



Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst

Employment First—The Times They are a Changing!

By Don Lavin



Have you noticed our new look?

In the past year, APSE's Board of Directors took unanimous action in recognition of our organization's core responsibility to lead the national Employment First movement. So we've changed our name and gave meaning to our call letters, APSE,

which now stands for "Association of People Supporting EmploymentFirst." Also, we've updated APSE's logo with a clearly stated message "Employment First, Employment Now!" All of these changes are intended to better communicate APSE's vision, mission, and brand.

National APSE, and its state chapters, is indeed leading the way in advancing this fundamental idea—*America needs all working-age youth and adults in the workforce for businesses to thrive and individuals, families, and communities to prosper.* APSE is the only national organization with an exclusive focus on integrated employment, career advancement, and economic prosperity of individuals with disabilities.

APSE can share proudly its Employment First movement is changing the public discourse about employment and disability. Today, 34 states already have some kind of formal or informal Employment First Initiative. And seven states have a formal Employment First Policy approved by their state legislature.

So what exactly does "Employment First" mean?

In 2010, National APSE adopted this statement on Employment First—"Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of

publicly funded services for all working-aged citizens with disabilities, regardless of level of disability."

Simply stated, Employment First has come to mean:

- Expecting, encouraging, providing, creating, and rewarding integrated employment in the workforce
- at minimum or market rate wages and benefits
- as the first, preferred outcome of working-age youth and adults with disabilities
- particularly in support of people with significant disabilities unlikely to benefit from traditional job development approaches.

Even after defining what Employment First means, there is confusion about its core purpose, goals, and intent. So perhaps it's also helpful to clear the air about what it's not. Employment First is not about—

- Closing down sheltered workshops
- Forcing or coercing employment options
- Promoting employment only (one dimensional)
- Advancing a monolithic policy or strategy.

With respect to the latter, Employment First Initiatives are driven by the unique characteristics, priorities, and qualities of each state's leadership. For example, some states focus on specific disability populations such as individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities while others are cross-disability initiatives. Some states are pursuing formal legislative policies while others are pursuing Executive Orders by their state Governor. Some State Initiatives are grassroots in approach while others are formally driven by public governmental bodies.

Regardless of form, a philosophical shift to Employment First is unmistakable. It seems everyone is talking about making changes in public policies and practices so competitive employment is a more easily accessible, attainable goal. In the past year, we've observed a gathering storm of public opinion—this convergence of public policy briefs, federal agency guidance letters, research briefs with new findings, costs-benefits analyses studies, business leadership initiatives, and even legal court challenges are linking together the social and economic issues of employment and disability.

To illustrate, the National Governor's Association (NGA) issued a report, *A Better Bottom Line*, adopting employment and disability as its national priority! Senator Harkin's Subcommittee on Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions (HELP) published a similar report entitled *Unfinished Business: Making Employment of People with Disabilities a National Priority*. The Centers on Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued an informational bulletin clarifying its position about competitive employment as the intended outcome of "time-limited" Prevocational Services under the Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services Waiver. A wave of interest of interest in employment by national disability advocacy organizations is also sending a clear message—the employment participation rate of Americans with disabilities is unacceptable and must improve.

Does research align with APSE's Employment First vision?

Research findings by the Center on Transition of Youth with Disabilities at the University of Maryland speak to critical importance of *expectations*. Researchers discovered youth with disabilities were **6.8 times** more likely to obtain competitive employment after high school when a youth's family expressed this outcome as their preferred goal! A related finding documents youth with disabilities are **4.5 times** more likely to obtain competitive employment after high school when paid, work-based learning is a core component in their school-to-career transition!

Researcher Robert Cimera has also conducted relevant studies on topics of cost-benefits analyses and comparing the effectiveness of supported and sheltered employment approaches in producing competitive employment results. There's overwhelming evidence in his research that

sheltered employment is not an effective practice in advancing competitive employment or accelerating wage earnings of its participants. Further, sheltered employment and non-work options are more costly in the long run than supported employment that emphasizes individualized, strengths-based approaches.

Shouldn't people with disabilities have the right to make an informed choice about working?

Well, of course! The Department of Labor reports 70% of all working-age Americans presently participate in competitive labor force in contrast to only 20% of working-age adults with disabilities. In 2011, the Social Security Administration reported 14 million Americans with disabilities had received disability benefits totaling \$174.9 billion. Finally, Mathematica's Institute on Public Policy indicates 70% of Americans living in chronic poverty report having a disability. Needless to say, this matter about "choice" is a false argument. People with disabilities can choose whether or not they wish to work, but they can't choose the consequences of this decision. The truth is competitive employment is a multiplier of choices advancing personal and financial freedoms.

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Need Help Implementing Employment First?

