used to assess individuals' need for supports and services, and to allocate resources based on individuals' level of support need.

In 2005, DDS began using utilization-based rates as part of the Individual and Family Support Waiver. The Individual Supported Employment (ISE) rate of \$58.11 per hour was billed for all face-to-face supports (direct time spent between the provider and the individual). The hourly rate was meant to reimburse the provider for both the direct and indirect costs incurred.

When DDS converted the traditional payment structure of ISE supports contracted through a Purchase of Service contract to attendance-based payments in February of 2010, the department used the ISE rate to determine the number of hours of supports for which the provider could bill. Since individuals served required only a few follow-along support hours, DDS determined that provider payments would be dramatically reduced from historical payments. This could jeopardize the agency's infrastructure, thus having a negative impact on the provision of employment supports.<sup>2</sup>

Earlier this year, an ISE work group developed a rate structure to encourage competitive employment and reward providers for supporting individuals to find and maintain work in the community. The group developed a career planning tool to determine the settings that best meet the needs and wants of participants. A payment system was developed to continue to fund the provider's infrastructure for participants who achieve stable employment. Providers will receive additional payments when they achieve specific outcomes. The start date for the new ISE rate structure was February 1, 2012.<sup>3</sup>

Providers receive financial incentives for providing integrated employment over other services. They are eligible for benchmark payments from DDS for getting a person a job, as well as when the person has reached 30-day, 90-day, and six-month milestones. Providers may bill \$4.48 for each hour a person works beginning at job entry, regardless of the supports received.

*Training for employment.* Providers are offered one-time funds to support the cost of release time when they send staff to trainings. Additionally, infrastructure development funds were recently awarded to six agencies to help enhance the employment services they are able to deliver.

A variety of employment materials were developed through funds obtained through the Connect-Ability Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. DDS also developed an employment website where these and other employment resources can be found.

Lastly, DDS is involved in the Youth Leadership Forum, which provides training on self-advocacy and leadership skills to youth with IDD. DDS has also partnered with the Department

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<sup>2</sup>[http://www.ct.gov/dds/lib/dds/operations\\_center/frequently\\_asked\\_questions\\_1-27-12.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dds/lib/dds/operations_center/frequently_asked_questions_1-27-12.pdf)  
DDS Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the New ISE Rate Structure

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.ct.gov/dds/lib/dds/operations\\_center/frequently\\_asked\\_questions\\_1-27-12.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/dds/lib/dds/operations_center/frequently_asked_questions_1-27-12.pdf)  
DDS Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the New ISE Rate Structure

of Rehabilitative Services (DORS) and with the Department of Education (DOE) to provide three separate employment conferences over the last two years. Over 600 people participated in these three conferences.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* A Memorandum of Understanding was recently developed with the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency. This agreement requires that DDS and VR agency staff meet regularly at both a central-office and regional level, and requires joint training and data sharing between the two agencies.

A current school-to-work pilot is a collaboration between the DOE, the Department of Rehabilitative Services (DORS), and DDS. DORS assists the student to get a summer job prior to their last year in school, the school system assists the student to maintain the job throughout their last year, and DDS signs off on funding for ongoing supports as soon as the student has a paid competitive job in place. DDS transition coordinators meet quarterly in each region with DORS staff to help ensure a smooth transition from school to work. DDS staff also participate in the DOE's transition workgroup.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* Connecticut has done a great deal of work to support self-advocates to provide training and employ them part-time with the IDD agency to be messengers for employment, self-advocacy, and self-determination.

In 2007, DDS partnered with the self-advocacy group People First of Connecticut to develop Employment Idol, an innovative project for promoting employment as the preferred outcome for individuals with IDD in the state. Spinning off the concept of the popular television show *American Idol*, Employment Idol showcases the employment success stories of a select group of individuals with IDD. The department shares the Employment Idol video at conferences, trainings, brown bag lunch sessions, etc., and mails it to employers. A copy of Employment Idol has been provided to every public library in the state.

Another strategy used to engage individuals with disabilities in employment is the use of self-advocate coordinators. Across the state there are 10 self-advocate coordinators (SACs) who are employed by DDS and reach out to every provider in the state to identify a self-advocate employment champion within their agency. The SACs are responsible for sharing employment updates with the identified "employment champions" and for mentoring them on how to present on employment-related topics. The SACs also show the Employment Idol video and present on employment to school staff, families, and self-advocacy groups.

*State performance measures and oversight.* DDS is currently defining an integrated employment data system. The goal of this data system is to collect and review information about all day services options, to collect and analyze wage and hour data, and to periodically review input and outcome data regarding referrals to the state VR agency.

## **Delaware**

*Definition of Employment First.* Signed into law in July 2012, the Employment First Act "requires that state agencies that provide services and support to persons with disabilities shall

consider, as their first option, competitive employment in an integrated setting for persons with disabilities.”<sup>4</sup>

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* Initially the Employment First initiative was established by the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) to affirm that employment and participation in their communities is an important part of the lives of the individuals it serves, and that employment in the community should be the first service option considered for people with disabilities. DDDS then set a goal of increasing community employment for individuals receiving center-based day program services, and requested that day program service plans be required to address the advancement of individuals towards meaningful participation and employment in their communities.

Building on this early initiative, Delaware gathered together several organizations at the request of a representative to the state legislature to draft an Employment First bill. The representative chaired a group that included a wide range of stakeholders from the Developmental Disabilities Council, the Governor’s Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens, the State Council for Persons with Disabilities, the Disabilities Law Program, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), DDDS, the Department of Health & Social Services, the Department of Education, employment provider agencies and their association, and people with disabilities and their families.

