

EmploymentFirstMaine

Policy & Legislation Work Group

Survey Summary

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Every person. Every talent. Every opportunity.

Introduction

This survey has been developed by the Policy and Legislation Work Group, a subcommittee of the Employment First Maine coalition. The survey is intended to identify barriers and develop solutions to overcoming those barriers in the effort to obtain meaningful, integrated employment opportunities for Mainers with disabilities. The key recommendations resulting from this survey, along with the information provided by the EFM coalition membership, will form the basis for the coalition's policy work as we move ahead and will be the basis of policy and legislative work the coalition pursues as part of our mandate.

Survey Questions

- Question 1.** Please identify your role or roles in this work.
- Question 2.** What would you identify as the three top barriers to promoting the goals of accessible, integrated employment for people with disabilities here in Maine?
- Question 3.** In addition to the barriers you mentioned above, are you aware of any other specific legislation, policies, rules or regulations that act as a deterrent or barrier to promoting employment for people with disabilities here in Maine? If yes, please describe the issue.
- Question 4.** Based on your experience with these challenges and barriers, what would you recommend for policy changes or other solutions to these problems? What are your ideas for removing these barriers to integrated, customized employment?
- Question 5.** Have you found techniques or creative "work-around" strategies that were effective in adapting to systemic barriers and succeeded in gaining access to employment services for people seeking your support? If yes, please explain.
- Question 6.** As Employment First Maine moves ahead, is there anything we have not asked that you feel the policy committee needs to be aware of?

Breakdown of survey respondents

Identified Role	Percent of total responses	Number of responders
Consumer	8.89%	4
Advocate	28.89%	13
Employer	4.44%	2
State agency staff	31.11%	14
Service provider	22.22%	10
Employment services Provider	26.67%	12
Other	13.33%	6
Total Respondents:	45	

Survey Results by Theme/Category

Based on the survey results, the Policy Work Group organized the barriers and policy change ideas they received into the three core areas below. Many issues, of course, were raised by more than one respondent. Transportation as a barrier to work, for instance, was raised by a third of the survey respondents. Below are the three themes, followed by the concerns and potential policy solutions respondents raised in each category.

Barrier 1: The lack of necessary information or knowledge creates barriers to employment for people with disabilities.

Barrier 2: The service system has built in barriers, and issues related to funding of services prevent people from working.

Barrier 3: Low expectations and stigma around disability are barriers to employment.

Concerns/Ideas for Policy Change

Foundational: EVERY one is presumed employable—this is NOT negotiable—there are no YES, BUTs....

Barrier 1. Information/Knowledge

1. Develop and promote resources for people with disabilities, parents and families regarding accessing proper transition services, what good transition should look like, and how to conduct good employment and career goal setting for young people with disabilities.
2. Develop and promote resources regarding benefits counseling for people with disabilities, families and students as they explore options in transitioning to the world of work as an alternative to living on disability benefits.
3. Develop and promote resources on funding and utilizing adaptive equipment and assistive technology as work supports.

4. Provide a range of professional development and technical assistance to employment support providers on the range of best practices for obtaining employment for people with significant disabilities, including transformational leadership and agency conversion.
5. Educate and inform employment support providers on the needs of employers.
6. Educate employers on the skills and potential of people with disabilities, and on the benefits to be had from a diverse work force, particularly in light of labor shortage in Maine.
7. Educate employers on available tax credits promoting diversity in hiring (this has not been proved to be an incentive at all to small employers—only large corporate hiring initiatives have utilized these).
8. Educate employers on reasonable accommodations in the work place, the ready availability of resources and technical assistance with RA, and the modest (if any) costs associated with RA.
9. Create opportunities to engage with employers and demystify disability.
10. Engage in a public awareness campaign promoting the skills, interests and eagerness of people with disabilities to work.

Barrier 2. Service System/Funding

1. Commit Maine’s Department of Education to using the innovative “Discovering Personal Genius” model in its transition and career planning process.
2. Develop a system to hold schools accountable for transition outcomes that include employment by the time a student graduates.
3. Fund and develop apprentice and practicum experience opportunities for high school students with disabilities.

