

Advancing Employment First and **BUILDING FULL LIVES:**



Summary of the 2018 Wisconsin Employment First Conference Discussions





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The passing of Wisconsin's Employment First law in March 2018 was a major milestone in our state's efforts to support people with disabilities to pursue community employment goals. This was a momentous occasion for many advocates, schools and service providers throughout Wisconsin who have engaged community members and policy makers for almost a decade to bring us to this day. In this next chapter, we must strengthen our efforts to ensure our Employment First law lives up to its promise and people have the resources and support they need to pursue their goals.

Employment First doesn't mean 'employment only.' Work is one part of a full community life. People need friendships, hobbies, ways to give back and feel valued. We cannot simply help people into jobs and ignore the rest of their lives. If we do, people might not choose to work in the community or, if they do, they might become isolated and lonely as a result of not having a means to maintain friendships and engage in meaningful activities outside of work. An initiative to provide supports for "meaningful days" or "building full lives" must accompany Employment First policies in order to create the conditions necessary to move people out of facility-based services into competitive integrated employment and community life.

Four years ago, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities, along with interested service providers, recognized this important need and in response came together to launch the Building Full Lives (BFL) initiative to support service provider transformation efforts. The Building Full Lives initiative is just one part of BPDD's Employment First agenda in its 2017-2021 State Plan. By expanding awareness about the importance of integrated employment throughout our state, fostering service provider transformation through training, technical assistance and supporting communities of practice, and empowering and involving people with disabilities and their families in shaping policies and future services, Wisconsin is on the cutting edge of a national change effort.



Transforming services to support meaningful lives in the community has gained considerable interest over the past three years in Wisconsin. In May, stakeholders came together at the 2018 Employment First Conference to learn from one another, share lessons and brainstorm ideas about service transformation. Each session at the conference started with a structured discussion about the topic. Facilitators gathered notes from these discussions. What follows is a summary of the ideas, strategies, and concerns shared by over 300 service providers, funders, self-advocates and families throughout the day.

Having a full life means:

- Being encouraged, respected and listened to
- Having purpose and self-worth
- Having typical life experiences and chances to have new experiences
- Having financial freedom
- Making choices and being self-directed
- Having connections, relationships and true friendships
- Feeling good about the day and having work-life balance
- Spirituality or religion
- Taking risks and being allowed to fail
- Continuing to learn and grow
- Being alone when you want to be
- Physical and emotional wellness



People with disabilities want the same things out of life as everyone: connections, friendship, love, meaningful work, a place to call home, fun, safety, choice and control over one's life. Supporting people to develop their own path in life, be part of their community, and gain independence involves supporting experiences and teaching skills in real life settings, not classrooms, separate places or simulated experiences. Skills and connections emerge after establishing routines and repeatedly engaging in activities over time. Individualization and flexibility is far more possible with small group or time limited one-to-one support, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Service providers can focus on people's hopes and dreams while thoughtfully supporting continued exploration and skill acquisition. This involves person centered planning and supporting individuals to develop their self-determination and self-advocacy skills by:

- Recognizing individuals with disabilities as "persons with agency," meaning having preferences and the ability to make choices
- Not enabling people and allowing for the dignity of risk
- Providing information and education about self-determination and self-advocacy
- Including the person in decisions about their life and learning about their hopes, dreams and preferences

Setting Meaningful Goals

Involves taking the time to ask and understand two key questions:

1. What do you want to do?
2. What do you need to learn?

Learning skills for independence and self-determination are essential components for Supported Decision-Making. Supported Decision Making is a new legal, alternative to guardianship in Wisconsin that allows individuals with disabilities to make choices about their own lives with support from a team of people. Schools and service providers can engage families to understand Supported Decision-Making by:

- Helping them develop high expectations
- Identifying ground rules to include the person
- Prioritizing the way to approach different types of decision-making
- Building upon skills for decision-making slowly and overtime when needed

People with disabilities want to live full lives in their communities but the right resources, supports and services need to be in place to they can do so, including:

- Ways to stay connected to their friends
- Transportation to get where they need and want to go
- More cost-effective housing options and supports for independent living
- Staff that are long lasting, consistent and know how to support them well
- Flexibility and individualized supports
- Inclusive opportunities and welcoming communities



HELPING PEOPLE LEARN ABOUT THEIR OPTIONS

Remember that “exposure precedes interest.” Youth and adults need to be supported to engage in a variety of opportunities and experiences, including tours, job shadows, volunteering and work experiences to explore their interests and build skills. These should start at a young age. Paid work experiences while in high school are essential for employment success as an adult. Providers and schools need to develop strong employer partnerships to provide opportunities for people to learn about and try new jobs.