The bill, based in part on Kansas’s Employment First legislation, established an Employment First commission within the State Council for Persons with Disabilities. The commission will provide oversight and guidance to address the advancement of individuals toward meaningful participation and employment. It will also work with DVR to identify the employment assessments that will best help individuals obtain integrated employment placements, review state agency goals and objectives for compliance to the law, and develop an annual report on the implementation of the law.

At the same time as the legislation was being drafted, members of these same organizations met separately to draft an action plan for Employment First. The action plan identified a series of goals for Employment First in Delaware:

- Create Employment First legislation for Delaware.
- Provide ongoing professional development, including a standardized curriculum for job coaches.
- Collect baseline data of numbers of people in segregated settings and those in supported and integrated employment for the past five years.
- Increase integrated employment outcomes by 50% by 2015.
- Institutionalize a checklist for all IEP teams, beginning in middle schools, to prepare children for transition from school to work.

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<sup>4</sup>Delaware House Bill No. 319. Retrieved from [http://legis.delaware.gov/LIS/lis146.nsf/vwLegislation/HB+319/\\$file/legis.html?open](http://legis.delaware.gov/LIS/lis146.nsf/vwLegislation/HB+319/$file/legis.html?open)

- Identify and obtain needed technology for successful work experiences for youth with disabilities, beginning in middle school and continuing through transition.
- Educate youth about their rights and teach them how to advocate for themselves.
- Institute and report annually the number of students that move from school-to-work and school-to-higher education.
- Promote a self-advocacy movement that advocates for integrated employment.
- Provide educational opportunities to Department of Education, school districts including the special schools, Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Labor, Department of Services of Youth, Children and their Families, and student families.
- Expand “Project Search.”<sup>5</sup>
- Expand collaboration between Department of Education, Department of Health and Social Services, Department of Services of Youth, Children and their Families, and Department of Labor.
- Expand educational opportunities for sheltered workshop providers to transition their business model.
- Advocate for incentives to shift from sheltered to integrated services.
- Enable people in workshops and day rehabilitation to increase their time in the community progressively to full time, including providing job exploration, volunteer opportunities, and resume building that will lead to more job options.
- Promote an enriched transition process that includes incentives to schools to encourage employment.
- Expand the Early Start Model to a customized employment process at an earlier age (12–14) so students have gained various skills and are ready to transition to DVR and/or other employment opportunities.
- Build a partnership with Delaware’s Business Leadership Network.
- Educate people with disabilities, providers, and school personnel on the Telework<sup>6</sup> opportunity, assistive technology programs, and funding sources for these services.

The Employment First Commission will consider the Action Plan as a part of their monitoring of the implementation of the law.

*State agencies’ values, mission, and goals.* Community employment is emphasized as the first option for individuals with developmental disabilities. The state DDDS goals demonstrate a commitment to this priority by requiring steady increases in the number of individuals engaged in community employment, and increases in the number of work hours of individuals employed part time.

DDDS also had a five-year goal of increasing community employment for individuals with disabilities by five percent per year.

*State operating procedures.* In Delaware, day programs were instructed to incorporate a plan for community employment into individuals’ service plans by July 1, 2009. Additionally, providers were instructed to develop a plan to increase the number of work hours for individuals who were

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<sup>5</sup><http://www.projectsearch.us/>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.dati.org/funding/FinancialLoanPrograms.html>

employed for less than 20 hours a week. Lastly, the state recommended that an assessment be conducted every three years for individuals who were not in community-based work.

*Funding for employment.* Delaware is a member of the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) and is working on revising service definitions and their funding structure.

*Training for employment.* There is no specific data at this time around training efforts for employment.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* In Delaware, cooperation between residential day programs and families has been prioritized. They are requested to assist in the development of the individual's services plans and support the prioritization of employment.

Delaware is also known for having strong relationships between its state education and VR agencies. The Early Start to Supported Employment (ESSE) pilot started in 2005 with the goal of providing a more seamless transition for students who would benefit from supported employment services when leaving school and entering the adult workforce. An interagency project team was established to guide the pilot work and to ensure that all participants knew their role and shared information and equal responsibility within the project. ESSE is a collaboration between DDDS, the Department of Education, and DVR.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* To build support for the Employment First bill, stakeholders met with a wide range of constituents who would be impacted by the impending legislation. The focus of the meetings was to provide information about the goals of the bill and what the intended outcomes would be for individuals with disabilities, for providers, and for employers. In particular, efforts were made to educate facility-based work providers that they would not be put out of business, and they would be supported to transition their service model to one focused on integrated employment. Now that the legislation has become law, additional efforts are planned to keep stakeholders informed about the implementation of the law.

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals to obtain employment (e.g., target transition-age youth, benefits planning).* Delaware has consistently emphasized the importance of youth leaving school and entering employment as opposed to other day services. The Early Start youth employment initiative has been able to sustain itself despite changes in the state. Additionally, the VR and education agencies are very involved in the IDD agency's initiative, and there is an interagency agreement around employment.

*State performance measures and oversight.* The Employment First Commission will provide oversight to guide implementation of the law. DDDS is also developing a data collection structure for employment.

## **Kansas**

*Definition of Employment First.* The Kansas Employment First Initiative Act became law on July 1, 2011. This law declares that it is the "policy of the state of Kansas that competitive and integrated employment shall be considered its first option when serving persons with disabilities who are of working age to obtain employment. This policy applies to programs and services that

provide services and support to help obtain employment for persons with disabilities. All state agencies shall coordinate efforts and shall collaborate within and among such agencies to ensure that state programs, policies, procedures and funding support competitive and integrated employment of individuals with disabilities...State agencies are authorized to adopt rules and regulations to implement this act.”

The act defines competitive employment as “work in the competitive labor market that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis in an integrated setting; and for which an individual is compensated at or above the minimum wage, but not less than the customary wage and level of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled.” It defines an integrated setting as, “with respect to an employment outcome, a setting typically found in the community in which applicants or eligible individuals interact with non-disabled individuals, other than nondisabled individuals who are providing services to those applicants or eligible individuals, to the same extent that non-disabled individuals in comparable positions interact with other persons.”

