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# Case Studies of Emerging/Innovative Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Practices in Improving Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities

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# CASE STUDIES OF EMERGING/ INNOVATIVE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCY PRACTICES IN IMPROVING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL/ DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

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[VR-RRTC.org](http://VR-RRTC.org)



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April 2013

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# Introduction

The Vocational Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VR-RRTC.org) based at the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston partnered with national content experts to identify promising VR employment practices serving people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD). The National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), the funding agency, requested an emphasis on identifying promising practices for people with mental illnesses and people with intellectual disabilities/developmental disabilities, and to identify promising practices related to order of selection and the designation of most significant disability. This report provides a summary of four promising VR employment practices for persons with IDD. The study included a nationwide call for nominations through extensive outreach using a variety of channels and venues, including (but not limited to) direct contact with VR agencies, Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Centers, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), and NIDRR. The VR RRTC formed a Delphi expert panel to review and rate all nominated practices using a systematic, multi-step procedure to evaluate nominations.

The ICI houses multiple national centers addressing employment outcomes for persons with disabilities. Dr. John Butterworth and colleagues operate multiple research centers, some of which are funded by the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities within the Administration on Community Living. Decades of ongoing research work have profiled the outcomes, cross-system issues, state and federal policies, and vendor issues in providing day and employment services for people with IDD. In 2012, Butterworth, Smith, Cohen Hall, et al published their summary of national data and research work profiling each state's accomplishments and outcomes. They conclude on page 9:

*Data presented for FY 2010 highlights the economic and employment disparities for individuals with IDD. While some data suggest progress (e.g., the positive effect of enrollment in post-secondary education on employment outcomes for those with cognitive disabilities), overall this report demonstrates the increasing need for policies and initiatives that prioritize employment. The evolving shift in states toward Employment First policies can make an important contribution to raising expectations, improving outcomes, and increasing self-sufficiency for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Butterworth, et al, 2012).*

Other key findings from the report have direct bearing on the effort to advance outcomes for people with IDD served by state VR agencies.

**IDD agencies reported a decline in the percentage of individuals with IDD receiving integrated employment services from 21.1 in FY 2004 to 20.1 percent in FY2010.** This one percentage point drop accounts for a substantial number of individuals and it is in a direction away from VR's definition of employment. This co-occurs with an expansion of community based non-work services (for those state IDD agencies that offer the service). While the total numbers served in integrated employment increased, the percentage receiving integrated employment declined. This may indicate an increasing demand for IDD services overall, but suggests that IDD agencies are not increasing the funding or placement emphasis on integrated employment services over other types of employment services. Whether this is a result of changing demographics (i.e., aging), public policy and funding priorities, provider capacity, family and/or individual choices, or budgetary pressures is not clear. It is likely all play a role.



There is wide variability across states in the percentage of persons in integrated employment. The Washington IDD agency reports that 89% of those served are receiving integrated employment services while the Alabama IDD agency reports 5% in integrated employment and 94% in facility based non-work services. These are not necessarily shared customers with the VR agency. However, the high degree of state variability has implications for VR agencies and could also indicate that in states with lower percentages of IDD customers in integrated employment, there could be provider capacity issues. Another issue in states with IDD agencies funding relatively low levels of integrated employment services could be the degree to which transition age youth are referred to VR for supported employment services. Philosophical differences, funding priorities, service capacity and infrastructure may play out very differently across states as VR agencies partner with IDD agencies.

**The rehabilitation rate of persons with ID only (i.e., not including DD, autism, cerebral palsy, or epilepsy) decreased from 58% in FY 2002 to 49% in FY 2010.** This is an important subpopulation in considering cross agency activities and outcomes as persons with “ID only” (as defined in the RSA 911) are more likely to be joint customers between IDD agencies and VR agencies than other DD populations. In 2010, a total of 49,697 people with ID exited the VR program compared to 59,865 reported in 2002 (Butterworth et al, 2012). Of those persons with ID, only 5.5% were reported closed because of inability to benefit from VR services.

**Employment outcomes for persons with ID successfully closing out of VR with employment show disparities in wages and hours worked between people with ID and people with other disabilities.** Weekly wages for persons with ID were about half (\$200) that of those with other types of disabilities (\$400). Some of the difference may be explained by differences in hours worked per week. Several possible issues could be at play and these data do not disentangle such issues as work experience at application, differences in education level, degree of downward pressure that receiving SSI might cause in weekly wages, and the influence of average age on earnings. About two-thirds (62%) of persons with ID closed out of VR were between the ages of 16 and 26 (Butterworth et al., 2012). Combined, these issues may create barriers for persons with ID to achieve higher weekly earnings. More innovation and creation of practices that target improved weekly wages for persons with ID is critically needed.

Findings from the 2010-2011 National Survey of Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) reinforced these trends. In a 2012 report, researchers aggregated data from over 1,000 CRPs serving 150,330 persons with IDD (Domin & Butterworth). The authors reported that only 15% (22,601 of 150,330) of the individuals with IDD served by these CRPs work for pay in individual integrated employment settings. More alarming is the finding that “the data suggest a shift in the balance between facility-based work and non-work services. Participation in non-work services has increased from 33% to 43% for individuals with IDD. Consistent with this trend, there has also been a 5% decrease in the percentage of CRPs offering only work services” (Domin & Butterworth, 2012).

The discouraging trend presented in these two reports contrasts with the growth, innovation and energy that both the IDD and VR systems demonstrated beginning in the mid-1980s in establishing integrated, community-based employment for persons with developmental disabilities. The Butterworth et al. (2012) and Domin & Butterworth (2012) reports clearly demonstrate the increasing need for policies and initiatives that prioritize employment. Underlying those policies and initiatives is the need to revitalize and re-energize the field of disability employment services to ensure full inclusion and participation in work and careers for persons with IDD.

# Abstracts of the Identified Promising Practices

The national Delphi expert panel reached consensus on four practices in the field of VR to be recognized as an innovative or emerging practices eligible for case-study research. More detailed descriptions are in Appendix A. Each can be used independently and provides sufficient detail for review. A note from the VR RRTC Team: These are descriptions of practices in one snapshot of time. We acknowledge that by the time we are able to produce a summary report, practices may have evolved or modified, and new practices may have emerged. For more specific details or up to date descriptions, we advise directly going to the source, the state VR agencies. We did our best to honor the ongoing work in the state VR agencies and among their partners. The shortcomings of this report are the responsibility of the authors who welcome corrections, amendments, updates, and review. We humbly thank the many individuals that contributed to this effort by nominating practices, reviewing materials, participating in interviews, reviewing summary reports, and serving on expert panels. We applaud the ongoing work to innovate and advance employment outcomes of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The abstracts are in alphabetical order by state VR agency and thus order does not reflect any particular endorsement. Our hope is that the identification of these four innovative/emerging practices can serve as a springboard to promote further policy, program, and resource development in order to expand career opportunities and options for persons with developmental disabilities. The four practices and the abstracts are listed here in alphabetical order:

**Piloting a Process to Refer Individuals with Development Disabilities from Day Habilitation to Vocational Rehabilitation:** The *Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)* piloted a process for referring individuals with developmental disabilities (DD), who receive day habilitation services from community rehabilitation provider agencies and who are interested in employment, to the Missouri state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program to access services and supports necessary to obtain community employment. DVR and the Department of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DMH/D-DD) proposed the effort as a joint collaboration between the DVR regional office in Springfield, DMH/D-DD, and the Arc of the Ozarks. The Arc of the Ozarks provides a range of services to individuals with disabilities, including employment services, and is a vendor for both DVR and DMH/D-DD. Implementation of this pilot project began in January 2010 with the goal of referring at least five individuals to the pilot over the life of the project. As of February 2012, four individuals had been referred. The pilot is a small one in number of individuals, but it is emblematic of a larger system issue in that multiple public systems and a provider agency can realign services and encourage those that had been placed into non-work settings to choose employment services. What is to be learned about the realignment and the effort to persuade individuals attending day habilitation facilities and their families to opt for employment services has larger implications than the numbers served in the original pilot.

**Using State Legislature to Fund Long-Term Supported Employment for Individuals on a Waiting List:** The *Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR)*, Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD), and the Utah state legislature created House Bill 31 to fund a pilot project that provided long-term supported employment (SE) for 100 individuals with disabilities in fiscal years (FY) 2007 and 2008. In 2006, due to budget limitations, the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (the Utah IDD agency) was faced with a waiting list that reached 2,012 people. In 2008, House Bill 45 was passed to continue funding long-term SE through a special pool of state dollars that would serve individuals on the DSPD waiting list. Funding was temporarily provided in FY 2011, and then again in FY 2012 for \$250,000.

