

**Initial Report from the  
Employment First Initiative Work Group  
To CDDOs and SRS**

**May, 2009**

**OVERVIEW AND PURPOSE**

The FY2009 contract between the State of Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services (SRS) and the 27 Community Developmental Disability Organizations (CDDOs), in Section VII.P.3 calls for the development of a workgroup that is charged to;

- Develop a comprehensive community employment service delivery evaluation with recommendations.
- Identify barriers and disincentives to increased independence in such areas as competitive employment, the need for a safety net for persons who lose a job, embracing SRS's mission to promote adult self-sufficiency, reviewing VR's role in assisting with supported employment, recommending methods of improving outcomes which clues include financial incentives, studying current Employment First models in other states, that treat employment as the "default" model for adults waiting for day services and also other methods of Medicaid funding such as support waivers for supported employment.

The work group has now met several times, beginning on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2008. The initial work group membership has expanded throughout the process to include representatives from work force centers, the Department of Commerce, the Department of Education and an additional person with developmental disabilities. As a part of its work, the group has spent an extensive amount of time reviewing resource materials regarding Employment First Initiatives from around the country.

A copy of the minutes from several meetings, a list of work group members, and links to all resource materials is available at

<http://www.srskansas.org/hcp/css/EmploymentFirstWorkGroup.htm>

## MISSION STATEMENT

The group has agreed to the following;

***The State of Kansas will establish integrated, competitive employment at a commensurate wage as the first priority for working age people with developmental disabilities. This initiative will be called Employment First.***

## VALUES

Years ago, Kansas supported persons with disabilities by placing them in institutions. The next step has been to close institutions in favor of placement in communities. Our final step needs to be full-participation in home communities which requires having a sufficient income through employment to purchase goods and services, pay taxes and have economic control over their lives.

The following values are necessary for us to develop our recommendations for the Kansas Employment First Initiative. Our real challenge is not in rehabilitating people. Rather, the real need is to rehabilitate the vision and goals driving Kansas' educational and rehabilitation service systems for people of working age with disabilities.

In other words, Kansas needs to refocus its resources and support infrastructure to promote the fundamental idea that all people with disabilities should be employed, regardless of the severity of their disabilities. We need to craft an educational and adult service system that expects, supports, and rewards integrated, competitive employment as the first option for every individual.

Here are some key reasons why the philosophy of Employment First makes sense for Kansas:

- 1) **Kansas needs everyone contributing to its economy**, Kansans with disabilities who are employed become taxpayers. Kansas data shows that as people with disabilities income increases, they pay taxes, buy goods and services, and support their community rather than relying on their community to support them.
- 2) **Kansas cannot afford to have people with disabilities not working**. It's important for all Kansans to contribute to their self-sufficiency up to the level of their capabilities. A lifetime of financial dependency on disability benefit programs such as Social Security and Medical Assistance is a costly proposition. We need to change this pattern to one of self-sufficiency for as many people as possible.
- 3) **Kansas needs everybody participating in its workforce**. Virtually every national workforce study warns us about emerging labor shortages in the United

States. Living with a disability doesn't mean a person doesn't also have abilities. Employment of people with disabilities should be part of the solution to the forecasted labor shortages in Kansas.

- 4) **Americans want people with disabilities contributing in the labor force.** In a recent national Gallup Poll sponsored by America's Strength Foundation, 92% of the respondents reported they held a "more favorable" or "much more favorable" opinion about companies who hire people with disabilities. 87% of these respondents said they would prefer to "give their business" to companies who hire people with disabilities. (National Survey of Consumer Attitudes" Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, January 2006, Vol. 24, Issue 1. IOS Press.)
- 5) **Employment is a human rights issue.** All Kansans of working age with any level of disability should enjoy their lives as their non-disabled peers do. Employment is fundamental to adulthood, quality of life, individual productivity, self-worth, and earning the means to exercise freedoms and choices available to all citizens.
- 6) **Kansas will lead.** An Employment First initiative is consistent with the guiding principles of the Kansas DD Reform Act, which remains an innovative and unique strength of our infrastructure. We will carry forward the values of integration, inclusion, productivity, and independence, and apply them to all working age Kansans with disabilities.

