

National Expert on Strength Based Learning to Head Minnesota APSE Conference

Chris Davies

Minnesota APSE is pleased to announce that Jennifer Fox will be our featured Keynote speaker at this year's conference and training expo. Fox is an international award-winning author and speaker and a recognized leader of the Strengths Movement within our educational system, for parents and organizations that serve youth.

She draws on 25 years experience in virtually every kind of pre-collegiate school setting to challenge the current educational system. Her message is focused on the need to develop children's strengths in an effort to help them find success and build meaningful futures. On May 18, 2009 she will take

her message to Minnesota APSE and illustrate how the Strengths Movement can be used to forward employment for persons with disabilities.

In her critically acclaimed book, *Your Child's Strengths, Discover Them, Develop Them, Use Them* (Viking, 2008), with a foreword by Marcus Buckingham, Fox gives practical advice to parents and teachers. She lays out a plan for parents, schools and businesses (the end-users of our educational system) to join together to transform our communities into learning environments where all children are focused on discovering their strengths and ultimately finding success.

In March of 2009, Fox sat on a



panel of experts that addressed President Obama to offer insights and unique perspectives on the current landscape of education and provide a vision for its future trajectory. To learn more about Jennifer Fox visit www.strengthsmovement.com.

Second Annual Employment First Summit

Jon Alexancer

In his final week as Assistant Secretary for the Department of Labor's Office on Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Neil Romano issued a memorandum highlighting the importance of the nation's employment-first movement. According to the former Assistant Secretary, "Several states have moved forward to implement policies that focus on integrated, community-based employment earning at or above the minimum wage as the first option for individuals with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. Using these 'employment-first' policies, states are tapping the skills and

contributions of these individuals to match employer demand for a reliable, productive workforce through customized employment opportunities. In these employment-first states, sheltered employment with sub-minimum wages and non-work 'day activities' are no longer acceptable employment outcomes." (ODEP Memorandum, January 15, 2009)

Minnesota is one of the several states mentioned by Mr. Romano in his memorandum. Over the past year, MN APSE and the other partners in the Employment First Coalition have continued to work towards achieving the recommendations it detailed in its

Manifesto.

In November, the Coalition hosted its second Employment Summit. The Summit II event was organized with two principle objectives in mind. First, our coalition recognizes the fundamental importance of tapping the leadership of private industries and businesses to drive sweeping changes in the employment rates of Minnesotans with disabilities. Therefore, the morning session of this event was dedicated to "business leadership" and identifying new policies and practices to support a business-based, employment first vision in Minnesota.

The afternoon session of Summit II

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Second Annual Employment First Summit

(Continued from page 1)

was coined, "The Scorecard," and included a broader base of employment first stakeholders including federal, state and county agency leaders, self-advocates and family members, disability advocates, disability and employment service providers, secondary and post-secondary educators, residential providers, veterans representatives, community representatives, and others. The afternoon session was dedicated to a discussion on Minnesota's progress and measurable successes made with respect to core recommendations crafted following Summit I. The afternoon session then concluded with facilitated group discussions about the critical next steps to advance an employment first agenda in Minnesota to the next level.

A report from Summit II is in process and should be released soon. The Coalition has already begun planning an event for 2009. Summit III will focus on self-advocates and their families in addition to continuing the efforts that are already underway. In addition, there are plans to facilitate as many as 3 events for businesses to be hosted by current champions within the business community. Finally, the Coalition looks forward to working with the new Training and Technical Assistance Center that is being funded by the State of MN through its Pathways to Employment program.

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Now More Than Ever

Bob Niemiec

We are definitely in uncertain times. Our country and the world are facing economic conditions that have not existed since the Great Depression. We are bombarded on a daily basis with news of layoffs, businesses closing, home foreclosures, and the like. Despite that, organizations dedicated to the employment of people with disabilities continue the work of developing jobs and helping people with disabilities discover their career pathways.

Even though times are tough, there are positives we can find to help us through to better times. One of those positives is the upcoming Minnesota APSE Conference on May 18th.

Now, more than ever, we need to learn from each other, find inspiration and hope, and create a positive future for the people we support.

