

Work and Community Engagement: Supporting Individuals to Have the Lives They Want

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The challenge

People with disabilities can work and want to work – yet the majority don't have jobs. State and national policies exist to increase employment but systems have not aligned to make integrated employment a priority.

Our center integrates research, dissemination and knowledge translation focusing on 4 areas:

1. Knowledge translation and support for individuals and families to promote engagement in employment planning
2. Increasing the effectiveness of support and services provided by employment consultants
3. Building the capacity and supporting organizational transformation for community rehabilitation providers
4. Policies and practices of higher performing state systems

The RRTC is a project of ThinkWork at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. It is funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research in the Administration for Community Living (ACL) in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Partners include the Arc of the US, Research and Training Center on Community Living at the University of Minnesota, National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services, Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, and the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

Bringing Employment First to Scale

Service transformation is key to making Employment First a reality for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The RRTC and the Community Life Engagement Initiative are working to move research into practice to support community providers in their efforts to move from facility based day and employment services to services that support competitive integrated employment and community life engagement.

4 Guideposts for Community Life Engagement

1. Individualize supports for each person

- Show understanding of personal preferences, goals, interests and skills
- Emphasize person-centered planning and discovery
- Consider creative grouping, staffing and scheduling



2. Promote community membership and contribution

- Start with inclusive settings and activities
- Ensure that staff presence does not limit connection with other community members
- Place value on not just presence, but membership in the community
- Consider an individual's preferences



3. Use human and social capital to decrease dependence on paid supports

- Use social capital to create natural supports
- Teach skills to build human capital



4. Ensure that supports are outcome-oriented and regularly monitored

- Emphasize goals rather than promises
- Hold CLE supports to clear state and federal expectations and guidance
- Lead to or complement employment



Community Life Engagement: A Field Initiated Research Project

The challenge

Community Life Engagement currently represents a wide range of activities and experiences with varied approaches to implementation and few consistent guidelines. The relationship between Community Life Engagement and employment is inconsistent and often Community Life Engagement serves as a substitute for employment.

The CLE Initiative is conducting research on Community Life Engagement in the Employment First context and developing guidance for states and service providers by:

- Engaging with State Employment Leadership Network to identify emerging needs and issues at the state level.
- Conducting interviews with 13 knowledgeable people representing state IDD agencies, service providers, researchers, family members, and individuals with IDD.
- Conducting case studies of Community Life Engagement efforts at three exemplary service providers.
- Developing a promising practices series on state and service provider implementation of Community Life Engagement.
- Surveying state IDD agencies about their Community Life Engagement policies and practices.
- Developing, piloting, refining, and disseminating guideposts and toolkits for states and service providers.

This project is funded by the National Institute for Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research Field Initiated Program and by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities as part of the Access to Integrated Employment project.

Partners include the State Employment Leadership Network and National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services.

10 Elements for Provider Transformation

Six elements originally identified by the T-TAP Project in 2007. A Delphi panel updated the original 6 elements and added 4 more to reflect the current policy and practice environment. Further verification and development of these elements is underway through case studies with 4 providers who have closed their sheltered workshops within the past 10 years.

1. Clear and consistent goals
2. Reallocated and restructured resources
3. An active, person-centered job placement process
4. Multiple and diverse community partnerships
5. A holistic approach
6. Strong internal and external communication plan
7. A focus on customer engagement
8. An ongoing investment in staff professional development
9. An agency culture that supports values
10. Effective employment performance measurement, quality assurance and program oversight



What's next?

Toolkits are in development to help put these research findings into practice.

The Community Life Engagement Toolkit is currently being piloted in:

- Washington DC
- New Mexico



The Provider Transformation Toolkit will be piloted with chapters of The Arc in 2017

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