

“Pathways to Employment: Each individual will be supported to pursue his or her own unique path to work, a career, or his or her contribution to/participation in community life. All individuals, regardless of the challenge of their disability, will be afforded an opportunity to pursue competitive employment.”

Supports are tailored to the needs, interests and abilities of the individual. All individuals receive supports to achieve and maintain integrated, gainful employment in their community. Gainful employment means employment that reflects achievement of or progress towards a living wage. Integrated settings means typical community settings not designed specifically for individuals with disabilities in which the majority of people employed are individuals without disabilities and wages are paid at minimum wage or better. Living wage means the amount of earned wages needed to enable an individual to meet or exceed his or her living expenses. Maintaining gainful employment means supports required to sustain gainful employment and increase earned income. Pursuing gainful employment means employment or other activities that demonstrate steady movement toward gainful employment over time. Supported employment means paid, competitive employment for people who have severe disabilities and a demonstrated inability to gain and maintain traditional employment. Supported employment occurs in a variety of normal, integrated business environments and includes: minimum wage or better; support to obtain and maintain jobs; and promotion of career development and workplace diversity (Washington State Working Age Adult Policy, 2004).”

In March 2012, the Washington State Legislature passed legislation to support employment as the first choice for adults of working age.

Since 2010 Washington has seen a near 50% increase in the number of people with intellectual or developmental disabilities (I/DD) working in integrated community living (>7,500). By 2016, the number of people with the most significant disabilities (High Acuity) earning minimum wage or higher has tripled (> 1,200). The average hourly wage rose from \$9.99 to \$11.44. The average weekly hours work decreased from 14 to 10 hours per week. The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston reports Washington has the highest rate of participation in employment services in the country. And, Washington has increasingly playing a leadership role in other states and on a national scale.

In September 2017, 150 stakeholders (the meeting capacity of the venue) in competitive integrated employment met for two days at the Alderbrook Resort near Union, Washington. The purpose of the gathering: to improve employment outcomes for people with I/DD in Washington. Participants included: employment provider personnel, county personnel, school personnel, family members, individuals with disabilities, case managers, training and technical assistance providers, as well as state agency personnel from Vocational Rehabilitation, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Developmental Disabilities Agency.

This event revisited the setting, the purpose and the intent of the 2007 Alderbrook event following the implementation of the Working Age Adult Policy.

<http://www.massworks.org/images/stories/Dale/wa.pdf>

National Context: Things have changed

Seven things have changed on the national scene, since Alderbrook 2007, that set a context different than 2007.

First, The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), issued (2014), a “Settings Rule” with the intent that services and supports provided to people with I/DD be provided in fully integrated settings. This means segregation or isolation of people with I/DD as separate will no longer be acceptable where people live, work or spend their time.

Second, CMS has investigated and made changes to how employment services can be funded, with the intent of making payment to providers of services for milestones and employment outcomes. This has the potential for creating incentives to deliver outcomes, beyond the provision of employment services.

Third, The US Department of Justice (DOJ) reached Settlement Agreements (SAs’) in Rhode Island and Oregon for reducing the segregation of adults with disabilities in sheltered work settings. These SA’s establish a legal court precedent favoring competitive integrated employment. The emerging results of these SAs’ are being closely watched by states nationwide. These court cases are based on The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Supreme Court Olmstead Decision which established the right to integrated vs. segregated settings. Initially applying to residential settings, these cases establish that the decision applies to work settings as well.

Fourth, the federal contract set aside contracting system known as AbilityOne® has been under a Grand Jury Investigation with regard to its contracting practices. The intent of the AbilityOne® program is to give preference to organizations and businesses that employ people with disabilities. It also requires the 75% of the work hours be done by people with disabilities. This is important for two reasons: the results of the investigation remain unknown; and, the 75% rule means some level of segregation of people with disabilities is a result, running counter to the CMS Settings Rule, and the DOJ SAs’.

Fifth, a national debate is unfolding about the payment of sub-minimum wages to people with I/DD. Several states has already eliminated sub-minimum wage. In addition, legislation has been introduced in the last few years in both the US House of Representatives and the US Senate to eliminate sub-minimum wages across the country. In addition, self-advocacy organizations, such as Self Advocates Becoming Empowered (SABE) have loudly called for the elimination of sub-minimum wages.