Minnesota is among a group of states that are moving toward an Employment First approach for people with disabilities. MN APSE continues to play a pivotal role in these efforts. The fundamental idea of Employment First is that employment should be the first and preferred option for working age people and students with disabilities. Inherent in the discussion of Employment First is a basic definition of employment. In the First MN Employment First Summit Consensus Report (often called, The Manifesto), employment was defined as:

- Regular or customized employment in the workforce on the payroll of a company (unless self-employed) at minimum or prevailing wages and benefits.
- Employment where integration and interaction with co-workers without disabilities and customers is assured.

After all, employment is employment. Why should we have different

expectations for people with disabilities when it comes to wages, hours worked, benefits, etc? Why are we satisfied that a 20 hour work week is a success? There are those who would make the case that sheltered employment, crews and enclaves, and other facility-based approaches constitute employment. A friend of mine recently said that if someone asks whether or not a particular approach is employment, it probably isn't. If we really believe that people with disabilities belong in their communities, then we must have the same expectations for them as we do for every community member.

There is a perception in the disability services arena that employment is an activity or a program goal. It is not. Employment is a job – a real job with the same expectations placed upon workers with disabilities as would be there for workers who do not have a disability. We need to work with our partners in the community, schools, residential providers, advocates, and others to break this perception. Together we can help people take their rightful place in the community as co-workers, neighbors and citizens.

Now, more than ever, we need to discover new ways to do business as well as building on tried and true methods. The advances in disability employment, such as supported employment, customized employment, self-employment, etc. are not luxuries or far-fetched ideas. They have been proven as effective ways to help people become more self-reliant, increase their earning potential and assume greater responsibility for themselves. Successful employment relies heavily on negotiation and strengths-based approaches that have always been present in the workplace.

There is no cookie cutter formula that assures success in helping people with disabilities become gainfully employed, but there are some

suggestions to increase the chances of success. Here are but a few.

Build Strong Relationships

Each of us has a network of people that we know and rely on. However, our individual networks are finite and if we constantly go the same well, it will dry up. Therefore, we need to expand our network potential. This can only be done by combining networks with people with whom we have relationships. This can be other businesses, friends of friends, families of the people we support, business contacts of our boards of directors, etc. Relationships may be the most important aspect of job developing. When you rely on community partners and strong relationships, you can withstand economic swings. The time spent building and fostering relationships expands our reach and produces great benefits.

Have High Expectations

People tend to live up to or down to our expectations. Unfortunately, expectations that have been typically placed upon people with disabilities have been low or non-existent. Expect the best for people. Expect what's typical for anyone of working age. Do your best to attack the subtle bigotry of low expectations. Help people to connect to their communities in ordinary ways. I recently attended a conference along with several people with disabilities (self-advocates). I was struck by the ways some people with disabilities dressed and brought attention to themselves. I couldn't help but think about the many ways people with disabilities adopt things that say to the general public: "we're different than you?" How do service providers, families and advocates promote these things? It will take a concerted effort on the part of all people who support people with disabilities to provide good advice about what it takes to

Now More Than Ever (Continued from Page 3)

get a job and keep a job, and that accentuating our differences might not be the best approach.

Have high expectations for yourself and your organization. We all make compromises, but don't start out by offering discounts or deals when it comes to employment. There is no need to rely on the sub-minimum wage if you have high expectations for the people you support. If you become good at negotiation and strengths-based approaches, there will be no need to offer an employer a worker at a discount wage. It isn't easy, but it is possible. I believe it

was Winston Churchill who said: "When you are going through hell, keep going." Keep your eyes on the prize – the positive future for people with disabilities. Believe in yourself and believe you can be successful. The people you support depend on it.

Turn, "No," into "Know

Rejection is a big part of employment. Learn how to turn no into know. What can you learn from the experience? Successful employment professionals take rejection in stride. Everyone will tell you that you can't take it personally, but they're not

being completely truthful. No matter how often you hear no, you never like it. Focusing on what you can learn from a no will help take the sting out of rejection. Like riding a bike, you just have to get back on after a fall and try again.

Now, more than ever we need to create the future – don't let what you don't know stop you from moving forward. Now, more than ever, we need each other. I hope to see you at the annual MN APSE conference on May 18th.

