

**Report on the Working Age Adult Policy
Adult Service Providers Focus Groups**

Prepared for the King County
Developmental Disabilities Division

Submitted by:

O'Neill and Associates
98 Union #706
Seattle, Washington

Candace O'Neill
Lyn Andrews
Joyce Black

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Introduction

This is a report to the King County Developmental Disabilities Division on information gathered from four participants at an adult services provider focus

group session on May 2, 2006. The purpose of the focus groups was to gather information on questions and concerns related to the Working Age Adult Policy.

The focus group session was led by a facilitator and a scribe to record participant responses to six questions.

- 1. The Working Age Adult Policy raises the following questions and concerns for me...*
- 2. I need more information or clarification on the following...*
- 3. What I like about the policy is...*
- 4. I have heard that the policy will...*
- 5. I would be less concerned and more comfortable if the policy...*
- 6. Other things I would like the county to know about the policy...*

The participants generated information on what adult service providers are concerned about related to the policy; information or clarification they need on elements of the policy; what they like about the policy; what would make them less concerned and more comfortable with the policy and other things they would like the county to know regarding the policy.

Summary

The adult service providers' focus group participants generally agreed that it would good if people had the opportunity to work and that the policy gives people the right to a job and helps with self-esteem. They also saw the policy as progressive, innovative and encouraged staff to break out of complacency. They believe there needs to be more information, education and training for everyone, including businesses, community, families, case managers and providers. They are concerned that people that choose not to work or have significant disabilities will fall through the cracks. They are also concerned that families will begin creating day care options to get more hours. They are concerned that there is a lack of accountability for jobs, timelines and the policy itself. They would like to see more flexibility and creative options for people.

General Themes

There are several themes that were shared by most of the participants.

All participants would like to see more information, education and training for people on the policy and implementation of the policy.

All participants are concerned that people who chose not to work or have significant disabilities will fall through the cracks.

All of the participants would like to see accountability, including jobs, timelines so people don't get stuck, a way of measuring success, and a revision of the policy if it isn't working.

Most of the participants would like to see flexibility and creative options for people.

Most of the participants were concerned with the lack of resources to implement the policy for all the people that will need assistance.

Areas of Interest

One participant would like to see consistency between counties on implementing the policy.

Several participants would like to see the State and County provide information to families, they see providers as the source of information on the policy.

Several participants raised questions on whether the county supports volunteer jobs and self-employment.

Working Age Adult Policy Focus Group
Adult Service Providers
May 5, 2006

1. The Working Age Adult Policy raises the following questions and concerns for me...

Participant #2

I am concerned about trying to fit everyone into one hole/service. We will need to come up with creative ways to find jobs. When are they going to establish timelines, six months still no jobs?

Participant #3

I have a question – now that the policy is here, how are we going to educate the business community? I think it's a great policy but many in my agency are not supportive. It's because there are a lot of people in my agency with sign. We are trying to focus on one person at a time but at six months for each person, it will take a long time. If we had enough money and a buy-in from our board it would help. The Board is still not getting it. King County has talked with us and forty-five people in the workshop have asked to be in a community job or Pathway.

Participant #4

The biggest concern is how does the policy support people with significant support needs? These individuals may not have community employment as a goal. What about those who don't choose employment? Are there provisions that provide supports? We serve people in workshops from both counties. We provide blended services in workshop plus community through person to person. We are trying to include workshop staff in this. It is also unclear what the path really looks like. Since we had the person to person services, some people can make a leap to employment or enclave. Yet others in workshop are just getting experience in community through person to person. If workshops have been a holding center without much progression, concern that person to person will turn into the new holding center. Will we just fill that up without a timeline and just trading one holding center for another.

Participant #1

In this transition the implementation could have included more education with the community. Most of the education is coming from the providers to families and employers. Individuals are falling through the cracks and there seems to be a lack of concern for those who opt out or are medically unable. We need to support employment with dollars, but there is a lackadaisical attitude for those sitting at home. People claim they support working and this policy but think people will sit at home. They really don't buy in and so people could end up stuck in volunteer jobs and end up the same as if they were in a sheltered workshop.

Participant #3

How do we move beyond volunteer jobs? Some staff think their work is done when someone has a volunteer job.

Participant #1

We are committed to volunteer jobs being a stepping stone, we try to get more hours, etc. With the rates we receive the ratio of staff to participant is high. This limits what we can do with people with more sign disabilities. You can go through a lot of dollars and it still may not result in someone having an opportunity for a community job.

Participant #4

Funding is a big problem. The County should put more dollars into educating the business community and opening more doors

2. I need more information or clarification on the following...

Participant #2

I am confused on what I need more info on. How can a person be in a workshop and in person to person or a pathway? There was a conference at NW center on self employment. How will the County feel about self employment and people owning their own business but not making a minimum wage? I am all for it. Many people at Highline have been creative in putting together self-employment opportunities for people who might have a hard time getting a job, this could be the answer. There has to be an infrastructure around the person to keep

them employed, including startup costs. I think people would buy from someone because it's for a good cause.

