State Agency Promising Practice

TOPIC: Training & Technical Assistance

Washington: Centering the Value of Community Inclusion in Employment Trainings

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Description

Washington is a good example of a state that helps people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) get competitive integrated employment (CIE).

Washington's Developmental Disabilities Community Services (DDCS) and Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) have worked together for many years to support people with IDD get competitive integrated employment (CIE). Both agencies share a commitment to training. DDCS and DVR help make sure that employment professionals, including community rehabilitation providers (CRPs), learn the skills they need to provide the best possible employment services.

Background

In the late 1970s, Washington introduced a way of helping people with IDD get better jobs called the Programs Analysis of Services Systems Model (PASS). PASS made sure that service systems, like IDD agencies and VR agencies, understood the value of community inclusion.

In Washington, this meant using a new training approach to help employment providers build skills. The new approach focused on helping these providers learn specifically about CIE and how it was important for people with IDD. The trainings included stories about people who had gotten CIE. Real people with IDD in Washington shared about what it was like to have a good job, and how that affected their lives. Many employment service providers went to these trainings. The trainings shaped a new way of thinking about employment for many people who became leaders in employment. The employment providers partnered with the state and county government, CRPs, and disability advocates in their communities. For the next 40 years, these partners worked together to make sure the trainings for employment professionals included the value of community inclusion.

What is Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)?

When a person with IDD has a competitive integrated job, it means they have a full-time or part-time job in the community with people who don't have disabilities. It also means:

- they get paid as much as people without disabilities who have similar job duties, training, and experience
- they get similar benefits as people without disabilities who have the same job duties, training, and experience
- they get the same opportunities for promotions as people without disabilities who have the same job duties, training, and experience

Implementation

Trainings that Include Community Values

Community partners have helped support DVR and DDCS's work. These partners include self-advocates and county-level administrative agencies, who have helped guide employment services. In the 1980s, community partners came

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together to decide on a set of values that now shape the agencies' services. These values are called "CHIRPS":

- Competence
- Health & Safety
- Inclusion
- Relationships
- Status & Respect

Washington includes the CHIRPS values in the entire statewide training process. One administrator shared about how these values have become a longstanding part of the culture in Washington, noting:

> ***I don't even remember when those were put together, but I have always been amazed at how these guiding values that were written so long ago are so relevant, even today.... And the one thing about those values is for employment, it meets all those things. You can't say that about any other service.***

One of Washington's strengths is that all the partners agree about these values. The state agency staff, county staff, and other partners all care about the CHIRPS values, so they prioritize these values in the employment services trainings.

When they hire new staff, DDCS and DVR ask the new staff, "what does your work mean to you?" This question helps the new staff think about what work means for the people they support as well. By answering this question, new staff consider the value of community:

> ***I'd say around the values piece, that those are trained in everywhere and in what we do. We really emphasize those because literally, in times of change, what doesn't move are your values. And so, we've been building off those values for almost four decades now. ... When we do leadership development, or we do onboarding, staff training sorts of things, the values are right there so people can relate to them. If you think about just learning these to start with, and you just talk about your own job, you just start with, 'what does work mean to me?' And you can tell your own story about what work does for you. It really embeds it in you, and you realize: This is what my job is; it's to afford this for somebody else...***

Another administrator explained, "On the training side, it's our job to embed that culture and those values, giving people a strong foundation for their work.... Training is not just about skill development—it's about building a movement."

Including these values in trainings helps create a shared understanding and a shared commitment to providing good employment services.

Statewide Consistency in Training

DVR and DDCS have both contracted with Washington Initiative for Supported Employment (WISE) for 35 years. WISE provides high-quality training and technical assistance about employment.

WISE makes sure they stay up to date about what CRPs need to know about employment services. WISE knows all the employment certification course CRPs need to take, and they share any new resources and information CRPs need to have. WISE delivers the training and supports statewide so that everyone gets the same training and learns the same information. This helps make sure that the employment services staff provide are consistent across Washington. As an administrator shared, "I think one of the things that works really well is that we use WISE for both training and support. This ensures that everyone has the same training provider, the same expectations, and the same delivery of information."

Another administrator spoke about how the longstanding partnership between DDCS, DVR, and WISE has created a strong foundation statewide: "To have access to skilled facilitators from WISE that know both systems gives us an amazing jump start that we could not have done if we weren't all collaborating."

