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WI Employment First Initiative

Regional meetings to discuss the meaning and intent of an Employment First Initiative in Wisconsin have recently begun. The first was held in Milwaukee on June 11th, followed by meetings in Janesville on the 16th and Oshkosh on the 17th. The list of upcoming meetings includes:

Wausau – July 9th from 10am – 12:30
Job Center
364 Grand Ave.
Wausau, WI

Ashland – July 23rd from 9:30am – 11 (as part of the EDG meeting)
101 W. Main St.
Ashland, WI

La Crosse – August 10th from 10am – 12
Riverfront
3000 South Ave.
La Crosse, WI

Madison – August 11 from 9:30am – 12
Waisman Outreach
122 East Olin Ave.
Madison, WI

Green Bay – Sept. 15th from 10am – 12:30
Harmony Café,
1660 West Mason St.
Greenbay, WI

Please join us for a discussion about the current state of employment for citizens with disabilities in Wisconsin and bring your ideas about how to increase employment opportunities. All are welcome!

The Wisconsin CRP Rebalancing Initiative is Underway

The Division of Long Term Care issued a request for proposals last December for a project designed to expand integrated employment options for people with disabilities served by community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) that currently operate facility-based day and employment services. The CRP Rebalancing Initiative seeks to accomplish this by:

- 1) Increasing the number and percentage of individuals with disabilities who are supported by community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) in integrated employment options including competitive, customized, supported, and self employment (including micro-enterprise), and

On May 17th, three WI APSE Board Members traveled to Minnesota to attend the annual conference hosted by MN APSE.

The keynote presenter as well as the break-out session topics revolved around the theme of staying focused on the positive. The things people can do instead of limitations.

Sessions covered topics such as job development strategies, being successful even in tough economic times and the progress being made in the state.

One of the most notable Successes for integrated employment in Minnesota has been the strength of the Employment First initiative there.

The Minnesota Employment First Coalition has developed into a broad group with members from various organizations and from around the state.

Two Summits have been held thus far, each producing a compilation of information contained in first a Manifesto on the Employment First philosophy and second a report card on progress.

Both documents can be found on their website at www.mnapse.org.

- 2) Expanding the capacity and expertise of CRPs to provide individualized, community-based employment supports.

Ten grants at \$30,000 each were awarded to CRPs that support this goal. The 2009 grant recipients are:

- Diverse Options - Ripon
- Diversified Services - Siren
- Hodan Center - Mineral Point
- N.E.W Curative - Green Bay
- Portal Industries - Grafton
- RCS Empowers - Sheboygan
- The Threshold, Inc. - West Bend
- Ventures Unlimited - Shell Lake, Hayward, Rice Lake
- VIP Services - Elkhorn

(con't on pg. 2)

The Integrated Employment Training was completed in 3 locations.

Pictured right:

WI APSE Board Co-President, Gary Ormsbee and WI APSE Board Member, Gary Noosbond at the MN APSE conference.

It was great learning new things from our neighbors in Minnesota!

**Job Developer Mentor Project—
In Partnership with Business**

On the Web at:
www.jobdevelopers.net/wisconsin



WI APSE NEWS: Board members attend MN APSE conference

CRP Rebalancing Act continued

The project started May 1st and a project-wide meeting was held in the Dells on May 13th. These ten CRPs are expected to use grant funds to restructure or rebalance existing organizational resources and develop staff capacity to provide individualized, community-based employment supports. Funds may be used for activities that contribute to and demonstrate a commitment to a planful organizational transition to providing more integrated, individualized employment. By December 31, 2009, CRPs are expected to:

1. Implement an action plan or strategy for rebalancing or restructuring organizational resources for working age adults with disabilities who receive day and employment services so that the amount and percentage of resources dedicated to supporting integrated employment increase,
2. Develop staff expertise in integrated employment, including the use of customized employment strategies.
3. Assist an initial group of individuals to move from sheltered employment or facility-based non-work activities to at least part-time participation in individualized, integrated employment and assist an initial group of new referrals to move directly into at least part-time participation in individualized, integrated employment, [Part-time means at least 12 hours per week for the purposes of this project.]

4. Adopt and implement the following policy for handling new referrals to sheltered employment (facility-based prevocational services) to ensure a process for these newly referred individuals to have the opportunity to make an immediate or subsequent transition to at least part-time integrated employment:

A) If new individuals are referred for prevocational services without a goal of moving to integrated employment, the CRP will do internal assessment and planning with the individual to ensure informed choice, and will revisit the choice of integrated employment over time so that marketable skills, and developing expertise with regard to customizing opportunities and supporting self-employment/micro-enterprise.

(B) If any newly referred individual has a goal of at least part-time participation in integrated employment, but goes into full-time facility-based prevocational/day services as a temporary measure, the CRP will create an individual transition plan that includes the steps necessary to achieve the integrated employment goal and a reasonable timeline for doing so.

