



OREGON
COUNCIL ON
DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES

**Policy Statement
Revised in August 2002
by Oregon Council on
Developmental Disabilities**

Employment

Summary of the Issue:

The majority of Oregonians with developmental disabilities are under employed or unemployed despite the demonstrated ability of individuals to become valued employees. Even when additional resources have been available, community employment opportunities and supports have not been extended to many persons who could benefit.

Position:

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes that people with developmental disabilities can and should have the opportunity to work, earn enough to support themselves, and have disposable income to meet their personal needs. Persons with developmental disabilities are an important and largely untapped employment resource. With the appropriate information, education, training, technology and support, the vast majority of persons can work in community settings. But the quality and quantity of employment options for people with developmental disabilities in Oregon must be improved.

The Council believes that quality outcomes for employment of Oregonians with developmental disabilities include:

- employment and the supports to make it successful;
- choice of employment;
- community inclusion, meaningful wages, benefits, advancement, and involvement with co-workers;

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes strong government and business partnerships are necessary to improve the employment issues of all people with disabilities. Broad inter-agency, disability, and business coalitions will increase

opportunity for state and federal reforms to promote gainful employment for individuals with disabilities.

The DD Council believes that to improve outcomes for employment state and local policy makers must assure a wide array of options and supports that meet the needs of consumers and their families. To achieve this:

- education programs must prepare students from middle school onward for employment in community settings¹;
- training and technical assistance must be provided to people helping individuals reach their employment goals;
- individuals with developmental disabilities and families must be assisted to see that real employment is an achievable goal;
- partnerships with the business community must be strengthened and be inclusive of persons with developmental disabilities.

Background:

Employment offers all people, with or without disabilities, access to other community members, a path out of poverty, independence from the service system, and activity that makes one feel valued. Workers with developmental disabilities report satisfaction with “having their own money to spend”, “doing important jobs”; “being independent”, and “making new friends”².

The development of employment has also proven to be a cost-effective means of supporting people with developmental disabilities. Persons with disabilities who work contribute to the tax base, use fewer support services, and are less dependent upon Social Security,³ and other public funds.

Oregon was a national leader in supported employment in the late 1980’s, with public policy that promoted integrated jobs. At the same time, with the assistance of a major federal grant, 50% of persons with developmental disabilities moved from segregated to integrated employment. In recent years, however, there has been an increased use of “alternatives to employment” activities with over 25% of the population in Alternative To Employment programs. During this time, a lack of focus on integrated employment

¹ See High School Transition Policy Statement, Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities

² Consumer Satisfaction Survey Focus Groups, Oregon Supported Employment Expansion Project, September 1995.

³ “Are Individuals with Severe Mental Retardation and Multiple Disabilities Cost-Efficient to Serve Via Supported Employment Programs?”, by Robert Evert Cimera; Journal of Mental Retardation, Vol.36, No.4, 280-292, August 1998

outcomes has resulted in only 28% of individuals with developmental disabilities employed in supported employment in community based settings and over 44% in sheltered employment .⁴ Previous gains in supported employment were lost as some persons moved back to sheltered workshops when job loss occurred, while other individuals did not move out of sheltered workshops into community employment even though they had competitive work skills.

Educators, service professionals, families and individuals frequently lack information and examples of employment that demonstrate the range of possibilities in their community. Based on a limited vision of employment options for people with developmental disabilities, families and other professionals sometimes recommend activities that limit rather than expand an individual's opportunity for productivity, integration, independence, and inclusion.

The issue of employment for people with disabilities is extremely complex. Finding a job to match skills and interests, planning supports for job success over time, addressing specific concerns of employers, workers and families, and identifying essential supports relating to housing and transportation is a monumental series of tasks. State and federal disability funding and policies are often confusing and conflicting. They may contain disincentives to employment despite recent efforts to allow individuals to retain critical health care and attendant supports. Increased capacity, knowledge, and creativity is essential for organizations and individuals helping people reach employment goals. Strategies specific to rural and other unique areas must be identified and implemented.

Increased resources available through the Staley Settlement will mean that thousands of individuals will now be able to access employment supports. Currently, however, there are too few people available with the skills and knowledge to:

- identify and develop jobs
- effectively utilize federal and state employment incentives
- work with public and private partners
- creatively support individuals with developmental disabilities and their employers.

In addition to the issues related to accessing employment, growing numbers of individuals with developmental disabilities are reaching retirement age and there are few retirement options currently available.

It is essential that the advocacy community continue to monitor the state's progress in improving employment services. Periodic assessments, with recommendations, should be

⁴ Employment Outcomes Systems Report;2002

made and widely distributed. With additional resources now available to thousands who have been waiting for services, providing quality employment options for individuals with developmental disabilities must become a high priority.

Possible Future Activities:

- Participate in broad disability coalitions at the national and state level to strengthen developmental disability representation in employment issues.
- Work to increase general public awareness and family knowledge of strategies for quality employment of individuals with developmental disabilities.
- Advocate for representation from the developmental disabilities community in strategic planning for employment and education. Targeted activities include the Department of Human Services Employment Initiative and the Department of Education transition initiatives.
- Support legislation identified by the Developmental Disabilities Coalition as important to the employment of persons with developmental and or other disabilities.
- Support Oregon Department of Education and interagency efforts to improve high school transition services and link school transition services to meaningful employment outcomes.
- Advocate with the DHS, Services to Seniors and People with Disabilities for improved employment outcomes.
- Support training and technical assistance to families, individuals with developmental disabilities, and professionals, that will increase the vision, creativity, capacity, and options for real employment.
- Encourage linkages between agencies like Vocational Rehabilitation and services for people with developmental disabilities at the local level.