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* Self-advocates initiated the initial request for Employment First practices during the contract negotiation process between the IDD agency and providers. This request led to the development of an employment workgroup. The employment workgroup began meeting in 2008, and after approximately two years, transitioned into an employment taskforce. The group ultimately had 40 members who represented various constituencies.

The taskforce coalesced around the idea that employment was for all Kansans with disabilities. The group identified issues, defined the term “Employment First,” and developed a white paper on its work. The white paper was adapted into marketing materials, which were distributed statewide, and all members of the taskforce signed on as formal supporters of the concept of Employment First.

*State agencies’ values, mission, and goals.* In August 2010, the governor of Kansas issued Executive Order 10-10. The Executive Order summarized the poor employment outcomes for individuals with physical, cognitive, and mental disabilities in Kansas, and directed “all state agency heads to increase coordination and collaboration across state agencies to provide Kansans with disabilities optimum opportunity to be competitively employed in equal numbers to their peers without disabilities and to help Kansans with disabilities meet the human resource needs of Kansas businesses. State agencies are expected to: 1) Develop a shared vision and mission statement for Kansas that will result in Kansans with disabilities becoming competitively employed in equal numbers to their peers without disabilities and capable of meeting the needs of Kansas businesses. 2) Inventory state plans, strategic plans, and mission and vision statements, to ensure competitive, integrated, employment of people with disabilities is encouraged and supported. 3) Identify policies and procedures within agencies that are a disincentive to competitive employment of people with disabilities, and revise these so that they support competitive employment. 4) Implement changes necessary to coordinate employment programs across agencies to maximize the employment of Kansans with disabilities, as well as tap into an under-utilized source of labor. 5) Explore the possibility of implementing new initiatives that will increase the number of Kansans with disabilities who are competitively

employed. 6) Identify mechanisms for determining baseline data of how many people with disabilities are currently employed in Kansas, how many become employed, and the fiscal impact of their being employed. 7) Report annually to the Governor the number of employed Kansans with disabilities and the fiscal impact for the State of Kansas.”

*State operating procedures.* As a result of Executive Order 10-10 and the Employment First Initiative Act, the development of an employment oversight commission was required. The commission is to establish measurable goals and objectives for Kansas to ensure implementation of the act. The commission is also responsible for tracking the measurable progress of public agencies in implementing the act. Lastly, the commission will work with various state agencies to produce an annual monitoring report to track progress in implementing the act.

*Funding for employment.* There was no funding attached to the Employment First legislation. The goal behind the legislation is that employment is the first option in each state agency that serves people with disabilities, and each agency must reassess how they allocate service dollars so that there is compliance with the policy. Based upon this requirement, it is likely that the state Medicaid agency may need to realign its payment system to support greater integrated employment outcomes for individuals on the Medicaid waiver.

*Training for employment.* Kansas’s Vocational Rehabilitation Services began funding the Great Expectations Employment Initiative in 2011. The focus is to improve access to integrated employment for individuals who have traditionally been excluded from integrated employment services. Working with 12 employment providers in two areas of the state, the project is looking at what interventions are needed at the individual, provider, and systems-funding levels to improve integrated employment outcomes. The goal is to collect data on the challenges to employment at all three levels and to use the data to make systematic changes to the service system.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* The Employment First Initiative Act requires that each state agency that serves individuals with disabilities appoint a liaison to work with the oversight commission, to participate in the development of the annual employment report, and to work across state agencies to reduce barriers to employment.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* Prior to the introduction of the Employment First legislation, the employment taskforce held a legislative event to educate state legislators about Employment First principles and to develop support for the legislation. Additionally, constituents who supported Employment First, including individuals with disabilities who wanted to work but had found it challenging to get employment services, contacted legislators.

An Employment First summit was held to encourage support for improving employment outcomes for all Kansans with disabilities. At the end of the summit, a public meeting was held, with all members of the governor’s cabinet invited. The meeting concluded with the recommendation that the cabinet members examine their agencies’ internal policies, and work across agencies to create cohesion regarding employment for people with disabilities. Each cabinet member also committed to one task within his or her purview that would create accountability for employment outcomes.

Lastly, Kansas has held family employment awareness trainings. The goal of the trainings is not only to educate families about employment, but also to help create demand for employment services across the state.

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals to obtain employment (e.g., target transition-age youth, benefits planning).* At this point in time, Kansas is continuing to identify strengths and weaknesses in their employment system. It is anticipated that additional resources and strategies will need to be developed and implemented to support individuals with IDD in integrated employment.

*State performance measures and oversight.* The Employment First law in Kansas requires that all state agencies shall, whenever feasible, share data and information across systems in order to track progress toward full implementation of the act. The oversight committee is working to develop and implement this requirement.

### **Massachusetts**

*Definition of Employment First.* Effective August 2010, Massachusetts' Employment First policy establishes that, for working-age adults served by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS), integrated, individual employment is the preferred service option and optimal outcome.

In the development of service plans and service delivery, assistance and supports for individual, integrated employment will be prioritized. An individual achieves integrated employment when hired and paid directly by an employer in a work place in the community, where the majority of individuals do not have disabilities, and which provides opportunities to interact with non-disabled individuals.

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* DDS convened a statewide planning team and work group in 2006 to create a strategic plan for employment and to advance outcomes in the state. The statewide planning team was comprised of area, regional, and state-level DDS staff, providers, families, and self-advocates. This document provided a blueprint for planning, and included recommendations to promote and support increased integrated employment opportunities. This document led to the adoption of an Employment First policy. DDS's message about the importance of employment has been described as "slow and steady."

