

**Position Statement on Integrated Employment**

Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

CHANGING NEVADA'S EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE-  
INCREASING INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR  
NEVADANS WITH INTELLECTUAL/DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

# INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

## Summary

Work is a fundamental part of adult life, and the benefits of integrated employment for individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD) have been clearly demonstrated. It gives us a sense of purpose; shaping who we are and how we fit into our community. Nevadans with IDD must not be deprived of the opportunity to work within the general workforce and make a meaningful contribution. Individuals in the labor force have a positive financial impact on our economy, generating income that is ultimately returned in the form of tax revenues. There is literature filled with examples of the benefits and Return on Investment (ROI) when individuals with IDD are working and contributing vocationally in their community. Our state is becoming more diverse and Nevadans with IDD should be included in diversifying the workforce. This can be achieved through established supported employment practices. Improving employment outcomes for Nevadans with IDD at the state level requires a holistic approach that communicates a clear message, incorporates policy change, funding, capacity development, interagency partnerships, outcome measurement and service innovation.

## Background

Individuals with IDD in the labor force have a positive financial impact on our economy, generating income that is ultimately returned in the form of tax revenues and the purchase of goods and services. Despite this knowledge, individuals with IDD continue to have the lowest workforce participation rates of any minority group in our country. The discrepancy between those with and without disabilities in the workforce is staggering. For example, 69.1% of working age adults without disabilities are employed compared to 20.5% of those with disabilities. Furthermore, for people with IDD the rates are between 5% and 7% which are working in the community for competitive wages.

The publication, *StateData: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes*, examined 37 states that consistently provided data on the total number of individuals served and the number of individuals in integrated employment services. Sixteen states increased the number of individuals in integrated employment.

... the average increase was 958 individuals (range: 133–3,367). States that increased the number of individuals served in integrated employment by more than 500 individuals between 2001 and 2011 were: CT, LA, MA, MD, NC, OK, OR, and WA. Each of these states has engaged in strategic efforts and systematic changes to their service delivery system to make integrated employment the preferred service outcome for adults with IDD in their state. (Butterworth et al., 2013, p. 22)

Nevada is no exception. Rather, it has been identified as a national leader in collaboration on integrated employment. With funding tied to innovative projects, clearly articulated goals, and mechanisms to track progress, supported employment has become an essential tool to help citizens with IDD become contributors to the economy rather than recipients. Changes in federal policy (e.g., Centers for Medicaid & Medicare Services, Rehabilitation Services Administration, etc.) and the development of national experts providing technical assistance (e.g., State Employment Leadership Network, Employment Leadership Network, Institute for Community Inclusion, Association of People Supporting Employment First, Virginia Commonwealth University, etc.) have changed the employment landscape and helped citizens with IDD find community-based employment.

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Vermont has closed their facility-based programs with mixed results. In Oregon, however, a class action lawsuit is currently under review.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court, charges state officials with violating the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act by confining individuals with disabilities to segregated settings where they... are paid far below the state's minimum wage of \$8.80 for doing rote tasks that offer no training, no skills, and no advancement. (Disability Rights Oregon, 2012)

The State of Nevada Developmental Services Jobs and Day Training (JDT) services has not restructured the rate setting process, decreased participation in non-integrated facility based day services, nor created incentives for community providers to advance integrated employment outcomes. To follow the national trend, there is much work before us.

### **Problem Statement**

The benefits of integrated employment for individuals with IDD are well established in nationwide literature, however, movement from segregated settings has been slow and the percentage working in integrated employment has been flat since the 1990s (Butterworth et al., 2013). In Nevada, the percentage of individuals with IDD in community based programs has increased since the 1990s. The effort needs to continue until everyone has appropriate community employment as the priority service option. The purpose of this paper is to inform Nevada's legislators about supported employment, provide a background of Nevada's efforts, and describe the picture that agency administrators, businesses, advocates, and Nevadans with IDD are painting. The picture we want to achieve is supported employment outcomes for Nevadans with IDD working in the community at competitive wages, making a financial impact on the economy, diversifying the workforce, and improving their quality of life.

Nevada needs to make the best use of limited resources to advance employment opportunities for people with IDD, beginning with re-aligning the financial structure so it is fiscally viable for providers to offer supportive employment services.

A recent publication, *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities; Blueprint for Governors*, is the culmination of the Chair's (i.e., Governor Markell) initiative for the 2012-2013 National Governors Association (NGA). This blueprint focuses on the employment of people with disabilities and the role of states in assisting businesses.

