



INSTITUTE FOR  
COMMUNITY  
INCLUSION

# Conversion to Integrated Employment: Case Studies of Organizational Change

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Community Enterprises

Life Skills Foundation

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MetroWest Human Services

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*Volume II*

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edited by

Sheila Lynch Fesko  
John Butterworth

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August 1999

**Conversion to Integrated Employment:  
Case Studies of Organizational Change  
Volume 2**



***Institute for Community Inclusion/UAP***

***Edited by:***

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***August 1999***



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*The Institute for Community Inclusion/UAP is an organization which advocates for the right of all people with disabilities to be full participants in mainstream society. In addition to directly assisting people with disabilities and their families, ICI conducts training, technical assistance, and research activities. ICI is also involved in special projects focused on ensuring personal choice, self-determination, and social and economic justice for people with disabilities.*





# Conversion to Integrated Employment: Case Studies of Organizational Change (Volume 2)

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction and Methodology</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Site Visit Procedure .....	7
Summary.....	9
<b>Community Enterprises, Northampton, Massachusetts</b> .....	<b>11</b>
Description of the Organization .....	11
History of the Conversion to Integrated Employment .....	15
Participant Perspectives on the Conversion Process.....	16
Critical Issues in the Change Process .....	26
Current Organizational Challenges .....	28
Conclusion .....	28
<b>Life Skills Foundation, St. Louis, Missouri</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Description of the Organization .....	29
History of the Conversion to Integrated Employment .....	31
Participant Perspectives on the Change Process .....	35
Critical Issues in the Change Process .....	44
Current Organizational Challenges .....	46
Conclusion .....	46
<b>MetroWest Human Services, Ashland, Massachusetts</b> .....	<b>47</b>
Description of the Organization .....	47
History of the Conversion to Integrated Employment .....	48
Participant Perspectives on the Change Process .....	50
Critical Themes in the Change Process .....	64
Current Organizational Challenges .....	66
Conclusion .....	67
<b>Organizational Perspectives on Closing a Facility Based Program</b> .....	<b>69</b>
Background.....	70
Methodology .....	72
Findings .....	72
Current Challenges Summary .....	82
Discussion and Implications.....	85
Conclusion .....	87





## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The development of supported employment in the 1980s represents a substantial shift in both the values and services that support access to employment for individuals with significant disabilities. Over the past fifteen years the number of individuals in supported employment has risen dramatically. During the same period, the technology of employment support has developed steadily, integrating strategies such as systematic instruction, natural supports, assistive technology, and person-centered planning into our work. Despite these successes, the majority of individuals with severe disabilities continue to receive their services in segregated, facility-based programs. We have succeeded in developing the technology of employment support. We need to learn more about the factors at both the state policy level and at the organizational level that shift resources and services from facility-based programs to community employment. The goal must be to make community employment available to every individual.

This monograph is Volume II of a study of six organizations that have successfully closed a sheltered workshop or a nonwork, facility-based program and replaced it with expanded access to community employment. The purpose of our inquiry was to examine the process of organizational change and the internal and external factors that influenced change. This volume presents case studies of three of the organizations that participated in the study. The summary chapter provides findings from across the six organizations.

Site visits were conducted over a period of two full days with each organization. Interviews were conducted with key leaders of the change process and representatives of the major constituencies affected by the change including program participants, program staff, family members, board members, funding agencies, employers, and other community agencies. Each of these organizations experienced unique circumstances that influenced the decision to close a facility-based program, and each has used a variety of approaches to accomplish the changeover process and create opportunities for community employment. Despite these differences, there have also been consistent themes across the organizations that speak to the factors necessary for successful completion of a change process.

### Site Visit Procedure

This project was designed to answer three primary research questions:

- What are the motivators and barriers that have influenced program's decision to convert from segregated employment to community employment?
- How did each organization approach the planning, communication, and implementation of the conversion process?
- What obstacles have organizations experienced and how have they responded to these obstacles to maintain the conversion process? What strategies and variables have had a positive impact on maintaining organizational change efforts?

**Sample selection**

A comprehensive national sample of agencies engaged in a conversion process was developed using a combination of a national nominations process and results from a survey of the day and employment services provided by 643 community rehabilitation providers in 20 states in 1991<sup>1</sup>. National experts in integrated employment services were asked to nominate organizations that, to their knowledge, had either successfully completed conversion of facility-based services or had closed one facility. These procedures generated a list of 133 organizations. Twenty five organizations were selected randomly from this list to participate in a detailed telephone interview. Because some of the original 25 organizations did not meet the criteria of completely closing a facility, several additional programs were added to the list and screened by phone. The final sample was selected to provide diversity across geography, location (urban/suburban/rural), and organizational size. The organizations selected are listed in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1  
Participating Organizations**

Organization	Region	Location	Size
Bonney Enterprises Corvallis, OR	Northwest	Suburban	Small
Community Enterprises Northampton, MA	Northeast	Urban/Suburban/Rural	Large
Life Skills Foundation St. Louis, MO	Central	Urban	Large
UCPA of Capitol Area Austin, TX	South	Urban	Large
Independence Association Brunswick, ME	Northeast	Suburban/Rural	Small
MetroWest Mental Health Ashland, MA	Northeast	Suburban	Large

**Data collection**

Data collection consisted of participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Preliminary information was gathered on each site through a phone interview with a lead contact, usually the Executive Director. At that time available written background information was requested including annual reports, strategic plans, or program descriptions. Project staff worked with the Executive Director to identify the key stakeholders in the conversion process that were relevant for their agency. For most visits the stakeholders included at least program staff, consumers, family members, employers, funders and members of the organization's board of directors.

Primary data collection took place during a two day site visit with each organization. Programs received a stipend for their participation in the project and to compensate for staff time and effort in organizing and hosting the visit. The project also reimbursed the program for site visit related expenses. Four senior research staff participated in the site visits, with a minimum of two attending each visit. These staff were experienced in both participant observation and qualitative research. All staff had substantive experience in conducting research related to the employment of

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<sup>1</sup> McGaughey, M. J., Kiernan, W. E., McNally, L. C., Gilmore, D. S., & Keith, G. R. (1994). *Beyond the workshop: National perspectives on integrated employment*. Boston: Institute for Community Inclusion/UAP

individuals with disabilities. Three staff had direct experience in providing and managing employment services and providing training and technical assistance to community rehabilitation programs, while the fourth staff person had direct experience in providing and managing related community-based services.

The project used in-depth semi-structured interviews with representatives from each of the stakeholder groups to gain their perspectives on the conversion process. Several members of each group were interviewed at each site either in small groups or individually. In addition, project staff visited work sites and interviewed individuals at job sites when appropriate. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for data analysis. Organizational documents examined included annual reports, consultant reports, mission statements, organizational charts, policies and procedures, and strategic plans. Information from transcripts, observer notes, and source documents were used to describe the organization and the process of organizational change. Key themes that characterize the change process and significant factors that influenced change were identified. A draft of each case study was forwarded to the Executive Director for review and comment before the document was finalized.

## Summary

The decision to close a facility-based program requires courage and a willingness to take concrete and often risky steps toward that goal. As more organizations develop strategic plans that include the goal of closing a facility-based program, it is our hope that these summaries will provide both guidance and the determination to take substantive steps in the change process. Chapter 5 of this volume summarizes the themes that were repeated across the experiences of these organizations.





## Chapter 2

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### Community Enterprises<sup>2</sup>

Northampton, Massachusetts

Date of Site Visit: February, 1996

Sheila Lynch Fesko

John Butterworth

John Johnson

### Description of the Organization

Community Enterprises is a comprehensive service agency that provides employment and housing supports to individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts and Connecticut. The agency began in 1972 and was originally based at Northampton State Hospital, where they provided employment services for people with psychiatric disabilities. Since that time they have expanded to serve individuals with a variety of disabilities and have 10 offices located primarily in western Massachusetts. Through their overall services, Community Enterprises supports approximately 1,000 individuals with disabilities and has 180 employees. The main office is located in Northampton Massachusetts in the Berkshire section of the Commonwealth. The local economy includes agriculture, manufacturing and service jobs. This site visit was conducted primarily with staff from the Northampton, Salem, and Holyoke offices.

The agency mission is "to support self-determination for people with disability labels by providing a set of resource options in a manner deeply respectful of personal dignity". This mission is achieved through individualization of services from a spectrum of service options available at most offices. A fundamental value of the agency is the empowerment and self-determination of individuals with disabilities and to that end they have made a commitment to have individuals with disabilities represent 25 percent of their staff and 50 percent of their board of directors.

### Administrative Structure

Community Enterprises is composed of ten local offices that are based throughout Massachusetts and Connecticut. Six offices provide employment services and each office has a program director who is responsible for all aspects of office management and program coordination. The program director is described by the vice president as "like an executive director of a smaller agency, and a lot of the offices are a million dollars plus in services, and with a wide range of services". In each office project managers are responsible for administration of specific projects or contracts. Additional employment staff at the local office level are employment coordinators or job coaches.

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### <sup>2</sup> Acknowledgments

Completion of this case study was made possible by the generosity and good will of the many consumers, staff family members, board members, and other associates of Independence Association. We would particularly like to thank Joseph Campbell, president and Dick Venne, vice president of Community Enterprises who hosted our visit and all of the staff who met with us and allowed us to learn from them. Thank you as well to Ken Gagne who was so generous with his time and insights as well helping to our coordinate interviews.

## ***12 • Conversion to Integrated Employment***

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Program directors and local offices are responsible for hiring individual staff, but other human resource functions are coordinated through the main office. All new staff receive orientation to the values that drive their services. Annual “think” days are held with staff and consumers to give people an opportunity to have input in the direction of the organization. Town meetings are also held occasionally to discuss changes or future plans that will impact staff in the various offices.

In the past, staffing at local offices were organized by disability type or funding type such as having a Department of Mental Retardation director and a Department of Mental Health director. The vice president stated that this practice ended three years ago when they “found that the person needs to know everything going on in the whole community, and needs to be able to look for employment opportunities, and needs to meet all the people living there. Instead ...we were running into each other, and there were turf issues.” They changed to a geographic management approach and have found that to be effective.

The senior management of Community Enterprises includes the president, vice-president for employment and training, vice-president of administration and finance and a newly created position, vice-president of quality. The vice-president of quality was the person who typically handled accreditation, licensure and program evaluation. The president describes that this new position ensures that the organization lives by its values on a day-to-day basis and their “responsibility is to see that if we are practicing what we’re preaching”. The program directors at local offices report to the senior team.

Community Enterprises has made a commitment to expand the number of staff who are also individuals with disabilities. They report a goal of twenty-five percent of the staff representing individuals with disabilities. The vice-president describes it as “wanting to put our money where our mouth was, ‘cause we’ve been talking to businesses for years about hiring and supporting people with disabilities”. To accomplish this goal, the vice-president describes making the work place accessible for all employees.

*We write the job descriptions in such a way where we list the priority of the job and what are the key, essential functions and what aren’t, so we can help people to be successful in the job. So, without alerting or putting the big “Disabled” sticker on somebody, we kind of work just like we do with everybody to make sure that they can do the job...we kind of look at everybody we hire and say, “OK, what do you need to be successful in this job?”*

### **Current Service Patterns**

Housing and employment services previously operated as two separate entities, but at the time of the site visits these two divisions were merging into one administrative structure. Area offices that provided both residential and employment services will now be managed by one program director. The current service patterns section of this report will describe all of the services offered through Community Enterprises, but the remainder of the report will focus on the employment services. Not all offices offer all of the services described below.

### ***Housing and Community Supports***

The president describes their original housing services as

*akin to the specialized home-care model. The idea was that our social workers went out and found families with an empty bedroom interested in taking somebody into their family, into their hearts, and really made them part of their extended family, to a certain extent, in that people were very, very successful, and the measure of success was keeping people out of the State Hospital...And we went, from 1976 until somewhere around 1989, without returning a single client to Northampton State Hospital*

This model continues to be provided as Home Sharing. Housing supports have been funded primarily through the Department of Mental Health, but in the last three years, Community

Enterprises has added housing services which are funded by the Department of Mental Retardation.

Other housing options include Independent Living with Intensive Supports, where individuals lease their own apartments and receive intensive staff support as necessary. These self-directed households are where participants manage their household with staff serving as off-site consultants. The president indicated that Community Enterprises emphasizes a consultative model of support because “people who are professionals really can’t be there all the time for individuals with disabilities who need support. People really need to get support the way individuals typically get support — from their family and friends and neighbors”. Staff have served to help build the community rather than providing direct services. An additional focus of this network building is provided in the Volunteer Companions Project where, staff and consumers pick volunteer companions that are matched to the individual’s interests and can help them in accessing the community.

Housing and Community Support services of Community Enterprises also run services funded through the Department of Mental Health for Support for Families of People with Psychiatric Disabilities. Services through this project include respite/relief assistance, education, problem-solving and self-advocacy groups and linkages with other supports such as the Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

Metamorphosis Center is an independently operated “organizing center” that has transitioned from a traditional psychosocial program. It is a member run organization that has independent corporate status from Community Enterprises, with some consultation and administrative support available when requested.

The Department of Mental Health has funded Consumer Initiatives which supports entrepreneurial ventures by individuals with disabilities. This program is administered by Community Enterprises. Some examples of these initiatives include a video production company, a car detailing business and “consumer consultants” who do public speaking and consultation around the needs of individuals with mental illnesses.

### ***Employment and Training***

Community Enterprises provides a variety of training and employment models to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Supported work sites such as a Marriott Hotel and Big Y Supermarkets provide training opportunities for individuals, and upon completion of their training most individuals obtain jobs with that employer. Under this model, the employer contracts with Community Enterprises and the individual remains on CE’s pay roll during the training period. At the completion of the training, most individuals are transitioned onto the employer’s payroll. Typically, the training component last three months and individuals receive intensive on-site job coach support. Once they are moved to the employer’s payroll, the job coach is available for support or problem-solving as necessary. Each of the area offices have contracts for supported work that include serving individuals with psychiatric disabilities, mental retardation, hearing impairments and traumatic brain injury.

Individual job placement is provided to the majority of recipients of employment services. The agency recently made a commitment of greater emphasis on individual jobs and the two offices that opened most recently are only providing individual jobs. The president describes that while individual jobs are the preference they “prefer to be an agency that offers a range of employment models, with a constant pressure for our staff to explain why somebody is here and not in an individualized setting”.

Community Enterprises maintains approximately eight enclave settings where a group of individuals with disabilities are working together in one setting. Individuals in enclaves are typically on Community Enterprises’ payroll with the employer contracting for the work. There are twenty-eight individuals served in the enclaves which are paid based on piece rate earning less than minimum wage. In one of the most recently developed enclaves, the emphasis has been on developing a collaborative business plan so that Community Enterprises is involved with the employer in the building of the business. Enclave services are funded through the Department of

## **14 • Conversion to Integrated Employment**

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Mental Health, Department of Mental Retardation, and the Extended Employment Program of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.

Evaluation and training contracts are also funded through the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission. Services under these contracts are time-limited. Enclaves or supported work training sites are typically used to allow the individual an opportunity to try out a job.

The types of services an individual receives can vary based on the contract that they are receiving services under. Project directors report completing an in-depth intake that allows them to consider the needs and interests of the individual. For individuals who have had limited vocational experience, opportunities for job shadowing are used to help the individual develop a better sense of the type of work they would like to do. Once a job is identified and obtained, the level of support provided on the job depends on individual needs. Some individuals with significant disabilities receive on-going one-to-one job coaching, while others require some initial assistance but then work independently. Transportation can be a major obstacle for some individuals in getting to and from work because of the rural nature of some areas they cover. The staff works with individuals, families and other service providers to arrange alternatives that allows the individual a consistent system to get to and from work. In some cases, Community Enterprises has a contract to provide the transportation serves for individuals.

A number of affirmative businesses are run by Community Enterprises, which create training and employment opportunities for individuals. Affirmative businesses include the Northampton Copy Center and the Plaza Maintenance Crews.

The training department of Community Enterprises also support individuals in pursuing their education either in the completion of their GED or at a post-secondary level. There are supported education programs at the University of Massachusetts and at Manchester Community College that are vocational/educationally oriented in the hotel/hospitality industry.

### ***Dependable Business Alternatives***

Dependable Business Alternatives (DBA) began in 1992 and is a for-profit corporation that is a subsidiary of Community Enterprises. Profits from the business are paid as dividends to Community Enterprises, which is the sole stock holder. DBA is a temporary employment resource for the general public. Several small businesses have been added to the for-profit business to create additional employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. An office cleaning business has been successful, while a landscaping crew and construction company that have not yet developed into successful entities. In these for-profit companies, there is an opportunity for individuals to participate in profit-sharing in addition to their regular wages.

The president of Community Enterprises describes the financial components of DBA as:

*This year, it has total growth revenues of about three and a half million, so it's a very fast-growth little business....Community Enterprises owns all of those shares; therefore, revenues or profits that have to be turned over, that are being turned over to Community Enterprises, have to be turned over as dividends. Dividends are not taxable to the non-profit. ...(Revenues from) the for-profit company split up in three different ways. A third of it goes into a stabilization fund for Community Enterprises, i.e., for a fund to help our liquidity a little bit... Another one-third of it would go into capitalizing the company itself, the DBA Company, and the other one-third of it would go into kicking off a special project...The money that DBA wanted to invest, like any corporation would invest some profits, would be in real estate, very carefully-selected real estate. And when that real estate would be rented to individuals with disabilities, there would be a percentage of each dollar — so many cents on a dollar would go into an equity fund for the individual, so that after whatever number of years, this person would have built up enough in the equity fund as a down payment. The mortgage that we would hold would be transferred, with our being a guarantor on it, to the individual, and that way, the person could actually buy their place.*

## ***Institute for Consumer Power in Mental Health Management***

The Institute for Consumer Power in Mental Health Management began in 1992 and has emphasized working to enhance the roles of consumers in the mental health system. An employment staff describes the Institute as being “run by a female psychiatric survivor, designed to assist non-profit corporations and organizations in looking at ways to empower people with psychiatric disabilities in their operation of their services and system”. Activities that have been sponsored through the Institute include: empowerment trainings; advocacy for people with mental illness at public safety councils, city task forces and advisory boards; co-organizing a state anti-stigma campaign; and serving as a resource to local media on mental health matters.

## **History of the Conversion to Integrated Employment**

Community Enterprises originally began in 1972 as a vocational service provider for individuals with psychiatric disabilities at Northampton State Hospital. It became incorporated in 1976 and opened branch offices and workshops in Holyoke and Greenfield. When the current president came to the agency in 1980, the Board of Directors was looking at new space for the workshop since the facilities were in such poor conditions. The president advised them to stay in the current space, but to move toward closing it down entirely and begin to obtain jobs in the community. He was concerned that if they moved to new space there would be less of an impetus to move into the community. He describes people as being motivated to make the change since “the workshop had bars on its windows, and you’ve got to go through locked doors to get to the workshop, and people were leaving the hospital to live in the community and coming back up the hill to go work at the workshop”.

The president prepared a presentation to the Board of Directors “a very, very rough blueprint, on how to develop an alternative to sheltered workshops.” They were still focused on a developmental model and proposed five levels of support ranging from special work enclaves to independent jobs. The “special enclaves” involved renting space from an employer and bringing in the contract work that was already being conducted in the workshop. People were skeptical of their ability to find these opportunities since the economy was poor, but the president described it as a good time since “there was a lot of empty space in plants out there in manufacturing operations, and people were hungry for any small contribution to their overhead...We kind of created a smaller workshop inside of an industrial plant with less people and we brought in some work, and then, once ...they saw us doing work, we would end up getting work for the company, too, and be able to make a transition right within the company. “

In preparation for this developmental model, staff developed a manual which described the production and educational levels that individuals needed to reach to move to the next level. Starting at the workshop on the first level, the second level was the standard enclave where individuals do the work of the host industry. The next level involved two or three people working in the same work environment with a staff person present. The fourth level was similar to personal adjustment training, an individual job with job coaching as appropriate. The fifth level was placement and employment with no supports. Over time Community Enterprises realized the developmental nature of this program was not necessary, but offered individuals the option of the top four levels of work environments.

In 1983, the agency made a commitment to close their sheltered settings and realized they needed a time period in which to accomplish this goal. They anticipated five years to close all three sites, with the first effort in Northampton because of the problems with the physical plant. In 1983, Community Enterprises was serving 100 individuals in their three sites. During their initial movement from the sheltered workshop, Community Enterprises focused primarily on the development of enclaves in community businesses. The president describes this transition as being effective because “for a lot of people, moving from the workshop to their own job was a big leap. So moving from the workshop to enclaves... was less of a big leap. They were still able to go with

## 16 • Conversion to Integrated Employment

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their friends and their peers". Enclaves were also seen as an easier transition for staff since they felt there were similarities to running a sheltered workshop. Over time, the employment services expanded to offer individual jobs, employment training sites and self-employment.

In 1993, the president describes that they "decided that everybody needs to go into individualized jobs" and in their "two newest offices, everybody is in their own jobs". While this emphasis on getting away from enclaves has continued and they have closed some group sites, they feel there continues to be a need for some individuals to have a group setting. The vice president for employment services reported that they are "wrestling" with this issue of offering group placement but there has

*been getting a lot of pressure from the consumers we work with there and from the funding source, to have a site developed where people who don't want to come to work every day, but don't want to have the structure of a formal job where they're in over there, to have a place to come and do some work. Now, you don't want to open up a workshop or anything like that, but it seems like they want us to have an enclave where people can come in and do some work and then go out.*

The president describes their philosophy about services focusing on individual jobs but does not want to limit individual's access. "We would hate if people are missing an opportunity to work because the enclave model was not available".

As the organization has closed some group placements or enclaves, they have dealt with similar issues that were expressed during the closure of the sheltered workshop. One site was closed because there was not consistent work for individuals and it was no longer felt to be an appropriate placement. The vice president describes the intensive effort that was undertaken to find individual jobs for people who were leaving the enclave:

*We did an intensive marketing effort to close down the site... I came down there every week. I did a lot of training and marketing. I trained all their staff. We went out, we did lots of things and pushed people. Gave them clear goals. This is what they had to do. We had them do market research, had to talk to 10 or 20 companies in a two-week span. We pushed people hard to close down the site. Which is very similar to closing down the workshop. We use the same strategies like if we were going to close down a workshop, we would come up with a marketing plan on how to do it, break it into pieces and go. And that's how we did the site.*

The staffing design which was established at the time of the conversion from sheltered employment was a "triumvirate" of an employment manager, marketing manager and a rehabilitation staff person. The vice-president describes the staff roles as "the employment manager took care of most of the work, the marketing manager went out and got the work and the jobs, and the rehab person did all the (Individualized Service Plan) planning and all the meetings, referrals and bringing the people in". In 1989 they decided to flatten the staffing structure and many roles were combined. The vice-president describes this change in staff

*We started doing away with some of these specialty positions of marketing and of rehab, and creating employment coordinators, which is employment-specialist type of position... we taught all the staff to go out and market and we taught them all how to do the rehab stuff.*

## Participant Perspectives on the Conversion Process

Project staff asked Community Enterprises staff to arrange opportunities to interview representatives of each of the major constituency groups who were either involved in or affected by the process of organizational change. Some of these interviews took place in the process of visiting employment sites, while others represented formal interviews. Project staff were particularly interested in talking with individuals who had a wide variety of perspectives about the

change process, and the opportunity to sample the range of points of view was specifically requested.

## President and Vice President

Both the president and vice president were with the organization at the time of the closure of the sheltered workshops. In 1982, they started to develop enclaves, they approached businesses to lease space and Community Enterprises would bring the work into their location. The vice president describes the benefit of this approach:

*We're closing down the [workshop], but we still had workers and we still had work. Can we rent a little space in your company? So then we gained the interactions with company employees, we gained the company break rooms. Once people saw us working, we gained jobs. It was a great way to gain jobs after that because once we were there, they saw that people in this place could work and it demystified that for them and they were able to say, 'OK, I can hire these people' and they started giving us work.*

The vice president described one of the components that made it easier for them to close the workshop as not having unionized workers, so they were more readily able to change job duties. There was also consent decree that called for closure of the state hospital, so there was already a movement to community services for individuals with mental illness. The final factor was that they did not own a facility, they were leasing space and had free space at the State Hospital site.

At the time of the closure there was a lot of anxiety and concern from staff members and they estimate that approximately twenty percent of the staff left rather than make the transition to the community. The vice president describes some "staff were petrified at [closing the workshop] because there was great safety in the workshop. They had their peers there, and now they're going to be at a site and they would meet consumers by them selves." Staff that did make the transition were described as being pleased with the new sites and having a new sense of ownership and responsibility for their enclave. The vice president described one staff person who was very non-committal to his work at the workshop, but after two weeks at the enclave there was "an amazing transformation" and he had increased pride in his work and performance.

As Community Enterprises has continued to grow, the program directors and individual offices have begun to have more responsibility for "growing the business". They have begun an emphasis on creating more services to be responsive to the needs of their consumers. The vice president describes it as "we set ourselves up for the future, the more we can offer makes us more appealing to the funder and makes us more appealing to the people who use the service". To accomplish this effort to continue to grow and be creative in their provision of services, Community Enterprises offers innovation awards to their employees. If the suggestion for an improvement is used, the staff person can receive a cash bonus. The president of Community Enterprises described this mandate for continual improvement in the following way:

*We tell our employees when they start with us, at the employee orientation, that if they do what we ask of them, they're good employees; if they can find a better way to do it, they're excellent employees. So everybody is constantly charged with, 'Look, this is the best that we can do; we know it's not nearly good enough; so your job is not just to do your job description, it's trying to figure out a better way to do this stuff.'*

In addition to program changes and innovation, the organization has a commitment to constantly re-evaluating and adapting to improve their responsiveness to the consumers that they serve. The vice president reiterates the importance of staff being able to work with ongoing change and innovation:

*We continue always to look for better ways to do what we're doing. So we're always trying out different approaches to it, looking at ways to create positions and create an organization that is viable. So if you like change, this is the place to work; if you don't*

## ***18 • Conversion to Integrated Employment***

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*like change, this is not the place to work. So in our hiring of staff, we make that very clear up front, 'cause we change a lot here. We still have the same goals and the same kind of drive to what we're doing, but we like to change and look for better ways. Not abandoning everything else, but looking for innovation, looking for people to try out different ways to do work.*

One strategy the organization uses to ensure that staff are aware of and sensitive to all components of operations is to require all administrative staff to work in the field five days a year. While staff were initially leery, they now look forward to the opportunity to get a different insight into the work the organization does. The vice president describes this as being very effective in helping "people understanding why we're in business, 'cause they see what we're doing". It also helps staff understand the pressures at a local office and when the best time of the day may be to call for information. The vice president also feels these "field days" have been helpful in developing the sensitivity of staff as they increase the number of individuals with disabilities who work for the agency.

