

EmploymentFirstMaine

Systems Development / Capacity Building Work Group

Recommendations Submitted to the Employment First Maine Coalition September 2014

Introduction

The Systems Development/Capacity Building Work Group of the Employment First Maine Coalition was convened in late fall, 2013 and met monthly for most of the last year. The work group conducted a provider survey as well as mining information and resources on best practice in employment services, workforce development and a variety of related topics. A number of the work group members were also active participants in the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment's (ODEP) Employment First Community of Practice and the Employment First State Mentoring Leadership Program (EFSMLP). Maine's EFSMLP work revolved around aligning policy and funding.

The purpose of the Employment First Maine Systems Development / Capacity Building work group was to review current practices and make recommendations regarding the needs of the provider community and all affected parties to realize the goals of Employment First Maine and to support the integrated, community-based and customized employment of Maine citizens with disabilities. In this report, the work group has identified initial needs and recommendations to address the provider community in Maine (broadly defined to include CRPs, day and work support providers, educators and school personnel, and case managers) to build their capacity to support integrated, community based and customized employment for all Maine citizens with disabilities.

We are hopeful that, in collaboration with the other work groups and the EFM Coalition, our collective work results in the following outcomes:

- All Maine citizens with disabilities have the support they require to seek employment.
- Employment is valued and everyone has an understanding that everyone can work.
- Expectations and aspirations are raised about what is possible
- The impact of our work and the employment outcomes of Maine citizens with disabilities are measured.
- Providers know of and are utilizing evidence-based and best and emerging practices.

- Youth with disabilities and their families are prepared for and expect to go to work after high school or completion of post-secondary education.

Background

Over forty states now have legislation, executive orders, and/or policy directives addressing employment as the first and preferred service in the service array available to individuals with disabilities. There is good reason for this critical, timely and urgent response. The U.S. currently spends over \$50 billion a year on intellectual/developmental disability services and supports, but less than 5% goes to community employment. Additionally, individuals with serious mental illness are employed at much lower rates than the general population. The Bazelon Center (2014) reports that the likelihood of a person with a serious mental illness having full-time employment is approximately 1 in 10.

These dire statistics are not a reflection of the capacities or desire of people with disabilities to be a part of the workforce. Considering the needs and desires of individuals with psychiatric disabilities, Bazelon (2014) reports at least two-thirds want to work and many have worked before. This low employment rate does not reflect an inability of people with serious mental illness to work. In fact, employment has been widely recognized as a fundamental part of recovery and of community integration for people with serious mental illness.

Traditionally, our employment services were designed to determine employer needs and then find a person with a disability to fill the job. Today, our practices have evolved considerably; for example, using a customized employment (CE) framework, an individual's talents and desires are considered first. Only then is suitable employment negotiated that matches the person's skills, contributions, and interests.

The low employment rate of people with significant disabilities reflects a failure to invest in the services that many people need to secure and maintain work. Disability systems have long operated under the mistaken assumption that people with significant disabilities cannot work. It is long overdue for change.

Employment First

The most substantial national Employment First efforts, such as those led by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor, for instance, take a broad view of implementation. Griffin suggests that most aspects of complex change are addressed systematically through training and technical assistance at the local level, through state and federal policy reform, funding strategy changes, and long range planning. Ultimately, efforts that focus on improving techniques for creating employment, engaging local business, and local collaboration and economic leveraging, must be supported. As expectations for employment for all become commonplace, the monumental task of creating

local leadership and management frameworks becomes critical to solving the unemployment problem.

Based on his work with leadership teams and boards of directors across the country, Griffin (2014) suggests the need for an intimate and thorough approach to stabilizing systems, identifying future leaders from inside and beyond an agency, fostering local collaborations, and teaching the skills necessary for change management and long-term growth. Griffin cautions us that we must learn from our previous efforts; one of the common complaints from the Supported Employment Systems Change era is that supported employment became an add-on service to day programs and sheltered workshops. “Employment First fails by definition if this result repeats (Griffin, 2014).”

