In this issue:

- Employment First Policy
- Strategic Goals
- Family Training Event
- State Conference Recap
- Person-Centered Planning & Employment
- National Conference Highlights
- Getting Involved

Board Members Attend APSE National Conference 2015 in Philadelphia, PA

Seven MN APSE Board members, as well as several MN APSE members, participated in the 2015 APSE Conference in Philadelphia. Board members participated in presenting at multiple sessions and represented MN well at this great conference, which had near record attendance! In addition, the MN Employment First Coalition received the 2015 APSE Public Policy Advocate Award for their tireless work on engaging elected officials and key stakeholders in discussions to promote policies that support the mission of Employment First!

(See the following articles for more information about the conference and the MN Employment First policy.)

Employment First Policy Developed for Minnesota
Kelly Nye-Lengerman, MN APSE Co-President

On September 29, 2014, MN APSE was pleased to announce the approval of an Employment First Policy by the MN Olmstead Sub-Cabinet. The approval of this policy was a culmination of years of collaboration, partnership, education, and dedication by a group united around the idea that people with disabilities are just as valued and should have the same rights as other citizens. The idea that employment should be the first option for working-aged Minnesotans with disabilities has not always been embraced, but with the passage of this policy, Minnesota stands on the doorstep of real and permanent change by making employment for all Minnesotans with disabilities a priority.

The Employment First policy formally puts into place the policy directives required of state agencies.

Employment First means raising the expectation that all working age Minnesotans with disabilities can work, want to work, and can achieve competitive integrated employment; and each person will be offered the opportunity to work and earn a competitive wage before being offered other supports and services. [Emphasis added.]

The MN Employment First policy now provides state agencies with:

- A clear statewide vision supporting transformational change and a long-range goal of working-age youth and adults with disabilities participating in the workforce at levels similar to their peers who do not have disabilities
- A guiding vision to increase public and business expectations about employing the abilities and capacities of all people with disabilities to work in the right job with the right level of support
- A policy framework that guides present and future decisions related to people with disabilities who receive public services
- Guidance to provide clarity on how this policy will be applied across state agencies
- Instruction to act to develop and implement plans to ensure the Employment First principles and informed choice are integrated into new and existing employment-related policies, services and supports for people with disabilities.

What does this mean in Minnesota? It means changes are ahead. In the coming months there will be more information from the Olmstead Sub-Cabinet and around implementation actions. State agencies are also engaged in Olmstead planning and implementation which is closely related to the Employment First policy. The passage of the Employment First policy in Minnesota is just one of many steps toward making the choice of competitive, integrated employment a reality for Minnesotans with disabilities.

MN APSE and many of its partners and collaborators are responsible for this momentous development, including (but not limited to): MN Employment First Coalition, MN Employment Training and Technical Assistance Center, and the MN Employment Policy Initiative. Thank you for making what once seemed to be an impossible dream reality!
Making Progress...

MN APSE’s Goals for 2015
Kelly Nye-Lengereman, MN APSE Co-President

Members of the MN APSE Board and several “friends of APSE” participated in a strategic discussion last fall, facilitated by Bill Mills of the Executive Group, with the purpose of developing the new goals and tasks the organization would focus on in the coming year. There were great discussions, but there is also a great deal of work ahead! A number of these objectives have already been accomplished in the first half of the year.

2015 MN APSE Strategic Goals:

• Support Olmstead and Employment First implementation.
  o Create meaningful metrics and solutions
  o Provide technical assistance and training (state and local)
  o Maintain and strengthen our role as a strategic resource
  o Work to ensure the spirit and intent of is carried forward

• Increase board diversity.
  o Diversify the MN APSE Board with three new members
    ▪ Advocate, family member, educator

• Promote positive messaging.
  o Facts
  o Examples
  o Call to action
  o MN APSE Mission Statement

• Increase MN APSE visibility.
  o Host conference
  o Explode myths
  o Promotional items and materials
  o Newsletter, FB, website

• Host collaborative events.
  o Raise expectations
  o Explode myths
  o Provide resources

Work Is Possible!

Chris Davies & Jill Kraemer, Board Members

Last October the MN APSE Family Involvement Committee came to the realization that we could not do this alone. After initial planning with Sean Roy of PACER Center, we joined forces with an impressive group of collaborators to develop an informational family event: Arc MN, Autism Society of MN (AuSM), National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)-MN, Arc Greater Twin Cities, MN Disability Law Center, Disability Linkage Line (DB101) and the Olmstead Implementation Office.

Together we have hosted two “Work Is Possible” workshops to improve understanding the MN Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy, and to champion the expectation that real work is possible of all MN citizens.