Minnesota's Employment First Movement in Mental Health

Don Lavin

The State of Minnesota recently issued its annual report for 2008 to the State legislature concerning the employment status of Minnesotans living with serious mental illnesses (SMI). Although we have a long way to go, this status report is rich with data and supports the progress Minnesota is making in clearing pathways to the workforce for its residents with SMI.

One of the most exciting trends identified in this 2008 report is Minnesota's gradual transformation to evidence-based practice, supported employment (EBP-SE) to improve the quality of employment outcomes in the State. EBPs are specific service interventions documented to support success in recovery from SMI through clinical research trials.

EBP-SE is one of six EBPs in psychiatric rehabilitation identified by Dartmouth's Psychiatric Rehabilitation Center (PRC) and the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). EBP-SE is characterized by an individualized job placement and support (IPS) strategy and focuses on bringing integrated employment in the workforce at competitive wages and benefits into the lives of working-age adults with SMI. Also, EBP-SE requires a practical framework for imbedding supported employment

services within a mental health treatment milieu due to the demonstrated benefits of integrated work in illness management recovery.

In 2006, Dartmouth's PRC and the Johnson and Johnson (J&J) Foundation, a philanthropic grants organization, awarded Minnesota a four-year, systems-change grant to transform its mental health and workforce development system to an EBP-SE model. The J&J initiative in Minnesota led to the funding of six pilot demonstration programs in local communities with a goal of adopting EBP-SE practices. These six new projects have already served 270 individuals with excellent results.

Why is EBP-SE so important to Minnesota? National research documents between 50-60% of consumers with SMI are successful in obtaining competitive employment when supported by EBP-SE programs. EBP-SE program performance is far superior to traditional employment approaches that lead to competitive employment for less than 20% of their enrollees. Also, EBP-SE research has documented superior outcome performance to other approaches regardless of geographic location, race or ethnicity, gender, age, or disability status.

My own organization, Rise, Incorporated, is one of the six providers participating in Minnesota's EBP-SE initiative. Rise is working with Family Life Mental Health Center (FLMHC) and other col-

laborators in Anoka County including Minnesota Rehabilitation Services, affordable housing and supported living providers, mental health self-advocates, Anoka County Social Services, and others to better integrate EBP-SE practices within a mental health treatment and recovery team model.

What have we learned? The principles underlying EBP-SE are different from conventional supported employment services in a number of ways:

1. Zero Exclusion Policy. Eligibility for EBP-SE is driven by a mental health consumer's interest in working. There are no protocols for engaging participants in traditional "job readiness" type activities.

2. Mental health treatment and supported employment services are fully integrated. This is accomplished by establishing multi-disciplinary treatment teams that meet and coordinate their core mental health, housing, community support, and supported employment services regularly. An employment specialist is a critical member of the team and works full-time on the development and sustainability of high quality competitive employment.

3. Competitive employment is the goal. All participants supported by an EBP-SE program work in regular, individualized jobs at competitive wages and benefits in the community's labor force.

Minnesota's Employment First Movement in Mental Health (continued from page 4)

4. Rapid engagement and job search. EBP-SE programs promote an assertive outreach process to engage unemployed individuals who express an interest in working. Also, it engages others who need ongoing job support to stabilize their community living and long-range goals for career advancement. In addition, there are no delays in beginning a competitive job search process for EBP-SE participants. The goal is to begin planning individualized job placement goals and contacting employers within 30 days of enrollment.

5. Job placement outcomes are driven by preferences and interests of the individual. The quality of job matching is fundamental to achieving personal satisfaction and long-term employment success. Therefore, EBP-SE programs focus on participants' interests and preferences including job type, industry sector, business location, work schedule, and position duties or responsibilities.

6. Job follow-along supports are continuous. Participants of an EBP-SE program have access to job support on a time-unlimited basis. The EBP-SE mental health treatment team and employment specialist are in regular contact with the individual to maintain job success and assist with career progression goals. Also, the employment specialist may have direct contact with business leaders periodically if desired or requested by the employee.

