



## Indiana's Employment First Summit A Follow Up on the 2005 Recommendations

Policy shifts over the past 20 years have created an agenda for sustained commitment to integrated employment for individuals with disabilities. But despite these clear intentions, unemployment of individuals with disabilities continues to be a significant and pressing public policy concern. On September 29, 2005, leaders from government, business, community, education and private sectors gathered in Indianapolis to begin creating a strategic plan for ensuring employment is an outcome for all Hoosiers with disabilities.

Indiana APSE believes that a strong economy is fueled by all Hoosiers working and contributing to the bottom line. Hoosiers with disabilities must be enlisted as part of the economic development strategy to move the Indiana workforce forward. While there has been much progress since the time of the summit, Hoosiers with disabilities continue to have the highest unemployment rate of any minority in our state. They want to work and reduce their reliance on state and federal subsidies. Some are able to secure employment on their own but many need assistance to overcome stereotypes, develop work experience, and become independent.

States all across the nation are beginning to focus on Employment First as a policy initiative. Many like Oklahoma have taken a lead and now have over 70% of individuals in services in community employment. In our state, a little over 25% of individuals in services are employed in the community. That statistic will not change until the state takes a strong Employment First position. For example, the state of Washington has made some funding contingent upon the individual getting paid employment.

During the *Employment First!* Summit, participants identified many positive aspects of Indiana's employment support network but also outlined some goals for the future. This report seeks to outline our progress toward achieving the goals established by the Summit participants and to encourage further work to address our outstanding policy, funding, and cultural barriers. Major recommendations are:

### ***Supporting a diverse workforce through business leadership***

- Develop a comprehensive statewide marketing plan for Indiana employers
- Prepare and coach provider staff to identify and meet employer expectations
- Create an Indiana Business Leadership Network
- Coordinate all efforts with the Indiana economic development efforts

### ***Promoting effective school-to-work transition***

- Ensure school staff are knowledgeable
- Gather data on the status of students post high school
- Create easy access to accurate information for students and families
- Work with state and federal policymakers to address testing and graduation requirements
- Increase workforce opportunities and experience during high school

- Consistently implement policies regarding transition
- Advocate for VR to continue funding for transition services

#### ***Aligning state policies to promote employment***

- Service and funding must be aligned with Indiana's Employment First policy
- State policy makers become informed about the services that promote employment
- Advocate for the Work First initiatives proposed by the DDRS Vision 2010 group
- Use the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Leadership Council to improve coordination among state agencies and employment and training programs
- Eliminate the limitation on supported employment follow along

#### ***Developing quality employment services***

- Train employment staff to utilize marketing approach
- Develop incentives so providers make competitive employment a shared outcome
- Make it easier for individuals to access services through community outreach
- Develop a comprehensive orientation, training, and mentoring program
- Provide ongoing training to case managers on employment

#### ***Becoming economically self-sufficient***

- Improve access to reliable transportation for people with disabilities
- Increase consumer education and training on work incentives, benefits and rights
- Increase the utilization of Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach
- Educate the public in general about the abilities of people with disabilities

The attached details our progress since the summit and provides more detail around suggestions make Employment First a reality in Indiana.

### ***Supporting a diverse workforce through business leadership***

Participants felt strongly that Employers need a good source of information about incentives that make it easier to hire people with disabilities. Specifically, the group discussed the value of creating a resource dedicated to helping employers navigate the wide range of programs and supports available to them to promote hiring people with disabilities. The following summarizes progress and what is left to do:

What has happened? Since the 2005 Summit there has been a great deal of activity in promoting business leadership.

- Education: Through the Medicaid Infrastructure grant, Indiana is promoting regional business leadership networks across the state. By the end of 2009 there will be 6 networks serving much of Indiana. The idea is to build business leaders in each region who will connect with local business to encourage, educate, and promote employment for people with disabilities.
- In addition, Vocational Rehabilitation has fostered several connections with business through their corporate job development initiatives including Walgreens and collaboration among providers and the U.S. Department of Labor to develop Affirmative Action programs for businesses with federal contracts.
- Employment first fact sheets developed and disseminated. To employers statewide and are available on IN-APSE website
- Work experience and on-the-job training are now more accessible due to efforts by Indiana Vocational Rehabilitation

What still needs to be done?