### **LEARNING FROM OTHER STATES**

The group recognized that they needed to learn from others, in particular it was important to them to learn what other States were doing with regard to employment issues for persons with developmental disabilities. As a part of their learning process, they reviewed a variety of articles, (articles are available at this link, <http://www.srskansas.org/hcp/css/EmploymentFirstWorkGroup.htm> ) and consulted two national data sources (The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts – Boston, and The State of the States in Developmental Disabilities report produced by David Braddock and associates at the University of Colorado) In addition, the group Investigated employment first activities in other states (e.g. Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Oregon).

The group took the following values from Mills, (2006), as the framework for the strategic areas of our report.

1. Existence of strong, clear and unambiguous state developmental disabilities agency policies, rules and programmatic requirements intended to support a clearly articulated agency preference for, and commitment to integrated employment for people with developmental disabilities.

2. Use of funding incentives to encourage the expansion of integrated employment opportunities and funding disincentives to discourage the use of facility-based employment and non-work services.
3. Liberal definition for the kinds of integrated employment arrangements that qualified for supported employment funding.
4. Adequate state agency staffing dedicated to employment.
5. Investment in on-going training and technical assistance.
6. Commitment to supporting organizational change among facility-based providers.
7. Use of a comprehensive data tracking system focused on integrated employment outcomes.

***Revitalizing Integrated Employment: A Study of Nationwide Best Practices for Increasing Integrated Employment Outcomes among People with Developmental Disabilities***, Lisa A. Mills, PhD, 2707 Mason Street, Madison, WI 53705

## **STRATEGIC AREAS**

The group has defined the following five key strategic areas.

- 1. Policies used to guide the developmental disability service system in Kansas will be revised to incorporate Employment First strategies and will include the input of persons with disabilities.**
  - a. Employment definitions from across all state agencies and MR/DD system stakeholders should be realigned, where possible, with the Employment First definition.
  - b. Educational opportunities regarding Employment First will be provided for state leaders including SRS, Education, Commerce, KDHE, KHPA, Legislative, and the Governor.
  - c. Training should be provided to and Information about Employment First should be disseminated through a variety of resources including; CDDOs, Community Service Providers, MR/DD system Case Managers, advocacy organizations, early childhood service providers, Special Education Advisory Council & SSA. A pamphlet/brochure/marketing tool should be created to share through KRS & the DOE use of the Career Pipeline.
  - d. Action Steps should be required in Person-Centered Plans related to a goal of establishing, increasing, or maintaining integrated, competitive employment for

everyone of working age. Employment First should be addressed and information disseminated in Person-Centered Planning meetings including intake.

1. Add specific requirements to Article 63 that incorporates Employment First values. For example, under 30-63-21 the statement that identifies a specific description of what should be included in the person centered plan in regard to the person's preferred lifestyle: (c) "What work or other valued activity the person wants to do" could be changed to "What type of paid employment the person who is working age wants to do" and perhaps another statement could be added, such as: "What valued activity the person who is non-working age wants to do.
  2. If the person is of working age and does not choose employment, it must be documented that viable employment options are being presented to the person and their support network on a regular basis and that efforts are being made to educate the person and their support network on the benefits of paid employment."
  3. Person centered plans will identify specific barriers to employment, and action steps to overcome these barriers for employment.
- e. SRS should measure individual and system progress toward an expectation of Employment First, and create accountability for providers through licensing requirements.
1. Include the use of the KLO used by SRS in the licensing process of community service providers.
  2. The CDDO quality assurance process.
  3. TCM quality review.
  4. Kansas Quality Oversight Management Committee (KQOMC).
- f. Persons of a working age seeking waiver-funded day supports are required to apply for VR services before or congruent to Waiver-funded services.
- g. Targeted Case Managers should have knowledge of and make referrals for services such as Benefits Specialists, Work Force Centers, VR, Working Healthy/WORK, etc..

- h. A service “safety net” should be designed for individuals working toward employment.
- i. Assurances should be made that individuals waiting for day services funding are not “penalized” by losing their spot while pursuing VR funded employment services.
- j. A seamless transition from school to VR should be established – with VR &/or Education funding service providers who facilitate competitive, community based employment a year or more before exiting school.
- k. VR should establish a certification &/or licensure requirement for their vendors, including core training requirements for job coaches, job developers and job specialists. Successful vendors will be granted “preferred” status.

