Do You Believe?

Employment First Wisconsin

Working to insure integrated employment opportunities for ALL citizens

Wisconsin APSE
ADVANCING EMPLOYMENT.
CONNECTING PEOPLE.
“I dwell in possibility.”
Emily Dickinson

“Be the change you want to see in the world.”
Gandhi

“We must all work to establish the value of an inclusive life.”
Michael Callahan, Marc Gold and Associates
Do You Believe? ...

- That people with disabilities can and should be contributing members in their communities?
- That everyone deserves the opportunity to find and develop their best talents and contributions?
- That businesses can benefit from employees who are enthusiastic and well-matched to their business needs?
- That local economies benefit from workers who purchase more goods and services and pay taxes?
- That many people need assistance to find their talents and ways to use them in their communities?
- That dedicated, well-trained employment service providers can effectively match individual worker talents with business needs?
- That workers, families, businesses, schools, employment agencies and entire communities CAN come together to include people with disabilities as productive members in the workplace?

*Rick Hall, WI APSE Board Member*

*If so, then you believe in EMPLOYMENT FIRST
Join us to advance this vision for all!*
The Wisconsin Employment First Initiative

Mission and Values

In 2009, Wisconsin APSE began gathering information and seeking broad-based support for an Employment First Initiative in the state. The WI Employment First Initiative is a state-wide effort to form a group working toward equal employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities.

Employment First is a term currently being used on a national scale to refer to vocational outcomes for citizens with disabilities. Employment First means exactly that – that all people are considered to have abilities and skills that can be applied to paid community work and that such work is the objective for all people, regardless of disability.

The Employment First Initiative in Wisconsin will work to gather and disseminate information on best practices for increasing employment outcomes for citizens with disabilities. The Employment First Initiative will also work to develop and promote policy and practice implementation that is thought or known to increase the outcome of integrated employment.

**Integrated employment means:**

- Jobs at regular businesses or self-employment
- Wages comparable to other workers in the business
- Insurance, vacation, sick leave and other benefits
- Opportunities to interact with co-workers, customers and the general public just as other employees do
Some of these jobs may be customized to match individual strengths with specific employer needs.

The Employment First mission is to make integrated employment the primary option for all individuals who require supports to participate in their communities. This means:

- Schools, service providers, and funding agency staff are trained and capable in assisting individuals with disabilities to reach their integrated employment goals.

- Transitioning high school students are offered assistance to prepare for and obtain real community jobs at comparable wages and benefits as other young adults.

- Staff of all employment programs support integrated employment as the preferred option throughout Wisconsin.

- Individuals entering Family Care Partnership/Pace, IRIS, mental health and other long-term support systems are encouraged and supported to obtain rewarding integrated employment.

- Individuals currently participating in work centers and day service programs are given the option to explore and learn about integrated employment.

- In some cases, a job that is customized to match individual strengths with employer needs can provide the best integrated employment option.
Employment First Values:

- Productivity and creativity - they are fundamental to the American way of life.
- The unique talents of each individual contributes to the fabric of society.
- Opportunities for meaningful, integrated employment exist for everyone.
- Employers who value their employees and bring out the best in them.

**WI APSE believes that effort is vital to the goal**

WI APSE believes that a state-wide Employment First effort is a vital component to the goal of increasing employment outcomes for citizens with disabilities in a manner that promotes equality of opportunity. Employment First starts with the foundational belief that everyone has abilities and talents that can be applied in a workplace if the right job and employer match is found. Best practices in employment supports need to be shared and a common vision for the state needs to be further developed. Together, we can all achieve more and work to insure that integrated employment is an option for everyone.

Between May and September 2009, WI APSE facilitated group discussions about employment opportunities in eight locations around the state. These locations included: Milwaukee, Janesville, Oshkosh, Wausau, Ashland, La Crosse, Green Bay and Chippewa Falls. Through these discussions, WI APSE began gathering information about the positive steps being taken in WI to increase employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities.
Four questions related to employment supports and outcomes were used to frame the discussions. Those included:

1. How can WI APSE members, in conjunction with additional collaborators, begin to build a state-wide Employment First Coalition?

2. In what ways can the intake and service delivery system further support self-determination and outcomes for the integrated employment of citizens with disabilities?

3. What can be done to more effectively engage employers around the state to understand the abilities and contributions that citizens with disabilities have to offer?