The five top areas are:

- Make disability employment part of the state workforce development strategy.
- Find and support businesses in their efforts to employ people with disabilities.
- Be a model employer by increasing the number of people with disabilities working in state government.
- Prepare youth with disabilities for careers that use their full potential, providing employers with a pipeline of skilled workers.
- Make the best use of limited resources to advance employment opportunities for people with disabilities. (National Governors Association, 2013, p. 4)

These areas reflect recurring themes heard during the NGA Chair's Initiative from experts in the field of disability employment and are supported by the latest research by experts on how states can improve integrated employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Independence and competitive employment should be the expectation for all adults in Nevada. For those with developmental disabilities who do not currently choose employment, meaningful day habilitation should be an option. Job and day training services awarded to the

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Nevada Department of Health and Human Services' (DHHS) Developmental Services agency could be leveraged with Rehabilitation Division funding to provide meaningful job readiness skills and prepare individuals for competitive employment. Providers of day habilitation should improve and increase programming geared toward competitive employment, including becoming a provider of supported employment job development services. Through these means, and others, state and local government, along with private industry could work together to realize the goals outlined in *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities; Blueprint for Governors*.

Also, litigation has increased the momentum to transition from sheltered workshops to integrated employment. The US Department of Justice (DOJ) has participated in lawsuits in Oregon, Rhode Island, New York and most recently Florida.

For example: the DOJ has previously advised the State of Rhode Island, the civil rights of people with IDD who can and want to receive employment services and day services in the community are violated when they are unnecessarily segregated in facility-based sheltered workshops and in facility-based day programs. Individuals are in, or at risk of entering, segregated sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs due to systemic State actions and policies, which include: 1) the State's failure to develop a sufficient quantity of integrated transition, employment, vocational, and day services and supports for individuals with IDD; 2) the State's direction of available employment resources to segregated sheltered workshops rather than to integrated employment service; 3) the State's direction of available day program; and resources to segregated facility-based day programs rather than to integrated day services; and lastly 4) the State's use of systemic criteria and methods of administration that unnecessarily require persons with IDD to attend sheltered workshops and facility-based day programs in order to access and receive employment, vocational, and day services.

In summary, the federal government is increasing pressure to support those with IDD to have the opportunity to work in a community based/competitive employment setting.

### **Nevada's Recent Efforts**

In 2010, Employment Policy Summits were held in Elko, Las Vegas and Reno through a grant sponsored by the Nevada Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities (NGCDD). Each two-day event brought together agency decision-makers, businesses, advocates, and Nevadans with IDD to identify the barriers to employment for Nevadans with disabilities. More importantly, attendees developed regional work plans to overcome the barriers identified and systematically work toward detailed statewide priorities (Harrington, McKinlay, & Rock, 2010). These events and subsequent meetings generated Medicaid Infrastructure Grant funding, innovative projects (e.g., Customized Employment Pilot Study, Nevada Career Development Academy, etc.) and have served as a catalyst for meaningful changes. One fruitful outcome is the Nevada Employment First Ad Hoc Committee sponsored by the NGCDD. These groups of forward-thinking and resourceful advocates are identifying best practices in community-based employment and are formulating language that identifies integrated employment as the first option for Nevadans with IDD. Another recent effort that shows much promise is the collaboration between the Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities (NCED), Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR), and DHHS Developmental Services' Sierra Regional Center (SRC) on the Customized Employment Project.

The Customized Employment Project is a braided funding strategy that is person-centered and carves positions in Nevada businesses based on the job seeker's strengths, interests, and skills. BVR provides funding for job development and the NCED provides job carving/development service while SRC identifies the individuals to be served and provides

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ongoing service coordination along with follow-up supports (jobs and day training funding) after the case has been successfully closed.

The Nevada Career Development Academy is a collaborative effort between High Sierra Industries (community provider), SRC, and BVR to provide intensive soft skills development to prepare Nevadans with IDD to leave facility-based centers and join the mainstream workforce with the ultimate goal of achieving competitive employment.

Based on Section 110 funding through the Rehabilitation Service Administration, the Washoe County School District (WCSD), BVR, and NCED are collaborating to utilize unclaimed federal funds through Vocational Opportunities for Inclusive Career Education (VOICE). Students participate in hands-on activities in the business community, learn public transportation skills, and are engaged in vocation-related classroom assignments in order to secure an integrated job for competitive wages.

The Clark County School District (CCSD) has two post-secondary programs designed to provide students with disabilities an opportunity to learn and develop necessary work skills in order to gain competitive employment. The Program Approach to Career Employment (PACE) and Post-Secondary Opportunities for Transition (POST) enables students to gain transition from school-to-work while obtaining necessary work skills through community-based instruction in order to eventually become competitively employed. Project SEARCH is a school to work program that is a partnership between University Medical Center (UMC), CCSD, and BVR and takes place exclusively at UMC. The program model is an integrated work setting where students work as interns in various departments within the hospital. The program is designed to assist students with disabilities to transition from school-to-work while obtaining necessary work skills in order to eventually become competitively employed.