- Develop a comprehensive statewide education and marketing plan for Indiana employers on the benefits of hiring people with disabilities
- Prepare and coach provider staff to identify and meet employer expectations
- Create a statewide Indiana Business Leadership Network that can drive and oversee outreach efforts to Indiana business utilizing the expertise of the regional groups
- Coordinate all efforts with the Indiana economic development efforts to ensure that Indiana is promoting employment for people with disabilities to new or potential employers

### ***Promoting effective school-to-work transition***

Group participants identified youth as a critically important population to focus on as their first brush with employment and work opportunities can set the tone for a lifetime of success or failure. Many recommendations were articulated to support more resources for ‘transition council’ or coordinator models that serve to bridge the gap between the youth and adult systems for benefits, healthcare and employment. The following summarizes progress and what is left to do:

### What has happened?

- VRS funded transition grants from 2006 to 2009.
- New transition planning systems in all schools
- VR initiative to get involved earlier with students
- Project Search, a work experience and placement model, has been piloted in 8 places

### What still needs to be done?

- Ensure that school staff and teachers get information about best practices in employment, and expertise about transition.
- Gather data to show how the lack of transition between school and adult service worlds negatively impact employment outcomes
- Create easy access to accurate information for families and students with disabilities about Social Security, guardianship, and other issues
- Work with state and federal policymakers to address the challenges of ISTEP (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress) related to identifying earlier students on a diploma versus non-diploma track
- Increase workforce opportunities and experience during high school through internships, job shadowing, job fairs, etc.
- Work with local Vocational Rehabilitation offices to ensure policies are implemented consistently across areas
- Advocate for continued VR funding of transition services that connect individuals with VR..

### *Aligning state policies to promote employment*

Participants in this group saw the lack of information and awareness of all the ‘pieces of the puzzle’ as a key barrier to successfully aligning various state and local policies to promote employment. Many solutions to this issue were offered. The following summarizes progress and what is left to do:

### What is happening?

- A Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Council has been formed to assist in setting strategic goals for the state’s plan to ensure systems enhance employment
- Ticket to Work regulations have made its use more viable for people with disabilities resulting in more people taking advantage of the opportunity to get support to return to work and more Employment Networks to serve beneficiaries seeking employment.
- In May 2006, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services developed a vision, to help move the state to where we wanted services to be in 2010. The four guiding principles were Self-Advocacy/Self-Direction, Quality integration/Quality outcomes, **Work First** and Meaningful Days, and Dignified Risk/Risk management.

- The State established four tiers for supported employment follow along funding depending on the level of need of the Supported Employee eliminating some of the need to make a choice between other day services and employment supports.
- Indiana Medicaid is moving to remove barriers for individuals who want to develop Plans for Achieving Self Support (PASS) as a means for gaining employment and needed services.

#### What still needs done?

- Service and funding must be aligned with Indiana's Employment First policy and ensure that providers are incentivized to support people in community jobs. Recent changes in the Medicaid Waiver definitions which time limits Supported Employment Follow Along is an example of how the state can greatly damage employment
- Focus on increasing opportunities for state policy makers to get more information about the programs, supports and services that exist to promote competitive employment
- Continue to advocate for the Work First initiatives proposed by the DDRS Vision 2010 group.
- Disseminate information about what has happened since the Employment First summit in 2005 and prepare for the summit in 2010.
- Use the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Leadership Council and its broad participation to improve coordination among state agencies and employment and training programs so information about work and disability is consistent across state agencies
- In October of 2009, DDRS and Medicaid changed the definition of Supported Employment making it time limited. This change will dramatically impact the availability of ongoing support so critical for those with significant disabilities. This limitation must be eliminated if **all** are to access community employment.

#### *Developing quality employment services*

Participants felt that there is a strong financial case to be made and marketed around hiring people with disabilities and the potential for positive impact on the Indiana economy. By considering how to develop the professionalism of staff providing employment support and assistance to businesses and people with disabilities, the group wanted to ensure that all services were the highest quality. The following summarizes progress and what is left to do:

#### What has happened?

- No systemic changes in provider requirements or training have occurred
- VR has made benefit planning a service that agencies can provide and the number of trained individuals has increased due to training provided in the state
- VR funding has incentivized retention and employment outcomes through results based funding tiers

- IN-APSE is providing regional network trainings for its members to ensure the professional development of its members

#### What needs to be done?

- Train employment staff to utilize marketing material developed by business group that targets a business approach to job development
- Developing more financial incentives for service providers to make competitive employment a shared outcome;
- Make it easier for the individual with disability to access employment services by increasing community outreach, for example, develop consumer portfolios that work for eligibility across programs and across services
- Develop a comprehensive orientation, training, and mentoring program for employment staff
- Provide ongoing training to case managers on employment for people they support

### ***Becoming economically self-sufficient***

This team identified many specific solutions for employment barriers that included an improved spectrum of incentives and information sharing particularly for people with disabilities. The group also discussed the importance of tapping into popular media sources, such as television, to identify new ways to reach people with an employment message. The following summarizes progress and what is left to do:

#### What is happening?

- The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant has developed a number of resources for assisting individuals to gain economic self-sufficiency
- First Freedom, a group of individuals with disabilities advocating for system improvement, have formed and become active at all levels
- Self Advocates of Indiana have resources through the Indiana Arc to create and promote more local self-advocacy groups

#### What needs to be done?

- Develop strategies to improve access to reliable transportation for people with disabilities at a statewide level
- Develop a marketing campaign and outreach program to increase consumer education and training on work incentives, benefits and rights
- Continue to increase the utilization of Work Incentive Planning and Assistance
- Educate the public in general about the abilities of people with disabilities and resources available for employment support.