<http://www.sabeusa.org/meeting-minutes/policy-statements/sabe-policy-statement-on-employment/>

Sixth, the number of states with some kind of “Employment First” initiatives has expanded to about forty six. This means the emphasis on competitive integrated employment as the first option for adults with I/DD is emerging from a state and grassroots level in addition to national policy.

Seventh, in 2014 Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which promotes competitive integrated employment for all people with disabilities, limits the use of sub-minimum wages for youth 24 or younger, and emphasizes transition from school to post-secondary education and competitive integrated employment. In addition, WIOA created an Advisory Committee charged with making recommendations on ways to increase competitive integrated employment, and address the use of sub-minimum wages. The committee issued its Final Report and Recommendations in September 2016.

https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/pdf/ACICIEID_Final_Report_9-8-16.pdf

This report and its recommendations have recently been the subject of a bipartisan and bicameral Congressional Briefing and a US Senate Hearing. One central theme of this report is the need to build the capacity, in communities across the country, to deliver competitive integrated employment services and outcomes.

In combination, these developments show the veracity of the policy of competitive integrated employment at both the state and national levels. In addition, all parts of the federal government are engaged with legislation, administration initiatives and judicial decisions.

Washington State Context: Things have changed

In addition to the noted changes on the national landscape, several things have changed in the state of Washington. First, leadership is changing at all levels. Retirements in recent years meant that fewer than 50% of those present participated in the 2007 discussions. Second, a debate has emerged in Washington about individuals choosing only one service (employment or community inclusion). This concern is related to the number of hours of employment weekly. Third, multicultural issues and outreach has emerged as important statewide in light of the growing multicultural nature of the state’s citizens.

In part, the discussions of this event were guided by a listing of “Ten Essential Things”, a list developed by former State Director of Developmental Disabilities, Linda Rolfe. These ten elements are:

- Clear Mission and Vision
- Funding
- Data

- Telling the Story
- Preserve Training and Technical Assistance
- Expand Training and Technical Assistance
- Partnerships
- Promoting Public and Private Employment
- Youth in Transition

Alderbrook Redux 2017

A full decade has passed since the last Alderbrook discussions. This event was organized around five themes and three conversation threads. This set a structure for fifteen discussions, as well as time for people to meet, for local action planning based on county or geographic area.

The Five Themes

- Messaging: Clear Story, Mission, Vision and Goals
- Partnerships and Collaboration
- Leadership and Systems Improvement
- Training and Technical Assistance
- Starting Early, Youth in Transition

The Three Conversations

- What has been done well?
- What needs to improve?
- What will be the results of this event?

Following, are highlights of these discussions.

What has been done well?

“Training and Technical Assistance is a values statement and an investment in each other”.

As the data about expansion, improvement and including more people with more significant disabilities suggests, some things have gone well in the last ten years. More specifically:

- Quality Leadership continues to emerge even as retirements are witnessed and celebrated. This leadership is evident at the community organization level, the county level, and the state level. And leadership from those that do this work, as well as families and people with disabilities themselves.

- Stakeholders continue to hold shared values and high expectations in the ability of people with I/DD to work successfully.
- A singular focus on employment outcomes
- A sustained infrastructure of training and technical assistance across the state.
- Continued investment in innovations to improve employment outcomes and include more people with significant disabilities.
- Ongoing investment in emerging leaders.
- Constructive relationships with state legislators.
- The use of data for decision making and improvement.
- Expanding to include more individuals with high acuity in employment,
- Renewed and expanded emphasis on transition from school to work.
- Greater use of technology solutions in the workplace.
- Good use of media, including social media to tell the story.
- Emerging national leadership roles.
- Greater presence and participation of people with disabilities, self-advocates.
- Increasing collaborations with schools for transition outcomes.

Many of these features have been sustained over time. Of particular note, is the decades' long investment in training, technical assistance and leadership development in all roles and at all levels. This may well be the single most important factor in the level of current accomplishments and the potential going forward.

What needs to improve?

“Always assume we can do better”

A part of the culture of these stakeholders appears to be a strong belief, not only in the capabilities of people with significant disabilities, but in the need for and the ability to do even better in achieving expanded and improved employment outcomes. Things that need improvement included:

- Expanded School to Work statewide.
- The need to start earlier and earlier with families and children with disabilities about high expectations and potential for employment.
- Expanded family engagement in employment.
- Outreach to healthcare community about raising expectations for employment.
- Retaining quality staff in all roles, especially employment consultants.
- Increasing the number of hours worked weekly by many.
- Rethink funding rates, funding structures and funding protocols to emphasize outcomes, especially related to those individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Increase capacity to include more people from multicultural communities.