*State agencies' values, mission, and goals.* Full implementation of the Employment First policy will be a long-term process, requiring a general shift in expectations by individuals served by the DDS, their families, and DDS and service provider staff about the ability of individuals to succeed in individual, integrated employment. This will require a consistent message across the DDS system regarding integrated employment as a priority; consistent actions that reinforce this message; and an infrastructure, including prioritizing and directing of resources, that supports this effort. This will also require a fundamental shift in thinking, from a mind-set of integrated employment as an option for some individuals, to employment as a goal for all.

*State operating procedures.* Since the adoption of the Employment First Policy, DDS has formally stated that the placement of individuals served by DDS in employment is driven by a person-centered career planning process. This process identifies an individual's career preferences and choices, and is based on a comprehensive career exploration and assessment, emphasizing community-based situational assessment. Emphasis should be placed on work environments, with potential availability of natural employer and co-worker supports. In providing employment supports, the optimal employment status should be one in which individuals are working the maximum number of hours they are capable of, and earning the prevailing wage with any associated benefits. Lastly, it is expected that through the implementation of this policy, individuals will be engaged primarily in paid employment.

However, it is recognized that for individuals who are working on a part-time basis, employment may not fully occupy their weekday hours. For these individuals, it is expected that the priority during non-working daytime hours should be getting support in other typical adult activities in the community, including volunteer work, recreation, and daily living activities.

Since 2011, DDS has required all providers of facility-based employment services to submit a transformation plan for integrated employment. Area offices are working closely with providers to support the implementation of these plans, which have great variation depending on the culture, philosophy, and level of investment of each provider agency.

*Funding for employment.* In 2009, funding began shifting from block contracts available to providers through a bidding process to a more open process of funding and selection of service provider. DDS has become increasingly clear regarding what services they intend to purchase from providers. The goal is to have a new set of standardized hourly rates for each of their three definitions of employment settings (individual, group, and center-based).

*Training for employment.* DDS has partnered with the SELN to host regional forums and web conferences on the topic of transition from school to employment. Small group discussions at each forum allowed attendees to share critical issues with DDS for future planning. A webinar promoting successful transition practices in Washington state was also offered as a follow-up to the forum comments.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* DDS has collaborated with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to improve access to VR funds for initial employment supports, with DDS providing long-term supports post placement.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* MA began increasing its technical assistance to providers around employment in 2005. The former DDS director began this emphasis by encouraging the development of employment workgroups at the state and regional level. DDS has also brought together stakeholders with different perspectives and concerns about employment in settings where they have been able to speak freely about integrated employment. The groups were diverse, and included those who were very invested in increasing integrated employment, as well as those committed to maintaining facility-based options. The communication between these groups has provided a successful environment for coalition building.

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals to obtain employment (e.g., targeting transition-age youth, benefits planning).* In recent years, MA has hosted regional forums on promising transition-related practices that are in alignment with their Employment First vision. They recently published *School Days to Pay Days: An Employment Planning Guide for Families of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities* (<http://www.communityinclusion.org/schooldays/>). This publication is not only a transition resource, but a tool for communicating the message of Employment First as it relates to youth in the Commonwealth.

Furthermore, DDS developed *Explore-Prepare-Act*, a video as well as a training curriculum (<http://www.exploreprepareact.org/>), in partnership with the Institute for Community Inclusion and Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong. This three-hour curriculum, presented by self-advocates with IDD for other self-advocates with IDD, provides an overview of the basic steps involved in finding a job. It is another valuable tool for supporting individuals to gain employment.

*State performance measures and oversight.* DDS continues to focus on the expansion of the Employment Outcomes data collection system. Currently reporting employment status once a year, the system is being expanded to include real-time placement data. This addition to the data system is being piloted from November 2011–April 2012. Providers receive a summary report each year that addresses employment participation, wages, and hours worked, and provides a comparison between the provider's outcomes and outcomes at the state and regional levels.

DDS staff have access to a website that provides detailed outcome data at the provider, area office, regional, and state levels. Providers in MA have been motivated by the availability of employment provider comparison data and the ability to measure new job placements as they occur.

## **Minnesota**

*Definition of Employment First.* The Minnesota Employment First Coalition defines Employment First as having a regular job, with regular wages, in a business that is not owned or operated by a human service organization, unless the individual is the owner of the business.

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* Minnesota does not have a formal Employment First policy or state initiative. Instead, key stakeholders engage in employment initiatives through the Minnesota Employment First Coalition. The coalition was an outgrowth of a summit held in 2007 that gathered different stakeholder groups concerned with employment services for people with disabilities.

*Coalition values, mission, and goals.* The purpose of the initiative is to close the gap in employment by facilitating dialogue and developing leadership on disability and employment policy. The coalition seeks to increase the number of people with disabilities in integrated employment by reducing bureaucracy and giving families and individuals more power to make informed decisions about employment.

The coalition has pushed for consumer-driven community supports and services with self-directed individualized budgets. The 2007 summit produced a report that identifies four areas in

need of improvement: a unified definition of employment, better coordination between state agencies and stakeholders, training and technical assistance to improve services, and the acknowledgment that Employment First coalitions can be most effective if done at a local level.

*State operating procedures.* N/A

*Funding for employment.* The Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Medicaid Infrastructure Grant funded the 2007 summit, but otherwise the Coalition does not have a committed operations budget. There are not any current initiatives to realign funding to prioritize employment in Minnesota.

