

State Agency Promising Practice

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TOPIC:
Implementation of
Priority Policy Goals

Washington: Promoting public sector jobs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities

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Background

King County's program to employ people with disabilities in county jobs is an example of Washington's commitment to the use of innovative approaches to increase integrated employment. In 1989, a training resource funded by Washington State and the county Division of Developmental Disabilities, O'Neill and Associates, submitted a grant application to the Rehabilitation Services Administration to develop public sector jobs for people with developmental disabilities within the state. These jobs were to be concentrated in King County (Seattle area) government because of the availability of high-paying jobs with benefits. With the political assistance of a King County councilor, the County approved a resolution to encourage county departments to hire people with developmental disabilities in 1990 (Mank, O'Neill, & Jenson, 1998). Over the past 15 years, this project has experienced tremendous expansion and replication.

Implementation

Recognizing that it would be difficult for the King County Division of Developmental Disabilities to achieve quality outcomes with only short-term intervention, a permanent county-level employee was hired through the state Vocational Rehabilitation system (VR) to serve as a full-time job developer for the program. This job developer was focused solely on working with King County department managers to develop their interest in integrated employment and identify potential departmental jobs. The staff person also trained county employees to support

co-workers with disabilities. The job developer did not specify the job tasks to be completed or provide long-term support

to employees

with disabilities. Instead, independent integrated employment providers were contracted by the county-based intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) system to conduct detailed job analysis and identify appropriate job matches. One important feature of this division of responsibility was that it freed the VR job developer to expand relationships with county departments without the responsibility of having to develop the long-term supports. This was also true for the integrated employment providers engaged in the program. They could focus on supporting the employee with a disability and not maintaining a relationship with the county department heads.

Impact

By January 2006, King County employed more than 60 people with disabilities who earned an average wage of \$20,000 per year and received full health and retirement benefits. The initiative had expanded across the state to include approximately 45 integrated employees with the City of Seattle, more than 100 people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in state government, and the replication of the King County program in other counties across the state.

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The State of Washington also passed legislation to promote the employment of people with disabilities in state government. This legislation enabled departments to hire employees with disabilities despite not having an official position vacancy or the ability to create a new position.

Suggestion for Replication

- » Fund pilot programs to pioneer new employment practices that meet the needs of local communities.
- » Connect with local and state legislators and work with them to champion your cause.
- » Allow people to do what they do best. For example, the VR employed job developer was best at making connections with department heads, whereas the providers were best at identifying and providing needed job supports.

Further Reading

Pushing the integrated employment agenda: Case study research in Washington state by Jean Winsor, Allison Cohen Hall, John Butterworth and Dana Scott Gilmore.

Available at www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=173

References

Mank, D., O'Neill, C. T., & Jenson, R. (1998). Quality in supported employment: A new demonstration of the capabilities of people with severe disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* 11, 83-95.

For more information on this practice
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