**King County School-to-Work Project: Interagency Collaboration to Increase Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth with Developmental Disabilities:** *Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)* and its partners have a leading role in the School-to-Work (STW) project in King County, Washington, which assists students with developmental disabilities (DD) in obtaining employment after leaving high school. STW is a collaborative effort between 17 school districts in King County, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), 15 employment service providers, the King County Work Training program, and the King County Developmental Disabilities Division (KCDDD). The project effectively streamlines transition services provided by DVR, KCDDD, and Washington employment vendors to improve employment outcomes for students. In 2004, the state of Washington passed the Working Age Adult Policy, which designated employment services, particularly those focused on community-based employment, as the primary mode of state-funded service delivery for working-age adults (ages 21–62). The Working Age Adult Policy shifted focus to community employment, which limited the KCDDD agency from offering facility-based employment services. This policy, along with the desire of KCDDD agency staff to improve outcomes for youth with DD leaving high school, provided the impetus and direction for the School-to-Work project.

**Student Transition to Employment Project (STEP): Certifying Teachers as Vendors for Transition-Age Students with Developmental Disabilities:** The Student Transition to Employment Project (STEP) provides training for teachers and aides from various county schools to become certified vendors with the *West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS)*. This process allows for a smoother transition from school to work for students with developmental disabilities (DD). It lets these students continue the transition process with adult professionals whom they already know and trust, and who are familiar with all aspects of the student’s life. This effort is a partnership between WVDRS, Vocational Services, Inc. (a community rehabilitation provider), and special education staff in 24 West Virginia counties. Solely funded by the West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council (WVDDC) for the first three years, WVDRS is currently providing joint funding for STEP. As of February 2012, 75 teachers have become registered as certified vendors and 73 students have entered employment through this project.

## Methods

The VR RRTC conducted three parallel research studies for identifying promising practices for three specific populations (persons with psychiatric disability, persons with intellectual and developmental disability and persons with most significant disabilities). In all three efforts, the same modified Delphi process with follow-up case studies was employed using a five step process: a) recruitment of an expert panel, b) solicitation of practice nominations and initial practice nominations, c) development of practice indicators, d) review of nominated practices (Delphi process) and selection of final set for case-study research, and e) case-study research.

### Recruitment of an Expert Panel

Researchers recruited a national panel of individuals who had expertise in one or more of the following areas: a) VR employment services for persons with IDD, b) other employment services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities; and c) research and program evaluation in any of the previously listed areas. The names and affiliations of the expert panel are included in the Acknowledgements section.

## Solicitation of Practice Nominations and Initial Practice Investigation

Researchers conducted extensive outreach to solicit nominations for effective VR practices. The VR RRTC sent a letter to all state VR agency directors to inform them about this study and encourage them to nominate a practice(s) in their state VR agency or another state VR agency. They also informed CSAVR and RSA. RSA contacted its staff including the monitoring teams as well as the state VR agency directors, requesting nominations for effective VR practices. Researchers also contacted their project officers at NIDRR who distributed the call for nominations among all NIDRR grantees. Other channels and venues used for outreach included: the project advisory board, the expert panel, the State Rehabilitation Councils, the regional TACE Centers, rehabilitation professional membership organizations (such as the National Rehabilitation Association), the National Independent Living Association, and other agencies and organizations. Researchers developed an accessible web-based nomination form that these individuals, agencies, and organizations could use to submit practice nominations. In addition, researchers reviewed existing research and reports (including annual VR agency state plans and RSA monitoring reports), agency websites (including those of RSA and individual state VR agencies), and other materials to identify potential practices.

Between May and October 2010, researchers received a total of 43 nominations for practices targeting employment services for persons with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. This included 17 nominations submitted through the web-based form, eight from RSA Monitoring Reports, 16 through RSA 2008 Annual Reports, and two by other sources (including expert ICI staff). In sum, 24 states received a nomination from at least one source, and some states had multiple sources of nomination. Blind agencies, D.C., and the territories received no nominations. Once a practice had been nominated, researchers and partners reviewed the information to determine its potential as an effective VR practice.

Nominations were excluded from Delphi panel review for the following reasons: a) insufficient information despite follow-up attempts (n = 16), b) not a vocational rehabilitation practice (n = 2), c) target population was not persons with IDD (n = 2); and d) described practice was relevant to case study effort on most significant disability group (n = 1). In some cases, one practice in a state was nominated by multiple sources, or the practice was collapsed into a broader nominated practice and included in the Delphi panel review. It is also important to note that nominations sourced from RSA 2008 Annual Reports were based on the employment rates for individuals with cognitive disabilities. In cases where this was the sole nomination source, researchers considered this insufficient data to warrant Delphi panel review.

Senior Policy Fellows and in-house experts (including a former VR director) reviewed the remaining nominations and recommended eight be submitted to the Delphi panel for review. The internal screening reviewed practices for several factors including whether or not the practice was unique to a particular state (thus having limited utility for transfer), was a viable practice for VR (i.e., most states are allowed to fund the specific activity), and whether or not there was an innovative aspect of the practice.

Once the internal process was completed, we contacted the respective state VR agency to request additional information and to schedule a key informant interview(s). The Delphi panel reviewed and rated the eight practices through a multi-step process using a rating tool displayed in Table 1. Ratings from the expert panel concluded that five of the eight nominated practices be included for case study research. One nominee that was recommended for case study research by the Delphi panel declined to participate in subsequent research efforts. Therefore, one of our study limitations is that we were only able to investigate practices that were

nominated (i.e., others may exist) and that agreed to participate in a review. In total, four practices were included in case study research.

**Table 1: Delphi Panel Indicators Rating Sheet for Nominated DD case studies.**

Indicator	Agree	Disagree	Not applicable / Lack of information
The practice demonstrates an <i>increase in VR program access and engagement</i> for individuals with IDD.	( )	( )	( )
The practice demonstrates ways for facilitating <i>active participation</i> of individuals with IDD in the rehabilitation process, specifically in the following five elements:			
1. Assessment and employment plan development	( )	( )	( )
2. Employment plan implementation	( )	( )	( )
3. Job targeted skills development, education, and training	( )	( )	( )
4. Post employment services aimed at employment retention	( )	( )	( )
5. Post employment services aimed at career advancement	( )	( )	( )
Adoption of practice has resulted in improved and measurable VR employment outcomes for individuals with IDD.	( )	( )	( )
Adoption of the practice has resulted in improved and measurable <i>other employment-related outcomes</i> of individuals with IDD, such as improved disability management, health status, self-advocacy, etc.	( )	( )	( )
The practice demonstrates <i>long-term sustainability, such as incorporation into VR policy.</i>	( )	( )	( )
There is evidence that the practice is <i>replicable / transferable</i> to another state VR agency.	( )	( )	( )
The practice represents an <i>improvement</i> of an existing approach, strategy or process to improve employment outcomes of individuals with IDD.	( )	( )	( )
The practice is <i>innovative</i> , that is, it pilots a new approach, strategy or process to improve employment outcomes of individuals with IDD.	( )	( )	( )

## Data Collection and Preparation

Researchers then conducted in-depth, qualitative interviews with state VR agency personnel and other key informants. With the help of the key informants interviewed previously, researchers identified between two and five additional individuals who were knowledgeable about the respective practice for interviewing. Researchers developed an interview protocol to guide the interview process. The protocol consisted of four sections: background, employment service delivery process, evidence of effectiveness, and transferability. The interviews were conducted via the telephone using a semi-structured format and lasted approximately one hour. Researchers asked key informants and interviewees for additional documents about the practice (such as manuals, cooperative agreements, documentation or data collection tools). Researchers conducted total of 15 interviews across the four practices. Each interview had 1-3 key informant participants. Drafts of study findings were compiled using the data collected and shared with study participants prior to this publication.

## Results and Conclusions

We are extremely grateful to the state VR agencies and partners that participated in this research study and we are particularly indebted to the four state VR agencies (Missouri, Utah, Washington State, and West Virginia) whose initiatives were selected by the Delphi expert panel and that are highlighted in this report. Those state VR agencies and their partners are to be commended on their creativity and commitment to continuous improvement in serving persons with IDD.

Despite these indicators of innovation, we feel that the findings are consistent with the findings of the 2011 National Report on Employment Practices and Outcomes (Butterworth, et. al 2012) and the 2010 Survey of Community Rehabilitation Providers (Domin & Butterworth, 2012). The original intent of the research was to present “best practices” in the field of employment services in VR. While we did find innovation and emerging practices as highlighted, it was evident to the research team that a national focus, energy and commitment to integrated, community-based employment for persons with IDD appears to be in short supply. There are numerous possible and contributing explanations regarding this apparent “lack of urgency” in addressing the employment and career needs of persons with IDD. Clearly a lack of funding/resources and the lack of flexibility in existing sources of funding are contributors. A very challenging labor market, a difficult and highly competitive business environment, economic disincentives and regulatory complexity for both consumers (Social Security disability programs) and service providers (Medicaid) in maximizing earnings and employment for the IDD populations might also be contributors. Despite the very real challenges, and the all-too-often cited excuses, our belief is we can and must do better!