### **Board of Directors**

The past president of the Board of Directors was interviewed to consider the board's perspective on the change process at Community Enterprises. The Board of Directors is composed of twelve members, and meets four times a year. The executive committee of the board and individual working groups meet more frequently. The past president has been on the board for seven years.

At the time of the sheltered workshop closure, the past president was working for the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and was affiliated with Community Enterprises in that capacity. He recalls feeling that it was "pretty radical, because it basically changed the paradigm of how referrals were done and basically how people receive services. So that was a big step in the region in terms of location of services, location of rehab services." While he supported the concept of employment in the community, he was uncertain about how Community Enterprises could actually accomplish this goal.

*I mean, the reasons make perfect sense ...for people who have been trained in rehabilitation, the idea of a more realistic work setting, for example, and really getting people on site and getting away from, in some cases, just artificial environments in terms of the way work is done. So that all made perfect sense. But the question was — I remember thinking how the hell are they going to pull this off?...How do you operationalize it? How do you communicate? How do you go out and find job sites?*

He recalls orientation seminars to staff at MRC that helped clarify how these services were to be available to individuals on his caseload.

The past president describes his current role and that of the board as "not running the organization" but "maintaining a policy making role". He sees the organizational values as driving the decision making process for the Board. As new programs or service options are considered, the Board reflects on "how does this relate to what our mission is"? He reports that senior managers are very effective at communicating with the Board but they "do not assume that we are just going to rubber stamp stuff that they bring before us. They know that they are going to be challenged". He compares the function of the Board versus the managers as

"the Board is not managing the organization, the day-to-day stuff, I mean, we're letting the senior management do the leading of the organization and we're setting the parameters and key points challenging that leadership to do its thing and try to remain true to the values which happen to include inclusion and participation of the staff.

He describes these values as being "the compass" to guide decisions, particularly in the turbulent times concerning managed care and increased organizational affiliations.

The retention of managers has contributed to the ongoing success from the past president's view. This consistency in staff "added a stream of value and consistency". One of these core values for the Board is "respect for our employees". The past president indicates that the board has tried to

consider “even with the constraints of funding, how can we find opportunities to reinforce the good work that our employees are doing”. By being attentive to the needs of the employees, the past president feels it’s “win-win situations that are going to be good for our employees and good for the people that we serve”. Community Enterprises’ president was also cited as critical to the constancy of mission and values.

Another important value for the Board is the importance of consumer input in the planning process. They have made a decision to make sure that fifty percent of the board represents individuals with disabilities. Several individuals with mental illness were hired as consultants to the organization, and the past president describes how this was initially received.

*People who have been mental health consumers, but they were advisors to the organization and would come to board meetings. They would express some very radical views about change and the best ways to support people with a diagnosis of mental illness. A couple of times, they were very frank and open and less polished than we would normally hear in terms of a board report. So here would be a staff person coming to the board and expressing, what was to the board, some radical concepts about consumer involvement and empowerment and really challenging the board to get on board with this. Some people around the table sat up a little bit and said, ‘hmmm, this is different, okay.’ But that was an adjustment that we needed to make because it was perfectly consistent with the values and what we wanted to have in place.*

After this initial period of adjustment, the past president describes the positive affect of these changes. “I’ve seen the board before and the board after, and we’re getting richer, the discussion is richer, it’s more consumer focused, for sure. And it’s just raised the whole awareness level of the Board. And it’s exactly what we needed for the next step.”

During the initial discussion of the development of the for profit company, DBA, the past president indicates that there was some trepidation. The initial response of the Board was “should we be sticking to our knitting and keep to... the service sector and the public service sector. But, I think it came down to one of the values that we have is really experimentation and we’ll try different things and this was something else to try. We didn’t know if we could do it.” He reported nervousness during the initial start-up period when profit projections did not live up to expectations, but as business has increased they have been very satisfied with the result of this experiment.

## **Parents**

Two parents were interviewed concerning their perspective on community based employment services provided through Community Enterprises. Both parents reported on services provided through the Salem office which never provided segregated services. However, their children have received services in sheltered workshops through other vendors. The movement to community based employment occurred for their children when case managers from the Department of Mental Retardation asked what options they would like to consider for employment. They expressed a desire to work in the community, but those services were not available through their provider at the time, so they were referred to Community Enterprises.

Both parents reported considerable anxiety about this transition, with their primary concern that their child would be unsuccessful and disappointed. They were concerned about what would happen if their child could not perform the first job they obtained. While neither parent was specific about what supports might be available if their child was to lose their job, they did express that they hoped Community Enterprises would continue to support them. The support their children receive at the work site has been considered a real asset with the employment staff helping deal with both work and non-work issues. The parents felt their communication with staff was excellent and that they could contact staff any time to express their concerns. While anxious about the future, the parents expressed great satisfaction with their current services and indicated that their children would not have had the success they’ve accomplished without the assistance of Community Enterprises.

## Funding Agency

Employment services at Community Enterprises are funded through a variety of contracts and grants with the Departments of Mental Retardation and Mental Health as well as the Vocational Rehabilitation agency. A representative from the Department of Mental Health (DMH) and the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) were interviewed to obtain their perspective on the community services provided by Community Enterprises.

One contract with the Department of Mental Retardation was developed when consumers receiving services from other vendors expressed the desire for employment in the community. The case managers worked with these consumers and family members to develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) and “put their questions in the RFP and asked the providers to respond to those questions”. Through this bid process, Community Enterprises established itself as being responsive to these concerns and “they already had a lot of contacts in the community and [staff] was very active in the community”.

The majority of individuals being served under this DMR contract were previously working in sheltered workshops, and the DMR staff were beginning to see a cycle of the most competent consumers not getting the opportunities for community jobs. “A lot of times in the subcontract for us, we saw a lot of people who were good workers being kept in the workshop to do the work and weren’t allowed to go out.” Consumers began to express their frustration at not having the opportunity for community jobs and when the contract was granted they had little reservations about leaving the workshop. DMR staff reported the families were much more anxious about the prospect of their child working in the community.

*I think one of the concerns in a couple of family members is that their children don't have the skills and will be worse off than they are. And it was the sons and daughters who made them change their mind, because even if they fail, they have tried and it's their lives.*

During the initial period when individuals were looking for jobs some parents became extremely anxious and encouraged their children to return to the workshop. Community Enterprises was described as being very supportive of these individuals and attentive to keeping families and consumers informed about what was happening in the job search. In one case, the individual was unhappy with her job and made the decision to return to the workshop, Community Enterprises staff indicated they wanted whatever was best for her even if that meant losing funding to the other program.

For some individuals who are under the DMR contract, Community Enterprises needs to be responsible for day custody which entails providing services between the hours of 9 to 3. For individuals who are in the process of looking for a job, staff at Community Enterprises arrange in work tours and job seeking skills videos. They try to focus all activities around work, but this is described as a challenge for employment service providers. Community Enterprises was described as being very creative and person-centered in how they deal with the issue of day custody.

The Department of Mental Health contract is one of the only contracts in the area that is specifically vocationally oriented. Other providers have a more psychosocial club house approach to services. With this strong emphasis on employment, DMH case managers refer people who “want to get a job and might not want to work in the traditional mental health programs...These are people who want to either stay out of our mental health system or who have a bad taste of mental health system.” Parents of consumers served through the DMH contract with Community Enterprises were less concerned with the movement from more segregated services to community employment. Staff from DMH describe

*our populations' parents have always said my child can work. Why don't you find this person a job. They have never felt that any option other than that was really an acceptable option....They have really been opposed to vocational programming, isolated or regimented or the workshops, so they have a tradition of being very outspoken on why are these people not working.*

Some of the individuals originally being served under this contract had no work experience and did not have basic work skills and behaviors. Community Enterprises was described as working with these individuals to develop these skills and respond to individual needs.

Representatives from both funding sources credit Community Enterprises staff with being extremely efficient in the job search and very focused on the individual's needs.

Their placement rate is very high. They get people jobs. They are working very quickly. If there is somewhat of an impediment they can work through it and the consumer is not blamed. It's not a matter of well that person isn't ready or if this person did something different we would be able to place them. Never the way they approach the problem. It's always the environment isn't right, we will get there....Never hear negative [from the staff]. I'll try it, very positive attitude which feeds to the individual and they become positive.

Staff at Community Enterprises were also commended for their flexibility and willingness to respond to concerns without getting defensive. "There is a nice collaboration back and forth. Case managers really like working with this group of people because they can easily go back and forth. They can communicate you do this, I'll do that."

Career advancement and day custody issues for individuals with disabilities were two areas identified by the staff from DMR and DMH as needing to be incorporated into Community Enterprises services, as well as all other vocational services providers. They are satisfied with how staff at Community Enterprises have responded to these issues so far, but feel they need to be addressed more formally by the funding and provider systems. The current structure allows for consumers to receive assistance in finding an entry level job, but there are not resources for people to develop into new jobs. Collaboration between the variety of funding sources was viewed as critical to meeting these needs. Day custody was another area that was identified as needing to be dealt with at a system level. Individuals who live in community residences need to either obtain jobs from 9 to 3, or the program needs to provide services. This requirement has resulted in some individuals not being referred for community employment services. Staff from DMR have begun to work with residential providers to address increased flexibility about hours that individuals are able to work and able to be at home.

## **Direct Staff**

The majority of employment staff joined the organization after the closure of the workshop and have primarily been working with consumers in individual jobs or in enclave settings. During the last several years there has been an increased emphasis on closure of two of the larger enclaves and the movement of these individuals to individual jobs. One enclave was closed because the company decided to stop making the product that the enclave was responsible for assembling. Community Enterprises staff decided to close the second site since it did not meet the needs of the individuals they were serving. Staff involved in the closure of the enclaves reported the process as being very similar to the closure of a small workshop. To accomplish the closure of the enclave, the staff identified a date when it would close and began to work on the development of individual jobs. One staff describes that they realized they needed to "develop some kind of system where they're not going to go back [into the enclave] or else you'll never close".

For the enclave that they targeted to close, staff felt it was no longer appropriate since they "had too many people. We had upwards of fifteen people during the week coming in and out of the place." There was also inconsistent work flow and the company was having temporary workers complete jobs previously done by individuals in the enclave. One staff person describes that "it got to a point where there was a lot of down time starting to accrue and it certainly wasn't our fault and there was work, but we weren't getting it". This treatment of individuals in the enclave frustrated staff and consumers and they decided to close this site. They set closure date of December 31st and staff describe it as "we put our feet to the fire and we had to do something with it".

Despite the closure being of their initiative, one staff person described the anxiety felt by staff at this time.

## 22 • Conversion to Integrated Employment

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*I think that all of us knew that the enclave was on the way out, and we wanted that more than anything. But it 's still difficult to envision certain people in an independent setting, and so we'd be thinking about what can we do, how can we help this person to get a job who needs constant support and so we just had to get extremely creative.*

To accomplish this goal of finding individual jobs, the staff set up a concentrated job development and marketing plan for each individual. Staff did business and marketing surveys of local employers and had assignments of job leads to bring back to the group each week. They received marketing training from the vice president and support from the rest of the organization. They set up a board in the office conference room with the names all of the individuals they were finding jobs for and as each person got a job their name was moved to the other side of the board. When the date to close came there were still some individuals without jobs, so the staff took over the office conference room and worked with people every day on job placement issues. While staff describe this time as being very stressful it also brought them together as a staff and created more collaboration and confidence in each other. One staff person remembers:

*We perhaps didn't realize it at the time because it was so frustrating , but we became more cohesive as an office . We began to share information .... We learned that we have the resources and we have in each other and certainly we can access resources that we just weren't accessing prior to that.*

During this period of transition, staff report that consumers and family members were very anxious about the change. One consumer expressed that she didn't want to leave the enclave and it was her security to continue to work in this place, but once she obtained her own job she was extremely positive and is very happy. Staff felt that it was very important to assure consumers and families that there was a plan of action, that staff would continue to work with people as they learned their new job and would not disappear as soon as the person started working.

The direct staff identified strong leadership and organizational values as being critical to their success during the closure of the enclave as well as throughout the provision of ongoing services. Some issues are addressed at the local office level and staff felt that the director was responsive to their concern. They also indicated that if an issue can not be resolved at the local level or if it is an organizational concern their director will make sure that it gets addressed at an administrative level. A staff person describes their organizational support for change,

*It's understood that if something does need to go up...they've always moved very quickly on issues. And so that does an awful lot for morale. when you're here and you're involved in an organization that is that responsive to you. You can't help but feel a responsibility towards it.*

Staff also report being involved in organizational planning and understanding their role and responsibility in continuing to grow the business. Representatives from each office are involved in semi-annual meetings with direct staff, administrative staff, and consumers. Plans are reviewed and goals are set at these meetings. This information is then communicated to the rest of the office and people's opinions are solicited either in writing or in person. There are also town meetings held where people can talk about where they would like the organization to head. A consumer advisory board meets monthly and provides feedback on office programs and areas they would like to see the staff develop. As a result of these planning efforts, it was identified that while the organization provides a wide variety of services, these are not available in every office. A staff person indicated that as a result of this recommendation "they pushed us to look at building our services in each territory to provide a good range of things they can choose from".

### Employers

A representative from the Human Resource department of Big Y supermarket was interviewed to obtain the perspective of an employer who has worked extensively with staff from Community

Enterprises. Big Y supermarket is a large chain in western Massachusetts that provides training sites and hires between 8 and 10 consumers onto their payroll at various stores throughout the year.

The original contract between Big Y and Community Enterprises was a subcontract for a mobile crew to be responsible for mall plaza maintenance. Individuals from this crew had exposure to the store through their work and began to express interest in jobs within the stores. The staff at Community Enterprises contacted with the Human Resources department at the store to explore developing additional jobs using the various stores throughout the chain. The relationship has developed to the point that the program director and the Human Resources manager meet to plan for the year and target locations with hiring needs. The store manager is contacted and a request is made by the HR manager to save several positions for Community Enterprises consumers. They have also identified positions with significant turnover at a local store and filled the position with a reliable worker through Community Enterprises.

Most of the placements obtained through Big Y involve an initial training contract and then when the individual has successfully completed their training they are hired by the company. During the training period, individuals are paid by Community Enterprises who invoices Big Y for their salaries. Some store managers prefer to put individuals onto the payroll directly, and that is negotiated at individual locations. The hiring decision is made at the local store. Orientation is also done locally, and staff from Community Enterprises help facilitate the initial adjustment and ongoing training.

The HR manager emphasized the importance of having the commitment to the program come from the CEO of Big Y, and being consistent with how they view all of their employees. He indicated that, as with all employees, the focus is on treating employees well and helping them to be successful. For the placements to be successful the HR manager describes the organization's value has in treating their employees with disabilities.

*I'm going to look at this individual as an asset, I'm going to look at this individual as someone who can perform the central functions of the job. I'm not going to look at the disability as far as a detriment to his or her performance and you have to have that philosophy.*

Big Y stores have worked with other rehabilitation providers but found that they were not as successful since the programs did not provide the follow-up necessary for the individual to be successful. The manager also felt that the other providers were not as effective since they mainly dealt with a local store and never coordinated their efforts through HR. By going to the top levels of the organization there can be a greater commitment. The manager also suggested that rehab providers "need some testimonials from successful companies, some successful partnerships to show them that it can work and that it's a win-win situation for everybody".

In addition to the importance of good workers meeting the needs of the employer, the HR manager related the benefit of the ongoing relationship with the program director. Community Enterprises staff have served as a resource to Big Y and have taken part in organizational training on issues beyond disability issues. Community Enterprises has also been responsible for Big Y receiving awards and acknowledgment for their work with the program.

## **Program Directors**

Program directors from three offices of Community Enterprises were interviewed. The offices represented by these directors reflect the different geographic regions and service sizes that occur between different offices. The local program directors were responsible for all the administrative and organizational functions of their office. These responsibilities include developing a budget based on their contracts for the year, and then they receive income and expense statements from the fiscal department. One expectation that was being developed for each program director is that they would be responsible for "building the business" of their office. This was described as either increasing the numbers of individuals receiving services or developing additional sources of

## 24 • Conversion to Integrated Employment

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revenues through new contracts or new relationships with employers. Each office is also working to expand the range of services that they can provide to consumers so regardless of which office a consumer worked with they can have a full range of employment options.

One example that was cited in developing the business component of services was a new enclave that was established with a ribbon and packaging company. In addition to having a contract for work that consumers were to perform for the company, the staff at Community Enterprises was developing additional product ideas that workers could manufacture. Toward accomplishing this goal, the office has purchased a shrink wrap machine and a bow machine in order to do additional work not currently done at the company. The program director describes this model as developing “something that would be a little bit more unique in terms of starting our own business with a business. So it’s really identifying a partner, someone that was willing.” In this model the enclave site supervisor will also be responsible for developing promotions with local schools and companies to market their new products. Consumers of Community Enterprises who work at this site are paid based on piece rate for most of their work. There is a price agreement on the cost of making each item and then staff invoice the ribbon company. Community Enterprises uses the money to pay consumers. Individuals served in this enclave were reported as needing significant support and have daily living needs that have not been successfully addressed when on individual jobs.

Another enclave site that involves collaboration with the employer is a Bio-Shelter company that uses an organic system to grow fresh herbs in water. Community Enterprises has not made a financial investment in this company, but they have worked with the employer in designing new work facilities that will be more accessible to employees with disabilities. The program director describes the relationship

*We were involved in the design of the new facility. The architects met with us to talk about the whole issue of accessibility going beyond having a wide door. I mean actual work stations and things within the facility that will make it really, really nice for people with disabilities of a vast nature to take advantage of the full facility and work at many different projects.*

While these enclaves represent more collaboration between staff and employers, they each offer limited access for ongoing interaction between employees with disabilities and non-disabled co-workers.

Program directors involved in the closure of other Community Enterprises enclaves indicated that to replace the group placement with individual jobs required a very strong emphasis on marketing and job development involving everyone in the office. All staff were expected to develop job leads. Staff who were anxious about the process of marketing were paired with more experienced staff until they felt more confident. With the increased emphasis on marketing, one program director describes the process as

*Marketing can be fun. I was saying to my staff, ‘what’s the best feeling you have working in a job.’ One of the best feelings is if they get somebody a job, you feel great. It’s the hardest work with the greatest payoffs. When you walk into a store like Kmart and see [a Community Enterprises consumer], just glowing with the satisfaction that she has with being there. I mean it’s not rocket science to figure out that you did something right there.*

This emphasis on marketing involves being a part of the community and building relationships with employers in the local community. While the scope of Community Enterprises activities cover two states, the individual relationships are developed at the local level. One program director describes this as building “relationships for the long haul because we are going to be here. We’re in the towns, we know the people that are our mayor and council people and all the people...and we make that commitment to being part of the community.”

Under some of their contracts, local office staff are responsible for coordinating transportation

needs of individual consumers as well as addressing day custody demands. Some of the contracts with the Department of Mental Retardation required vendors to incorporate provision of transportation into their employment services. In the past, this service was contracted with outside vendors, but the requirement recently changed. For a subsection of consumers served in each office, the staff need to either arrange individual transportation to and from jobs or need to transport the person using an agency van. One program director described providing transportation as a "mixed blessing" since there is the difficulty of getting multiple people to a variety of different sites, but by providing their own transportation they can be more flexible. For example, if one individual has a change in schedule, they can accommodate that rather than having to negotiate a change through an outside company. The day custody requirement is also a component of some contracts. Staff are responsible for providing services to the individual from 9 to 3, regardless of their work hours. For some individuals who work afternoon or evening shifts, the agency still needs to provide programming for the day time hours. The expectation for the employment program being responsible for the individual during the day hours is primarily tied to the staffing of community residences and limited provisions for individuals to be in their homes during the day time.

Despite the differences between local offices, there is a consistent mission that ties the services together under one organization. Some offices work more collaboratively if they are geographically closer to each other, but all the program directors have contact with each other at bi-monthly meetings. The consistency in message and collaboration is credited to the president and vice president as providing the leadership. One program director described the president as a "visionary guy. He's good at letting you know what that vision is taking and how we can play a part in the making that happen." The communication of the vision happens through orientation activities, the "think days" and town meetings. In addition to these more formal activities, the president also spends time at each office at planned meetings or for a spontaneous visit. In addition to communicating about the mission and values, program directors felt that the president encourages staff. Since staff will be implementing the vision, he challenges managers to make sure their employees really like what they are doing and will stretch themselves to do it better. One area that he asked staff to extend themselves is in how they think about service delivery. One program director describes the president as saying "'Generally speaking we'd like to throw out the models. Everything's individualized. To hell with the models.'"

## **Consumers**

Multiple consumers were interviewed including those who worked in individual jobs as well as those working at the ribbon factory and Bio-Shelter enclaves. Consumers in individual jobs were working at supermarkets, Kmart and Marriott Hotels. The levels of support individuals were receiving varied. For individuals working in enclaves, they reported satisfaction with their jobs and they liked the opportunity to see their friends and interact with other consumers of Community Enterprises service. One individual had an individual placement in the past but was not happy there and decided to move to one of the enclaves. Individuals working in the enclaves indicated that they had looked into several other job opportunities before they selected their placement. One individual reported that they occasionally run out of work. When that occurs, he reads or listens to music on a walkman.

Consumers in individual jobs reported satisfaction with their jobs. One individual who worked in a supermarket indicated that he would like to be working more hours but that earning more money would have a negative impact on his Social Security benefits and he was unwilling to possibly jeopardize these benefits. One individual who was working at an enclave when it closed, stated that she was able to move directly from the enclave to a new job but she was concerned about others who did not have jobs at the time that the enclave closed. Her feeling was that "until they were able to find something for these people to go to, they shouldn't have let us go". For herself, she viewed the move to an individual job as very successful and positive. She describes:

*The difference in the job is working here, you get to meet more people and the atmosphere is much better for me...I feel at [the enclave site] you weren't really working. You were working for that company but you weren't really involved...Now I'm on my own and I feel more freedom for myself and it's good for me.*

## Critical Issues in the Change Process

Community Enterprises has a long standing tradition of providing services in the community having begun the process of closing their sheltered services in 1983. Throughout that time they have expanded the range of services provided as well as vastly increasing the number of individuals served. Their process of conversion, which has included both the closure of a sheltered workshop and then a second round of closing larger enclaves, has continued the movement toward more individual services. The primary considerations that drive employment services for Community Enterprises are a focus on individual choice, providing a full spectrum of employment options for this choice and an emphasis on services that start with the individual and not with a specific service model. The following themes have been critical to the process of conversion and change at Community Enterprises and contribute to their current focus.

### Theme 1: A two-phase conversion process

Community Enterprises has completed two employment service conversions in the last fifteen years. The first phase of closing the sheltered workshop was driven by the de-institutionalization movement where individuals with mental illness were living in the community and did not want to return to the hospital for their work experience. To accomplish the goal of closing the workshops, the majority of individuals moved into community based enclaves. Over time staff began to feel that these enclaves were not meeting the needs of individual consumers and they closed some of the larger sites and began to focus more exclusively on providing individual jobs. This second process of closure was described by the vice president as being very similar to the closure of the workshop.

*We pushed people hard to close down the site. Which is very similar to closing down the workshop. We used the same strategies like if we were going to close down a workshop, we would come up with a marketing plan on how to do it, break it into pieces and go.*

The reactions of staff, consumers and families to the closure of the enclaves were also very similar to the workshop closure. The reactions and concerns also required time and attention to address.

### Theme 2: Entrepreneurialism

Staff at Community Enterprises have begun to develop a focus on the business aspect of services and needing to ensure that they can maintain the income to provide services. Examples of this entrepreneurial approach is the focus on growing the business, developing partnerships with employers to market their own products and the establishment of their own for profit companies. Each of these approaches create greater economic independence for the agency so they are not restricted by the availability of state or federal funds to support their services.

### Theme 3: Emphasis and appreciation for innovation

In keeping with their focus on growth and improvement, Community Enterprises has made a commitment to rewarding staff for innovative ideas. By offering a financial bonus to staff for innovative ideas, the message of continually looking for a better way to do their business is clear to individuals at all levels of the organization. This self-evaluative attitude and striving for continual improvement has led to creativity and collaboration to get the job done better.

## **Theme 4: Culture of change**

The vice president describes Community Enterprises as an organization that is always growing and changing and that people need to be comfortable with that in order to be successful. There are many structure activities that Community Enterprises uses to evaluate themselves such as the “think days” and consumer and staff surveys. This information is incorporated into the running of the organization and causes it to be fluid in its response to change.

## **Theme 5: Commitment to hiring individuals with disabilities**

Community Enterprises has made an organizational commitment to have twenty-five percent of their staff and fifty percent of their Board of Directors be individuals with disabilities. They have accomplished these goals and have worked with staff and the Board to ensure that this commitment results in true inclusion of everyone within the organization. Additional training was provided to offices that had hired several individuals with hearing impairment to ensure that all staff would be able to communicate effectively and work collaboratively as an office. A representative from the Board of Directors indicated that initially board members were a little unsettled by the directness of new members, but now see this energy and enthusiasm as a refreshing and needed change.

## **Theme 6: Creation of a for profit business**

The development of a separate for profit company is an innovation that has been very successful for Community Enterprises. This addition provides income for some standard agency services, but also allows them the freedom to explore different areas such as home ownership for consumers of residential services. The flexibility created through income from the business dividends allows Community Enterprises to be more flexible than they could be with funds from state and federal grants. It also allows them to purchase real estate that can be leased with an option toward buying for consumers of Community Enterprises services. This creative alternative would not be possible with the usual constraints of a non-profit company.