7. Benefits Planning. The number fear about entering the competitive workforce by adults with SMI is the potential loss of disability and health care benefits. The impact of earned income through competitive employment is examined carefully and discussed with each participant before implementing a job search to allay fears and engage appropriate strategies. The mental health treatment team and employment specialist in an EBP-SE program share information about work incentives and monitor wage earnings once a participant chooses to engage in remunerative work.

Minnesota APSE—The Network on Employment and Minnesota's Employment First Coalition (MEFC) are excited about this emerging opportunity to transform policies and promote professional development training to expand EBP-SE services on a statewide basis. The reason for this excitement is EBP-SE is highly consistent with the articulated goals of Minnesota's fast growing Employment First movement.

To illustrate this point, EBP-SE focuses on assertive, rapid engagement of integrated employment at competitive wages and benefits. This concept is congruent with core recommendations identified in Minnesota's Employment First Manifesto published in 2007. Also, the proponents of EBP-SE are working to build on existing service systems

strengths to promote the job preferences of Minnesotans with SMI and meet the workforce objectives of their employers.

Finally, EBP-SE promotes the engagement of community action teams (i.e., mental health treatment teams) to transform local policies, infuse researched practices, and increase the number and quality of competitive employment outcomes of mental health consumers. Indeed, a majority of EBP-SE's core principles are complementary to the stated goals of MEFC.

Minnesota's vision to become an Employment First State means embracing an "employment for all" philosophy so no one is left behind. And it's abundantly clear working-age adults with SMI are one of the largest underrepresented groups in Minnesota's workforce. For these reasons, Minnesota APSE and MEFC see great wisdom in working jointly with State agency leaders, policymakers, and local community mental health teams and providers to pursue mutually shared goals.

Together, we can do much more to increase public awareness about the employability of Minnesotans with SMI. And together, we can make sweeping changes in service policies and practices so competitive employment is routinely recognized and accepted as the first choice of Minnesotans with SMI.

Employment First at the Local Level

Dawn Bacon & Andrea Zuber

Many counties have noticed that the needs, expectations and preferences of the younger and more diverse population, who have experienced integration, strong relationships and community connections, are changing. Those people are moving Service Delivery Systems to create the same level of integration in their adult lives. To support this effort and trend, Ramsey County's Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Section has launched a local Employment Initiative, with the goal being to increase positive employment* outcomes for people with disabilities in Ramsey County.

One component of the Ramsey County Employment Initiative is a new Employment Tracking System developed in 2007 and implemented in 2008 to track employment data (employment type, hours worked & wages) for over 1300 people participating in programs through Day Training and Habilitation Centers, Employment and Alternative Services and Supported Employment on June 30, 2008, representing 13 providers. The results are in, and the data provides Ramsey County with a baseline from which to go forward.

Employment Type: Less than twenty percent (<20%) of participants are in individual employment. 25% of people with no employment are retired. See

Illustration 1.

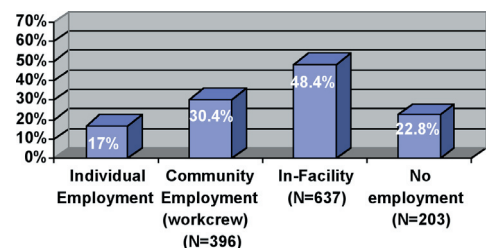


Illustration 1: % Persons with I/DD in employment types N=1304

Individual employment - Persons in individual employment earn on average \$7.93/hour and are more likely to work 4-5 days a week than their counterparts in community or in-facility employment. About half of persons in indi-

Employment 1st at the Local Level (continued from page 5)

vidual employment participate in two programs.

Community employment/work-crew - Persons on work crews earn on average \$4.82/hour. The average hours worked a week in 7.7 hours, the median, or midpoint, is 4.9 hours. When we look closer at average hours worked in week by program we see a wide range: from .8 hours to 13.1 hours.

In-Facility employment - People who work in facilities earn on average \$2.82/hour, with their median wage at \$2.30, and work an average of 5.4 hours a week.