The project is modeled after the national T-TAP program which was funded by the Department of Labor and ran from 2002 to 2007. (Maybe say a bit more about T-TAP). The project includes mentoring and technical assistance from mentors who were involved in T-TAP and Wisconsin consultants, plus training on customized employment. Mentors are experienced executives with organizations that have made success transitions to a primary focus on integrated employment. Mentors include: Beth Durkee from Michigan, Jim Meehan from Maine, and Don Lavin and Bob Niemiec from Minnesota. Pathways consultants on the project are Colleen Kennedy and Rick Hall. The Project Director is Lisa Mills. Each site will have two on-site mentor visits, monthly technical assistance calls and the opportunity to participate in Customized Employment training with Michael Callahan in September.

For more information contact Lisa at Lisa.Mills@dhs.wisconsin.gov.

CELEBRATING SUPPORTED EMPLOYEES

From around Wisconsin

Fond du Lac Synergy Cooperative: A member owned work cooperative striving to provide employment opportunities for citizens in recovery from mental illness.

The idea sounds fairly simple: a group of people who want to work join together, form a cooperative, seek jobs, share the work load and obtain paid work. In reality, however, there are many i's to dot and t's to cross before the paid work can begin. Adult Care Consultants formed a board of directors to begin the process of hammering out the many details involved with the formation of a worker cooperative. This group wanted to have their ducks on a row and do this correctly.

One point was clear from the beginning, the workers needed to own this cooperative – not Adult Care Consultants. The board came up with a name for the cooperative and it soon became known as: The FDL Synergy Coop (short for the Fond du Lac Synergy Cooperative). A plan was developed to ensure that the workers of the cooperative would be invested owners. Each owner would need to invest both money and time to become a member prior to being paid for work. One of the owner members took on the task of tracking the list of members and their time and money investments.

After many months and a great deal of hard work, the FDL Synergy Cooperative is beginning to have steady paid work in addition to the button making business. The coop recently completed several yard work and cleaning jobs and has also obtained two contracts for cleaning work that will provide ongoing opportunities for owner members to have paid employment. Some of the details and accounting systems still need to be put into place, but this group is well on its way – and people now have opportunities to work and get paid.



CELEBRATING SUPPORTED EMPLOYEES

From Around Wisconsin

Kelly went to a small high school on the outskirts of Sheboygan. Kelly began working with RCS two years before her graduation in 2007. After entering the transition program, Kelly had several work experiences. Since Kelly struggled with social interactions, she started out completing work within the school district. Some of her first work experience jobs included: janitorial work, shredding and filling vending machines.

Kelly spent a brief period of time trying out work at an RCS work center so that her skills and preferences could be assessed. From there, she went on to have work experiences at a library, grocery store and electric company. The library was a good job match for Kelly because she could work more independently as opposed to directly with coworkers. She also did quite well at the job at Wester Electric. The first few work experiences that Kelly had were paid through the school district, but the one at Wester Electric was paid through the company. Kelly was hired there to meet need that they had and she also received training and support from one particular coworker in the very small office there.

During the last semester of her high school career, RCS assisted Kelly to find employment with Aurora Health Care. Kelly works at the clinic(there performing duties such as sorting and delivering mail and packages, filing and doing other tasks that need completing in the medical records department. She was hired to work two days per week. RCS was very familiar with Kelly and her support needs by that time thanks to the transition program and the amount of time that they had been able to spend with her over an extended period of time and through several different work experiences, so the transition to the job was smooth. Kelly continues at this job today.

In addition to her two days per week at Aurora, Kelly was also called to return to work at Wester Electric where she now works each Friday. Kelly only has part-time coaching for her jobs as she can complete the majority of her job duties independently. RCS does continue to provide a few hours per month of support to assist both Kelly and her employers with challenges that may arise. In addition, RSC provides a ride home for Kelly on Mondays. Transportation has been an issue for Kelly since she does live about twenty miles away from her jobs. Transportation has been arranged through a combination of a transportation service, Community Care, RCS, Kelly's home support provider and her mother.

The transition program at RCS gave Kelly the chance to try a number of jobs and work environments to find two that are a good match for her. Kelly has support from RCS, her parents, her home support provider and her two employers, who accept her for who she is. Kelly, along with other students who have the opportunity to begin work experiences and the transition process a couple of years before high school graduation often have an advantage in the job market over new high school graduates who experience disability and have not been involved in a formal transition program.



Self-Employment Technical Assistance, Resources, & Training (START-UP / USA)
Self-Employment Q and A: Discovery

Traditionally, determining employer needs and then finding a person with a disability to fill the job was common practice. Today, using a customized employment (CE) framework, an individual's talents and desires are considered first. Then suitable employment is negotiated that matches the person's skills, contributions, and interests.

