

Toward Integrated Employment for All:

APSE's Position on Segregated Services for People with Disabilities

By Dale DiLeo and Pat Rogan

We have reached a crisis in the unemployment and underemployment of people with high support needs who are considered to have the most severe disabilities. Supported employment, while not yet fully realizing its potential, offers by far the best opportunities for employment and a career for individuals most at risk of living life without a job.

Yet, studies show the reality for most of these individuals is lifelong segregation, in day treatment, habilitation, or sheltered training. Various national studies have shown:

- *The majority of people with severe disabilities are in sheltered workshops (44%) and day activity programs (37%).*
- *Most employment service funding still supports segregated environments.*
- *A 1995 survey found that more people entered segregated programs than entered supported and non-supported competitive employment combined.*
- *That year, vocational rehabilitation services referred 8400 more people to sheltered workshops, considering them "successfully rehabilitated."*

Over the last ten years, supported employment has been studied extensively. We know how many people annually receive services, as well as their characteristics, wages, job types, costs, and other outcomes. We know that supported employment cost-benefit studies are positive, and that people significantly improve their wages, quality of life, and skill development when they access real jobs.

Research has demonstrated that people overwhelmingly express satisfaction with and preferences for their community job experiences. Organizations that have totally converted to integrated services have found that individuals with disabilities have no need for facility-based employment services. All services and supports can be provided successfully in an individualized fashion in the community at comparable costs to segregated services.

In contrast, there is very little national data about traditional, segregated day services in terms of wages earned, skills learned, movement to integrated employment, costs, and other quality of life measures. Yet the majority of funding, at both the federal and state levels, continues to support these traditional, segregated programs.

While there are approximately 150,000 people working through supported employment, approximately 450,000 people remain in segregated, sheltered day programs. Yet vocational rehabilitation status 26 case closures (successful closures) in supported employment cost an average of only \$1,255 more than sheltered closures. It is time to move forward.

Therefore the Board of APSE resolves that:

- **No person should be denied the opportunity to have a real job in his or her community based on their disability or perceived support needs.**
- **The unacceptably high unemployment rate of people with disabilities must be addressed through community-based, integrated employment options. People need jobs and supports for job success, not segregation.**
- **Youth with disabilities transitioning to adult employment should move directly into integrated jobs, and should never be sent to workshops or segregated facilities to "get ready" for employment, or for any other reason. Integrated employment and necessary supports must be available to all students at the time of school exit, regardless of intensity of support needs.**
- **"Successful vocational rehabilitation outcomes" must include only integrated, community-based employment, and appropriate experiences, supports, and opportunities must be available to support this outcome. Placement in segregated settings should never be considered a successful outcome.**

To this end, APSE will advocate for:

1. **A national review of facility-based, sheltered day services that documents the outcomes and costs for people with severe disabilities, including median wages, benefits, skills gained, level of integration, and other quality of life indicators. Comparative measures should be presented to consumers to assist their choice of employment services.**
2. **Integrated, community-based placements as the criteria for successful vocational rehabilitation closures, rather than placements in segregated settings.**
3. **A freeze on funding for segregated services, and concurrent allocation and continuing expansion of new funding to support integrated, community-based employment options.**
4. **A cessation of funding for new segregated facilities.**
5. **A significant increase in each community's capacity for integrated work opportunities for people with disabilities, including the development of "free standing" employment providers that support integrated employment services.**
6. **The promotion of greater informed choice regarding integrated employment opportunities, career development, and options for support that includes community employment experiences matched to interests and skills.**

APSE will work to marshal the forces of those committed to integrated employment for people with disabilities and make these principles reality.