

State Agency Promising Practice

YEAR OF PUBLICATION:
2010

TOPIC:
Collaboration

Maryland: Collaborating to Promote Self-Employment for People with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

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Background

Self-employment has emerged as a viable option for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD). To meet increased self-employment demands, Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), in collaboration with the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS), adapted services offered through the Reach Independence through Self Employment (RISE) program. The RISE program, funded by DORS, provides technical assistance and financial support to people starting their own businesses. DDA's role in this self-employment initiative has helped people with IDD start a wide variety of businesses and achieve meaningful employment.

Implementation

In 1997, DORS began the RISE program in order to help people with disabilities explore and pursue business ownership. However, people with IDD and their families remained largely unaware of this resource until 2001. At that time, a group of active family members and The Arc of Maryland approached DDA with the idea of expansion. DDA believed in the value of this opportunity and invited families, self-advocates, service providers, the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council, and DORS to join in planning discussions.

Over the course of the next year, DDA and the other constituents worked with DORS to tailor the services offered by the RISE program to individuals with IDD. They established the Supported Business Enterprise, specifically for people who might require ongoing supports to operate their businesses. They also included DDA's statewide employment services coordinator and members from the business community on RISE's business advisory board. Next, the Supported Business Enterprise project team

created a flowchart of services for the purpose of training DORS counselors, DDA providers, and DDA local area service coordinators.

Training opportunities are still being offered regionally as part of ongoing efforts to promote self-employment as a viable outcome for people with IDD.

Once a person has decided to explore self-employment and is referred to DORS, RISE program staff will meet with the person, his or her resource coordinator and VR counselor, and other team members to begin discussing business ideas. RISE staff offers classes in entrepreneurship and business-plan development, training and technical assistance, and funding of up to \$15,000 for business start-up costs. After the business is "up and running," RISE staff provide periodic follow-up support over the next couple of years as needed.

Impact

DDA's support of the RISE program has allowed 39 new businesses to start since 2001. These include a deli, a stained-glass business, and businesses that perform vending, document scanning, shredding/recycling, and video production. The RISE program has remained involved as a consultant to some of these businesses since 2001. Also through the RISE program, DDA has made strong connections to community resources that help people write business plans, learn business skills, and keep their businesses running successfully. Local providers have partnered with business schools, local colleges, local Small Business Administrations, and SCORE, a free online and face-to-face business counseling, mentoring, and training service. The strength and commitment of the partnership between

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people in the business world and the disability field have sustained and nourished this initiative, helping business start-ups to succeed.

Suggestions for replication:

- » Adapt existing resources and programs, rather than “reinventing the wheel.” Agency administrators and other stakeholders interested in self-employment for people with IDD realized that they could tailor an existing program, rather than inventing a new one.
- » Build strong partnerships between employment support systems and the business community. The success of this initiative is built on strong collaboration and the shared goal of supporting people with IDD to achieve meaningful self-employment outcomes.

For more information on this practice
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Promising Practices is an initiative of the Access to Integrated Employment Project, funded in part by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Administration on Community Living, US Department of Health and Human Services. Access to Integrated Employment is a project of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ThinkWork! is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

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