



Montana

Findings and Observations Report

State Employment Leadership Network

June 2011

State Agency

Disability Services Division Montana Department of Public Health & Human Services

Process

Review of Montana Developmental Disability Program (DDP) team state strategic assessment

Review of state policy documents and reports

Review of Supplemental Stakeholder survey

Meeting with various Montana Developmental Disability Program (DDP) leadership team members

Stakeholder forum with family, members, and

SELN Project Team

John Butterworth University of Massachusetts, Boston Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI)

Rie Kennedy-Lizotte National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS)

Introduction

Upon joining the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN), each new member state agency is asked to complete the SELN State Strategic Employment Assessment. This comprehensive self evaluation tool provides a description and analysis of the state's infrastructure and support for achieving integrated employment outcomes among persons with developmental disabilities receiving publicly financed support. The state then has the opportunity to utilize a survey supplement to gather even more input from a wider stakeholder group. Using the State Strategic-Assessment and the survey supplement as a guide, the SELN Project Team conducts an on-site visit with key state developmental disability agency officials; regional, county, and local leaders; providers; and other stakeholders. Participants were determined by the state agency with the goal



to develop a thorough understanding of the state context. Information gathered through the State Strategic-Assessment and site visit is summarized in this *Findings and Observations* report prepared by SELN staff. This report is formatted to provide the results of the assessment process (Key Findings) and to offer a list of possible system opportunities for improvement (Potential Focus Areas) under each of seven key employment framework areas. DDP and other state officials may use the report as the basis for the development of a work plan detailing the outcomes, goals, and strategies to be pursued in the months and years ahead to improve employment outcomes.

Follow-up meetings will be held with state officials to identify key outcomes they desire to be pursued through SELN participation and to develop effective implementation strategies.

I. Leadership

A. Key Findings

- State leadership is strong in their expressed commitment to improving employment outcomes for Montanans that access developmental disability services.
- Stakeholders however express concern for what they see as mixed messages with regard to leadership commitment to integrated employment as a priority; on one hand they hear what is articulated but don't feel DDP leadership is always "walking the talk."
- Leadership within the provider community appears varied about making integrated employment a priority outcome in delivering services. However, there is clearly some provider leadership in the state to move forward with improving employment outcomes through their service delivery systems.
- Responses to the SELN supplemental survey reflect strong interest in improving employment for Montanans with disabilities. The survey was sent to one hundred ninety (190) stakeholders who may have employment-related feedback for Montana DDP. There were seventy-six (76) completed surveys returned, an outstanding response rate of 41 percent. Respondents were asked to comment on the highlighted elements in this report. Findings are reflected in the tenor of this report.
- Leadership for employment needs to occur at the state and regional levels. Cost plans are approved by regional managers. Case managers maintain a reasonable caseload size and are an important advocacy resource.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- Develop and distribute to regions, providers, and stakeholders a statement affirming the department's commitment to improving integrated employment outcomes and in developing the capacity of the service system to achieve this goal. The DDP would benefit greatly for improving and realigning resources to clarify and affirm DDP's goals, values, and expectations regarding integrated employment for Montanans with disabilities.
- Consider establishing a permanent full time position within DDP with the responsibility for leading the department's efforts to improve employment outcomes throughout Montana. At a minimum, identify a lead staff within DDP with authority to manage system wide improvement in employment services for Montanans with disabilities regardless of their avenue of entry into Montana's services systems.
- Develop strategies for increasing awareness of integrated employment as a viable and preferred service outcome among DDP staff, regional managers, the case management delivery structures, service providers, individuals, and families. The intent is to create:
 1. Awareness and use of evidence-based best practices and to make integrated employment a consistent part of discussions of service options and service plans.
 2. A consistent message regarding the importance of integrated employment as an avenue for individual asset development, economic empowerment, and community inclusion.
- Continue to engage self-advocates and family groups in planning efforts to create external pressures and demands for increasing integrated employment opportunities in the general workforce and alternatives to traditional community day service options. Key to such an effort is providing information and tools to assist families and self advocates in understanding and advocating for quality employment services and working with them on how best to play strategic roles in quality service delivery.