- Improve messaging to the business community.
- Increase the roles and involvement of self-advocates.
- Address issues of supports for people when they are not working.
- Increase collaboration with schools.

Of particular note in the areas for improvement, are the repeated calls for starting earlier and earlier with families and children with disabilities. The concern about low expectations of individuals is seen as a multi-faceted problem showing the need to involve the health care community, where expectations may first be set. This also implies the need for greater and greater visibility of people with disabilities as productive members of community. In addition, the multicultural nature of many communities in Washington is increasing viewed as important and will require new kinds of resources to work effectively with individuals and families from varied cultural histories.

What will be the results of this event?

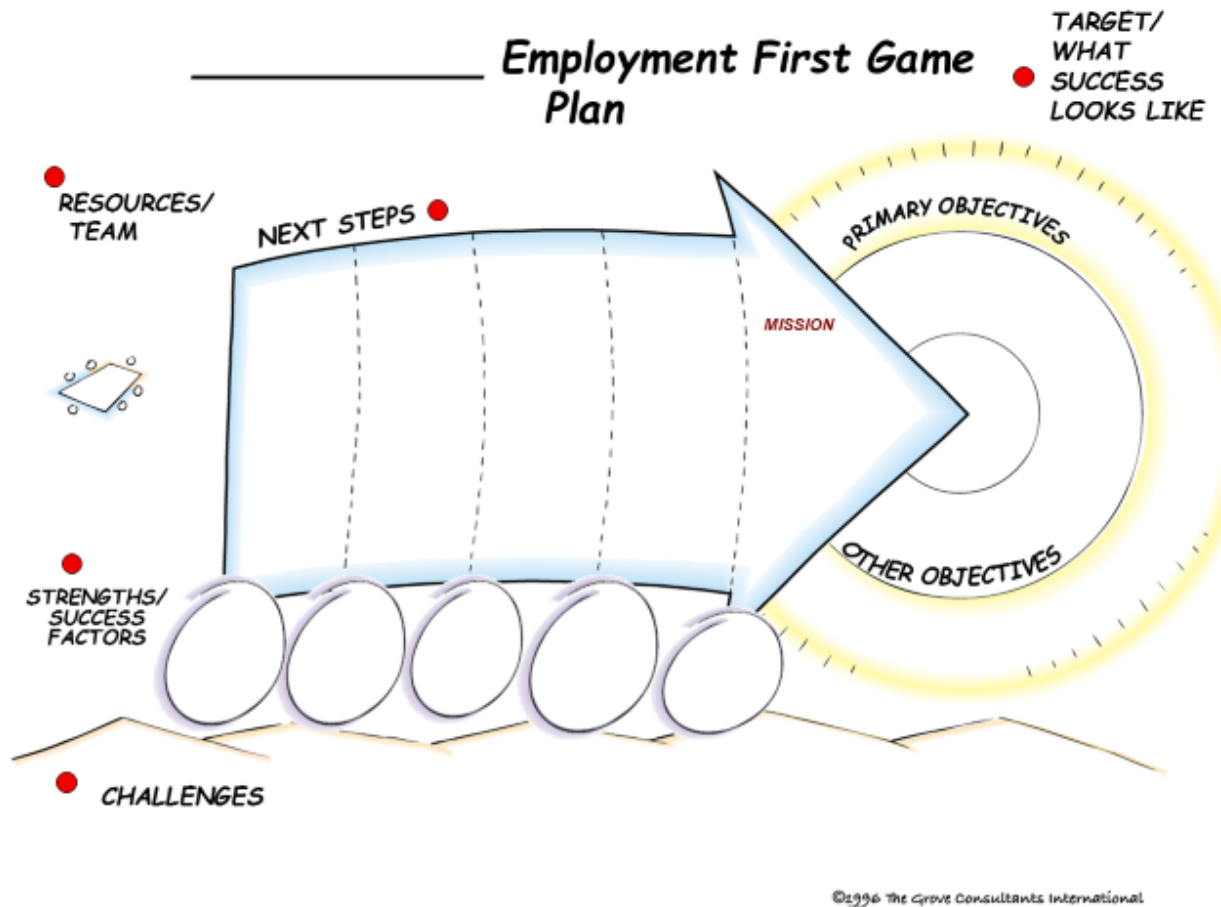
“When I say All Means All, I really mean it”.