Opportunity Village (community provider) has a long-standing Job Discovery Program (JDP) which is a partnership between the CCSD and Opportunity Village. Students in the JDP rotate in sequential nine-week sessions at worksites where they “try out” assorted jobs such as food service, retail, child care, custodial services, art, animal care, and customer service. This partnership was formed to provide intensive vocational training in a natural work environment to CCSD students who require an enclave community based work setting or supported employment activities to become successfully employed.

Another innovative program is the Community Based Career Exploration Summer Camp (CBCESC). This is a collaborative effort that brings together the resources of BVR, Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living (NNCIL), WCSD, NCED, and NGCDD to produce a one week, vocational summer camp experience. To set the tone and reinforce the employment emphasis of this program, students must submit an application to participate in the camp. An interest inventory embedded in the camp application assists in determining each student’s community based employment site. During the week of camp students divide their day between work experiences at their community based job site, mobility orientation/transportation skills, resume writing, job applications, interview skills, self-advocacy, and engaging in vocation-related classroom assignments.

The Path to Independence Program, a pilot postsecondary program for students with IDD is a collaborative project between the University of Nevada (UNR), Aging and Disabilities Services Division (ADSD), and BVR that began in the fall semester of 2013. Research by Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) shows that students who participate in such programs have 26% increased success in finding employment, and earn 73% more in weekly wages.

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### **Recommendations for Consideration**

- Maximize available state and federal resources through improved rate and payment systems offered by the RSA Section 110 dollars to increase competitive employment.
- Increase supports to pursue and maintain gainful employment in integrated settings in the community, making it the primary service option for working age adults.
- Develop a five-year, system-wide, employment policy priority and strategy that increases integrated employment by a set percent each year. Consider additional strategies that promote employment services and outcomes, such as encouraging service systems to make use of community resources available in schools, institutions of higher education, employment networks, and federal and state work incentive programs already in place.
- Develop a full-time statewide position for employment development within the State DD system. This would identify an individual with a specific job function and accountability for developing employment strategy and policy and improving employment outcomes.
- Explore new outcome-based reimbursement systems for providers to assure that BVR can support the intensity of supports to assure that people with severe disabilities acquire an appropriate community placement and that the Aging and Disability Services Division can support the follow-along services to be successful.
- Emphasize the use of the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waiver to promote integrated/competitive employment options through revised service core definitions and provisions for career planning services.
- Encourage individuals to participate in a community-based work assessment before applying for jobs and day training services, where assessments are reviewed annually and individuals are encouraged to participate in this further evaluation of integrated/competitive employment service options.
- Utilize training curricula from national organizations, University classes, etc., for BVR employment staff.
- Encourage employment as the outcome of the annual Individual Service Plan (ISP) process and emphasis the critical role of person-centered planning in achieving community-based employment. These employment outcomes must be consistent with the individual's skills, interests, abilities, and reflect an informed choice.
- Embrace new, innovative, evidence-based models of support (with provider payments) to help individuals obtain and maintain integrated and competitive employment in the community.
- Continue membership with the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), a multi-state technical assistance collaborative established to improve employment outcomes.
- Establish a uniform definition of integrated employment and use the definition to create a statewide baseline to measure performance progress.
- Share resources of both time and knowledge for systems change and performance at all levels.
- Develop an Employment First Task Force to collaborate, coordinate and improve competitive and integrated employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

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## Appendix

### NGCDD Employment First Ad Hoc Committee Members

Sherry Manning, Facilitator (NGCDD) – Non-voting member  
Jack Mayes (NGCDD and Nevada Disability, Advocacy, and Law Center)  
Mary Bryant (Parent)  
Lisa Bonie (Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living)  
Ed Guthrie (Opportunity Village)  
Scott Harrington (Nevada Center for Excellence in Disabilities)  
Mark Hinson (Nevada Department of Education)  
Elizabeth Kelley (Damonte Ranch High School)  
Mechelle Merrill (Division of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation)  
Naomi Leahy (Ruby Mountain Resource Center)  
Rosie Melarkey (DHHS Aging and Disabilities Services Division)  
Jennifer Coleman O'Connor (Clark County School District)  
Santa Perez (People First of Nevada)  
Robin Renshaw (NGCDD and Nevada PEP)  
Staci Pratt (American Civil Liberties Union)  
Kelly Wales (Washoe County School District)  
Anita Frantz (Nevada Disability, Advocacy, and Law Center)  
Rena Smith (National Federation of the Blind)