All stakeholders, especially families and businesses, need more information about inclusion, high expectations, natural supports, and employment for all. This information should be given out at school and CESA events, community fairs, etc. to help raise expectations about what people with disabilities can do.

Find ways to turn challenges into opportunities. Seek out information and resources for transportation, assistive technology and adaptations, and best practices. Be creative! Provide soft skill training, use Discovery and personal inventories. Connect people and families to benefits analysis services to learn how they can work and keep the benefits they need. Provide more information to families about transition so they know what to expect.



SUPPORTING PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY

1. Consider how the experience feels for the person being supported. Is the person comfortable having a community instructor or job coach with them? Be present and mindful when providing support. Strive for consistency among coaching staff. Use electronic access to share job site recordkeeping easily.
2. Set clear expectations with employers and help them understand the role of a job coach before the person is hired and when setting up the training plan to ensure they understand the worker and coach are not a “two for one” deal.
3. Consider other community members’ perceptions about the support being provided. Close proximity supports can reflect on the person with a disability that they are NOT capable. Community members might wonder “what is ‘wrong’ with them to need someone with them so much?” The goal is to help people feel they are part of their workplace and community. The support staff should not be the focus. However, it is important job coaches identify themselves and help coworkers understand their role when a worker is in training. Avoid helicopter job coaching so natural interactions and supports from coworkers can occur.
4. Staff have different support styles - differing expectations, communication and interactions with the people they support. This can be confusing to the person with a disability, to the public, to families and to coworkers. This lack of consistency among support staff can have a negative impact on the person but also on community members, as they may not understand how they are supposed to interact with the person, which will affect natural supports and fading.
5. Personal care in the workplace can be challenging for some individuals with disabilities. Many vocational agencies will not provide personal cares and they may require a home health agency to



come into the jobsite. Many home health agency staff are not trained to provide cares in a workplace. Vocational agencies play a critical role in addressing this issue by training job coach staff to provide personal care when needed, helping home health agencies understand how to provide care in the workplace, or learn more about the adaptations people can use in order to meet their personal care needs more independently in the community.

6. Agencies struggle to adequately train staff due to high turnover rates and covering schedules due to staff vacancies. Yet, to provide effective supports, agencies must carve out time and resources to help staff learn how to teach skills using systematic instruction vs. allowing staff to default to the caregiver approach of doing things for people. While it may be quicker or easier to do tasks for someone, this takes away the opportunity for them to learn and gain independence. Agencies should recruit staff who want to be teachers, not caregivers.



RESPONDING TO STATE AND FEDERAL POLICY CHANGES

Stakeholders in Wisconsin are keeping up with federal law changes through emails, webinars, meetings and attending professional conferences with National Rehabilitation Association, Wisconsin APSE, Wisconsin Board for People with Disabilities, Disability Service Provider Network, Wisconsin Rehabilitation Council, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Policy Academy meetings, as well as other sources such as Public Radio International and Wisconsin Public Radio.

Internally, service providers are supporting their staff to understand these changes through regular meetings, encouraging open dialog and participation in meetings with DVR, scheduling time to accompany people into the community, orienting production center staff on community service coordinator duties, and using visuals (such as TV screens in the hallways) to show people working and doing other meaningful activities in the community.

Service providers have been using emails, newsletters, letters and calls to help individuals and families understand the changes. Some have conducted surveys to determine the goals and types of services and supports individuals and families want. Many use six-month prevocational service review meetings to have a two-way dialogue about the changes and new opportunities.

Since enactment of WIOA, providers recognize there is a more unified plan at the state-level that has been helping to drive change. And as a result, more providers are taking action to change their services for youth. Transition teams are more collaborative and creative during IEP meetings and the transition process. Teams have higher expectations for youth and more youth are leading their meetings and transition experiences. School transition programs are adopting more innovative approaches, locating programs off site in apartments or community settings, running cafes and other businesses. Businesses and the community at large seem more aware and interested in hiring youth with disabilities.

Shared Concerns

Service providers and funders share similar concerns about the new policies and how these will impact services. Some of their biggest concerns are:

- Having adequate financial resources to sustain services to support people in the community
- Being planful and assuring system-wide and systematic transformation
- Meeting people's transportation needs in the community
- Continuing to have positive, trusting and transparent relationships between funders and providers
- Implementing strategies to achieve program coherence across the state

However, some communities in Wisconsin are still struggling to make positive changes. Confusion and misinterpretation of guidance about the changes and lack of information and outreach to youth and families about options for community involvement and Competitive Integrated Employment has led to youth transitioning into facility-based day service programs, especially youth with significant disabilities. Long-term care funding hasn't aligned with the value proposition of WIOA and the HCBS settings rule, resulting in inadequate funding for service providers to launch or expand community-based services for employment skill development and building full lives.