4. How can the network of people and agencies involved in employment better promote improved systems for information sharing toward the goal of equal employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities across the state?

The following themes emerged during the eight group discussions conducted around the state:

**Consumer Education** is still needed to help students and adults with disabilities, as well as their family members and advocates, to understand the available resources, how to access them and to learn what is possible – that all people can seek employment in the community that matches their talents and interests – in terms of employment options. The consensus was that we need to keep talking the language of Employment First/Employment for All, while working toward a support system that is easier to access and more user friendly.
Transition emerged as a second area of need that came up often during these discussions. Participants expressed the need for career planning to start earlier and students and parents to be better informed about employment options, educational opportunities beyond high school and funding for adult employment supports. The need for adult support systems to work more closely with schools was also identified.

Training for agencies and staff providing employment supports arose as a third area needing attention in Wisconsin. Additional nuts and bolts strategies in both job development and job coaching are still needed despite significant efforts made through the Wisconsin Medicaid Infrastructure Grant. Many providers feel that staff could benefit from additional training in areas such as, conducting good vocational assessment, job seeking assistance methods, job training methods and fading/developing natural supports in the workplace.

Transportation to and from places of employment continues to be a barrier for many people who are unable to obtain a driver’s license due to disability. The need to continue to address transportation issues is strong, particularly for people living outside of cities.

Funding for employment supports in many areas of the state is limited. It is unclear what the impact of the Family Care model has been in many parts of the state. Participants expressed the need for changes to funding that would allow providers to pay employment specialists better and also allow for increased flexibility in support delivery. There is a need for funders to place the most value on the outcome of paid, integrated employment by whatever means work for each person (acknowledgement that employment is not one-size fits all).
In addition, the need for employment supports to become more business-friendly in utilization of language as well as job seeking and job training methods was discussed. Employment support providers need to look more closely at models that are working: Project Search (Cincinnati), First Step (Boston), EmployAlliance (Chicago).

Under each category, group members were asked to address the following three questions:

1. What is working well in this area? (celebrating successes)
2. What more can be done? (generating good ideas)
3. How can it be done? (next steps)

In addition, these discussions touched upon the areas that attendees felt needed attention in Wisconsin in order to increase employment opportunities for citizens with disabilities.

Next Step: A State-Wide Community Conversation

In November of 2009, WI APSE brought together over one hundred people from around the state to gather information and ideas based on the five primary categories of employment support needs that were identified through the eight group discussions that were held earlier in the year.

For this community conversation format, people were asked to choose one of the topic areas to discuss. Participants gathered in groups on the subjects of: Consumer and Family Education, Transition, Training for Employment Support Providers, Transportation and Funding.

7
This community conversation yielded a set of information that can be used not only by WI APSE, but also by state agencies, provider agencies, schools, families and citizens with disabilities. It can be utilized to both celebrate the steps our state has taken toward equal employment opportunity and also to develop a plan for increasing employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities throughout Wisconsin. The rest of this booklet contains a summary of the information gathered at the WI Employment First Community Conversation on November 13, 2009.

What is working to increase employment outcomes?

### Consumer and Family Education

#### CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Members of this group developed a list of both general and specific things related to consumer and family education that seem to be contributing positively to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

- Collaboration among the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), Managed Care Organizations (MCO’s) and Schools to provide information to members and their families.
- The existence of Transition Advisory Council and Job fairs (TAC’s)
- Discussions with Case Managers regarding employment options and outcomes
- Employment Coordinators at the MCO’s
- Pre-intake training and workshops sponsored by the DVR
Talk about “Real World Pay”

Formation of Parent Groups in some areas

Presentations by employment support providers

Information provided by Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRC)

Case Managers and Service Coordinators becoming more educated about employment options and then sharing that information with those they support

Teachers and school leaders becoming more involved in employment planning

Open houses held for parents and teachers to share employment information

Project Search – hospital jobs

On the Job Training Program through the DVR

What more can be done in this area?

GENERATING GOOD IDEAS

Next, members of this group developed a list of possible ways to increase consumer and family education.