*Training for employment.* The Minnesota Employment Training and Technical Assistance Support Center, a project funded by Minnesota's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, provides training and technical assistance statewide using proven, inventive, and evidence-based methods that meld the needs of employment seekers, the business community, service providers, policy makers, families, educators, workforce development professionals and other Minnesota stakeholders. The initiative also educates leadership on disability and employment policy through facilitated discussion to ensure that integrated competitive employment is widely recognized and routinely promoted as the preferred outcome of all Minnesotans with disabilities. It supports up to five local community action teams as cross-stakeholder collaborative planning groups. The initial goal of each community action team is to support five individuals with varying disabilities to become employed.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* The Employment First coalition is a loose affiliation and has members in positions of influence all over the state. Coalition members are on the statewide Workforce Investment Board, Developmental Disabilities Council, and Statewide Rehabilitation Council. Members also come from local nonprofit agencies, such as MN ARC. The community action team approach used by the MN Employment Training and Technical Assistance Support Center is also designed to support collaborative planning and resource coordination.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* Minnesota has had five employment summits. Summits engage stakeholders to learn what they want for employment and to solicit their ideas of how to change the system. The third summit gathered all parents and family members who wanted to see their family members working in the community.

At the fourth annual employment summit in 2011, attendees from twenty disability organizations identified the next steps for the coalition as:

- Develop information to better inform Minnesotans with disabilities and those who support them about the benefits of competitive employment including: work incentives to address concerns about losing public benefits; statistics, research and personal stories illustrating the contributions of individuals with disabilities in the workplace; employment strategies such as supported and customized employment that make the workplace accessible to individuals for whom competitive employment is often not even considered.

- Develop strategic actions, including consideration of legislation, to promote Employment First policies and practices which: have a broad focus across the spectrum of disability groups; include ways to ensure individuals make an informed choice about employment; promote coordination among agencies; ensure young adults moving from school to work are an emphasis; identify specific policies which need to be added or changed, strategies to promote Employment First, and measureable outcomes to determine progress. (Source: Minnesota Employment First Initiative Report, January 2012).

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals.* N/A

*State performance measures and oversight.* N/A

## **Missouri**

*Definition of Employment First.* In its Employment First policy, Missouri sets the expectation that “everyone of working age and those supporting them should consider work as their first option as fully participating members of their community, and should build on career planning and engage in work that makes sense to them.”<sup>7</sup> The policy establishes community integrated employment services and supports as the first service option and primary outcome for youth and adults with disabilities. It also establishes career planning and supports as priorities to explore with all working adults who receive services.

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* In October 2008, the Division of Developmental Disabilities joined the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). To support this process, the division developed a state-level employment leadership network comprised of people with developmental disabilities, family members, community provider agencies, the Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities, the Missouri Governor’s Council on Disability, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Missouri Office of Special Education, the Missouri Division of Workforce Development, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education - Office of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation Services, the University of Missouri Kansas City Institute for Human Development, the Missouri Parents Act, the North East Missouri Workforce Investment Board, APSEMO, and other state and local agencies, including Senate Bill 40 boards. The division also hired a director of employment and training and identified employment coordinators in 11 regional offices.

*State agencies’ values, mission, and goals.* Missouri’s Employment First policy lists several value statements:

- People who want to work can work.
- People that are of working age are expected to work.
- People have the right to achieve their career goals.
- People should earn prevailing wage in an integrated setting of their choice.

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<sup>7</sup>Missouri Department of Mental Health, Division for Developmental Disabilities Employment First Policy

- People should have the opportunity and support to realize economic self-sufficiency.<sup>8</sup>

*State operating procedures.* The state's individual service plan directive mandates that employment be included in each plan for individuals between the ages of 16 and 64. The guidelines are under revision and will specify the type of information to be added based on the individual's age (e.g., for youth in transition, there will be a focus on early work experiences, volunteerism, and self-determination).

Quality assurance processes are in place within the Division's regional offices to track compliance with the above directive. Employment coordinators at the local level provide an additional level of oversight and technical assistance. Every service coordinator, whether at a county board or the Division, must complete an online service coordinator training, which includes information on the policy. There is a posttest after the training to ensure that coordinators understand the information.

*Funding for employment.* Missouri provides funding for employment services through three Home and Community-based Waivers. In the Division's new Partnership for Hope waiver, the state match is shared equally between participating county boards (SB 40 boards) and the division, which maximizes state resources. Senate Bill (SB) 40 Boards are local county boards, which via county tax levies, fund and operate services for individuals with developmental disabilities, including residential, vocational, and other related services. Although SB 40 boards are not in every county, most of the state's population lives in a county with such a board.<sup>9</sup>

Sheltered work is provided and funded through the Department of Education and not the IDD agency. Missouri is building a structure to ensure that community employment is the first option offered to individuals, and is developing practices to support individuals and families in making informed choices regarding work alternatives. Additional work is being done to ensure that individuals and families are knowledgeable about employment options, the Division's employment policy, and available services.

*Training for employment.* In March 2012, an IDD-agency sponsored conference with an employment strand drew more than 300 participants. Although provider qualifications for employment providers are the same as for other day service providers, the Division is working with the SELN to strengthen qualification requirements of vendor agencies. Employment coordinators provide training and technical assistance on topics such as the employment policy, service plan guidelines, career planning, etc. Training content is consistent statewide, ensuring that all staff provide a clear and coherent employment message.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* Missouri is focusing many of its efforts on interagency collaboration. The Division and the state VR agency have created a case collaboration manual. Cross-agency training for staff will occur in 2012–2013. Missouri was also one of six states to be awarded a Project of National Significance grant through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families,

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<sup>8</sup>Missouri Employment First Policy

<sup>9</sup><http://www.dmh.mo.gov/mrDDD/provider/manuals/sec13ServiceDescriptiondraft.pdf>

Administration on Developmental Disabilities. A consortium of leaders leads this “Show Me Careers” grant from the following agencies and organizations:

- University of Missouri Kansas City Institute for Human Development
- Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities
- Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities
- Missouri Office of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation Services
- Missouri Office of Special Education
- Missouri People First
- Associated Industries of Missouri (AIM)
- Workforce Development

