

# State Agency Promising Practice

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## The Maine Employment Curriculum: Delivering Best Practices for Employment Support Professionals

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### Background

The University of Maine's Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (CCIDS), along with the Maine Department of Behavioral and Developmental Services (BDS) and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, developed the Maine Employment Curriculum (MEC). The comprehensive curriculum fosters best practices in employment supports for people with disabilities statewide by using a cadre of trainers who are supported by the Maine Employment Curriculum project staff. The Maine Employment Curriculum ultimately seeks an increase in the number of integrated, community-based supports available and builds the capacity of the employment support provider community to achieve this goal.

### Implementation

In 2000, BDS unveiled a new vocational policy that places a strong emphasis on competitive employment. More importantly, the policy, which states, "persons who express a desire to work will be presumed able to work and planning will be individualized to the person's desired quality of life," assumes employability for everyone<sup>1</sup>.

In order to build the capacity of the workforce to support these changes, BDS collaborated with the University of Maine's Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (Maine's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research, and Service or UCEDD for short) to develop and support the implementation of the

Maine Employment Curriculum. The curriculum was researched using a wide range of resources that represented the most current

information on employment for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. A year of work produced a train-the-trainer model of education that includes a comprehensive, best-practices curriculum to be delivered across the state. The delivery structure is innovative in that the trainers are staff from employment providers, which expands training capacity within the state while simultaneously embedding it within the provider community. Maine's UCEDD is responsible for monitoring the quality of implementation and training the provider-agency trainers.

The Maine Employment Curriculum was first introduced at the weeklong Leadership Institute for community rehabilitation providers in 2002, and continues to be offered in modules at different locations throughout the state. Employment support professionals can register for \$15 per module. Job coach certification can be achieved by completing eight modules, including An Employment Vision; Providing On-site Supports: Roles and Responsibilities; Using Assessment to Provide On-site Support; Skill Acquisition Parts I, II, and III; Building Natural Supports and Understanding Workplace Culture; and Positive Supports in the

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<sup>1</sup>Butterworth, J. & Gilmer, D. (2003). It's All About Opportunity: Making Employment a Reality in Maine. Community Services Reporter, 10 (12), page 5.



Workplace. If job coaches wish to continue their education and training, they can go on to the next level, Employment Specialist certification, which can be achieved by completing an additional six modules: Assessment for Career Planning, Marketing and Employer Development, Marketing and Job Development, Coordinating Supports and Managing Benefits, Understanding the Unique Needs of Individuals, and Post-Placement Support. A unique and beneficial aspect of the Maine Employment Curriculum is that completion of the curriculum can fulfill or partially satisfy various state requirements for employment certification.

## Impact

Significant changes have occurred in Maine since the BDS policy and the MEC curriculum were implemented. A number of sheltered workshops and other segregated day services have closed, and these agency-sponsored programs have converted to integrated, community-based supports. Since the primary trainers are staff from employment providers, not only is the capacity of the provider community increasing, but so is their overall commitment to integrated employment for individuals with ID/DD.

Overall, since the inception of the project, Maine Employment Curriculum has delivered modules to over 700 individuals in 134 agencies and school districts. This has yielded 400 certified Job Coaches, 210 of which went on to become Employment Specialists.

## Suggestions for Replication

- » Enact change at the state policy level and develop a policy that prioritizes and emphasizes employment.
- » Collaborate with agencies and organizations that share a common goal (i.e., increased integrated employment).
- » Develop curriculum in a systematic manner, using a range of sources, with clear outcome goals.
- » Support investment in the training curriculum by involving stakeholders in curriculum development, quality monitoring, and/or as trainers as in Maine.
- » Ensure that training is valued by establishing staff training requirements that link to the curriculum.

### Further Reading

To access the project's website, which includes a regularly updated statewide calendar of training, point your browser to [www.ccids.umaine.edu/projects/mec/default.htm](http://www.ccids.umaine.edu/projects/mec/default.htm)

For more information on this practice  
contact [thinkwork@umb.edu](mailto:thinkwork@umb.edu)



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