Participant #1

We need some criteria. Could be meaningful but low wages

Participant #3

When you find those families that can support a person in their own business that path is a great thing.

Participant #2

Most people we serve don't have that support.

Participant #3

I need clarification on state case manager's role is on getting this information out there. I feel I have to be responsible to educate the parents. In fact case managers are saying they can give exceptions.

Participant #4

Case Managers seem as confused as everyone else. What about the person or family that has chosen not to move into community employment? What will happen? Is there something else they can move into so they are not just sitting at home?

Participant #1

What is after the policy? What would change in the future how will the policy might change or grow? What are the timelines, what if some pieces aren't working? Who is responsible to look at that as time goes on.

3. What I like about the policy is...

Participant #2

It gives everyone his or her god-given right for a job, helps with self esteem. Forces us to value people more – gives value.

Participant #3

It's progressive, innovative, and uncomfortable. The State is supporting us to do something new.

Participant #4

I like the spirit of the policy. It can help the individual staff person to break out of unconscious complacency.

Participant #1

I concur. This removes the potential to see employment services as respite. When we closed the workshop our biggest concern was where people would go for 30 hours per week. That big chunk of the world now becomes a job and integrated environment. Puts us in a position to use dollars appropriately for what it was intended for...as stewards of public dollar.

4. I have heard the policy will...

Participant #2

I haven't heard anything from people at the houses I go to. I have heard some concerns that people will fall through the cracks.

Participant #3

You name it, I've heard it: ruin family life, close workshops, and also give people opportunity. I've heard more bad than good and it's from misinformation. From people who haven't seen the policy.

Participant #4

I heard things that made me think that timelines will be imposed.

Participant #4

I've heard negative and positive. People interpreted that since we were closing the workshop during the same time people thought the policy was the reason for the closure.

Participant #3

The biggest fear from families is, what am I going to do if I have to quit my job and stay home with my child?

Participant #1

I heard this will force families to get together to start their own workshop.

Participant #3

There are a lot of fringe groups trying day care. I'm worried we'll go further back.

5. I would be less concerned if the policy...

Participant #2

I would be less concerned if there were more education. If even people like me got more training, and school staff get more training not just business people.

Participant #4

There was a group up north talking of certification for Job coaches, but what training does person to person staff have to move into employment.

Participant #3

I would be less concerned if all the policy players (State and County) were on the same page. I would be less concerned if we were giving the same answers to families. Case managers are not in touch with the community. It's not their fault, it's a lack of training the only pay attention to what they need to do their job.

Participant #4

Two things. If the policy provided cohesive structure from high school to adult services and if there were consistency between counties.

Participant #1

I agree that there needs to be more education. If there was a little forethought on this policy for the future and what will happen next. There will be consequences are we thinking about that?

Participant #3

I am worried that fringe parents will get the message out to media and it will be killed before it hits the ground.

Participant #1

It happened to us with the closure, an individual was featured negatively. He became employed but media did not want to return to report it.

Discussion that fathers seem to be taking a larger role (against this)

Participant #4

I fear when a husband is there, it's worse because he's less informed.

Participant #3

I'm going to hold out that we are going to work together.

6. Other things I would like the County to know about the policy....

Participant #1

Service providers being the ones to educate families and participants ended up getting the wrath of this policy. Families will always see them this way in the long term. Some of that might have been avoided had the State and County taken that role. That will take time to overcome.

Participant #4

I don't know if the County has thought this out well. Here's what we have to do and this is how to do it. As opposed to here it is. They are not taking into account people who do not fit into this policy easily. I hope that doesn't imply agencies haven't been providing individualized services. How is the County going to measure success? What are quality indicators? I don't see that what is being measured. What

really is driving the number of people employed/unemployed. There are other things involved that are not accounted for like flat numbers employed, change in types of work – off shore, doesn't that affect employment. Maybe staying even is a success.

Participant #3

We are working with people. How are we going to address those who don't fit in and those who do, that we are really making someone's life better. That we are doing it right. There are no guidelines, timelines, or help to make it work.

Participant #2

I haven't thought about future,, I'm stuck on this. I would like the County to think about the impact on people in the future.

Participant #3

Wealthy families where she works, they are looking at models from the 70s.

Participant #1

I would like for the County to be aware that families are going to start looking at other services with other providers. They are not always looking for better outcomes. I see movement already occurring. They are looking for someone to give them more hours of service.

Participant #3

There is one organization that is capitalizing on this. They are promising them things they don't get. All they need is a couple hours more. I heard there are large groups going out in vans to work.

Participant #4

Managers got together to change definition of workshop. Create an integrated workgroup in the workshop and raise wages to give meaningful salary. They have people not ready for volunteer jobs even.

Participant #1

Group site that starts with everyone on minimum wage.