This customized approach to assisting an individual with a disability in finding a job also applies to starting a business. In other words, the person's talents, desires, and interests are considered first, and the business idea follows. The process for determining the person's talents, desires, and interests is called "Discovery". This Q and A will answer some basic questions about how to use Discovery when assisting an individual in becoming self-employed.

Question: How is the Discovery process implemented?

Answer: Discovery is an emerging technique. However, numerous practitioners are testing strategies in "real life" settings, and a basic framework exists. Please review the list of references that are provided at the end of this Q and A for additional information.

Discovery typically begins in the home where family members or others who reside there are engaged in conversations with the individual. In these conversations, people are encouraged to talk about their observations of the individual's interests, talents, and needed support strategies. This conversation can also reveal the family's social capital, business expertise, connections, and experiences that may be helpful if the individual launches an enterprise. In addition to conversations, a quick look around the individual's household can provide clues to hobbies, interests, and chores that can be further explored in the community. A walk around the neighborhood can also be enlightening offering information on local commerce, connections with neighbors and the potential for leveraging social capital into employment connections.

An essential next step is to engage in community activities and, sometimes, work experiences that match the individual's interests. Several hours spent at a few activities, or in particular work environments, can give credibility to stated or observed interests. These experiences can provide new information regarding how the person learns, what supports may be needed in particular environments, and whether the interest has vocational potential. Essentially, the Discovery process seeks to get to know the individual to reveal personal themes that can be used to develop goals for employment. Questions that should be asked and answered include but are not limited to the following:

- When is this person at his or her best?
- What support strategies are needed in particular situations?
- How does the individual learn best?
- Who knows the individual well?
- What circumstances may make the individual anxious or frightened?
- When is the person "in flow" (i.e. at peak performance or most comfortable)?

Question: Who should be included in Discovery, and what skills should they have?

Answer: Usually an individual's service team initiates Discovery and enlists others that the individual identifies. A working team is best kept to a maximum of five or six people that are committed to supporting the person. Two of the key skills for those participating in the Discovery process are:

1. Listening with the ability to prompt conversation and remain respectfully quiet, and Observing without speculation as to motives of the individual or others.

Question: How does employment or business development proceed following Discovery?

Answer: The personal themes uncovered during the initial steps in Discovery lead to employment development strategies. One approach is to identify 20 specific places in the community where people with similar interests work. This has been referred to as "going where the career makes sense." For instance, if three personal themes have been identified for a person, 60 places in the community where people with similar interests work should be selected. Next, five or six businesses are targeted where informational interviews can take place. The informational interviewing typically involves one team member and the individual. An entire team may overwhelm the employer.

The purpose of these informational interviews is not to apply for work. Rather, the meeting is for gathering information about the work performed and to get a tour into the backrooms and operations that job developers and the public rarely see. Through these tours and advice from employers, vocational opportunities emerge for the individual. Observations and discussions are focused to reveal emerging markets, holes in customer service, opportunities for job or small business creation, and so forth.

As these, and possibly additional, informational interviews are completed, business ideas (or wage employment options) are developed. If owning a business becomes the vocational option of choice, then the team may be reformatted to create a Business Development Team (BDT) with staff and others skilled in enterprise development.

Question: Do you have an example of how attitudes about an individual's employment potential were changed through the Discovery process?

Answer: Yes, let's look at a young woman who has been described as "depressed, unkempt, and unmotivated." Her parents who speak primarily Spanish revealed that their daughter loved social activities of all kinds (e.g. parties, going to church, and bowling). In contrast, the staff supporting her knew her as a total "homebody." They also thought her to be somewhat "slovenly and disheveled."

After going into her bedroom (with permission), the team noticed that every dress the young woman owns for special occasions (e.g. Easter services; weddings; family reunions in Mexico) were neatly arranged in her closet. They also learned during Discovery that she regularly cleaned the house, which was spotless! The young woman also has an overwhelming interest in karaoke, evidenced by a karaoke machine in her bedroom!

During the conversations, the young woman openly stated that she really enjoyed being in the company of children. Her mother quickly verified this information adding that the young woman's older sister managed a day-care center down the road. Within an hour, someone who had received services for almost a decade was known as an entirely different person! The team realized that she is *alive, vibrant, and talented* compared to the previous hour when she was described as "depressed, unkempt, and unmotivated."

The caution at this point is not to quickly identify a specific employment outcome. Often, professionals think in terms of job descriptions or small business types. In this example, some professionals might be tempted to assume that the young woman should go to work at the Day Care Center; become a housekeeper; or start a DJ service. Instead, these themes should be explored in the community, going to both familiar and unfamiliar settings, participating in activities and capturing information through observation.

