



Survival Coalition

of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

PRE-VOCATIONAL REFORMS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

Background

Nationwide, integrated supported employment is the preferred outcome by individuals with significant disabilities over employment or enrollment in segregated facility-based programs. It is widely agreed that investments of public funds should reflect integrated, supported employment as the preferred outcome. Focused efforts in Washington State have resulted in integrated employment rates of more than 64% for waiver participants with developmental disabilities. Nearly half (24) states have adopted Employment First legislation or Executive Orders declaring integrated employment as the preferred outcome. Wisconsin is not yet among these states and its performance continues to lag behind. Consider these facts:

- Wisconsin spent \$96 million in 2010 according to Wisconsin's Long-Term Care Reporting System on pre-vocational placements for individuals who are eligible for and could be served in supported employment. Almost all these placements were in facilities: not the community.
- At the same time, the overall integrated employment rates within our long-term care system were a dismal 5% in Family Care and 4% in IRIS. Even when factoring in age, only 8% of working age (18-64) Wisconsin residents in the long-term care system in 2011 participated in integrated employment.
- In 2011, DVR closed only 145 cases statewide that resulted in successful supported employment case closure for people with physical or developmental disabilities, and 31 of those were in Dane County. In more than half of Wisconsin counties, not a single DVR case was closed with a successful supported employment outcome.
- Research shows that individuals who enter facility-based pre-vocational placements rarely leave them.¹
- Studies also show facility-based pre-vocational placements result in few to no marketable employment skills.²
- A recent study demonstrated that individuals who participated in facility-based pre-vocational programs before moving on to supported employment had poorer outcomes overall, including less hours worked and less wages earned in supported employment.³

Yet, we know many individuals with disabilities who want to work, including many youth who have grown up experiencing inclusive school and community participation. Increased employment rates for individuals with long-term care needs reduce poverty rates, reduce use of public programs, improve health outcomes, and contribute to local economies by increasing the purchasing power of people with disabilities who spend most of their income locally.

Recommendations

Survival Coalition would like to explore these targeted efforts to reduce the use of facility-based pre-vocational placements, reallocate existing resources to supported employment services, and increase integrated employment rates for people with long-term care needs that include:

- Stopping the payment for new entrants into facility-based pre-vocational placements.
- Enforcing clear expectations for community-based pre-vocational placements that ensure referrals to DVR within twelve months of service authorization.
- Implementing new policies and practices to ensure there is timely follow-up and advocacy efforts by Family Care IDTs and IRIS Consultants when DVR closes or intends to close a long-term care participant's case before s/he has successfully obtained integrated employment.

These changes will not only improve opportunities and outcomes for individuals with disabilities involved in long-term care, they will also reduce costs for the long-term care system and ensure Wisconsin is adequately addressing the need to provide vocational services in the most integrated setting possible.

1. Rosenthal, D.A., Hiatt, E.K., Anderson, C.A., Brooks, J., Hartman, E.C., Wilson, M.T., & Fujikawa, M. (2012). Facilitators and barriers to integrated employment: Results of focus group analysis. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 36, 73-86.

2. Cimera, Wehman, West, & Burgess (2011). Do sheltered workshops enhance employment outcomes for adults with autism spectrum disorder? *Autism: The International Journal of Research and Practice*, 16, 97-94.

3. Cimera, R., (2011) Do sheltered workshops prepare persons with disabilities for community employment? *Job Training and Placement Report*, vo. 35, no. 2, pp. 1-2.