As an action oriented group, specific outcomes of this event were discussed. Of course, the items noted as “needing improvement” form the core of action steps. While many items discussed are local in nature, several themes can be noted, including:

- Work on developing “family” plans in addition to the individual plan.
- Develop Family to Family Mentors
- Develop Self-Advocate peer mentors.
- Increase family and multicultural outreach.
- Revisit funding rates and protocols.
- Streamline school to work processes.
- Increase investment in working with school personnel.
- Expand messaging about employment successes.
- Continue investment in training and technical assistance as well as leadership development.

In addition to the thematic discussions, final discussions were held, organized by geographic area or county. The purpose of these discussions was to develop a Game Plan for local action and collaboration. Each county or geographic area (21 in total) were created for planning and accountability. Each group created a Game Plan using the following template:

<http://gowise.org/wp-content/uploads/Documents/WebsitePDFs/Alderbrook-Action-plans-2017.pdf>



The Path Ahead

Fourteen years since the Working Age Adult Policy, a decade since Alderbrook 2007 and the launching of full implementation of the policy, and five years since Washington's Employment First Legislation, Washington State has identified what's working, what needs improvement and generated action steps to improve competitive integrated employment for people with significant disabilities.

From this Alderbrook Redux, seven issues may be especially important in the next decade.

Continue work addressing the issue of the number of hours worked weekly and the need for wraparound supports. This issue has been the source of some debate in recent years. On a national scale, since the great recession, states nationwide have seen some reduction in the average hours worked. At the same time, Washington has expanded employment services to include many more people with significant disabilities. And, the funding amount of individual's waivers is likely also a factor related to hours worked. Discussion and work to increase average hours will continue to be important, while recognizing when a smaller number of hours may be in the best interest of the individual.

Track national developments. National developments related to Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, other legislation as well as budget decisions in Washington DC will influence the State of Washington's attention to competitive integrated employment. Rather than a "wait and see" approach, this is an opportunity to be alert to recognize opportunities for improvement wherever they emerge.

Revisit funding structures, protocols and rates. Much has been accomplished with the current funding structures in place. Nonetheless, revisiting the issue provides an opportunity to change, tweak or affirm funding and related matters.

Continue investment in Transition from School to Work. Washington has had notable success on Transition. These discussions affirmed the value of this work, and refocused to increase outcomes and expand transition outcomes statewide.

Expand attention to multicultural communities. Many Washington communities have become increasingly multicultural. This raises many issues about understanding different cultures and developing culturally competent services and supports. This will also require attention to the need for translators.

Sustain each other. Training, technical assistance, leadership development, and mentoring have long been valued in Washington, and to good effect. This is an investment, rather than a cost. Sustaining, even expanding this investment will continue to be important.

Sustain the Vision of All Means All. High expectations of individuals with disabilities have long been a part of employment in Washington. These expectations, and a belief in the capabilities of every person will continue to lead to innovations and creativity to improve outcomes.

Resources. Relationships. Meaning.

In my own words (Ivanova's) at the Closing:

"All people with IDD should be given the chance to be employed! For long time we been denied the same quality of life as non-disabled people. We been institutionalized, sterilized against our will. We been used as slaves in massive institutions. This inequality is important to remember and fight against. It important that our work seen with same value of all work! We should be allowed to be same chance to show our abilities! And be paid equality to non-disabled people. We not be forced to be segregated! We should get to work in our community for a competitive wage. When I say all I mean all! Functioning labels have been used to say some of us should be treated with equity. These functioning labels been uses during the eugenics era. They used to oppress us and they still used that way today. When people say some can't work! Or some can't live in community or some can't make minimum wage it hurts all of us. We all can work! We all can benefit from inclusion in community! We need to end systems that allow for oppression based on functioning labels. Even if all a person can do it smile that is enough! They are valued

Person. We all are human beings that deserve the dignity of work and community! That is why am for Employment First for all!”

The Circles Initiative®, a social strategy for assisting people to overcome poverty gives meaning to the words, Resources, Relationships and Meaning, as worthy goals in life. Resources are financial, emotional, mental, support systems, resilience, persistence, integrity, as assets in life. Relationships are connectedness and belonging. Meaning is purpose, value.

Employment brings an important measure of resources, relationships and meaning to day to day life of people with disabilities.