As presented in this report there are without question pockets of innovation and emerging practices that can serve as a foundation for leaders, administrators and policy makers upon which to focus and to expand services and employment/career opportunities for persons with IDD. In speaking about Washington State, Jane Boone testified to the U.S. Senate Health Education Labor and Pension (HELP) Committee on February 26, 2013 and eloquently stated:

*Contrary to previously held beliefs in the United States, beliefs that resulted in segregating people with even very mild disabilities into sheltered workshops and adult “habilitation” centers, Washington has learned over and over again, job by job, person by person, employer by employer, that everyone is employable. Over 3,000 people with significant and sometimes*

*very complex disabilities are now working in integrated, competitive jobs with employers large and small. These are people who were segregated and not working 30 years ago in our state. With purposeful intent in policy and in funding, collaboration amongst government agencies, and the support of employment service agencies, families, friends, schools and networking, those jobs happened one employer and one person at a time. It did not happen overnight (Boone, 2013).*

Findings from the four identified promising practices lead us to agree with Boone's testimony. The following are our recommendations to advance the effort to advance opportunities for persons with IDD.

**State IDD agency and VR agency leadership should clearly promote a shared expectation of integrated employment for persons with IDD.** Leaders should examine ways to ensure that the shared expectation for persons with IDD is for integrated, community-based employment. In Missouri, the partnering agencies are piloting an effort to change the outcome of day services placement and determine if people who are currently receiving day habilitation services can be persuaded to pursue vocational rehabilitation services. This population is often excluded from the opportunity to pursue integrated employment. In Utah, the VR and IDD agency partnered to address a serious barrier to serving mutual clients. VR counselors must secure long-term funding for extended services to be able to provide supported employment services (c.f. Haines, Marrone, Tashjian, Klemm, Stoddard & Foley, 2012). Many states have waiting lists for the IDD, VR or both agencies. Persons who are eligible for both systems but are on a waiting list for either get "stuck." Leadership efforts are necessary to address funding and eligibility barriers to prevent "case flow" log jams.

**Engage elected officials and policy makers in the quest to remedy policy and budgetary entanglements that create barriers for persons with IDD and to create initiatives to address private sector needs.** The Utah promising practice is an excellent example of working with elected officials to resolve an entanglement. The challenge is that these efforts may not be stable from budget year to budget year. To what extent could state elected officials and policy makers look across systems and agencies to identify the stumbling blocks that prevent progression through to employment? Don Uchida, Executive Director of USOR testified on February 26, 2013 at the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee of the United States Senate on Leadership and Innovation in Disability Employment (Uchida, 2013). He stated that:

*[T]he idea behind the [Support Work Independence partnership] is to address the DSPD waiting list from the back or low priority side and it also gave USOR a source of long-term funding for consumers in supported employment. Those individuals would no longer just sit, wait, and collect SSI or more expensive Medicaid services; they went to work, reduced their cash benefits, increased their income and paid taxes. In FY 12, DSPD had 156 individuals participating with 84 of them employed. Additionally, USOR successfully closed 59 individual sin supported employment and transferred them to DSPD for long term funding.*

**Agencies should monitor wages, hours worked, and competitive employment placement and make the necessary corrections to reduce disparities and raise expectations for "better jobs."** The federal-state VR program has an incredible resource at their disposal, the RSA 911. Limited employment outcome data are collected by IDD agencies and it is highly variable in measures across states. We did not find practices that were actively targeting improvement in wages, hours worked, nor "better jobs" with career progression. We found promising practices that focused on integrated employment. We urge the field to set higher expectations for good jobs for people with IDD. Monitoring wages and hours worked is a first start.

**VR agencies should look toward efforts at “early intervention” and partner with schools and the IDD agencies to work with youth and families to influence the decision to pursue competitive employment.** In Washington and West Virginia, public agencies are partnering with schools to keep the emphasis on integrated employment and establish mechanisms for youth to move into employment rather than be relegated to narrow adult service options. Many states VR agencies are exploring such programs as Project Search that focus on youth. We agree with the strategies employed to move youth into integrated employment.

**Build partnerships among public agency partners and vendors.** The four promising practices identified were built on partnerships that included vendors that are contracting with both the state VR agency and the state IDD agency. Many key informants have reported limited vendor capacity in integrated and supported employment services. VR agencies may have less financial clout and influence with providers than IDD agencies. ICI surveyed vendors and found that 60% of vendors had at least some business with VR but that the majority of those had less than 10% of their business with VR (Haines et al., 2012).

**Move beyond partnerships of memorandums of understanding and alignment of values to blending and/or braiding funds and resources.** Having “skin in the game” and committing resources, dollars, and personnel to partnership and service delivery is critical. Haines, et al, (2012) delve into more detailed recommendations about extending long-term supports, partnership models, and resolving cross-system definitional issues as they arose in case studies of supported employment models in the states of Maryland, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, and Washington. The report is available at [VR-RRTC.org](http://VR-RRTC.org).

**Engage the business community and advance demand side strategies that identify “better jobs” with career progression and higher wages should be inclusive of people with IDD.** Demand side strategies are a growing focus of VR agencies. The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) has invested substantially in growing a network of VR personnel who are focused on improving responsiveness to the business community. The NET, led by Kathy West-Evans, is an impressive effort to reach out to business and connect them with jobseekers engaged with the VR agencies. These efforts may connect people with IDD to better paying jobs.

Through this study, we were privileged to work with many dedicated, highly knowledgeable and committed rehabilitation practitioners and administrators. The mission now must be to engage those professionals, create the vision and focus that leads to action and change, and to build from the innovation and lessons learned in this field study.



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## **Appendix A**

# **Summary Reports of Promising Practices in Vocational Rehabilitation to Improve Employment Outcomes of Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities**

**Served by the State VR Agency.**



# Piloting a Process to Refer Individuals with Developmental Disabilities from Day Habilitation to Vocational Rehabilitation

Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

## Abstract

The *Missouri Division of Vocational Rehabilitation* piloted a process for referring individuals with developmental disabilities (DD), who receive day habilitation services from community rehabilitation provider agencies and who are interested in employment, to the Missouri state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program to access services and supports necessary to obtain community employment. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the Department of Mental Health, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DMH/D-DD) proposed the effort as a joint collaboration between the DVR regional office in Springfield, DMH/D-DD, and the Arc of the Ozarks. The Arc of the Ozarks provides a range of services to individuals with disabilities, including employment services, and is a vendor for both DVR and DMH/D-DD. Implementation of this pilot project began in January 2010 with the goal of referring at least five individuals to the pilot over the life of the project. As of February 2012, four individuals had been referred. The pilot is a small one in number of individuals, but it is emblematic of a larger system issue in that multiple public systems and a provider agency can realign services and encourage those that had been placed into non-work settings to choose employment services. What is to be learned about the realignment and the effort to persuade individuals attending day habilitation facilities and their families to opt for employment services has larger implications than the numbers served in the original pilot.

# Implementation of the Practice

The referral process for the pilot begins when staff members at the Arc of the Ozarks identify an individual who would like to work. Many of the individuals have prior work experience from the Arc of the Ozarks and want to become more involved in the community through employment. The VR counselor meets with the individual and his or her support team, including Arc of the Ozarks staff, a community support worker, and family members, before the individual applies for VR services. The purpose of this preliminary meeting is for the VR counselor to meet with the individual and his or her support team and to build rapport. This aims to increase the seamlessness of the referral process to the VR program.

Arc of the Ozarks staff assess the individual's employment interests and support needs. This helps reduce VR counselor time and cost for customer assessment, and allows for individuals to receive services and supports more quickly. Arc of the Ozarks staff use the Career Planning Guide: A Guide for Career Discovery<sup>1</sup> developed by the Missouri Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities for assessment purposes. A key informant elaborated on using the guide: "The provider has modified some of the things a bit more with the individual client...So even if the provider isn't using the entire manual, they're picking and choosing what they think is appropriate [for the client's goals]." In total, the Arc of the Ozarks' assessment and referral process takes approximately three months.

Arc of the Ozarks staff participate in career team meetings prior to VR eligibility and establish career goals for individuals. The VR counselor involves him- or herself approximately halfway through the assessment to help address employment and other related issues. The VR counselor may also provide any additional input on an individual's goals. After the assessment, the individual is referred to the VR program for employment services and supports. The VR counselor provides the individual with network resources to help achieve his or her career goal. Once the individual has found a job, he or she may receive post-employment extended supports or other community services to help him or her maintain employment.