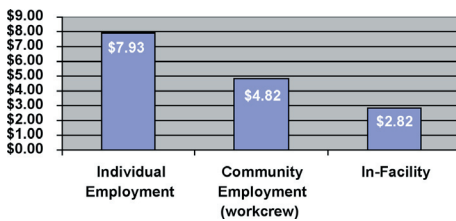


Illustration 2: Average hourly wage by employment type

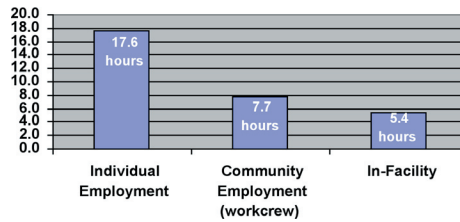


Illustration 3: Average hours worked in week by employment type

Over 50% of persons employed in facility-based employment work less than 3 hours a week.

About a third of those in individual employment work 25 hours or more a week, while less than 8% of those in community or in-facility settings work 25 or more hours a week.

Other critical strategies of the Employment Initiative to increase full integration and the number of people in individual employment include:

- Build a Community of Practice in Ramsey County to include in-

dividuals, families, case managers, educators, providers, employers, advocates and other stakeholders, to create processes for making employment the first, viable option for people with disabilities.

- Increase access to training and technical assistance for creating positive, customized employment outcomes.
- Create policy and practice standards to support and incent employment outcomes.
- Work towards making Ramsey County a model employer for people with disabilities.

* For the purposes of this initiative, Ramsey County has defined employment as, "Employee has an individual job, is included on payroll of a competitive business, industry or government (unless self-employed), where the assigned employment tasks offer at least minimum wage or prevailing wages".

Tracking Unemployment for People with Disabilities

David Hoff
Senior TA Specialist - Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston
Co-chair APSE Public Policy Committee

The US Department of Labor (DOL) has announced that it will now be tracking the unemployment rate for people with disabilities on a monthly basis. This effort is calling increased attention to the issue of employment of people with disabilities, but is also raising some questions and concerns regarding how the data may be interpreted.

The initial release of this information from DOL (<http://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsdisability.htm>) indicated that in January 2009, the unemployment rate for persons with a disability was 13.2%, compared to 8.3% for persons without a disability. At first glance, this data seems to be at odds with the generally accepted view that about 70% to 80% of adults

with disabilities are not working. The reality is that both of these statements are basically true, and they offer a lesson in understanding what data is really saying. The unemployment rate (the DOL data) is based only on individuals currently in the workforce - i.e., those people either currently employed or actively looking for work, which is a subset of the entire population. In the case of people with disabilities it's a pretty small subset, as only 23% of people with disabilities are considered to be "in the workforce", compared to 71% of people without disabilities. Putting it another way, that 13.2% is 13.2% of 6.2 million individuals, while another 20.6 million individuals with disabilities are not even included in the unemployment data. While a 13.2% unemployment rate is nothing to be thrilled about, the real issue is that 77% of people with disabilities are not even participating in the workforce, compared to 29% of

people who don't have disabilities. Therefore, it is incorrect to say the oft repeated "the unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 70%" when the truth is that 77% of people with disabilities are not participating in the workforce (which is something different). This also speaks to what our real core issue is as a field - that people with disabilities participate in the workforce at about the third the rate as the general population.

With the release of this data, some concerns have been raised, particularly regarding whether possible misinterpretation is going to do harm to the cause of employment of people with disabilities. Policymakers, legislators, etc., could see this new monthly data, and not understanding the context, come to the conclusion that employment of people with disabilities is not nearly the major societal issue that they assumed it was. In turn, they could decide that funding employ-

Tracking Unemployment for People with Disabilities (continued from page 6)

ment services and supports is not as critical as they thought. This speaks to the importance of understanding what this data is and isn't saying and making sure that it is properly interpreted and explained.

In looking at this data, consideration should also be given regarding the definition of disability being used. This data is based on the

Community Population Survey (a monthly household survey), using six questions to determine whether the individual has a disability, relying on self-report by the individual being surveyed. This definition is unrelated to Social Security disability status, or other definitions of disability (such as that used by the Americans with Disabilities Act).

Given the limits of this definition, additional care must therefore be taken in how this data is applied.

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