Whether it's Employment Training & Certification, Conference presentations, facilitated Strategic Planning sessions, Policy Refinement, or Funding Strategies, Griffin-Hammis Associates has helped over 20 states with their Employment First initiatives

Contact Cary Griffin
(cgriffin@griffinhammis.com),
Bob Niemiec
(bniemiec@griffinhammis.com) or
Doug Crandell
(dcrandell@griffinhammis.com)

www.griffinhammis.com



Are YOU an Employment First Champion?

This short quiz should provide your answer—

1. Should people work in the labor force if they can?
2. Should we teach promising practices and use technologies to increase the employability of people with disabilities?
3. Should we encourage people with disabilities to use their strengths and talents and learn new skills?
4. Should we encourage people to earn as much money as they can doing what they like and are good at?
5. Should we encourage inclusion of people with disabilities and increase social relationships with others in their community?
6. Should employers be encouraged and supported to build new capacities to hire, train, supervise, and support job seekers with disabilities?
7. Should we reform public/organizational policies to encourage and support work as the first option?
8. Should we encourage (re) investment of public resources in ways to increase integrated employment as an outcome?

If you answered “yes” to all or a majority of these questions, you’re indeed an Employment First Champion! And APSE needs your voice, passion, and energies to advance equitable employment as an obtainable goal for everyone who wants to work.

Can Employment First make a real difference?

Absolutely! For starters, Employment First galvanizes a much clearer vision and grounding in core values as well as direction about public policy. It raises the bar of public expectations and requires a refreshed focus on the passions, skills, and strengths of individuals. It speaks loudly to better wages and benefits, more effective employment practices, increased social integration, and building stronger capacities within businesses to employ people with significant disabilities.

So an Employment First Policy is surely not an end goal. Rather it’s a new beginning and conceptual framework to bring competitive employment to scale so everyone benefits.

Public Policy Update

*By David Hoff,
Public Policy Committee Co-Chair*

The APSE Public Policy committee works on a wide range of activities to promote public policies at the federal and state level that support employment of people with disabilities. In addition to advocating on policy issues, we also work to build a strong infrastructure to support APSE’s public policy efforts at the national and state level.

National Governor’s Association Focus on

Employment of People with Disabilities: As you may know, the National Governor’s Association (NGA) has embarked on a year-long focus on employment of people with disabilities. APSE is participating in a work group that is part of the NGA initiative. It is expected that an initial report will be issued in NGA in the next couple of months, and APSE will make sure that members are aware of any reports that are issued. APSE members are urged to contact their Governor’s office, and state policymakers, and ask how they are supporting this NGA initiative.

Election Aftermath: While APSE is non-partisan, and does not endorse candidates, the re-election of President Obama means that full implementation of the Affordable Care Act (i.e., ObamaCare) will move forward, assuring that individuals with disabilities have access to a wider range of health care options, and will not be denied access to health care coverage due to pre-existing conditions and annual or lifetime limits on benefits. In addition, the work of the US Department of Justice will continue regarding advocating for integrated employment as part of its legal actions in various states, including its ongoing support for the lawsuit in Oregon against sheltered employment. APSE is also hopeful, that with the election over, the proposed regulations that strengthen the obligations of federal contractors to employ people with disabilities will be released.

WIPA and PABSS Update: Unfortunately there is still no resolution at this time on efforts to continue the Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs and the Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security programs. However, on January 19th, the term of Social Security Commissioner Michael Astrue expires. Given that Commissioner Astrue has refused to

re-authorize these programs, despite clear direction from Congress to do so, the hope is that with a change in Commissioner, that there may be some movement on this issue. APSE will keep its members posted on that status of these programs, and any actions necessary to advocate for their reinstatement.

Senate Rejects UN Treaty on Disability Rights:

Despite the advocacy efforts of APSE and many other advocacy groups, in early December the US Senate rejected the United Nations treaty that bans discrimination against people with disabilities. The treaty, modeled after the Americans with Disabilities Act, has been ratified by 126 other countries. Passage of the treaty fell 5 votes short of the two-thirds majority needed for passage, with 38 Republican Senators voting against it. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has vowed to reintroduce the treaty this year.

If you have input or questions regarding the APSE Public Policy Committee, please contact the committee co-chairs: David Hoff – david.hoff@umb.edu; Bob Lawhead - rlawhead@emplink.org

Employment First: A National Update

By Wendy Parent-Johnson, Ph.D. and David Hoff

Interest in the concept of Employment First – the idea that employment in integrated settings within the community should be the priority service option – continues to grow throughout the United States. With at least 34 states having some type of Employment First movement, there is clear momentum towards a national vision of employment for individuals with disabilities. The ongoing challenge is ensuring that these policy activities are translated into practices which result in increased workforce participation for persons with disabilities.

