

Employment Options for People with Developmental Disabilities in Arizona

Although employment is a building block for inclusion, income, health and freedom, it is still an elusive goal for the majority of people with developmental disabilities who wish to work. Equal access to employment for people with disabilities has not improved since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) twenty years ago. The following table reveals that the difference in labor market activity rate between those employed with no disabilities versus those with disabilities is large at 57.4 percent and has grown significantly since the passage of the ADA.

Table 1. The Growing Employment Gap¹



Similarly, a 2010 Kessler Foundation/National Organization on Disability study² surveyed over 2,000 people with disabilities and no disability across the nation. Findings revealed that employment remained the largest gap between the two groups. These trends are reflected in Arizona. In 2009, 66 percent of those with no disabilities were employed compared to only 33 percent of those with disabilities, and the employment percentage of people with disabilities in this state have declined since 2004.³

The Debate Behind Center-Based Employment

Historically, many young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Arizona and across the nation are placed in what have been called facility-based, or center based employment, e.g. sheltered workshops. These programs offer skills training, special

¹ National Council on Disability. (October 4, 2011). "The Power of Digital Inclusion: Technology's Impact on Employment and Opportunities for People with Disabilities." (p. 42).

² http://nod.org/what_we_do/research/surveys/kessler/

³ Butterworth, J., Hall, A.C., Smith, F.A., Migliore, A., & Winsor, J. (2011). "StateData: The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes." Boston, MA: Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.

certificate subminimum wage work, prevocational services, group work placements, and recreation and leisure activities in segregated settings with other workers with disabilities. Proponents argue that these sites are training sites for integrated employment, and that they also provide an employment avenue for those with significant disabilities who are thought not to be able to participate successfully in traditional work settings. They also argue that these facility-based settings allow participants to have pride in their work, and offer them an opportunity to socialize with others and make money. Proponents also state that these facilities are expensive to operate, because they pay for personal assistance services for people with disabilities to participate.

On the other hand, critics⁴ have argued that sheltered employment is menial, assembly-line type of work offered to people with disabilities in a segregated setting. Participants in these settings are usually paid less than minimum wage, yet these settings are expensive to operate, leaving participants in poverty, and directly contradicting the Americans with Disabilities Act that allows individuals equal access to employment and opportunity. Further, the great majority of participants never leave these prevocational settings once they begin. A recent study found that people with Autism that worked in sheltered workshops cost more and were paid less when compared with their counterparts in integrated settings, and the majority never left the sheltered workshops.⁵

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has removed placement in facility-based settings as a successful employment outcome, and consequently has reduced the number of placements in these sites across the country; however the Arizona Division of Developmental Disability (DDD) employment counselors still refer to these settings for various reasons, including the absence of available employment opportunities in Arizona. Because employment is such a formidable issue, many different options and strategies across the nation have been introduced to help promote it.

What is Integrated, Competitive Employment?

Integrated employment is defined by RSA as paid work alongside others with no disability in a community, non-segregated setting. Additionally, RSA defines competitive employment as self-employment or work in an integrated setting that is performed on a full or part-time basis that is at least equal to the higher of the federal or state minimum wage.⁶ RSA and other disability organizations have recognized the value of integrated and competitive employment, and have made obtaining either one of them, and reducing dependence on sheltered employment, national goals. There have been various strategies introduced to ensure that individuals are successful in integrated settings, including the use of supported and customized employment.

⁴ Cimera, R., Wehman, P., West, M., Burgess, S. (2011). Do sheltered workshops enhance employment outcomes for adults with autism spectrum disorder? Available <http://aut.sagepub.com/content/early/2011/05/19/1362361311408129.full.pdf>

⁵ National Disability Rights Network. (2011). "Segregated & Exploited: The Failure of the Disability Service System to Provide Quality Work."

⁶ Although this is definition that RSA uses, a minority of advocates feel that not allowing subminimum wages would act as a disincentive for employment for those with DD among employers.

Supported Employment individualizes supervision on the job according to the individual's abilities. This can be offered either through natural or formal supports. Natural support tends to be a preferred option as on-the-job assistance and role modeling is offered by peers, supervisors and colleagues, thus there is no differential treatment based on disability. Formal support is offered by state and federally funded job coaches who provide assistance/training to workers with disabilities while on the job. This type of support is extended to individuals, as well as, to groups in the form of enclaves. Enclaves are groups of people with disabilities that work together to perform the same job in an integrated setting with a job coach. Examples of enclaves are often found in janitorial and food service.