II. Strategic Goals and Operating Policies

A. Key Findings

- DDP manages the delivery of services with one central office in Helena and five regional offices throughout Montana. DDP manages three Medicaid waiver programs; The Children's' Autism Waiver, Comprehensive Waiver, and the Community Supports Waiver in addition to two non-waiver programs: the

Part C infant and toddler program and the Family Education and Support for those birth to age 22.

- Integrated employment is not listed as a priority goal or desired outcome in either Montana's Department of Public and Human Service or Developmental Services Division current mission or philosophy statements.
- During the site visit stakeholders expressed concern about the screening process used to allocated resource amounts to individuals on the wait list.
- A career planning process has already been developed and implemented as a supplement to DDP's Personal Support Plan and is utilized when an individual chooses to engage in employment services. However, expectation of integrated work is not present and case managers see the "career plan as just another piece of paperwork."
- Stated in DDP mission "choice" is seen as a priority in service delivery and case managers report "Our only mantra is "choice" unless it hurts health and safety. " ...we are told not to influence anyone's choice of service.' Choice in and of itself is clearly an important principle in service delivery. However, in framing a pro employment message choice alone as a guiding principle is vague/broad and doesn't help people make informed decisions. Oregon for example has developed a guide to assist for their system case managers to discuss employment as a priority outcome for working age adults for whom they deliver services. See guide at http://www.dhs.state.or.us/dd/supp_emp/docs/planning-guide.pdf.
- Rural economics, especially in a state like Montana, demand creativity and flexibility in delivery of employment services, Montana's tightly structured delivery expectations appear to hinder creativity in best practice employment service. Montana's service array appears to limit the time employment providers can spend on job creation and job development. Rural economies demand additional attention for both new business development and labor market development.
- Montana uses both contracted and state case managers. Providers cannot provide services and case management for the same people. In children's services the family support specialists provide holistic services including case management, parent education and support, and training in home aides.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- Review current Personal Support Plan (PSP) and Individual and Family Service Plan (IFSP) process to determine how to focus an expectation of integrated employment for adults receiving services. Consider a policy

statement that employment is discussed at every planning meeting. Require on a regular basis a community based employment assessment for adults not engaged in active employment. (Examine Tennessee policy requiring employment community based assessment every three years http://www.tn.gov/didd/provider_agencies/policies.html).

- Consider revising format of Personal Support Plan to include employment as a priority section; simplify the information gathered in the PSP and move the activities of career planning to a provider level.
- Establish requirements for staff qualification and training to ensure staff providing employment services have the necessary competencies to deliver quality services.
- Review, with SELN assistance, other states' experiences with "Employment First" policies and practices that establish goals and programmatic preferences that are designed to ensure that working age students and adults receiving services have increased choices and options for accessing and maintaining employment in the general workforce.
- Clarify definitions of employment-related services to insure these services can be consistently provided and understood regardless of the provider. This will help to empower consumers, providers, and employers. Review state service delivery policies, for consistency in expectations for employment services and the outcomes. Revise as appropriate to assure single messaging of commitment to integrated employment for Montanans with disabilities.
- Analyze current policies and procedures (practice) regarding transition, and determine, with engagement of the Office of Public Instruction, how these can be strengthened to support integrated employment as a preferred outcome for students moving into the adult service system. This should include a full range of career path options including post-secondary and national service such as AmeriCorps to further prepare students for adult life.
- Review Family Education and Support program and consider adding assistance with youth work program for those of youth working age (16-22). Include parent education on the values of employment including simple benefit awareness when their sons and daughters become employed.

III. Financing and Contracting

A. Key Findings

- DDP furnishes employment services through contracts with private providers which are managed by their regional offices. Employment supports are