## **Theme 7: Organizational values**

At all levels of the organization, staff and board members speak about the values and mission that drive the organization. Some ways that the values of the organization are communicated to staff include orientation, think days and the frequent visits of the president. The past president of the Board of Directors presents values as the “compass” they use to make decisions within the organization. There is not just a verbal commitment to the values but they are actively lived in the organization. Their commitment to listening to the views of consumers of their services is evidenced in the changing their staff and board representation; involvement of consumer in advisory boards and “think days”; and the establishment of consumer run advocacy institute.

Having clear organizational values does help guide the organization’s direction but there are ongoing struggles in balancing potentially conflicting values. The vice president describes the conflict between a value that focuses on individual jobs and the importance of individual choice.

Kind of an interesting dilemma, the argument of a lot of people would say just individual jobs. That’s the only option. But then the other side of it is that individual choice, and if someone chooses to be in a different situation, which is sort of the value that’s more important. So we needed to offer them a wider range of things to choose from.

## **Theme 8: Leadership**

The president of Community Enterprises is viewed as a key component to the success of the organization. He is viewed as the leader who guides the organization and communicates and emphasizes the values and mission. He is also as a leader that encourages his staff to take more responsibility and innovation to creatively deal with their jobs and organizational services. This type of leadership has been very empowering for the staff and encourages them to be the best that they can be.

## **Theme 9: Empowered and capable staff**

All the individuals interviewed emphasized the positive regard they had for the staff of Community Enterprises. They were credited with being creative and committed and as one individual from the funding agency indicated they were always positive in how they dealt with people. The past president of the Board of Directors reported that they respected the abilities of the staff and felt that they could be relied on to implement the agency's values.

## **Current Organizational Challenges**

As Community Enterprises continues to provide employment services to individuals in the community, they will continue to struggle with the following issues.

### **Day Custody**

Like all employment providers in Massachusetts, Community Enterprises has a contractual obligation to provide service to some individuals during the hours of 9 to 3. This contractual stipulation was established when most employment services were provided in segregated settings and these hours reflected the typical day. Residential services typically do not provide staff coverage during these hours and if the consumer is not able to stay home independently the employment program is required to provide service. This model is not appropriate for individuals who might work an afternoon or evening shift and then need to get up early to come in to the Community Enterprises office for services. In some cases, individuals could accept only jobs with day time hours or have had to take enclave placements where the hours match better.

While Community Enterprises is committed to being creative in how they address the day custody needs of consumers, it continues to take staff time and energy away from job development and support as well as not reflecting how the individual consumer would choose to spend their time. This issue will need to be addressed at a system wide level, but until that occurs Community Enterprises will continue to find interesting and productive activities for individuals during those hours.

### **Provision of Enclave Services**

Staff at Community Enterprises has made a commitment to providing individual jobs for consumers but continue to maintain multiple enclaves. They feel conflicted about the value of individual jobs versus the expressed interest of some consumers for a group setting. The standard that the president has set is that all consumer obtain individual jobs and if they are not staff needs to justify why that has not occurred. Their current commitment is to provide many options and allow individuals to make the choice as to what is best for them.

Within the provision of the enclaves model, the Community Enterprises staff should be continually working to ensure that individuals served in this group setting have as much opportunity as possible for interaction with co-workers without disabilities. The enclaves visited as part of the site visit were more segregated. By dispersing individuals throughout the company there may be greater opportunity for true inclusion.

## **Conclusion**

Community Enterprises has a long history of moving toward greater community inclusion. The closure of their workshop dates back to the mid 1980's and they went through a secondary conversion when they moved from enclaves in the community toward a emphasis on individual jobs. Throughout this growth, the organization has focused on challenging themselves to continually improve their services and never settling for less than their best. As the organization has expanded it services as well as it geographical region they cover, they continue to focus on "growing the business" which allows them to expand the range of services they can provide.



## Chapter 3

### Life Skills Foundation<sup>3</sup>

St. Louis, Missouri

Date of Site Visit: May, 1996

John Butterworth

John Johnson

### Description of the Organization

Life Skills Foundation was established by a small group of parents who came together in 1964 to start a summer camp for their children. The camp was followed by sheltered workshop training and residential services. Life Skills Foundation was the first organization in the St. Louis area to offer residential services outside of state institutions, and is currently the only day and employment services program in Missouri that offers exclusively supported employment services. Based in St. Louis, Missouri, it now serves a multi-county urban and suburban area, with primary services in the City of St. Louis and St. Louis County. Life Skills works in a region that provides a wide range of choices for individuals seeking human services supports, with many other organizations providing day and employment services. Since it was founded over 30 years ago it has grown into a large multi-service organization with a budget in excess of 8 million dollars. During that time, the mission of Life Skills Foundation has remained close to the purposes of its founders, as reflected in the organization's mission statement (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1

#### Life Skills Foundation Mission Statement

*Life Skills Foundation assists people with mental retardation or other disabilities to live and work with dignity in our community.*

#### Life Skills Foundation Vision Statement

*Life Skills is that all individuals have the options they want to meet their needs and achieve their dreams so that everyone participates in society in the way they choose*

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#### <sup>3</sup> Acknowledgments

Completion of this case study was made possible by the generosity and good will of the many service customers, staff, family members, board members, and other associates of Life Skills Foundation whom we met with. In particular we extend our thanks to Wiley Smith, CEO at the time of the visit; Bill Welsch, past CEO; Nance Ketchelmeier; Carol Flood; and Jocelyn Waller for giving freely of their time and insight. Hillary Melechen was our guide, interpreter, historian, and caretaker. Hillary arranged and managed our visit, and her enthusiasm for and honesty about her experiences at Life Skills was invaluable.

Bill Welsch served as executive director of Life Skills Foundation during most of the period covered by this case study, and to enhance readability is referred to as the executive director in this manuscript. He left the organization in 1995.

The organization's fiscal year 1996 annual report states that Life Skills served over 1100 individuals in the Community Support, Employment Services, and Supported Socialization programs. Community Support is the largest program area, with direct expenses of over \$3,500,000 in FY96. This program provides a wide range of services, from early intervention to supported living, including community-based living supports for over 400 individuals. The Supported Socialization Program facilitated community access for 480 individuals including participating in community activities, finding recreational opportunities, and using public transportation. Finally, Life Skills' Employment Services supported 207 individuals in FY96, including 128 individuals in long term job retention. The direct expenses for this program for the year were \$458,000, or approximately 7% of the overall expenses for the agency.

This case study addresses change that occurred between 1989 and 1995. Life Skills closed its facility-based employment training program in July, 1989. During subsequent years the change process continued, with an increasing emphasis on permanent individual employment. Life Skills gradually reduced involvement with group work sites, closing or transferring all but one group work site by 1995. The site visit that this case study is based on took place in May, 1996.

### **Employment Services: May, 1996**

In 1996, the Employment Services of Life Skills Foundation provided supports to 128 individuals in community employment, 52% of whom had been employed for over 4 years. Data from a 1995 study indicated that over 57% of the individuals supported by Employment Services received company benefits, and the average hourly wage was \$5.41, as compared to an average hourly wage of \$4.65 across the state of Missouri for individuals in supported employment. By 1996 Life Skills had, with one exception, stopped providing contracted group supported employment services. The exception is a group work site for 10 people at the Metropolitan Sewer District. This section provides a snapshot of the structure of employment services at Life Skills at the time of the site visit, and represents the outcome of the change process at one point in time.

Employment supports are provided by four Employment Coordinators, Job Consultants (3 full time and 8 part time), a Marketing Manager, and a half time Job Developer. A consumer's first contact with Life Skills is through an Intake Unit that screens for eligibility for services, funding, and appropriateness of fit. Individuals who specifically want sheltered employment might be redirected to an alternative service provider at this point. Organizationally, the Intake Unit is in the development department, and is separate from the Supported Employment Program, allowing intake staff to take a broad look at the supports an individual may need or want.

Once eligibility for funding is established, an individual is assigned to a job consultant and begins a four week assessment. Individuals work at four work sites in the community during the assessment period, and staff individualize the assessment experience using standing relationships with 37 sites and, when appropriate, may also develop individualized options. Staff emphasized that the goals of the assessment process include identifying the best job for the individual, the individual's support needs, and the characteristics of an optimal workplace culture. Assessment also considers whether Life Skills is the most appropriate source of employment support. Job consultants provide assessment services, on-the-job support, and job retention support. Ideally, the same person fulfills all functions.

While job consultants provide most job-related supports, job development is a specialized function. Currently there are 1.5 staff dedicated to job development, including a Marketing Manager who was hired specifically for her marketing and sales experience rather than having human service experience. The marketing manager is viewed as bringing a realistic view of the labor market in as it relates to individual goals as a way of meeting the primary goal of employment. She states her goal as, "We have a commitment to place people within 2-3 months." A variety of job development strategies have been tried, and the current arrangement replaces 3.5 Job Developers.

In addition to assessment, Life Skills provides job development, job coaching, and job retention services. Life Skills' staff use the term "consulting" to describe on-the-job supports provided to consumers. Staff provide job consulting services for anywhere from 25% to 100% of the hours an individual is at work. Since the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) will, in practice, only fund job coaching for 9 months or until job coaching has faded to 25% or less of an individual's work day, job retention services formally begin at that point. However, the change may involve little practical adjustment in the services. Life Skills provided job retention support at a variety of levels based on individual need. Since 1993, Life Skills has emphasized the use of natural supports in employment. Staff report a dramatic decrease (1/3 of the previous level) in the use of job consultation following that shift in emphasis. "Now in our job development process we really carefully assess every job site for natural supports ... [and] the way we sell to an employer is very different." Consistent with this idea, Life Skills values the ability of employment staff to network and establish relationships. One staff member noted, "The successful consultants are the people who can make relationships." One consultant described how he would track down Carl, a program participant who sometimes walks away from work, by using Carl's social network. "Fran [was a] manager at Parkmore where Carl is notorious for having a pancake breakfast. We used to lose Carl, and we would call Parkmore and Fran would find him."

### **Funding: May, 1996**

Life Skills Foundation receives funding and support for its Supported Employment Program from several sources, including the County Productive Living Board, the primary source of funding for individuals with developmental disabilities, and the state Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). Funds from DVR are received both on an outcome basis (\$1200 on completion of an assessment, \$1200 for a first placement, and \$600 for a job change) and on an hourly basis for job coaching services (\$22/hour). Staff noted that the \$22/hour rate for job coaching does not cover costs, and funding in the form of an administrative grant from the County Board makes up the difference between DVR funds and the true cost. Life Skills also relies on strong community participation, including an active development program. Donations of \$275,000 and an active volunteer network speak to the organization's connection to the St. Louis community.

## **History of the Conversion to Integrated Employment**

During the period between 1989 and 1995, Life Skills completed several major transitions, including closing its facility-based day services and discontinuing its role as a significant provider of group supported employment. The chronology of major change events is listed in Table 3.2. Life Skills ran a workshop training program for most of its 30 year history. The program, called a presheltered workshop training program, was designed to prepare individuals to enter sheltered workshops in the region. While activities included both simulated and paid contract work, participants typically completed the program within 3-6 months and were referred to a permanent work placement at a sheltered workshop. Staff identified several reasons why Life Skills did not develop a capacity to provide long term sheltered employment services, including the presence of several sheltered workshops in the area and an organizational emphasis on training rather than ongoing services. Prior to closing, the workshop training program operated in three sites, a main site with two smaller satellite sites. The program was closed in 1989, and this marked the beginning of substantial change in the style and structure of employment supports for the organization.

**Table 3.2**  
**Chronology of Major Change Events**

Event	
1989 January	Decision to close workshop training program
1989 July	Workshop Training Program closes
1991	Group sites converted from transitional to permanent employment
1993	Decision to reduce involvement in group work sites
1993	Organizational commitment to using natural supports begins.
1995	Transfer of group sites to other organizations complete (except for Metropolitan Sewer Commission)

### **Closure of the Workshop Training Program: 1989**

In January, 1989, Life Skills provided sheltered workshop training in three sites. Staff remember an enrollment of between 40 and 60 individuals in the program as it was being closed in the Spring of 1989. In addition to the workshop training program, Life Skills was providing both group and individual employment opportunities during this period. During 1989, 65 individuals received services in enclaves, 28 individuals entered individual jobs, and 83 individuals were supported in job retention. Life Skill's largest enclave site, the Federal Records Center, employed 29 workers.

The decision to discontinue facility-based services involved a value shift that developed over time. The executive director<sup>4</sup> recalls the role of one long term staff member, Carol Harris, as central. Carol Harris worked for Life Skills for over twenty years through 1989, up until shortly before the decision to close the workshop training program. In 1996 staff still credit her as a significant catalyst for change. After serving in many positions, including a brief period as executive director, Carol ended her career as Director of Employment Services during the period in which many of the organizational values that influenced the decision to close the workshop training program were formed. She began to question the focus of the organization in part because of her interaction with external resources such as Lou Brown and Paul Wehman. Other staff confirmed Carol's role in developing community employment opportunities. A former program manager said "She was just an incredible force behind creativity and advocacy for clients and for their choices and she did a lot of research. She called a lot of people, she knew where to go for the information."

Life Skills had a strong value for contacting and using outside resources. In addition to Carol Harris, many staff were involved in external training and outreach efforts in the late 1980's. A program manager at the time the workshop training program closed noted:

*I personally called agencies across the country many times to find out what are you doing, how are you helping people that have severe behavior problems find jobs ... we invited speakers like ... Lou Brown and other people of that caliber to not just speak to Life Skills, but to other agencies.*

<sup>4</sup>Bill Welsch served as executive director of Life Skills Foundation during most of the period covered by this case study, and to enhance readability is referred to as the executive director in this manuscript. He left the organization in 1995.

The executive director's value for outside resources was also cited. "[He] traveled quite a bit ... and brought back a lot of information ... He came across this information, these ideas, 'would you pursue it some more, would you call this person, would you discuss it with your staff and think about it?'"

While the value shift occurred gradually, the executive director and other staff remember the actual decision to close the workshop training program as occurring suddenly, without a lot of discussion. The executive director recalled, "I don't know, I think [the director of employment services] on maybe the first of the year said 'I think we will close it July 1st.' That's pretty much all I remember. I am being glib but in fact that is really what happened." Consistent with this rapid decision, staff report very little formal effort at communication or planning for the change. The executive director confirmed this, saying,

*At the time I managed this business [it] was pretty much do as I wanted to and tell the board as little as I could ... If I had asked the board's permission we would still be going to committee meetings. They would say well maybe we can close down. So I didn't even ask, I just said we are going to close it.*

Despite the speed of the closure, there was little or no negative reaction reported regarding the decision to close the workshop training program. Staff emphasized that because the workshop training program never provided long term services, there was no strong constituency to advocate for maintaining the program. The limited effort put into planning and communication about the change may have resulted in a much stronger backlash if this had not been the case. Life Skills had experienced a very different response when changes were made to the Socialization Program, a program that provides leisure and recreational opportunities, and the executive director remembered the difference that individual investment in a program made.

*At the time there were maybe 30 board members, none of them had kids, lots of parents who had kids with disabilities but none were being served in that program ... [the workshop training program's] clients, if you will, were not there more than a year, and that would have been a long time in that program. So you just didn't have the habit strength. You didn't have all that. So yeah, I just made the decision and told the board about it afterwards. ... [the problem was with] our socialization program, ... we used to have group dances and everything. When we changed that program the mess wasn't cleaned up with the parents and isn't fully cleaned up with some of them. At least some of those parents came to my going away party and finally got to the point where they would come and be in the same building with me, and we kind of could kid about that we disagreed.*

The importance of constituency was also influenced by the availability of alternative services. While the socialization program was unique in the region, state agency personnel estimate there are 10-15 workshops or other facility-based programs available in the St. Louis metropolitan area.

The impact of closing the facility-based services included a financial loss. Historically, the workshop training program was a source of surplus income for Life Skills and funded the startup of the agency's residential programs. Closure required using fundraising income to support the changeover. The executive director acknowledged that the closure cost the agency money. "We still had staff, but we didn't have the number of people to support the staff. We still had overhead, but we no longer had client volume to support the overhead." These issues were described by several staff as after the fact concerns, issues that had not been planned for effectively. The executive director continues, "to the extent we were behaving consistent with our values was great, but we didn't do a real good job of planning out how we are going to support this thing with just supported employment." The fiscal impact was in 1989, the year that the program closed, because the closure was not accounted for in the initial budget. The workshop space was converted to office space in the following fiscal year, allowing Life Skills to reduce its use of rented space (Life Skills owns the building the workshop was in). The executive director recommends that organizations focus more energy on long term fiscal planning.

Staff report a substantial staff turnover during this period as well, and feel that workshop training program staff were not enrolled in the change. Of approximately 12 direct service staff only two remained with the organization at the end of 6 months, and only one stayed in employment services. The executive director recalls spending limited time with program staff during this time, noting, "... we just said we are going to change, and suddenly their lives are in turmoil."

### **Ongoing Change: 1990-1995**

The change process at Life Skills continued after the closure of the workshop training program with a retreat from providing or managing enclaves as an employment option. Enclaves were a significant part of Life Skill's services in the late 1980's and early 1990's. The number of individuals served in group work sites was 65 in 1989, the year the workshop closed, and 54 in 1991. Staff described the role of the early group work sites as comparable to the workshop training program in focus, with an emphasis on training.

*We set up [work stations in industry] and work sites so that was one model, and again it was training but it was training in a competitive work site. People would go to the Marriott Hotel and we had a staff person who would work with them and teach them and when they mastered the skills they could get a job working in the hotel industry ... the next milestone was we got a very large grant to provide janitorial services at the Federal Record Center. And that was viewed again as transitional employment.*

As the organizational focus changed, these transitional employment sites came to be viewed as permanent employment in 1991. The employment program director described this change, "It didn't make any sense, so we changed the transitional employment program. It was considered permanent employment. They could go there and work as long as they wanted, and if they wanted a new job, fine, we would support them in that too."

Between 1991 and 1995 Life Skills reduced its involvement in running community-based group work sites. The number of individuals supported in group sites declined from 66 in 1990 to 10 in 1996. Staff cited the influence of the Board of Directors in establishing organizational criteria for evaluating decisions such as whether or not to maintain group work sites. The Program Committee, working with staff, established three criteria; (1) whether the work opportunity exists elsewhere, (2) whether employees in that site will make more money than in an individual job, and (3) whether the site is able to break even financially. Staff indicated that Life Skills is willing to support group sites if those criteria are met, as in the case of the one group site that continues at the Metropolitan Sewer District.

The formal commitment to reduce involvement in group work sites was established in 1993, and Life Skills ended most site agreements over the following two years. In several cases, sites were not directly phased out, but rather transferred to other organizations. In the case of the Federal Records Center, Life Skills provided notice to the Department of the Army that they would no longer maintain the contract, and assisted in locating alternative vendors. Similar transfers took place at two other sites. While Life Skills ceased managing enclave sites, they have maintained a case management and support relationship to individuals working in those sites. Staff described the conflict felt between the roles of employer and provider of support. "[The other provider] took over the supervision of it, but we still provided supported employment. We still provided and consulted to [the new agency]." Some of this change was spurred by service issues. "To be honest with you, what initially spurred it on was that the Army General Services Administration was not happy about the services ... [managing janitorial sites] wasn't what we did best."

One staff member also highlighted an increased focus on finances and Life Skill's performance as a business. "... Life Skills truly went from a pure social service agency to much more of a business than I had ever seen ... in terms of finances being a concern, how to do budgets, knowing where we were financially." A similar realization occurred regarding the work sites in industry. It became clear that the organization was subsidizing those sites with fundraising income. The agency's assumption was that sites like the group work site at Marriott should break even.

## Catalysts

Reported catalysts for the changes at Life Skills Foundation include changes in the goals and working paradigm of the organization, as well as business decisions regarding the role and fiscal soundness of the workshop training program and group work sites. The change in values is shared deeply by Life Skills staff. The employment services director stated,

*... I took over the employment program, ... and it became apparent that given our commitment to supported employment a lot of the other things we were doing were really inconsistent. So to tell people you are capable of supported employment, we will help you find something, and then say to another group you need transitional employment, it didn't make any sense.*

This philosophical commitment to change was shared at all management levels of the agency, including the employment services director and the program director for the workshop training program. There is evidence of a strong, persistent focus during this time that resulted from a single shared goal. "What is really present in all of this ... is called alignment. Which means that the mucky mucks, if you will, the management level people, were aligned that this was the right thing to do ..."

As noted earlier, Carol Harris is attributed as a significant individual catalyst for the value change at Life Skills. Part of her contribution was her emphasis on observing the field from a national perspective and reaching out for input through conferences and other opportunities. The executive director remembers, "I came back in '84, and I remember saying there was a big need for workshops. We should think about opening a workshop. I will never forget that look on her face."

Less obvious in the history of the conversion process were changes in the fiscal climate that affected the decision to close the workshop training program. By the late 1980's other workshops in the area, with the support of the County Board, began to establish internal training programs. With this change, the need for a workshop training program became less obvious. Staff reported that the number of referrals to the program were declining, and that there was no longer a dedicated staff person procuring contract work. Because of these changes, agency fundraising dollars were needed to support the program. The employment services director states,

*The county board had worked with all of the sheltered workshops and established inside of each sheltered workshop a training program. So there were already some systems in place such that it didn't look as if we were going to be necessary.*

The executive director confirmed this view, noting that the organization had to decide to either invest more money in subcontract procurement and program development or transition it out. Similar factors influenced the decision to discontinue managing group work sites in industry. These sites were being supported by fundraising dollars, "... so we were funding Marriott Corporation which looked pretty weird. We expect these sites to break even."

## Participant Perspectives on the Change Process

Project staff asked Life Skills Foundation to arrange opportunities to interview representatives of each of the major constituency groups who were either involved in or affected by the process of organizational change. Some of these interviews took place in the process of visiting program sites, while others represented formal interviews. Project staff were particularly interested in, and requested an opportunity to talk to, individuals who had a wide variety of perspectives and opinions about the change process.

## Consumers

Consumers of Life Skills' services that we spoke to expressed their satisfaction with their work situation, but did not have a strong memory of the change process. One consumer was clear that

he liked his current job in a restaurant better than he had liked his previous work in a workshop. He said that while the people were nice at the workshop, he likes it at his current job better because he makes more money. He works around 25 hours a week, and while primarily not receiving benefits, he receives paid vacation time because he was “heartbroken” after coming back from a vacation and not receiving his paycheck. He also discussed liking his coworkers because they are “really nice to me”, and talked about time he has spent bowling with coworkers outside of work.

## **Family Members**

Family members have very little recollection of discussing the decision to close the workshop training program. One family member, who was also a board member of Life Skills at the time, said of her experience in both roles, “I don’t remember having any input into it.” They noted that the closure of the program did not fundamentally alter access to sheltered employment services in the region. “... I guess the parents who still want sheltered employment still have the sheltered workshop [through other providers]” Similarly, the initial transition was gradual for some because Life Skills ran a number of group work sites in 1989 that provided a protected environment and stable employment.

Other parents confirmed the availability of workshop placements if desired. An additional theme expressed was that Life Skills had difficulty supporting some members of their constituency in jobs. One mother described the decision to have her daughter attend a workshop. Life Skills had been unable to find her daughter a long term job, despite the family’s preference that she work in the community.

*[She] has very limited skills. Because of the ... reduced number of jobs available in today's job market place and because of Life Skill's desire to make the good job match which is the only way you can have the best situation and a long term situation, after months and months they are coming up with zero. So rather than having her in a bored situation ... [we] finally gave in and sent her to a workshop.*

During the period that her daughter waited for employment, she was at home during the day. This was a difficult period for both the daughter and the family. Her mother indicated that Life Skills’ optimism about their ability to find a good job match was a concern, she felt “frankly, it’s a bit too optimistic”. While her feelings about the workshop are mixed, overall she feels the daughter has been happier and has stronger social ties at the workshop, and noted that “Life Skills best success and most numerous successes are with higher functioning individuals, not with lower functioning individuals”.

The focus of this concern is the need for Life Skills to develop a better capacity to support individuals with more significant disabilities. A parent who is also a board member expressed the wish that Life Skills would reconsider developing enclaves for this purpose. “... I guess what I am saying is I don’t see the problem with enclaves. To me that is just like a very good compromise for a lower functioning individual.”

There was a substantial difference between the limited response of parent’s to the closure of the workshop training program and Life Skills’ decision to restructure the socialization program from center-based to an integrated community-based service. There was a strong negative reaction, and several respondents shared the view that “... a lot of these older parents felt like we pulled the rug out from under them.” A parent who is also a board members noted that the strong reaction to changes in the socialization program was unanticipated. “I think we just picked a day ... There was this flurry of parental upset and [we changed] the date to like a year away.”

## **Executive Director**

The executive director of Life Skills during this period of change emphasized the importance of values and process of rapid decision making based on those values. Staff described his willingness to back decisions that required major organizational change. The executive director expressed this

view as, "It's like, 'put a man on the moon by the end of the decade', and then it happened." Like other staff, the executive director emphasized Carol Harris's role in shaping the his own values and enrolling him philosophically in the need for change.

The importance of values in directing services at Life Skills was discussed by almost all respondents including staff, funders, and family members. Even when talking about the business and fiscal reasons for the organizational changes at Life Skills, the executive director talked about the importance of the value base to individual staff:

*This company has a lot of faults and a lot of strengths but you can't fault it for not being clear about its values. Somebody comes to work here and feels they want to cut a corner in terms of integrity. You just don't do that here. It's pretty simple.*

He emphasized that the process of organizational change ultimately relies on values more than strategy. When talking about organizations that are considering closing a workshop the executive director noted,

*... I say once they get their values together and say they are going to do it, it will happen. Regardless of the money and the board and the parents, the hurricanes and all the circumstances people elude to that prevent them from behaving consistent with their values.*

This emphasis on values drove the change process forward, and resulted in quick decisions and implementation of change. The executive director considered "I think we didn't need everything to be in place prior to it happening ... everything can't be just right for it to happen, or it will never happen." Discussing his views on leadership, he noted,

*... one thing about leadership style is that I don't have enough sense to know when I'm in danger. Retrospectively there is risk ... VR was very upset with us. VR did not want us to do it. They met with us consistently and tried to talk us out of it, but family members by and large were not upset. The board didn't know about it and if they did they were only concerned that they work for the clients. Staff were upset about it. Life Skills was so driven philosophically that it was clearly the right thing to do and there was just no doubt about doing it.*

The change process, from the perspective of the executive director, happened smoothly, but in retrospect was not implemented correctly:

*Looking back in hindsight it may have been a lot more powerful to have the Board be a stakeholder in that decision. Because what if the stuff had hit the fan. [The Employment Services Director] was dealing with a lot of upset VR counselors. We should have had the board involved. It is a policy decision ... my role was to enroll them in what I knew was the right thing to do for the organization and I chickened out on that, thinking that they might not agree with me.*

The executive director also indicated regrets about the limited effort spent in enrolling staff in the change process. He noted the strong philosophical schism that existed between the readiness model in the workshop, and the supported employment services. He described a specific example of a young man who had challenging behaviors and whose family wanted him in a community job that highlighted this schism.