Key informants emphasized the participatory nature of this pilot. Individuals are involved in the assessment process, lead their own meetings, and serve as the major decision makers. This in turn acts as a source of empowerment. With the help of their job developers, individuals create an agenda to run their meetings and establish a set of rules for the meetings. They also have the opportunity to share career development skills and discuss any concerns or issues. These meetings occur once a month.

The braiding of VR and DMH/D-DD funds at the individual customer level is key to facilitating the referral process. Braiding funds also helps to ensure customer success in gaining and maintaining employment. In the pilot project, DMH/D-DD funding, typically used for day habilitation, is put toward the costs of individual assessment and extended services. DMH/D-DD pays for the assessment component, costs that DVR otherwise would incur. DVR covers the costs of employment services and related expenses until the individual obtains employment and his or her case is closed. Once the case is closed, DMH/D-DD funding can be used to provide post-employment extended supports or other community services to the individual as needed.

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<sup>1</sup> Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities. (2010). *Career planning guide: A guide for career discovery*. Retrieved from [www.mpcdd.com/pageDownload.php?docID=3354](http://www.mpcdd.com/pageDownload.php?docID=3354)

Our key informants noted that one challenge in implementing this pilot project was the extended amount of time it takes to make a referral. Team members come from multiple agencies so coordinating schedules and following through with tasks can be time consuming. Furthermore, staff turnover delayed some of the pilot's progress, as training was needed for the new staff members.

## Project Outcomes and Future of the Practice

The pilot began in January 2010 and the first referral to the VR program was made in May 2010. As of February 2012, four participants have been referred to the VR program. Successful closures are currently being used to gauge the effectiveness of the practice, and two individuals have successfully found jobs. One is currently detailing vehicles and the other is performing janitorial services. The pilot project intends to refer at least five individuals to the VR program over the life of the project. An individual, who was referred to the pilot's service delivery process through a work crew rather than day habilitation, is also using the job development techniques of the pilot to seek employment.

A key informant emphasized that the project has increased collaboration between all of the participants and helped all parties use various resources to serve individuals in day habilitation: "This two-year project has helped with partnering and making sure that we get all of the stakeholders involved. Also we make sure that everybody is networking as much as possible to help the individual move forward." VR counselors have found that their relationship with the Arc of the Ozarks has improved as partners have learned to understand each other's roles in the process. Although this collaboration is still in its early stages, a VR key informant indicated that DVR is considering replicating this pilot project in another location in the state.



# Using State Legislature to Fund Long-Term Supported Employment for Individuals on a Waiting List

Utah State Office of Rehabilitation

## Abstract

In 2006, Utah's developmental disability agency, the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD), was faced with a waiting list that reached 2,012 people due to budget limitations. The Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR), DSPD, and the Utah state legislature created House Bill 31 to fund a pilot project that provided long-term supported employment (SE) for 100 individuals with disabilities in fiscal years (FY) 2007 and 2008. In 2008, House Bill 45 was passed to continue funding long-term SE through a special pool of state dollars that would serve individuals on the DSPD waiting list.

## Background

The relationship between USOR and the DSPD dates back to the 1986 reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. With this reauthorization, the two agencies developed a strong working relationship to fund and to provide supported employment services to individuals with disabilities. After a class-action lawsuit in the 1990s, DSPD changed its waiting list to serve individuals on a need-based model, rather than providing services in the order in which individuals applied. DSPD was unable to provide services to all customers due

to budget restrictions, and its waiting list quickly grew. In FY 2006, there were 2,012 individuals on the waiting list,<sup>2</sup> and in FY 2007, 1,839 individuals were on the waiting list.<sup>3</sup>

Individuals on the waiting list are served in a specific order based on the level of their needs. This order is determined by standard assessment that considers each person's living situation, disability, health and safety issues, dangerous behaviors, and number of years without services.<sup>4</sup> Many of the individuals on the waiting list are those who live in the community and could work, but do not score high enough to be prioritized in DSPD's waiting list.

DSPD and USOR worked together to design a pilot program to address this service gap, which would be funded by House Bill 31. USOR provides initial intensive job development services for individuals, and the funds from House Bill 31 are used for sustaining employment. In 2006, USOR, DSPD, and the state legislature piloted the Supported Employment Pilot Program for the Provision of Services for People with Disabilities. The pilot program was an early intervention program for providing services to individuals with disabilities who had lower needs scores. It was able to provide supported employment services for 100 individuals with the intent to remove them from the waiting list in FY 2007 and 2008. The funding for the program came from the House Bill 31 legislation, and provided long-term SE services to individuals in need of these services after vocational rehabilitation (VR) SE services ended.<sup>5</sup>

USOR and DSPD determined 100 individuals to be the appropriate size for this pilot project. The decision was made based on how much funding could feasibly be attained through the legislature to cover the cost of up to 20% of job coaches' intervention time. The initial funding of \$150,000 for the pilot project allocated approximately \$1,500 per person in the pilot. The funding was flexible and allowed for more than \$1,500 to be allocated to individuals with greater needs and less than \$1,500 for those with fewer needs.

Following the pilot program, USOR, DSPD, and the Utah state legislature developed House Bill 45 to address the lack of stable funds to provide long-term SE. This bill provides a permanent funding stream to support customers of both USOR and DSPD in need of these services. In 2008, House Bill 45 was passed and the Support Work Independence Program was launched. In 2008, budget cuts absolved the funding for FY 2009 and FY 2010. Funding was temporally provided again on a one-time basis for FY 2011, and in FY 2012 funding was granted again for \$250,000.

## Purpose and Goals

The purpose of House Bill 45 is to provide a permanent funding stream for SE services, in order to provide long-term supported employment services to individuals on the DSPD waiting list. The FY 2012 budget of \$250,000 aims to serve at least 200 people. Further goals of this legislation are to provide supervision, support, training, and companionship to individuals with developmental disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities. Unduplicated count (point-in-time) of individuals waiting with an immediate need for division services (97-06).

<sup>3</sup> Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities. Report on waiting list, March 2007.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Utah State Plan 2011, Attachment 4.11 (c)(4).

<sup>6</sup> Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities. Report on waiting list, March 2007.

# Development and Implementation

This section outlines how USOR, DSPD and the Utah state legislature coordinated the development of House Bill 45, including its target population, data sharing between USOR and DSPD, and its implementation and funding. The section concludes with a description of overcoming the obstacles from initial budget cuts.

## Development of House Bill 45

After the success of the House Bill 31 pilot program, USOR and DSPD recognized a need for a more permanent source of funding for long-term SE services. USOR and DSPD found a champion in the Utah state legislature. Legislators advocated for prioritizing employment for individuals with disabilities and specifically saw a need to target both ends of the DSPD waiting list. Through the existing waiting list, individuals with the most severe disabilities are first off the waiting list to receive DSPD services. With the new legislation, funding would target the low-priority end of the waiting list for long-term SE services. USOR, DSPD, and the legislature emphasized that with this new program, the costs for providing long-term SE services per client would be significantly lower than in the existing system serving only those individuals with the greatest support needs.

USOR was operating under a budget cut, and SE services could not be funded through Medicaid waivers due to the waiting list. Medicaid waivers are one of the main sources of DSPD funding, and in order to provide long-term SE services to an individual, an agency must be able to “have at least reasonable expectation that long-term funding will be available.” The passing of House Bill 45 in 2008 created this reasonable expectation for USOR and DSPD by providing a funding stream to be used solely for long-term SE services. The bill originally provided \$150,000 in FY 2008 to be used for these services. This amount of funding was determined based on an estimation using the total number of individuals with lower needs scores on the DSPD waiting list (projected to be between 100 and 200 individuals per year).

## Target Population

A key informant stated that a subset of individuals with IDD is eligible for both USOR and DSPD services. USOR services are for VR eligible individuals who meet functional impairment definitions across multiple disability categories while DSPD services are for individuals with specific categories of disabilities who demonstrate a support needs in three or more functional impairments. According to the informant, it is this shared population of individuals eligible for both USOR and DSPD services that can be best served by long-term SE services. However, it is often the case that VR eligible individuals might not meet the severity category to be a priority for DSPD services and may end up on the waiting list.

Individuals on the DSPD waiting list are the primary target population for funds from House Bill 45. Individuals being served through House Bill 45 are aided on a priority basis, with shared customers served first, followed by customers on the DSPD waiting list, and then customers of USOR who are not yet DSPD customers. USOR counselors and employment providers initially assess the amount of support individuals may need and whether they are a good fit for participating in the program. Shared customers who are farthest along in the VR process are contacted by DSPD first with an invitation to participate in the program. Service brokers then meet with interested individuals and their families to further assess the situation and determine if participating in the program would be beneficial for the customer.



