

## *Moving from Sheltered to Inclusive Work Opportunities*

It is time to make a commitment to end segregated workshops. Organizations and systems that successfully make the transition from segregated employment for people with intellectual disabilities to inclusive employment options and alternatives must be willing to make a radical shift in order for workshop closure and conversion to occur. This shift starts with a primary decision that employment is possible for all, including those with more significant disabilities who may have previously been thought of as “unsuitable” for employment or considered “unemployable”. Being successful in this process requires a lot of front-end preparation, timely communication, and intense involvement with all stakeholders including family, organizational staff members, people receiving services, state and local representatives, and business and community members. It requires an unwavering commitment to the decision that workshops will close. It means that the new core value and focus is one of inclusive and individualized employment, self-employment and other individualized work alternatives – not center-based activities and segregated work. People with intellectual disabilities want to have real jobs – they want to be valued and contributing members of their communities – they do not want continued isolation and segregation to persist.

*“With regards to sheltered workshops and congregate settings: We must stop building the buildings. (If you build it, they will fill it). We must put our funding dollars towards the future... put money and resources towards where the vision is, not in propping up past obsolete models.”*

*...“Be sure to define priorities in a disability neutral way: when you begin to help people move out of sheltered workshops into real jobs, don’t start with those who are considered the most capable and work from there. Instead, use some arbitrary way to begin, for example start with everyone who has a last name starting with J, or in a way that isn’t tied to any disability factors.” — Dale DiLeo*

### Quality in Practice

- Closing down sheltered workshops and converting services into more individualized approaches requires persistence, focus, and a firm belief that segregated workshops are not the way to provide quality individual outcomes and best practice supports.
- A strong self-advocacy movement can play a huge and positive role in moving things forward and should be encouraged and highly supported.
- Advocate for appropriate transportation to ensure that people with disabilities have the means to get to and from jobs.
- If you want to convert from workshops to individualized supported work, you must stop paying for services delivered in a workshop.

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## *Moving from Sheltered to Inclusive Work Opportunities (continued)*

- Organizations and states engaging in this process must have the flexibility to be creative in the use of funding and have mechanisms in place for individualized budgeting.
- A strong focus on relationship building outside of the service system with community members, organizations and mainstream funding sources will expand options beyond the “system” and into more integrated approaches.
- Creating options for self-employment and micro-business efforts will help organizations and systems to have more possibilities to tap into beyond the traditional job opportunities available in the community.
- Forge relationships with universities, colleges, other partners – using an outside perspective strengthens the message of change. Other partners can do and say things that will aid process.
- Seek funding from grants; there may be joint grant agreements with providers.
- From the funder’s perspective: ensure that you are funding outcomes. Funding should go to successful job placements, number of new placements, and the infrastructure for follow-along services. Negotiation should occur with each provider, with strong expectations around improvement. Some providers may require mandatory technical assistance.
- Provide individuals with choices about working full-time or part-time and ensure that they have access to benefits counseling.
- From an organizational perspective, a major piece in transitioning from workshop to real jobs comes in helping people to believe in themselves and that having a job is a possibility. The organization will have to do a fair amount of work with families too in this regard.
- Stay away from charity – don’t use or promote tax incentives with potential businesses in order to “sell” the idea of hiring a person with a disability.
- Connect with other organizations such a local Chamber of Commerce, Human Resources Boards, Businesses for Social Responsibility, etc.

### Success Stories

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*Vermont’s last sheltered workshop for people with developmental disabilities closed in 2002. Mark did not welcome news of the sheltered workshop closing down. He had been part of the workshop all his adult life. 35 years in the same place, with the same people, and the same routine, had become quite familiar to him. Stability in a sheltered environment was the norm. But the times were changing.*

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*The sheltered workshop was closing in favor of community-based employment and Mark was upset at the change and he made it known. But after a few weeks, Mark entered the agency proudly announcing that he got a job! The employment team knew Mark was fond of music and helped him obtain a job for him at an f.y.e. (for your entertainment) store. His new job was to package and label used DVDs and CDs. When asked if he wished to return to the sheltered workshop he quickly responds, NO. He’s been at his job now for five years now and says, “I’m never late for that job. I’ve been making a lot of money, I’m happy.”*

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*Bob also spent his adult life in the sheltered workshop. He currently volunteers, as his family does not want him to work. He states he’s been “overprotected” and prefers life now, as he is part of the community. One of his favorite activities is co-hosting a cable-access television show called the Advocacy Team where they interview various guests. In speaking of his days after the sheltered workshop he says, “I’m trying to get out of the shadow of over-protectiveness.” Bob’s advice to others is, “Don’t be overlooked. I just hope that those who come after me won’t be a product of discrimination.”*