For instance, a tour of a day care center to watch the young woman's reactions and to see how she engages children is a next step. Or, a recreational outing or two such as karaoke might be conducted to assess her skills and support needs. The observations at this point should lead to the construction of a descriptive vocational narrative listing her family support, interests, observed skills, interests, and potential contributions to a business (i.e. she is tidy, organized, energetic, and friendly when she is doing what she enjoys), etc. Once a complete vocational profile is compiled, employment or business development can begin.

Question: What role does Vocational Evaluation play in Discovery?

Answer: Discovery is vocational evaluation by other means. Traditional vocational assessments compare the individual to established "norms." Comparisons are what CE aims to eliminate, because when people with disabilities are compared to others without disabilities, they are often scored as "less-able or less-worthy" of employment. Further, testing repeatedly results in a prescription of more training before the person is ready to work. Data collected over the past decades indicates that many people with significant disabilities will remain in "readiness" forever unless employment development commences.

CE assumes all people are ready to work, and Discovery shifts the focus from assessment to assistance. Again, because there are no limits to creativity in the marketplace; interest inventories and other paper and pencil approaches are too limiting. Exploration in the local community and matching the individual to environments where new skills can be acquired and old ones can be sharpened is a more effective approach. Time and money would be better spent assisting individuals in refining their business plans and operations, making certain that they are meeting customer needs and adapting to changing markets.

Question: Is Discovery useful for everyone starting a business?

Answer: Knowing one's strengths, interests, skills, and workplace contributions is important for all people wanting business success. But a Discovery process is probably not needed for individuals with strong work and educational histories who have ample supports, or who know their career path. In these cases, a thorough business feasibility regimen is likely more helpful.

Discovery makes sense for almost anyone with a significant disability and complex support needs. It also makes sense for individuals approaching a major life transition, such as exiting school. The goal of Discovery is to develop employment by answering some basic questions, including: Who is this person; where are they most who they are; what are the ideal conditions of employment? Discovery fits a proactive economic development model suggesting that armed with information about a particular individual, opportunities that match market needs and the person can be revealed or created.

Question: Isn't Discovery too expensive and time consuming?

Answer: Data suggests that Discovery must be formally designed using a project management approach or it loses its urgency and devolves into a substitute for day-program activities. Anecdotally, Discovery takes approximately 12 to 60 hours over a span of 4 and 6 weeks, with various team members being matched to the array of activities and experiences undertaken. Discovery should not be done by only one person because that does not allow for enough diversity of thought.

As for expense, Discovery appears to cost roughly the same as standard vocational evaluation. In states that set costs for assessment services, Discovery fits without too much need for cost increases. Several state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies now purchase Discovery, and Medicaid Waivers regularly cover assessment phases. Perhaps the cost of not doing Discovery, in dollars and time, should be considered. Traditional means of approaching assessment and employment yielded on-going day program costs and lifetimes spent unemployed.

Question: We have an opportunity to start a paper shredding business with 5 people now served in the workshop. How does Discovery apply?

Answer: Discovery must be used to avoid this and similar circumstance. It is unlikely that in one program Discovery would yield data indicating that five people all want to earn a living in the same way. Rather, this seems to indicate that an opportunity to shred paper exists in the market, and the agency is seeking to fill it. Customized employment utilizes an abundance mindset that understands there are unlimited ways to make a living and by revealing who a person is and using creativity, businesses can be developed that meet each individual's employment goals.

Discovery is an individualized approach. Most major disability legislation, including the Rehabilitation Act, the Developmental Disabilities and the Mental Health Acts, the Workforce Investment Act, et al., reiterate that services should be individualized. Employment, therefore, should be individualized.

SUMMARY

The Discovery process is essentially the assessment phase that precedes determining an individual's career path. Discovery must begin with the belief that all people with disabilities can work and that they have multiple talents and interests. The process is both open and formal; it is time-limited; and it is not concerned with predicting the future. Rather, it is focused on employment that matches who the individual is now. In a sense, Discovery creates urgency for engaging in meaningful work.

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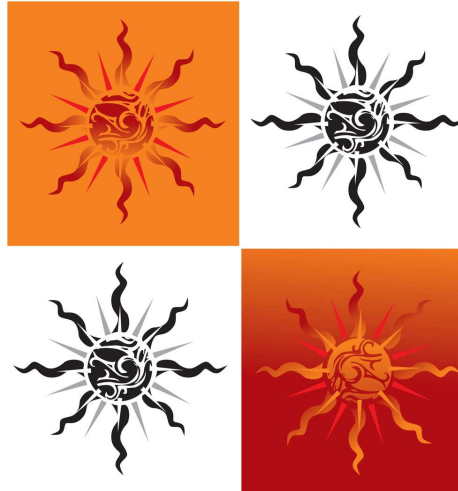
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