## Data Sharing

USOR and DSPD actively share data as part of a memorandum of understanding (MOU). USOR delivers client information to DSPD who is responsible for identifying shared customers. DSPD sends information about the program to eligible customers and invites them to participate. The MOU outlines how the data will be used, including confidentiality measures. As DSPD takes over funding responsibilities to provide long-term supports, DSPD manages outcomes data including wages and average support costs. These figures are shared with USOR. A key informant attributes the data match system as a contributing factor to the success of identifying and enrolling program participants who might not be identified as a client at DSPD or on their waiting list.

## Implementation and Funding

The funds from House Bill 45 are used alongside Utah's Partnership Plus Ticket to Work program. This program allows an individual to use their Ticket to receive services after their case has been closed with a VR program. USOR and DSPD recruit Employment Networks (ENs) to work with individuals being served through DSPD. PowerPoint presentations on House Bill 45 are tailored for different ENs to highlight the appropriateness of House Bill 45 for their organization. A key informant found that many ENs are motivated to work with individuals enrolled in the program, as these individuals do not require as much intervention as other DSPD clients with more severe needs. USOR pays for customers' services, such as job coaching, using House Bill 45 funds until the individual requires less than 20% intervention time. At that point, the customer is closed in the VR system and an EN receives the Ticket to continue providing the customer with services. The EN is paid from House Bill 45 funds for the milestone payments that the Ticket will not pay for. Then the EN can apply for the outcome payment, which they receive through the Social Security Administration. House Bill 45 uses the same funding system as the pilot program, allocating an average of \$1,500 per person for services. This \$1,500 is adjusted based on support needs, within reason. Key informants noted that the average cost per person during program implementation came out to less than the estimated \$1,500 per person. Funding for House Bill 45 has carry-forward authority, allowing the funding pool to grow if funds remain under-spent in a fiscal year. This is a critical aspect to the program, as it allows for cash flow from year to year. A key informant highlighted other flexibilities associated with the state (as opposed to federal) funds. Funds from House Bill 45 can be used to offer the supports needed to maintain employment without requiring the person to re-enroll with USOR.

## Overcoming Obstacles

DSPD received \$200,000 in FY 2008 for House Bill 45, but this funding was cut after only a few months. The funding was entirely cut by the state legislature for FY 2009 and FY 2010 and provided again on a one-time basis for FY 2011. In July 2011, USOR and DSPD received \$250,000 to fund House Bill 45 for FY 2012. Many individuals who had participated in 2008 lost their jobs as a result of losing the support from House Bill 45, and had to re-enroll in USOR. Even after the one-time funding renewal in FY 2011, hesitation about re-enrollment existed among potential participants, family members, and VR counselors who had previously been involved. They all felt uncertainty about sustainability. However, the ongoing funding for FY 2012 has renewed interest in the program, and a key informant felt that obtaining their goal of serving 200 clients for the FY2012 was achievable.

The budget challenges associated with House Bill 45 were one of the driving forces in developing Utah's House Bill 240. This legislation became effective on May 20, 2011 and acts as an employment-first policy. The House Bill 45 legislative champion also advocated for House Bill 240. The goal of this new bill is to "establish employment first policy for persons with a disability within the Employment Support Act, State

Office of Rehabilitation Act, and the Utah Human Services Code.”<sup>7</sup> Further, this legislation is intended to protect the funding of policies associated with USOR, DSPD, and the Utah Department of Workforce Services (DWS), including the House Bill 45 initiative. Through the employment-first partnership, USOR, DSPD and DWS have renewed their shared mission to emphasize competitive, integrated, and community-based employment for individuals with disabilities.

## Project Outcomes

The pilot program (House Bill 31) from which House Bill 45 was developed was able to use legislature funding to provide 100 customers from the DSPD waiting list with long-term SE supports. This success was the backbone for the development of House Bill 45. Since the re-initiation of funds for FY2012 and up until the time of this case study effort, 115 individuals had enrolled in the program and 43 had been employed as of December 2011. Don Uchida reported in his written testimony to the HELP Committee on February 2013 that 156 persons were enrolled for FY 2012 with 56 employed. USOR and DSPD highlight and distribute individual stories of success to key stakeholders.

Key informants at USOR also noted that working together with DSPD has strengthened the relationship and communication between the two agencies. A key factor to streamlining and improving communication between agencies is having a single point of contact on the DSPD side for USOR staff. USOR offices also have a staff person who is the primary resource of information on House Bill 45 for counselors who may be unfamiliar with the program. Key informants also emphasized the transferability of new funding initiatives and this practice to other states. They noted the major challenge in implementing this type of funding stream as identifying a champion in the legislature to advocate for the earmarking of dollars for local long-term funding and then ensuring a sustainable funding source.

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<sup>7</sup> Utah House Bill 240, 2011.



# King County School-to-Work Project: Interagency Collaboration to Increase Employment Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth with Developmental Disabilities

Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation<sup>8</sup>

## Abstract

The School-to-Work (STW) project in King County, Washington assists students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in obtaining employment after leaving high school. STW is a collaborative effort between 17 school districts in King County, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), 15 employment service providers, the King County Work Training program, and the King County Developmental Disabilities Division (KCDDD). DVR and KCDDD have taken a lead role in this project in funding and coordinating youth employment service delivery. The project streamlines transition services provided by DVR, KCDDD, and employment vendors to improve employment outcomes for students.

## Background

In 2004, the state of Washington passed the Working Age Adult Policy, which designated employment services, particularly those focused on community-based employment, as the primary mode of state-funded

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<sup>8</sup> Information in this case study report has been obtained from communication from key informants unless otherwise noted.

service delivery for working-age adults (ages 21–62).<sup>9</sup> The Working Age Adult Policy shifted focus to community employment, which limited the DDD agency from offering facility-based employment services. This policy, along with the desire of DDD-agency staff to improve outcomes for youth with IDD leaving high school, provided the impetus and direction for the School-to-Work (STW) project.

Key informants reported that prior to this policy change, DVR, KCDDD, employment vendors, and the school districts did not communicate or collaborate often. While working relationships existed between some of these parties (e.g., DVR worked with KCDDD, DVR had transition counselors working with the schools, and KCDDD worked with school districts), collaborative efforts did not occur on a consistent basis. This created confusion, duplication, and fragmentation in the services provided to students and families.

Key informants reported that families of students with IDD expressed concern over a service gap between the schools and the adult disability and employment service system, and DVR and KCDDD parties shared a concern over the lack of funding for long-term supports at the state level.<sup>10</sup> It was reported that school staff did not have the information and support to adequately prepare students for jobs. Within schools, no clear guidelines existed outlining when DVR counselors could begin to provide services to students. This resulted in many students leaving school without employment and experiencing a service gap. Typically, DVR would begin working with students in the last two months of their high-school career. DVR and KCDDD changed the way in which contracts and administrative arrangements operated and developed new funding arrangements for employment service provision through STW. KCDDD recognized the need to better integrate services across agencies and to begin employment service delivery earlier, which led to the development of STW.

## Purpose and Goals of the Practice

The purpose is to improve employment outcomes for students with IDD leaving high school in King County, Washington. Specific goals include:

- Assist students eligible for KCDDD in obtaining a paid job by graduation each year;
- Increase the capacity of the high schools to prepare students for employment;
- Increase collaboration between the school districts, KCDDD, and DVR;
- Increase collaboration between the schools and adult employment-service providers; and
- Work with parents to increase awareness of employment services as well as the value and possibility of employment for their children with IDD.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Hall, A.C. (2007). *Washington State's working age adult policy*. Retrieved from [http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article\\_\\_id=222](http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article__id=222)

<sup>10</sup> Tegenfeldt, K. (2010). *King County developmental disability services division school to work project evaluation*. Copy obtained from key informant. Report prepared by KCDDD.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

# Implementation

## Administrative and funding arrangements

KCDDD approached DVR to discuss the implications of the Working Age Adult Policy and the need to increase the consistency of access to employment support services for all young adults with IDD, including those with the highest support needs. It was important that all students have access to services earlier. KCDDD negotiated a contract with DVR in which KCDDD serves as the DVR vendor responsible for coordinating services for STW students. The contract facilitates an infrastructure for a seamless transition between high school and work and it ensures that students receive the necessary services for successful employment. STW was initially developed around an outcome-based funding structure. KCDDD earmarked funds received from a millage assessment on property taxes within the county to invest in the county adult employment service agencies. KCDDD pays the employment service agencies for services provided to the students with the local dollars earmarked for this project. DVR reimburses KCDDD if a student successfully finds employment.

