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### Partnering with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services on Employment-Focused Systems Change

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# PARTNERING WITH THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES ON EMPLOYMENT-FOCUSED SYSTEMS CHANGE

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### ABSTRACT

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (MA-DDS) has been working to make its system of day services and supports more focused on competitive employment outcomes. This effort has involved a partnership among DDS, the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI), the State Employment Leadership Network, and the Work Without Limits project. ICI has worked alongside DDS throughout this effort, providing consulting, technical assistance, training, and evaluation activities.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The overall goal of this effort is to improve employment outcomes for individuals served by DDS. Objectives include establishing an Employment First policy and focus at the leadership level, increasing the capacity of local service providers to support people in finding and maintaining employment, and increasing interest in and demand for employment services among individuals with disabilities and family members.

### APPROACH AND IMPACTS

Using a systems initiative framework developed by the Build Initiative (Coffman, 2007), ICI staff have developed a theory of change model for DDS, indicating how the major strategies being undertaken collectively work toward systems change. The framework groups systems change activities into five Build “Focus Areas:” Context, Components, Connections, Infrastructure, and Scale. The illustration at right describes activities and impact in each area.

### CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

DDS has clearly made strides to date. DDS’ leadership has communicated a clear preference for “Employment First” and the adoption of an official Employment First policy is an important step forward, setting the standard for employment to be available for all. Recent and ongoing improvements in data collection and use, as well as in employment services procurement, have also played a role in infrastructure change. Training, technical assistance, conferences and symposia, and publications have all targeted improvement at the local service provider level.

Most recently, DDS has continued to shift the Employment First emphasis to the implementation level by requiring local service providers to craft transformation plans for moving people from sheltered to community employment. In addition, a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) has been signed between DDS and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to collaborate in serving young people transitioning from school to adult services. The “Explore, Prepare, Act” project, a training effort by people with disabilities for people with disabilities, has also been a recent highlight.

The next steps involve continuing to emphasize implementation at the service provider level and to improve connections with other agencies. DDS will need to follow through on the transformation plans required of providers by giving feedback on the plans, providing technical assistance and training as needed, and maintaining a focus on the goals and timelines in those plans. Following through on the MOA with MRC, and also coordinating with statewide and local educational entities, could enable DDS to further improve services and outcomes for youth and young adults. Finally, continuing to work with self-advocates with disabilities through efforts such as “Explore, Prepare, Act” will be an ongoing focus. ICI will continue to support these efforts through training, technical assistance, and expert consulting.

### REFERENCES

Coffman, J. (2007). A framework for evaluation systems initiatives. Downloaded March 17, 2009 from [www.buildinitiative.org/content/evaluation-systems-change](http://www.buildinitiative.org/content/evaluation-systems-change).