Customized Employment is a form of job-carving. The employer focuses on the discrete contributions of the individual in relation to the specific needs of the organization and crafts a position that meets the goals of both parties. This option provides an advantage to job seekers who struggle in the competitive job seeking process. The following insert demonstrates how competitive employment can be used to obtain and retain employment.

Customized Employment Success Story

A large commercial real estate business decreased the time it took to complete transactions by restructuring administrative support to manage a central filing room. Josie was an employee with a developmental disability. Her job duties included delivering packages and faxes, creating files for property submissions, routing submissions to the appropriate account manager, collating packets, and selected filing. This allowed other, more detailed administrative tasks to be performed by co-workers. As a result, real estate transactions were accomplished much more quickly, and the business began making more money on each of its real estate transactions. (<http://www.onestops.info/pdf/edge.pdf>)

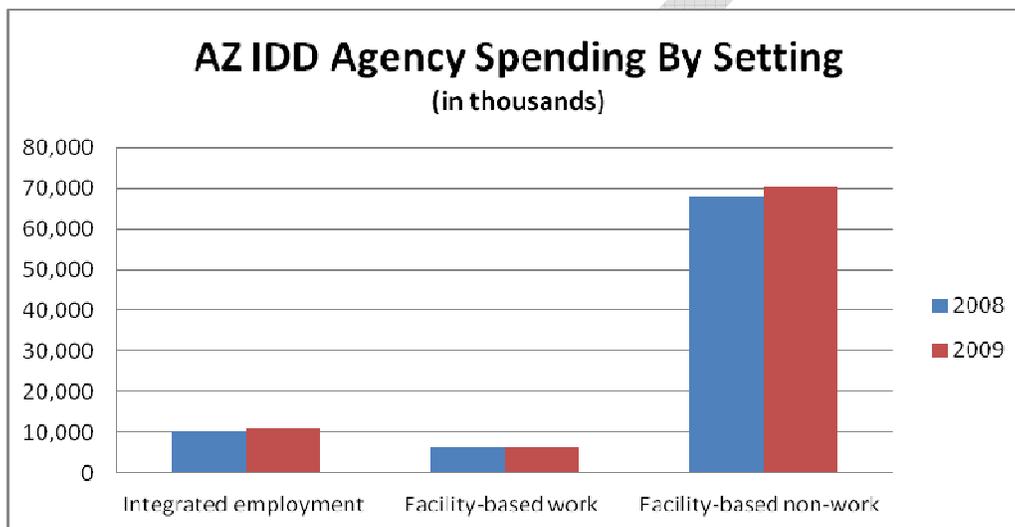
Although community rehabilitation providers have demonstrated that supported and customized employment lead to successful hiring and retention among individuals with disabilities⁷, national averages reveal that funding has declined in these areas. Many policy and funding disincentives still exist that discourage people with developmental disabilities from seeking integrated employment. The federal government continues to spend four times more money on segregated adult day, non-work programs than on supported employment. In fact, only 2 percent of the costs of the entire disability system are spent on programs that provide employment services.⁸ As a result, most are unaware that 3 out of 4 people with

⁷ Rogan, P. & Rinne, S. (2011). From Sheltered to Integrated Employment. *Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, 49, 4, 248-260.

⁸ Wittenburg, D., Rangarajan, A., & Honeycutt, T. (2008). *The United States Disability System and Programs to Promote Employment for People with Disabilities*.

developmental disabilities spend their days in center or facility-based services where most are only paid a fraction of the minimum wage.⁹

The National Survey of Day and Employment Programs in 2009¹⁰ show that nationally supported employment has been on the decline since the mid 1990's, and the percentage of those receiving integrated employment as a whole greatly fluctuates between states - ranging from 4 percent in Arkansas to 88 percent in Washington. In Arizona, employment spending for DD continues to favor non-integrated settings. The following table shows disproportionate levels of spending to facility based services over integrated settings in Arizona.