The Division has also built a partnership with businesses through the creation of the Missouri Business Alliance, which is coordinated by the president of Associated Industries of Missouri (AIM). AIM is Missouri’s business trade organization, which has over 100 business members.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* Through its Employment First working group and the Show-Me Careers project, Missouri is expanding outreach and engagement to improve employment outcomes. Missouri’s IDD agency has used the following outreach strategies:

- A series of “tip sheets” for families, individuals, and service coordinators have been created to share at intake, meetings, and trainings. The tip sheets include information about many different employment topics, and focus on the state’s employment initiative.
- The Division of Developmental Disabilities service coordinator training manual is a vehicle for building an emphasis and skills in transition.
- Employment coordinators across the state are using a prescribed series of trainings for businesses, schools, service coordinators, and community rehabilitation providers. These trainings include information about the Division’s employment policy.
- A series of webinars were conducted throughout 2011–2012 on new waiver services and the employment policy. Providers and service coordinators from around the state attended.
- Employment coordinators at regional offices participate on community transition teams throughout Missouri. They train school personnel and families on the policy and provide additional technical assistance.
- A three-module training was completed for AIM.
- The Division has provided trainings at several state conferences on their employment policy in the past year, including APSE MO, the Division-led Visions for the Future conference, a consumer conference called Real Voices - Real Choices (which had over 600 attendees in 2012), the Spring Training Institute, and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Summer Transition Institute. The policy has also been discussed at a variety of meetings with other partners, such as employment provider meetings, case management meetings, and People First statewide meetings.

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals.* Missouri is moving forward to make use of the Ticket to Work (TTW). The IDD agency is trying to identify individuals in the system who may be candidates for the Ticket. A series of marketing materials regarding TTW have been developed for individuals and family members.

*State performance measures and oversight.* The Division has a memorandum of understanding in place with VR that aids in data sharing. Data is also collected through service coordinators at the annual planning meeting. This was begun in January 2011. It includes information such as full- or part-time work, types of employment services / supports received, type of employment, and wages earned. As noted above, specific processes are in place to ensure compliance with directives that support the Division's employment efforts, including the requirement that employment be in service plans for individuals ages 16–64.

## **Tennessee**

*Definition of Employment First.* The Tennessee Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD) implemented an Employment First initiative in 2002. The goal of Employment First was to make employment the first day service option for adults receiving supports funded by DIDD, Medicaid, or the state. Employment First set the standard that employment was the preferred service option for adults with IDD.

Several assumptions underlie Employment First:

- Employment should be considered for anyone who wants a job.
- Respect for an individual's employment goals should drive efforts to assist people to identify, obtain, and maintain employment.
- As people's interests and skills change, their desire to seek new employment opportunities must be valued and supported.
- Both formal and natural job supports should be available on an ongoing basis to meet individual needs.
- After a person obtains a job, his or her satisfaction with the position should be assessed. A skill or career plan should be developed and implemented to identify opportunities for professional development and career advancement.<sup>10</sup>

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* Prior to the Employment First initiative, Tennessee did not have a specific focus on integrated employment. However, the DIDD vision statement provided a strong foundation to support the Employment First policy. This statement addressed the importance of supporting choice in residence, employment, recreation, and other community activities. Additionally, data from a late-1990s survey of DIDD consumers indicated that Tennesseans with IDD wanted the opportunity to work. The vision statement and consumer survey data were important factors that set the stage for DIDD to focus on integrated employment.

The Employment First policy grew out of the work of several advocacy groups, including the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities (DD Council) and the Arc of Tennessee, as well as stakeholders in the state's settlement of several federal lawsuits. Individually, each of these groups began to discuss the importance of expanding integrated employment in Tennessee. The Arc and DD Council developed and submitted separate position papers to DIDD to make employment the preferred day service option. Additionally, the DD Council offered a grant to

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<sup>10</sup>Tennessee Day Services Resource Handbook, 2005

DIDD, challenging the agency to increase integrated employment outcomes across the state. The challenge grant, data on consumer desires, and advocacy by stakeholder groups were all factors that led DIDD to implement Employment First.

*State agencies' values, mission, and goals.* The DIDD vision is that Tennesseans with intellectual disabilities should have the opportunity and need support to be part of the community in which they live. The agency's mission has been to provide leadership in the development and maintenance of a system that offers a continuum of services and support for people with IDD, so that they can lead healthy, secure, and meaningful lives.

The DIDD will work to accomplish its mission by recognizing that its values and principles are the cornerstones of the service delivery system. DIDD staff will act with professionalism, integrity, and honesty to achieve and maintain the credibility that is required to fulfill the organization's mission.<sup>11</sup>

*State operating procedures.* The Employment First policy requires a periodic community-based work assessment. In Tennessee, independent support coordinators manage services for people with IDD. Under the initiative, these staff members must ensure that individuals who were not in integrated employment participated in a community-based work assessment at least every three years. This requirement provides an opportunity for individuals who might be hesitant to pursue community employment to experiment without fear of failure.

*Funding for employment.* To support Employment First, DIDD reevaluated the rate paid to providers for day services. One important change was to pay a daily rate for all day services. Prior to 2005, the state had paid an hourly rate. The hourly rate was found to discourage providers from expanding integrated employment services, because it was not structured to allow people to easily transition between sheltered and integrated employment, or between short- and long-term employment supports. Additionally, to encourage community rehabilitation providers to expand integrated employment activities, DIDD established a higher rate of payment for integrated employment than for other day services.

*Training for employment.* Tennessee requires that any individual who provides integrated employment support complete an established job coach training curriculum. To ensure that providers are using the curriculum to train new integrated employment staff, DIDD requires that each contracted provider of integrated employment services identify and qualify provider staff to train new job coaches. The department's regional office staff development units provide classroom training opportunities on CB Day/Discovery, supported employment, job coach training, and person-centered planning.<sup>12</sup> DIDD also uses the nationally recognized College of Direct Support as an online training resource for contracted provider staff.