Increase utilization of ADRC’s

Further increase collaboration between schools and the long term support system

More ways to connect parents and teachers to long term support agencies

School personnel education

Increase post-secondary training and education options
Empower parents to be more involved in decision making
Promote self-directed services
Listen to students during the transition process
Develop more ways for parent to parent networking
Share employment success stories
Have everyone at the table for meetings
Make sure that all options are presented
Involve guidance counselors
Develop brochures with information
Invite businesses to education fairs

How can it be done?

NEXT STEPS

Lastly, members of this group generated options of what can be done (by all of us) to help consumers and families better understand the possibilities for citizens with disabilities in the world of employment.

Provide information to parents/families by tapping into existing parent groups and have staff from ADRC’s and MCO’s, vocational support providers and employers present at those groups

Provide more futures planning in schools and increase the focus on career development so that students and families “think work”

Include students and parents in the Individual Education Plan (IEP)/Individual Transition Plan (ITP) process by allowing them to have more input about interests and preferences
Educate guidance counselors about vocational options for students with disabilities so they can assist students and families

Provide schools, parents, students and adult vocational support providers with information about self-employment as an option

Get parents, consumers and businesses involved in Job Fairs and APSE

Hold more conversations about Employment First and invite consumers and parents to attend

Help consumers and families work on additional community connections (and tap into the ones that already exist)

Connect families, consumers and students with service groups such as, Chamber of Commerce /Rotary Clubs/Lions Clubs

What is working to increase employment outcomes?

Transition From High School to Integrated Employment

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Members of this group developed a list of both general and specific things related to transition that seem to be contributing positively to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

More and more schools are developing partnerships with MCO’s, DVR, and vocational support providers

School personnel have attended training through Pathways

Informational vendor fairs have been held for schools in some areas

Schools are accessing the University of Wisconsin – Stout campus vocational assessment program

Multi-disciplinary teams for students are providing more information about employment options
More schools are focusing on community employment training during the final years of school for students.

Some students are starting work prior to graduation and are spending more time in the community versus in the school building, especially between the ages of 18 and 22.

Collaboration and information sharing has increased.

DVR is providing information to school personnel, students and families earlier.

There is a strong and active system of TAC's.

There is an interagency agreement between the Department of Health Services (DHS), the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and DVR to collaborate for the purpose of increasing employment options for students with disabilities.

Employment First values are strong.

**What more can be done in this area?**

**GENERATING GOOD IDEAS**

Next, members of this group developed a list of possible ways to increase employment as an outcome of the transition process.

- Increase school and employer relationships.
- Increase training in job development and job coaching for special educators and paraprofessionals.
- Expand the expectation of integrated work post-graduation.
- Utilize the expertise of employment support providers.
- Continue spreading best practices.
- Expand life skills building opportunities for students.
Increase parent involvement in the process
Eliminate the wait list for long term support services
Help students get more work experience
Have one main person in the school who coordinates transition
Increase community connections for students
Clarify roles (school, MCO, DVR, students, families)
Identify strong providers and good matches for students
Engage students in the process more
Increase communication between schools, parents, DVR and MCO or county
Take advantage of pilot programs
Let go of fear of failure and trying new things

How can it be done?

NEXT STEPS

Lastly, members of this group generated options of what can be done (by all of us) to increase integrated employment as a next step for students with disabilities after high school graduation.

Host employer breakfasts at high schools
Share information from graduates working in the community
Have the most successful schools share their methods of transition planning and execution
Schools could write grant proposals to help with funding issues
Provide more information sessions to school personnel state-wide
Continue expansion of the Project Search model

Engage families in the process of tapping into community and business connections

Develop specialized training for students and schools based on community businesses (e.g. – construction, manufacturing, sales)

Create fact sheets for schools, students, families

Implement ways for students to be included in career development activities alongside peers without disabilities

Start conversations with students and families earlier – raise the bar on expectations around employment

Make the transition process individualized and believe in the potential of all students

School outcome goals – one student at a time

What is working to increase employment outcomes?

3 Training for Employment Support Providers

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Members of this group developed a list of both general and specific things related to vocational support provider training and education that seem to be contributing positively to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Community conversations to share information and generate ideas

Training through Pathways (Customized Employment, Discovery, Systematic Instruction, Person-Centered Integrated Employment Series)

More meetings with local providers

Information about self-employment

14
DVR programs (On the Job Training)
Social Security Administration programs (Ticket to Work)
Conferences around the state (APSE, RFW, Transition)
State-wide Managed Care and Employment Task Force recommendations
The Employment First message is spreading
Presentations by DVR, MCO’s
Incentives for agencies (grant funds)

What more can be done in this area?