WISE also knows that all communities are different, so WISE allows partners to tailor training for each community. An administrator from WISE noted:

> ***Our state's very diverse, as many states are. And being able to administer those programs on the local level really allows for creativity and innovation and the flexibility DDCS gives our counties...is fabulous. It allows them to really be themselves and create an identity for their community members. It also is a wrestling match sometimes, because individuality does not breed uniformity, right? And state structures really love uniformity. But the local structure allows for the creativity to meet individual needs.***

Including the Voices of People with Disabilities and their Family Members

One reason the trainings are successful is because people with disabilities and their family members helped create and deliver the trainings. Leaders from Washington believe it is important to make sure people with IDD and their families have the opportunity to share their stories, and that those stories are included in trainings. One administrator noted:

> ***Families love to listen to other families and friends. I remember when we still had sheltered workshops, and people would say, 'Oh, I can't work out in the community.' Then someone would get a job in the community and share their experience with friends, and it just would catch like wildfire. And then, people began to realize that everyone can do this.***

Another administrator agreed that storytelling is a powerful part of technical assistance and training. When people with disabilities who have experience with employment share their stories, it can help someone who is unsure about working in the community feel more comfortable and curious.

What can other states do to achieve Washington's success? One administrator shared, "I think they will get there even faster than we did if they start with that [including people with lived experience]." Another leader added:

> ***A connection to self- advocates and parent advocates and even support for those groups that comes through government funding is very different in Washington compared to other states, and I think that it is a very defining thing when you're thinking about success; you have to have the voice of people that are receiving services and the family members that are connected to them.***

Creating High Standards for Training

Washington staff meets federal regulations and policies. The state also has a high standard for training across DDCS and DVR. For example, all staff who provide services within the DVR CRP Contract must complete DVR's 13 core modules of Supported Employment Trainings developed by WISE.

Staff who work at the CRP have 12 months to complete the training. All new staff have 90 days from their hire date to complete the training. The 13 modules include information about:

- business perspectives
- collaboration
- negotiation
- customer rights
- developmental disabilities services and their history
- mental health
- service delivery outcomes
- benefits planning
- transition from school to work

Staff can work through the training modules at their own pace. Each module has presentations and transcripts. CRPs must keep records showing that all of their employees completed the training. DVR gives all staff a training completion certificate template to keep for their records. If CRPs want to learn more, they can take optional training modules about job placement, job retention, trial work experience, and customized employment.

DDCS providers must have at least one staff person who has at least two years of experience providing the employment services the agency will provide to DDCS clients. If at least one staff does not have these two years of experience, they must have at least one year of experience and other prerequisites. These prerequisites are at least one of the following:

- an Employment Professional Certificate from Highline Community College
- completion of the Wise Online Academy (WOA)
- Certification as a Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) from the Employment Support Professional Certification Council (ESPCC)

Impact

CRP staff, leadership, and other state agency staff all share the values of community and CIE. These training requirements helped create a good foundation for consistent, high-quality employment training across the state. As a training provider, WISE understands that each part of the state has unique needs, too. WISE relies on each organization to understand the unique needs of their community and the people they serve.

Suggestions for Replication

Create values that will guide the work. Washington's experience shows how important it is to make sure the value of community inclusion is part of their training, staff hiring, and day-to-day work. Employment professionals in Washington have the knowledge, skills, confidence, and sense of purpose. Things often change, but having consistent values helps people feel stable and safe. This includes staff and the people with IDD who they serve.

Work with key partners, self-advocates, and families to create a shared set of values. This shared values can be a foundation for training. They can help create a person-centered culture among employment providers.

Always include people with disabilities when creating training. The principle of "nothing about us without us" also applies to training and technical assistance. People with disabilities can help create more meaningful trainings. Including people with disabilities helps make sure supports and services meet the true needs of the communities you serve.

Make sure training and technical assistance are consistent. Working with a single training provider like WISE can help make sure everyone receives the same information across the state.. This means staff can all share the same expectations and experience a consistent training.

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The contents of this report were developed under a grant from the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR grant #90IFRE0058). NIDILRR is a Center within the Administration for Community Living (ACL), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents of this report do not necessarily represent the policy of NIDILRR, ACL, or HHS, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

Suggested citation: Bose, J., Kamua, E., Powers, B., & Winsor, J., (2026). Washington: Centering the Value of Community Inclusion in Employment Trainings. [State Agency Promising Practice Series]. University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

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Year of publication: 2026