

## **Current Iowa Employment Systems Improvement Efforts**

A job establishes someone as a contributor to the community, and real jobs and income are how most people maintain independence and create economic security for themselves and their families. Community based integrated employment is now the gold standard in employment service outcomes. Iowa's emerging vision is that employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome for all working age Iowans with disabilities, regardless of level of disability. This vision provides a framework for systems-change efforts that assumes *ALL* people, including people with the most significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in community life. Integrated employment means work occurring in the general workforce where workers with disabilities have opportunities to interact regularly with co-workers without disabilities; where workers with disabilities are paid at minimum wage or above, directly by employers; and where workers with disabilities have opportunities for advancement and access to employment benefits such as healthcare.

### **IOWA'S EMPLOYMENT FIRST INITIATIVE**

Since 2009, CDD has worked closely with other employment stakeholders on Iowa's Employment First initiative. Employment First began with a series of 14 focus groups, conducted around the state, to solicit feedback from all constituents – including people with disabilities, family members, service providers, and other stakeholders – about how to move Iowa's employment system, policies, and funding toward an Employment First perspective. Feedback from these focus groups formed the basis for Iowa's Employment First Summit in the fall of 2009. Priority statements coming out of this summit were 1) Alignment of policies and funding, as well as strong partnerships, remove barriers to employment; 2) People with disabilities and their families advocate for employment and participate in service design, to drive successful high school and adult transition to work; and 3) Businesses influence businesses and partner with advocates to create employment opportunities. Iowa's 2010 Employment First Summit was held in conjunction with Iowa's Parent-Educator Connection and focused on transition-age youth. In 2011, Iowa ASPE took over the lead role in the Employment First Initiative and held the third summit with a focus on Employment First work across the nation. The 2012 summit and Iowa APSE conference focused on individual employment systems and services.

### **STATE EMPLOYMENT LEADERSHIP NETWORK**

Iowa joined the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) late in 2009. The SELN is a community of practice collaboration between the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) and The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts – Boston, working with member states to improve employment outcomes for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD). In 2010 the SELN provided a Findings and Observation report for Iowa, based on extensive analysis, survey data, and stakeholder input, with detailed information on areas on which Iowa could focus in order to impact employment services and outcomes. These included Leadership, Strategic Goals and Operating Policies, Financing and Contracting, Training and

Technical Assistance, Interagency Collaboration, Services and Service Innovation, and Performance Measurement.

### **IOWA OLMSTEAD PLAN and MHDS SYSTEM REDESIGN**

Also in 2009, DHS's Mental Health and Disability Services Division (MHDS) began work to update Iowa's Olmstead Plan. The Plan's vision, "A life in the community for everyone," reflects the affirmation in Iowa Code that the purpose of the mental health and disability service system is to ensure the right of Iowans to live, learn, work and play in their community of choice. Among the Plan's strategic priorities are to "Establish the leadership, necessary partnerships and infrastructure for a service system expanding opportunities for competitive employment." In 2011 the Legislature passed legislation mandating comprehensive redesign of the mental health and disability services system, affirming that it is to be based on Olmstead principles. This has great relevance for employment services. Recent analysis of employment and pre-vocational services in Iowa reveals that 80% of funding is on facility-based services and that less than 7% of those served move on from pre-vocational to supported employment services in integrated settings. Recent Department of Justice findings and settlements make clear that such segregated employment services are of great concern.

*The Employment First priorities, the SELN report, the Olmstead plan and MHDS System Redesign contributed to the development of a conceptual framework for an employment services system focused on the outcome of integrated employment. They helped set the stage for other key employment systems change grants to Iowa.*

### **IOWA COALITION FOR INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT**

In 2011 the Iowa Developmental Disabilities Council was awarded a Partnerships in Employment grant, entitled the Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE), from the federal Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. The overall goal of the ICIE grant is "to improve systems so that Iowa youth with developmental disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, have fully integrated, competitive work, regardless of where they live in the state." The key assumptions underlying this goal are: 1) Iowa youth with disabilities should have opportunities for competitive, integrated employment; and 2) there are systemic barriers to achieving this. As a Coalition member and participant on the grant management team, CDD provides technical assistance toward achieving the ICIE objectives (e.g. helping to develop a rate structure that incentivizes competitive employment). See

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/aidd/resource/partnerships-in-employment-systems-change-grants>.

### **EMPLOYMENT FIRST LEADERSHIP STATE MENTOR PROGRAM**

In 2012, Iowa was selected as one of four Employment First Leadership State Mentor Program (EFLSMP) states by the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the federal Department of Labor. Leadership for Iowa's EFLSMP is provided by Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services. CDD helped to draft Iowa's EFLSMP application and continues to serve on Iowa's EFLSMP Management Team. Collaborating EFLSMP partners include Iowa Department of Human Services (both the Iowa Medicaid Enterprise and the Division of Mental Health & Disability Services), the Iowa Association of Community Providers, Iowa APSE, and others. EFLSMP Subject Matter Experts have been working with Iowa's EFLSMP Team to increase the array of employment options by rebalancing Iowa's employment funding system. Department of Labor funding will continue EFLSMP work in Iowa in 2014. See <http://www.dol.gov/odep/media/newsroom/employmentfirststates.htm>.

### **DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVE**

In the fall of 2012, IowaWorks was awarded a Department of Labor Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) grant. CDD provided technical assistance to IowaWorks with DEI program development, particularly in regard to self-employment work in Iowa. CDD continues to serve on the DEI governing team. Iowa's DEI project will provide Disability Resource Coordinator positions in selected IowaWorks regions to test the usefulness and efficacy of providing specialized assistance to job-seekers with disabilities in order to navigate Iowa's disability/employment service system. See <http://www.iowaworkforce.org/centers/IntegratedWorkforcePlan%20forIowa.pdf>.