

DDAN Employment Workgroup

An Outline for the presentation at the 7/9/21 Meeting with
Acting Commissioner Adelman and Assistant Commissioner Seifried

1. DDAN Employment Workgroup continues our advocacy to ensure timely passage of A5262 and S3455 so that working New Jerseyans with disabilities will gain access to NJ WorkAbility more easily. Five changes to NJ WorkAbility's eligibility requirements we have been advocating for are: the removals of earned and unearned income caps; a 12-month grace period of continued eligibility following job losses; the removal of the upper-age limit (currently at 64); and the exclusion of spousal assets and earnings in the applicant's financial determination.
2. The fear of losing benefits is a major barrier to employment and career advancement of people with intellectual or developmental disability. Therefore, we are advocating for DDD to support the capacity building of Certified Benefits Counselors within the fee for service system. We strongly believe that Benefits Counseling service should be available to all DDD beneficiaries, including those who do not yet have paid employment. Such a capacity building would advance New Jersey's Employment First Initiative further.

Accordingly, we are recommending that:

- a) DDD provide financial assistance to qualified providers to cover direct and indirect training costs, including compensation for training time.
 - Cornell and Virginia Commonwealth Universities (VCU) are the only two institutions in the country which provide such training. (VCU training takes 2 full weeks and is intensive and demanding; it requires homework and success in 14 tests.)
 - b) DDD create a service separate from Supported Employment for "Benefits Counseling" which could include:
 - A minimum of one face-to-face meeting with the person served
 - Include support for the required monthly reporting of earnings to Social Security
 - Include support for completing "Work Activity Reports" when requested by Social Security
 - Include support for meetings with the Social Security Administration (SSA) as needed
 - c) Because of the difference in skill sets of a Benefit Counselor compared to those of a Job Coach, DDD should encourage the creation of a separate position for this within their agency.
3. Because the quality of support services significantly impacts a person's success and because Supported Employment is a multi-phased and multi-directional support service that requires a high level of knowledge, competence, and a deep understanding of the individuals being served and the challenges that face employers, it takes a unique skill set to find a successful job match for the individual using supported employment, while fostering the natural supports and relationships needed at the workplace for the supported employee to be successful.

For these reasons, we are recommending:

- a) DDD consider a re-calibration of the reimbursements provided to qualified Supported Employment providers in order to advance Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) in NJ.

State agencies in AL, DE, GA, IA, OK, NC, TN, Central Wisconsin, and Huron County, Michigan have adopted "Value-Based Purchasing" practices and have successfully raised CIE outcomes in their states. These innovative reimbursement structures recognize the following factors:

- The length of time needed for job development
 - The number of hours the person is working
 - The time needed for effective development of natural support at the job sites
 - The time needed for successful fading of employment support
 - The consumers' tier / support needs at the workplace.
- b) DDD consider requiring employment professionals, including those who provide “Pre-Vocational Services” to have a nationally-recognized, accredited credential such as CESP (Certified Employment Support Professional). CESP includes an independent and standardized evaluation of a sufficient level of knowledge, skills, competencies, and best practices to provide effective services leading to CIE. Continued, ongoing professional development and recertification every three years are also required of CESP holders. Such credentialing differs from training programs which offer certificates of attendance upon completion of the coursework.
- c) Because direct and indirect costs of acquiring and ongoing CESP qualification can be significant in terms of the certification costs including the assessment, paid time away from billable time to prepare for the assessment, we are recommending that DDD consider the funding of CESP requirement.

In recent years, states at the forefront of Employment First recognize the benefits of CESP Certification to CIE outcomes. For instance, Pennsylvania saw a “3% growth in employment for people with I/DD and Autism” after state agencies in Pennsylvania required certification and credentialing of employment professionals and provided financial incentives to service providers to assist in the process of building capacity of credentialed professionals across systems. ¹ Other states with similar CESP requirements and policy include IA, OH, OR, RI, SD, and TN.

- d) DDD consider providing incentives such as higher reimbursement rates for employment services of CESP certificate holders. In 2015, vocational rehabilitation agencies in South Dakota raised the reimbursement rate for services of CESP certificate holders who completed two-day Person-Centered Training by 25 percent above the established reimbursement rate for services of those without CESP certificates.² Ohio vocational rehabilitation agency sponsored more than 1,000 test takers for CESP certification during the four-year period through 2020. ³

National credentialing of employment professionals provides them with much-needed career pathway. It was estimated that nearly one in four employment professionals with CESP certifications received a salary increase, promotion, or other reward as a result of CESP. Such a career pathway helps provider agencies more easily retain their qualified professionals and reduce their turnover.

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¹ <https://cesp.helpscoutdocs.com/article/614-what-states-have-cesp-related-policies>

² <https://dhs.sd.gov/rehabservices/docs/Feb%2018%20CESP%20and%20Reimbursement%20Rate%20memo.pdf>

³ <https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/information-for-providers/provider-news/cesp-examination-support>

