

Notes from Employment Conference Call

Thursday, May 6, 2004

Presenters

- Shelia Fesko, National Center on Workforce and Disability
- Vicki Brooke, Research Center on Workplace Supports
- Melissa Wittman, National Consortium for Health Systems Development
- Cindy Thomas, Massachusetts Comprehensive Employment Opportunity Medicaid Infrastructure Grant

Introduction

Mike Cheek, TAE Staff

- The purpose of this call is to give you a sense of the employment support landscape and to provide an overview of the programs and services that are available for persons with disabilities.
- Many are systems change and infrastructure grant projects. These are very good potential partners for you. They have a great deal of expertise in the impact of work on benefits eligibility and how to link to work incentives that allow consumers to continue to work and still access benefit.

Overview of Current Employment Programs and Ideas for ADRC Collaboration

Sheila Fesko, National Center on Workforce and Disability

Workforce Investment Act Background

- The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), which was implemented in 2000, altered the scope of employment services. WIA mandates pulling together all kinds of employment resources and services together. As a part of the integration of resources, persons with disabilities became better integrated into employment programs.

One-Stop Career Centers Background

- Every state is mandated to have one-stop career centers, which are local entities that pull together partners as mandated by WIA. The goal of WIA was physical co-location of the various local partners offering employment services was, but this has had varied success. In some communities, physical co-location of partners has been achieved and in other communities, they are connected electronically.
- WIA mandates that one-stop career centers partner with 14 different types of programs, including: employment services, Jobs Training Partnership Act programs, adult education programs, Wagner Peyser programs, veterans employment programs, housing-administered employment programs, and vocational rehabilitation programs.
- Centers can also partner with other types of programs not mandated by WIA. State departments of mental health and mental retardation are not mandated partners, but are involved in some states.
- One-stop career centers were designed with two goals in mind:
 - *Universal access.* Services should be appropriate for anyone looking for employment services. For persons with disabilities, services must be available, accessible and appropriate for them.
 - *Seamless system.* One-stops should eliminate redundancies and make the system more user-friendly. This is still an ideal that communities are working toward, but not there yet.
- To ensure that services are responsive to the needs of the communities, one-stops were designed to shift responsibility and flexibility to the local level. Local workforce investment boards are responsible for establishing policies for and certifying the centers.

Customized Employment Grants and Workforce Action Grants

- The National Center on Workforce and Disability is funded by the Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy to provide technical assistance to states receiving Customized Employment grants or Workforce Action grants. The goal of both programs is to make the one-stops more responsive to the needs of people with disabilities.
- There are 26 grantees nationally, including eight that also have ADRC grants: Alaska, California, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Minnesota.

- Many states that do not have either of these grants are engaged in similar efforts.

ADRC Role

- ADRCs could provide two different primary resources:
 - Connect consumers who come to the ADRC with employment services, either offered by the ADRC or by a local one-stop;
 - Serve as a partner to the one-stop system, providing assistance to consumers of the one-stop system with other needs that they have.
- The National Center on Workforce and Disability can be a resource to ADRCs in thinking about how to work with their local one-stops. We have an information and referral number (888-886-9898) and a website that ADRCs can access (www.onestops.info).

Vicki Brooke, Research Center on Workplace Supports

- Research Center for Workplace Supports is a research center funded by the US Department of Education. The website is <http://www.worksupport.com>.

Benefits Planning Specialists

- Our Benefits Planning and Assistance Outreach Center at the Virginia Commonwealth University is one of three regional training and technical assistance centers funded by the Social Security Administration.
- Our job is to provide support to benefits planning programs across the country. We also offer training and technical assistance to other federally funded programs, such as Medicare, Medicaid, food stamps TANF, employment insurance, and veterans' benefits.
- There are 117 organizations in the community providing benefit specialist supports. The specialists can help people with disabilities understand what the impact will be on their benefits if they go to work. Many of the specialists operate out of independent living centers. The specialists have served 123,000 beneficiaries to date. Our website has a directory of specialists.

- ADRCs may want to link up with these programs in their local communities to enhance local benefits counseling capacity.

Melissa Wittman, National Consortium for Health Systems Development

- The National Consortium for Health Systems Development (NCHSD) is a technical assistance network of states that have received Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) funding. This is a partnership funded and directed by state MIG grantees.

