



Transforming Iowa's Infrastructure to Support the Employment of People with Disabilities

Background: Created by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999, the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Program's mission is to develop and establish a comprehensive employment agenda for people with disabilities at the state level. Creating this agenda for people with disabilities and transforming the systems in a state to accomplish the agenda is not a quick or simple process. The barriers to employment are ingrained in individual and societal attitudes and expectations as well as the complex systemic mechanisms developed over time to serve persons with disabilities.

The Iowa MIG project, "Working Together so All Can Work," developed over time. It started with a focus on services supporting employment provided by Iowa's State Medicaid Agency. It then moved to strengthening the linkages between Medicaid and other employment related agencies as well as outreach to consumers and providers. Currently, Iowa MIG project is supporting comprehensive and collaborative work between and among agencies and funding streams to improve the employment outcomes for Iowan's with disabilities.

Iowa has received a total of \$6.5 million in MIG funding since 2000, and has made significant progress in addressing the health coverage issues for employed people with disabilities, informing people of the work incentives and supports available, developing service provider capacity to provide quality employment services, and bringing together the partners and stakeholders for the purpose of improving overall employment outcomes for Iowan's with disabilities.

Key Accomplishments of Iowa MIG:

- ✚ Medicaid for Employed People with Disabilities (MEPD) with over 14,000 members.
- ✚ Work incentives/benefits planning, supported employment services, and self employment training, technical assistance, and outreach.
 - Over 600 staff trained in benefits planning and/or customized employment.
 - Over 1500 consumers attending work incentive or self employment workshops.
- ✚ Interagency collaboration through Iowa's "Governance Group" of seven state agencies placing the focus on improved employment outcomes.
- ✚ Grassroots *Employment First* Initiative involving consumers, families, schools, providers and other stakeholders focusing on high expectations for young people, employer engagement, outreach and communication, and alignment of services.
- ✚ The State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) stakeholder survey and resulting findings, providing state leadership with feedback and guidance and technical assistance in improving employment outcomes.

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Personal Success Stories of people touched by Iowa MIG. These stories will be featured in video and available March 15, 2011.

Wage Employment:**Marianne, North Central Iowa,**

By receiving support from a local Community Rehabilitation Provider, Marianne got a part time job--a housekeeping position at a local nursing home. With onsite job coaching assistance, she was able to learn all the skills required for her job.

Gradually, she has decreased her need for a job coach and now works at the nursing home without any job coaching assistance at all. Marianne was promoted to full time work and began earning more money. She has gradually and carefully worked her way off of Social Security disability benefits with assistance from a Work Incentive Counselor (Benefits Planner/WIPA). She makes much more money now by working than she did by drawing her disability benefits. Working her way off of disability benefits is no small accomplishment -- only one half of one percent of Social Security disability beneficiaries ever discontinue receiving the cash benefit by working and earning money.

Marianne is one of 14,000 people who participate in Iowa's Medicaid Buy-In program. She is able to participate in the Buy-In program because she is working AND she has a disability. Marianne pays a small, pro-rated premium to maintain her Medicaid healthcare coverage under Buy-In program -- and she is happy to do so. She's glad for the peace of mind of knowing she can maintain Medicaid coverage and still earn a livable wage.

Marianne is using her earnings to purchase the home she currently lives in and is well on her way to becoming a homeowner.

Others featured in the wage employment video:

Mike, with his mobility impairment, works as a blackjack dealer in a northern Iowa casino.

Richard, with a significant mental disability, has worked at a department store in Des Moines for 40 yrs.

Self Employment:**Emilea – “Em and Jeri’s” Coffee Shop, Independence Iowa.**

Recognizing that the traditional service system would not allow Em, who experiences a severe intellectual disability, to reach her potential, Em's parents considered various types of businesses while trying to match Em's abilities and ambitions with the needs of the community. Em needed something which would allow frequent contact with the public. Both coffee shops in Independence had closed. The idea to create Em and Jeri's was born. Em is the sole proprietor and Jeri is Em's former job coach from the local goodwill and the coffee shop's manager.

Programs and services of the Iowa Department of Human Services, Iowa Medicaid, Iowa Workforce Development, and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation and a USDA small business development grant were used to get the coffee shop off the ground.

Em and Jeri's opened in December 2009, both Em and Jeri are making money and the coffee shop now employs several other persons with disabilities.

Others featured in the self employment video:

Lori, with a serious mental illness owns and operates a locksmith business in western Iowa

Nic, with a mobility impairment owns and operates a Lens grinding business in west central Iowa