- financed with Medicaid, vocational rehabilitation resources and state extended employment ("EE") dollars. There has been significant change in contracting structure in recent years, notably a shift from a contracted dollar amount to an individual unit rate structure and rebalancing of rate differences.
- Some case managers are aggressive about referral for EE funding when an individual is on waiting lists for DD funds. While EE funds at a very low rate, waiting periods can be shorter. EE originally only funded supported employment, but currently also funds workshop services. EE offers different rate levels for individual supported, group supported, and sheltered employment as of two years ago.
 - Introduction of the Montana Resource Allocation Protocol (MONA) resource allocation tool is affecting service options for new entrants to system. Individual allocations are based on assessed share of DSP time. Some stakeholders perceive MONA as a barrier to employment, and that individuals do not choose employment after the screening process. Other stakeholders indicated individuals are screened out because a person's needs need to match (\approx 20%) the available funds and supported employment is a lower cost service. An increase in a person's level of support need requires negotiating a transfer of resources from another person's plan or person is put on wait list for additional resources. Supported employment is inherently more variable, individual needs can decrease during follow-along but also may spike due to a job loss or change in work situation. Current rate system has not provided any level of incentive for employment in spite of the state's attempts to allow for the fluctuating needs when a person is engaged in supported employment,
 - Supported employment service is paid as a flat monthly rate based on the level of need determination for the person receiving services. Rates seem to be reasonable for the anticipated level of service, but relatively few individuals are supported by this funding stream. This is in part because of the complexity of regulations and the requirement that individuals work 20 hours or more per week to blend supported employment and other day service funding. Supported employment funding is not available to individuals who are paid by their provider.
 - Funds are allocated to individuals from the waiting list by the eligibility and resource specialist at the central office. The process of allocating resources is based partly on what becomes available and partly on level of crisis creates a complexity that appears to drive decisions that do not support an employment first practice in development of individualized service plans.
 - Limited incentives are present to support providers to increase integrated employment as an outcome of services delivered. Stakeholders believe that

current rate structures provide more financial incentive for providers to offer congregate services.

- There is limited participation of Montana vocational rehabilitation (VR) in funding supported employment for individuals with developmental disabilities who are utilizing Waiver services.
- Montana VR manages state extended employment resources that are used to provide long term supports to workers with developmental disabilities who may be on waiting list for waiver services.
- The majority of stakeholders view rate and rate structures as not supporting individual supported or competitive employment or encouraging employment over other day service options.
- Changes in the availability of production work from general industry to service providers have affected some large providers and may be a catalyst for movement to alternatives to sheltered employment.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- Review qualified provider process to assure better balance in number of approved providers to deliver employment services and non-facility based life supports both for Medicaid services and non-Medicaid services.
- Review waiver services to ensure service definitions support a clear and intentional pathway to employment including person centered career planning and discovery, job development, job stabilization, and ongoing supports.
- Review other state payment methodologies and consider implementation of performance based payment systems similar to other states, i.e. Oklahoma Performance Based Payment System http://www.nasddd.org/Meetings/2010_Annual_Conference/2010_AC_Presentations.shtml.
- Consider instituting mechanisms that ensure that providers consistently consider the full array of employment funding, not just available Medicaid waiver employment service dollars, to support individuals' engagement in the workforce (i.e. opportunities such as use of Social Security Work Incentives and Ticket to Work).
- Review rate setting methodology for employment and facility based day habilitation to ensure community integrated employment is a "preferred" outcome of service in terms of reimbursement.

- Consider engaging SELN to provide technical assistance to Montana in the area of resource and reimbursement best practices and identifying strategies used by other states for supporting employment services that may be appropriate for Montana and that (1) will help support achieving effective employment outcomes; (2) offer increased accountability; and (3) meet other state and individual employment goals.
- Consider a cost analysis relating to the community wide and economic return on investment of redirecting dollars currently supporting facility-based programs to individual employment in the general workforce.
- In collaboration with Montana VR and Office of Public Instruction, build the capacity to target and fund integrated employment supports for individuals' developmental disabilities transitioning from school to adult life.

IV. Training and Technical Assistance

Key Findings

- Available training and technical assistance throughout the DDP system appears to be more focused on health and safety, process management, and monitoring.
- It is encouraging to learn Michael Smull and Support Development Associates are implementing a series learning opportunities to use person centered tools and practice to support the implementation of the systems changes to focus on personal outcomes in service delivery. Montana also participates in the College of Direct Support, and some providers use the Center For Technical Assistance and Training (CTAT).
- There is not an established staff development infrastructure (at the provider level, case management level or internal state developmental disabilities staff level, nor for individuals and families) to address competencies and knowledge of best practices in employment service delivery.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- Review options for creating sustainable strategies for (1) assisting facility-based employment programs transition to programs promoting competitive employment; and (2) helping staff acquire competencies needed to offer effective supported employment services.

