

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
RSA-IM-99-09
DATE: December 30, 1998

ADDRESSEES: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
STATE REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCILS
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
PROTECTION & ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS
PROGRAMS
REGIONAL REHABILITATION CONTINUING EDUCATION
PROGRAMS
AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE
PROGRAMS
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

SUBJECT: Information regarding "Project EMPLOY", an initiative begun by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (the President's Committee).

CONTENT: The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to inform RSA's constituencies of a program begun by the President's Committee that is designed to identify strategies to improve the quality of employment outcomes achieved by individuals with cognitive disabilities. What follows is a summary of several partnerships between community rehabilitation programs and employers. In about half of the partnerships, State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies also participate. These partnerships have resulted in employment for individuals with cognitive disabilities in a wide variety of jobs that pay above minimum wage, and provide benefits and promotional opportunities. The partnerships were identified in a report submitted to the President's Committee in May of 1997 by Catherine A. Raggio of Independence Now, Inc. It is hoped that, as a result of this summary and in partnership with the President's Committee, the models highlighted through "Project Employ" can be replicated by other State VR agencies, as appropriate.

In FY 1996, State VR agencies closed the cases of 28,738 individuals with mental retardation. Of those, 3,749 or 13 percent, were placed in

professional, clerical, or sales positions. The mean hourly wage for this group of individuals in FY 1996 was \$4.91. These data indicate a need for improvement, and, as a means of providing examples, the “Project EMPLOY” programs have achieved success in placing individuals with cognitive disabilities into jobs, which pay higher than the minimum wage, and provide benefits and promotional opportunities.

After collecting the information on the programs featured by “Project EMPLOY”, the President’s Committee approached RSA to request our assistance in expanding these types of programs through education of VR professionals as well as employers. RSA has agreed to publicize the efforts of the partnerships highlighted by “Project EMPLOY”. Staff of the President’s Committee presented a concurrent session regarding “Project EMPLOY” at RSA’s second National Employment Conference in August of 1998. This IM is designed as another step toward expanding this program. Future collaborations will be developed.

In identifying the programs contained in “Project EMPLOY”, the President’s Committee also developed broad themes that seemed to apply to all or most highlighted projects. These included:

- Individualized and person-centered job development;
- Corporate commitment;
- Contacts with business;
- Natural supports;
- Multi-source funding;
- Job opportunities that provide more than minimum wage, benefits and opportunities for career growth;
- Collaborative approaches;
- Flexibility;
- Understanding of the local market; and
- Responsiveness to employer needs.

What follows are several examples of programs highlighted by the “Project EMPLOY” initiative. They feature the VR agency as partners in the projects.

The Arc of Delaware with DuPont Merck

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DuPont-Merck, a pharmaceutical firm, employs nine people with cognitive disabilities. Positions include that of marketing clerk, document delivery clerk, laboratory assistant, and building and conference room coordinator. While there is a project coordinator on-site from the Arc to offer advice, as needed, supports are offered to the employee with a cognitive disability by their supervisor and co-workers. The program was initiated by the CEO of the company who had a child with a cognitive disability. Jobs were identified in various departments and modified to accommodate the workers with disabilities. Candidates were interviewed and positions filled according to standard company policy, and workers receive the same benefit packages available to other employees.

Best Buddies Jobs, Miami, Florida

Contact: David Lotz, Director

Phone: 800-892-8339

Using person-centered planning and the corporate contacts of Best Buddies founder, Anthony Kennedy Shriver, employment consultants develop jobs (mostly in for-profit companies), train the employee with a disability, and immediately after placement begin to shift the support of the employee with a disability to supervisors and co-workers. Of the 46 jobs Best Buddies developed, 17 meet the criteria for "Project EMPLOY". They include legal, education, banking, and office work, such as filing, mail room, etc. In addition, another 20 jobs are non-traditional commercial jobs, including retail (stocking, sizing, tagging, greeting, etc). About 3/4 of the workers with disabilities received benefits, but only 1/4 received health insurance.

Iowa Creative Employment Options (CEO) Corporate Initiatives

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The primary purpose of the initiative is to market supported employment as another source of employees to businesses and trade associations by linking employers with job developers and by providing technical assistance to local agencies wishing to develop non-traditional placements for individuals with cognitive and other disabilities. The program began as an RSA systems change grant in 1991, but when the grant ended, the

project was continued through a cooperative agreement between Iowa's VR agency and the Division of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. Financial institutions and other businesses employed individuals with cognitive disabilities in clerical and other positions.

King County Government, (Greater Seattle Area) Washington

Contact: Candace T. O'Neill, O'Neill and Associates.

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With the help of a member of the County Council to cut through red tape and address various personnel issues in county government, a provider, O'Neill and Associates, developed 64 jobs in county government, 28 of those in professional or non-traditional areas, such as clerical or office work. Fifty-two of the individuals placed had cognitive disabilities. The average hourly wage of all placements is \$8.93, and 50 people have full benefits.

Our House, Inc. Employment Services and the Prudential Insurance Company of America, New Jersey

Contact: Ellen Nalven, Director of Employment Services

Phone: 908-464-8008

This program is jointly sponsored by the business and the provider, and it was begun when a manager at the business was doing research on employment opportunities that would someday be available to his young son with autism. All placements have been in non-traditional or professional jobs (filing, mail room, etc). Co-workers of the individuals with disabilities are trained by the provider to mentor the employees. Fifteen clerical workers with disabilities have been hired and they earn between \$7.58 and \$9 per hour. Only one employee works full-time receiving benefits.

Options of Linn County, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Contact: Reggie Ancelet

Phone: 319-398-3539

This program is conducted by an agency of local government. It provides job development, placement and support, and sheltered work. Fifty-two percent of community placements were in non-traditional or professional jobs. The locality's attendant services contract for in-home non-medical services to elderly residents with disabilities is conducted by this agency, and seven attendant services workers have cognitive disabilities. Another 20 people with cognitive disabilities hold competitive clerical jobs. Attendant service workers make an average hourly wage of \$5.80. Clerical workers average \$5.28 per hour.

It is the hope of RSA that this document, and future efforts in partnership with the President's Committee and others, will result in greater recognition of the need for better quality employment outcomes for individuals with cognitive disabilities. The President's Committee, with assistance from RSA, has developed a video "Discovering an Untapped Resource", which highlights some of the projects and markets the concepts of "Project EMPLOY". For information regarding the video, contact Randee Chafkin, Program Manager, with the President's Committee at 202-376-6200. To receive a copy of the complete report conducted for the President's Committee or to ask any other questions regarding this initiative, please contact Jenn Rigger, RSA Program Specialist, at (202) 260-2179 or via e-mail at jenn_rigger@ed.gov.

Fredric K. Schroeder, Ph.D.
Commissioner

cc:

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