GENERATING GOOD IDEAS

Next, members of this group developed a list of possible ways to increase employment as an outcome through training and education for vocational support providers.

- Even more conversations with providers
- More training on how to work with employers (business language)
- Ask providers what training they want and need
- Set benchmarks and clear competencies for providers to meet
- Follow-up to trainings
- Increase collaboration with DVR
- More internal training – have trainers at agencies
- Increased use of the mentor model
- Targeted “How To” training
- Vocational Futures Planning
Provide more benefits information and training

Share best practices from region to region

More community conversations and information sharing

Clarify language/terminology used

Training on Discovery process of assessment

Teach employment specialist to access employers and get them to participate in the process

Employer trainings

Develop web-based tools

How can it be done?

NEXT STEPS

Lastly, members of this group generated options of what can be done in the area of training to increase employment outcomes.

Co ordinate a series of brown bag lunches on pertinent topics

Providers should have sufficient budgets to consistently send staff to training

Develop and implement more web-based training

Engage employers to provide training on how to approach and work with them

Creation of small work groups to tackle relevant issues

Develop and provide a tool kit of information for employment specialists

Implement a series of competency trainings that become tied to pay increases
Work toward training the trainer in various regions of the state to increase the availability of expertise

Increased flexibility on the part of employment support providers – jobs do not just happen between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday

Foster Integrated Employment Champions in various regions of the state to mentor others

Develop and implement a set of outcome goals for every vocational support provider based on the one person at a time mentality

Provide incentive payment for outcomes

Increase access to training – particularly in rural areas of the state

Opportunities for more providers to access grant funds to make systemic changes and increase integrated employment outcomes

What is working to increase employment outcomes?

FUNDING FOR EMPLOYMENT SUPPORTS

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Members of this group developed a list of both general and specific things related to employment support funding that seem to be contributing positively to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

- There has been increased consistency of decision making about funding through DVR
- Family Care model (MCO’s) commit funds post-DVR period of funding
- Positive and creative models being utilized more (Customized Employment) to use funds for integrated employment
Grant funding has expanded (Department of Transportation, Pathways)

Consumers, parents and providers are getting more information about ways that funding can be used

Discussions between partners are leading to use of funding to meet critical employment needs such as transportation

More people are learning about how to use benefit protection program (such as the Medicaid Purchase Plan – MAPP)

Providers are seeking community dollars through fund raising, banks, foundations

Transition planning assisting students to prepare for employment and establish clear post-graduation support needs and budgets

Discovery and individualized assessment processes are becoming thought of as best practice and funding is following (although it does not always cover the expense of this to providers)

What more can be done in this area?

GENERATING GOOD IDEAS

Next, members of this group developed a list of possible ways to increase employment as an outcome through changes to funding for employment supports.

Make the transition from DVR funding to long term support funding smoother

Increased knowledge about employment and long-term goals of consumers for MCO staff

Opportunities for employment specialists to attend classes in Human Resources

Disincentives need to be removed from public benefits programs

Families need to better understand the options they have in terms of how support dollars are spent
Families need to better understand the benefits system to reduce fear of too much employment

Clear definitions and application of long term support funding – with flexibility built in for times when support needs or employment changes

Funding sources should work together better to meet individual needs

Increased financial rewards to providers for outcomes (incentives)

Engage consumers and families more in the process of funding allocation decisions

How can it be done?

NEXT STEPS

Lastly, members of this group generated options of what can be done with regard to funding to increase employment outcomes.

- Maintain the focus on the desired outcome of integrated employment for citizens with disabilities and keep funding targeted to tasks that work directly toward that outcome

- Increase efforts to develop community partners – reduce reliance on public funding dollars to support employment services

- All funding partners should collaborate and communicate to increase consistency of requirements
Funding sources should not dictate the process for supporting people to gain employment – outcomes should be the focus of funders

Consumers, families and providers should seek natural support connections

Proposals for changing the benefits constraints should be made

Fewer meetings – more job seeking/coaching

Providers should learn from successful businesses

Employment supports should become part of economic development groups

Seek more grant funding

Internal challenges at provider organizations to use support dollars efficiently

Create a system for increased collaboration and communication between MCO’s and DVR as well as providers

What is working to increase employment outcomes?

