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Colorado's Ad Hoc Committee on Employment and Community Participation

By:

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The Ad Hoc Committee on Employment and Community Participation began meeting in the winter of 2004 in an effort to promote integrated employment opportunities for people with disabilities in Colorado. The committee was comprised of representatives from the Division for Developmental Disabilities (DDD) administration; the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; local Community Centered Boards (private nonprofit organizations responsible for authorizing services); advocacy groups; and self-advocates, parents, and service providers.

Implementation

A statewide review of the Colorado developmental disabilities service system in 2002 and the publication of *Issue Paper 2003* (see below) lead the DDD to develop a strategic plan to address concerns related to all areas of service provision. A component of the strategic plan focused upon the creation of a number of ad hoc committees, including a committee to focus on employment and community participation.

The need for a committee to address employment services was spurred by a decrease in the number of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) participating in integrated employment between the mid 1990s and 2001. Changes in employment outcomes were especially troubling to stakeholders in light of substantial increases in the number of people served in community-based non-work programs. Stakeholders expressed concern that that many individuals were discounting their potential for integrated employment in favor of community-based non-work activities.

The Ad Hoc Committee on Employment and Community Participation began meeting in the winter of 2004 and in June 2005 released its *Final Report on Employment and Community Participation Recommendations* (see below). The report described the vision and mission of the Committee: 1) raising the priority for integrated employment, 2) ensuring equality of opportunity for all individuals to participate in paid community employment, and 3) promoting informed self-determined employment choices.

Development of a consensus definition. A key piece of the group's work was to develop a consensus definition of "community employment." This definition provided the group and others concerned with a benchmark by which to judge integrated employment services and outcomes.

Emphasis on increasing informed, self-determined choice. Self-determination and informed choice has been an important theme among the group. There was a concern that the growth of community-based non-work services was due in part to the lack of informed choice among individuals. The consensus definition of community employment specifically stated that person-centered planning should be evident in the process of deciding to pursue employment services, and that individuals should receive experience and information to facilitate choice-making. Increasing the support and opportunity for community employment exploration is one way to ensure greater access to real choice.

Impact

The Ad Hoc Committee recommended the following suggestions as ways to improve Colorado's employment outcomes:

1. Strengthen guidelines for the number of people participating in integrated employment, the collection of employment data, and informed choice.
2. Increase the dissemination of good employment outcomes and best practices.
3. Increase DDD partnership with stakeholders—specifically the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, school systems, and the business community—to promote integrated employment.
4. Identify additional sources to fund integrated employment initiatives and increase the current reimbursement rates for integrated employment.
5. Create small work groups to include those not on the original committee in order to increase grassroots participation from a wide range of stakeholders in the transformation of DDD policy and practice.

DDD has made changes to its integrated employment system based upon the work of the Ad Hoc Committee. DDD's informed consent process now requires that integrated supported employment be addressed during the development of individual service plans and again annually at the renewal of each plan. Colorado requires that this conversation be documented. DDD has also created a Standing Employment Committee consisting of representatives of various system players. This committee meets quarterly and is charged with reviewing DDD's efforts to implement the Ad Hoc Committee recommendations.

Suggestions for Replication

- Develop a shared vision and mission for integrated employment by including a full range of stakeholders
- Make specific recommendations for improving integrated employment practice
- Designate who will be responsible for implementing the committee recommendations

References

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