Two models were developed over the first two years, both of which are still used today. The first model requires each STW student to select a vendor to work with during his/her last year of school. A district that has five STW students might have five different vendors. Vendors may be working with students from different districts. Several districts felt that the program and outcomes would be streamlined if one designated employment consultant worked full time with a transition program in a single district. This led to the development of a second model, now known as School Partnership (formally known as the embedded-vendor model).

KCDDD works with school districts to issue a Request for a Qualified Provider to vendors. In the School Partnership Model, DVR, district staff and parents participate in a panel facilitated by KCDDD to interview and select agencies to provide services to STW students in a single district's transition program. The panel uses a rating scale to narrow down potential vendors and then interviews the top candidates to determine the best fit. Panel members seek vendors that have previous experience with the IDD population, a positive reputation in the community, effective communication skills with families, and the ability operate independently. The selection process is helpful for many families who do not have experience in seeking out vendors. DVR initiates contact with the vendors and coordinates meetings between job vendors and school districts with the assistance of KCDDD staff.

The School Partnership model houses the vendor at the school to streamline service delivery and increase student access to services. The process allows KCDDD to streamline service coordination across DVR, school districts, and service providers. The school pays approximately one third of the cost of employment services and KCDDD pays the remaining balance using dollars from the local property tax millage. This method of braided funding is unique within the state and ensures that students receive employment services while still in high school.

In 2009, the contract between DVR and King County was approximately 1.2 million dollars and the county earmarked approximately \$300,000 to pay for up-front costs of services. The contract was renewed in 2011 at 1.7 million dollars to support 200 students to get jobs through October 2013. King County earmarked approximately \$400,000 for the up-front costs. The project has been gaining support through private funding. The Hong Kong association of Washington has chosen their benefactor as the Washington Initiative for Supported Employment and plans to use funding to support STW.

A new contract between KCDDD and DVR was negotiated and went into effect July 1, 2011. It stipulated that the outcome payment would be available upon job stabilization, rather than 90 days post job stabilization. KCDDD changed the School Partnership model's vendor contract to include the outcome payment as administered under the first model. Base costs for staff under both models continued to be supported using funds earmarked from the local property tax millage. Now, both models provide outcome payments. A key informant elaborated, "I think being able to offer that outcome payment [within the School Partnership model] probably was programmatically a good decision. It helped support the commitment of the agency."

### **Training provided to school and employment service staff**

Employment vendors informed KCDDD that community-based work sites established by schools were problematic for integrating students into the community through work. The jobs offered through the work sites were not structured to reflect what a student would typically encounter in the workforce. Staff were not prepared to support students to be as independent as possible and, at times, were over-supporting students and performing job tasks for them. KCDDD and DVR staff worked with technical assistance and training agencies to offer multiple trainings for school staff and employment vendors each year. Resources are invested in training school staff by DVR and KCDDD on community employment, expectations of staff, and enhancing levels of independence in students. Two topics are covered in teacher-training workshops funded by KCDDD: job coaching/natural supports and best practices in community employment.<sup>12</sup> Employment vendor staff learn more about how schools operate, and how to work with others to take advantage of preexisting resources to prepare students for employment. DVR staff receive peer-to-peer training with other DVR staff about topics related to the eligibility of students and the application process.

### **Eligibility criteria**

A student must be a client of Washington DDD, be a King County resident, be enrolled in school, express a desire to work, and be eligible for DVR services. The vast majority of students are in their last year of eligibility for school. Students are encouraged to apply for Social Security benefits though not required. Key informants stated that beneficiary status is important because of funding for long-term supports. DVR, KCDDD, and employment services staff communicate the importance of long-term support funding and encourage students and their families to use Social Security work incentives for funding long-term job supports. DVR counselors meet with a student before he or she is an official DVR client to assess whether or not participation in STW would be beneficial for the student. A DVR counselor highlights the need for students and families to understand that participation in STW is "a commitment and investment" that requires effort from all parties.

### **Recruitment process and student involvement**

DVR has delegated KCDDD to engage in student recruitment activities. KCDDD works with school districts to designate responsibility for identifying students to participate in STW. School districts agree to work with the students, parents, and employment services agencies to engage the students in employment-focused activities during their final year of high school. KCDDD uses several outreach activities to promote STW and to recruit students including attending parent nights at schools and going to monthly potluck dinners with parents of students in each school district. In addition to direct referrals from schools, STW's primary source of recruitment is through yearly Transition Resource Fairs, which provide students and parents with information on a variety of transition services in Washington. KCDDD uses a statewide database to invite all school-age clients of the Washington State Division of Developmental Disabilities (WADDD) who reside in King County and are 14 years of age and older to attend the resource fairs with their families.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Transition Resource Fairs, sponsored by KCDDD, occur in south, north and east King County. This ensures geographic accessibility. DVR staff attend and provide information on their role, how long they might work with the students, and long-term funding. They also accept applications for VR services. Students tend to apply for DVR services during their second year (typically age 19 or 20), and work with DVR to gain access to STW, DVR and DDD services.

KCDDD staff provide information on STW at an orientation session that includes information about entering the program, selecting an employment services vendor, participating in planning meetings, and expectations for using public transportation and promoting independence. KCDDD staff discuss the benefits of employment and address concerns. Vendor staff attend these fairs and participate in the breakout sessions. They explain the types of services they offer and provide information on long-term supports. Students and parents attend sessions led by other disability professionals, parents, and advocates with disabilities about how to prepare for work and how to become more active in advocacy, guardianship, and adult-service systems and issues. The STW program coordinator visits King County school districts that might be interested in participating in the program and former STW participants share their program experiences with interested students.

### **Service delivery and student participation**

Once a student has applied and accepted, he or she is responsible for submitting an application for DVR services. This typically occurs between January and April before the student's last year of school. STW staff work with the student and his or her family to select an employment vendor where the vendor is not embedded in the student's school. DVR counselors help initiate contact with the employment vendors and coordinate meetings between the student and family, school staff, DVR staff, and vendors. Since the 2011 contract, two DVR counselors have been appointed as points of contact coordinators. KCDDD staff remain involved with the DVR case, particularly if there is a question of a student's ability to benefit from STW participation. Open communication between all parties is key to ensure that the student receives all the necessary services for STW participation.

Within two months of finding an employment vendor, the student, his or her parents, school staff, the employment vendor, the DVR counselor, and the DDD case manager meet for a team meeting. The goal is to develop an individualized plan for assessing the student's skills and planning their work goals over the next three months, to outline the roles of each team member, and to establish a communication strategy for members of the team.<sup>13</sup> Families play an important role in supporting the student through this process.

Services for students are individualized. Some students may enter the program having had a variety of work experiences, with a clear sense of a work goal. They may be good candidates for supported-employment positions that require minimal restructuring. Other students may have limited or no work experience, and/or complex support needs. These students may require a customized approach to supported employment, including discovery, the development of a personal profile identifying specific tasks and environmental supports in an ideal job, and the creation of unique job proposals that may involve job restructuring or job creation. Following the team-planning meeting, students engage in the individual work plan activities for three to four months and then meet again for a team review meeting. This meeting is an opportunity to reflect on the student's past months, redefine goals, and get input from the team on job development. The team meeting typically occurs by the end of February of the student's last year of school.

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<sup>13</sup> School-To-Work project orientation video. Retrieved from <http://www.kingcounty.gov/operations/DCHS/S2W%20Video.aspx>

Services provided to students (by school-district staff and employment vendors) are dependent on the district in which the student is enrolled. These may include person-centered planning, ongoing community-based work experiences or individualized internships, short-term work experiences and job development, job placement, training, and retention services that may require both natural support and ongoing agency support at varying levels of intensity. Other community skill-building activities include pedestrian safety, using public transportation, shopping, eating out, joining community centers or athletic clubs, recreation, and learning about personal finance.<sup>14</sup>

## Feedback gathered

In 2007, KCDDD held focus groups with special-education administrators, directors of employment service providers, DVR, and other project partners. The goal of these early feedback sessions was to determine ways to formalize the relationship between all project partners, to more clearly outline the financial commitments of the schools, and to establish strategies to improve the quality of collaboration across all project partners. During the first two years of the project, DVR transition counselors met quarterly with a KCDDD liaison to discuss STW progress. These meetings were a formal mechanism between DVR and KCDDD to discuss updates and to work through challenges. The newly negotiated contract between DVR and KCDDD stipulates that coordination meetings should occur at least twice a year. Coordination meetings primarily serve to keep partners informed on STW.

A first “All Partners” meeting was held in August 2011. The meeting agenda primarily focused on the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community’s formal evaluation. Partners discussed how the findings might impact future plans. A follow-up all-partners meeting was then held in January 2012. The information obtained from these meetings will be used to continue to evolve the program and serve more students, including those with more significant disabilities, and to improve employment outcomes.

