

Partners with Business Annual Report to the Legislature, July 2020 – June 2021

The Wisconsin Legislature established the Partners with Business initiative to assist businesses interested in hiring and employing people with disabilities using an evidenced based coaching model. During the past state fiscal year, Partners with Business provided grant funds and coaching to ten grantees.¹

According to a report published by the Kessler Foundation, employment rates for people with disabilities fell by 20% due to the pandemic, while rates for workers without disabilities fell by 14%.² The impacts of COVID were even greater on people with disabilities in Wisconsin's Medicaid funded long-term care programs. Wisconsin Department of Health Services data indicates approximately 50% of people in long-term care lost jobs during the pandemic.



Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the Partners with Business initiative was able to demonstrate cost savings in Medicaid funded job coaching support through stronger partnerships with employers, influence positive systems change, and develop best practice guides for employers and employment service providers.

Cost Savings through Stronger Partnerships with Employers

The initiative collected employment data from 9 participants with disabilities to determine the impact on Medicaid savings when service providers invest in creating stronger partnerships with employers.

| Before Partners with Business | | After Partners with Business | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Average Hours per Week Employee with a Disability Received Medicaid Funded Job Coaching Support | Average Annual Cost to Medicaid System to Support this Person on the Job | Average Hours per Week Employee with a Disability Received Medicaid Funded Job Coaching Support | Average Annual Cost to Medicaid System to Support this Person on the Job |
| 6.8 hours/week | \$8,840 | 4.6 hours/week | \$5,980 |

The Partners with Business investment resulted in a 32% reduction in the number of Medicaid funded job coaching support hours. This saved the Medicaid system on average \$2,860 annually per person or about \$25,740 total per year for the 9 participants with disabilities in this year's Partners with Business cohort.

¹ Inclusa, Lakeland Care District, Headwaters, Goodwill of North Central Wisconsin, Lakeside Packaging Plus, Aspiro, Rangan SourceAble, Wisconsin Association of People Supporting Employment First (WI APSE), Ascend Services and Disability:IN Wisconsin.

² Kessler Foundation. (May 20, 2020). May 2020 Special Report: Workers with Disabilities in the COVID-19 Economy. <https://kesslerfoundation.org/press-release/may-2020-special-report-workers-disabilities-covideconomy>

Systems Change: DVR Promotes Partners with Business in response to COVID-19

The Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) decided to promote Partners with Business strategies so that more employees with disabilities could be supported by co-workers. This decreases the need for outside job coaches to come into the business to provide support. It also provides an incentive to businesses to rely less on outside job coaches and utilize a more cost-effective model for supporting workers with disabilities on the job. Three businesses have taken advantage of this new option, resulting in 6.5% savings for DVR funded workplace supports. This cost savings will continue to increase over time as the individuals working with these businesses transition from DVR funded support to Medicaid funded supports in the long-term care system.

Partners with Business Capacity Building:



Ensure good job matches between employers and job seekers with disabilities;



Empower employers to directly train and supervise their employees with disabilities;



Cultivate workplace inclusion and natural supports;



Maximize independence on the job for workers with disabilities; and



Reimburse employers for the costs of providing formal support above and beyond the “natural supports” typically found in the workplace to their employees with disabilities, rather than relying on outside job coaches provided by a vocational agency.

Partnership with Disability:IN Wisconsin to Create Best Practice Guide for Employers

Many large businesses and corporations want to diversify their staff and create an inclusive culture. However, many do not know where to start. To support interested businesses in their efforts, the Partners with Business initiative partnered with Disability:IN Wisconsin to develop a best practice guide for employers on recruiting, hiring and supporting workers with disabilities.

Disability:IN Wisconsin, a business-to-business association, is a state chapter of the United States Disability:IN. Disability:IN Wisconsin offers participating employers resources for recruiting candidates with disabilities, information on disability issues/topics, recognition for best disability employment practices, and exposure to an untapped market for goods and services. This newly developed guide will be distributed widely throughout Wisconsin.

Partnership with Wisconsin APSE to Create Best Practice Guide for Service Providers

When employment service professionals use best practices to support people with disabilities on the job, there are reductions in Medicaid spending. To increase the number of professionals using these best practices, the Partners with Business initiative partnered with APSE (or Association for People Supporting Employment First), a national and state membership organization that focuses exclusively on improving and advancing integrated employment opportunities, outcomes, and services for people with disabilities. WI APSE developed a best practice guide for agencies that provide employment services and supports to people with disabilities. The newly developed guide will be distributed widely to employment service providers throughout Wisconsin.

Partnership with Rangam SourceAble

A private sector business, Rangam, joined the Partners with Business initiative this year to support more large businesses to hire people with disabilities. Rangam is an international staffing agency that has developed a service called SourceAble. SourceAble leverages the latest technologies, workforce expertise, and strong ties to the disability community to deliver an integrated solution for attracting and hiring qualified talent with unique abilities. Through innovation and collaboration, SourceAble helps employers build a culture of inclusion, create a better brand, and drive sustainable results.

With support from the Partners with Business initiative, Rangam presented its SourceAble service to four businesses and is moving forward with Cargill to expand their efforts to hire people with disabilities. For more information about SourceAble, visit: <https://www.sourceabled.com/>

Partners with Business Success Story

Mitchell started his job as a laundry attendant at Fox Hills Resort in Mishicot, WI in March 2021. Mitchell worked with an Employment Specialist named Logan from Ascend Services to find his job. Because Logan made the extra time and effort to find the right job match, Mitchell caught onto the job quickly. He also has a coworker, Linda, who teamed up with him through his shift. With Linda's support, Ascend Services was able to fade back Mitchell's publicly funded job coaching support significantly.

Mitchell is a very social 22-year-old powerlifter who has a goal to move out into his own apartment soon. "We like him a lot. He fits right in," says Mitchell's boss, Alissa, who spoke about her experiences with Mitchell at a Legislative Mixer event about employing people with disabilities hosted by Ascend Services in August 2021. Mitchell plans to pick up more hours at work so he can start saving for his future apartment.

For more information about Partners with Business visit: <https://wi-bpdd.org/index.php/partners-with-business/>

**“We like him a lot.
He fits right in.”**

Mitchell's boss, Alissa



Mitchell, his coworker Linda and his Employment Specialist, Logan, at Mitchell's job