Policies stakeholders would like to see changed to help people be more successful in Competitive Integrated Employment include:

- Better incentives for employers to hire people with disabilities
- Better incentives for people with disabilities to be employed and create better benefit safeguards for people who are working
- Revised job development reimbursement models with DVR, taking into better account the length and amount of time it takes to find good job matches
- More collaboration within the One-Stop Job Centers (i.e. DVR, benefits analysis, etc.)
- Shortened DVR timelines
- Differentiated MCO capitated rates between members with physical disabilities, members with intellectual/developmental disabilities and frail elders
- DVR vendors allowed to provide transportation to job shadows and job interviews
- Easier methods for employment service providers to become transportation providers as well
- Better access to Work Incentives Benefits Counseling early (even before looking for work) to reduce fear and increase understanding about impacts of earned income
- Policies aimed at improving coordination to maintain employment, especially after DVR services have ended

TRANSFORMING SERVICES IN WISCONSIN

Service providers have been responding to changes in State and Federal policies by:

- Having a clear vision of the direction they want to go
- Developing clear and measurable goals
- Adjusting and realigning their services to create a focus on community first
- Negotiating contracts and rates before launching or expanding new services
- Being thoughtful and leaving no one behind in the change process
- Taking inventory along the way to change
- Being creative
- Decreasing the number of hours people receive facility-based prevocational services
- Advocating for improvements to policies and practices
- Participating in BPDD's Building Full Lives service transformation initiative
- Providing training to staff; strengthening local partnerships
- Improving communication to the people and families they support
- Helping people understand the 'why' and philosophy behind the changes

Specific service transformation strategies they've been using include:

- Starting and expanding small group community day services to get people outside the building and exposed to new opportunities each week
- Establishing community-based senior services
- Building capacity to support more people in jobs by working with employers to reduce job coaching for people who have been on the job a long time
- Establishing natural supports from the beginning when someone starts a job
- Using community-based prevocational services (job shadows, volunteering, soft skill instruction, etc.) to bridge to services with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
- A lot of trial and error!

Service providers are reallocating resources to expand community-based services in many ways, including:

- Shifting from fee for services to outcome-based services
- Revamping the agency's mission to focus on CIE and investing in CIE by hiring more staff to increase capacity to support people in community jobs
- Adding staff to community-based services rather than moving existing staff into those new roles
- Shifting existing staff from internal to external services
- Cross training staff to provide CIE services and to float as needed
- Eliminating internal case management services
- Seeking grant opportunities to help address gaps while transforming services
- Using foundation and donated funds to cover resource gap during service transformation

Understanding the impact of community-based services:

Are we able to document people's progress toward attaining goals? Do we keep in mind some people will take longer to reach their goals?

Are we obtaining feedback from individuals and their families?

Are individuals and their teams motivated, participating and collaborating?

Are schools, funders and service providers effectively and consistently collaborating at the local level?

Are funders and providers aligned with people's plans and goals?

Partnerships between funders and service providers have been inconsistent across the state. Many find they share similar philosophies about providing community-based services but translating these shared values into contracts that allow for flexibility and individualization and provide incentives for providing services in the community has been slow in development. Once contracts are changed, education within the MCO is needed to help care managers understand the new service models. Proactive service providers have found backing-up rate negotiations with hard data, especially when transportation is involved, to be an effective way to negotiate rates with MCOs.

PARTNERING & COLLABORATION

All partners can increase collaboration to understand each other's programs and services and work through barriers to align systems at the local level. Service providers can reach out to schools who have

under-resourced transition programs to provide services to youth who have DVR support; Schools can provide more information to youth about employment earlier and more often, so families have higher expectations; and MCOs can reach out to providers to pilot and adequately fund more community-based services.

Long-term care programs, schools, DVR and service providers need a more intentional process for collaboration. An interagency 'policy and practice roadmap' coupled with common/shared forms and requiring discussions about responsibilities, timelines, goals, services and informed choice would create a clearer process to achieve CIE outcomes. Other strategies recommended by conference attendees include:

- Invite DVR to IEP meetings earlier
- Focus more on clear, measurable outcomes rather than process
- Improve collaboration between schools and DVR to provide job shadows and work experiences
- Make more resources available to teachers, youth, families, counselors, service providers, etc.
- Establish better methods for “hand-offs” and exchange of information between state agency partners

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES TOGETHER

Providing services in the community presents a number of new challenges for service providers including:

Transportation – people are no longer transported to and from one building every day. Getting around the community is an essential part of living a full life.

