

Interagency Agreements Encouraging Supported Employment for People with Disabilities: Preliminary Report on Exemplary Practices

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ABSTRACT

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at Children's Hospital in Boston is conducting three companion studies to investigate the extent of interagency activity among state agencies that deliver or fund employment services. The purpose of the first study is to identify exemplary models and strategies used within interagency agreements that improve the delivery of supported employment services. This study examines the use of state level interagency agreements and their impact upon supported employment. It also investigates the content, context, and impact of agreements nominated by experts and key informants in the field of vocational rehabilitation. This report presents the preliminary findings of the qualitative study and provides a preliminary report on the nomination process and the early phases of content analysis. It provides a list of agreements that have been nominated as encouraging supported employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities and offers a method for categorizing agreements. During the next phase, the researchers will interview key informants familiar with the development, processes, practice, and impact of each specific agreement.



INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at Children's Hospital in Boston is conducting three companion studies to investigate the extent of interagency activity among state agencies that deliver or fund employment services. The first study, completed in December 1998, examines the use of state level interagency agreements and their impact upon supported employment. Vocational rehabilitation (VR) program managers at the central office were asked to identify interagency agreements and informal activity between the VR and other state agencies. They were asked to nominate agreements that encouraged supported employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities. The second study will analyze these and other agreements nominated as encouraging supported employment. During the Spring of 1999, key informants will be interviewed to explore the relationship of each agreement to employment outcomes and practice. The last study, implemented in the Fall of 1999, is a survey of local VR administrators on interagency activity at the local office level.

The first study found that interagency agreements were most frequent with state agencies that specialized in or had substantial involvement with disability services including the state mental health agency (MH), the state mental retardation and developmental disabilities (MR/DD) agency, and the state department of education (DOE) (Foley, Butterworth, and Heller, 1999). These agreements were also seen as having a more positive impact on employment opportunities than agreements with other types of agencies. Foley, Butterworth and Heller (1999) also found that agencies that typically provide employment services to the general population were as likely or more likely to be participating in informal interagency activity than written state level interagency agreements. The impact of these agreements in encouraging supported employment varied by type

of agency. The MH and MR/DD agency agreements with the VR agency were rated as having the highest impact while the agreements between the One-Stop Career Centers and the VR agency were rated as having no impact, positive or negative (Foley, Butterworth, and Heller, 1999).

A question emerges from this analysis: What factors of interagency agreements lead to successful employment outcomes? Could these factors be adopted or transferred to written agreements with other state agencies. The second study investigates the content, context, and impact of agreements nominated by experts and key informants of vocational rehabilitation. The purpose of this study is to identify exemplary models and strategies used in interagency agreements that improve supported employment delivery.

This report summarizes the ongoing activities of the qualitative study and provides a preliminary report of the nomination process and the early phases of content analysis. The intent is to provide a list of agreements that have been nominated as encouraging supported employment opportunities for people with significant disabilities and to offer a method for categorizing agreements. During the next phase, the researchers will interview key informants familiar with the development, process, practice, and impact of each specific agreement.



NOMINATION PROCESS

The study used an "expert opinion, independent validation" approach (Datta, 1993) in selecting interagency agreements. The approach has several steps including:

1. gathering nominations from the literature and from researchers in the area of supported employment;

2. gathering nominations from organizations and state agencies that are involved in interagency agreements; and,
3. validating the nomination through key informant interviews and achievement of outcomes.

The first two steps were implemented through three channels:

1. an electronic mail (e-mail) solicitation;
2. telephone follow-up using a snowball technique; and,
3. the FY 1997 Supported Employment Implementation Survey administered by the Rehabilitation and Research Training Center (RRTC) at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU).

The e-mail nominations request was sent to members of the Supported Employment Consortium (SEC) who are nationally recognized researchers active in employment and disability research. The inquiry asked members to identify best practice interagency agreements between the VR agency and other agencies and to nominate other key informants. One nomination was received through this channel.

Members of the SEC, state agency personnel, researchers, and disability related organizations were contacted by telephone. Figure 1 on the following page displays a list of organizations contacted. This effort encompassed over thirty states and 93 respondents. Each person was asked to nominate interagency agreements which increase supported employment opportunities for people with severe disabilities. Respondents were also asked to provide contact information of other individuals who would be able to provide a nomination. This approach had a snowball effect as individuals furnished additional names of experts to contact. Fifteen nominations were received through this channel.

