

ILLINOIS EMPLOYMENT FIRST BLUEPRINT

EQUIP FOR EQUALITY



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Where We Stand

- Historically, people with disabilities in Illinois have received services in segregated settings
- Recent efforts to increase community-based services have not extended to employment
- 25 years after the Americans with Disabilities Act was passed, nationwide only 20% of people with disabilities are employed
 - In Illinois, only 6% of people with developmental disabilities are employed in integrated settings



Employment First in Illinois

- In 2013, consistent with a national trend, Illinois became an “Employment First” state
- Executive Order issued by Governor Quinn requires the state to develop a five-year plan to implement Employment First
- Employment First means:

“Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age people with disabilities, regardless of the level of their disability.”



Illinois Employment First Blueprint

- Intended to provide Illinois policymakers and stakeholders with
 - **Recommendations and concrete action steps to increase the competitive, integrated employment of people with disabilities**



Current Employment Services

- Supported employment provides personalized supports for people with significant disabilities to find and keep a job
- Only 4.3% of people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services have supported employment as a goal
- Services are usually limited to 18 months



Barriers to Supported Employment Use

- Many Vocational Rehabilitation counselors will not open a supported employment case
 - Presumptions about “employability”
- Supported employment services are available under certain waiver programs after 18 months
 - Transition often difficult and not timely



Current Employment Services

- Supported employment services for people with serious mental illness are provided using an Individualized Placement and Support model
- Makes employment services part of the person's mental health treatment plan
- It has been successful in Illinois, but has only limited availability



Recommendations for Current Employment Services

- Revamp supported employment programs to encourage use by vocational rehabilitation counselors
- Extend supported employment services beyond 18 months
- Ease the transition between funding sources
- Expand number of people with mental illness served through Individualized Placement and Support model



Supported Employment Funding and Rates

- Services are underfunded
 - Limits opportunities for people with significant disabilities
- Disparity between rates paid by Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for supported employment
 - DDD rates only 1/3 of DRS rates
 - Serves as a disincentive for transitioning between funding sources



Recommendations for Supported Employment Funding and Rates

- Increase funding and rates for supported employment services to offer incentives for providing integrated employment
 - Adjust rates to reflect actual cost of services
 - Make rates consistent between Division of Rehabilitation Services and Division of Developmental Disabilities



Data Collection & Reporting

- Illinois lacks an effective system to collect and publicize data on the employment of people with disabilities
 - Very difficult to get information on where people with disabilities are spending their days including how many are employed in integrated settings
 - Information is not shared among agencies



Recommendations for Data Collection

- Develop a comprehensive data collection system to track and report employment data on a timely basis
 - Require service providers to report frequently
- Require state agencies to share employment data
- Report data to the public regularly



Use of Segregated Settings

- Illinois over-relies on use of segregated settings (i.e., sheltered workshops and day training programs) for people with developmental disabilities
 - Presumption of eligibility for day training services, not employment services
 - Work and “non-work” activities performed do not prepare people for competitive, integrated employment
 - Activities engaged in are not designed to reflect individual interests, skills and preferences



Use of Segregated Settings

- Two state programs perpetuate the use of segregated settings:
 - Business Enterprise Program awards state contracts to “disability-owned businesses” defined to include sheltered workshops
 - Sheltered workshops receive 94% of contract dollars
 - The State Use Program allows state agencies to buy products and services directly from sheltered workshops without receiving competitive bids
 - Many sheltered workshops pay workers with disabilities less than minimum wage



Recommendations for Decreasing Reliance on Segregated Settings

- Eliminate presumptive eligibility for day training services
- Require that people with disabilities are informed of integrated employment opportunities
- Reform the Business Enterprise Program (BEP) and the State Use Program
 - **BEP:** Remove sheltered workshops from definition of disability-owned business
 - **State Use:** Require vendors awarded state contracts to pay minimum wage and explore opportunities for community employment



Transition Services

- Requirements for transition planning and services are inconsistently applied
- Transition plans, required starting at age 14 ½, often lack specific goals until the senior year of high school
 - Students miss earlier opportunities for work experience and training
 - Students often receive cursory “interest inventories” instead of comprehensive vocational assessments
 - Transition plans are often “one-size-fits-all”
 - Some districts shift responsibility to students or families for transition services



Transition Services

- Many transition plans presume students will be “unemployable”
 - For students with certain disabilities, non-academic goals may appear early in elementary school
 - For some, work in a sheltered workshop is the transition plan
- Schools may not contract with the Division of Rehabilitation for services to train and place transition-age students, such as the Secondary Transitional Experience Program
 - Even if they do, schools have discretion about which students to refer
- The Interagency Coordinating Council charged with recommending changes to improve transition has been inactive



Recommendations for Transition Services

- Require Individualized Education Programs for students with disabilities to be based on a presumption of employability
- Require transition plans to contain specific employment and/or post-secondary education goals starting at age 14 ½
- Empower students and parents with the information and resources needed, such as a training toolkit
- Utilize the Interagency Coordinating Council to regularly gather and report on transition data in order to issue recommendations to improve service delivery



Employer Engagement & Workforce Development

- Employers must support the idea that hiring people with disabilities will help their business
 - Evidence of the value of hiring people with disabilities and the low cost of providing reasonable accommodations exists
 - The message still may not resonate for many employers
- Existing workforce development programs are not widely used by people with disabilities
 - One Stop Career Centers
 - Illinois JobLink



Recommendations for Employer Engagement and Workforce Development

- Encourage creation of and membership in regional Business Leadership Networks throughout Illinois
- The Division of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and Department of Employment Security should work together on outreach to employers and the disability community
 - Section 503 regulations, reasonable accommodations and customized employment
 - Awareness of workforce development initiatives



State Government Employment of People with Disabilities

- The Supported Employees Act, now repealed, gave people with significant disabilities an opportunity to learn and demonstrate core job functions
 - Recognized that testing and interview requirements were barriers for many
 - State did not rigorously pursue the program's goals
- The Successful Disabilities (SD) Opportunities Program provides no trial period to learn and demonstrate core job functions
 - Imposes barriers of testing and interview
 - Limits opportunities for employment of people with significant disabilities



Recommendations for Increasing Employment of People with Disabilities in State Government

- Set a hiring goal of 7% of people with disabilities in state government
- Re-examine and restructure the SD Opportunities Program to remove barriers for employment of people with significant disabilities
- Replicate programs like those within the Illinois Department of Transportation
 - Gives people the opportunity to demonstrate they can do the job without testing or interview requirements



For More Information

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