The first workshop was held at the PACER Center on April 23, 2015 with about 60 people in attendance. Participants had the opportunity to work through a benefit estimator session with representatives from DB101 prior to or following the workshop. The workshop included presentations by members of the Family Involvement Committee and its partners. An amazing panel of individuals was assembled to share their employment stories, challenges, and triumphs.

The second workshop, held June 18, 2015 at the Burnsville Library in Dakota County, featured an additional introduction by the Executive Director of the Olmstead Implementation Office, Dr. Darlene Zangara. An additional panel member joined the group from the previous session and provided insight on how it felt to graduate from his transition program with a job! The second workshop was also videotaped and is now in editing to become a teaching tool for sites across the state!

MN APSE and the Family Involvement Committee are excited to share this important information with everyone throughout the state! The next session has been scheduled for the Arc Minnesota State Conference on October 24, 2015 in Shoreview, MN. Stay tuned for more information!
Employment First Is No Tall Tale: 2015 MN APSE Conference Is a Success!  
Jolene Thibedeau Boyd, MN APSE Co-President

This year’s MN APSE State Conference, held at the lovely Edinburgh Golf Course in Brooklyn Park, brought a wealth and variety of employment information to attendees. The day kicked off with a historical perspective on employment in MN by Dr. Colleen Wieck (Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities), followed by a panel of individuals shared their inspiring personal employment stories. Attendees were able to browse the information of several exhibitors and a small-business venture during breaks.

Also presenting during the morning session was a panel of state agency leaders including Dr. Darlene Zangara (Olmstead Implementation Office), Alex Bartolic (Dept. of Human Services), Kimberley Peck (Dept. of Employment & Economic Development), and Jayne Spain (Dept. of Education), who shared their current goals and initiatives and their potential impact on the future of employment in MN.

The afternoon was equally valuable with presenters from across the country: Debbie Gilmer who spoke about Employment First initiatives in Maine, Tricia Jones-Parkin who shared some of the innovative practices being implemented in Utah, and Wally Tablit, who shared his enthusiasm with updates from his home state of Washington. A rousing close to the day was shared by Don Lavin (Arc MN) along with his observation that “Truth Happens” in spite of ridicule and opposition, and that we all do better when we collaborate!

A sincere thank you the Conference Committee and other volunteers who put in many hours to make the conference an informative and memorable event for all who attended!

“It is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work.”  
Jim Collins  
Good to Great (2001)

A Meaningful Life with a Purposeful Plan  
Alison Campbell, Board Member

At this year’s Arc Minnesota State Conference the following slide caught my attention:

My dreams for Margaret are not different than those for my other children.

I hope that someday she may be a:
• Friend
• Wife
• Mother
• Colleague
• Taxpayer
• ANYTHING but a client

Arc MN has done a great job at messaging to “raise expectations!” With Minnesota moving toward the implementation of our Olmstead Plan and lots of talk surrounding person centered planning, we must make sure conversations about employment are part of these plans. Olmstead is about raising expectations to create fuller inclusion and citizenship. At its foundation it’s about having the same opportunities my neighbor has. I can’t imagine my friends and family helping me to create a person centered plan and not having a conversation about what I am going to do to support the life I want.

Employment can give our lives greater purpose; our jobs are a big part of how we define ourselves. Many have met their spouses or have a good friend at work. Our state’s Employment First Policy starts to guide us on how to start to shape conversations surrounding employment, but let’s not forget to keep it simple and focus on one person at a time and what would make for a meaningful life with a purposeful plan.

Let’s get to work!

“Truth Happens”  

“To hear the history of how far MN has come over the last 80 years. Amazing.” - MN APSE State Conference Attendee
National APSE Conference Highlights

MN Employment First Coalition Receives National APSE 2015 Public Policy Advocate of the Year Award
Jolene Thibedeau Boyd, MN APSE Co-President

One of the highlights of the 2015 National APSE Conference in Philadelphia was being present at the awards ceremony on Wednesday, June 24 when the recipients of the 2015 National APSE Awards were presented. Especially since the MN Employment First Coalition was nominated in a new category, “Public Policy Advocate of the Year”. Although this award had originally been intended to recognize individual public policy advocates, the nomination for the Employment First Coalition was so outstanding that the Awards Committee made an exception and we were thrilled to hear them call out the MN Employment First Coalition as one of this year's recipients! Here is a short excerpt from the nomination that illustrates why the committee chose this group for this great honor:

“The approval of [the MN Employment First] policy is a culmination of years of collaboration, partnership, education, and dedication of a group of united around the idea that people with disabilities are just as valued and have the same rights as other citizens….from this point forward Minnesota stands on the doorstep of real and permanent change by making employment an option for all Minnesotans with disabilities.”