### ICI PROJECT STAFF

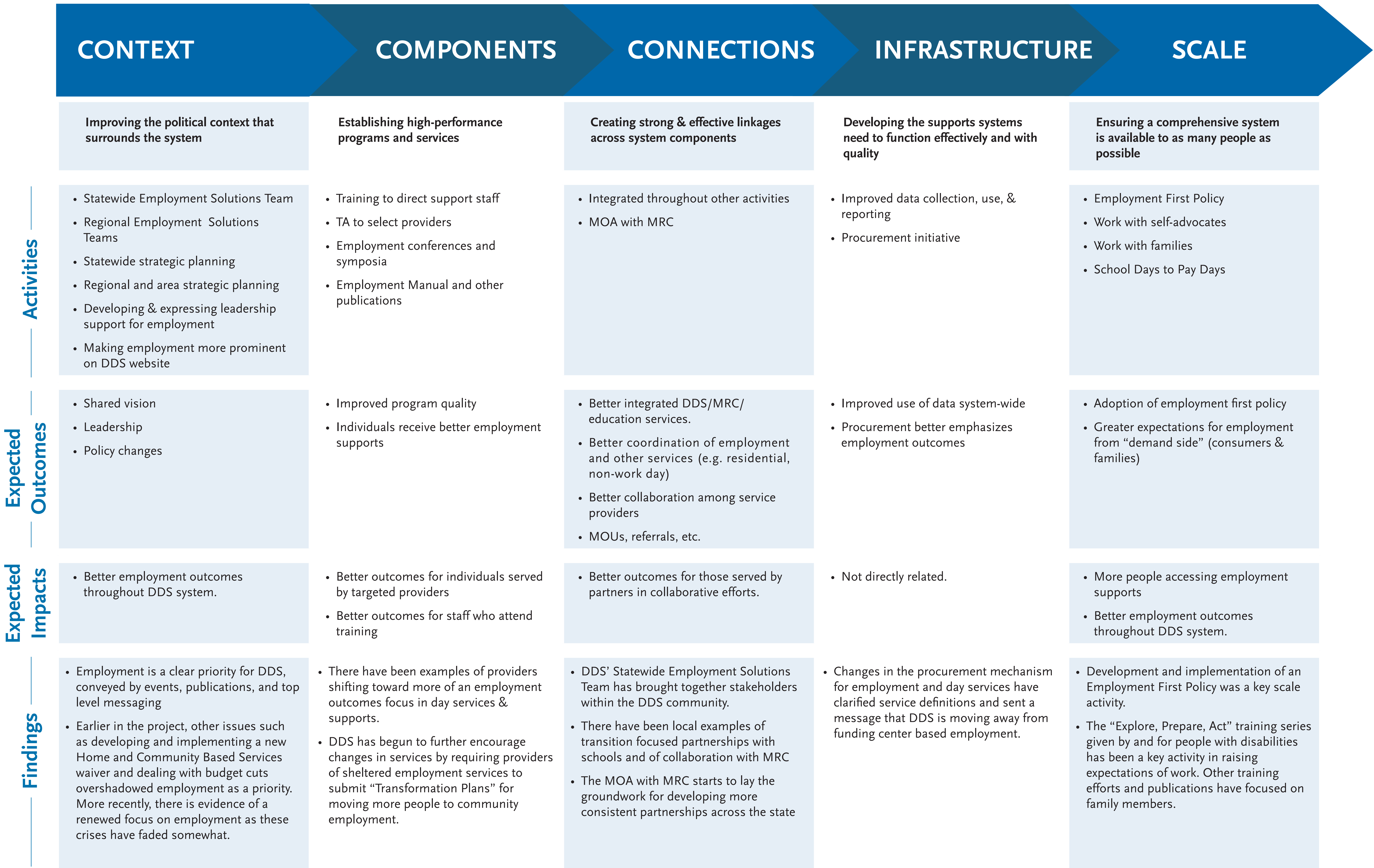
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### WorkWithoutLimits

Putting abilities to work in Massachusetts.

Work Without Limits: A Massachusetts Disability Employment Initiative is funded by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services through a grant to the University of Massachusetts Medical School (CDFA No.93.768). Work Without Limits is managed through a partnership involving the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Commonwealth Medicine Center for Health Policy and Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

## MASSACHUSETTS DDS THEORY OF CHANGE MODEL



“ I think with the new fiscal year starting... employment is one of the top agendas for the department. It’s one of the programmatic areas of focus and development. ”

“ ...the weekends are hard to get [job coaches]. They’re looking for a job...during the week, I’m sure they’ll make it like two to five, or five to seven. Don’t tell me you can’t because people do work nights. ”

“ [Transition from school to work] was certainly a priority in our strategic plan. I think everyone’s in agreement that it makes sense to sort of start people out on a different employment path, rather than kind of ending up in a different sort of day program model to begin with. ”

“ Prior to attending I was really feeling that meaningful employment might not be within [my son’s] grasp, but I’m much more encouraged after seeing all the resources and websites. ”

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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