FIGURE 1: ORGANIZATIONS CONTACTED FOR NOMINATIONS**State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies** -- Idaho

Kansas
Louisiana
New Hampshire
New York
Nevada
Rhode Island
Virginia
Vermont
Wisconsin

Other State Agencies or Entities

Governor's Council on Disabilities,
Alaska
Colorado Developmental Disabilities Council
Iowa Department of Human Services
Minnesota Department of Human Services, Mental Health Division
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health
Wisconsin Department of Education
Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation
Governor's Council for People with Disabilities, Utah
Virginia Department of Education

University and Research Programs

Berkeley Planning Associates,
California
University of Arkansas
Human Services Research Institute
University of Illinois
Indiana University
University of Iowa
Matrix Research Institute
University of Montana
University of Oregon
University of Vermont
Virginia Commonwealth University

Employers and Providers

Marriot Foundation, Maryland
Coordinated Employment Opportunities, Connecticut
Dakota Works, South Dakota
Transition and Community Employment, Michigan
Irene Ward and Associates, Ohio

Disability Organizations

Independent Living Research Utilization
Arizona Bridge to Independent Living
Valley Association for Independent Living, Texas
Rock Creek Foundation, Maryland
Tasks Unlimited, Minnesota
New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

The third channel used a national survey of VR program managers to gather nominations. The FY 1997 Supported Employment Implementation Survey, administered by the RRTC at VCU, was mailed to 70 VR agencies including the commissions for the blind in 50 states and territories. A topical module was inserted into the survey which included a request for nominations of inter-agency agreements considered to be highly effective in increasing supported employment op-

portunities for people with severe disabilities. Eleven nominations were received through this channel (Foley et al., 1999).

INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

In total, 21 separate agreements were received from the three nomination streams. Table 1 on the following page lists the inter-agency agreements and the channel through which they were nominated. Three agreements

 **TABLE 1 -- NOMINATED INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS**

State	Title of Agreement	Nomination
IN	MOU between the Indiana Family and Social Services	Telephone
	Administration Division of MH and Disability, Aging, and Rehabilitation Services	Survey
MN	Interagency CA DES, Rehabilitation Services Branch	Telephone
NC	Paid Co-Worker Support, an Innovative Partnership	Telephone
NY	MOU regarding SE	Telephone Survey
OK	MOA between Department of Rehabilitation Services and the DD Division of the DHS	E-mail
RI	CA for the Delineation of Responsibilities for Individuals with Disabilities between the DHS and the DOE	Telephone
	CA for the Delineation of Responsibilities for Individuals with DD and MI between the DHS and the Department of MH, MR, and Hospitals	Telephone
SD	CA Concerning SE Services	Telephone
	MOA between the DCS and VR	Telephone
	CA on Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities	Telephone
	Policy on Joint Funding Sources	Telephone Survey
VT	CA between DET and VR	Telephone
	CA between, VR, DDS and Vermont District Social Security	Telephone
	CA between DSW and VR	Telephone
WA	Extended Services Agreement with the VR	Survey
WI	MOA between the DCS and VR	Telephone
	Interagency CA/Contract for SE, DSL and VR	Telephone
WV	SE Partnership	Survey
WY	CA between the Wyoming VR and the Division of Behavioral Health/Wyoming State Hospital	Survey
	Independent Living Cooperative Agreement	Survey
	MOA between the Wyoming DOE and the VR	Survey

CA = Cooperative Agreement; DCS = Department of Community Services; DD = Developmental Disabilities; DDS = Disability Determination Services; DES = Department of Economic Security; DET = Department of Employment and Training; DHS = Department of Human Services; DOE = Department of Education; DSL = Department of Supported Living; DSW = Department of Social Welfare; MH = Mental Health; MI = Mental Illness; MR = Mental Retardation; MOA = Memorandum of Agreement; MOU = Memorandum of Understanding; SE = Supported Employment

received multiple nominations. Most of the agreements are between the VR agency and a state agency that operates disability services.

PRELIMINARY CONTENT ANALYSIS

Content analysis of the agreements was subdivided into four tasks: 1) preliminary screening; 2) categorization; 3) content summary; and 4) key informant interview. To date, the project has completed the first two tasks. The content summary and key informant interview phase was scheduled for completion in late Spring 1999. The goal of the preliminary screening was to determine if the interagency agreements met basic criteria for inclusion in the study. Agreements were screened for eligibility according to the following criteria.

- VR is one of the partners.
- The agreement addresses employment or related issues.
- The agreement focuses on or is relevant to people with disabilities.
- The agreement is active and in operation.

Two nominations were eliminated during the first screening. These nominations were not agreements but descriptions of a service delivered by community rehabilitation providers.

The goal of the categorization phase was to screen for exemplary practice potential and develop a method for categorizing agreements into types. The 19 eligible agreements ranged from large multiagency systems change documents to agreements that resembled contracts for transfer of dollars for specific initiatives. Three researchers read the nineteen agreements and rated independently whether the agreement was likely to be a best practice or not. The team met to reach consensus. Only agreements that were rated as a potential best practice by at least two researchers remained. Three of the nineteen were

eliminated. One was out of date, and two were understood to be agreements of required interagency coordination for information sharing.