Source: IDD Agency National Survey of Day and Employment Services, 2011

Further, using recent state vocational rehabilitation (VR) data,¹¹ Arizona shows a dramatic 87 percent reduction in funding in supported employment from 2011 to 2012.

The Status of Arizona Employment

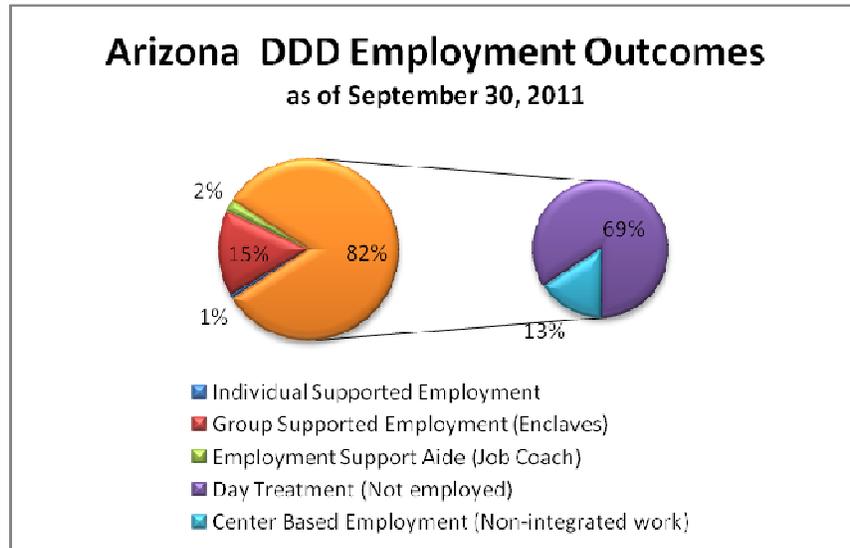
Arizona's statistics for employment outcomes do not fare much better. In 2010, there were 11,000 individuals served in Arizona's VR program. Out of this number, 1,131 were closed with integrated employment outcomes, while even more, 1,807, were closed without obtaining employment. Both figures deteriorated by approximately 20 percent over the prior year. Further, among those cases closed, only 39 percent of Arizona's applicants obtained integrated employment, which was less than the national average of 52 percent.

⁹ Rogan & Rinne. (2011).

¹⁰ Winsor, J.E. & Smith, F.A. (2011). State Intellectual Disability and Developmental Disabilities Agencies Services Trends. DataNote Series, Data XXIX. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

¹¹ Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration Annual Review Report (FY 2010). Retrieved from <http://rsa.ed.gov/view.cfm?rsaform=ARR&state=AZ&fy=2010&agency=C>

DDD also presents a dismal picture. Following is a breakdown of the 6,654 people with developmental disabilities that are 18 years and older in the DDD system seeking employment. The largest percentage (82 percent) of people with DD is placed either in day treatment/non-employment or center-based employment. Only 18 percent of people with DD work in an integrated setting, and only 3 percent of those have individualized employment.



Source: Department of Economic Security, Division of Developmental Disabilities, Individual/Group Supported Employment Report, 12/1/2011

As demonstrated, there is still much work to be done to advance people with DD in employment in Arizona. Examples drawn from national initiatives can provide resources that Arizona can use to chart a new course.

National Models of Employment

Employment First initiatives have spread across many states to advance the goal of integrated, competitive employment. According to the former Assistant Secretary of the Office on Disability Employment Policy, Neil Romano¹²:

“Several states have moved forward to implement policies that focus on integrated, community-based employment earning at or above the minimum wage as the first option for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. Using these ‘employment first’ policies, states are tapping the skills and contributions of these individuals to match employer demand for a reliable, productive workforce through customized employment opportunities. In these employment first states, sheltered employment with sub-minimum wages and non-work ‘day activities’ are no longer acceptable employment outcomes.”

¹² ODEP Memo, January 15, 2009.

While there is some disagreement among the disability community over whether these initiatives honor choice among people with disabilities over where they would like to work, most support the ideals of integration and equality behind this initiative.