## Project Outcomes

Partnerships between KCDDD, DVR, employment vendors, and school districts were strengthened and roles were clarified. STW was found to improve employment outcomes of participants through KCDDD’s evaluation. Trainings for teachers increased their ability to work with students to find a job. Finally, evaluations of the project revealed a shift in perceptions of students with IDD about work. The program had an initial goal of assisting 50 students eligible for KCDDD services in obtaining a job by graduation. The completion of this initial goal has provided the impetus for STW to serve as many students as possible.

Interviews revealed that STW has been able to foster collaborative and communicative relationships between the various agencies and participants involved with the program. A DVR counselor has seen tremendous improvement between DVR’s relationship with schools. This informant recalls sparse buy-in from schools prior to STW. STW has led to a working relationship between schools and DVR. Nearly all of the informants emphasized the importance of open communication between all parties involved and its impact on providing effective services for students. One key informant commented, “Open communication is absolutely the thing that needs to happen. And it has to happen by all parties, always, all the time. And if that happens, if there is open and consistent communication among people, things work really well.”

A KCDDD evaluation report in 2010 stated that STW had a significant impact on employment rates of students six months after leaving school. In the three years prior, employment rates six months after leaving school ranged from 7% to 14%. During the first three years of STW, employment rates of students enrolled

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<sup>14</sup> Tegenfeldt, K. (2010). *King County developmental disability services division school to work project evaluation*. Copy obtained from key informant.



in the project increased to 53.5% in 2006, 67.6% in 2007, and 76.4% in 2008. During those years, employment rates for students who were not enrolled in STW resembled outcomes for students prior to the project (2006: 7.1%, 2007: 9.0%, 2008: 12.5%).

In 2007, 67.6% (50 of 74) of STW students participating were working within six months of leaving school. In 2008, 76.4% (55 of 72) of STW students were working. These findings indicate that STW's first goal of assisting 50 students to obtain a job each year was achieved. However, wages and hours for students who participated in STW were similar to those of non-participants, with most working fewer than 20 hours per week and earning \$750 a month or less.<sup>15</sup> Key informants expressed their desire to increase the working hours for students and improve the quality of jobs.

KCDDD's evaluation revealed the benefits of making an early connection between students and employment service vendors. Of all STW participants (N=221) who participated in the program from 2005–2008, 20 students enrolled in STW did not work with an employment service agency. None were employed six months after leaving school. There are several reasons that the 20 students did not get connected with a vendor. Some did not follow through with selecting a vendor. Others developed health issues, moved out of the county, or waited too long and their desired agency could not serve them. Conversely, 72% (144 of 201) of the students who began working with an employment service agency early on were employed within six months of leaving school. Eighty percent of STW participants responding to a follow-up survey reported that they found their job through an employment vendor.<sup>16</sup>

KCDDD's evaluation included a student survey and a primary contacts survey on their experiences. Of the 82 of 208 (39.4%) who responded, 88% reported some type of work experience while in school. Of these, 53% reported their experience as very good and 39% reported that there were "good and bad" things about their experience. Eighty percent felt more confident that they could find a job after school because of work experience in school.<sup>17</sup> A total of 50 primary contacts responded to the survey. Eighty-seven percent agreed that the student was better prepared to find and hold a community-based job and was more confident in his or her ability to work. About 85% agreed that community employment was more likely due to participation. Most respondents reported satisfaction with the employment vendor.<sup>18</sup>

STW changed the perception held by many staff and students that young adults with IDD are not capable of holding a community job. Participating teachers were asked to complete a survey about the program. Of the 20 responding teachers (response rate of 26%), 55% reported that their belief in the possibility of community employment for people with IDD had significantly increased, with another 15% reporting a slight increase. Half of the respondents strongly agreed and 15% agreed with the statement, "Community-based employment can be an ongoing life activity for individuals with all types of developmental disabilities." A key informant from KCDDD noted, "I've seen some people who I wouldn't have expected to go to work become very successful [. . .] with an incredible amount of support from the team process in the beginning and the school's buy-in."<sup>19</sup> However, 35% of respondents strongly disagreed with this survey statement, pointing to the need for continued work in this area.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

In 2010, researchers from the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community at Indiana University were contracted to formally evaluate the STW program. Many of their findings echoed the findings of the evaluation by KCDDD. Through focus groups and individual interviews with project partners (including parents of students in the program), evaluators found that, in general, all project partners were excited about the project, felt it improved coordination of services, and thought that the positive outcomes of the project reinforced that individuals with IDD can work. Feedback showed that DVR staff were more engaged and had better support from schools, families, employment vendors, and King County for making decisions about eligibility and planning services. Evaluators noted the three major strengths of the initiative to be the clarity of the mission, KCDDD leadership, and buy-in among all project partners.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Future of the Practice**

The current STW design targets students during their last year of high school. Key informants from KCDDD expressed that, ideally, they would like to expand the program to include students at 16. This would facilitate an earlier exposure to gaining employment skills through community-based work experiences. A pilot was launched to work with a transition class earlier on. The goal was to provide students with as much work experience as possible during high school while remaining within the constraints of the participating service systems. Two small districts in rural areas of King Country have enrolled in this pilot. The pilot is not only beneficial to the younger students receiving services earlier, but also to small districts that may not meet the requirements of having at least eight students enrolled. DVR would like to expand the STW service model beyond King County to counties across the state of Washington. Kitsap County is looking into adopting the model, and has been communicating with the STW program coordinator about the project. A regional center in California has also expressed interest in the STW model.

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<sup>21</sup> Mank, D. (2010). *King county developmental disabilities transition initiative: External evaluation report*. Indiana University. Retrieved from <http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/DDD/services/employment/school-to-work.aspx>



## **Student Transition to Employment Project (STEP): Certifying Teachers as Vendors for Transition-Age Students with Developmental Disabilities<sup>22</sup>**

**West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services**

### **Abstract**

The Student Transition to Employment Project (STEP) provides training for teachers and aides from various county schools to become certified vendors with the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services (WVDRS). This process allows for a smooth transition from school to work for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Students continue the transition process with adult professionals whom they already know and trust, and who are familiar with all aspects of the student's life. This effort is a partnership between WVDRS, Vocational Services, Inc. (VSI) (a community rehabilitation provider), and special education staff in 24 West Virginia counties. Solely funded by the West Virginia Developmental Disabilities Council (WVDDC) for the first three years, WVDRS is currently providing joint funding for STEP. As of February 2012, 75 teachers have become registered as certified vendors and 73 students have entered employment through this project.

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<sup>22</sup> Information in this case study report has been obtained from communication from key informants unless otherwise noted.

# Background

In West Virginia, students with IDD may be referred to a community rehabilitation provider (CRP) from WVDRS shortly before graduating from high school. While many students may have participated in school-to-work programs and have experience in different job settings, a referral to the CRP generally marks the start of the employment process. Often any initial steps towards employment taken during the student's high school career are not taken into consideration when the student applies for jobs after graduation. In 2007, the coordinator of the Kanawha County Schools Work Exploration Program approached the WVDRS program manager of CRP services with an idea to use secondary special education teachers and aides as adult service vendors. Because of previous experience using teachers as vendors, the coordinator proposed the model could address a gap in employment service delivery for transition-age youth with IDD. According to key informants, the coordinator reviewed the program's effectiveness and proposed that teachers become sole-proprietor vendors for students in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and above. The state's rural geography makes it difficult to adequately provide vendor services. Sole-proprietor vendors offered a solution. A proposal was submitted to the WVDDC and a grant was awarded to pilot the STEP program.

According to project participants, the program is filling a gap for students otherwise overlooked when leaving school. Many who have participated in STEP are those who would not typically have obtained adult services. The vendor services provided do not conflict with those provided by CRPs. There was some initial trepidation about teacher -vendors taking away some CRP business. Yet, key informants reported the project increased service capacity. Pre-existing relationships with WVDRS were influential in determining in which counties the STEP program would begin. Originally, students in the school-to-work programs were given the option to continue working towards employment with teachers they already knew and trusted through STEP. Eventually, the program expanded to include other schools due to growing interest among teachers, students, and their families. WVDRS makes it clear to students that STEP is one option for students and that other postsecondary options also should be presented and discussed.<sup>23</sup> WVDRS and WVDDC have provided funds for STEP. The program continues to serve students with IDD while broadening its focus to include students from other disability groups as well.

## Purpose and Goals of STEP

The purpose is to provide a seamless transition from school to work for graduating students with IDD and other types of disabilities. Contracted teachers working with Work Exploration and other special-education programs become sole-proprietor vendors for WVDRS to provide transition services to students who are VR customers. The goal is to significantly increase employment outcomes among transition-age students.