Three categories of agreements appeared: 1) consortia; 2) task-specific; and 3) population-specific. Interagency agreements with three or more state agency partners with substantive roles were considered consortia. Those with a specific target population (i.e., people with severe psychiatric disability, transition age youth with disabilities) that were not consortia were categorized as population specific. These agreements listed multiple tasks or goals to improve the service system for a particular target group. Task-specific agreements may or may not have a particular target population specified but focused on a very narrow activity between two agencies (i.e., a one time transfer of dollars). Two agreements from each were selected as representatives of that category.



FINDINGS & NEXT STEPS

Table 2 on the following page lists the final six interagency agreements that will be reviewed for content, context, and impact. The two consortia are the Memorandum of Interagency Understanding Regarding Supported Employment from New York and the Supported Employment Partnership Agreement from West Virginia. The New York agreement brings together four state agencies, the VR agency, Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, MR/DD agency, and MH agency. The intent of the agreement is to “develop and enhance supported employment for persons with the most severe disabilities” (The State Department of Education, 1997, p.21). The agreement delineates goals for interagency

**TABLE 2 -- NOMINATED INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS**

Type	State	Title of Agreement
Task Specific	IN	MOU between the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration Division of MH and Disability, Aging, and Rehabilitation Services
	RI	CA for the Delineation of Responsibilities for Individuals with Disabilities between the DHS and the DOE
Population	MN	Interagency CA DES, Rehabilitation Services Branch
	OK	MOA between Department of Rehabilitation Services and the DD Division of the DHS
Consortium	NY	MOU regarding SE
	WV	SE Partnership

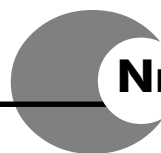
CA = Cooperative Agreement; DD = Developmental Disabilities; DES = Department of Economic Security; DHS = Department of Human Services; DOE = Department of Education; MH = Mental Health; MOA = Memorandum of Agreement; MOU = Memorandum of Understanding; SE = Supported Employment

planning and coordination, eligibility, service delivery to consumers, program development and coordination, and fiscal responsibilities. It responds to a legislative mandate to improve integrated employment for people with disabilities and is one piece of the Interagency Employment Implementation Plan. The West Virginia agreement brings together seven state agencies or programs to create the West Virginia Supported Employment Delivery System.

The seven agencies or programs include VR, the MR/DD, the Office of Special Education within the Department of Education, the Office of Employment Security and the Job Training Program within the Bureau of Employment Programs, the Development Disabilities Planning Council, the Governor's Cabinet for Children and Families, and the Social Security Administration. The goal of the agreement is to define the roles of each of the partners and to encourage each partner to develop local interagency agreements (State of West Virginia, 1997).

The two task-specific agreements are the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Supported Employment Consultation and Training Program from Indiana and the Cooperative Agreement (CA) for the Delineation of Responsibilities for Individuals with Disabilities Between the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education from Rhode Island. The Indiana agreement is between the MH agency and the VR agency. The intent of the agreement is for the MH agency to provide the state match portion for the Supported Employment Consultation and Training Program (SECT) which will "assist providers to become eligible for establishment grants and to provide ongoing technical assistance to contracted providers" (Division of Mental Health, 1997, p. 1). The Rhode Island agreement is between the VR agency and the Department of Education. The Department of Education provides matching funds to the VR agency with an overall goal of coordinating an "interagency approach to transition services

maximum utilization of resources" (Dept. of Rehabilitation Services, 1997, p. 1). This agreement was the subject of a review by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Employment and the National Supported Employment Consortium. It was recognized as an example of an effective agreement between a VR agency and the Home and Community Based (HCB) Waiver representatives (RRTC on Workplace Supports, 1998, <http://www.worksupport.com/library/lp/ssw/mar98.htm>). The Minnesota agreement is between the MH agency and the VR agency. It's intent is to improve the quantity and quality of rehabilitation and support services to persons with serious and persistent mental illness (SPMI) through: interagency systems planning and policy development, development of funding strategies, service delivery and implementation, information gathering and exchange, and training and technical assistance efforts (Rehabilitation Services Branch, 1998, p. 1).



NEXT STEPS

Key informants from each of the agencies participating in the agreements will be interviewed indepth. A protocol developed specifically for this study will be used to guide the interviews with an open discussion encouraged. The first key informant is the central office VR personnel most familiar with the agreement. This individual will be asked to supply the name and contact information of other VR staff with preference for a local administrator. Personnel of other state agencies participating in the agreement will be recruited in the same fashion. Qualitative data analysis techniques will be used to explore themes across the six agreements and to develop policy and practice implications.

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