**2. Mechanisms used to manage the developmental disability service system in Kansas will be revised to incorporate Employment First strategies. Funding incentives to encourage the expansion of integrated employment opportunities and funding disincentives will be developed to discourage the use of facility-based employment and non-work services.**

- a. VR fees should cover the average cost of securing stable employment for people with developmental disabilities, or fees should be individualized based on need. Vendors who meet certain performance standards or “preferred” status would receive higher reimbursement.
- b. Waivers may provide long-term funding support for employment, but VR, as appropriate, should be responsible for covering initial short term costs, including the costs associated with serving people who have the most severe disabilities.
- c. Reimbursement rates should be changed for services provided to persons of a working age, by offering a significantly higher rate for Supported Employment services than for other Day services.
- d. Incentives should be offered to providers who assist people to become independent enough to forego Waiver funded services. For example, providers could receive one time funding grants to build further capacity in their programs, or the ability to take a person off the waiting list who has identified the provider as their chosen provider. Utilization of incentives should be a net cost neutral distribution of resources but could be a barrier to implementation.
- e. SRS and CDDOs should seek commitment through provider based annual goals, to support philosophical/organizational change from facility based providers.

- f. VR should reach agreements with ticket to work employment networks that allow employment networks to maximize ticket to work revenue opportunities.
- g. An adequate and well-trained number of State staff should be dedicated to employment issues and is essential for a successful Employment First Initiative.
- h. A mechanism will be developed to track the success rate of placement within competitive, integrated employment, including the number of people who have left waiver services, and results will be posted.

**3. Implementation of competitive, integrated community based employment as the first option for all consumers of working age may come in phases.**

- a. The use of employment options other than competitive integrated employment should be documented in the person centered plan and reviewed on an annual basis.
- b. Outcomes that include work paid according to Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor standards act, and work environments like agency contracted labor groups that offer some degree of integration, should continue to be funded as transitional outcomes.
- c. Providers of employment services and school district employment staff should focus on career development beyond the first available job match. Funding systems will be continuously monitored for quality and long-term success.
- d. Those phases include employment retention and we must recognize that many persons need an on-going, nominal level of support..

**4. The success of the Employment First Initiative requires an investment in on-going training and technical assistance with a system-wide commitment to quality employment services.**

- a. Providers will be responsible for training of job coaches, job developers and/or job specialists; training requirements will be outlined in regulation. (Models to consider are the training requirements for case managers and foster care licensure.)
- b. Responsibilities of job coaches will be defined and standards of service established.
- c. Service provided by job coaches, job developers and other employment specialists will be professionalized (possibly through certification) by developing a required comprehensive training curriculum. This could be accomplished by collaborating with the College of Direct Supports to develop a module(s) that includes training on best practices in the field for job development and coaching.

- d. Every effort should be made to include career advancement as an employment option for job coaches, job developers and job specialists.

**5. The Employment First Initiative will include a policy, funding, program analysis and the use of a comprehensive data tracking system focused on integrated employment outcomes.**

- a. A mechanism should be developed to share aggregate data across state agencies (that may include transition data from schools). This can be funded under the Medicaid infrastructure grant.
  - 1. Use information in Basis and compare it to VR' and other existing data systems.
  - 2. Outcome measures should be assessed in comparison to the general work force in Kansas. Do not change expectations based upon a person's disability.
- b. Use surveying methods to accurately reflect effectiveness of the Employment First Initiative.
  - 1. Ask where we are now, and compare it to where we want to be. Effectiveness studies must include measurable, annual goals over a multiyear period. Other measurables include, but are not limited to, how long it take a person to get a job, the frequency of contact with a job coach, the current number of providers, what *types* of jobs are available and who are the employers, how many jobs has the person with a disability had in the past (and perhaps present), etc.
  - 2. Examine benefits of employment such as increase of wages, health, attendance and retention. (Similar to current Working Healthy data models)
- c. Make sure we are providing internal quality assurance. Ask for consumer feedback and offer satisfaction surveys to consumers, families, providers and employers utilizing Employment First. Assure that consumers have access to State staff.

## Summary

This report represents the efforts of a diverse work group that has met several times, and for many hours, since October of 2008. We understand our charge to be to develop a report, including recommendations to SRS leadership and CDDOs for their review, comment and feedback. The group feels that we are at a point where we need, and should expect to receive, specific feedback regarding the future work of the group that may include the next steps for implementation. It has not been the intent of the group to create barriers or disincentives (financial or otherwise) to individuals who are currently receiving appropriate services.

**Please send Comments to: [Greg.Wintle@srs.ks.gov](mailto:Greg.Wintle@srs.ks.gov) by July 1<sup>st</sup> 2009.**