



## **State Employment Leadership Network Advisory Group Annual Report July 2009-June 2010**

### **I. Summary:**

DBHDS became a member of the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) as of July 2009. In the Fall and early Winter 2009, a new DBHDS staff was hired and soon formed a core group of ODS staff to prepare for the first stage of SELN involvement, the state self assessment. Simultaneously, a round table discussion was convened at the 2009 COLLABORATIONS conference to introduce interested conference attendees to this nationwide project.

By December, the SELN national staff sent out a survey to over 150 employment stakeholders across the state to get a better picture of the state and history of integrated employment (DRS counselors, Employment Service Organization staff, CSB staff, individuals with disabilities, family members, other state agency staff, etc). The state self assessment was also completed at this time which was followed up by a site visit from staff from the national SELN project (Institute for Community Inclusion and NASDDDS staff). The site visit served as an opportunity for this SELN staff to meet with a core group of Office of Developmental Services (ODS) staff to discuss their initial findings, gather additional info, and help ODS staff to begin to plan a course to improve and increase integrated employment opportunities for Virginians with developmental disabilities.

The SELN staff site visit occurred in conjunction with the initial meeting of the state SELN Advisory Group. The Advisory Group (AG) was able to meet SELN staff, receive information about the national SELN project and to review a summary of their initial findings. The SELN staff used this opportunity to gather additional information to use in their subsequent "findings report".

The SELN Advisory Group has been meeting on a bi-monthly to quarterly basis since. The AG is comprised of a fluid membership base made up of representatives from DBHDS, DRS, DMAS, employment services organization staff, self advocates, family member advocates, DOE, etc. The group has worked on many different activities in efforts to reach the overall goal of developing a strategic work plan with outcome measures and deliverables stated. There were numerous discussions about how to get to accurate employment numbers (i.e baseline data) of persons with intellectual

disabilities or developmental disabilities who may receive services from unrelated providers. The AG also spent time working on identifying potential policy, regulation, funding, supports, leadership, community barriers to helping persons get jobs in their communities earning competitive wages. In efforts to develop a group consensus on our approach to employment supports, a “core belief” statement was developed as well as a mission statement. There were five subgroups formed to address these varied yet related topics (i.e. Policy and Regulations, Funding/Contracting Methods, Training/Technical Assistance, Awareness/Education/Self Advocacy, and Data groups) And finally, in later summer 2010, the AG began to consider an Employment First Policy statement and will move towards pursuing related projects and initiatives during the upcoming year and beyond.

## **II. Core Belief Statement-**

“Employment for persons with developmental disabilities enhances the person’s self-worth, is a key factor in a healthy economy, reduces overall service costs, and creates individuals that contribute to, and are valued by their community. In addition, other positive aspects of employment are: the benefits to businesses, accessible environments, and diversity in the workplace.”

## **III. Draft Mission Statement-**

The State of Virginia believes that all citizens have the right and opportunity to pursue careers of their choice. To that end, persons with Developmental Disabilities should be able to have any post secondary educational and/or employment options that individuals without disabilities have access to. It is our belief that employment enhances a person’s sense of self-worth, is a key factor in a healthy economy, and creates individuals that contribute to and are valued by their communities.

The areas of importance are as follows:

1. It is the obligation of all service systems to facilitate employment outcomes through education, career planning, and the utilization of blended funding mechanisms.
2. It is the obligation of the education system to begin to assist individuals and their families in considering employment from the beginning of the school experience. This includes but is not limited to: awareness of the beneficial aspects of integrated employment, emphasis in soft skills, life skills training, academic achievement, vocational exploration and transition planning.
3. The employers of Virginia will be empowered and well trained to employ persons with developmental disabilities and will understand the essence of having a diverse workforce in the 21st century.
4. Persons with DD will be full participants in their lives and communities. Employment is a critical element of this full participation.
5. Informed choice, person centered and individualized supports are essential components of assisting a person with career planning.

#### IV. Employment First Policy Statement (DRAFT)-

Virginians with disabilities have the right to work. With that right, they have the responsibility to contribute towards their own self sufficiency as well as the opportunity to fully participate in their community.

Therefore, Virginians with disabilities should first be presented with the opportunity to work in integrated community based employment before considering other alternate day activities. It will also be assumed by service providers that individuals who *want* to work *can* work and the team supporting an individual with disabilities, using person-centered practices, has a responsibility to navigate through barriers to employment and locate the necessary supports. **to enable employment if that is the desired outcome.** In order to accomplish this mission, **it is agreed that and the individuals themselves, support teams, families of individuals with developmental disabilities be educated about integrated employment opportunities and supported employment services and that** individuals have access to support team members who are knowledgeable about integrated employment alternatives.

(Highlighted areas indicate future revisions.)

#### V. Focal Areas Identified through overall AG work and Subgroup work-

- Increase the Waiver Group Supported Employment rate above that of the Day Support rate in order to assist individuals and providers in making the switch to an Employment First approach
- Which Waiver service(s) should situational assessments be added to?
- Should situational assessments (or job discovery) be made mandatory or be optional?
- What other states do for non-Waiver long-term supports. LTESS for Va, how to expand?
- The need for data was mentioned, particularly a cost-benefit comparison of employment and day support, including the effect of employment on benefits.
- Modify the PCP Personal Profile to prioritize employment and increase planning teams' awareness of employment

- Engage support coordinators and providers in education/training about employment options and “employment first” policy
- Waiver regulatory and service definition changes
- Pursue greater reimbursement rate for Waiver Group SE than DS/PV services to provide incentive for providers to provide SE services. Pursue additional LTESS funding (per above). Va Accesses to lobby GA for specifically what is needed.
- Need to continue to advocate for changes to regs. that could have an impact, including Medicaid funded transportation and the ability to blend services for one person.
- How to get to accurate data on #'s of Virginians with dev dis. Who are working in community, earning min wage or higher. Plus hours working, etc.
- Propose changes to waiver regs that specify a person receiving waiver transportation must be picked up at a waiver provider and dropped off at a waiver site. Therefore discouraging individual competitive placements.