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<sup>11</sup>[http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider\\_agencies/resources/DIDD%20Annual%20Report%202011.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider_agencies/resources/DIDD%20Annual%20Report%202011.pdf)  
Tennessee's Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities, Annual Report FY2010-FY2011

<sup>12</sup>[http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider\\_agencies/resources/DIDD%20Annual%20Report%202011.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider_agencies/resources/DIDD%20Annual%20Report%202011.pdf)  
Tennessee's Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities, Annual Report FY2010-FY2011

Over the past year, DIDD has continued working towards “Becoming a Person Centered Organization” by transforming the current system to recognize that what is important to people must be balanced with what is important for people. DIDD is establishing person-centered practice models throughout the service delivery system. The Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Centers funds the Person Centered Practice initiative for Medicare and Medicaid Services Real Choice Systems Change Grant. Support Development Associates and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services facilitate the work.<sup>13</sup>

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* The Tennessee Employment Consortium (TEC) is a statewide organization focused on increasing the number of Tennesseans in integrated employment. The consortium comprises volunteers from DIDD, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, The ARC of Tennessee, the Center on Disability and Employment at the University of Tennessee, community rehabilitation providers (CRPs), and family members. TEC’s ability to organize collaborative activities across state agencies, advocacy organizations, and CRPs has played an important role in increasing integrated employment outcomes.

TEC focuses on identifying the barriers to integrated employment in Tennessee and developing and implementing interventions to promote change in the employment system. To support their guiding goal of increasing integrated employment outcomes, TEC has developed annual work plans to guide their progress, as well as a state policy evaluation tool. The policy evaluation tool measures how well current and future state policies support DIDD’s goal of integrated employment as the preferred day service outcome.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* TEC also focuses on disseminating success stories in integrated employment. In spring 2006, the Tennessee Microboards Association, Inc., with funding from TEC, began conducting training for people with IDD and their families around integrated employment. Project Income, a series of trainings written and presented by individuals with disabilities and their family members, uses peer-to-peer education to communicate the economic and social benefits of integrated employment for people served by DIDD. Initial feedback from Project Income training participants indicates that sharing stories of employment success is having a positive impact on individual and family perceptions of integrated employment.

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals.* TEC has had some success in using incentive grants to improve integrated employment outcomes. Initially, a request for proposal was issued to providers, offering mini-grants for innovation in integrated employment. While the grants produced integrated employment outcomes, they did not lead to sustained change at the provider level.

In FY 2005, TEC began offering \$1,000 to providers and individuals in the community who assisted an individual served by DIDD to obtain and maintain a job in the community. That same

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<sup>13</sup>[http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider\\_agencies/resources/DIDD%20Annual%20Report%202011.pdf](http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider_agencies/resources/DIDD%20Annual%20Report%202011.pdf)  
Tennessee’s Department of Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities, Annual Report FY2010–FY2011

year, TEC set aside \$100,000 for these stipends. TEC has tied conditions to the receipt of the stipends.

To encourage use of both DRS and DIDD funds, eligible candidates must have a signed letter of understanding for employment funding with DRS. Some stakeholders have been critical of the TEC stipends, and feel that the providers who are receiving the grants are already inclined to engage in integrated employment, while there is little pressure to change for providers who are not in compliance with Employment First. In response to this criticism, in FY 2006 the stipends were increased and targeted to providers that support less than 15% of their total base in integrated employment. These stipends are paired with technical assistance.

Recently, with DIDD as the lead agency, Tennessee was selected as a protégé state for the Employment First State Leadership Mentor Program, funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor.

*State performance measures and oversight.* DIDD has relied on TEC to analyze its employment data. The data analysis has occurred for several years, and targets information on the regional, provider, and individual level. Prior to the TEC analysis, DIDD did not have an accurate count of the number of people they served.

Recent trend data suggests that after the Employment First policy was initiated in 2002, the state reached a high of 24% of individuals served in integrated employment; however, 2010 data show that only 16% of individuals are served in integrated employment. The recent grant from the Department of Labor is one reflection of efforts to re-energize the policy.

## **Washington**

*Definition of Employment First.* Washington's Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) Working Age Adult policy was adopted in 2004 and went into full effect on July 1, 2006. This policy "designates employment supports as the primary method of furnishing state-financed day services to adult participants." Emphasizing community employment as the primary service option, the policy further states that "services for persons under the age of 62 that do not emphasize the pursuit or maintenance of employment in integrated settings can be authorized only by exception to policy" (WA DSHS, DDD, "County Services for Working Age Adults" Policy 4.11). The policy does not eliminate sheltered employment or community access services; rather, it focuses supports towards gainful employment.

*Background on the development of the policy or initiative.* The roots of the state's focus on employment trace back to values-based training that began in the late 1970s. A long-standing network of stakeholders in state and county government, providers, and the advocacy community grew out of this early values-based training. These stakeholders have continued to share information and collaborate, resulting in innovations spreading rapidly through the state. Overtime these stakeholders have become leading advocates for employment for individuals with IDD. Thus the state and these stakeholders jointly delivered a policy whose cornerstones included maintaining, achieving, or progressing towards gainful employment, and earning a living wage. This policy was intended for all adults of working age, with few exceptions.

*State agencies' values, mission, and goals.* In the 1980s, the spread of a values-based service philosophy across the state had a significant impact on the number of people who believed in the importance of increasing opportunities for community inclusion. An additional key factor that impacted the development of DDD system's values was the widespread belief that everyone could work and contribute to their communities. The intersection of the value of work and community inclusion set the standard that integrated employment was the expected service outcome for people with IDD.