There are currently 20 states that have been identified as having something akin to an Employment First policy - an official directive from a state government agency stating that employment in the community in the general workforce is the first and primary option for individuals with disabilities and/or it is the intent of the state to move in that direction. Seven states have passed legislation: California, Delaware, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Utah, and Washington. The other 13 (Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Tennessee) have a policy directive, Executive Order, or

similar official policy statement. The substance of these policies varies. In some cases, the policy has a strong and specific definition of employment integrated within the general workforce, and clear requirements regarding implementation of the policy. In other cases, the policy is a general affirmation of Employment First concepts, but is not very specific in terms of implementation or requirements. There are also cases where the policy has had a wide degree of latitude, allowing for group employment/enclaves, and in one case employment at less than minimum wage. Of the 20 states with policies, only 7 are cross-disability, with the remainder focused exclusively on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In addition to the 20 states identified with a policy, there are at least 14 additional states that have Employment First efforts and initiatives underway. However, at this point it appears that an official Employment First policy has not been issued within these states. These efforts typically consist of grassroots advocates, including APSE chapters, pushing for the state to adopt Employment First both in terms of policy and practice.



SB 6384 Bill Signing with WA Governor Chris Gregorie

The tremendous growth in Employment First policies and activities around the country is truly exciting and through these experiences other states can learn and promote

similar initiatives in their own communities. A brief summary of *current* events and *examples* of specific strategies are provided in an effort to stimulate ideas and build on the many accomplishments (see the APSE website for a more detailed description). These generally fall into the following five categories:

Leadership – States are getting started and moving forward through the efforts of a group of people, often a Work Group, Steering Committee, Coalition, Learning Network, or Task Force, who provide guidance, planning, energy, and direction (e.g., Maryland, North Carolina, Maine, Minnesota, Oregon, and Kansas). These are often begun by or involve APSE chapter members and vary in their representation of other key persons around the state.

Communication – Information about Employment First is being shared in a variety of ways to get the word out, define the message, and expand stakeholder support. Some states have conducted Employment First Summits, Conferences, and formal trainings (e.g., Alabama, District of Columbia, Minnesota, and Oregon) while others have communicated using social media, Employment First dedicated websites, and position papers (e.g., Oregon, Kansas, and North Carolina).

Action – A wealth of techniques have been used to promote and support Employment First activities that help states gain momentum as they move their message forward. For example, some states have adopted a Community of Practice approach, conducted strategic planning, obtained external funding, brought in outside consultants, documented employment success stories, established provisions for technical assistance, and created an Office of Employment First (e.g., Maine, Pennsylvania, Nebraska, Alabama, New Mexico, Colorado, Minnesota, and Georgia).

Policy - As states work to establish policy, numerous mechanisms are being utilized to formally proclaim an Employment First agenda, such as draft regulations, agency position statements, Mayor-issued proclamations, and introduction of legislation (e.g., Maryland, District of Columbia, Washington).

Many states are currently developing bills in preparation for the 2013 legislative session (e.g., Maine).

Implementation – States that have policies are identifying strategies that are useful for addressing the myriad of issues associated with moving beyond planning to practice and outcomes. Some states are investigating rate and reimbursement structures while others are implementing model demonstration programs or convening a Commission with monitoring and oversight responsibilities (e.g., Colorado, Washington, and Kansas). It is not uncommon for local APSE chapters to be instrumental in providing on-going assistance, sharing national resources, and promoting leadership and collaboration.

While much of the activity regarding Employment First has been at the state level, there is also increasing attention at the federal level. There have been discussions regarding inclusion of a definition of Employment First within federal legislation (such as the Rehabilitation Act). In addition, the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor, is currently working with states via its Employment First Mentoring Program. Iowa, Oregon, and Tennessee are receiving assistance via this program to build Employment First efforts, with Washington State serving as a mentor to these other states. Details on the various state and federal efforts can be found on APSE's Employment First web page: www.apse.org/employmentfirst

Developing policy statements and initiatives is only the starting point in terms of making Employment First a reality. To avoid having Employment First become nothing more than simply empty words, requires a long-term commitment by policymakers and public systems to fundamental systems change to ensure that employment in the community is truly the first option for individuals with disabilities. This requires addressing all aspects of services ranging from funding, contracting, service quality standards, staff competency, data measurement, and mandating that employment be part of any type of planning process for an individual starting when they are a teenager. This also requires educating individuals with disabilities and family members about Employment First, and encouraging them to both pursue employment, and to pressure policymakers and systems to make the necessary changes to make employment for all

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CERTIFIED EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL

Since the inception of APSE in 1988, the concept of training and credentialing employment support professionals has been a dynamic and evolving issue. Despite the identification and adopting of Ethical Guidelines and Competencies, community rehabilitation programs, professionals, self-advocates and employers still struggled with identifying and developing qualified employment supports professionals. To respond to this ongoing need, the Employment Support Professional Certification Council (ESPCC) was established in 2011 to establish and implement policies and procedures for a national certification program and to establish a council to oversee the development of the CESP certification standards, process and examination.