- Include into the case management training modules on the values of employment and how they play a pivotal role in messaging and improving employment outcomes for individuals on their case loads.
- Strengthen guidelines/requirements regarding service provider and case manager qualifications and competencies with respect to integrated employment and self-direction. Consider the merits of competency based, comprehensive curricula. For example, Florida requires successful completion of training before employment services are provided. Pennsylvania contracts with Virginia Commonwealth Institute (VCU) to establish discounted tuition for provider staff to participate in the VCU employment specialist distance education program. Providers pay an upfront reduced cost for employees to participate in the course and when the employee successfully completes the course the provider is reimbursed the paid tuition fee.
- Develop guidelines/requirements as well as training for DDP staff regarding the value of employment and necessary knowledge regarding integrated employment appropriate to their roles (e.g. program oversight, case management) including educating those involved about Montana-specific employment benefits and how to address employment outcomes in the Personal Support Plan (PSP) and the Individual/Family Support Plan (IFSP).
- Make greater use of opportunity of resources available through The Rural Institute at the University of Montana (<http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu>) and specifically the Research and Training Center on Disability in Rural Communities at the Institute (<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu>) is a resource for materials and information.
- When developing training infrastructure for all targets groups (providers, internal staff, case management, individual receiving services and family) explore utilization of a full range of learning technologies including in-person classroom training, on-line offerings (instructor led and self directed), mentorship, etc., to ensure training is delivered in an efficient and wide-spread manner and is responsive to the full range of learning styles and preferences.
- Determine options for providing necessary technical assistance to service providers to build structures and systems to better support individual integrated employment and reduce reliance on facility-based services.
- Enhance efforts to work strategically with self advocates and families to enhance their knowledge and optimize the value of family networks. Use this opportunity as catalyst for increasing employment expectations. Develop training and materials regarding employment to provide learning opportunities

for families to become familiar with the opportunities employment creates for individual growth and self sufficiency.

- Reach out to the state's active People First network with information and training/messaging opportunities.

V. Interagency Collaboration

A. Key Findings

- Interagency collaboration is seen at the state and regional level making efforts to effectively utilize resources, share providers, etc. Coordination between VR and DD is complicated by recent turnover in VR managers and different regional boundaries. VR accepts qualified DD providers as eligible for enrollment as a VR provider based on presentation of a plan for service delivery and a regional review process; however VR regions make the final decision on whether to allow enrollment.
- VR standards for a successful closure are flexible and based on individual goals.
- Several stakeholders commented that they feel it is difficult to become a VR provider, and other providers are reluctant to engage with that system. VR has concerns about enrolling too many providers and diluting the support resources, making it difficult for new providers to be enrolled in some areas. This is particularly problematic for very small providers in rural areas. The limited number of approved VR providers in some areas is also of concern within DD because of the DD commitment to choice. The possible need to switch providers is both a system barrier (for case management) and a personal barrier to job seekers.
- Some stakeholders feel that engaging with VR can be slow, and that these issues are most pronounced in rural regions because of limited resources and large distances. Developmental disability guidelines do allow authorizing supported employment services in the interim, and guidelines are in the case management manual.
- The process of allocating developmental disability follow along funding for supported employment is not clear across VR staff, and a case is not opened without a commitment of funding. There may need to be a more formal agreement or process for demonstrating commitment of funds at the time of referral. Stakeholders noted that the current waiting list for services is also a barrier in coordination with VR, and may particularly limit access to VR services for younger individuals when they exit school and need to wait 6 to 7 years for waiver funds.

- Staff reports limited engagement with schools. Children's case managers are more likely to attend, and may be an important advocate for employment experiences and goals as a result. Education funding ends at 19 by state law, so transition programs targeted to 19-22 year olds are unlikely in Montana. The age cut offs maybe adding to the limited opportunities for career exploration and development in the later years of high school.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- In collaboration with Montana Vocational Rehabilitation Services, explore the use of person-centered planning approaches in employment and community based situational assessments – a brief "real world" evaluation of an individual's employability skills intended to establish a baseline from which to develop trainings plans for determining career direction not just employability. In some states VR funds extended situational assessments as part of the career planning process and in other states this falls to the developmental disability services as a non-facility based prevocational service or part supported employment services.
- Establish a clear process for referral to VR and for ensuring a commitment to follow-along supports. Consider a strategy for targeting funds for long term support for individuals who otherwise would be waiting for funding including earmarking funds for employment support for transition age youth. Develop case coordination linkages and cross training.
- Review and revise current parent and individual education and outreach materials to reflect a stronger emphasis on employment as an expectation in adult life regardless of disability.
- Consider ways to strategically built interagency collaboration with VR, DDP, and schools to improve employment outcomes for Montanans with intellectual and developmental disabilities through shared project/activities implementing practices that support of integrated community based employment.