Our systems are at a crossroads. To continue business as usual is not sufficient; we need fundamental change in the ways in which we support individuals with disabilities in Maine. And, this change must begin with the supports and information we provide families of young children, educators, and the full array of service providers, including case managers, policy makers and funders. A provider who completed our survey shared this: *Education is necessary for case managers and other service providers regarding Employment First. For example, I work with an individual who wants to increase her work schedule and has the skills to do so. Her team does not agree because the independent living provider will not change their service schedule to accommodate working additional hours.*

We believe the recommendations provided below will ameliorate such practices.

“The road to Employment First is challenging, long, and ever changing. Building an organizational vehicle that responds to the demands and needs of that employment seeker sitting in the driver’s seat requires attention to multiple and diverse considerations. Having a focused, intelligent, and cohesive team synchronizes the component parts, fostering arrival at career destinations in timely, reliable, and cost-effective fashion. Griffin (2014)”

This, we believe, will be the outcome of the Employment First Maine Coalition’s work committed to realizing the vision of the Employment First Maine Act.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are built on the foundational values that everyone can work, that there are an unlimited number of ways in which to make a living and that we have the technology and “know how” to realize this vision.

1. That over time, a wide range and tiered system of professional development and technical assistance be made available to providers of service (including educators) to individuals with disabilities across the state that is accessible and affordable to assure a common foundational level of knowledge and skill in at least the following topics:
 - Creating a culture supportive of employment for all (the work group believes this should be required for providers)
 - Strategic planning for agencies to address conversion of services
 - Innovative funding strategies to support an array of employment options including blending, braiding and amalgamating funding using strategies such as resource ownership, business within a business, and using SSA work incentives like PASS plans for job creation.
 - Whole life supports—wrapping a supports package around an individual that includes employment and inclusive community supports
 - Career Planning and Discovering Personal Genius™
 - Information on SSA work incentives and using work incentives
 - Customized Employment
 - Job development and job carving
 - Strategies to negotiate with employers
 - Financial literacy, financial planning, asset development and economic empowerment
 - Evidence-based Individual Placement Supports and integration of employment into the ACT teams
2. That an Employment First 101 curriculum be developed and available in multiple formats to provide a values-based and foundational introduction to the concept that everyone can work. EF 101 should be required for case managers, educators, and policymakers and recommended for individuals with disabilities, parents and board members.
3. That a job coach credential be established and added to the career ladder of Maine's employment support providers. Training for this credential must be accessible and affordable and jointly recognized by the Maine Departments of Education, Labor and Health & Human Services.
4. That the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services adopt a policy of presumptive eligibility for individuals on all of the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers.

5. That the use of sub-minimum wage certificates (14c in the Fair Labor Standards Act) be eliminated in Maine as it is direct conflict with the Employment First Maine Act.
6. That small group employment be phased out and eliminated as it is in direct conflict with the Employment First Maine Act.
7. That the Maine Department of Health & Human Services' Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services work in collaboration with MaineCare to submit a 1915(i) waiver. This recommendation is consistent with the recently released report by the Bazelon Center (2014), "States must cover a robust package of Medicaid-financed supported employment services for people with mental illness to supported employment under the "home and community-based services" state plan option, known as the "Section 1915(i) option." This option will permit Maine to target a set of home and community-based services, including employment services, to a set of individuals using needs-based criteria.
8. That, as a component of the CMS required transition plan, Maine re-allocate Medicaid funded intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health funds from segregated day treatment and/or day habilitation services to pay for employment services consistent with the new CMS final rule on non-residential community services.
9. That the Departments of Education, Labor and Health & Human Services assure and annually report that individuals with disabilities served are on a pathway to employment and barriers are addressed in person-centered planning processes.
10. That, as a component of the CMS transition plan, Maine eliminate the conflict of interest where the individual with a disability is employed by the same agency that is providing him/her services and supports of any kind (employment, residential, etc).
11. That a mentoring program be designed and delivered to support agency leadership in their transformation.
12. That Maine's Department of Education will use the "Discovering Personal Genius" model in its transition and career planning process.
13. That provider agencies, at least annually, post a "Report Card" that identifies the number of individuals served, the number of individuals employed, the number of hours worked and wages earned.
14. That all Work Support Providers shall become CRPs.

Respectfully Submitted,

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