*[His parents] said we want our kid in that program and all of our evaluations said he is not ready. He picked his face into scabs and just had a whole bunch of stuff and the staff said no way. Fortunately Carol [Harris] was loony enough, and so was I, that we said okay, let's try this. Let's stick this kid where he doesn't belong, and that created a furor ... because we just ignored our own evaluation and put him where his family wanted him.*

## Life Skills Staff

Closure of the workshop training program is remembered as a stressful time for direct care staff. The program supervisor noted that "... we were dealing with anger from some staff." Staff in the workshop training program were described as disconnected from other changes at Life Skills. The supervisor of that program at the time noted,

*... staff who were working in the workshop training program really didn't know a whole lot about supported employment ... they were very unsure about what was going to happen to them and their jobs, and what was going to happen to the people we were serving.*

The view that staff were uninformed about supported employment was shared by other supervisory staff. This disconnection was also mirrored by staff in the supported employment program at the time of the closure. The program manager for supported employment noted that there was very little interaction between the programs at that time, and that she and her staff knew little about what was going on in the workshop training program.

The program manager noted that a longer time line (one year rather than 8 months) would have allowed more time for communication with funders, families, and staff. She stated, "One thing I didn't do a particularly good job of was educating staff and getting them excited about supported employment." Staff also noted that individuals hired as employment specialists were, in general, a different type of person, and this was reflected both in who was interested in the work and what Life Skills looked for in hiring.

These stresses may have had a positive effect on staff who were working in supported employment at the time. "I think it spurred job development ... it kind of brought us together as providers of employment services, and that brought us together in terms of our commitment. Now we could really focus in on supported employment." The program manager also noted that some consumers in the workshop training program, who in the past would have transitioned to a workshop, moved directly into supported employment.

Staff who worked with Life Skills before the workshop training program closed had clear memories of it.

*We had a huge room, with tables in a square around the room. [It was a] different building, and the people we were training would sit on the outside of this square and they were doing simulated work, sorting beads, washers of different sizes, screws, stringing boards.*

While not true immediately before the closure, staff also remembered periods of strong subcontract work. One staff noted that when she was hired there were 2 staff dedicated to procuring and managing subcontract work. "We had a lot of subcontract work, [and staff] had to work weekends to get it done." The program had a strong emphasis on prerequisites, and individuals typically moved on to a sheltered workshop run by a different community organization after 3-4 months in the workshop training program. "There was very much a system where you did simulated work, subcontract work and you could do subcontract work all the time because you were really good and earn to be graduated to another job and that would usually mean sheltered workshop placement."

There is evidence of a shift in thinking that occurred with the closing of the workshop training program. Prior to the workshop closing, "placement" was a function that included placement into sheltered workshops. One staff noted,

*We had placement people. When people completed the presheltered workshop training, then they would go to one of two places. Most people would go to sheltered workshops, and we had placement people who supported them in that transition. We also had placement people who would assist people, very few people, that we deemed appropriate for competitive employment.*

As the role of group work sites changed in the early 1990s from training sites to permanent employment, staff also began to reconsider their roles. Staff discussed the shift in their role from a working supervisor to a source of support.

*We became clear that job coaches were there to support the people with disability in adapting to the job and that they weren't there to be doing the work which had been the expectation. So once we pulled job coaches out and they weren't cleaning rooms anymore, and they weren't doing laundry, a lot of the sub contractors we were working with were upset. They said wait a minute you want us to pay for more bodies, like what is your job coach doing. So we had to have a lot of conversations about these contracts need to stand alone.*

This shift in paradigm was also evident in other conversations. Two staff discussed the change from a readiness model, stating, "When I first started in the [program] we were getting people ready. You were getting ready to go out into a real job ... and there were things you had to do. I think we made [those prerequisites] up."

Life Skills staff emphasized that they support choice across the variety of service options for individuals, including sheltered employment. They described their role during intake as screening individuals to be sure that there is a good fit:

*We very much would support other choices, and we have a commitment and will in fact hook people up with other services. So the way we view it is that there are all these other services available, and Life Skills says 'this is what we are good at and here is the one we are going to provide, and we will help you access whichever ones you want.'*

Life Skills staff also reflected a practical approach to the issue of choice in the job development process. The role of the new marketing manager was described by one staff member as,

*she brings with her an uncommon realistic view of the job market. So when somebody says I can only work Mondays and Fridays and only at lunch time, she will say let's talk about this, do you really want a job. She has a commitment to finding people jobs but she also knows the market. It's been a big contribution.*

Staff view change as a constant at Life Skills. Comments such as "Life Skills is constantly in transition" were common. Decisions about change were also viewed as happening rapidly, consistent with the views of other groups. One staff member noted that "Once an idea is grabbed onto that's pretty much the goal. The objective and obstacles in the way are just simply problems to be dealt with along the road."

The focus on change is consistent with a similar view of the organization as a place that emphasizes values and creativity. A former program manager stated that "... it is a very exciting place to work because there are a lot of ideas going around, and everybody just really is very committed to people being independent." Some staff also emphasized the focus on individual preferences in the job search:

*There were a lot of people who wanted [janitorial or service industry jobs], but some other people didn't, and we tried many different ways of finding jobs that were clerical in nature or warehouse or other types of jobs ... We thought something was going to really help us and it would only go so far, and we would gather it back up and brainstorm and go for it in a different way ...*

One staff member summarized Life Skills' focus on creative brainstorming by saying,

*Everyone just pretty much was always caught up in the spirit of finding better ways to do things ... I think we just tended to hire people who were innately interested in creating new approaches and not just basically 'here's the procedure, you follow it, and that's the end of it.'*

The focus on creativity and innovation was influenced in part by the values and focus of managers at Life Skills, but also may have been supported in concrete ways. One staff member highlighted the organization's participation in competitions for excellence awards. Life Skills applied for and won an award in 1994 from Project Excel in a four state competition for exemplary supported employment programs. In addition, Life Skills pursued an application for the national Malcolm Baldrige award for quality of service when they were opened up to nonprofit organizations.

Staff indicated considerable pride in the willingness of the organization to do the right thing and take risks. A long term staff member who, even after taking another job, continues to work part time for Life Skills said,

*It is much cheaper to run group programs and just rely on what funding is out there and shape your program around the funding, and Life Skills actually kind of looks at that as the last factor. So I think it is a very daring organization, and I am proud to be part of it in whatever way I can be for as long as they continue to act in that manner.*

Another senior staff person said, "I love talking about Life Skills, and it's a big part of my life and I am proud of the changes we have had at Life Skills." Two staff mentioned their experiences interviewing for other jobs in ways that indicated pride for the organization. One said, "Actually I have had times during my employment that I have done some interviewing with other agencies, and come back and said ... 'I couldn't do that.' I think we are much more advanced."

Despite the evidence of pride in their work and in the organization, staff also demonstrated a willingness to be self critical. Discussing the lack of success the organization has had in the job search for some individuals, one staff member noted "It is an issue about our inability ... to convince employers that people have abilities, even though when you meet them they interact or appear otherwise." Life Skills staff, like family members and funders, discussed issues related to the organization being less successful in supporting individuals with more significant disabilities. Several staff indicated that recently the organization was becoming more selective about who it accepted in order to be more accountable about outcomes. "Now we are actually trying to be very accountable. Can we provide the job of your choice and be successful at it within 2-4 months?"

**Organizational Functioning.** Staff described the organizational structure of Life Skills as flexible and compatible with the focus on creativity. Staff indicated that they had access across the organizational chart. "... it is not traditional in the sense of other organizations. You go and talk to who you need to talk to." Power was perceived as shared. "It's always been my perception that the director team, which is [the employment services director] and the department heads, have more power in the company than any sole executive director."

Life Skills staff indicated that leadership in the organization comes from multiple sources, and saw that as a strength. Staff also indicated that they had considerable independence, and saw creativity as a clear part of their responsibility. "We are very independent in these jobs, which is really part of what I like about it. [The program director] provides me with a lot of opportunities to do those things traditionally that a director has done. And the same holds true for consultants." This opportunity is consistent with what staff described as an evolution toward self-directed work teams.

The strong theme of clear values for community inclusion and commitment to Life Skills as an organization was repeated in interviews. Staff were asked how these values are shared among staff. "It starts as early as the hiring process when someone is hired, or maybe even during the interviewing when someone is being interviewed we go over the mission, the vision, the employee agreements. It is reiterated." Staff also emphasized the importance of the type of person who works for Life Skills. "I think we seek out individuals that in their own personal life and their own personal dreams have goals similar to what our agency is trying to strive for."

Several staff discussed the commitments that staff must explicitly agree to when beginning work with the organization. Staff must sign off on four agreements that address people's commitments and interactions with one another (See Table 3.3). One staff member said,

*I see it as a contract between the employer and the employee. To begin with, maybe the employee doesn't understand how it impacts them or how it affects them. But by and large because of the way our culture is within our agency the employer expects these things from you in order for you to be a thriving member of the community within the agency.*

These agreements include a strong emphasis on honest and straightforward communication in a way that values conflict and disagreement.

### Table 3.3 Organizational Agreements

1. To communicate straight, always
2. To be empowered
3. To fulfill my dream and participate in society in the way I choose
4. To be accountable for it All

**Relationships with funders.** Life Skills staff perceive Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) as being upset about the change at the time. Staff felt that this was partly related to DVR's assumption that the service was needed, and partly practical. "They thought we were throwing away a moneymaker." Overall, staff remembered DVR staff actively working to keep the program open. A staff member comments, "It was really interesting because they spent a lot of time trying to talk us out of it ... finally after we spent lots of conversations I just had to say thank you for your input and we are doing it ... and at that point they shifted to helping us with the transition plans." Life Skills' staff recognized organizational communication as one source of this conflict with funders. On staff member indicates "... they were left out of the circle and then plopped with a problem on their hands ... the voc rehab counselors were unaware of the conversion until we called to speak to them about a specific client."

**Role of external resources.** Life Skills relied heavily on the experience of external resources to help define a vision. A senior staff member described the commitment of the executive director and Carol Harris to innovation and the evolution of the field saying, "[They] would read something in the literature, and the next thing you know our funding sources would be trying it and we would be trying it." Life Skills also invited national leaders into the agency, but found these contacts mixed in their usefulness. Staff described the experience of bringing in a national expert who rather than encouraging staff, highlighted the problems with existing services. "I mean [staff] felt like they were criminals. They felt like terrible people because they worked in this program."

The organization also used outside consultants to support development of a clear mission and values. The employment services director recalled,

*... About five years ago I hired a consultant to support us in developing an agency vision ... we set out to create a certain culture. We are very aware of what that culture is. We screen people, we talk about it at interviews and when people are first hired, at orientation we spend time going over it as well ... Here you tell people up front what [the culture] is, and you don't have to work for 6 months to figure it out.*

Staff talked about "communicating straight", one of the agreements staff are expected to commit to, and the expectation that staff be comfortable disagreeing with their supervisor or director. Outside support was used to help establish this agreement. "... initially when we first did it, we met with our consultant on a weekly basis, and we had groups that really would look at 'so what does it mean to communicate straight.'"

## Funding Agencies and Workshop Providers

Representatives from the County Productive Living Board (County Board), the state vocational rehabilitation agency (DVR), and other employment service providers in St. Louis participated in

the site visit. Employment services in the St. Louis area are primarily funded by DVR and the County Board, the local source of funding for individuals with developmental disabilities. DVR serves as the primary source of funds for job placement. County Board staff indicated that at the time the workshop training program was closed, their primary concerns were that individuals not lose access to services by failing to meet minimum production or other requirements. Overall, funders expressed commitment to maintaining a full range of service options in the St. Louis area, including sheltered workshops, enclaves, and individual supported employment. A representative from the funding agencies states, "I would prefer most people to be in regular employment ... but people should have the choice."

State agencies in Missouri emphasize the role of sheltered workshops as employers for people with disabilities rather than rehabilitation service providers. The agencies provide funding to workshops only to address additional supervision needs of consumers as employees, and not for rehabilitation or training services. State law also limits the flexibility of workshops by prohibiting them from using nondisabled workers. Initiatives to change this law have failed in the past two years, and there continues to be a vocal constituency who are resistant to changes in the role of workshops. Respondents viewed the limited funding and role of workshops in Missouri as significant barriers to program conversion. These factors, though, have also resulted in a strong cooperative relationship between workshops and programs such as Life Skills that provide other services. This relationship was one factor in the minimal impact on consumers and the community when the workshop training program closed. Life Skills maintains formal and informal cooperative relationships with other programs, and respondents described individuals routinely moving between services based on their individual preferences. Few organizations provide a full range of services which is a unique feature of this area. As a result, individuals often begin interviewing for jobs with support from outside agencies while continuing to attend a workshop.

At the time of the closure, the County Board had already been active in promoting supported employment, and eliminating the pretraining model for workshops was consistent with that movement. A representative from the County Board describes, "... We had been doing supported employment, and we had gotten beyond the train-and-place model in community based employment several years earlier, so it made sense to us that we would do the same thing in the sheltered workshop system." The County Board's response was to provide resources to workshops so that they could provide training internally, and not consider minimum production rates. This change in the capacity of workshops to provide training internally was well established by the time the workshop training program at Life Skills closed, reducing the demand for the program's services.

The Director of a local workshop confirmed the shift, and talked about both bringing outside programs into the workshop to provide training services and develop internal capacity. "We [now] accept people as they come to us with their present skills and then train them with either our work adjustment program or with in-house, on the job training." This program has maintained a distinct purpose and does not provide community employment services, relying instead on Life Skills and other organizations to provide job placement services. The role of workshops has also led to increasing use of cooperative agreements between workshops and other providers to provide job placement and training services. In some cases, other providers furnish intensive training within a workshop.

Funders described the clarity of Life Skills values as important to the program closure. Life Skills was strongly praised by funders for the caliber of its staff, and for the organization's commitment to quality and innovation in services. One funder stated,

*Life Skills is an agency that doesn't just have a list of values following their mission statement. Every level of staff, direct service up to administration, and support staff as well knows what the mission of the organization is and are very clear about the values ... It is very different from many agencies that kind of go wherever the money is.*

Similarly, Life Skills was characterized as being responsive to the need for change. "There is a real willingness to say 'we screwed up, this isn't working as well as we thought it would, what can

we do better.”

Consistent with other groups, funders acknowledged that a need in the change process was more communication with constituents. One funder felt that Life Skills could have been better at “... keeping families informed ahead of time, before the fact, and making plans and making sure all the bases are covered. I think this is critical ... and sometimes I am not sure that all of those bases were covered right off.” Another funder discussed communication with the funding agency observing, “from the beginning people always ask for feedback but it sounds like the decision has already been made by that time.”

Resources to support the expansion of supported employment has not been an issue for the County Board, though they continue to provide as much support to workshops as community employment. Over the past 5 years, \$100,000 to \$200,000 in funds each year allocated to supported employment have not been used by programs and have reverted to the Board. The policy of the County Board is to support the full range of employment options.

The majority of funding for the workshop training program was from Vocational Rehabilitation. A DVR staff person remembers the workshop training program as not very effective, and not a loss to the region. Consistent with other funders, she stated support for maintaining a range of sheltered and community employment options, including workshops and enclaves. As a result, the closure of the group work sites was more significant to this respondent. “[Getting rid of the enclaves] was probably more of an issue for me and the other VR people that I know ... I still think there is a need for people to work in groups that need ongoing supervision and I was not happy that they were not going to provide that ...”

VR staff members indicated concerns about variability in the quality of the services provided by Life Skills. This was viewed, in part, as an inconsistency between Life Skills’ values for all individuals being able to work and their capacity to support individuals with more significant disabilities.

*I will only refer people here who I feel can fit with what their criteria and philosophy is ... When I refer somebody here I know it will be someone fairly high functioning, that can go out in the community and get a job and is not going to need a whole lot of support because they don’t provide traditional job coaching, its the natural support model, so I will take all of those things in consideration with the referral.*

These comments also reflect a concern about consistency in the message Life Skills gives about its services. “There have been people with more severe needs, and Life Skills hasn’t wanted to say ‘no, we can’t serve these people ...”

## Board Members

Board members acknowledged that they were only minimally involved in the decision to close the workshop training program. One board member noted that “at that point in time I would say the staff made decisions, made recommendations to the board, and it was pretty much rubber stamped ...”. Board members did not indicate that there had been an urgent need to change, and one board member, who is also a parent, noted that “I think we did a very good job of doing preworkshop [training] with the individuals prior to assimilating them into the actual job they were going to do.”

Board members noted that rapid growth and change throughout the organization between 1991 and 1996 forced the board to become more focused and more professional. This led to an expansion of their role in decision making. At the time, the board noted that decision making rested in the hands of program directors and management staff, reflecting the alignment of management and supervisory staff, but that “... it was a much smaller group of people making decisions, and now I think that it has grown.” This change is reflected in the board’s role in establishing criteria for the continuation of group work sites. Staff viewed these criteria as significant in influencing the decision to discontinue most of Life Skills’ involvement in group work site models.

The board shared the agency's immediacy of action in decision making.

*We used to decide that we wanted to do something and jump right into it and not worry about the financial end of it ... we also had some cushioning because some of our programs made money at that time ... Now we are all pretty cognizant that we can't jump in if we can't break even.*

Board members defined their role as a responsive link to the community, and emphasized their availability to constituents. One board member notes, "I guess because there wasn't a huge upset from our community, the board went along with it ..."

## Critical Issues in the Change Process

Life Skills Foundation is described across all constituencies as an organization that has a strong sense of shared values, and a commitment to innovation and change. This is reflected in the continuous nature of change in Life Skills' employment services across the time period that this case study addresses. Between 1989 and 1995 Life Skills staff repeatedly evaluated the purpose and quality of the services being provided on both organizational and individual levels. Particularly striking were the strong feelings reflected across constituencies, but particularly among staff, about Life Skills as an organization that was willing to take risks and stay true to its values.

The major themes that emerge from Life Skills Foundation also reflect an apparent contradiction between organizational characteristics that were both strong positive influences in the change process but also sources of real or potential stress and risk for the organization. This dual focus is true, in particular, in the first two themes described below. These themes reflect both the strong bias for immediate action evident in the culture of Life Skills, and the attendant risks that result.

### Theme 1: Bias for immediate action

Life Skills initiated change repeatedly on short time lines, often with limited outreach to constituents or formal planning. The executive director noted "It sounds like this whole thing back in the 80's when they said 'pre means never.' That extends not only to the individual, but also on an organizational level. If you wait for everything to be in place it's never going to happen." This theme recurred frequently at all levels of staff: "Really just do it. Communicate and just do it. You can communicate forever." These change decisions worked because they were clearly linked to larger organizational goals and values, and they also represented a commitment to continuous innovation. Leadership staff had strong shared agreement that closing the workshop training program, for example, was the right thing to do. Underlying the willingness to act was a strong belief that all change is just one part of a long term process, and that no change is set in stone. A senior staff member emphasized,

*There was some advantage to having it short term. I certainly wouldn't extend it beyond a year, because what happens then [is] you can keep postponing it and postponing it, and say this circumstance isn't right for you. Well, they are never going to be exactly right, you just make the commitment, do it, and then handle whatever shows up.*

### Theme 2: Risk taking

Along with the bias for immediate action, Life Skills staff and board members expressed a willingness to take risks in implementing change. Staff were willing to do the right thing, and then to manage the consequences as they emerged. These risks were sometimes significant, as indicated in management staff reflections on the unplanned financial impact of closing the workshop training program or the limited amount of time spent talking about the change with key constituencies. Staff acknowledged that sufficient attention was not always paid to the details of the change plan. Nevertheless, this willingness to take risks contributed to the speed of change at Life Skills, and to the quality of outcomes for Life Skills consumers.

### **Theme 3: Strong shared values, sense of pride, and clarity of commitment among staff**

Across all levels of the organization, staff communicated clear values and a tremendous sense of pride in the organization. Staff described Life Skills as a unique organization, and a leader in the St. Louis area. This pride, in part, seems to sustain staff through the constant change. One staff member said, "Life Skills has always prided itself on being on the cutting edge of services ..." The development of shared values is far from accidental at Life Skills. It is emphasized in many ways including the four agreements staff sign, during the hiring process, and through participation in regional and national award competitions including the Malcolm Baldrige award.

### **Theme 4: Consistent unquestioned commitment to goal**

The direction of change at Life Skills has been clear throughout the period described here. Life Skills has gradually refined its approach to providing full and inclusionary community employment opportunities to individuals. As it became clear that a strategy such as enclaves was not fully meeting that goal, then additional change was initiated. Life Skills also invested considerable resources in defining its vision. The organization used outside consultants, conferences, and written materials to help focus its goals and values. There was clear evidence that Life Skill's focus and commitment occurred across all management levels. One manager stated, "It never occurred to me that [closing the workshop training program] was the wrong decision."

### **Theme 5: Outwardly focused but inwardly driven**

Life Skills has simultaneously maintained a strong outreach to ideas and resources, as well as maintaining an inwardly driven set of goals. As an outward-focused organization, Life Skills has used national and regional input to shape it as a learning organization that is willing to engage in continuous change. As an inwardly focused organization, Life Skills has resisted the attempts of local forces such as families or funders to influence decisions and direction. For example, a consistent message from both families and funders is that they would like Life Skills to continue to offer group work opportunities such as enclaves. Despite these concerns, the organization has not wavered from its stated values and goals.

While being inwardly driven has helped Life Skills to maintain focus, this characteristic has also contributed to limited attention to the process of change. Despite the use of national resources to shape its values and goals, Life Skills did not consistently engage local constituents in the change process, and significant decisions were often made by a small group of leadership staff. The time limited nature of the workshop training program did not impede closure of the program, but staff at all levels acknowledge that the lack of communication posed problems and risks to the change process.

### **Theme 6: Limited real impact on access to sheltered employment services**

While Life Skills has implemented substantial change in the structure and goals of the organization, it is significant that the decision to close the workshop training program had limited impact on access to sheltered employment services in the St. Louis region. While this is not a significant factor in the culture and decision making of the organization, it did serve to minimize community and customer reaction to the decision. Some of the themes noted above, in particular issues related to risk taking and limited communication about the decision, may have had significantly different effects if there had been a strong constituency that supported continuing the program. Life Skills staff clearly acknowledge this concern, and used their experiences in changing the Socialization program from a center-based service to a community integration service as an example.

## **Theme 7: Self critical/Self evaluative**

Funders identify the willingness of Life Skills to be self critical as an important attribute. This theme of self-evaluation is closely related to the strong organizational emphasis on creative problem solving. Staff highlighted the push for creativity, and this emphasis is related to Life Skills being unwilling to accept the way things are.

### **Current Organizational Challenges**

Life Skills staff and other constituents consistently identified two ongoing organizational challenges. The first challenge is the difficulty the organization has faced in meeting the needs of individuals with more severe disabilities. Life Skills maintains a strong commitment to the value that all individuals can work, but is not viewed as consistently effective at supporting this group in moving into employment in a timely manner. A related challenge is the differing perspectives among constituencies about the range of services Life Skills should provide. The decision to eliminate most group supported employment services was questioned by both parents and funders. Life Skills is also clearly structured as an employment service, and does not attempt to provide alternative activities when consumers are between jobs. These two characteristics are consistent with the Life Skills mission and values, and help establish the clarity staff have about their goals. Nevertheless, key constituencies continue to have strong alternative opinions, making it important for the organization to address these issues through communication and planning.

### **Conclusion**

Life Skills Foundation continues to change and redefine itself, while maintaining a strong sense of shared values and pride. Staff talked about the possibility of cultural differences that may result from the recent hiring of a new executive director. However, a strong message across staff was that the values of Life Skills were strongly embedded throughout the organizational chart and that they anticipated little opportunity for changes in direction. Above all, this sense of shared purpose and vision defines Life Skills, and was evident in the consistent pride in the organization presented by staff and other constituency groups.



## Chapter 4

### MetroWest Human Services<sup>5</sup>

Ashland, Massachusetts

Date of Site Visit: September 1996

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Vaunne Ma

### Description of the Organization

**M**etroWest Human Services began as an Association for Retarded Citizens that was started by a group of parents in the early 1950's. South Middlesex Association for Retarded Citizens (SMARC) originally provided day and residential services to children and adults with developmental disabilities. In 1985, the agency was serving 300 individuals. At that time, the Department of Mental Retardation, SMARC's primary funding source, began to encourage the agency to provide supported employment opportunities for individuals who received services from them. As the agency continued with the process of increasing community employment and closing their segregated services (which will be described in greater detail in the next section), they also underwent two mergers for other organizations. In 1994, SMARC merged with MetroWest Mental Health Center. Fiscal concerns were a primary influence in this merger. With the merger, the day services component became referred to as MetroWest Human Services. The advocacy component of SMARC services remained separate and continues under the same name as an independent non-profit organization. In 1995, MetroWest Mental Health Center was bought by Columbia/HCA, a national for profit health care company. With this final merger, the executive director who had been with SMARC for thirteen years was replaced and a new executive director appointed.

MetroWest services are based in Ashland, Massachusetts, a community in the western suburbs of Boston. In 1990, prior to the closure of the workshop, SMARC purchased a warehouse building and converted in for the workshop and administrative offices. This building continues to house the administrative offices and the Day Habilitation services. Some space is leased to an early intervention program. The space that was previously used for the workshop is rented out evening for a bingo hall, but otherwise is unused. Community Options, a day alternative for people when they are not working, is located in an adjoining town.

