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Oklahoma: Contracting with Industry for the Provision of Job Coaching Supports

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Contracts with Industry, implemented in the 1990s as the Natural Supports Initiative, is a program option that allows the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OKDHS) Developmental Disabilities Services Division (DDSD) to contract directly with businesses to provide job coaching supports that become a part of the natural workplace. Individuals participating in this program are employed by a business and are paid minimum wage or better. The name change to Contracts with Industry was an effort to distinguish the program from other DDSD employment options that involve employment service providers and paid job coaches.

Implementation

The goal of the Contracts with Industry program is to enable individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities (ID/DD) to become trained and familiar enough with their work that they can remain employed without the need for paid job supports. Through the program, the DDSD contracts with a business to provide job coaching services. Under this contract, employers designate an existing employee to complete DDSD-provided job coach training and serve as a job coach. Individuals receive these job-coaching services during their first six months of employment. Employers are reimbursed for this service at the individual-placement-in-job-coaching rate, which is based on the number of hours the individual works. After those first six months, the contract is reduced to a lower stabilization rate based on job support intervention not exceeding 20 percent of the job coaching recipient's total work hours. Reimbursement for stabilization services is still based on the number of hours the individual works, extendable up to 12 months per job. Throughout the length of a contract, per funding requirements and with the employer's knowledge, OKDHS performs oversight, just as they do in other employment arrangements.

The program also allows employment providers to subcontract with businesses to provide job coaching services. To qualify, the subcontract must be reviewed and accepted by the personal support team, including the case manager and other members designated by the individual, and the individual or his or her legal guardian prior to its execution. These subcontracts are approved by OKDHS when it is determined that the individual's needs are best met by supports that supplement those provided by industry employees. Subcontracts are administered by the approved employment providers using the same protocol followed by contracts administered directly by DDSD.

Impact

During the past three years, there have been 23 businesses with three-year contracts across the state participating in the Contracts with Industry program. Twenty-five individuals have been served through the contracts. The program is especially beneficial in rural regions of the state, where there are fewer employment providers to provide support on the job.

A highlight of the program is that it allows people to find and sometimes create jobs in places where they do business or volunteer, as was the case for an individual who was promoted from a volunteer position at a local thrift shop to a paid full-time position when the thrift shop contracted with DDS to hire and pay him for his work.

Suggestions for Replication:

- It may be more efficient to have supports provided directly by a business, particularly if the support need is intermittent. Consider ways that contracting with a business can expand support options for individuals.
- DDS has actively engaged the private sector in the employment process. The two entities now share responsibility with the employment provider and the individual in achieving success.
- Think carefully about developing funding mechanisms that encourage sustained supports. The Contracts with Industry model facilitates relationship-building between the employer, co-workers, and the employee as part of a natural employment course.

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