4. Allow young adults to access vocational services or job coaching as they can legally work at 15.
5. Explore crowd-sourced transportation options, outside-the-box carpooling, and public/private collaboration with small businesses and local schools/service providers.
6. Increase funding long term supports for people with mental illness.
7. Increase funding for long term supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
8. Reform the funding incentives that keep people with ID/DD in a day hab services culture rather than seeking employment.
9. Train and support Vocational Rehabilitation and employment specialists to think/visualize/expand outside of their standard procedures, to engage in meaningful discovery and to customize employment.
10. Commit Vocational Rehabilitation and employment specialists generally to increasing services to young people with significant disabilities.
11. Eliminate the use of sub-minimum wage provisions in Maine's service system.
12. Amend regulations to give preference to people who want to work over those who don't in terms of waiting lists.
13. Reform the rate of reimbursement for providers. (Makes it difficult to get top notch professionals as employment specialists, and it is difficult to send employment specialists to trainings as the rate does not factor in unbillable time and administrative costs.)
14. Reform the Section 21 and 29 waivers to address funding disincentives and service caps and limitations on employment support services.

*"There has to be another way ... other than financial incentives to get businesses to hire pwd. I am strongly against any legislation that would fund compensation re this..."

*Vocational Rehabilitation does not effectively work with high school students with significant disabilities.

*Options for employment being limited by VR or job developers

*VR funding

*Resistance from vr in accepting people with complex behavioral/physical challenges

*VR application process restricts access to "opportunistic" job match for someone in a community support program that is not open as a VR client.

*Create a 'fast track' with VR that allows people to take advantage of opportunities

*Redesign the VR system so that it is responsive, adaptable, and flexible to meet the employment needs and wishes of people with disabilities. Allow for greater flow between VR and community businesses, including a wide array of options for clients including office positions, the trades, and other employers that would offer clients real choice and a career path. Require VR to expand its vision of what is possible for people with disabilities by mandating participation in the new career search process unveiled earlier this year.

*Low number of Employment Specialist willing to travel to provide services to VR clients.

*People are ruled as unable to work rather than jobs being found to match people's abilities and interests.

*Change the 1/4 hour billing system for work support and use the same system as community support.

*Consider funding short-term 1-1 staff support to assist a person to integrate into employment - perhaps, for a 3 or 6 month period

*Policies around MaineCare for people who need direct service in order to be able to work, frequently people on Waiver Programs who would be unable to pay for the services even if they were fully employed

*Need more flexibility in job support – ie when a person doesn't need a job coach but needs other support to maintain long-term employment

*Lack of well-trained and professional employment support workers.

*Dearth of service providers in rural areas

*Reimbursement for LTS for people with mental illness is so low that providers are unwilling to provide this service.

*The regulations surrounding Employment Specialist services. Meetings with the employer to discuss progress, concerns, etc. are not billable services. Many times these are necessary services that contribute to the maintenance of their employment. This is not a service that a job coach can or should provide. Typically the amount of ESS service requested is 1.25-hrs monthly and frequently the resource coordinators question the need for this extremely minimal number of hours/units. We cannot afford to maintain an Employment Specialist on staff if we are not allowed to bill for necessary non-job coaching type employment services.

*The prohibition of personal supports at work-person may not need a job coach for the work, but they may have personal factors that create a need for support/supervision at work. These people can get 1:1 support at home, why wouldn't we make sure they could use that support to be employed?

Barrier 3. Low Expectations/Stigma

1. Work with Child Development Services, other child service providers, and child educators to improve the messages families receive when their young children are first entering the service system and to increase expectations for employment and inclusion in the work force for all children.

2. Promote a message, from the Commissioners of DHHS, DOL, and DOE, as well as top management at funded service provider agencies, advocating a strong Employment First orientation.

3. Develop and promote resources on customized employment, highlighting successful employment outcomes that can result from creative, individualized, person-directed planning beyond traditional job development. Use these materials to raise expectations.

Other: Federal policy issues

*federal policy accepting of enclaves & sub minimum wage different rules, programs etc based upon diagnosis

*sub-minimum wage laws rules that "enable" community programs to under-perform (example: placing a client in only a couple hours of employment per week) Performance expectations in programs, such as the Workforce Investment Act, that dis-incentivize helping people with significant barriers to successful employment

*"WIOA - Workforce Incentives Opportunity Act, the legislation that funds training and placement for workforce, defines a successful outcome as full-time (40 hour) employment. Changing that definition for emerging target populations would enable access to federally funded workforce programs by PWD. Currently, if the individual can't convince the Case Manager/Center Manager that their disability in itself does not prevent them from working 40 hours/week, they are not candidates for enrollment in publically funded workforce programs. This is evidenced by the (lack of) numbers of PWD being served in the federally funded workforce system."