

# Emerging Practices, Transition Interagency Collaboration

## 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.

*There is a shared statewide interagency responsibility and authority for coordinating transition services.*

## IOWA

Iowa has a strong history of interagency collaboration. The Iowa Governance Group includes the Iowa Department on Aging, Iowa Department for the Blind, Iowa Department of Education, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS), Iowa Department of Human Rights, Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS), Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council, and Iowa Workforce Development.

The heads of these state agencies meet annually, and the Operations Team meets more frequently. The Operations Team functions under the Governance Group, and its purpose is to develop policy and practices and deploy resources that strengthen employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The Operations Team consists of program implementation staff from the eight state agencies listed above. The Memorandum of Agreement to Strengthen Employment Services for Iowans with Disabilities (originally developed in 2001 and redrafted in 2012) creates a structure for the partner agencies to meet on a regular basis. At these meetings, team

members identify practices and policies that impact employment outcomes. The team also serves as a resource to local communities in assessing regional and local issues and opportunities, addressing systemic barriers to employment, and identifying promising practices.

The history of the Governance Group provided a backdrop upon which the Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE) consortium could further advance systems change in the state. First members of the four state agencies, Iowa's Developmental Disabilities Council, Department of Education, IVRS, and DHS are also members of the ICIE core team. Over time, the ICIE core team was broadened to include representation from community rehabilitation providers, Iowa's Department of Workforce Development, and the Iowa University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.

As staffers were selected from these agencies to participate in ICIE, there was an intentional overlap of staff between those on the Governance Group Operations Team and ICIE. Additional members of the ICIE consortium include community organizations, service providers, individuals with IDD, and families.

ICIE offered an additional venue through which barriers to employment could be identified and collaboratively addressed. The Governance Group had worked to address inconsistent information and practices across state agencies on benefits planning and the lack of a common method to collect employment outcome data across agencies. These actions enabled the group to evaluate systemic efforts to increase employment outcomes.

The collaborative staffing model has aided in the development of complementary systems-change goals to address barriers. Also, it has ensured that what is learned from the five model employment transition sites funded by ICIE is disseminated to the highest levels of state government. One outcome of this is that IVRS has added service codes and funding rates for new services such as Discovery.

ICIE's Core Team also works collaboratively with DHS, aligning efforts with the DHS work plan (developed with the State Employment Leadership Network) and the IVRS Employment First project (funded through the federal Office of Disability Employment Policy).

## Lessons learned:

- » A strong network of partners and projects allows systems change efforts to be efficiently and effectively implemented across the state. ICIE supported key partners to participate across multiple initiatives, and allocated time to the coordination of efforts across common goals, such as reforming funding mechanisms and policies.
- » Interagency collaboration should include mechanisms for ensuring communication across multiple service and funding agencies, such as Medicaid, school districts, and vocational rehabilitation, and ensuring that a wide range of priorities can be addressed simultaneously through various initiatives. In Iowa, these initiatives include participation in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), being selected as a protégé state by the Office of Disability Employment Policy, and receiving a Disability Employment Initiative grant from the Department of Labor.
- » When all stakeholders, including individuals with disabilities, families, and service providers, have the opportunity to participate in systems change activities, it makes planning for and implementing complex changes more achievable.

## WISCONSIN

Wisconsin's Let's Get to Work Project has facilitated partnerships among the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Department of Health Services, the Department of Children and Families, and the Department of Public Instruction. These entities have modeled interagency collaboration at the state level and facilitated interagency collaboration at the local level, both of which have led to significant policy changes within the agencies.

In addition, Let's Get to Work is part of a statewide coalition that requested and received a guideline from the federal Office of Special Education Programs that clarifies high school vocational assessments in "Least Restrictive Environments." Let's Get to Work Project staff was also instrumental in the state's efforts to obtain a national PROMISE Initiative (Promoting the Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income) awarded by the U.S. Department of Education. With this grant, the state will establish and operate a model demonstration project designed to improve the education and employment outcomes of child SSI recipients and their families.

Interagency collaboration to support transition-age youth and young adults has already improved access to employment services and overall employment outcomes. Collaboration between schools and DVR has made it possible for all youth in the nine high school pilots funded by Let's Get to Work to connect to DVR services at a younger age. Stronger collaboration between DVR and schools has also led to more situations in which DVR could provide additional services, such as job coaching and transportation, that have led to paid employment. In the fall of 2014, 66% of students participating in the pilots had a paid, integrated job.

## Lessons learned:

- » Successful systems change is facilitated by stakeholders' investment in developing relationships, building trust, increasing their shared understanding of common goals and objectives, and identifying specific practices that will allow them to achieve their mutual goals and objectives.
- » State agencies can provide a valuable example of collaborative leadership. In this way, they can serve as a model for local-level systems change and help to ensure that changes occur across all regions and levels of the state.
- » Investments in strong interagency relationships and practices can lay the groundwork for other efforts to expand and sustain systems change. Relationships developed among state agencies through the Wisconsin Let's Get to Work initiative positioned the state to submit and be selected for the PROMISE grant.



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