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#### <sup>5</sup> Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the consumers, staff, family members, board members, and other associates of MetroWest Human Services who participated in this site visit. Their willingness to give us as much time as we needed and to share both the celebrations and struggles of the change process allows us to present this complete picture of their experience in closing down an adult day care program and creating opportunities for employment in the community. We would particularly like to thank Sue Hatton, who hosted our visit and all of the Metro West staff who helped coordinate interviews and opportunities to learn from them.

## **Current Services**

MetroWest Mental Health Association, Developmental Disabilities Division includes day, employment, residential, and counseling services and placement review for individuals with developmental disabilities who are living in nursing homes. The day and employment services include the Day Habilitation Services, Employment Services and Community Options. At the time of the site visit, approximately 90 individuals were being served in Day Habilitation program. Services in this program included traditional center based services with a focus on development of independent living skills; adult day activities which were therapeutic enrichment activities; and community and volunteer services where the focus is on increasing community participation. The agency is focusing on reducing this component of their services but they continue to get pressure from funding sources to add new people to their services.

Employment services provides both short term job placement services and longer term supported employment services. There are employment teams that work together and divide up responsibilities for job development and job coaching for the individuals they serve. Currently, Employment Services have focused on coordinating all the job development activities so that staff are not going to the same employers or “bumping into one another” out in the community.

Community Options is the newest service that MetroWest is providing and it was designed to meet the day needs of individuals who were looking for employment. Since MetroWest’s DMR contract requires them to be responsible for people they serve from 9 to 3, Community Options was created to provide support during this time for people who were not working. Individual schedules and activities at Community Options differ depending on the needs of the individual. Most individuals served in this program begin their day at the Community Options site and then leave either with a team or individual to engage in activities in the community. There are a range of activities including volunteer jobs and recreational activities from which individuals can choose to participate. There are also some activities that are provided at the site including educational groups and independent living skills training. Medicaid funds support the majority of individuals served in Community Options. For individuals who are not eligible for Medicaid, their services can be funded by DMR.

## **Administrative Structure**

MetroWest Mental Health Association, Developmental Disabilities Division is a division of a local hospital which is run by Columbia/HCA. The administrative structure of the division includes a director and departmental directors. The departments that comprise the DD Division include residential services, employment services, day habilitation (which includes responsibility for the Community Options program) and the Pre-Admission Screening/Annual Resident Review (PASARR) department. Within the employment services department there are teams comprised of four to five staff people who are responsible for doing job development and job coaching for approximately 20 individuals. See Figure 4.1 on the opposite page for the MetroWest table of organization.

Staff at MetroWest credit their mission statement as being a driving influence in their decision making and planning process. Their current mission statement is described below:

Our mission is to affirm the dignity of all people and promote the roles we play in our communities as productive workers, valued neighbors and friends.

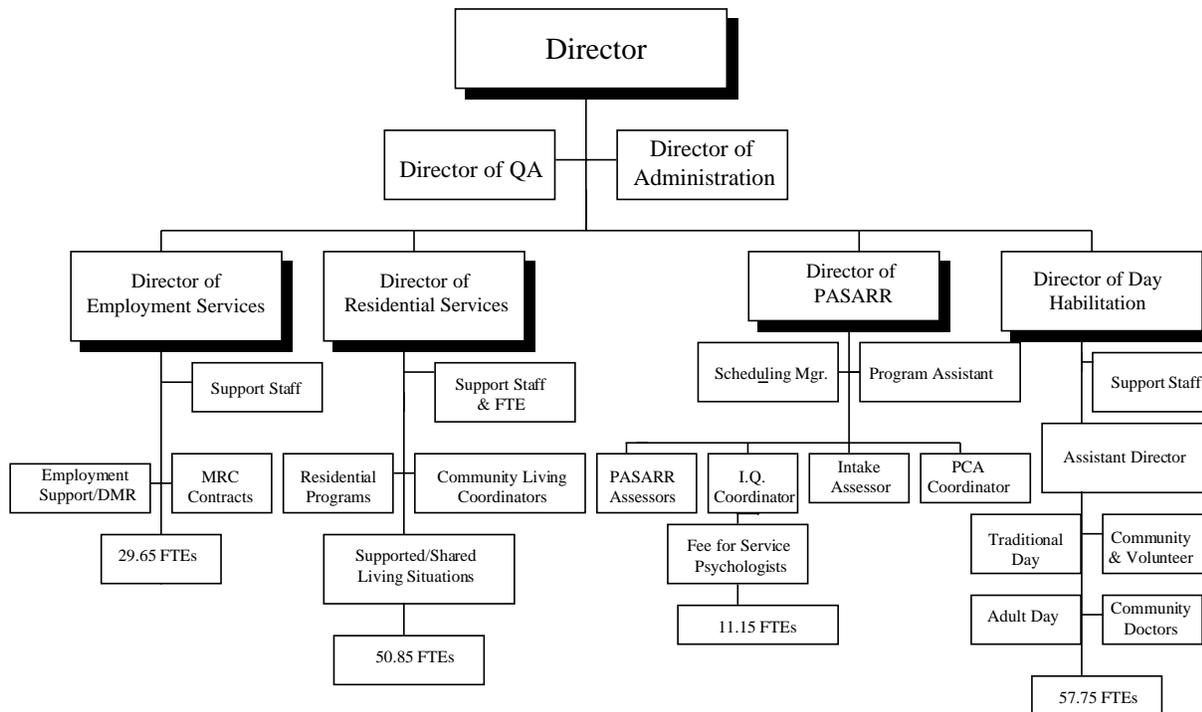
We are committed to creating opportunities for all people to initiate ideas, make choices and decisions, and share in the resources of the community.

## **History of the Conversion to Integrated Employment**

Strategic planning to increase community based employment for consumers of MetroWest services began in 1985. The Department of Mental Retardation which funded some of the day program was encouraging all providers to expand their services to include supported employment.

Figure 4.1

**Columbia MetroWest Human Services**



During this period, MetroWest developed a janitorial crew and enclave placements as well as beginning to provide some individual placement services. The janitorial crew resulted in a struggle between needs for staff support in the community versus staffing demands in the workshop, however, this experience gave people the perspective that community employment was possible. The two enclaves that were created during this time were described as being “mini workshops in industry.” At one site there were up twenty consumers from MetroWest working at a company. Forty individuals were identified as being ready for individuals placement, but staff had difficulty obtaining jobs and only twelve of these individuals entered employment. Despite these attempts, MetroWest was not successful in their efforts to provide individualized community jobs and in 1990, a second strategic planning process was undertaken.

At the same time as this second planning process to expand community employment opportunities, MetroWest moved into a new larger facility. Their old facility required repair work in meet minimal standards to continue operation. Taking on this new larger space created additional financial pressure as well as conflict about the direction of the agency. Some staff indicate that the move was a bad decision and caused a continued emphasis on segregated services. The former executive director indicates that if there had “been a six month difference, we probably wouldn’t have moved.” To address the financial pressure of the new space, as well as to create a more integrated work place, MetroWest explored the possibility of having individuals without disabilities come into the workshop and work on subcontract business. This was viewed by the former executive director as an opportunity to bring in enough revenue to support itself and supported employment services.

To address these continuing financial concerns, a consultant from SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) was brought in to do an evaluation of the workshop. This cost analysis indicated that it would be necessary to triple the size of the workshop to be able to make it

profitable. To expand the workshop to such a great extent was inconsistent with the agencies mission and increase focus on community employment. Faced with this information, the former executive director and management staff made the decision to close the workshop. The situation was presented to the board of directors and they were told it was no longer feasible to provide both workshop and supported employment services. In June of 1993, the board voted to close the workshop in January 1994.

Individual and group meetings were held with consumers and their families and they were given the choice to become involved in the new supported employment services, move to the MetroWest Medicaid funded day habilitation program or receive assistance in finding workshops services at another agency. For individuals who opted for the supported employment program there was a commitment that there would be activities during the day if they had not yet obtained a job. Satellite sites were developed in the community to serve as a central meeting place for transportation and a place to run groups and activities for individuals when they were not working.

In January 1994, production at the workshop ended and the last group of consumers and staff were moved to satellite locations in April. There were five satellites with four to five staff and up to 20 consumers. Satellites were located in community setting such as church basements or recreation centers. In some cases the satellite group would meet in the residence of individuals participating in the group. During this first year of the satellites the majority of staff time was spent on community integration activities for individuals and limited time was devoted to job development. Employment rates remained at approximately 40% and staff, consumers, families and the funding source were frustrated with the lack of jobs as well as the type of activities people were engaged in during the day. The contract funding these services was up for re-bid and there was serious concern whether MetroWest would receive this supported employment funding.

A restructuring of the supported employment services focused on developing more time and resources to developing jobs and they created a program called Community Connections to provide day support to people when they are not working. Community Connections services are largely funded by Medicaid funding and were considered an extensive of the day habilitation services. In July of 1995 Community Connections began and DMR gave MetroWest a one year provisional contract to continue their supported employment services. With the available of Community Connections to provide day support, employment staff was able to focus more time and energy on job development and they quickly increased the number of community placements to the point that 80% of individuals receiving supported employment services were in jobs. Community Connections continues to provide community integration activities such as volunteer work and recreational activities to individuals who are not working or during the day hours they are off from their jobs. There is central location for Community Connections which serves as a meeting place, but the majority of activities happen off site.

## **Participant Perspectives on the Change Process**

Project staff asked MetroWest staff to arrange opportunities to interview representatives of each of the major constituency groups who were either involved in or affected by the process of organizational change. Some of these interviews took place in the process of visiting employment sites, while others represented formal interviews. Project staff were particularly interested in talking with individuals who had a wide variety of perspectives about the change process, and the opportunity to sample the range of points of view was specifically requested.

### **Executive Director**

The executive director who led the organization through most of the conversion process returned for the interview to provide his perspective on this process. He had been with the agency for a decade prior to the movement toward community based employment, leaving in 1995 after the merger with Columbia/HCA.

During the earlier planning process which began in the mid 80's, the focus was more on developing the business component of the agency. They looked into running small business such as printing match covers and running a mailing service. The executive director describes this plan as not being successful since they did not know how "to treat it like a business".

*The vision early on was to have a very good workshop for people to choose it, to gradually integrate the workshop with non handicapped workers. To have a variety of enclaves and jobs out in the community. I think that probably was the bad plan vision. I think the problem is that we found very quickly that we weren't very good at running a business.*

During late '80's when they were looking at the building the business they had a consultant who come in a work with them from the Executive Service Corps. Through this year long study , they considered "what we were doing in volume, who we had placed out, what was our product, who was our customer, all the kinds of things we were doing and what we needed to break even".

This process of reviewing their long term plan and their financial status made them realize that they were losing money and could not run even an expanded workshop in a profitable way. This realization that they were losing up to \$100,000 a year and that they would continue to lose money if they proceeded in this direction was described as the turning point in the movement toward community based employment. Without this fiscal rationale for the change in services, the executive director did not believe that the board would have supported the change to close the workshop.

*I think the board was convinced that that had to be done. But they were convinced financially first, which is the only way I could have done that. They had to know they had no choice. ...You can't really do without a fiscal rationale. If that workshop were churning out \$200,000 a year they wouldn't have been able to close it.*

In addition to these financial considerations there was a strong movement within the agency that community employment was the right philosophical direction for the organization. The executive director credits the middle managers as being the main leaders in this movement and he felt "you couldn't have done it without that group. They are a terrific group. There was tremendous pressure". While the executive director indicated that he also believed in the value of community employment, he acknowledges that "it was easier for me to have the workshop. In the end that is a far more secure and easier thing to have". Despite his ambivalence about the conversion, the executive director felt that the managers

*focused even at the time when things were kind of unfocused, where we were being driven by forces around us, they kept focusing on the fact that people deserved a shot at supported employment.*

Once the decision was made that community employment was the best direction both philosophically and fiscally for the organization, the agency set a date for closing the sheltered workshop and moving all employment services into the community. The executive director viewed that setting a date for the closure of the workshop was much more effective then trying to gradually move people into the community.

*Nobody wanted to set a date. Everyone said we will do 10 [placements in the community] a year until the workshop is empty. It never would have worked so I was convinced we set a date and that's it. And we held to that date. We did not move that date up. No matter what the doors close, the vans stop, the jobs stop on that day, and although we kept a few stragglers, actually staff had to finish up the jobs here.*

Once a date for closure was set, MetroWest staff held meetings with the community and meetings with consumers to ask if they wanted the option of supported employment. The executive director indicated that the majority of people said that was the service they wanted. Some individuals did not want to work in the community and they received assistance in moving

## 52 • Conversion to Integrated Employment

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to sheltered workshops managed by other organizations. During these meetings, the executive director laid out the factors that contributed to the decision to close the workshop.

*You present the facts on the table. You look to them for alternatives. We frequently asked the people 'What's the alternative?' We are losing money, we can't afford to run the workshop, and we provided alternatives. We made a win win all the way around. The people who wanted their sons or daughters in workshops, we made arrangements with existing workshops so they could go over there.*

Some of the reactions to the closure included parents who felt "it is much safer having them here and they can find them, see them during the day, take them out to lunch". Despite these concerns the majority of consumers and families wanted the option of supported employment but "they wanted to know there was a net. If their sons or daughters weren't working what would happen". Staff spent time with individuals families helping them plan for dealing with those situations.

In addition to concerns of consumers and family members, the executive director reported that there was some sadness on the part of the administrative staff to the changes because they were also used to have consumers around during the day.

*The workshop is much more fun. I really miss the consumers here. Everyone did. You know in some ways there are friends and it is a very emotional thing. ....They are all gone, we didn't see them anymore. A lot of us went down everyday and talked to people. Very hard to let go of that.*

Representatives from the funding source were described by the executive director as being involved in the conversion process and took part in the community meetings. After the workshop was closed and all of the individuals were being served in satellites locations with a primary emphasis on community integration, the Department of Mental Retardation threatened to pull their contract if they did not increase their placement rates. The executive director did not feel there was a serious threat to close them down since DMR did not want them to return to providing sheltered employment, but there was a lot of pressure from some families to have a sheltered employment option.

*When we went to bid for the contract, they (DMR) invited other proposals, ... We had another group come in and was a non state group who said they would gladly put a workshop back in. They actually went around the decision of that [parent] group and re-awarded the contract to us with the understanding we would have an 80% placement. So they stood behind us. They could have backed out. It was a very easy way to back out of the contract. So as far as [DMR], I think they deserve a lot of credit because they took a lot of heat from parents.*

In addition to the closure of the workshop, MetroWest was also going through a merger with MetroWest Health Center. While these two events were unrelated, the executive director describes that the membership of SMARC, which include consumers, family members and staff from DMR, "thought it was all connected, it was all a plot".

When asked for suggestions that the executive director would offer others in the process of closing a workshop, he identified the continued involvement of the funding source as being a key factor in their ability to convert to community employment. Having a strong fiscal argument for making the change in addition to the philosophical basis was critical in their situation and he suggests undertaking a strong fiscal analysis through this process. His final suggestion considers the nature of the organization and the staff to support this type of closure.

*It will never happen in places where they risk adversity. You need a very strong support philosophically and emotionally from senior management within the organization and it works.*

## Managers

The program managers at MetroWest are credited by the former executive director and other staff as being the leading force in the conversion process and all of the managers who participated in the conversion were interviewed. The manager of Employment Services and manager of Residential Services were the guiding influences to the conversion process, though other middle management staff were involved as well. These managers credit the fact that they had been with the organization for an extended period so when they began to push community employment, their view was respected. The nature of the organization was also seen as contributing to their success, since they described it as a place where open discussions were allowed and encouraged.

*You might not always get what you wanted but you certainly could get your voice heard. Then I think having staff who felt comfortable enough to come to us as directors and say wait a minute again you are sending us to all these great trainings and we are coming back hearing what all the other agencies are doing, we are not doing this .*

One result of this open culture was an “equal airing of people who felt strongly about needing to make the change and people who were opposed to it” during the initial discussion of the closure the employment manager indicates that there was

During the early 1990's when MetroWest began restructuring their services, the focus was on increasing the options that were available to people, not on closing the workshop. One factor considered in expanding services was looking at new ways to bring in revenues. They drafted out a list of different services they could offer and began meeting with the funding source, families and consumers to discuss the changes. Planning was also done as part of the yearly planning process of each individual.

*If they had an ISP coming up we discussed it at that meeting or else just had a team meeting and said where would you like to go. It wasn't 'do you want MetroWest to change, but since MetroWest was changing what would you like to do' and people actually checked off what they wanted. 'Do you want to be part of this supported employment component that will guarantee 9-3 services? Do you want to skip the 9-3 but still have us working on the job? Do you want a day hab option or would you like to go to a workshop?'*

For a year they targeted forty individuals they were going to assist in obtaining community employment while continuing to run the workshop and day habilitation. While they were not successful in helping these individuals to get jobs, the experience did start to pique the interest of some staff.

After this unsuccessful attempt to move into the community, the managers began to refocus energy on how they could successfully accomplish this objective. One of their first steps was to write a new mission statement.

*As administrators we had developed this mission statement and everyone was involved and once we had that in hand I think that was something that energized some of us and ....that was a tool because that was a hard thing for our executive director to say no to.*

The mission statement began to drive decisions that were being made by the agency. the manager's joke that they referenced it so frequently, the executive director told them they could not use the words mission statement again. The managers agreed that the executive director was supportive of the concept of community employment philosophically, but that it was probably the financial pressure which finally sold him.

When faced with the financial crisis, staff realized things would need to change. They felt the board was “motivated not so much that supported work sounds wonderful, it clearly sounds okay and maybe a lot of people like it and it may be a more cost effective way to go”. One manager

## 54 • Conversion to Integrated Employment

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holds the executive director responsible for the financial problems they experienced, and felt that they needed to battle with him about the value of community employment being more than dollars and cents.

Once the decision was made to close the workshop and move individuals to community jobs, families and consumers reacted with concern and fear. One manager remembers,

*I think that the concerns that consumers had when they heard the workshop was closing is that they wouldn't have anything to fall back on. If they lost their jobs, they would have no place to go. A lot of parents had that concern too. So that was a big concern of the consumers that were already working, should they lose their job what would they do.*

While people liked the concept of community employment, the employment manager describes that "a lot of people wanted it, but they didn't want it instead of a workshop they wanted it in addition to. Nobody said 'please close this workshop.'" The managers acknowledged that "even though we thought it was the greatest thing to be done, it was a real loss for them."

During the first year after the closure, staff and consumers who were not working were in the community in satellite locations, one group of 10 to 15 consumers were going to Natick recreation center each day with 3 or 4 staff people. Managers describe the conflict of being responsible for people during the day did not allow staff the time to do job development.

*The 9-3 day killed us, because in the end little of our time could be spent on real employment. Time was spent finding volunteer sites and supporting people in volunteer sites, which is a wonderful experience but it wasn't also getting that person a job. You might do an interview ...but you didn't have that time to really do marketing*

Because staff could not build momentum on job development their success in getting people jobs was not better than when the workshop was running.

In addition to concerns about the low number of jobs that were obtained, representatives from the funding sources were concerned about what people were doing during the day. One manager describes: "I remember some people from DMR at times kind of clutching their chests at the thought of us working out of churches. It's like they are back in the 60's and these poor people you have them working out of churches and driving around in automobiles all day."

In addition to the satellite site, MetroWest was also using enclave placements for employment experiences for individuals. The original intention of these enclaves was as transitional placements where individuals would get experience and then move on to community jobs. A manager describes individuals being in these transitional jobs for years rather than moving through as anticipated.

*It was set up for 18 months go over there and work and get some skills that would help you get a job out in the community some day. Your first step out of the workshop. Two things we didn't do is we didn't explain to the company adequately that this was what we would like to use this situation for, so they got attached to some of the workers and some of the more pleasant personalities and would approach them about well we would like to try them well you can't....And the consumers that were working there, they didn't want to go anywhere, some of them really liked it.*

In 1995, one year after closing the workshop, the Community Options center was opened and staff were no longer responsible for coverage at the satellite sites. The employment managers describes staff as being "free to do 100%, or 90% job development, and not only 10% job development". Staff were given the choice to move toward employment services and job development or focus on community activities. In most cases, decisions were made based on both individual preferences as well as strength. Throughout the course of the entire conversion process, no staff were laid off, though several elected to leave.

At this point, job development teams were established to provide for the employment needs of

individuals served in Community Options. Roles within the team include one person who is more focused on job development, while others serve more as job coaches and help the person develop their placement plan, attend interviews and then provide on the job training. These roles are negotiated within each team.

One major change for staff during this transition period was the necessity of staff using their car to transport people. When one staff person left her position, she indicated that she resented this expectation and that it made it difficult for her to work there. To help offset this inconvenience the agency reimbursed people for the expense of higher insurance coverage as well as paying for mileage. One manager reported “we budgeted \$10,000 for travel and it was \$60,000”. They were not prepared for the impact of the change in service this area. Over time, the agency developed a transportation department and have a full time staff person assigned to this function. This reduced the dependence on staff vehicles and utilize community resources like the lift bus. This solution has helped address the financial issue as well as the staff’s concern.

While acknowledging a rocky road through the transition process, the managers report satisfaction with their current employment services and the changes for individuals who were previously served in the workshop. One manager describes the changes in people in the following way:

*We are seeing real personalities that we didn't see when they were stuck in a workshop. They had nothing to talk about. You would ask them what they were doing for work. Boxes whatever. Now they are out there. They can talk about what they are doing for volunteer work. They can talk about where they stop for coffee. They have so many experiences that they never got before in a sheltered situation.*

Throughout their process of closing the sheltered workshop, MetroWest received technical assistance and support from the Organizational Change project at the Institute for Community Inclusion. This project worked with 12 other agencies as well as MetroWest and staff were able to learn from each other and share their experiences.

In considering what recommendations they would have for other agencies going through the process of closing a segregated program, the managers suggest agencies need to “just bite the bullet and do it”. They made the conversion over several years and felt that it would have been easier to do it more quickly. As one manager said, “You still are publicly going to have the same amount of people that don’t want to do it and the same amount of opposition whether you take 5 years or 5 months”. While suggestion that agencies move more quickly than they did, they also acknowledged the need to “continually educate the board, the funding sources, the families about what you are doing and why you are doing and why it is the right thing to do it”. Listening and addressing the concerns of consumers impact by the change was also suggested by one manager.

*Have individual clients make a little group and have a staff there and really write down their concerns, what's going to happen, what they are thinking, what do they see and really have it open on the table and talk about it. Have more communication going towards the individuals.*

Using the mission to guide the conversion process was also a strong recommendation. “You just have to be incredibly strong about what your mission is and if you have to make compromises, know that they are compromises and everybody is aware that we make this compromise and in 6 months we are going to fix it.” Also being willing to carry things out and take a risk to make the change happen was cited by one manager.

I think a bit part of it is being able to take that risk and not just throwing up your hands, because we all could have done that many times over the last few years. Not saying we can't do it...but say okay, maybe we can't do it this way.

In addition to the changes related to the closure of the workshop, the managers were also dealing with the merger with a new organization and the change in management that came with this merge. One manager identifies this change as being a positive influence, and credits the new

executive director with keeping them on target.

We finally felt that there was somebody in a decision making position who agreed with our philosophy and our morals and our vision and dreams. It was the best thing that could have happened. I can't say enough about what she has done to enhance the agency and its values and how it looks at people with disabilities and how it serves people with disabilities. It's 6,000% better.

## **Direct Service Staff**

Staff that were working at MetroWest at the time of workshop closure felt that they were not involved in the decisions concerning the closure. One individual indicated that they were notified at a meeting a couple of month before the workshop was to close. While the staff has been pleased with the outcomes of the closure, there was anxiety about the process and the uncertainty that marked the closure. This uncertainty affected staff differently. One person who was more involved in the production aspects of the workshop, was anxious whether there would be a job for him in the new structure. Other direct line staff felt more confident that they would have positions in the new program. Some staff left during the transition. One staff person describes feeling that direct service staff were not involved in the overall organizational vision.

*What the staff lacked necessarily was the vision of what was possible, what it could be and what it would look like. Lacking that vision it was hard to work towards an unknown destination.*

Staff reported considerable resistance from parents who were anxious about what would happen to their child, and staff felt they did not have enough information to give these parents. The plan for services felt unclear to them and therefore not very reassuring. For consumers who remained in the workshop after the contract work ended but before satellite sites were available there was a lot of confusion since they did not understand why there was no work to be performed.

Once the satellites were in place, staff have different perspectives on the experience of this year of off site community activities. Some staff describe the time as providing "day care" for consumers, and that there was little guidance concerning what activities would be appropriate for their satellite groups. Staff also struggled with the demands of trying to do job development and job coaching while also supporting people who needed day services.

*It was clear that it wasn't going to work because you have so many people at these satellites sites [that] for one person to go out and job coach someone, it put so much strain and stress on other people on the team that they couldn't do anything but stay in that site. Things weren't individualized....One person would like to work in an office, but no one else does, but you had to bring other people because what else are they going to do.*

Other staff felt more positively about the time spent with satellite sites since they felt it gave them the opportunity to learn more about the people they were working with.

*One of the nice parts of it all was we got to know individuals, and even though we might have had an individual in the workshop it wasn't the same as being out there everyday with someone, getting to see who people were, what their likes were and saw what their personalities were. And individuals got to see staff as something more than staff. I mean it was kind of a real shift in relationships.*

It was also described as helping consumers have a better sense of the community and their possible involvement in the community.

*I think it motivated them more, it motivated the consumers to want to work because they were out in the community, seeing more jobs and more opportunity to make them really want to work and the fact that they didn't have a job and that they were just kind of doing the same old thing everyday*

Staff were pleased with the opening of the Community Options Program as it allowed them more time for job development. When Community Options was opened staff was given the option of remaining in employment services or move to community integration positions. With things re-structured after the introduction of Community Options, there was also greater co-ordination of job search efforts. In the past people would be approach the same employers, but now the teams are sharing job leads and finding better jobs. With this increased success in getting jobs for people, staff report seeing the positive results of the conversion.

*The ultimate goal is for everybody to have a job. The consumers, to have them working all the time and be happy. Not just a job, but to be happy too. Interact in public more, learn to do more different things. You see how much happier they are than in the workshop.*

Despite their frustrations with the process of closing the workshop and the uncertainty of the satellites, staff who remained are now very positive about what they have accomplished.