*State operating procedures.* In Washington, day and employment services are implemented at the county level. Initially adopted in the 1980s, DDD administration sought to formally institute the values of community inclusion and work through the county guidelines. Stakeholders who had participated in values-based training drafted the guidelines under the belief that inclusive employment was a civil right. The county guidelines continued to provide a framework for how counties contracted with employment service providers.

*Funding for employment.* Washington has a history of targeting funds for integrated employment. Prior to the Working Age Adult policy, many counties had eliminated funding for sheltered workshops, while other counties funded integrated employment at a higher rate than sheltered employment. Contracting is managed at the county level, and finding structures and rates vary from county to county, allowing for innovation in establishing an expectation for employment. Funding resources include ongoing state funding for employment; county property tax funds (local property tax dollars that could be used flexibly); additional legislative proviso dollars to support students graduating from high school to enter employment; and joint funding between DDD and Department of Vocational Rehabilitation around some job seekers.

*Training for employment.* The state and counties have maintained a strong investment in employment-related training and technical assistance for over 25 years. The state/counties contract with internal training providers for training activities, and maintains active relationships with a wide variety of external consultants. For many years, Washington has hosted the Ellensburg conference as a chance for all levels of staff, from front-line day and employment staff to agency administrators, to learn about innovations in the field. Collectively, these activities provide ongoing opportunities for networking, debate, and sharing innovations.

*Interagency agreements and collaborative efforts.* Dollars from the 1985 Systems Change Grant were important for stimulating shared funding across agencies. This grant had the long-term impact of encouraging collaboration between different state agencies and was partly responsible for encouraging the state legislature to support regulation allowing DDD, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), and the Division of Mental Health (DMH) to share funding. In 1994, the legislature passed a provision that required DDD, DVR, and DMH to share funding around joint customers. In addition to state level interagency agreements, individual counties have developed innovative partnerships with other agencies and with community stakeholders. In fiscal years 2008 and 2009, the Jobs by 21 Partnership Project found that, for transition-age youth, interagency planning conducted through county-based transition councils has been an important part of supporting students to seamlessly transition from school to work. DVR has been an important collaborator with schools and DDD to support transition-age youth. The

individual client Data Exchange Agreement between DDD and DVR is one way that these systems have worked together to support transition-age youth to obtain employment.

*Outreach to stakeholders.* Early in the development of Washington's integrated employment services, values-based training was offered to individuals with disabilities, their families, and employment providers, with the goal of increasing expectations. Since that time, with DDD support, counties have targeted parents for training on service expectations, including employment.

During the period between adoption and implementation of the Working Age Adult Policy, a comprehensive planning process was undertaken. In addition to a core stakeholder workgroup that identified best practices, implementation began with state and county-level meetings. These meetings were important because they involved key stakeholders and were used to develop local implementation strategies.

*Use of resources and strategies to support individuals.* In recent years, DDD has targeted transition-age youth as a group that was at risk for poor employment outcomes. The 2007–2009 Washington State Legislature funded the Jobs by 21 Partnership Project. DDD was authorized to identify and demonstrate best practices in sustainable partnerships among Washington's counties, school districts, employers, families, students with developmental disabilities, and adult service agencies. The focus of the collaborative relationships between Partnership Projects stakeholders was to obtain "Jobs by 21" for young adults with developmental disabilities.

One requirement for participation in the Jobs by 21 project was that students become eligible and apply for DDD services. This provided a natural opportunity to provide individuals and families with information about applying for Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance, and Medicaid, as well as information about benefits planning.

*State performance measures and oversight.* Since the early 1980s, the state has collected and tracked wage and hour information for individuals on a monthly basis. Data collection is included in the provider billing process, and must be submitted for a provider to receive payment. Early on in the development of the state's integrated employment system, DDD developed measurable monthly goals to increase the quantity and quality of employment placements. Data were collected on individual employment outcomes, and used to assess whether monthly goals were met at the regional, county, and vendor levels.

## **Conclusion**

This review includes a wide range of approaches to Employment First across the country. The movement serves as a potential catalyst for the long-needed increase in workforce participation for individuals with disabilities. At the same time, it is important to recognize that creation of policy documents alone will not change the lives of individuals with disabilities. Only a long-term commitment to action will make the vision of Employment First a reality for citizens with disabilities. Successful states support the Employment First policy in a holistic way, by engaging stakeholders, assigning staff resources to employment, investing in training and staff qualification requirements, collecting and using outcome data, and focusing funding.

Florida has much to learn from these examples of Employment First Policies and initiatives. Across the states, there is a focus on leadership. The approach varies from designated staff to cross-stakeholder working groups to a legislated commission, but there is both a planning (cross stakeholder teams) and accountability (staff responsibility and/or commission) focus.

States with strong integrated employment outcomes, like Connecticut and Washington (53% and 89%<sup>14</sup> respectively), have formal Employment First policies in place, with the origins of the initiatives firmly rooted in their IDD state agencies. As such, state operating procedures serve as tools to realize the vision behind the policy. In Connecticut, DDS has reassigned existing DDS staff to newly created Self Determination-Employment regional positions. Washington also has a structure that supports a focus on employment supports at a county level.

Successful states also value stakeholder input. Washington invested heavily on stakeholder input during the period in between adoption and implementation of its Working Age Adult Policy, as did Massachusetts during its policy formation.

Conversely, there are some states with long-term Employment First policies in place that have not positively impacted their employment outcomes. States such as Tennessee have had policies in place for almost two decades, but have yet to focus their efforts on the necessary infrastructure and long-term commitment to moving people into community employment.

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<sup>14</sup>Due to the Washington Working Age Adult Policy, nearly all individuals receiving services from the Division of Developmental Disabilities receive integrated employment services. Of those receiving integrated employment services, 5,319 (64% of all individuals served) are in paid employment.