Over 25 states have some type of Employment First initiative, and at least 14 of them have it codified in legislation or policy.¹³ In 2007, Vermont was the first state to discontinue state funding for sheltered workshops, and Washington State aligned their Employment First policy by adopting “Pathways to Employment.”¹⁴ This policy allows for individual choice in employment options and gives everyone the opportunity to pursue competitive employment, regardless of disability. With these values codified into state policies, Washington has reported a 72 percent employment rate for individuals with intellectual disability and/or developmental disability (ID/DD). Other top tier states reporting that more than 40 percent of those with ID/DD who obtained competitive employment were: Oklahoma, Vermont, New Hampshire, Connecticut and New Mexico.¹⁵

This national call for integrated, competitive employment is being supported by employing businesses as well. The U.S. Business Leadership Network is a national disability organization representing over 5,000 employers. Its goal is to assist in career preparation and employment of people with disabilities, improve customer experiences for people with disabilities, and promote the certification and growth of disability-owned business. While there are approximately 60 state affiliate BLNs across the country that seek to advance employment, there are no affiliates located in Arizona; however Arizona is taking steps to advance integrated employment and working increasingly with the business community to promote employment opportunities.

On the Horizon in Arizona....

Arizona has new efforts underway to create a system that will provide more competitive employment opportunities along with tools and resources to help individuals with disabilities (and their families) make an informed decision about the pursuit of competitive and integrated employment. According to one stakeholder who supports individuals with developmental disabilities, it is integral to support individuals with developmental disabilities and their families to learn about all the options available, make an informed decision and choose whether or not to pursue competitive employment:

“Many within the community here feel that individual choice should take precedence over competitive employment, because some folks have worked in sheltered workshops for twenty years and just do not want to change to start something else. It produces a lot of anxiety for them to talk about change. Sheltered workshops have been all that they know.”

¹³ Butterworth, J. (2011). Creating an Employment First Policy: Lessons Learned. Retrieved from <http://www.allianceforfullparticipation.org/images/stories/handouts/butterworth-handout%204a.pdf>

¹⁴ Rogan & Rinne. (2011).

¹⁵ Hall, A.C., Butterworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzel, D. (2007). Pushing the Employment Agenda: case Study Research on High Performing States in Integrated Employment. *Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities*, 45, 182-198.

Stakeholders within the systems, that support individuals with developmental disabilities to become employed, are placing an emphasis and priority on starting the competitive and integrated employment discourse with youth in transition and their families, so that today's youth will be employed in tomorrow's integrated settings. Several initiatives are underway to support both adults, youth and their families to make informed decisions about work or to consider a progressive move into a more integrated working environment and/or increase earnings:

❖ **Employment Summit for Transitional-Age Youth:**

Representatives from the Northern Arizona University and the University of Arizona's University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities; the Arizona Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities; Rehabilitation Services Administration; Arizona Center for Disability Law; Division of Developmental Disabilities; Arizona Department of Education and the Arizona Employment and Disability Partnership are part of a collaborative work group to plan for a Summit geared toward promoting employment among transition age youth with developmental disabilities.

❖ **Disability Benefits 101 Online Tool:**

Many people with disabilities are afraid to consider employment or a progressive move because they are uninformed about the work and healthcare incentives that can assist them to make a transition to work and greater levels of self-sufficiency. In early 2012, the Arizona Disability Benefits 101 (AZ DB 101) online tool will be available to support individuals with disabilities to plan for employment, learn how work and benefits go together and make informed decisions about going to work or accepting a job offer.

❖ **Untapped Arizona:**

Arizona has created a new employer engagement collaborative, Untapped Arizona, to support the business community in meeting their workforce needs by including individuals with disabilities into their hiring practices. Untapped Arizona has created a system to connect employers with qualified job seekers with disabilities. Additionally, Untapped Arizona has a network of partners who can provide technical assistance and support to employers pertaining to hiring, legal issues, reasonable accommodations and employee retention.

Conclusion

While Arizona is heading in the right direction, there is still a long way to go towards achieving integrated employment. State funding in Arizona needs to prioritize individualized, integrated employment if any gains are to be made in employment and retention. The business community also needs to take the lead on setting the trend of hiring people with disabilities. Untapped Arizona is a good start; however with MIG funding ending, the state of Arizona and businesses need to step up and take leadership to grow this group. People with DD and their families deserve to be presented with more flexible, individualized employment options besides simply staying at home; because everyone, regardless of disability, wants to have an opportunity, or at least the choice, to contribute.