*The people who were really half hearted or not into it have other jobs now. But for a lot of us who believed in it, we sort of stuck to it. Lord knows we are not sticking with it because of the high salaries and big bonuses. There has to be something inside of you that makes you want to advocate and believe that people have the right to work and people have a right to be in their community. This is what kept people going.*

In considering recommendations to other organizations closing a workshop, one staff person suggests having members of all levels of the organization involved in the process.

*It would have been easier if more staff were involved. Someone might have had an idea. So I would say definitely have a plan of what is desired to be achieved generally and individually, and try to have more staff involvement especially at the lower levels. So that the staff can be part of it rather than just being told 'well beginning next week you are going out and that's where you are going to be, and this is what you are going to do'. You are going to look for jobs, entertain, educate.*

Direct service staff emphasized the value of having a clear plan and communicating the plan and vision to all staff.

## **Parents**

Nine parents were interviewed regarding their experience with the conversion process. Six of the consumers had been with the agency for a number of years and had experienced the workshop and the transition. Another consumer was in the program while the workshop was open, moved to a residential program during the transition, but has since returned to the program. Some of the parents interviewed were also members of the board, and their responses may represent a dual perspective.

All of the parents we spoke to seem to be satisfied with their son or daughter's current situation. One parent just found out that his 25 year-old son wanted to work full time. The son works as a grocery packer in a supermarket, and the store seems to be agreeable to expanding his schedule. Another parent has a son who works at Home Depot 16 hours a week. She says he loves it and his co-workers really like him, "The first day he came home form Home Depot he was totally amazed that someone actually sat down and had lunch with him. And he thought that was really great." A third set of parents have a daughter who has been with MetroWest since it began and has been employed in packaging furniture polish for the past year and a half. Her parents say she is very happy there because they give her a lot of variety. She began working 2 days a week, but is now working full time. "Boy, is she happy. She just takes in this work." Another set of parents described their son's success as exceeding their expectations. He is 29 years old and has been with MetroWest for the past 7 years. Although he participated in the workshop, he was in the day habilitation program and did not receive a paycheck. Now he has works one hour daily at a

restaurant doing janitorial work and watering plants. The parents feel that the structure of the position complements their son's orderly personality and he is self-initiating as a result. "He is very happy too. We can see it fills a need."

Many parents expressed initial concern about the plan to move from the sheltered workshop to community employment. These concerns included doubts of how people will treat their daughters or sons, fear of failure, and fear of the unknown. One parent remembers:

*I probably was one of those parents who wasn't all for the change. So I had a lot of reluctance in closing the workshop because the unknown is scarier than what you do... In the beginning everything wasn't as smooth as it is running for me now. You did have ups and downs and you didn't know where your kid was... there wasn't that comfortable feeling of being able to get a hold of someone if you needed to... they had to work out the kinks and it seems to be going really well... I have come full circle to thinking it's pretty great.*

Despite initial doubts and concerns, most of the parents later changed their minds about supported employment once they saw positive results.

Some parents expressed concerns about how they were told about the closure and the amount of input they had in the decision. When asked how she had heard about the closure, one parent said,

*Through the grapevine kind of thing. To be honest with you everything seemed to be kept under wraps. I think the whole change went through without anybody really knowing what hit them. It was talked about, but the next thing that was it, they were closing it. It seemed like you really didn't have people go to those meetings till you you're blue in the face but they had their mind met up. That's the way I felt. It was going to be done whether you wanted it or not."*

Parents who were also involved on the board tended to feel that communication efforts regarding the workshop closure were ample. One parent responded that "...there was nothing hidden or kept from anybody. That information was readily available. Special meetings were called to let parents, the membership know what was going on". Many of the parents we spoke with said that lack of attendance at meetings was a factor in the communication gap: "We [the board] offered all kinds of communication modes for people and sent them information and had these sessions with a lot of varying times so people could come when they were able. But we still didn't get a lot of participation at the sessions so people went through this whole thing and complained afterward..." These parents said they didn't know what additional efforts could have been made, but that communication remains a problem.

When asked how they felt about the period right after the workshop closed when consumers participated in satellite sites, one parent responded

*...it was no good for them as far as I was concerned. They had them come out of the workshop for a while and some would just go to a home or another site and watch TV for a great part of the day and have lunch and then go do something else and that wasn't a great deal of benefit for them.*

Another parent agreed that he didn't see much benefit in the consumers just sitting in a shopping mall and eating lunch. He said from a business perspective, he didn't think the mall owners liked them taking up the tables. One parent remembers the workshop closure being a gradual process and appreciated the fact that there was always a program in which her son could participate.

All of the parents we spoke with cited the job coaches and staff as a critical supporting factor in the conversion process. Staff's patience, understanding, and commitment was appreciated by parents. They felt that the case workers and job coaches really paid attention to the needs of the consumers and were very dedicated to finding jobs for them. One set of parents we spoke with would like more periodic communication between staff and themselves. The mother communicates with staff via a notebook, which she feels is easier and less intrusive to staff's time

than communicating by telephone. Other parents felt that staff did a good job of keeping parents informed of consumer progress and activities. One parent said that when her son first went into Community Options, she wrote a note to the staff which listed her son's likes. Staff used the information to help him find a job where he would have success. This same parent also ordered business cards for her son when he got his job so that he would feel involved in the working community.

A current concern expressed by some parents was that if their son or daughter were to be hired permanently by their employers, the support provided by job coaches would be withdrawn. Parents worried that the companies' priority would be production rather than the individual's process.

When asked how their son or daughter has changed as a result of the workshop closure, parents' responses varied. One parent said she hasn't seen drastic changes in her son. Another said that even though her son is currently doing work similar to work he did in the workshop, the supported employment setting has changed his behavior. The lack of workshop environment has greatly decreased his disruptive habits. Yet another parent noticed "tremendous improvements" in his daughter "She can hold her own in conversation and in company... now she is very happy. She is very proud of that check she gets... it has been a positive thing." In general, positive outcomes were cited by parents.

Some parents felt that although community employment is a positive service, it should be offered in conjunction with, rather than replacement for, a sheltered workshop. Several parents stated that they felt the workshop would have been successful had it stayed open, and that there is a definite need for keeping the workshop open as an option. This perception of need seems to stem from the idea that certain individuals are not prepared for supported employment, "Certainly if I were doing it again I would find some way of keeping a sheltered program going for some set of people." A parent and the current SMARC board president said that although he feels fortunate that his son has been successful and happy at his current job, he continues to be very against the closing of the workshop.

Other parents were not as concerned about having a workshop in particular, but are more concerned about whether their son or daughter will have something to "fall back on" if things don't work out with their community employment. One parent said, "It is really a comfort thing that they come back here if something fails out there." Another parent had similar fears, remembering a time when consumers had the workshop to go back to if they lost their jobs. Now he is worried about "What happens or what provisions are made when the jobs go?"

## **Consumers**

Four MetroWest consumers were interviewed during the site visit. One consumer had been working in a janitorial position at Burger King for almost one year. A second consumer had been at her dishwashing job for approximately 7 months. Another consumer worked at a nursing home and was also a Board Member. A fourth consumer we spoke with was a greeter for a CVS store.

All four consumers had worked in sheltered workshops before acquiring their current positions. One consumer was working in the community before the workshop closed. When asked how he felt when they first heard that the workshop was going to close, one consumer said that he was "nervous about it", especially leaving his friends. He also reported that other people have reacted positively to the fact that he's working, but at first they were "all upset about it". Another consumer said that she preferred working in the community over working in the workshop, and that staff helped by making the transition easier for her. She reported that her family initially wanted her to stay at the workshop. When asked what other people thought about her working in the community, this consumer reports "They said lucky you." A third consumer said she preferred her current job because the workshop had too many people. When asked if he missed the workshop, this consumer said "I wanna work in the community... I like the work I do now. It is better for me."

The consumers we spoke with shared interesting stories of how they got their jobs. One woman was hired for her current position because the manager had remembered her from a couple years back. He remembered her sense of humor and personality and hired her without an interview. Another consumer knew he wanted to work with the elderly, particularly in a nursing home. The job development involved a lot of conversations, weekly meetings, and going to a lot of nursing homes. What eventually happened was that this consumer and his job developer went out to coffee and bumped into a mutual friend. He was hired for the nursing home position through this personal contact.

When asked how they liked their jobs, consumers were generally satisfied. One consumer said that he was a bit nervous when he first started his job, he but did very well. A job coach helped in the beginning, but now he works independently. This consumer liked the fact that his job did not involve doing too many things, "it was an easy job". He described his co-workers as being nice, but there is a pretty high staff turn-over. He is satisfied with working 4 hours per day, but would prefer to work only four days a week, and has already expressed this to his supervisor. Another consumer was especially happy with her work schedule, which allows her to spend afternoons with her friends.

Three of the four consumers we interviewed attended Community Options in addition to their jobs. One person works in the morning and spends her afternoons at Community Options. Another consumer is involved as a board member and attends Community Options when he's not working. This consumer was a speaker at Community Options, telling other consumers about his job and that the staff were able to find a job for him, so they could do the same for other people. One consumer no longer participates in Community Options, although he still sees people from the workshop. While at Community Options, he "went on trips. I don't know. Just kind of bored." He likes working better, "...it was alright but I like to earn money."

## **Funding Source**

A case manager from the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) was interviewed since she was involved in the entire process of closing the workshop. This region of DMR has made a strong emphasis on closing segregated services and the case manager describes "our objective here was to hold the line on sheltered placements and now we actually have no sheltered workshops in our geographic area so we ended up referring people out to other areas in sheltered workshops."

The DMR case manager describes MetroWest as being a trend-setter in the closure of the sheltered workshop, "because it is something they had to live through and it was a huge risk after getting in on a lease in what is really a warehouse building." The former Executive Director was credited as a significant factor in the conversion, "He did make it happen because fiscally he couldn't afford to be running a sheltered workshop and a placement program as well. So I have to say that the former director did do a lot to make it happen even though it was in part philosophy and in part fiscally driven... what really brought it to a head was that the agency could no longer really fiscally make a go of it."

Once the decision was made to close the workshop, the case manager describes the process of informing and educating key stakeholders.

It was painful, but it was thorough, and everyone who was a stake holder in making the process happen from an administrative point of view got together and really planned. I felt very much an intricate part of that even from over here rather than at the agency. I wanted to support them in that. They had a lot of meetings with families, they discussed with their funding sources extensively what this would entail. There was a lot of written communication in terms of letters, and offers were made to meet with people individually. They had extensive discussions with individual consumers of the agency to try and help them understand what it would mean for them. They met with their residential provider staff not only in their own agency but with other residential providers who have clients that attend the day program to help them understand the impact it would have on them residentially. Every possible agency or individual or family or

outside source that would be affected by the change we had to discuss this.

The DMR representative describes some initial concerns about the conversion to community employment related to the structure of consumers' days. "Some people did not want their family member to be dealing with the unknowns of being unemployed or waiting for employment or going through the changes of approaching employment and they were very anxious that the person continue to have the kind of structure that a sheltered workshop would provide them." From the initial 100 individuals who were involved in moving to community services, the case manager estimates that 80-90% have stayed with MetroWest.

During the first year of the conversion, the majority of individuals served in employment services were at satellite locations. The contract with DMR required MetroWest to cover the hours of 9 to 3 since residential services were not available and families could not always be home to coincide with someone's work schedule. The case manager expressed concern about that happening and said it retrospect they would not have done things that way.

*They were treated well, respected in the settings, but maybe if we had to do over we wouldn't be supporting those kinds of settings. There were times that some of the individual's group residences were used as satellite gathering places and if the job coach had willed it then the day involved hanging around there during the day, a cooking class, a discussion group, some people ended up watching TV.*

The new executive director, who arrived after the closure of the workshop, was responsible for creating Community Options as a solution for the 9-3 dilemma. The case manager viewed this change as very beneficial to everyone since people received more individualized and appropriate services and it freed up staff to job development. After the addition of Community Options the placement rate for individuals served in employment services went from 40% to 80%. The DMR representative describes Community Options' goals as "to get out and experience as many life activities as possible in the community that are real activities... they also do a tremendous amount of giving back to the community in terms of volunteer work...and sometimes volunteering can lead to a job either with a place or just helping you figure out what you would like to do or wouldn't like to do. It's job exposure in one way or the other."

The ideas and values of the new executive director were seen by the case manager as contributing to the success of the organization in the previous year. The case manager describes the executive director as having

*...a different set of values and maybe stronger grounding in the philosophy and I think really does see people becoming more a part of their communities and is trying to think of different ways to make people less dependent on her agency...They see themselves as not needing as many staff because they really want to have people connected up with more natural supports and hopefully they can do that. I think she has really driven it the last year since she has been in charge of this whole operation.*

The staff of MetroWest were also credited for contributing to the successful conversion, "They have been very flexible in terms of working with people who didn't want to work traditional hours... staff were willing to hang in there." The staff is described as "really good, committed people with a vision of where the agency wanted to go... they have had a tremendously positive placement rate and in fact much better than anyone else in the region." Staff who did not share the agency's vision chose not to stay, as the DMR representative puts it, "if you are in conflict with where the agency is going it is better that you look somewhere else."

MetroWest's close relationship with DMR, and communication in general, were also cited as a critical factors in MetroWest's successful conversion, "I have been very proud to have the close connection I do with them in not just monitoring the contract but also supporting them in the conversion because it has been a very positive change..."

Another supportive factor described by the DMR representative was technical assistance MetroWest received from the Institute

## **62 • Conversion to Integrated Employment**

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*Very helpful to have the consultation from the institute because sometimes when you are feeling that you are going out into places you haven't been before it is nice to have someone to help guide you. There are times people get very discouraged in their efforts because they are breaking new ground and they are not sure of themselves. So having mutual supportive networks in the process and having a lot of open communication that people don't have to be afraid of*

Trainings were also provided for DMR staff, families, guardians, and agencies. Experts from Social Security provided trainings and served as valuable resources. They were willing to spend time with individual families after presentations, in order to go over individual cases.

The current contract is for employment services that people receive, and that is structured depending on the number of days they are working. Only supports that individuals receive while working or in the process of looking for a job are billed, so DMR does not receive bills for Community Options services, which are funded by Medicaid. One of the innovations developed last year was an hourly rate contract. It has the capacity to serve about 8 people at a time, and was devised for people in the day habilitation program. The goal for DMR as well as MetroWest is to begin to move people from the day habilitation program into community employment. To accomplish this goal of serving more people under the existing contract, the DMR case manager would like to see "some people off the contract and be solely dependent on the employer and given the waiting list that we have in need of similar services".

Another change in the contracting process is that DMR is now contracting with MetroWest to provide transportation services. The case manager described the benefits of this system:

*We can hopefully individualize the job placements so that MetroWest can do their own transportation, they no longer have to go through the department, to go through the machinations of our putting through with the service coordinator my transportation authorization form over to our transportation office, over our regional office and then they feel out with the various transportation providers in the region who can do it if anybody and for how much and if it is going to cost us more, how much more and where are we going to get that money. This way MetroWest can make their own internal arrangements to do that and they have been able to through a contract identify a sole individual who will coordinate all the transportation. One nightmare job and she does a really good job doing this and she coordinates this all for everyone in the agency who needs it vocationally.*

While this system has been successful the case manager is concerned about whether they would be able to support transportation if everyone was working at different locations.

An additional concern of the DMR case manager is the intensive documentation required through the billing process. She is concerned that such detailed documentation is taking time away from their employment duties, yet the department "would like to capture the information to know really where in some instances some people have very little time allotted to them because they are virtually independent on the job".

Community Options is described to be "a tremendous boom, because it opens up time for non day habilitation staff, job development specialists, job coaches, to actually go out and creatively develop the job scenarios for the various people that they are trying to find employment for." There are about 105 individuals either in the traditional day habilitation, the adult day activity, in the community and volunteer.

## **Board of Directors**

Three board members were interviewed during the site visit. All three had children who were consumers of MetroWest services, and were also interviewed for their parent perspectives. One board member was the president of SMARC for ten years, from 1980-1990. He served on the state board from 1990-1993 and is still active with SMARC. Another board member had been involved with the board for 10-11 years. The board consists of 14 people- 4 officers, 9 members, and the

president. Parents make up the majority of the board.

The main concern, according to one member, was "What happens to people who can't go out to find jobs that were in a workshop... I think what I heard expressed most often back then was somehow or other we shouldn't have said we were totally going to close the workshop." Another board member remembers some negative reaction to the closure, and said that it made them all stop and think about how they were going to set up a support system so that people "would not be thrown to the wind and they would be given the best that we could give them." One board member was concerned about the "horrendous transportation bill" that resulted from closing the workshop and moving consumers into the community.

According to all three of the board members we spoke with, the catalyst to close the workshop came from the Executive Director and DMR. "I got the impression that the DMR pushed the over-riding directors' emphasis that really brought this all about. It was their wish." Another board member said that DMR pushed the date for closing the workshop. One board member felt that because the workshop "skimmed off the better workers" to work in the community, they had to hire non-consumers in order to meet deadlines. Another board member agreed that hiring "outside people" and having staff do the work was costly, "Cost was the basic reason in the final analysis to that workshop closing. They just couldn't support it. It was draining and taking a terrific toll... the final vote was taken it was decided basically strictly on a monetary basis that it had to be closed."

The board members we spoke with had varying opinions on the communication regarding the closure and the mergers. One member said communication was thorough,

*Special meetings called, as we progressed with meetings with the hospital, we came back told the board many times, the members would say this is something we want to give out now. Parents should know about this and the staff as well. So as we progressed... there was nothing hidden or kept from anybody. That information was readily available."*

Another member agreed that they tried many attempts at communication, but they didn't have a strong membership support "I just don't know what else we should have done but communication is always a problem and I think it still is for some people." Another member said that many families were "caught by surprise". One member said that there were many concerns and questions from the board, "we kept sending [the Executive Director] away with questions and they came back with really explicit answers, plans, so forth."

At the time of the site visit, one board member described himself as the opposition leader to the workshop closure. "I was very opposed to closing the workshop. I was against it and still am against it." This board member felt that there wasn't a support system in place for the consumers who did not get placed into community jobs... "you still have to form a nucleus and they just didn't."

Some parents and board members are considering opening a new sheltered workshop. According to one parent and board member, the board had one meeting with the executive director and assistant director of a sheltered workshop to discuss the possibility. At the time of our interview, nothing beyond this meeting had occurred.

The Executive Director was cited as the leadership, "the board's interface was almost totally with the director... He would bring in one of the [program] directors periodically to make presentations to the board, talk to the board but in all the issues of long range plans and so forth was almost all [the Executive Director]." The board members we spoke with also talked about some people's distrust of the Executive Director, that he was pushing for change in order to benefit himself rather than the consumers.

Looking back on what they would have done differently, one board member stated

*The one thing that bothers me and a bunch of people on the board at that time was the fact that we allowed this very strong director to be so dominant with the board and*

*I think we received a very fair criticism on that front... we didn't have our own groups looking and studying some of these things and we should have spent more time on it... I see the board as having to be stronger. you have to have a board who is able to take the time to really think and discuss and ask and deal with those things. I think that would have changed a number of things that we did, taking the time and effort to tell him those things.*

## **Critical Themes in the Change Process**

Despite multiple efforts in strategic planning and small projects to increase their capacity for supported employment, MetroWest was unable to make a large scale conversion to community employment until faced with a financial crisis. Once it became clear that they could no longer afford to run a workshop and supported employment services, they made a decision to close their workshop. Six months later they were not doing contract work. This quick closure created anxiety for parents, consumers, and staff, and resulted in the initial implementation of satellite placements to occupy people while they were in the process of job searching. While staff can identify some positive aspects to this year with satellite locations, most of the stakeholders were dissatisfied. Everyone was pleased when Community Options was opened during the second year of the closure. The experience of MetroWest is summarized in the following key themes that impact their process of closing the workshop.

### **Theme 1: Fiscal and philosophical influences to close the workshop**

There was strong philosophical support for expanding community employment at MetroWest. This philosophy was supported by the funding source, DMR, and in the mid 1980's they were strongly encouraging MetroWest to add supported employment services. A support for community employment was strong throughout 1984-1994, but the middle managers led a shift from adding community employment services to existing sheltered services to a total closure of the workshop. When the final decisions were made to close the workshop, managers describe using the mission statement as their focus point to ensure that their decisions reflected their values.

While this philosophy was in place, the primary catalyst that convinced the former executive director and the board of directors was that it was no longer feasible to run both types of services. Many of the stakeholders describe the fiscal crisis as being the only thing that could convince some people who felt they had no other choice.

### **Theme 2: Bias for action.**

Beginning with the first strategic planning process, MetroWest was willing to try several different models including enclaves, an affirmative business, an integrated workshop and a janitorial crew, to increase the opportunity for integrated work experiences. There was varying degrees of success with these different activities, but MetroWest showed an openness to trying things rather than just discussing options.

Once MetroWest made the decision to close their workshop they moved quickly and aggressively to accomplish this goal. The former executive director describes the need to set a date for the closure and move forward despite the anxiety that created. He emphasized that taking the risk and doing it was the only way the closure would happen and if they keep planning toward that goal it would not have succeeded. The end of contract work forced the creation of the satellite placements for day support. Some staff felt that this step could have been avoided with more time and planning before the closure occurred, but in general, the managers viewed this trial and error approach as being effective in teaching them what they needed.

MetroWest also took the risk of closing the workshop in a large facility to which they had recently moved. No longer having contract work, meant expensive space was not being used and there was not income to pay for their overhead. They continue to look at ways to rent or use the

space to offset this expense.

### **Theme 3: Leadership of middle management in accomplishing the closure**

Many organizations that are closing segregated services, rely on the executive director to drive that process, but that was not the case at MetroWest. Two middle managers were identified as being the key forces in closing the workshop and increasing supported employment services. While the executive director was aware that the organization needed to change, he did not provide the leadership to make this change occur. The executive director at the time felt that continuing both sheltered and supported employment was feasible, but the managers focused on the fact that sheltered employment was inconsistent with their mission statement.

### **Theme 4: Strong relationship with representative from the funding source**

Representatives from the Department of Mental Retardation were actively involved with MetroWest throughout the movement to community employment. Their contracts began to include the need for supported employment options for people back in 1985. When MetroWest made the decision to close the workshop, staff from DMR attended meetings with families to explain the change and the impact for their children. During the period of satellites and limited job placements, DMR put pressure on MetroWest to make a plan to increase their placement rate and provide more appropriate community activities for individuals not working. The introduction of Community Options has accomplished these goals and the DMR case manager reports considerable satisfaction with MetroWest services.

### **Theme 5: The service model to address day needs while individuals were looking for work**

The creation of the Community Options program is viewed as a positive addition by all of the stakeholders. For families and consumers, Community Options creates more clearly defined community activities and there is less down time or recreational activities than what was occurring in the satellites. Consumers are exposed to a variety of volunteer options and have more choice over what activities in which they would like to engage. Employment staff have felt a considerable change since they can now devote more time to job development and job choice. This increased emphasis on job placement is reflected by an 80% employment rate for people interested in working.

### **Theme 6: Creative use of medicaid funding to support community options**

Through the use of Medicaid funds, MetroWest was able to find additional support to meet the day custody needs of their consumers while using DMR resources to support the employment services. Since Community Options emphasizes community integration and independent living skills, it is Medicaid reimbursable. This creative financial decision expanded MetroWest options and allowed them to create a service that meets everyone's needs. Use of this funding mechanism also increased the per person funding so that the agency could provide both job development and community integration services to individuals.

### **Theme 7: Additional change through two administrative mergers**

During the same period in which they were closing the workshop, MetroWest underwent two mergers with larger health care organizations. The first merger created a loss of identity for SMARC, the parent run organization who no longer ran the day services but continued to exist as a separate, small advocacy service. The combination of the closure and the merger angered many parents who felt that this was done behind their backs.

The second merger with Columbia/HCA created additional change with the departure of the executive director and the introduction of a new director. This new director has been credited with being a positive influence on the organization and as being responsible for the creation of

Community Options. Despite the positive result of the mergers, they have created considerable change and transition for the staff.

### **Theme 8: Flexibility concerning staff roles**

During these different service approaches, MetroWest has worked with staff to identify appropriate jobs that meet the staff person interests and abilities. While one staff person expressed anxiety about this during the conversions, most of the staff indicated that they felt their jobs would be secure. They also felt they were given options to change to jobs that would better meet their abilities. There was also the option given to staff to move to other positions within the organization such as residential services or day habilitation. The team structure and roles within teams have been redefined till they have arrived at a structure that works well for staff who were interviewed.

### **Theme 9: Use of external resources**

Through these process of conversion, MetroWest used resources with special expertise to help them in planning. During their strategic planning process that occurred several years before the closure, MetroWest received consultation services from the Institute for Community Inclusion to help them in their planning. They also participated in the ICI organizational change project which allowed them to share information and strategies with 12 other organizations in the process of closing their segregated services.

MetroWest also used the expertise of a businessman affiliated with SCORE to help them evaluate their financial status. This consultation was key to their decisions concerning the fiscal feasibility of continuing to run a workshop and provide supported employment services.

## **Current Organizational Challenges**

While pleased with their increased placement rate and overall satisfaction with employment services, MetroWest continues to be self-critical of the day habilitation component of their services. The day habilitation program which runs separately from the employment services has grown since the closure of the workshop. Their goal for this program is “unified goal of making it community inclusive” and to provide services in a manner similar to Community Options. Whenever possible, they would like activities to take place in the community rather than in a segregated day program. One manager described some skepticism from staff about this prospect. “The staff working there saying how could I take this person out? Sure 1 hour a week I can take them out if the staff was 1:1 or 2:1. So that the practicality, it's not that they disagree with it it's that they don't know quite how to do it.” In the future the staff would like to see the agency provided more “blended” services that respond to the support needs of the individual and not the service model in which they are based.

MetroWest also continues to work on their communication and interaction with parents and family members of consumers served by the agency. While parents are satisfied with the services being provided they are looking for more communication from the agency on the overall organizational direction. In addition, several parents expressed the desire for more day to day information about their child from the direct staff. A small component of parents continue to try and bring back the workshop or create a new workshop with a different provider. Staff from the DMR has indicated that they would not fund a sheltered workshop, but this continues to be an ongoing issue for some parents associated with MetroWest.

