

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 sustained and significant investment in training and technical assistance to support statewide goals regarding the transition from school to employment.

ALASKA

Alaska's Integrated Employment Initiative (AIEI) has created a sustainable process to provide training on customized employment and self-employment to community rehabilitation provider vendors (CRPs) of the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The AIEI training coordinator developed a curriculum and replicable training model that is accepted by DVR as a part of the agency's CRP certification process. The training covers the individualized planning and job development process and provides instruction on matching individuals' strengths to employers' needs.

The training consists of a three-day class, Basics of Customized Employment, and requires practical demonstration of knowledge after class completion. To become certified, trainees are required to submit three customized employment Discovery profiles to DVR for approval. As a result of this initiative, DVR incorporated the training requirements into standards for evaluating customized employment and self-employment services, and established a process for reviewing and approving individualized Discovery plans.

Alaska is building on this training infrastructure to include training for teachers and paraprofessionals within school districts that allows them to become trained CRPs. These CRPs are located at sites where AIEI is enhancing transition services by building elements of customized employment, such as Discovery, into for-credit classes for students.

The benefits of this strategy can be seen in the four Project SEARCH high school transition programs (Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Central Peninsula). In 2014, 19 students graduated from the programs, and 14 have obtained employment to date.

In addition, the AIEI training coordinator has conducted Discovery training with Anchorage School District teachers and students within the ACE/ACT. This is a post-secondary community-based instructional program for students, 18–21 years old, needing additional transitional supports after completing required core credits at neighborhood schools. The coordinator also completed similar training for members of LINKS, a parent navigator group in the Mat-Su borough of Southcentral Alaska.

Because regional Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Centers will no longer be funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, a more significant training need will be present in Alaska in the future. To this end, the AIEI team and Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities staff are working with state agencies and the University of Alaska to adapt elements of the AIEI training into what will become an Alaska-based CRP training that is endorsed by multiple state agencies and provider organizations. With distance delivery options already in place, the state has the capacity to reach into rural and remote areas.

Lessons learned:

- » Systems-change initiatives should use a training curriculum, not only to build the skills of those providing services, but also to establish professional certification requirements for providing employment services.
- » Training of providers, when linked to certification requirements and the approval of service providers, helps to systemically improve the quality of services to individuals, and to ensure that state agencies that provide funding are purchasing services of high quality and fidelity.

TENNESSEE

The TennesseeWorks Partnership (TWP) has made significant investments in training and technical assistance to support systems change. One of TWP's goals is to "raise the aspirations and capacities of young people, their families, educators, service systems, and employers to pursue integrated, competitive work for youth with IDD as a realistic and first choice." Building capacity and raising expectations through training is a major thrust of the Tennessee systems change project.

In the context of other Tennessee initiatives addressing training for service providers and employers, TWP has focused on building new resources for families and educators and has developed a three-tiered approach to training. Each of the tiers addresses six core areas: (1) high expectations for employment, (2) person-centered thinking, (3) teaching work-related skills and attitudes, (4) connecting students to community work experiences, (5) using individualized and natural supports, and (6) identification of relevant systems and resources and how to access them.

Tier 1 is an on-demand information dissemination strategy. It connects families, educators, employers, and other professionals with resources on employment. Information is provided through multiple formats, including one- to two-page fact sheets on services and systems, two- to four-page strategy briefs, six- to 15-page "good practice guides," on-demand and self-paced webinars, monthly e-newsletters, and video vignettes of success stories, parent perspectives, and promising practices.

Tier 2 is a more intensive strategy. It includes professional development and training for families, educators, and other professionals. In order to accomplish this, TWP is working with multiple partners to update existing trainings and ensure they include consistent information. The partnership also developed a new series of in-person trainings—each about two hours in length—designed primarily for educators.

Tier 3 is the most intensive strategy. This tier links individual families, educators, and professionals to one-to-one coaching, intensive supports, or more detailed information. To provide this option, TWP will expand access to a comprehensive bilingual disability information and referral resource center, map the individualized supports and expertise available in the state, and develop a network of volunteer employment advocates.

In addition to making these resources available, TWP posts all training and informational resources online at www.TennesseeWorks.org. TWP works hard to address the information needs of youth and families who are often overlooked because of cultural or linguistic differences, poverty, or residence in a rural area. Each resource offered in the tiered training and made available on the project website will be translated into the multiple languages spoken in Tennessee.

In addition, Vanderbilt University's Tennessee Disability Pathfinder Multicultural Outreach Program (<http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/pathfinder/page.aspx?id=3030>) will provide information to families throughout the state in any language needed. Partners, regional offices, schools, and community venues will distribute printed resources to families that do not have Internet access. The use of plain language and elimination of jargon are used to make the information inclusive and accessible.

During year 1 of TWP, Vanderbilt Kennedy Center staff piloted the trainings. In the future, TWP will be working with the state education agency to develop sustainable methods for providing information on employment to educators and offering trainings for families using a train-the-trainer approach. The family trainings will be free and offered at local schools and advocacy organizations across the state. This will enable families to connect and provide support to one another.

Sustainability of efforts through the wide distribution and cross-posting of information across 45+ partner agencies, as well as a commitment from the Vanderbilt University Kennedy Center to maintain the website, will help to ensure that the information and resources will be widely available for many years.

Lessons learned:

- » Information should be targeted to individuals' needs and desire for depth and breadth of knowledge. Tiered training strategies provide information on demand and at the level needed.
- » Successful training and technical assistance strategies should address the needs of traditionally underserved populations.
- » Sustainability of training and technical assistance efforts requires collaboration with multiple partners, and these relationships should be the basis for all efforts.



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