Medicaid Infrastructure Grants

- MIGs are planning grants that states can use to build up the infrastructure surrounding their employment programs and services that help working age adults with disabilities go back to work, or if they are already in the workplace, to work more. MIGs are used for strategic planning, building partnerships, and creating the infrastructure to link programs and resources. MIG funding cannot be used for direct service. Forty-two states have MIGs. Only a couple of ADRC grantee states do not have MIGs.
- NCHSD helps MIG grantees by conducting assessments of what services and resources are already in place in the state, making recommendations about what the states can do to enhance their infrastructures and, identifying challenges and weaknesses to streamlining the system.
- States' focus with MIGs was initially on implementing Medicaid Buy-In programs, which allow people with disabilities to work more and save more while retaining their benefits. Thirty-two states have already implemented or in the process of developing Medicaid Buy-In programs.
- Another area that states have been focusing on with MIGs is on personal assistance services. When people get into workforce and are employed, personal assistance services can be made available to them in the workplace as well as in the home.
- Some MIG-funded activities that may be of interest to ADRCs include:
 - Working with existing advisory council, consumers, and stakeholders on policy development. MIGs can support meaningful information exchange with advisory councils.

- Feasibility studies and cost models.
 - Resource mapping.
 - Information sharing, materials development and outreach
 - Training for eligibility workers.
 - States are also developing employment websites that include benefits calculators.
- States have a lot of new options to do demonstrations, come up with creative ways to serve people around employment and independence. One thing they're doing is identifying individuals who are not currently Medicaid eligible, but who have been diagnosed with a disability that could eventually be so serious that they have to leave the workforce. States can offer them health insurance coverage now so that hopefully they can stay healthy and in the workforce longer.
 - States are also using to MIGs to examine whether disability determinations can take place as part of eligibility screenings for other public programs.

ADRC Role

- MIGs and ADRCs can collaborate on resource mapping. ADRCs can also help MIGs identify what is working well and what is not working well in the employment system for people with disabilities. ADRCs and MIGs can also work together to remove administrative and legislative barriers to employment services.
- If you don't know who your MIG contact is for your state, we'd be happy to help.

Preliminary ADRC and Employment Supports Projects Partnering Ideas

Cindy Thomas and Heather Johnson La-Marche (Massachusetts)

- MA is one of a small number of states that has a comprehensive employment portion of a MIG grant. MA is using the grant to expand on many of the other programs and activities discussed on this call.
- Some activities that MA is planning on include:
 - Collaborating on development of a database and a website. MIGs and ADRCs might be able to share resources around a web-based resource directory.
 - The independent living program, one of our pilot sites, also does MIG work around employment. Will help facilitate connections across programs, reaching out to stakeholders.
 - Also, we have a number of other initiatives, benefits planning, transportation, disability navigators. Challenge and opportunity to figure out how to leverage these resources.

Sarah Stout, TAE Staff (on behalf of Doug Blakley, Montana)

- Montana is thinking about how the ADRC in Billings can link with employment services offered by the local one-stop, vocational rehabilitation center, and ExperienceWorks (a local employment services organization for adults 55+).
- Montana's goal is to think about how the ADRC can work with these organizations and not duplicate resources. Some of the ways that Montana is initially thinking about working with these organizations are:
 - Resource mapping with the other agencies to establish a clear picture of what services are available, for which consumers, through which agencies. The resource mapping will help identify gaps and overlaps in service.
 - Out-stationing ADRC staff at one-stop centers on a regular basis and hosting one-stop center staff at the ADRC on a regular basis.
 - Collaborating on outreach activities with the local one-stop center. One-stop centers are mandated by WIA to reach out specifically to people with disabilities.
 - ExperienceWorks and the ADRC are serving on each other's advisory committees and are talking about how to link their electronic databases.

Selected Questions and Answers

- **Question.** How can I get more information about what programs are operating in my state?
- **Answer.** ADRC TAE Staff will add information about how employment supports grants map to Real Choice grants.
- **Question.** What states have good examples of employment benefits calculators?
- **Answer.** California has built a nice website with a lot of concrete information about services available (www.disabilitybenefits101.org). The website has a lot of information about how access to health care and disability services work. It also contains stories about how employment services work from the consumers' perspectives. They are adding a benefits calculator.

Wisconsin developed the CHEQ Tool. CHEQ stands for Comprehensive Health and Employment Query. Consumers can go online, answer questions and it gives information back about their eligibility and what the impact of employment would be. The tool also captures the information that consumers submit about their situations and compiles that to give policymakers and program administrators a sense of where consumers are. The tool is available at www.wicheq.com.

Call Attendees

Maryland
Massachusetts
Minnesota
Montana
Pennsylvania
South Carolina