Some families and consumers expressed interest in working additional hours than their current jobs entail. Currently Community Options meets the day service needs of these individuals and provides coverage between 9 and 3, if the person is not working or is working limited hours. However, increasing hours and employment opportunities will be an area that MetroWest will need to continue to develop in their work with individual.

## **Conclusion**

MetroWest was engaged in a very gradual process of increasing community employment options when a fiscal crisis created a more urgent need for change. This change came quickly and with some anxiety and discomfort for families and some staff. The first year after the closure was somewhat experimental and when they realized their satellite model was not going to work, they created a new services called Community Options. By having this new program available to meet the day custody requirements of their contract and provide community integration activities, employment services was able to focus on getting jobs. The year following the opening of Community Options, MetroWest doubled their placement rates. Their willingness to experiment and then change focus when it was not successful, allowed MetroWest to create a model that meets the needs of their staff, consumers, families and funding source. After several years of major changes with the closure of the workshop, start and ending of the satellite model as well as two administrative mergers, MetroWest has settled into community based employment services that is responding to the needs of the individuals they serve.





## Chapter 5

### **Because It Was the Right Thing To Do: Organizational Perspectives on Closing a Facility-Based Program**

Over the past 15 years there have been substantial changes in the delivery and funding of day and employment services for individuals with disabilities. Most notably, the introduction of supported employment has led to a dramatic increase in the number of individuals with severe disabilities in integrated community employment. Using a broad definition of integrated employment, State MR/DD agencies report a 40% increase in the number of individuals in integrated employment between FY88 and FY96, and the percent of individuals with developmental disabilities closed into integrated employment by Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies increased from 74% in FY85 to 86% in FY95 (Butterworth, Gilmore, Kiernan & Schalock, in press; Butterworth, Gilmore & Schalock, 1998). Similarly, Wehman, Revell, and Kregel (1997) report national participation in supported employment increasing from 10,000 individuals in 1986 to almost 140,000 in 1995. Despite these promising changes, the implementation of supported employment has not fully lived up to its expectations. Early expectations for the initiative were that programs would transfer resources and services from facilities to integrated employment. The National Survey of MR/DD agencies found that in FY96 77% of those served in day and employment programs participated in sheltered employment or non-work day programs, and data from state MR/DD agencies suggest that while the number of individuals in integrated employment has increased, the number in facility-based programs has also continued to increase (Butterworth et al., in press).

These results suggest that integrated employment services, and especially supported employment, are being viewed as an add-on service by community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) with little progress toward transitioning people away from sheltered employment (Gilmore & Butterworth, 1996; Mank, 1994; Wehman et al., 1997). At the same time, it is clear that some organizations have successfully shifted emphasis from facility-based services to community employment, and some organizations have been successful in closing their facility-based services (Butterworth & Fesko, 1998; Hagner & Murphy, 1989; Rogan, Rinne & Held, 1997). For significant progress to be made toward the goal of increasing access to integrated employment, CRPs will need to commit to limiting or closing facility-based services. In order to develop the capacity of the service system, there is a need for a better understanding of the organizational and systems factors that influence organizational change. This chapter will present the findings from a study of six community rehabilitation providers that have successfully closed a facility-based program. The goal of this research is to support organizations and systems in advancing access to integrated

employment for all individuals. The project was designed to answer three primary research questions:

- 1. What are the motivators and barriers that influence an organization's decision to convert from segregated employment to community employment?**
- 2. How did each organization approach the planning, communication, and implementation of the conversion process?**
- 3. What obstacles have organizations experienced and how have they responded to these obstacles in order to maintain the conversion process? What strategies and variables have had a positive impact on maintaining organizational change efforts?**

## Background

The process of shifting organizational resources from facility-based services to integrated employment has been routinely referred to as conversion. Advocates for supported employment promote the goal of transferring systems efforts from segregated services to integrated employment (Mank, 1994; McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, Gilmore & Keith, 1996). Despite this goal, data indicate continued growth in facility-based and other nonwork services (Butterworth et. al, in press; Lecher & McDonald, 1996). Overall, the process and tools of change at a systems level are not well understood. Interviews with ten directors of the state supported employment systems change projects indicated both wide variety in the approaches used to influence change, and also concern about the long-term development of the initiative (Mank, Buckley, Cioffi & Dean, 1996). This section will focus on change at an organizational level.

### Organizational Perspectives on Conversion

West, Revell, and Wehman (1998) report that there is little knowledge about the factors that are catalysts for organizations to expand or reallocate resources to community employment. In a study of supported employment programs funded under Title VIc of the Rehabilitation Act, West et al. found that only 37% of organizations that offered both facility-based and supported employment services reported downsizing segregated programs while expanding supported employment services, with the remaining 63% maintaining or increasing their investment in facility-based services. The authors also found that supported employment staff remained a minority, representing on average only 11% of an organization's total staff. Reported barriers to conversion were largely internal to the organization, with the most cited barriers being family and staff resistance and budgetary concerns. To the contrary, board members, funding agencies, and consumers were rated as very supportive of change. There was little evidence of demographic variables that distinguished organizations that were converting resources. Organizations committed to change had slightly more staff on average (91 total staff versus 78), and organizations that received a statewide fixed rate of funding for services rather than a negotiated rate were more likely to report that funding was a barrier to change.

Executive directors in New Jersey also indicated that internal factors had the greatest impact on organizational decisions. In a survey of CRP executive directors, Lecher and McDonald (1996) found the highest ranked incentives for conversion in a survey of CRP executive directors in New Jersey to be the beliefs and communication of the executive director, followed by access to funding for integrated employment and consumer preferences. Respondents identified family concerns about the severity of their child's disability and family concerns for security as the top two disincentives. On a systems level they also concluded that limited state or agency resources are being used to expand integrated employment opportunities, and the fifth highest disincentive identified was that funding continues to be directed to expanding facility-based services.

Several reports address change in a specific organization, and these experiences reinforce the role of internal resources in change efforts. Beare, Severson, Lynch, and Schneider (1992) report that Clay County Diversified Services, a small nonprofit in Northern Minnesota, changed in response to an internal philosophical shift that occurred for the executive director and two board members. Resistance to the change process centered in staff and family members, and all of the staff eventually left the organization. Other than the acquisition of new grant funding for supported employment, external factors were not a role. The authors conclude that the one action the board should have taken was setting a firm date for closure. Block (1993) describe the conversion of a small (67 consumer) sheltered workshop. While political changes, including an Ontario policy statement about integrated employment, contributed to the change process, the author cites a small core group of staff with strong commitment to community-based services as the primary agents of change. Resistance to change came from multiple sources, including workshop staff, consumers, and family members. The author emphasized the complexity of change and the need for strong communication and a clear vision of the future.

Albin, Rhodes, and Mank (1994) report on a survey of eight organizations that were committed to or had completed a conversion process. Overwhelmingly these organizations indicated that the decision to change was an internal values-based decision. Similarly, leadership at a director level was viewed as critical to successful change. External factors, such as the availability of funding, were reported as helpful but not as catalysts for change. Both internal and external factors were cited as barriers to change including contradictory federal and state policies, lack of skilled staff, and the need to build consensus both internally and externally. The large number of barriers cited reflect the complexity of initiating a change process, and the authors cite this complexity and the difficulty of managing a program in transition as disincentives to programs.

The largest survey of programs who either have closed a facility-based program or who are committed to organizational change was implemented by Rogan, Rinne, and Held (1997). While this survey includes organizations in all stages of a change process, most consider themselves less than halfway through the process of conversion. Preliminary results suggest that organizations have needed strong leadership and a creative approach to managing funding. Organizationally they have worked to improve efficiency and flatten their structure to make conversion work. The negative attitudes of key stakeholders was cited as a major barrier, and organizations used a wide range of communication strategies including education and meetings to communicate the change. Shifting to more person-centered approaches to planning and service delivery were cited as key. The preliminary results of this survey reflect the diversity of organizational experiences with conversion, but reinforce that it is a complex and time consuming process.

CRPs report a variety of local and state factors that influence the expansion of integrated employment services. While over 60% of the providers felt that state funding practices influenced their programs, the most significant factor influencing change, reported by over 85% of the respondents, was the values and philosophy of the organization (McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, Gilmore & Keith, 1994). Through the use of case studies of organizations that have experienced this change process, we can develop a better understanding of specific strategies that are effective in implementing this type of conversion.

## **Research on Organizational Change**

Change is a complex process, and understanding the experiences of organizations that are implementing a change process requires understanding the interaction among the components of an organization. In 1989, Hagner & Murphy observed that change in human service organizations involves structural, political, human resource, and ideological elements. This view is consistent with research in the business world that emphasizes the need to align the many components of an organization to achieve effective organizational change.

Systems theory is an approach to understanding the structure and behavior of organizations that recognizes that organizations are composed of multiple and interdependent parts including

people, processes, structure, and culture. The extent to which an organization emphasizes employment outcomes over other goals is defined by the interaction of these many parts, and by the interaction of the organization with external forces such as community factors or state policy. Systems theory suggests that organizations address goals by directing resources and establishing values, explicitly or implicitly, through policy and funding decisions. In order to understand and effect change in an organization, we must address the multiple components of that organization simultaneously (Alderfer, 1980; Beer & Spector, 1993; Waterman, Peters & Phillips, 1980). One central variable in organizational change is organizational culture, with particular emphasis on the assumptions or values that underlie that culture. There is a need to sustain alignment of strategy, structure, and culture to achieve success (Tushman and O'Reilly, 1996).

Authors in human services agree that comprehensive change is a complex and difficult process that requires attention to multiple organizational variables or structures. These areas may include attitudes or values, structure or service design, staffing and resource allocation (including management structures), and change in the technology or strategies being used to support program participants (Mank, et.al 1996; Racino, 1994; Kiracofe, 1994). Analysis of organizational experiences with program conversion need to take a multi-dimensional view of organizational structure, strategies, and culture.

## **Methodology**

These case studies involved site visits to organizations that have closed a sheltered workshop or a nonwork, facility-based program and replaced it with integrated employment or other integrated, community-based activities for individuals with disabilities. The organizations vary with respect to size, geographic location, and the characteristics of persons receiving supports. Their common feature is that they no longer operate typical segregated programs. The purpose of our inquiry was to examine the process of organizational change and the internal and external factors that influence it in order to assist other organizations interested in pursuing a similar goal. Site visits were conducted over a period of two full days with each organization. During this time interviews were conducted with key players in the conversion process and representatives of the major constituencies affected by the change including program participants, program staff, family members, board members, funding agencies, employers, and other community organizations.

This research used a qualitative research design borrowing tools from ethnography such as participant observation and open ended interviews. This design was chosen based on the exploratory nature of the research questions. For detailed information about the research design, please refer to chapter 1.

## **Findings**

The organizations participating in this study shared a common commitment to change and a strong value for the goal of community employment for all of the people they supported. However, they varied in significant ways in their approach to the conversion process and to the catalysts for that change. Table 5.1 summarizes these differences, and the following sections will address the similarities and differences in organizational strategies and the role of internal leaders and other catalysts in influencing the change process.

**Table 5.1**  
**Summary of Strategies and Catalysts in the Change Process**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Speed</b>	<b>Leadership</b>	<b>Catalysts</b>
<b>Bonney Enterprises</b>	Organizational goal Clear closure date	Medium	Executive director	Values shift
<b>Community Enterprises</b>	Organizational goal	Medium	Executive director	Values shift New president Physical facility and location unacceptable
<b>Life Skills Foundation</b>	Organizational goal Clear closure date	Rapid	Shared: Middle managers & executive director	Values shift Financial Funding opportunity
<b>UCPA of Capitol Area</b>	Individually driven	Gradual	Executive director	Values shift Financial Funding opportunity
<b>Independence Association</b>	Individually driven	Gradual	Executive director	Values shift Funding opportunity
<b>MetroWest Mental Health</b>	Organizational goal Clear closure date	Rapid	Shared: Middle managers & executive director	Values shift Financial Funding agency expectations

## **Approaches to Conversion**

The six organizations used two distinct approaches to organizing and implementing organizational change. These were labeled as individually driven change and organizationally driven change, and each approach was characterized by different strengths and weaknesses during the change process.

**Individually driven change.** This approach occurred gradually, one consumer at a time, and was centered in the individual planning process. In this approach facility-based services continued until the majority of individuals supported by the organization held community jobs. UCPA's experience is typical. The organization adopted a person-centered planning approach as a way of focusing efforts on the individual rather than the organization. While senior managers had a clear commitment to a goal of closing their facility-based services, this goal was not discussed widely outside of the organization. One program manager describes this strategy as, "Don't tell people you're doing a conversion. Just use personal futures planning. That will convert it, if you listen to what their dreams and goals are."

Organizations experienced different challenges and benefits based on the approach they chose. A gradual, individually driven change process was more clearly focused on what would benefit each individual. As a result the change process was less stressful, and these organizations experienced very little resistance to change from families or other stakeholder groups. Organizations using the individual approach, however, did not always clearly communicate values

to staff, consumers, and other constituents, and may be easily derailed by other forces such as funding or staffing. A larger national question is whether organizations using this approach are less likely to complete a conversion process. The approach also took much longer. Independence Association, for example took 10 years from the time the organization began emphasizing community jobs to the final workshop closure in 1991.

**Organizationally driven change.** Organizations that chose an organizationally driven approach established a firm date for closure of the facility, communicated that decision clearly, and completed the closure much more rapidly. Bonney Enterprises set October, 1991, as their closure date, and stuck to that timeline despite not having a site for one of their small businesses. The organization celebrated the closure with considerable ceremony by holding a party that included burning simulated work in the parking lot on October 31st, and then completely vacating that building. Life Skills Foundation made the decision to close their sheltered workshop training program only 6 months before the doors closed. The executive director remembers the director of employment services saying at the first of the year, "I think we will close it July 1st."

Organizations using an organizationally driven approach typically completed the change process and found community employment for a significant percentage of the individuals they support more rapidly. As a result, the goals and intent of the organization were very clear to all stakeholders, and in some cases stakeholders had ample opportunity to participate in planning for the change. Organizations also implemented considerable creativity and experimentation as they sought to implement the change. The tradeoff for this speed and clarity of intent was a change process that was at times described as both stressful and chaotic. In some cases the change was experienced as abrupt by staff, families, and consumers. At times this led to a pronounced negative response to the organization's plans. This negative response resulted in part from the perception that important services were being taken away before stakeholders had the opportunity to understand or see the alternatives that would replace them. These fears were often reinforced by the organization's experiences. In the case of MetroWest Human Services, for example, the interim plan for supporting the many individual's who did not have jobs was to establish small satellite offices in community locations. The lack of structure for these groups and the staff time needed to invent and provide activities made it a stressful time for consumers and families, and almost impossible for staff to invest resources in job development. An alternative strategy needed to be developed before things settled down and employment goals began to be reached.

## **Approaches to Service Delivery**

The manner in which each organization provided their services in the community varied, but all organizations used at least two different models of service to address the needs of their consumers. Approaches concerning the type of service model that organizations used included: 1) Individual placement only; 2) Use of group placements as a transitional model; 3) Ongoing use of group settings; and 4) Non-work community integration activities.

**Individual placement approach.** All of the programs provided at least individual placement in jobs, although there was differing emphasis on the importance of individual jobs. When UCPA made the decision to close their adult day care service and provide supported employment services, they committed to doing only individual placement. As a result they did not have any group or enclave placements. In addition to a focus on individual job placements, Community Enterprises assisted individuals to start their own independent businesses. Funding from the state Department of Mental Health had been used to develop these new businesses which included close captioning videos and providing clerical support.

**Group placements as a transitional approach.** Several organizations used enclave or group work sites when they originally closed their segregated services, but over time they have reduced

their use of this model. During the closure of a sheltered workshop on the grounds of a state hospital, Community Enterprises emphasized group placements. The original intent was for group placements to lead to individual jobs in a developmental approach to community employment. They quickly realized that this developmental model was not responding to the needs of the individuals they served, and have since gradually reduced the number of individuals working in group placements while focusing more on individual placements. As they have tried to eliminate group placements totally, there has been a push from consumers and representatives from the funding source to keep this option available.

Life Skills Foundation originally used a variety of group settings when they closed their pre-sheltered workshop services. Several years after the closure, the board of directors established criteria to determine whether or not to maintain specific group work sites. The criteria included: 1) whether the work opportunity exists elsewhere (if so, discontinue the site); 2) whether employees in that site will make more money than in an individual job; and 3) whether the site is able to break even financially.

**Group setting as ongoing approach.** Several of the organizations studied have used group placements as an ongoing service option. These group placements are in addition to individual job placement services. While most of their job placements are individual, “dispersed enclaves” would best describe several of Independence Association’s work sites. At these sites there are several consumers who work similar hours in the same department, but have different job duties. Independence Association also established an artist cooperative called Spindleworks in the 1970’s and this continues to be a group based service option for consumers. Individuals who participate at Spindleworks share space with other artists from the community and receive payment from the sale of their products (e.g. clothing they weave or paintings they produce).

Bonney Enterprises purchased several existing businesses, including a bakery, a book bindery, and a nursery which they run as affirmative businesses. In each of the businesses there were employees with disabilities and employees without disabilities, and the expectation was that all staff perform a variety of functions within the business. While Bonney began by purchasing existing businesses, the organization has also developed their own businesses such as landscaping crews, a message delivery service, and a pushcart selling bakery goods in a retail area. In addition to providing training and employment, Bonney Enterprises elected to develop affirmative business to provide them more flexibility with revenue since the businesses represent a source of income.

In new situations where they do have group placements, Community Enterprises has worked with the employer to establish a joint partnership. Community Enterprises has invested in capital equipment for a new enclave site, and assisted another business in developing an accessible work space. While these placements had a greater entrepreneurial aspect, they were not true affirmative businesses. Community Enterprises also uses group placements at a hotel and supermarket as training sites where individuals are paid by the organization instead of the employer. At the completion of their training individuals are either hired onto the employer’s payroll or receive assistance from Community Enterprises to find a job in another company.

**Non-work community integration activities.** All of the programs visited have services that focused on community integration but were not employment. Some organizations used this model as a transitional tool once the workshop was closed, with a clear goal that all participants would enter employment. In these situations individuals who were not working in employment would engage in non-work activities in the community during their job search. Other organizations used community integration services in the transition and plan to continue the service for new referrals who are not requesting employment, people in the job search process, or as a supplemental service to individuals who are working.

The type of activities provided through the community integration programs were similar across the organizations and focused on individuals and small groups having the opportunity to take part

in social, recreational, volunteer or learning opportunities in their communities. Typically, there was a home base where all individuals supported by the program met in the morning. Individual choice and development of skills were usually the key factors in determining which activities an individual would engage in. MetroWest and Independence Association also provided group teaching and discussion activities at their home base location. Some participants of community integration programs had jobs, but attended community activities during off-hours.

At UCPA and Bonney Enterprises, individuals served in this program were typically people from their previous program who they had not been able to find jobs for or who elected not to work. For both of these organizations, these were small and gradually reducing groups which were not adding new referrals. Community Enterprises had the least formal type of community integration program, which provided community integration services for individuals while they are in the process of looking for work. Some of their contracts require them to support individuals during the hours of 9 to 3. Therefore individuals looking for jobs might attend job seeking groups or go on tours of work sites. Community Enterprises has tried to emphasize activities that related to work during these times, but there are also other community activities.

Independence Association and MetroWest provide community integration services as an ongoing program service and are both accepting new referrals. Both organizations also use community integration services to supplement individual's services outside of work hours. There were no plans to discontinue these programs in the event that all participants entered employment. While the community integration program at Independence Association did not focus on employment, the executive director emphasizes that at planning meetings for individuals served in the program individuals were continually asked whether they are now interested or ready for employment.

## **Catalysts for Change**

The six organizations identified multiple factors that led to the decision to discontinue facility-based services. While the organizations typically identified changing organizational values as one variable, all of the organizations identified additional variables including the presence of a new leader (executive director or president), an organizational financial crisis, and pressure from consumers to relocate services. It is notable that funders and state policy were rarely reported to be significant factors in the decisions of these organizations to change. The catalysts for change were largely internal to the organization.

**Leadership.** Even when other factors were involved, changing values in the organizations defined a clear direction for the change. The role of leaders in shaping the organization's value structure is a critical part of the change process, although leadership was provided in a variety of styles and from a variety of sources.

Despite the emphasis on top-level leadership in much of the literature on conversion (Albin et al., 1994; Lecher, & McDonald, 1996), leadership for the change process was broader than just a single top level executive. Values leadership came from both the executive director level and from middle managers. The potential role of a top level leader was exemplified by Bonney Enterprises, where leadership was clearly provided by the entrance of a new executive director. This director brought a new value structure to the organization. The executive director maintained a high profile throughout the change process as a leader and advocate for change. There were also examples of executive directors who led the change process using a more facilitative approach. At Independence Association and UCPA the executive director was a clear catalyst for change, but in a less visible manner.

Strikingly, though, there were two organizations in the study where significant leadership was provided at a middle manager level, suggesting the need to pay more attention to building the capacity of leaders at multiple levels in organizations. At MetroWest Human Services the executive director had a strong commitment to changing services in order to address pressure from funders

and fiscal concerns. That this change be in the direction of closing the workshop and emphasize community employment was driven by two middle managers. Change at Life Skills Foundation was also driven by middle managers. Staff in particular emphasized the role of the program director for employment services in promoting and maintaining the organization's values for integrated employment. In both of these cases the role of middle management was to influence the direction of change. Top management was committed to change, but not necessarily in the direction of conversion to community employment.

**Financial concerns.** Several organizations identified financial crises or changing financial circumstances as central to the decision to change. In the case of UCPA the organization was undergoing financial difficulties at the same time that there were questions about future funding for their primary day service model, adult day care services. A board member identified the importance of this factor when he credited the executive director as "managing to pull the agency forward in times of severe economic crisis." MetroWest Human Services was experiencing financial pressure, combined with the expenses related to moving into a new facility. At the time of the decision to close the workshop an independent consultant had reported to the MetroWest board of directors that future economic viability for the workshop would require substantial investment in equipment and resources. Life Skills Foundation was experiencing declining referrals to their pre-workshop training program. While these financial pressures did not establish a clear direction for change, they did serve to establish a clear need for change within the organization.

**Role of funding.** While organizations reported varying levels of collaboration with funding agencies, the decision to convert resources was almost exclusively an internal decision made by the organization. This view was summed up by the comment, "The purpose was about everyone having a meaningful contribution to make, not about closing the facility...I think we changed in spite of the system, not because of the system." Once an organization had made the decision to move toward integrated employment, funding sources were a resource that could support the new services. UCPA and MetroWest Human Services, for example, were successful in using Medicaid funds to address the needs of individuals when they were not working. Several organizations used funds from the state supported employment systems change projects to support change efforts.

The strongest direct involvement of the funding agency as an influence on the change decision occurred at MetroWest Human Services, where the organization was receiving pressure to expand their supported employment services. It is significant to note, though, that while their contract specified expansion of supported employment, there was no mention of closing the facility-based options. Independence Association reported that their collaboration with their primary funder was a support for the change process, though not a catalyst. The executive director indicated that because of the

*...trust that's built up between our organization and the system, we've been willing to take some risks that with other kinds of administrators I wouldn't have been willing to take, ... but because there is a trust there that we will figure out a way to do this, and we'll figure out a way to fund it, and let's not hold the service away from the consumer until we do that, because if we do, we'll always be behind."*

Funders were also reported as impediments to program change. Life Skills Foundation reported pressure from staff in the vocational rehabilitation system to not close their facility-based program. MetroWest received pressure to retreat from their decision during the chaotic period after the workshop closed and before they achieved a comfortable model for supporting individuals who were out of work.

**Consumer pressure.** Only Community Enterprises identified consumers as a direct catalyst for change. In the early years of the organization the sheltered workshop was located on the grounds of a state hospital. Community Enterprises staff identified the stigma of that location for individuals

who had left the hospital. In addition, concerns about the unpleasantness of the physical facility were regularly voiced by consumers.

## Common Themes in the Change Process

These six organizations who have successfully closed a facility-based program had a strong and well defined culture that emphasized clear shared values, innovation, and a willingness to take risks. Seven themes were identified that characterized the change process. While not universal, these themes were largely shared across the six organizations and are discussed below.

**Openness to risk taking.** Organizations displayed a substantial willingness to take risks. This was displayed as both an openness to new ideas and different approaches to doing business. More explicitly, there was a willingness to take action in situations with uncertain outcomes or at times when all of the details had not been worked out. One result of this culture was substantial staff tolerance for change and uncertainty. One Life Skills Foundation staff member noted that,

*you can't ever just get locked into one thing, because as soon as you do we go a different direction. So I've learned to enjoy that, and become as time goes by more flexible . . .if things weren't working, there was a lot of support, and the way that we handled it, we looked at it as . . .an opportunity for change and growth.*

The executive director of Life Skills Foundation noted that "I think we didn't need everything to be in place prior to it happening...everything can't be just right for it to happen, or it will never happen." This theme was repeated at Independence Association, where a job developer was hired before resources were identified, and at MetroWest Human Services, where closure proceeded without a clear idea how staff and consumers at the community-based offices would spend their time. In all of these cases there was a strong commitment to working out the details as they went along, and a strong tolerance for uncertainty.

**Shared values drive services.** These organizations were also characterized by a clear value structure that was shared across staff and other stakeholders. An Independence Association staff person reported a clear commitment to the capability of any individual to succeed in integrated employment, a common value across these organizations. He noted that the change was "...because it was the right thing to do...and people that could work in a sheltered workshop could work anywhere." Concurrent with these shared values were strategies for communicating and maintaining values within the organization, often as explicit policy within the organization. Life Skills Foundation established four agreements about how the organization would function that emphasize openness and personal responsibility. Along with the mission, these agreements are shared aggressively with staff and others. One staff summarized the effect as "this company has a lot of faults and a lot of strengths but you can't fault it for not being clear about its values. Somebody comes to work here and feels they want to cut a corner in terms of integrity, you just don't do that here." Instilling values at Life Skills Foundation begins early in staff careers. "It starts as early as the hiring process when someone is hired, or maybe even during the interviewing. When someone is being interviewed we go over the mission, the vision, the employee agreements."