“The EF Coalition provides a safe and collaborative environment where issues can be discussed, challenged, and debated. This environment has allowed for the development of one the most progressive and comprehensive EF policies in the United States....The EF Coalition has provided [a] strong, solid, and steadfast foundation from which the state of Minnesota can continue to build as we continue to support the full employment of all Minnesotans with disabilities.”

Jon Alexander accepted the 2015 APSE Public Policy Advocate of the Year Award on behalf of the MN Employment First Coalition.

Want to Get Involved?
Try a Committee!

MN APSE Committees are open to all of our membership, and we are looking to add some additional talent!

Communications
Kelly Nye-Lengerman: knye@umn.edu

Training/Conference
Alison Campbell: alisonc@dependable-care.com
Amber Eisfeld: ambere@comconpar.com

Legislative Action & Employment First Coalition
Derek Nord: nord0364@umn.edu
Jon Alexander: jalexander@kaposia.com

Family Involvement
Chris Davies: cdavies@kaposia.com

Community Partnerships
Kelly Nye-Lengerman: knye@umn.edu

Feel free to attend a meeting to see if it’s a good fit for you. Contact the individuals listed above for meeting information.

Bringing the “Smack Down” to Philly
Josh Dean, Board Member

For the 1,000+ individuals who attended the APSE 2015 National Conference in Philadelphia, there were over one hundred breakout sessions to choose from to further continuing education as professionals, advocates, and as individuals. One engaging breakout session was the “App Smack Down”, presented by Jessica Stover of Networks for Training and Development, Inc.

Jessica took her session in a unique direction. The “App Smack Down” was advertised as a “show and tell”; attendees were encouraged to bring their “Smart Technology Devices” and applications (apps) that they’ve used to help them and individuals they support. Many self-advocates also shared apps that have helped them improve their quality of life by making things more accessible.

Of the 40+ apps that were shared at the “Smack Down”, a few really stuck out. “A-Tracker” was one of the top apps, helping employment professionals track their billable units, create files or lists of individuals they support, different sub-categories for billing, and had individual “stop watches” for each sub-category, to track time spent in each. The “SSI Mobile Wage Reporter” was also very helpful for individuals who received cash benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA): Employees can take a photo of paystubs and report wages to SSA quickly. (This app isn’t available in every state yet.)

Overall the session was full of great people, great ideas, and of course, great technology. It’s incredible to see how far technology has come in the last 25 years and how it has made things more accessible and more efficient for users. Everyone who attended left with something tangible. The parting words from this breakout were to continue exploring new apps, implementing them, and sharing them with others!
Why Minnesota Needs an Employment First Policy

Minnesota needs an Employment First Policy to challenge the pervasive belief that most citizens with disabilities cannot work successfully in the regular workforce. This belief can be a greater barrier to employment than the disabling condition. The employment rate for Minnesotans with disabilities is 44% compared to 81% for other citizens, and nationally nearly two-thirds (65%) of citizens trapped in long-term poverty have disabilities. Minnesota needs an Employment First policy to change those statistics by making employment in the regular workforce a viable option considered by citizens with disabilities. Most Minnesotans with disabilities “choose” unemployment and under-employment because they do not have access to the information and experiences they need to make an informed choice about employment in the regular workforce.

To make an informed choice about employment in the regular workforce, Minnesotans with disabilities need:

- Positive encouragement and support from their inner circle of family, friends, educators, and paid professionals who assist them.
- Clear information about Social Security benefits, healthcare coverage, and work incentives that protect government benefits and access to health insurance.
- Access to contemporary practices, technologies and accommodations which make work an option for individuals once considered “unemployable,” such as supported and customized employment, Individual Placement and Support for people living with a mental illness, and specialized employment supports for people who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, blind or have other sensory or physical disabilities.
- Information about the social, career, health, mental health and economic benefits of a working life.

The lack of expectations about their potential for adult employment impacts citizens with disabilities from an early age. It often means they do not have the experiences and opportunities that lead to successful employment for citizens without disabilities. Youth with disabilities, like their peers, need experiences such as chores at home, working for a neighbor, having a short-term job while attending school, a high school diploma and others which provide a foundation for future employment. Without these typical life experiences, Minnesotans with disabilities cannot make an informed choice about employment.