## Implementation of STEP

*Student eligibility:* Participating students need to be interested in working and be eligible for VR services. They also need to have consistent and reliable transportation. Related support services need to be in place including long-term supports if needed. This funding is provided via extended supported employment service dollars for un-funded individuals or a Medicaid Waiver for individuals who qualify. This funding is

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<sup>23</sup> Community Access, Incorporated (2010). *STEP Training Manual, WV*. Community Access, Inc. Copy obtained from key informant.

only available for students closed into supported employment and needing ongoing support.<sup>24</sup> A strong support network is crucial to helping students succeed. This network includes students' parents, guardians, and other individuals who know them well. One benefit of the teachers is the familiarity and trusting relationship already in place prior to the job search.

### **Referral to the STEP program and VR**

Participation in STEP is based on student choice and is an option in transition plans for all students. WVDRS school counselors are assigned to each of the 55 county school districts in West Virginia and identify students eligible for WVDRS services. In other cases, a teacher with whom the student has worked may identify the student as a potential candidate for STEP and refer the student to WVDRS. WVDRS is notified if the student is interested. The student, the teacher, and the WVDRS counselor meet to determine WVDRS eligibility if the student is not yet a client. Students may also self-refer.

## **Roles and responsibilities of teacher vendors, recruitment, and contracting**

### **Roles and responsibilities**

Teacher vendors for WVDRS are responsible for providing job development, short-term job coaching, and job follow-up to students. They are expected to complete a CRP Service Plan and a Job Placement Plan together with the students, their families, and the WVDRS school counselor. These plans outline the goals, objectives, and strategies that will ensure that the services and supports provided meet the student's employment needs. In cases where students are placed in supported employment, CRPs will step in and provide ongoing follow-up when necessary. Any employment service provided by the teacher beyond the scope of a school-to-work program, if the student is enrolled, is considered to be part of the teacher vendor's job. Any employment service provided by the teacher vendor outside of a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is considered to be the teacher vendor's job.

If a student is enrolled in the school-to-work program, employment goals may also be included in their IEP. However, if job coaching and other employment-related services are not included in a student's IEP, these services must occur after school hours and the teacher vendor will be paid for them. Job-development, coaching, and follow-up services for employment often take place on weekends, evenings, and, mainly, throughout the summer. If additional support is needed after the summer months, teacher vendors may continue to work with the students after the school day or during the weekend. The WVDRS counselor or CRPs may step in to offer additional support.

Two participating vendors who already had experience with school-to-work programs discussed the ease of incorporating STEP into their workload. One teacher vendor found that the typical activities during the school year made for a seamless transition for placing the student in a job during the summer months. Another teacher vendor added that, due to collaboration and coordination with WVDRS counselors and families during the school year, time management was not an issue.

CRPs would gather community assessment information about a student already known by the teacher who has direct involvement with the student. A key informant said: "It kind of made the process a little quicker

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

because you weren't at a totally starting over point." Such information includes the student's interests and goals, what kind of job would be a good match for the student, what kind of job the student wants to pursue, and what abilities and strengths the student possesses that will enable him or her to succeed in a job. It is common for students working with a teacher vendor to graduate ready to work, and to have identified a vocational goal and specific job. Some students graduate with applications ready to send to job positions.

The partnership between teacher vendors and WVDRS counselors has flourished since the founding of STEP. This improved relationship is largely due to the development of open and fluid communication. One teacher vendor commented on the impact of increased communication: "We've had a good relationship... [because] we'll talk about some different aspects [of the program] and how we can be successful in this program. We're very close as far as keeping in contact." An increase in communication has resulted in the development of a trusting relationship between teacher vendors and WVDRS.

### **Recruitment and contracting**

Teachers must be working in the school system as part of a Work Exploration or other special-education program. Each year, participating schools host a meeting led by STEP staff to introduce the program to teachers who may be interested in becoming vendors. The project coordinator, accompanied by teacher vendors and WVDRS school transition counselors, holds orientation meetings for interested teachers. A general overview of the project is provided, including its purposes, goals, and requirements, and the process for becoming a vendor for WVDRS. Teacher vendors discuss their individual experiences with the program. A key informant elaborated, "We talk to [educators from different WV counties] about how we go about working with these kids and how we go about working with the WVDRS counselors. It's all about teamwork. If we get everybody involved, it makes it a lot easier."

### **Vendor training to provide transition and related services:**

Teachers who are interested in becoming vendors are invited to participate in a special training program on how to provide effective transition and related services to students. Interested teachers also have the opportunity to shadow counties currently participating in STEP. The new vendors file the necessary paperwork to operate a business, submit the paperwork to WVDRS, obtain professional liability insurance, and receive information on paying all the necessary taxes.<sup>25</sup> Teachers attend trainings to become vendors providing effective transition and related services to students. These trainings are conducted by a variety of individuals, including staff employed by WVDRS, Social Security Work Incentives and Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) Programs, and staff from the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VCU-RRTC).

Staff in counties with school-to-work programs require less training on basic aspects of job coaching, job development, and community-based education, as they already have familiarity with employment services for students with disabilities. Teachers participate in training that consists of five modules: a) Building Business Relationships and Job Development, b) Job Coaching, c) WOTC (tax credit opportunity), d) WVDRS; and e) Social Security Administration Work Incentives.<sup>26</sup> These training modules are offered to all teacher vendors in person. A STEP representative is always present and provides additional support and training to teacher vendors if needed. A WVDRS representative is often present as well, especially for the WVDRS training module. Some teachers have acted as mentors for new teacher vendors. All trainings are held after school in two-hour blocks, with the exception of the VCU-RRTC training, which lasts two days. Building Business

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

Relationships and Job Development focuses on the importance of networking. Job Coaching focuses on responsibility to aid a student at his or her new job, to advocate for the student, to analyze expected tasks, and to develop job accommodations. The WOTC training informs teachers about the tax-credit opportunity that provides an incentive for employers to hire individuals with disabilities.<sup>27</sup> The WVDRS training provides information on the VR system and process. Training is provided on policy and procedure, forms, expectations, definitions of services, and expectations of how those services are to be delivered. This training emphasizes both supported placement and direct placement. Social Security Administration Work Incentives provides information on the 2010 Red Book and the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs.<sup>28</sup> Trainings also discuss effective ways for teacher vendors to partner and work with WVDRS counselors.

### **Funding of the STEP program:**

The STEP program is funded through WVDRS and WVDDC dollars, each serving different regions of the state. Having two grants has allowed the project to train more teachers from more counties in less time. Both projects use the same methodology, and all placements are made through the local WVDRS counselor. The grant money from WVDRS and WVDDC is used only to fund the training component of the STEP program. Key informants believe STEP is sustainable without the need for continuous grant funding once trainings for teacher vendors have taken place and structures are established for program continuation. The key components for STEP (i.e., motivated special educators and VR training funds) are already in place throughout all states.

Many of the teachers trained in the first three years have worked each summer as independent vendors with transitioning high school students. STEP hopes to receive one more year of grant funding to finalize mechanisms, including the teacher vendor-training manual that would allow the project to be self-sustaining. WVDRS pays on a fee-for-service basis. They receive a \$600 fee and additional fees for milestones of follow up after one week of employment, and then at 30 days, 60 days, and 90 days. Teachers may receive \$50 an hour for up to two hours for face-time planning and additional fees for short-term job coaching at \$40 an hour.

### **Project Outcomes and Future of the Practice**

As of February 2012, 24 counties had received training, 75 teachers were certified as vendors, and 73 students had been employed. The top three industries for job placements were hotel and motel work, food service, and retail. About 25 of the 55 counties have school-to-work programs. STEP has been most successful in retaining teacher vendors involved with Work Exploration. As the program has expanded to other counties without school-to-work programs, there have been problems with teachers not following through and not providing services to students after receiving training to become certified vendors. Key informants attributed this to the workload being higher than anticipated, the need to continue providing services after the summer months, and unfamiliarity with job development. As the program continues, staff will focus on identifying school system staff and counties that are the best fit for the program to ensure its success.

There is anecdotal evidence from successful teacher vendors that the program is effective in finding employment for students, even in challenging situations. For example, one teacher found employment for three students in a county with high unemployment rates. Another found employment for three students

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

coming from a school that did not have a school-to-work program. A third teacher found employment for a student who had to rely on sparse public transportation for getting to work. To encourage positive change, the project manager and the program manager of CRP services at WVDRS have created a venue for current teacher vendors to meet and discuss their involvement in STEP. STEP staff and WVDRS staff has also presented the program to the WVDDC, at statewide transition conferences and meetings, and for school districts and other groups in the transition and special education fields. The staff hopes to increase the program's exposure and impact through these efforts.