VI. Services and Service Innovations

A. Key Findings

- Pockets of innovation can be seen across Montana and interest in sharing and expanding those innovations was heard clearly during the site visit.
- Approved waiver service definitions follow very closely with the generic Medicaid suggested core definitions and are broadly written.

- Capacity of the service network to implement integrated employment services varies from region to region.
- From some provider's perspective implementation of the "MONA" has greatly declined interest in supported employment. It may be more the process of how resources are allocated than the MONA tool itself that is driving service choice.
- Effective and responsive transportation systems are not available in many parts of the state and need improvement.
- There are limited numbers of providers jointly approved by both the DD system and the VR system affecting the continuity of supported employment services.
- Current service models, while allowing employment services to assist Montanans with disabilities to access and engage in integrated employment, are structured to promote congregate service models.
- There is a great concern for the ever expanding waiting list for services and how services are screened when they become available.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- Highlight through a regular employment newsletter/bulletin the success of individuals in employment and the providers who support them.
- Consider a marketing strategy that highlights successes in integrated employment to inform communities and employers at large.
- Develop an interagency strategy for establishing state or local government employment initiatives, utilizing examples from other SELN member states such as California and Washington state.
- Consider engaging VR to utilize current "EE" resources to support a pilot directed at youth in later years of high school to create opportunities for employment for youth before they exit school.
- Examine current service definitions under the 1915(c) Medicaid waiver programs, and the catalog of services. Consider revisions to ensure that the employment-related services support employment outcomes for individuals to work in competitive jobs integrated within the general workforce at or above minimum wage

- Participate and include regional and provider community in SELN network webinar series on employment innovations and issues.
- Develop a clear quality standard for delivery of employment services, including such areas as person-centered planning/discovery, assessment, job development, etc. Integrate these standards within contracting, program monitoring, individual service planning. Review APSE (Association for Professionals in Supported Employment) standards as a basis in development of competency standards.

VII. Employment Performance Measurement, Quality Assurance, and Program Oversight

A. Key Findings

- Providers feel that there is a stronger emphasis on compliance in Montana that results in a significant investment in management of paperwork and overhead, while limited emphasis is given to individual outcomes.
- Limited data is systematically collected statewide on employment outcomes. Service records are not an effective approach for identifying employment status because many people are supported using other services.

B. Potential Focus Areas

- Consider the development of a comprehensive approach to data management and display that collects individual data rather than summary data. Utilize SELN to identify and access information from other SELN states on their strategies for data management. What gets measured and reported gets done.
- Develop a system of performance benchmarks in order to gauge progress in expansion of integrated employment.
- Develop reporting and publication strategies to celebrate success achieved by all players in these efforts!
- Consider implementation of performance or outcomes based contracting and payments system. For instance, review Oklahoma's performance based contracting and outcome payment methodology for employment services.
- Review how the quality and responsiveness of employment services is currently integrated into DDP overall quality assurance and improvement system, and determine how this can be improved through adding elements

related to integrated employment. Consider exploring the approaches used by other states to access and manage the quality and responsiveness of employment service as an integral component of their overall quality management systems.

- Develop strategies to create greater awareness regarding value of community integrated employment in quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities among DDP staff, individuals, family members, and service providers – marketing of the positive aspects of employment and the essential nature of it in an individual's life. This would include cataloging materials (written products, videos, etc.), creation of new materials, and strategies for dissemination of information (meetings, newsletters in both electronic and paper form, conferences and similar venues, DDP website and other department websites). The intent would be to create a consistent message regarding the importance and positive aspects of employment, awareness of best practices, and to make employment a consistent part of discussions regarding service options and service planning. Access information from other SELN states on their strategies to review their materials for ideas.
- Train staff on utilization of data as part of their provider and individual service plan monitoring, to measure not only provider performance, but to also inform and monitor individual service planning, and employment outcomes vs. goals in the PSP/IFSP.

Appendix A