Certified Employment Specialist Professional (CESP)

certification demonstrates to colleagues, supervisors and individuals with disabilities that the individual has completed a rigorous process to earn a national professional credential. The Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) credential is awarded to individuals who have demonstrated an essential level of knowledge and skill necessary to provide integrated employment support services. Individuals who earn the CESP credential have demonstrated knowledge of the skills necessary to help expand equitable employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

In accordance with most national certification programs, the CESP credential requires periodic recertification to promote professional development for employment services professionals and to ensure individuals who hold the credential maintain an ongoing commitment to learning. Professional development is accomplished by either obtaining the required number of continuing education credits or by passing the updated certification examination.

To date, there have been a total of 11 exam sessions held in New Hampshire, Kansas, Louisiana, Virginia, Kentucky and Wisconsin. Thus far, a total of 297 individual test takers have sat for the exam. Several other states including Iowa, North Carolina and Maryland are in discussion for hosting exams in 2013.

For further information on the **CESP** certification, please contact Pat Keul at pat@apse.org.

"Thanks to the MIG & APSE partnership that provided the opportunity to take part in the historic National Certification Program - CESP Exam. Just 2 of the benefits that I appreciate the most:

- 1) the portability of the CESP designation that will follow to every State and Region.*
- 2) Professional credibility is validated and ensures ethical standards to customers and employers thus increased opportunities."*

Marilyn Martin, Affiliated Blind of Louisiana, Inc.

"I found the LA CESP exam to be very intriguing, thought-provoking and yet very straight forward. I highly recommend any Employment Support Professional to take advantage of this opportunity to sharpen their mind and become more competitive in their field, by writing for this exam. It's worth the effort!"

Tiffany Lyons, Teem Educational Foundation

"With the opportunity to attend a workshop/ training for supported employment has eased my fears of this CESP examination. I was able to attend this exam with confidence and I strongly recommend taking a workshop before taking the exam."

Cheyenne Bryant, The Betty and Leonard Phillips Deaf Action Center



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From the Desk of our APSE Board President, David Hoff



Dear APSE Members:

On behalf of the APSE national board I want to welcome you to our special issue on Employment First.

"Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities, regardless of

level of disability." In October 2010, the APSE board endorsed this statement, along with a number of underlying principles reinforcing the concept of Employment First (the full statement can be found on our website). APSE, its chapters and members, have been playing critical roles in making Employment First a national vision and direction for employment. At the same time, APSE, and every APSE chapter and member must be vigilant in making sure that Employment First is not simply platitudes and empty promises. This requires advocacy and long-term involvement to undertake the fundamental system and societal changes required. Please contact your state chapter or the national office to learn more about how you can get involved to make Employment First a reality for all.

In terms of Board news, our six operating committees (Chapter Development, Communications & Marketing, Fundraising, Public Policy, Students for APSE, Training & Conference) have been busy with a variety of efforts to support and strengthen APSE – but we could use additional help! If you have time, energy, and ideas that

you would like to contribute to APSE, these committees provide a great opportunity. If you are interested, please contact me at david.hoff@umb.edu, or contact the national APSE office.

We've had some recent changes in national board membership. Unfortunately both George Nostrand and Jennifer Joyce have decided to step down from the board due to other pressing obligations. They will both be missed, and I want to thank them both for all of their hard work and dedication to the board. Debbie Walker-Lass from Georgia has been appointed to take George Nostrand's place. SueAnn Morrow from Iowa has been elected to take Jennifer Joyce's place as head of the Chapter Delegates Council, and will be serving on the national board in that capacity. Sam Dotzler, an attorney from Chicago, has also recently been appointed to the board. Sam will be a great asset in providing expertise on various legal and governance issues.

Finally, as we begin the New Year, I want to say thank you to all of our members and chapters for all you do on behalf of APSE. Together we are all making a real difference in the lives of others, and moving forward to the day where employment for people with disabilities will not only be the first option, but will be a normal and typical expectation, as it is for every other member of our society.

David Hoff, APSE Board President



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You are cordially invited to
The 2013 APSE National Conference
June 25-27, 2013
Pre-Conference Day - June 24, 2013
JW Marriott, Indianapolis, IN

Presentation Proposals and Award Nominations are being accepted online at www.apse.org.

"I learned quite a bit and enjoyed myself at the Conference. This was my first APSE conference for myself and for my company, Trinity Services. I plan on attending future APSE conferences due to the great information and experience. Thank you." -Kevin Cunningham

Join us to
celebrate
APSE's
25th
Anniversary!





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