

# Position Statement on Employment and Alternative Services

Third Draft 7/24/08

## Issue

Integration of persons with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in the life of the community requires employment and alternative services provided in the community. A survey done in February, 2007 by the Minnesota Governor's Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities showed that Minnesotans embrace the idea that everyone is better off when people with developmental disabilities are integrated into society and living independent and productive lives as much as possible. Over 90% of survey respondents believed that, with the right training, people with developmental disabilities could be very productive workers. 85% of respondents strongly agreed that they have a lot of respect for companies that employ people with developmental disabilities. Despite these findings, many persons with intellectual and other developmental disabilities continue to be unemployed, under-employed or receiving alternative services in segregated settings.

Current employment and day services for adults with intellectual and other developmental disabilities rely on an old payment structure of federal and state programs which does not reflect individual choice or provide a range of supports for employment and alternative services which encourage community participation and contribution. The setting of payment rates for employment and alternative services continues to be highly regulated and it is a concern that this payment structure limits the choice, flexibility and service options of adults with intellectual and related developmental disabilities. Unfortunately, under this system, two persons with similar needs can often have very different budgets to pay for their services. During difficult financial times, policymakers have cut the funding and the availability of employment and alternative services. Also, the wage structure affecting adults who do work has not been reexamined in many years. All these have had a negative impact on the long-term well being of adults with intellectual and related developmental disabilities and hindered their opportunity to make meaningful contributions to their community or to reach their highest level of independence, productivity and integration into the community.

For a time, the Consumer Directed Community Supports option of the MR/RC Waiver was used by some adults to achieve more individual choice in employment and alternative services. However, budget changes in that program forced many adults to leave the program because their new budgets did not provide sufficient funding for the employment and alternative services they needed. Another issue in the area of employment and alternative services is that individuals with the most severe disabilities have few program choices and often receive services in segregated settings with limited opportunities for inclusion in the community. Still another issue is that transition services from school to work rarely focus on outcomes stemming from the individual's hopes, desires and dreams but are geared toward currently available program choices.

## Position

1. The vocational assessment process must result in reliable funding for employment and alternative services that is based on individual needs and desires as well as providing a range of individual choices.
2. Statutes, rules and funding streams related to employment and alternative services must be updated to include the ability to design individualized programs based on individual choice and to ensure that funding flows to where it is needed by the individual. Funding for employment and alternative services must seek to provide individual outcomes guided by principles of self-determination, access, equity, and quality. Statutes affecting wages should be reviewed so that compensation for services rendered more closely reflects the community norm.
3. Funding for employment and alternative services must be made more flexible, reliable and responsive to changes in the needs of individuals, such as changes due to aging or the desire of individuals for a variety of working hours and days. Ongoing supports should be provided, if needed, to help maintain employment or find new employment opportunities.
4. Changes in the Consumer Directed Community Supports option must be made to provide sufficient program budgets for employment and alternative services so that consumers are not required to give up individual choice in order to find meaningful access to employment and alternative services.
5. Meaningful inclusion in the life of the community must be a goal of all employment and alternative services regardless of the severity of the individual's disability.
6. Schools, providers and counties must work together to provide effective transition services. These services should anticipate and plan ahead for future needs including increases in the number of graduates and changes in the types of jobs in the future. Transition services should be focused on the principles of self-determination and guided by the individual's hopes, desires and dreams in order to facilitate the movement of young adults with intellectual and related developmental disabilities into adult life in the working community.

Approved by The Arc of Minnesota Delegate Body at its annual business meeting on

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