Parents – some parents are fearful or skeptical of the changes. Service providers are the front line of communication with families. They need more resources and support to communicate changes and new opportunities to families.

Time management – staff must learn to work smarter and more efficiently when supporting people in the community, especially if the goal is to increase independence and decrease support.

Buy-in and Referrals – many service providers are eager to launch or expand new community-based services but referrals are not forthcoming, or participants are being diverted to other traditional service agencies. Service providers need better commitment from funders to promote and authorize values-based services.

Funding – community-based services are not feasible at the high staff-to-participant ratios currently being authorized in facility-based service contracts. Smaller ratios and adequate rates are necessary to pay staff enough to provide high quality community-based services.



Grouping and Scheduling – meaningful small group community services are much more complex than serving large groups of people in buildings. People need to be grouped by interests and goals. The community activities they engage in need to provide meaningful opportunities to build skills and develop relationships.

Hiring, Training and Managing Staff – the competencies necessary to support skill building and connecting in the community are vastly different from caregiving or supervising production work. Supervising and retaining staff in the community, rather than in a building, also presents a different set of challenges.

Managing Change – participants, families and staff respond to change differently, and some people are very fearful of change. Service providers need better information and strategies to be effective in addressing these fears.

Service providers rely on a number of different funding sources including Managed Care Organizations, IRIS funds, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, United Way funds, small grants, private donations and foundation contributions, private pay, school district funds, and Ticket to Work revenue. Typically, the agency director develops the budget with input from business managers, after which the board reviews and approves the budget. To forecast the budget, they look at year to year trends and talk with their funders to understand the current market and predict the number of referrals they might receive. Predicting budgets has become challenging in this time of change, especially for providers who rely on value-added outcome-based funding rather than hourly fee for service models. Low wages paired with historically low unemployment rates have resulted in high turnover and position vacancies. Providers feel squeezed between increasing benefit expenses and unstable or decreasing service revenue. Many report experiencing mixed signals from their funders – even within the same area/office; being asked to develop new, more costly community-based service lines but finding care managers diverting people to other facility-based services or significantly reducing services.

In order to evaluate the impact of Employment First policies, state agencies should improve their data sharing capabilities and increase their data collection methods. Beyond the simply looking at the percentage of individuals with disabilities working in the community, the following factors could be helpful in determining if Wisconsin’s Employment First Policies are having a positive impact:

- Timeframe to reach CIE goal. Has this timeline improved?
- Quality of Life Indicators both pre and post-employment - including time out of one’s residence in the community and health improvements.
- Correlation between the number of people receiving supported employment services and number receiving prevocational services. Are prevocational services in fact decreasing as supported employment services increase?
- Feedback from families about transition and employment planning – conducting exit interviews after DVR case closures.
- Cost analysis of services and Medicaid costs. Are we seeing a reduction in Medicaid cost when people are working and spending more time in the community? How do costs vary based on the complexity of peoples’ needs?



Many opportunities are available to support efforts to increase competitive integrated employment at both the grass roots and service system level, including:

Wisconsin Employment First Partner Grants support individuals/organizations interested in engaging in community outreach activities in local communities that lead to increased community, integrated employment opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Applications will be available in Summer 2019. More information can be found at: <https://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/employment-projects/>

Sparks Grants support local grassroots groups to make changes in their communities that result in a positive impact on the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). Applications will be available in Summer 2019. More Information can be found at: <https://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/sparks-grants/>

Partners In Policymaking is a six-session advocacy and systems change training program designed to develop a group of future leaders across the state, who are able to work with legislators and communities on policies and initiatives that will support the full participation and inclusion of people with developmental disabilities in all aspects of life. More information can be found at: <http://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/partners-in-policymaking/>

Building Full Lives Grants provide technical assistance and coaching for service providers interested in service transformation. Applications will be available Fall 2018. More information can be found at: <https://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/employment-projects/>

Partners with Business Grants provide technical assistance and coaching for organizations interested in implementing the Partners with Business model of employment supports. This is a creative way to support workers with disabilities to achieve long-term success on the job by using a combination of natural and formal supports, both of which are provided by the employer. Applications will be available in early Spring 2019.

To receive updates on upcoming opportunities, visit <http://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/contact/> to sign up for BPDD's newsletter and policy alerts.

**Save the date for the next
Wisconsin Employment First Conference!
May 15, 2019 at
the Kalahari in Wisconsin Dells**

Thank you 2018 Employment First Conference Sponsors!



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