Minnesotans with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, can be successfully employed at regular jobs in the community using employment practices that are person-centered, evidenced based and emphasize their strengths and interests. There are many ways people can make a living including working for pay in available job vacancies, working for themselves as business entrepreneurs, and working in jobs that are “custom built” around the interests, skills, and strengths people have. We need to shift our perspective from the presumption that Minnesotans with disabilities cannot work to the presumption that they can and focus on their strengths and abilities rather than on skills they lack.

Minnesota is the 32nd state in the nation to adopt an Employment First Policy to make regular employment in typical workplaces a reality for citizens with disabilities. Employment First means:

- Regular employment is the first and expected outcome but not the only outcome individuals can choose.
- People with disabilities have services and supports tailored to meet their needs in a job which is a match for their strengths, interests and skills with ongoing supports where needed for long-term retention.

We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper.
Myth 1: The Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy are closing down my son or daughter’s day provider.

Reality: Nowhere in the Olmstead Plan or Employment First Policy is there any language stating that day services will be closed. Both of these initiatives ensure all people with disabilities receiving public services that want to work in the regular workforce, with or without supports, have that opportunity.

Myth 2: The Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy will require my son or daughter to work 30 to 40 hours per week, at prevailing wages with benefits.

Reality: Neither the Olmstead Plan nor Employment First Policy specify the number of hours, wages, and benefits that people with disabilities are required to earn. In fact, there are no requirements on people with disabilities.

Myth 3: The Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy force my son or daughter to work in the regular workforce, rather than providing a choice.

Reality: Neither the Olmstead Plan nor the Employment First Policy require people with disabilities to work in the regular workforce. They require actions by state agencies to increase employment opportunities and to ensure processes are in place that help people with disabilities understand the benefits of employment in the regular workforce so they can make an informed choice about employment based on factual information and their personal experiences.

Myth 4: The Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy are trying to force my son or daughter off the public benefits and supports (e.g., SSI, Social Security, Medicaid, etc.) they need.

Reality: Neither the Olmstead Plan nor the Employment First Policy state that people with disabilities will be moved off public benefits or out of services. In fact, they ensure that people understand the financial and other benefits of working and the work incentives that protect public benefits so that people with disabilities can choose to work without losing the financial support and insurance they need.
MYTH 7: Most people with disabilities cannot work in the regular workforce.

REALITY: There is a pervasive belief that most citizens with disabilities cannot be successfully employed in the regular workforce. That belief can be a greater barrier to employment than the disabling condition and is reflected in an employment rate of 44% for Minnesotans with disabilities compared to 81% for other citizens. With supported employment, accommodations and other practices, typical jobs are an option for people once considered “unemployable. The Employment First Policy requires state agencies to assume the employability of people with disabilities and work toward providing the services and supports needed to Minnesotans choosing to work in the regular workforce. Having the right services and supports are key. Not everyone will be successful, but many more Minnesotans with disabilities will have their own job on the payroll of a typical community business in the mainstream of community living.

We need everyone in the workforce for businesses to thrive and communities to prosper.

MYTH 5: The Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy require my son or daughter to work in community settings where they may not be safe.

REALITY: Neither the Olmstead Plan nor the Employment First Policy require people with disabilities to work in settings that they do not choose. Finding the right job match and setting are essential to successful employment. Being safe is part of that match. For many people, individualized job supports are an important element to working safely in the community. Both the Olmstead Plan and the Employment First Policy recognize the importance of adequate support services to ensure people who want to work in the community can do so safely.

MYTH 6: The idea of “community-based services” is a trendy topic that the Olmstead Plan and Employment First Policy latched onto.

REALITY: The notion that people with disabilities can and should have the opportunity to live fully in their communities goes back decades. In the 1960s, ‘70s, and ‘80s people with disabilities and their families fought for the right to live in the community and receive community-based services, rather than living in segregated settings. In 1983, Home and Community-Based Services came into existence to ensure those with the most significant disabilities could receive long-term support services. Community-based employment supports, also known as individual supported employment, also emerged during this time.

In the 1999 Supreme Court Olmstead decision, the right for people with disabilities, including those with the most significant barriers, to receive public services in the community was affirmed. Minnesota’s Olmstead Plan is aligned with that court decision.
The Disability Community Presents
25 Years of the ADA!

October 28, 2015

ADA at 25: Minnesota Moving Forward
Minnesota Convention Center
Free and Open to the Public

A conference to discuss recruiting, hiring, promoting
and retaining employees with disabilities. Event features
a career fair for people with disabilities.

Employers throughout the state are invited to a televised
Brown Bag Lunch as part of the conference.

Learn more at MSCOD25ADA.com
Follow us on Facebook and Twitter.