5 Transportation to and from Jobs

CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Members of this group developed a list of both general and specific things related to transportation that seem to be contributing positively to employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

• Recognition that transportation is a significant barrier for some people – particularly in rural areas

• More transportation options and ideas are being discussed

• Natural supports are being sought to provide rides

• Funding options for transportation are expanding
- People are being supported to work closer to home to reduce transportation costs
- Some supported employees are paying for part of their own transportation
- Bus, taxi, and accessible van service available in some areas of the state
- Employment specialists can provide transportation
- DVR funding can be utilized for transportation
- Volunteers can be sought to provide transportation
- Some people can walk and ride bikes to and from work
- Family, friends and co-workers can be approached about transportation assistance
- Some places have funding through the WI Department of Transportation (DOT)
- MCO’s are reimbursing some individuals and providers for transportation costs
Next, members of this group developed a list of possible ways to increase employment as an outcome through expanded transportation options.

- More people share rides with co-workers
- Expansion of public transportation options
- Transportation costs built into long term support rates
- Extended days and hours by transportation companies
- Funding for individuals to provide transportation to peers (peer support model)
- Use of the Community Rides model
- Provision of funding to help supported employees purchase their own cars/vans
- Medicaid funding applicable to work rides
- Find a way to provide transportation for less money
Lastly, members of this group generated options of what can be done in the area of transportation to increase employment outcomes.

- Develop and coordinate local groups of volunteer drivers
- Increase assistance with transportation needs from DVR and MCO's
- Groups of people should let state agencies (DHS) and legislators know about the importance of transportation to employment
- Engage families to find natural supports
- Get over the fear of asking co-workers and employers about ride share programs (good for the environment too)
- Providers could seek grant funds
- Providers could seek a contract to become a transportation provider
- DVR and MCO should talk about sharing transportation costs
- Consider shifting funding from other areas to increase funds available for transportation
- Tap into existing resources (transportation providers)
- Consumers and families could be asked to agree to pay a portion of costs when a job is acquired
- Do not be afraid to ask families to help – and/or to help solve transportation issues
CONCLUSION AND FOLLOW-UP PLANS

The participants at our local meetings and the statewide Community Conversation contributed many thoughtful and useful ideas that will help move Employment First forward in Wisconsin. Now the charge for APSE members and all who support Employment First to seek opportunities to promote Employment First in our local communities.

We must all ask ourselves, what can I do next to have a positive impact on the employment of citizens with disabilities in my community? What is my next BOLD move – or next BOLD moves? Change starts with you – and me – in the work that we do every day.

There is a newly developed Wisconsin Integrated Employment Network (WI IE Network) that grew out of a combination of Self-Directed Supports and Employment First Initiatives. Everyone who believes in an Employment First vision for our state is encouraged to join this expanding group to gather with others to continue to discuss, brainstorm and learn about employment issues. Future WI IE Network meetings will include follow-up to this series of discussion groups and community conversation.

WI APSE, along with the WI IE Network will again be hosting a community conversation at our conference on November 4, 2010. We will provide copies of the information from last year’s community conversation and learn about the national momentum that is building to insure integrated employment options for everyone through Employment First initiatives around the country. Participants will have the opportunity to work with others from their area to develop specific goals related to integrated employment outcomes for citizens with disabilities. We hope that you will join us!

Learn more about this network and future meetings at:
e-mail: nancym_wiapse@earthlink.net
phone: (608) 220-4524
fax: (608) 299-3746
“There is an employer that will pay for the contribution you have to make.”

Michael Callahan, Marc Gold and Associates

“Those who say it cannot be done should stay out of the way of those who are doing it.”

Unknown

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

“Special thanks to Laura Owens, Bob Niemiec, Don Lavin, and Dave Hammis for their ongoing inspiration.”
WI APSE
207 North St.
Sun Prairie, WI 53590

e-mail: nancym_wiapse@earthlink.net
phone: (608) 220-4524
fax: (608) 299-3746

APSE: The Network on Employment
www.wiapse.org

Funded in part by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Medicaid Infrastructure Grant-CFDA No. 93.768, Wisconsin Department of Health Services/Pathways to Independence

“The support for this publication should not be construed as either an endorsement of, or disagreement with it’s content by the Department of Health Services. The content is purely the position of Wisconsin APSE.”