This combination of strong commitment across staff and established strategies for sharing values are repeated across these organizations. At Community Enterprises specific targets for consumer representation on the board and on the staff set a clear overall value for the individuals the organization supports. UCPA set clear principles for its conversion, including an explicit expectation that all jobs would be individual placements. A funder described the UCPA staff, saying "I've never seen a bunch of harder working employment specialists in my entire life. They're driven...workaholics. Driven, driven in the value and the philosophy and truly believing in inclusion in the community of all people."

**Ongoing process of self evaluation.** A willingness to be self-evaluative combined with staff who were comfortable with internal criticism of services was a strong theme across these organizations. This self-evaluation represents a strong cultural characteristic that affected the ability of organizations to change rapidly and engage in continuous improvement of services. At Life Skills Foundation this trait was continually emphasized in staff interviews. One staff member stated, "There is a real willingness to say 'we screwed up, this isn't working as well as we thought it would, what can we do better.'" One result of this culture has been a developing emphasis on continuous improvement. At Bonney Enterprises, staff have implemented a second stage of planning to address dissatisfaction with some of the outcomes, particularly a limited number of individual jobs. Community Enterprises has gradually reduced the group employment sites that were a key strategy in their original efforts to close the sheltered workshop.

Staff at Community Enterprises and Life Skills Foundation were also encouraged to actively challenge the status quo of the organization. The vice president of Community Enterprises described how this push for innovation was communicated to staff.

*We tell our employees when they start with us, at the employee orientation, that if they do what we ask of them, they're good employees; if they can find a better way to do it, they're excellent employees. So everybody is constantly charged with, 'Look, this is the best that we can do; we know it's not nearly good enough; so your job is not just to do your job description, it's trying to figure out a better way to do this stuff.*

**Linkages to external resources.** There was an apparent paradox in the tendency of these organizations to initiate change processes that were almost entirely internally driven (driven by internal goals and values, and not by outside sources such as funding agencies), but at the same time to establish strong outreach and linkages with experts and national trends in employment services. On a local level, these linkages were characterized by strong community ties. UCPA established a strong Business Advisory Committee that not only assisted with networking to companies, but required committee members to meet individually with a program participant and employment specialist once a month and to provide the participant with two business contacts per month. Independence Association has a strong community presence and emphasized reciprocity through staff participation in other community organizations. Their Spindleworks artisans cooperative reaches out to the arts community through its gallery and through projects like an artist-in-residence program.

Organizations also reached out nationally by bringing in experts in supported employment as consultants and sending staff to national conferences and to visit exemplary programs. These contacts had a great deal to do with setting goals and directions. UCPA emphasized the importance of its connection to the National UCPA office and its information and training. They also used Cary Griffin, a nationally known consultant in organizational change in employment, as a consultative resource. Life Skills Foundation sponsored experts such as Paul Wehman and Lou Brown to present to area programs. This type of outreach helped provide a benchmark for the change process. Both Bonney Enterprises and MetroWest Human Services became involved in statewide or regional change projects that provided organizational assessment and technical assistance support for the change process.

**Holistic focus on consumer needs.** Focusing on the goals and needs of individuals they serve was a consistent theme for these six organizations whether they used the individualized or organizational approach to conversion. UCPA and Independence Association were acknowledged in particular by families and representatives from the funding source for looking at the whole individual as the basis for their intervention, rather than just the employment needs. The approach that organizations used to consider individual aspirations included person-centered planning, holistic intake and service delivery models, and identification of support needs using the natural environment.

UCPA and Independence Association used person-centered planning processes as both a change strategy and to identify the goals of individuals they supported. UCPA used this approach as a person by person mechanism to complete the conversion process and emphasized the importance of listening to individuals' hopes and dreams. Using this planning process, it became clear to staff and families that individuals did not want to continue in adult day care on a long term basis.

Independence Association began to use a person-centered planning approach when it received a grant to provide planning for a small group of consumers. The staff have expanded their use of this planning approach and found it helpful in defining goals of individuals and arranging supports to reach those goals. In addition to emphasizing the whole person in this process, staff respected and honored the individual's choices. An emphasis on helping individuals maintain prior social relationships has been important to staff and consumers. With assistance from the staff, one individual who works in a hospital cafeteria has arranged his schedule so that he can have lunch weekly with his girlfriend who he would otherwise be unable to see.

Using a more holistic approach to meet the needs of individuals they support has resulted in better job placements for consumers of UCPA services. Representatives from the funding source felt that this organization was successful in obtaining jobs for individuals that other organizations could not serve because they were able to consider all components of the individual and make a more compatible match. Not only were they able to find better job matches, UCPA staff were credited with finding situations that allowed individuals to grow and maintain their employment for an extended period of time.

Independence Association also used a holistic approach in their intake process and talked with individuals about life areas in which they may need assistance. They address nine areas of the individual's life to consider where their services might be able to address various needs. The staff person also talks with the individual across the scope of life issues such as residential, medical, legal and therapeutic to ensure that these needs are being met. If services are being provided through other organizations, staff serve a case management role to make sure that communication and collaboration occur. The rehabilitation plan is then developed with consideration for all aspects of the individual's life.

**Direct Staff Roles in Organizational Goals and Decision-Making.** Staff being empowered to take responsibility and play an active role in the management of their organizations resulted in consistently impressive staff at each of the organizations. Parents, funders, and board members complimented the organizations on the high caliber of staff. Staff were described as creative, always having a positive attitude, willing to take chances to make something work for an individual, and driven by values. A representative of the funding source described the placement efforts of staff at Community Enterprises:

*If there is somewhat of an impediment they can work through it and the consumer is not blamed. It's not a matter of 'well that person isn't ready' or 'if this person did something different we would be able to place them.' Never the way they approach the problem. It's always the environment isn't right, we will get there....[I] never hear negative [from the staff].*

The staff at each of the organizations were identified as committed and motivated, which translated into positive experiences for individuals who were receiving support. Independence Association and Bonney Enterprises indicated that when they hire staff they are more focused on the values the individual holds rather than the experience or knowledge they have about job placement. Managers at these organizations feel that they can teach people skills to do their job, but it is very difficult to change values and philosophy. In addition to hiring quality staff, all of the organizations used strategies to empower their staff and have them be participants in the change process.

Staff at Bonney, UCPA, and Community Enterprises were actively involved in the planning of the

closure of their segregated services. Staff input in this process was obtained through staff retreats. At Community Enterprises, staff and consumers continue to participate in “think days” where they consider the direction of the organization. Staff who had more managerial responsibilities or were involved with community employment activities were involved in the conversion discussion at Independence Association and MetroWest. A manager at MetroWest describes how staff put pressure on the managers to make change.

*You might not always get what you wanted, but you certainly could get your voice heard. Then I think having staff who felt comfortable enough to come to us as directors and say ‘wait a minute. You are sending us to all these great trainings, and we are coming back hearing what all the other agencies are doing, we are not doing this.’*

To emphasize the role staff play in managing the organization, Bonney Enterprises and UCPA converted to self-managed teams as part of their change process. At both organizations the most complete incorporation of this concept has been in employment services. Other components were just starting to implement this team approach. At UCPA there continued to be a supervisor of the employment team, but they redefined their job descriptions to better meet individual staff needs and converted from individual to team goals. The supported employment department at Bonney Enterprises implemented self management by having no supervisor. Staff were collectively responsible for all aspects of managing the team, including budget and staff evaluations.

In addition to empowering staff through self-managed teams, UCPA has created opportunity for staff input and collaboration across projects in organization-wide teams for interviewing and accessibility. Activities like the organization softball team and optional classes allow individuals throughout the organization to meet and interact in a fun and relaxed manner. This style creates a more homogenous organization despite the variety and disparity of different projects.

Organizations engaged in activities that ensured staff were committed to the values and goals of community employment. During the closure of segregated services, staff at MetroWest, Bonney Enterprises, and Independence Association were given the opportunity to choose the role they wanted to play in the new organizational structure. Since these organizations continued to provide non-employment activities in the community and residential services, staff could elect to have employment specific jobs or not. The majority of staff who were working in the workshop at Independence Association elected to work with consumers on community integration and volunteer activities rather than in job development or employment. New staff were hired to provide the employment services. Bonney Enterprises offered a variety of new employment opportunities for staff in the businesses they developed, so staff were given a choice in the type of setting they wanted to work. UCPA was also adding a supported living component to their services, and some staff made lateral moves within the organization. Having their preferences respected during this time of change made it easier for staff to adjust to the conversion and resulted in a better matching of staff skills and interests with new jobs. The opportunity for staff to choose either employment or non-employment jobs allowed supervisors to hire only staff that were fully committed to developing community employment.

**Emphasis on Continuous Improvement.** Many of the organizations studied indicated a strong emphasis on continually evaluating the quality of their services and making improvements to respond to newly identified needs. The focus on continuous improvement required staff to be flexible since service approaches were changing frequently. In addition, they were required to be creative in developing new approaches when something was not working.

Every organization emphasized the importance of their staff being flexible in responding to the needs of the day as well as the changes that occur during conversion. In most organizations, job descriptions are viewed as providing some structure but essentially staff need to do whatever is required to get the job done. One employment staff person at Bonney Enterprises explained that she was told at the interview that the job required flexibility, but that she did not truly understand

what that meant until she was in the community providing support.

Expanding the range of services they could provide and expanding sources of funding for their services led Community Enterprises and Bonney Enterprises to develop a more entrepreneurial approach to program management. Motivated to have funding sources other than state and federal grants, these organizations developed business interests that allowed them to have more control of their destiny and allowed for more creativity in service provision. Income from the affirmative businesses was used for alternative services that are not typically funded (i.e. home purchasing supports for consumers at Community Enterprises) and hiring staff to develop community activities.

Creating a culture that supported this entrepreneurial spirit was related to the organizations' emphasis on self evaluation. They were continually looking for ways to develop their businesses and for better ways to do things. This sense of innovation was common across all aspects of the organization. Life Skills Foundation staff reported that they tended toward hiring staff who were not satisfied with the status quo and were enthusiastic about finding better ways to do things. They were continually questioning themselves: "Why are we doing this? Does it still make sense? What would be better?" Community Enterprises rewards staff for new ideas. By offering a financial bonus for innovative ideas, the message of continually looking for a better way to do their business is clear to individuals at all levels of the organization. The vice president described the culture of the organization:

*We continue always to look for better ways to do what we're doing. So we're always trying out different approaches to it, looking at ways to create positions and create an organization that is viable. So if you like change, this is the place to work; if you don't like change, this is not the place to work. So in our hiring of staff, we make that very clear up front, 'cause we change a lot here.*

The entrepreneurial spirit at Community Enterprises was reflected in new service components that expand the population served by the organization and, therefore, the organization's funding base. Staff are charged with "growing the business" and this has included partnerships with businesses to market their own products. They have also developed a for-profit company that provides dividends to the non-profit component and these funds can be used for innovation projects that can not be funded through traditional approaches. Bonney Enterprises is growing the organization through the small businesses that they operate. While they were not looking to expand the number of businesses that they own, each of the existing businesses has been charged with increasing their income. Some examples of how this growth occurred was the addition of an orchid business and possible mushroom production at the nursery. The bakery has researched the possibility of mail order sales of their product as well as new merchandising and packaging to reflect seasonal gift giving. Both of these organizations have set performance goals for their employees to continue to expand the income resources and program options the organization can provide.

## **Current Challenges Summary**

Although in general, these organizations have been successful in their movement toward integrated services, they identified several on-going challenges in providing integrated, community-based employment for individuals with disabilities.

### **Expanding Integration and Striving for True Inclusion**

Four of the six organizations visited identified the need to expand integration and strive for true inclusion. Although these programs have successfully closed a sheltered workshop, they acknowledge that they have not yet achieved the goal of full participation in the community for their consumers. For example, Bonney Enterprises staff acknowledged that two of their small businesses provide minimal integration or interaction with other employees without disabilities. Also, at the time of the site visit, only 5 individuals were employed by businesses not owned by

Bonney, and there was an expressed desire to increase these numbers. The Community Connections program (primarily nonwork services) offers some interesting volunteer options for persons who have not yet identified their own career goals. However, there were concerns that a small number of Community Connections participants needed more opportunities for community activity.

In addition to striving for more inclusion in their enclaves, Community Enterprises felt conflicted about the value of individual jobs versus the expressed interest of some consumers for a group setting. The standard set by the president was for all consumers to obtain individual jobs, and for the cases where that did not occur staff needed to review the basis for the decision. They were committed to providing many options and allowing individuals to choose an option. Within the provision of the enclaves model, the Community Enterprises staff were continually working to ensure that individuals served in this group setting have as much opportunity as possible for interaction with coworkers without disabilities.

While Independence Association's Executive Director was pleased with his organization's progress toward community inclusion, he summarized the idea that it's critical to reach a point where the community can provide the supports individuals need and Independence Association's services are no longer necessary, "I really believe that programs like these are the last barriers to true integration, that we in fact create walls in the process of trying to knock them down." While this Community Connections program provides opportunities for individuals to have a greater role in their community, there are still some large group activities which take place in their program space.

## **The Need to Improve Opportunities for Employment and More Work Hours**

Four of the organizations identified a need to improve the quality of the work opportunities for the individuals they supported. In particular, limited work hours and limited wages were cited as concerns by family members, consumers, and staff. A number of reasons were identified for the limited hours, including other habilitation needs and the nature of supports that individuals need to perform their jobs, and this continues to be an area of growth for many of the organizations we visited.

MetroWest developed the Community Options program in order to address the need to provide day services between 9 and 3 for individuals who are not working or are working limited hours. However they see that program as a stop-gap measure that does not represent the program's overall goals. Independence Association staff have made the commitment to encourage people to work as many or as few hours as they choose, but staff identified a need to better support those individuals who choose to work more hours than they are currently working. Life Skills staff and other constituents consistently identified the ongoing organizational challenge of meeting the needs of individuals with more severe disabilities and improving employment opportunities for this group.

## **Need for Additional Services to Meet Consumer Needs**

Many of the organizations we visited identified a need for additional services that meet consumer needs that are currently not being met with existing services. This is consistent with the holistic approach to consumer support identified as a theme. Because Independence Association was getting more referrals for individuals with traumatic brain injuries, they needed better access to additional therapeutic and consultation services. At the time of the site visit, Independence Association had plans to add these services to their Community Connections program.

The demand that programs provide a predictable service delivery day, sometimes known as the day custody requirement, was a concern for several programs. The contractual requirement that individuals receive services between 9 and 3 does not reflect the variability in job opportunities and takes staff time away from job development and job support. While some organizations, including MetroWest and Bonney Enterprises, explicitly provided services to meet this need, others

struggled with staying true to the primary mission of employment support. Life Skills staff and other constituents identified a need to establish effective supports for individuals who are in the process of looking for jobs. Similarly, Community Enterprises is also facing this challenge.

The employment staff of United Cerebral Palsy Association (UCPA) of the Capitol Area were concerned with the issues of follow-up services and replacement jobs. Employment staff were committed to providing support for the lifetime of a job, but their funding only covers job placement and short-term follow-up. Because of this shortage of funds, consumers' ongoing long-term support needs create work load challenges for staff. They were also concerned about being able to assist people who may lose their job or choose to change jobs. In addition to the existing funding resources, staff are working with consumers on developing Plans to Achieve Self Support (PASS) so they can independently fund additional support services as necessary.

## **Funding Challenges**

Securing funding continues to be a significant challenge for the organizations we visited. As mentioned in the previous section, UCPA continues to pursue alternative funding options for employment follow-up and replacement services. Two organizations were trying to reduce their dependence on federal and state funds by building entrepreneurial businesses. For Bonney, one of the advantages of their small agency-owned businesses is that it allows them to become less reliant on Oregon's state MR/DD agency, since the state's financial support of integrated employment has been reduced, and state VR funds remain relatively flat. The president of Bonney also noted a disparity between regulations enforced by the state Mental Health agency and the organization's goal of developing innovative services responsive to individual needs. Community Enterprises is also building their for-profit business for this reason.

Independence Association expanded its fundraising efforts in order to provide discretionary resources. The executive director also indicated that there is a critical need to allow for conversion of Title XIX (Medicaid) funds to be used for community-based employment in order to provide ongoing supports. Maine currently has a waiver which allows for the use of these funds for individuals who are moving out of institutional settings, but the executive director would like to see this available for students transitioning from schools. He reported that throughout the state there are students who have graduated from school, but are sitting at home because there are no available services. Independence Association does not have a waiting list and is actively working with school age youth to connect them with services prior to graduation. Their establishment of a Transition Coordinator position using discretionary funds has helped address this issue locally, but it continues to be a poorly addressed need throughout the state.

Independence Association's director of employment services described funding cuts that were threatened by the State of Maine as a result of a fiscal deficit. This threat was very anxiety-provoking for newer staff. The executive director indicated that other organizations have moved back toward more segregated services because more individuals can be served with less funds, and he finds this to be a disturbing trend. He felt it is critical for his organization to continue to build the residential component of their services, as this will give them more financial stability through difficult times.

## **Communication**

Independence Association, Life Skills, and MetroWest cited communication as a current challenge. In particular, the change from all staff and consumers being in one location to placements throughout the community requires a greater commitment to information sharing. Independence Association continues to work on communication among staff, while MetroWest continues to work on improving communication with parents and family members. Parents at MetroWest indicated that they would like more day-to-day communication with direct staff as well as more information on the overall direction of the organization.

A related communication challenge which was specific to Bonney Enterprises was clarification

of the varying roles of staff, employees, and service customers. Bonney distinguished between staff who provided disability-related supports, employees who worked in the organization's small businesses, and service customers who had disabilities. Staff acknowledge that the lines of distinction are sometimes unclear, and coworkers or supervisors who are not considered "staff", but rather "employees," actually may be participating in individual service planning or providing other, more formal support to service customers. There are also differences in pay and benefits for staff and employees. This created issues surrounding Bonney's role and purpose as an organization, since social services were also being provided in the businesses.

## **Discussion and Implications**

Development of an expanded community capacity to support integrated employment is a significant need if substantial systems change is to take place in day and employment services. The large national investment in community rehabilitation providers suggests that both CRPs and the state agencies that fund them need to better understand and facilitate change at an organizational level.

### **State Systems**

In a study of state project directors from the RSA supported employment systems change initiative, project directors identified the need to influence change by redirecting resources from segregated services to integrated services in order to sustain change (Mank et al, 1996). It is striking that none of the organizations in this study identified systems change initiatives as a significant factor or catalyst in their change process, although some organizations sought funding from state supported employment systems change projects after they began their change process. Change was primarily driven by internal decision making and resources. In past research CRPs reported that state agency policies that influenced the development of integrated employment included funding tied to integrated employment (42% of respondents), additional training and technical assistance (29%), and higher rates of funding for integrated employment (17%) (McGaughey et al., 1994).

This study also suggests additional ways that systems can overtly support change. State agency policies need to be revised to acknowledge the different purpose inherent in integrated employment services. While some individuals and their families require day support, absolute policies such as a requirement that programs provide 9-3 services reflect an obsolete custodial model of service delivery. This policy forces programs to provide contradictory services, and to limit the range of job options that they offer participants. State agencies can also address this issue by requiring and funding residential services to provide non-work supports at flexible times. Policies that emphasize integrated employment for new referrals and individuals who are exiting school, and zero-entry policies for facility based services can also support a gradual redirection of resources.

The limited impact of external factors on these programs also suggests a need for a more aggressive stance by state agencies in establishing contractual and financial incentives for organizations to expand integrated employment services and to down size facility-based programs. These incentives could take the form of performance-based contract goals, time-limited grants to support shifting resources and downsizing or selling facilities, and higher rates of funding for integrated employment outcomes. State agencies can also explicitly emphasize integrated employment through clear regional and state level goals and providing training and technical assistance supports to organizations that want to change. Finally, states can provide information and outreach to families that illustrate employment successes, and emphasize the range of possible outcomes and services.

### **Community Rehabilitation Providers**

Some of the organizations involved in this study, including Bonney Enterprises, set a specific

closure date for their facility-based programs and were explicit about their goal, while others such as UCPA implemented change through their person-centered planning process and were less visible about the change process. While these two approaches established different organizational dynamics, there are implications that affect both types of change process, as well as implications that are specific to the approach.

Organizations that implement a change process need to be clear and uncompromising about their goals and purpose. Each of these six organizations, whether explicitly or implicitly, set a clear goal and direction, and implemented policies and strategies that supported that goal. Effective change requires a clear commitment to the goal that is shared across an organization. These organizations used a variety of strategies for reinforcing that goal, including staff training, use of external consultants, establishing a no-entry policy for the facility-based program, and reorganization into self-managed teams.

The importance of organizational communication was universally addressed across stakeholder groups and across organizations. This type of dramatic change is stressful for all stakeholders, and several organizations emphasized the need to attend more to both individual and group communication to keep stakeholders in touch with the organization's goals and directions. Organizations described a multi-strategy approach that included 1:1 communication during planning meetings, involvement of key stakeholders in strategic planning processes, newsletters, and frequent public forums. Community Enterprises uses regular staff and consumer "think days" to bring representatives from different offices together to plan for the organization. Poor communication represents a significant risk for organizations that take an organizational approach to change and set a specific closure date. Often specific stakeholder groups, including direct service staff, consumers, and family members, expressed that they were frustrated by having a limited role in the planning process and limited information about the goals or process of change. Organizations that used an organizationally driven change process that included a specific closure date needed to pay substantial attention to engaging and communicating with stakeholder groups. This included involving consumers, family members, and other stakeholders in a visible and open planning process.

Contrary to the image of change occurring through a dynamic leader, middle managers played a significant role in shaping the change process for some of these organizations. This finding is consistent with observations about the role of mid-level change agents in business literature. Peter Senge (1990) observes, "Effective progress can start in the middle as well as at the top of organizations. [Some of the most effective change projects] were initiated with neither the awareness nor support of top management" (p. xix). There is a need to identify ways to build and strengthen mid-level and line staff as change agents in organizations. Leadership skills can be nurtured by encouraging middle managers to be conversant in changes in the field through membership in professional organizations, attending local and national conferences, and sponsoring discussion through journal clubs. Middle manager roles in the organization can be strengthened through breakfasts and other informal forums with organizational leaders, and by providing an aggressive internal training program. A future study might look at the circumstances in organizations that foster these types of leadership at multiple levels. Building leaders at all levels is particularly important because of how dispersed staff are in employment services.

Finally, these organizations illustrate the importance of maintaining a culture of change and innovation in organizations. All of the organizations continued dramatic change after the closure of the facility. Programs can support a culture of change by nurturing risk taking and innovation, providing incentives for staff who recommend innovations that are implemented, and visibly recognizing innovators whether or not the innovation is successful.

On a practical level, most of these organizations continue to struggle with ways to support individuals while they are not working. A common theme in successful approaches seems to be clearly separating community support function from staff who are doing job development and job support. It was difficult for staff at MetroWest Human Services, for example, to devote sufficient

time to job development during the period in which they were also responsible as teams for daily support for individuals who were unemployed. They became more successful at meeting employment goals when this function was taken out of the employment support teams using reallocation of resources and a creative approach to mixing funding resources.

**Organizationally driven change (Specific closure date):** Organizations that used this approach to change were able to complete closure of their facility more quickly, and established employment opportunities more rapidly. Having a specific timeline for closing a facility is a powerful tool in communicating the goals of the organization and maintaining accountability during a change process. Despite these advantages, these organizations were more likely to experience overt resistance to the change. This approach requires a substantial investment in planning and communication across stakeholder groups.

**Conversion driven by individual goals:** Organizations using this approach experienced a less disruptive change process, with less overt conflict among stakeholder groups. There was a clear risk of the organization's goals being derailed during the process. Stakeholders were less likely to be aware of the goal of the organization, and it would be easy for the process of closing a facility to be delayed indefinitely. These organizations need to be careful to develop and inform staff and other stakeholders of organizational goals, and to set benchmark goals to maintain accountability for the process. Clear policy directives such as a moratorium on accepting new referrals for the facility may help clarify the goal. Use of a person-centered planning approach can help individuals and families connect their goals and dreams to employment opportunities.

## **For External Stakeholders**

Much of the change in special education and adult services for individuals with MR/DD has been driven by family members and self advocates. Consumers, family members, and other groups (including board members and employers) can be important allies in the change process by seeking a place at the table during strategic planning, and by keeping the pressure on program staff to achieve placement goals. Families are also in a unique position to monitor the outcome of change at an individual level. The goal needs to be improved quality of life through employment, not just finding a job. Consumers, family members and other stakeholders should be invited to participate in training opportunities and conferences.

## **Conclusion**

At its heart, the commitment to close a facility-based program and move resources to community employment requires reframing the organization from a caregiving to a goal-driven mission. While these six organizations were successful in closing a facility-based service using a variety of strategies and approaches, they all were clear and uncompromising about their goal. Facilitating this type of change on a broader basis requires that funders and policy makers become clear and uncompromising in their goals for the network of day and employment services.



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# ARE YOU ON OUR MAILING LIST?

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail \_\_\_\_\_

## How would you describe yourself?

(check all that apply)

- person with a disability
- family member (of a person with a disability)
- General public/community member
- Professional

## Who do you work for? (if applicable)

(check the most appropriate)

### State Government

- State Blind /Visually Impaired agency
- State Mental Health agency
- State MR/Developmental Disability agency
- State Public Health agency
- State Vocational Rehabilitation agency
- State Developmental Disabilities Council
- State Protection & Advocacy agency
- other state agency (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### Service Provider/Private Provider

- day or employment services
- residential
- independent living center/consumer run program
- private practice
- consumer group (parents/family/self-advocate)
- professional association
- other provider (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

### School

- elementary/secondary/voc tech
- post-secondary
- special education
- early childhood

### Other

- RRTC
- RCEP
- UAP
- Other Organization \_\_\_\_\_

## I would like to receive publications & notices in the following subject areas:

- employment
- HIV/AIDS
- recreation/leisure
- multicultural
- mental health
- health care
- inclusive education
- transition from school to adult life
- advocacy
- early intervention
- self-determination/self-advocacy
- assistive technology
- research (any area)
- training (any area)
- other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Title/Role (if applicable)

- Executive Director/Commissioner
- Program/Project Director
- Direct Service Staff
- Teacher
- Counselor
- Clinician
- Policymaker/Legislator
- other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## Population served (if applicable)

- Sensory impairment
- Mental Illness
- Mental Retardation/Developmental Disabilities
- Learning Disability
- Physical Disability
- Health impairment
- other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_